



**Doreen Massey: Space, Place and Politics**

*Audience Q & A Part 2*

**Audience member (Male student)**

I'm a third year undergraduate at Goldsmiths and you know but very proudly so but I'd like to thank you very much for the local global sort of idea, the framework that you've offered. I'll be travelling to America to show them what British cultural studies is about, you know, and this is something I am definitely going to push for. My point really is that you kind of gave us an idea of a globalisation that is not necessarily cultural imperialism, you know, and the thing is the cultural studies perspective as the Americans here we can be a bit too political at times and I think that's a criticism that I have as well. You kind of developed that and I that's just my interpretation, and so you the way I see it is that you, yeah it's not necessarily cultural imperialism and yet it's still political and that's very valuable I think. My problem today is this idea that Professor Mouffe discussed this distinction she made between multiplicity and cosmopolitanism and that's this may be a matter of semantics erm well lets say multiplicity are the processes that you kind of identify in the global cities and that sort of thing. The way I see cosmopolitanism and this may be a limitation. It may be a limitation that we cultural theorists have I see cosmopolitanism as the cultural residue which is vital to understanding cultural identity in the - in modern day. This may have been a misinterpretation of Professor Mouffe but you seem to kind of push for the multiplicity yet negate the idea of cosmopolitanism and this I find problematic. I don't want to cause any you know I'm just wondering I was wondering if you could respond to this issue perhaps together. Thank you.

**Professor Gillian Rose**

Thank you. Shall we may be see if there are two or three other questions possibly related but don't have to be just to and then we can have a more general response from the panel I think on this.

**Audience member (Female)**

Thank you. I had the opportunity of attending conversation about the new the celebration of the Communist manifesto and um David Harvey has written the introduction for this new edition and I was very lucky to be there and of course it was all about the current crisis of course and one of the things that he said was that he seemed to have hope in what has been happening in Latin America, which is where I happen to come from, and if we place that hope within these ideas of places global and local constituting each other I can understand that we all have concern for what the effect of this crisis might be in those places that seem to be more vulnerable. However, I wanted to ask what role do you think that what is happening in Latin America particularly in Venezuela or Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina might have to what things could we learn from them. What role what can they provide us in order to think about new geometries of power. So it's not just a concern for what they the effects that these places could endure but what can they give us as an answer. Thank you.

**Professor Gillian Rose**

Thank you. I can see a couple more at the back.

**Audience member (Female)**

I have a question and I will try to formulate in English if not I will tell you in Spanish. How can you – how can you talk about changing the narrative from economic crisis to politic crisis if they are intimate related? I mean economic now drives politics.

**Audience member (Male)**

I just wanted to interrogate a space between something that Chantal said and something that Doreen said. Which is between Doreen celebration of the resurgence of mutualism and the dependability of various forms yeah, in little ways but also Chantal's dismissal of some of the political projects of exodus and non hegemony because I think actually in those spaces of

exodus and non hegemony whether in Chiapas, in Argentina or through the European movement social centres and other social centres movement and other spaces like that, new experiments with new forms of mutuality have come about over the last ten or fifteen years.

### **Professor Gillian Rose**

Thank you. Who would like to start? Chantal you had a direct question.

### **Chantal**

Yes, and I would also – well as I say cosmopolitanism is so polemic that it's also become very trendy term so multi cosmopolitanism. In fact recently I've just heard about what they call local cosmopolitanism which seems to be really an oxymoron for me but you know so every body wants to be cosmopolitan so I don't know what maybe your understanding of cosmopolitanism is you know is not at all in contradiction with multiplicity but if I was and let me just say I am not at all critical of cosmopolitanism if we understand by that a sensibility or even an ethos, you know, of openness to the world to the other. Yeah – no problem with that. What I find very problematic is some political project you know of cosmopolitanism which are designed by political theorists and my main problem with those views I won't give any names here – is that in fact all in different ways they tend to advocate some kind of universalisation of western liberal democracy. When they think of, you know, a cosmopolitan world and it will be on the basis that it is the form of - of course to be absolutely honest when they refer to the broad democracy it is not really existing liberal democracy. In most cases it will be some kind of social democratic liberal democracy. So it's because most of the people are on the Left so they are very well intentioned. I am not putting that into question but their idea is that well the, our model of liberal democracy if it was really implemented you know that is the best model. It is a universal model. It's got some specific take on rationality and this is what you know all the people in the world if they were able to reach our level of moral development would accept you know us their - institution and this is what I'm putting in to question because I think that you know it is – and this is central to political theory. Most political theory is trying to show that liberal democracy is really you know the best form of democracy. And so there is definitely no place for a multiplicity for I personally am in favour of what I call the idea that democracy – I'm not saying that democracy is something you know only good for the West but I think the democratic ideal if you understand by that you know the rule by the people could be inscribed differentially in different cultural civilisation context. And that for instance I know there are people trying to develop what they call an Islamist form of democracy Muslim form of democracy, other, you know, confirmations of democracy and I am very much in favour of that because I think the world is pluriverse. It is not a universe. So this is the kind of democracy of cosmopolitan you might find really very problematic. Concerning the question of my take on exodus well I you made reference to Argentina and I think that's precisely the best example I will use against this form of politics, not engaging with the institution, not wanting to get you know dirty with working with the State and we know what happened in Argentina and with the movement of the *piqueteros* at the beginning of the, you know, this century. They were very strong. They managed to bring down the la Rúa government, so it was of course an incredible moment of you know getting imagination doing things except that their motto was "*¡que se vayan todos!*", you know, "they must all go away". So when the la Rúa government fell then they were election and of course the *piqueteros* it's absolutely no way in which they could even influence the election. I mean things turned out quite well because finally Kirchner won imagine would it have been Menem, that would have been a total catastrophe. But Kirchner and Kirchner turned out to be much more Left than people would have dreamed of so things are much better in Argentina at the moment than they were before but the *piqueteros* with their strategy of you know, exodus, these actions from the traditional institution that clearly showed the limits of that because if you really want to construct a different society you need to engage with the institution in order to transform them not just say well you know we are leaving – say "*¡que se vayan todos!*", and I think that's the best example of the limitation of that kind of strategy. I'm not saying that one should not also try to create new form but always you know in trying to create them as re-articulation of existing condition you know not simply trying to do that outside. But it's very important to address structural geometries of power transfer them rearticulate them and not having this strategy of deception

### **Ken Livingstone**

Globalisation could have created a cultural imperialism. I but one thing I think makes it impossible. Back in 1964 Arthur C Clarke wrote a book speculating about all the possible futures we faced. He had a chapter in which he posited the question 'we will either develop instantaneous travel or instantaneous communication'. And you only need one of those and of course as you know we haven't got Star Trek beam me up Scottie. But what we have got though is instantaneous communication and it embraces millions of people even in sub Saharan African, somewhere between twenty and twenty five per cent of people have a mobile phone. And whereas I think after the collapse of Communism and all the Huntington stuff about clashes of civilisations and the implosion of the Japanese economy. I remember, I can't remember who wrote it now – the book about the Twenty First Century will be American and so on. And this just isn't happening. It isn't happening because all over the world, hundreds of millions of people, mainly younger people, are developing a mix and match approach to culture. They're taking what they want. You're beginning to see Bollywood changing Hollywood because all over the world people are making their choices through their iPods, their Blackberries, their mobile phones, their computers. The International Olympic Committee are really terrified because the average age of the people who watch it on television, which is where they make their big bucks from the networks, is now fifty five years old and they want to make sure that come the games in 2012 there's all these young people sitting watching it in their computers and interacting and so on and that is the way it will develop. You just can't get a cultural hegemony any more because people can choose what they want and it's not like you know in the late 1940's where forty five per cent of reductive capacity was in the United States of America and it had the power to impose. I mean we have to pass round the bloody hat now to be able to invade Afghanistan for God's sake. Those days are gone. And I think it will be openness of cultures I mean I think Japan implosion had a lot to do about being the intense levels of xenophobia that exist in that society. The failure of Tokyo to rival New York in the way London was able to, is because only two and a half per cent of people in New York are foreigners. You can't have a great world city which isn't awash with people from all around the world. And the test will be for Mumbai and Shanghai as they grow are they going to be generally multicultural and I think they will. And so I'm really optimistic. I don't fear the globalisation creating a new cultural hegemony and you've actually got the fracturing of what people watch on television the dozens and dozens of options and all that. The days when, in Doreen and my generation, everyone sat at home and watched the same bloody programme and came in and talked about it are gone. There is no power on earth even a successful eventual super power of China, capable of imposing that. It's just gone and it's gone because of Arthur C Clarke's prediction about instantaneous communication. Once you've got that you can't block it, and you can't control it, and you can't censor it. And all of that will break down. We will choose the future we want.

### **Olaf Eliasson**

Can I just say the one of few last standing places where people sit down and share a collective space is the weather forecast. Being in this context I thought it was –

### **Michael Rustin**

I just want to say one thing about the relation between politics and the economy and I've got to put it this way. Here we have an implosion and a general view that the financial sector can't have quite the same dominant role in London as it has had before. So what is to be done instead? What are people to work at? What are they to produce? What is to be the main content of economic activity? And how we even think about it? It's quite difficult to think about because the way the government always thinks about it is always in the terms of aggregates. Quantitative easing so there will be more money. There might be a bigger deficit. We had the big magnitudes but the content of what is to be done is below the field of decision or even thought because that's to be left to the market. Now contrast this with what Ken and Doreen and Vela and Robin Murray were doing in the London Labour plan when they thought it was absolutely essential to grasp and name the kinds of things that people did in order that one can even begin to make decisions about them, like how should waste be disposed of, or how should the environment be dealt with, or what about the development of creative industries. So there was a precedent in the work they did then about at least trying to map, name and describe the fields of economic activity we have in order that there could be some possible decision about them. We are not even at the point at the moment about having a

description or even the possibility of a description within the orthodox economic discourse. And without a description it's quite hard to have a policy.

### **Professor Gillian Rose**

I was hoping to squeeze in a couple more questions but I think we have run out of time I'm very sorry to say. It was a fascinating discussion and I hope the discussion will continue if as many of you as possible can join us at the reception afterwards.

Please recall what I said about the cloakroom moving. If you're leaving now go out the front way. If you're leaving later it will be at the back. Just like to thank all our panellists and I think Doreen would like to say a few closing words before you all gather your things.

### **Doreen Massey**

Only to carry on the responses to the questions so um on the politics and economics I mean yes of course there is a clear relation between - between the two but I absolutely agree with Michael in the way in which the economic crisis is being faced at the moment, in the popular media, in the dominant discourses is through a narrative which is within the economic and which is on the whole from the Right. And what we need to do is to re articulate what is going on at the moment in a political discourse which challenges more deeply the economic things that are happening and turn it into a political crisis about the tone of society, about the way in which we do live together that goes - which goes beyond the economic - because that in the end is what is at issue. And finally on the globalisation and cultural imperialism there are a number of questions that are related and I just wanted to say one or two things. Um there is occasionally sometimes also a cultural imperialism on the Left. This is not to disagree with what Ken said but when I say I am working in Venezuela the immediate thing is that people judge it - ah but he's a dictator isn't he or whatever. And that's a kind of immediate judgementalism that we know the model here. We know what's good politics and we will judge what's going on in Venezuela by what we have here. And I'm not saying there should be no judgement, that there should be no evaluation but on the other hand what's happening in China, what's happening in Venezuela or Bolivia, comes out of long, long histories and battles that they themselves are fighting that we shouldn't just simply and very briefly judge by criteria which have come out of our history and our battles. And so, um, the first thing I'd say is that we must get away from that kind of implicit cultural imperialism of the Left and learn to learn because I do think what's going on in Latin America is enormously important and it's potentially more important if we try to learn from it. The way in which my concepts as it were power geometries was taken up there has been in order to try and establish participatory democracy which takes democracy right out across the country to regions whose voices have never been heard before, to poorer barrios in some of the big cities whose voices have never been heard before. To try and build, and this is non-elective communal councils which are places trying to form collectives, another form of power. So not only the geometry in a sense, the geography of the power being changed by coming from poor barrios and regions in the Orinoco or the Amazon but also the nature of the power which is participatory and collective as opposed to the individual voting kind of power that comes out of representative democracy. So I learned a huge amount about what power geometry meant by that. I also learnt to return to the discussion with Oliver about the temporalities of power because one of the difficulties in what they're trying to do is that well Chávez's power is very quickly established, by law, by the fact that he is President. The power that comes from the base takes donkey's years. People who have never known how to speak before. People who never thought they had the right to have a political voice, learning to participate, learning collective decision making. That takes years and so within this new proposed geometry of power in Venezuela there are multiple temporalities and sometimes they're dislocated one from the other and I'd never thought of that before. So being involved in Venezuela I've learned enormously about something I thought I was suggesting.

And the final thing I'd say is I think one of the things I think is important about what's going on in Venezuela and Latin America is it does involve that relationally of place from which we started. There's a very strong determination to have an outward looking politics of place and I think I was probably well one amongst a very small number if not the only person arguing in favour of Ken's initiative for the agreement between London and Caracas and I thought that was fantastic demonstration that you don't have to have neo liberal relations between places. You can have equal exchange between places apparently in such different positions within

the inequalities of globalisation that places don't have always to compete with each other. They can co-operate. It stood for all of that and it is no accident that after that strange and eerie pleasantries that you and Boris Johnson exchanged immediately after the election the first way in which Boris Johnson broke that peace was to abolish the agreement between London and Caracas. He knew that politics of place beyond place and ones that challenge the current hegemony really matter. They have symbolic and real political potential. And that's what we should be getting on and doing more of.