



Doreen Massey: Space, Place and Politics

Doreen's response to the panel

Doreen Massey

One thing I would quite like to reflect on comes out of that that multiplicity which is this business of talking beyond ones own discipline and how different it is in different directions and so Chantal and I and Michael and I come from different disciplines but it's quite immediate – but of course there always is an issue of words meaning slightly different things in different contexts, and negotiation to be done before one can establish a conversation which means more or less the same to me as it does to the other person. But that kind of interdisciplinary can work within a conversation and I have hugely enjoyed it. I mean some of the stuff we're now Chantal and I are now bounding back between us around multi polarity the political problem problematical nature of a notion of smooth space, of a global commune which doesn't leave a political possibility of challenging it. It doesn't have an outside in that sense. All of those things are ways in which quite unexpectedly I found myself very closely talking to political philosopher and finding it works. In conversations with the arts it's completely different and I – and I often don't – I mean this time I actually did and I want to talk in a minute about what I responded to and what you said but quite often I have conversations and I go away and it's weeks before I know what was going on in them. Or I look at a piece of work and I know that it's been done somehow in conversation and yet it takes me donkey's years before I understand at all. Where it's coming from somewhere different and yet getting at the same kinds of things that I am. And I am working at the moment with Patrick ... who is here at the front and we too we sometimes have conversations and I'm sure we both walk away thinking what was all that about and then weeks later can pick it up and carry on. So different – speaking beyond one's discipline in an academic sense is so fundamentally important beyond all the cries of the - the academic establishment that we should do it and we should all set up centres and we should all do interdisciplinary stuff. Beyond all that it's intellectually and politically important that we do it. And the only point I wanted to make was how different it can be in different kinds of dialogue and that some take off just like that and some take a long, long time to mature into some kind of mutual intelligibility but all of them in my experience have been utterly productive. I just wanted to make one point about our work together because I think it has been as you said Oliver very much about the integration of space and time, trying not to think them separately because so often they're counter posed and in particular space is often thought of as the dimension without time and that's one of the things I've been trying to dispel from our imagination for a long, long time. So I think both of the things I wrote with you are about one of them is called Some Times of Space but they're all about the way in which – I mean space isn't just this flat surface of dead things like Foucault said – you know also Foucault also criticising the notion that it's the fixed and the dead. Space is this in my way of thinking about it. It's a cut through the myriad of stories that are going on at any one moment. What I call it in 'For Space', is simultaneity of stories so far. So it's the fact that at the moment something is happening in Afghanistan that we'll learn about on the news in the morning; that at this very moment it's beginning to get light in the Arctic. At this very moment people are getting up in Venezuela to start on another day of trying to build a new society. And it's that simultaneity of the spatial that a simultaneity utterly imbued with temporality which is one of the things that I've been getting at and which is one of the things that as Chantal said and that I've been going on about makes it into the dimension of the social. It's space that's the dimension that presents us with the other. And therefore presents us with the challenge of living together and I really hadn't quite picked up Mike said about politics and the quality of these relations I'd been thinking about it in a much more kind of global and inter placed sense and when you said that and knowing where you're coming from in terms of your disciplinary affiliations I just thought how general and a concept that is but also how important it is at this moment that we should really be insisting on this. Because we are once again at a moment, some kind of conjectural moment. Jamie spoke about the moment of spatial divisions of labour, the moment of World City. It was only thirty years and yet that period has been the period of the dominance of what in short time we called neo

liberalism and it permeated all of life. That was the moment of the kind of relationality as non-relationality. Relationality as individualism. And I think what might give us hope is the brevity of that period. It seems I mean that's the nature of hegemonies. They stop us thinking that there are alternatives. They get so inside our minds that we forget how deep that it's an utterly deep common sense that we have been asked to and have imbibed. So remember that it was brief. To remember back in the Fifties we thought completely differently, that equality wasn't a dirty word, that Keynesianism was obvious and the State was good – a public good. But also to remember and this takes me to Ken just how contested was the establishment of that neo liberal dominance over the last thirty years. I mean when we were battling away in the GLC I don't think we, well I didn't know, just what a cataclysmic decade that was. About I didn't quite grasp the enormity of what was going on that we were up against, that it was a real conjectural moment in which a new social settlement was being established. And it is that that has imploded now and as Michael said the difference is that that settlement of the, that moment 1980's was provoked by in a sense the victory of forces of the Left. I mean the growth of social democratic forces, the success of Trade Unions where we waged demands and so forth had pushed to a point where there had to be some kind of confrontation and there was and therefore there was social forces to be embattled and we in the cities and others in the coal fields were part of those social forces. What's happened now as Michael said is quite, quite different, that it's an implosion of their model and we don't at this moment have the social forces kind of ready to do anything about taking that moment forward and yet there are things that are happening. And there's an example that I gave to some other people so it may be a repeat to some but I mean its things like the Co-op is the most successful bank at the moment yeah. There's an advert which as I said some of you know about this. It's on Kilburn station but I'm sure it's in many places too and it's says along the top "Solid, Stable Dependable" and underneath it says "Exciting aren't we?" and it's an advert for a building society and underneath it says "Proud to be a Building Society". In other words there's a kind of change of tone going on that here we have mutuality being advertised as the thing which is good rather than making the fast, individualist buck. So there's something that can be picked up on. And there's huge discontent. I mean right across Europe I mean the latest places to erupt have been Guadeloupe and Martinique. There's huge things going on and that's where I think just to return to Chantal that is exactly where we need to be thinking about a relation of politics of building change of equivalents those discontents in Greece, in Latvia in France in Guadeloupe, all sparked by different things all in a sense against a similar frustration that could so easily be turned against each other. There isn't a natural affinity or a natural alliance between them and one of the things I think we can do as journalists and academics and public intellectuals and artists is try and construct a different narrative because at the moment this is an economic crisis and I think what we have to do is turn it into a political crisis. One which brings together all those discontents and tries to weave a narrative that poses a challenge to the fundamental way in which this society has gone wrong, the kind of thing that Ken was talking about and tries to build connections between those discontents that enable us to look forward to a different kind of future.