

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

**David Featherstone and Joe Painter (eds)**, *Spatial Politics: Essays For Doreen Massey*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013. ISBN: 978-1-4443-3830-0 (paper); ISBN: 978-1-4443-3831-7 (cloth); ISBN: 978-1-118-27883-3 (ebook)

This book is about the political nature of space. What else could it be about? For anybody who has been engaged with Doreen Massey's work in any way knows that this is exactly what it is all about. For Massey, space is first of all the result of and ground for social interactions, it is where encounters are produced and where conflicts arise and can be negotiated. It may now sound commonplace but, as Ash Amin (2009) has reminded us, it absolutely was not when she started theorizing on it. Over the course of time, her ideas on the nature of space have been progressively enriched to form a refined theory of space that she finally gathered together in her *For Space* (Massey 2005).

The book is rightly subtitled *Essays For Doreen Massey*, and it is actually a collection of articles not on Doreen Massey's work, but rather on how different scholars and activists, many of them Massey's colleagues and friends, have developed their own ideas informed by hers. In their hands the concepts she has created look not only easily malleable but also extremely useful for a number of purposes. In fact, none of the essays openly confront Massey's theoretical framework, and this is not only because of the deep personal and intellectual appreciation of Doreen Massey that most of them explicitly show, but also because Massey's ideas seem to be most of the time a kind of 'open source' that can be used and modified as needed. This is precisely the way that the editors of the book, Dave Featherstone and Joe Painter, seem to have thought while designing it. Gathering together a bunch of colleagues, activists, artists and political figures, each contributor offers an overview of how their main concerns relate to, or have benefited from, Massey's concepts. For the scope and significance of her ideas seem to have been enormous; just think of the very different disciplines that have benefited from her spatial vision (take only the ones present in the book: political

# Antipode

## A Radical Journal of Geography

science, sociology, anthropology, and psychology, even the arts, not to mention the practice of politics itself).

Perhaps one could also ask: but what is so attractive about Doreen Massey's ideas? If I had to answer, I would highlight three issues that immediately stand out. Firstly, Massey combines a bright clarity of language with a tremendous originality in her insights that diverges from what has been already said on the subject and that always brings unexpected ways to look at old issues. Secondly, her level of abstraction is always grounded in the most quotidian facts of everyday life, which not only makes her abstract ideas more consistent and understandable but easier to apply to other contexts thereby serving a variety of objectives. Thirdly, Massey easily goes back and forth from abstract theory to political commitment and practice. In fact, she entirely personifies the figure of the 'public intellectual' (Hubbard 2008), always aware of, and intervening in, the social and political events going on in her own city and beyond. It's no wonder that in the book's preface, Ken Livingstone (the former Labour Mayor of London and Massey's longtime comrade-in-arms during the 1980s on the Greater London Council) points out how this book is a good opportunity to rethink 'where we are' after three decades of neoliberalism in the UK.

All of this, and more, is very evident throughout the chapters of the book that start with an introduction by the editors. Entitled "There is no point of departure" to stress the Althusserian anti-essentialism that characterizes Massey's trajectory, Featherstone and Painter outline Massey's major intellectual influences that led to an exceptionally open theoretical approach, which resists identifying itself with a particular scientific paradigm.

18 very diverse contributions are brought together in four parts. In the first one, 'Space, Politics, and Radical Democracy', five different essays deal with many of the concepts that the relationship between space and politics involve; democracy, hegemony, power-geometry, relationality. Chantal Mouffe opens by confronting her own idea of radical

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

politics with postmodern theories of desertion and exodus from existing institutions as expressed by Hardt and Negri. For Mouffe, the problem is the inadequate conception of spatiality that informs their views of globalization leads to a mistaken conception of politics. Combining Massey's geometries of power with her own idea of engagement with existing institutions in order to disarticulate existing discourses and practices, allows Mouffe to state the need for a hegemony strategy informed by a conception of space which acknowledges its dimension of multiplicity. The conversation between Mouffe and Massey seems to have mutually enriched their respective approaches. For example, Massey (2012) has used Mouffe's proposal to confront the idea of a consensual direct democracy as used in Occupy LSX with the necessary political antagonism.

Conceptions of space and place are also taken up in the essay by Lawrence Grossberg. He embarks on a very hard journey through 'arcane philosophers' - his words - to theorize on the notion of 'context' to show how most discourses on globalization fail precisely because of their lack of theorization of context, equating elements that operate in very different scales and dimensions. Using Deleuze and Guattari's notion of assemblage as a base, and building on Jean-Luc Nancy's distinction between globalization and mondialisation, Grossberg tries to stretch out Massey's conception of space without straying too far from his departure point. At the end of a somewhat awkward journey, Berg leaves us once again in Massey's hands: "... 'In every age there is a making and re-making of the spaces and places through which we live our lives: what need to be addressed are the power relations through which that restructuring takes place' (Massey 1997:11)" (p.42).

Power relations, and Massey's concept of power-geometry in particular, is also one of the objects of Arun Saldanha's chapter. For him, despite the apparent simplicity and down-to-earth way of arguing, Massey is the most systematic philosophic geographer since she managed to build a brand new concept of space at the crossroads of a number of philosophical systems. For him, the most evocative of Massey's

# Antipode

## A Radical Journal of Geography

concepts is the power-geometry notion that explains best modern global processes. However, the ambivalence that Massey shows with the Marxist tradition leads him at the end to claim that “[a]ffirming space still requires affirming Marx anew” (p.53). Saldanha is clear in his opinion that the turn away from Marxism in British academia has been part of the redefining of the European Left under the pressure of a neoliberal Right that resulted in a loss of the historical fight for social justice. In reclaiming Marx, he seems to long for a contribution to recast Marxism such as the one that Massey (1984) reached with her *Spatial Divisions of Labour* in the mid 1980s.

Michael Rustin, for his part, deals with relationality, analyzing the notion in his field and wondering whether a relational theory can exist in psychoanalysis. This leads him to assess the relevance not only of time but also of space in psychoanalysis; space is where differences and conflicts can be negotiated, and also at an individual level. Rustin seems somewhat astounded to finally find such commonalities with his longtime friend. Even if the final intention is clearly different (repairing and inclusionary in the case of psychoanalysis, more combative and conflictive in Doreen Massey’s geography), Rustin ends by asking himself how this relational social thinking could contribute to breaking our present period of neoliberal individualism.

In the last chapter of this first part, David Slater focuses on the spatiality of democracy. Slater is obviously interested in the relevance of Massey’s theorization of space for political thinking and stages a dialogue between hers and his own argument. He delivers a hard critique of the legitimacy of democracy and the universality of its principles (as he says, “democracy for export” [p.74]) that is more than interesting in itself although only vaguely related to Massey’s (2005:11) recognition of “the simultaneous coexistence of others with their own trajectories and their own stories to tell” and to the power-geometry of spatial relations. Perhaps a further dialogue with Massey’s ‘geographies of responsibility’ could have broadened his argument into new directions.

# Antipode

## A Radical Journal of Geography

In Part 2, 'Regions, Labour, and Uneven Development', three different contributors deal with the ideas of region and labour following Massey's innovative thinking on these issues since the mid 1980s. Allan Cochrane bases his thoughts on the notion of assemblage to analyze the ways in which regions (with the focus on London and the Southeast) are constructed politically. The notion of assemblage is clearly connected with Massey's spatial relationality and Cochrane easily finds the way to widely use Massey's concepts to draw a complex landscape of political strategies, inequalities, and geographies of responsibility meaning that the governance of regions works with arrangements that stretch across and beyond regional boundaries.

Jamie Peck stresses the enormous significance of *Spatial Divisions of Labour* at the time it was published, in showing how changes in the labour process were not automatically driven by the logic of capitalist development and that the outcomes were always particular and case-specific. Although Massey's realist approach did receive severe criticisms at that time (by David Harvey, among others) and even though Doreen Massey herself later made her positions more relational, Peck argues that the so-called labour geography, mostly driven by isolated case studies, needs to re-engage today with strategies of capital and the state and to learn from the conceptual and political problems that Massey established in *Spatial Divisions of Labour*, in a radically transformed context.

In the last essay of this part, Elena dell'Agnese builds an interesting argument to relate the two apparently opposite concepts of territory and relationality taking the challenge to re-conceptualize the idea of territory and its boundaries from a relational point of view. As normally used in political geography, territory is nothing but a bounded portion of space, a notion that, as dell'Agnese states, can have dramatic consequences: it crystallizes reality as flat and static and simplifies it to the level of "a logo-map" (p.120). After taking up the traditional opposition between territory and network, she finds a way out in Claude Raffestin's conceptualization of territory as a network of relations. By putting together Raffestin and Massey, dell'Agnese finds her

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

way to state that “territory is not a cultural container...but a portion of relational space, porous, processual and unstable” (p.122). And if Massey is right in saying that all notions of space have consequences, it could be said here that all notions of territory have consequences too. Boundaries are never irrelevant or immaterial but, as Massey would say, we need to take responsibility for the boundaries we draw. dell’Agnese succeeds with a few movements to reconceptualize the old notion of territory to make it useful again.

Halfway through the book we suddenly come across a completely different piece by the Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson that the editors have elegantly included as an ‘interlude’. But is it so different? Eliasson leaves us for a while in the midst of a glacier in Iceland to live an emotional spatial experience. The extreme landscape is what allows him to re-evaluate common definitions of time and space. Not really far away from Massey, in fact. There are other ‘intrusive’ details in the book. To begin with is the cover of the book itself. It includes a reproduction of *Landscape Trauma*, an image based on the original elements of the earth, by Ingrid Pollard, an artist whose pieces are designed “to explore social constructs such as Britishness or racial difference” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ingrid\\_Pollard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ingrid_Pollard)), ideas that are of course close to Massey’s concerns. Another one: in his contribution, Jamie Peck notices the change in the covers of the first and the second editions of *Spatial Divisions of Labour* that evoke Massey’s more relational thinking through time: “the original yellow cover, featuring a stylized map of the United Kingdom, subdivided by regional-economic functions, is replaced by an abstract and distinctly non-territorial image, evocative of multiplicity and mosaic” (p. 105).

Even my own writing here has been unexpectedly interrupted. In a similar vein to how Andy Merrifield (2013) found a way to go beyond Lefebvre in Pollock’s *One: Number 31*, I have been struck by the contemplation of Van Doesburg’s *Composition XI*. At first glance, it looks antithetic to any notion of relationality: a number of squared

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

colored objects scattered on a white-ish surface that are seemingly unconnected. But upon closer inspection, you suddenly realize that perhaps all these objects have not always been there in their present shape, perhaps all these objects have a past and future, perhaps the artist just wanted to show us a moment of what had been moving and changing all the time. After a while, you can even start feeling the movement. But wait, how can a piece of abstract minimalism, made only with one single shape and three primary colors suggest the complex relationality of the world that Massey has long been wrestling to explain? It seems to me that Massey has only needed a few basic ingredients to intensely deal with the most important problems and that she managed to put into words what many times only artists have been able to evoke.

Part 3 is called 'Reconceptualising Place'. Jane Wills' chapter 'Place and Politics' is perhaps the one that faces most directly and openly some of Massey's positions. In particular, she sees two different phases in Massey's trajectory. The first one, "politics *in place*" (p.137), happened in the 80s when academics and activists were using particular places to launch political campaigns in opposition to Thatcher's new neoliberal order. Since 1990s, however, Massey would have been more concerned with a more theoretical "politics *of place*" (*ibid.*) that have overshadowed her earlier arguments. Wills is clearly uncomfortable with this move, arguing that "we still live in places that provide opportunities for interaction with our neighbours, with the potential to forge a sense of shared interest in relation to place" (p.142). Although she is completely right in noting that too often everyday struggles don't capture the attention of intellectuals they deserve, this does not necessarily have a direct connection with theoretical approaches to place and, I think, doesn't undermine the strength of Massey's politics of place.

The Brazilian Rogério Haesbaert explicitly takes a "peripheral' point of view" (p.146). He is more than right when he states that "[p]lace is to Anglo-Saxon geography what territory is to 'Latin geographies'" (meaning by that geographies in Spanish,

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

Portuguese, French and Italian), a point that it's worth clarifying while he confronts his notion of 'multi-territoriality' with Massey's 'global sense of place' (p.147). By multi-territoriality Haesbaert means both the 'multiplicity of territories' (different types of territories) and the 'multiplicity of territory' (internal differentiation), which has a clear connection with Massey's notion of global sense of place. He goes on, however, to pull the thread and elaborate further "in and through movement" the notions of simultaneous or successive multi-territoriality, and even potential and actual multi-territoriality. All this analytical work makes complete sense when Haesbaert applies it to the margins of the world economic order, where territorial openness and closure can have a very different significance than in the center.

The members of the collective project 'Women and the Politics of Place' (Wendy Harcourt, Alice Brooke Wilson, Arturo Escobar and Dianne Rocheleau) present a dialogue among themselves to demonstrate the many ways in which Massey's work has given them new ways of seeing (the chapter is entitled 'A Massey Muse'). Thus, Harcourt uses Massey's notion of the complexity of considering gender 'in place' while analyzing feminist resistance to globalization at the micro level, aware of how it relates to global economies and politics. Brooke Wilson fruitfully relies on Massey to point out the contradictions of the 'local food movement' in the United States that in no way can be seen as neutral and unproblematic. Escobar shows himself to be deeply influenced by Massey's conception of place (as part of networks that stretch beyond places, as sites of continuous negotiation and transformation, as calling for a politics of responsibility towards those connections) in his work on the politics of difference. And Rocheleau takes the chance to move nature and ecological questions towards the centre of the conversation by combining Massey's geometries of power with ecological relations of power in particular places.

The last chapter of Part 3 deals with the physical sense of the world. Here, Steve Hinchliffe opens with the effects of the 2010 volcanic eruption in Iceland that disrupted the whole world for several days to show from the very beginning he is pointing directly

# Antipode

## A Radical Journal of Geography

beyond the social. He points at how the non-human world is present in Massey's global sense of place and highlights Massey's long endeavor to bridge the physical and human geographical divide. It is not, Hinchliffe remarks, only a practical question (climate change, catastrophic physical events, and so on) but a conceptual and political issue that has to do with geography's contribution to a better understanding of the complexity of the world that does not discern between the physical and the human.

Part 4 is given over to 'Political Trajectories'. In their 'Downunder'/'Antipodean' vision, Sophie Bond and Sara Kinson work with two basic Massey concepts - openness and struggle - to rethink the politics of race relations in a post-colonial setting in New Zealand/Aotearoa. They creatively combine Massey's insights with Jean-Luc Nancy's ideas on myth making. Myths, as they aim to demonstrate empirically, have worked to maintain the geometries of power that support them. However, struggles exist to assert and expose the multiplicity and alterity subsumed in colonial power-geometries; they go on to include Chantal Mouffe's visions to state that they are potentially agonistic spaces which can enable progressive politics.

Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift show deep appreciation for Massey's political stance ("principled but not orthodox, coherent but not dogmatic, critical but hopeful" [p.205]) and give enough details of how her natural tendency to foster debate has made her a truly engaged public intellectual. However, they immediately take their chance to state their ideas on the "politics of propensity" (p.207) that requires a space not only for traditional Left principles such as solidarity, equality, justice, and so on, but also for imagination and emotions. The political 'openness' that Amin and Thrift stand for ("The Left has to stand for a different way of doing politics...", they contend [p. 211]) may connect with Massey's work, but it seems to me that her always grounded way of theorizing is very far from Amin and Thrift's rhetorical play.

Andrew Cumbers and Paul Routledge deal with what they call Global Justice Networks (GJNs) in a very engaged and critical tone. They make the most of Massey's

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

notion of geographies of responsibility to rethink how particular social movements participate in GJNs. In particular, they consider the motives of locally based movements to become involved in global networks and, more specifically, ask how everyday practices attempt to enact responsibilities to distant others. On the other hand, and following Massey's outwards-inwards play, and thinking of the several examples of resistance to global neoliberalism in Latin America, they sensibly state the need to understand them in relation to their specific geographies and the histories of colonial repression and failed state projects.

The very real presence of Massey in Latin America is precisely what the next chapter brings us. Ricardo Menéndez, geographer and Minister of Science, Technology and Intermediate Industry of Venezuela since 2009, explains how among the key principles of the new popular nation state was included the creation of new geometries of power. This time the political application of one of Massey's notion seemed to be more real than ever. Creating the geometry of popular power, as Menéndez calls it, involved a difficult and contradictory process. As Massey (2011) has explained, the tempos of popular acquisition of the mechanisms of participation and direct democracy were very different from those of the state in exercising power. In all events, it is still a challenging experiment that reminds us, in a very 'Massey' way, of the consequences of the ways to think of space.

The next chapter is by Hilary Wainwright, Massey's longtime comrade in the 'good old times' of the Greater London Council. Wainwright digs in her own experience for real political examples of the political consequences of different geographical scales. The lessons of the World Social Forum (and how it stimulated local orks and new actions at community level) and of the 'unfinished business' of the Greater London Council (its abolishment is described as a class victory at the UK level) give her a base for sketching out the challenges of an alternative model to market-led politics. The book closes with an interesting and entertaining interview with Massey, "“Stories so far”" by Dave Featherstone, Sophie Bond and Joe Painter, that paves the way for a quick

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

overview of her thinking (I wonder why the editors decided to include it at the end instead of starting with it?!).

There's no doubting that Doreen Massey has created new ways to think about the world geographically. The abundance of concepts she has put into play is simply overwhelming. Not only has she revolutionized old 'containerized' ways of thinking about space (for her, space is the product of interrelations among people and among places; it's the very possibility of existence of multiplicity; it's always unfinished and under construction) but she has conceived imaginative new ways to think space politically. Many of the contributors here have eagerly taken concepts such as power-geometry, global sense of place, or geographies of responsibility, put them to work in different places, criticised them, developed them, span them outwards and onwards. Whether looking for new insights to what is going on in a variety of contexts, trying to move their own theoretical proposals in new directions, or testing the capacity of ideas to transform political realities, Massey's concepts always seem to stimulate new ways of approaching old problems.

Also, as some of the chapters in the book show, Massey's thoughts have been influential well beyond the UK. To foster this 'transnationalisation' process of spreading ideas across language barriers and other borders, a few months before this book was published Abel Albet and I authored a book in Spanish on Massey's contributions (see Albet and Benach 2012). Despite some similarities, the two books are very different in scope and objectives, partly because of the place of publishing and above all because of the different audiences they address. In our book, we aimed to translate into Spanish some of her key articles, to introduce both the person and the intellectual, and to make her ideas more available so they could be used in other battlefields and places. It's all to the good, then, that here we have a group of scholars who seem to have been long doing so successfully, taking Massey's work in new and exciting directions, and we have eighteen excellent examples of how to do it.

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

## References

- Amin A (2009) Paper presented to 'Spatial delights: An engagement with the work of Doreen Massey', Royal Geographical Society, London, March  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/researchcentres/osrc/events/spatial-delights> (last accessed 12 September 2013)
- Hubbard P (2008) Book review forum: Doreen Massey (2007) *World City*. *Area* 40(3):411-412
- Massey D (1984) *Spatial Divisions of Labour*. New York: Routledge
- Massey D (1997) Problems with globalization. *Soundings* 7:7-12
- Massey D (2005) *For Space*. London: Sage
- Massey D (2011) Espacio y sociedad: experimentos con la espacialidad del poder y la democracia. In González A G (ed) *Latinoamérica: laboratorio mundial*. (pp29-55). Madrid: La Oficina de Arte y Ediciones
- Massey D (2012) Londres, Diciembre de 2011. In Albet A and Benach N (eds) *Doreen Massey. Un sentido global del lugar* (pp247-264). Barcelona: Icaria
- Merrifield A (2013) *The Politics of the Encounter: Urban Theory and Protest Under Planetary Urbanization*. Athens: University of Georgia Press

Nuria Benach  
Departament de Geografia Humana  
Universitat de Barcelona  
nuriabenach@ub.edu

September 2013