

Essays

Doreen Massey argues that the way in which space is conceptualised is of critical significance for the conduct of social sciences, here with particular reference to development geography. She begins with a proposal for the conceptualisation of space, and argues that if such a conceptualisation were taken seriously it would pose considerable challenges, both scientific and political. As a result of this, 'weaker' conceptualisations are frequently resorted to, in order to evade such challenges, and the second section of her paper explores two such 'evasive imaginations'. The third section then takes up a particular case of identity and subjectivity and the different geographies potentially implied by different conceptualisations of them. This leads into the question of the geographies of responsibility, especially in a globalised era. Massey argues for a greater degree of 'outward lookingness' and puts the case that, again, the conceptualisation of space feeds into the idea of responsibility.

Space, Time and Political Responsibility in the Midst of Global Inequality¹

1. Introduction

The central argument of this lecture is a very straightforward one. It is that the way in which space is conceptualised is of fundamental importance. It *matters*. It has implications both for the conduct of social sciences, and including in particular here development geography, and for the way in which political positions are constructed and engaged-with. This, then, is an inprinciple and very general argument. However in this particular lecture the intent is to focus on some of the aspects of this general argument that relate to issues of inequality within our currently, neoliberally, globalised world. Moreover this in turn will lead towards considering the notion of political responsibility within such a world.

It is important, however, first to set out some basic, general, propositions concerning the conceptualisation of space.² There are three, as

follows. The first proposition is that space is a product of practices, relations, connections and disconnections. We *make* space in the conduct of our lives, and at all scales, from the intimate to the global. This is a proposition that is now frequently accepted, yet more honoured in the recitation than in the practice. The second proposition is that space is the dimension of multiplicity. Evidently, without space there could not be multiplicity (in the simple sense of the existence of more-than-one-thing). However this proposition implies also the reverse – that without multiplicity there could not be space. Space and multiplicity, in other words, are co-constitutive. The third proposition follows from the two that precede it. It is that space is always in process; it is never finished; never a completed holism. There are, in more practical terms, always connections, relations, yet to be made, or not made. Space is an on-going production. In consequence, and of central significance to the arguments here, it is always open to the future and, in further consequence, always open to responsibility and to politics.

It is possible that these propositions appear intuitively evident. In fact, however, they imply a way of conceptualising space that presents it as a real challenge, frequently underestimated, to social sciences and perhaps to geography in particular, to political engagement, and to the practice of daily life. Moreover, precisely perhaps because it does present such a challenge, it is common in all of the spheres mentioned above (social science, politics, daily life) to adopt alternative conceptualisations (implicit imaginations) in order to deflect that challenge. They are ‘small manoeuvres’ that make it easier to live in the world but without confronting, head on, the challenge of space. The next section explores two of these ‘evasive imaginations’, an exploration that will also help bring to life the three initiating propositions.

2. *Evasive imaginations*

Perhaps the strategy most frequently adopted, and particularly so in the field of development, when faced with the challenge of space, is *to turn space into time, geography into history*. Thus, to take a simple example, when questions are raised concerning the poverty and

inequality that exist within today's form of globalisation (in Mali, perhaps, or Nicaragua, or Mozambique), the reply is frequently constructed around notions such as 'they are behind', 'give us time', 'they will catch up'. Likewise it is common practice to categorise countries or regions as developed or developing. Or again, in both high politics and social sciences, discourses frequently proceed by deploying (implicitly or explicitly) one of the modernist grand narratives, such as that of Progress, or that of Modes of Production.

In all of these formulations, a particular operation is being performed upon the underlying conceptualisation of space and time. In all of them, the whole uneven geography of the world is effectively reorganised (imaginatively) into a historical queue. There is a turning of geography (which, given the initial propositions, is a spatial simultaneity of differences) into history (itself seen as a single succession). There are in other words two operations being performed here. First there is the obliteration of the contemporaneity of space. Second, and equally importantly – and implied by the first – temporality is reduced to the singular: there is only *one* historical queue (one model of development) and it is one defined by those 'in the lead' (there is one voice) and sometimes, perhaps often, accepted by those who are figured as 'behind'. The most immediate and obvious result of this manoeuvre is that those countries or regions which are 'behind' in this queue have no possibility (precisely, no 'space') to define a path of their own. Their future is foretold. Maybe they would not wish to follow the path along which the 'developed' have led. This manoeuvre, in other words, this conceptualisation of spatial difference as temporal sequence, is a way of pronouncing that there is no alternative.

There are, moreover, further consequences of this turning of space into time. The first further consequence is that it ignores any possibility (some would argue 'the evident fact') that the inequality in the world is being produced *now*; that, moreover, it is being produced as a structural fact of this form of globalisation. This particular evasive imagination ignores the effects of the current forms of 'connectedness' (space as relations, practices), and this in turn not only renders it

less likely that a majority of 'others' *can* 'catch up' but also cunningly conceals the implication of 'the developed world' within the production of this inequality *now*. (This, then, begins to raise the question of responsibility, which will be returned to at the end of the lecture.)

The second further consequence of this imaginative manoeuvre that turns space into time is more difficult to evoke. It is that it reduces, makes more bland and less pressing, less urgent, the way in which the differences between places (countries, regions) are framed. (Between the rich of the UK or Germany, say, and the poor of Mali or Guatemala.) That difference is reduced to place in the historical queue. And that in turn produces an effect that is absolutely crucial: it denies equal standing; it is a form of belittlement; it denies 'coevalness'.³ (And this, I would argue, affects us both as intellectuals attempting to address global North-South relations, and as ordinary members of society.)

Both of these further consequences of turning space into time (and thereby obliterating its essential nature), that is the denial of implication in the production of inequality and the reduction of difference to place in the historical queue, imply the erasure of ethical and political challenges. Both also depend upon particular, evasive, conceptualisations of space and time.

It is necessary at this point, however, to insert an important clarification. What is being proposed here is absolutely *not* an argument against *any* notions of 'progress' or 'development' tout court. At the most obvious level, clean water is better than dirty water. The problems with such concepts, that the argument here is intended to highlight, concern first the singularity of their assumed form and second the question of who it is that defines that form. The aim here is, rather, to point to the apparent difficulty involved in a real recognition of the spatially differentiated and unequal present and our implication in it, and to indicate what little manoeuvres are so frequently adopted, what 'political cosmologies' are conjured, to avoid confronting this element of the challenge of space.⁴

It should also be recognised that this turning of space into time has long been challenged in the international political field itself. Thus it

has been argued, persuasively, that this struggle to establish their own coeval story was crucial both to national liberation movements (that is, in the sphere of the immediately political) and to the theorising of the dependentista school (that is, in one of the intellectual stances behind such struggles).⁵

There is one final point it is important to add about this evasive imagination (and which applies, indeed, to all such imaginations). This is that, while it is certainly the case that the dominant, hegemonic, mobilisation of such imaginations is often by the powerful forces – global leaders in the West, the IMF, and the WTO, and so forth – it is also the case that these imaginations infiltrate also into our daily lives. Moreover this is just as important an effect, and one that is intellectually and politically even more challenging. One small, particular, example might help to illustrate the point. When George W. Bush was re-elected to the White House, a typical line of analysis in leftish ‘liberal’ circles in the UK consigned those who had voted for this President to some archaic past. They were ‘old fashioned’; how could they hold such beliefs (about family, religion, sexuality ...) in the twenty-first century? Their ‘difference’ was understood as being temporal. Such a stance, in other words, denies their actually-existing difference, it displays a lack of respect (and respect is a correlate of the recognition of coevalness). It also, by thereby ignoring the relations that have contributed to *producing* these positions, deprives those who hold such a stance of any political purchase *upon* them.

Having explored at length this first example of an evasive imagination, the second example can be dealt with much more briefly. It is presented here in part simply to emphasise the fact that there are many alternative conceptualisations of space which in no way conform to the propositions laid out at the outset and which, each in their own way, seek to evade the challenge (or, more precisely, aspects of the challenge) of space. The core of this second evasive conceptualisation is the strategy of *thinking of space as a surface*. This happens in a variety of ways. In casual talk and writing (and indeed in much writing in the non-geographical social sciences) space is assumed to

be equivalent to the landscape 'out there', the surface of earth and sea that stretches out around us. There is doubtless here a connection back to the philosophical understanding of space as the dimension of extension (whereas in this lecture what is being stressed is space as the dimension of multiplicity). In similar mode, travelling is often rendered as 'travelling across space'. One sits in a moving train, for example, and gazes out at a landscape within which a woman is cleaning out a drain.⁶ For the train-traveller she is caught in a moment, frozen in that act, as the train passes on. She is part of 'the space out there', conceived as a surface across which one travels. In contrast, and in fact, for the woman this movement of clearing out the drain is part of a life, a moment in an ongoing trajectory. She is, let us say, just about to go away (precisely, to travel) to visit her sister and has been thinking for days 'before I go away I really *must* clean out that drain'.

The point, of course, is that that moment, captured through the train window, is not frozen; it is part of an ongoing story. And so it is for all of that 'landscape out there'. It is not a surface but a constellation of on-going trajectories. Moreover these are trajectories not only of the humans but of the nonhuman too – the buildings, the trees, the rocks themselves, all moving on, changing, becoming. It is that multiplicity of trajectories that it is important to capture – not travelling across space conceived of as a continuous surface, but travelling across stories.

There are other ways, also, in which this implicit conceptualisation of space as a surface operates. There is, for instance, a frequent confusion, or elision, between maps and space – that is, between the surface of the map and the dimension of space itself. This, again, is to render space as a completed whole (in contrast to the propositions laid out at the beginning of this lecture, which would propose space as always in the process of production). There is, however, one manifestation of this evasive imagination that is of particular relevance to development geography. This is the imagination of what are called 'the voyages of discovery'. In this imagination, Hernán Cortés crosses space (the Atlantic, the neck of what was to become Mexico) and comes

upon Tenochtitlán, capital of the Aztecs. In this imaginary there is only one active agent (the voyager). Those who are 'discovered' are implicitly conceptualised as located on this spatial surface which has been crossed, implicitly awaiting the arrival of the voyager. It is a classically colonial imagination, conceiving only the coloniser as active agent and in so doing depriving 'the other' both of autonomous active agency and of a history of their own. This relation to modernity is significant, for it characterises also that evasive imagination of space that was detailed in the first example (the turning of space into time). In that case it was the 'grand narratives' of modernity that were at issue, the rendering of multiple histories into one single trajectory and so enforcing one model of development or of progress. In this second example the crucial manoeuvre is depriving 'the other' of agency and of history. And this, again, is achieved through an implicit reconceptualisation of space in such a way that aspects of the challenge of space (in particular the contemporaneous existence of autonomous others) is evaded. Rather, it is proposed here that space is a dimension that *cuts through* stories/trajectories, but not to stabilise them into a surface in which the lives of others are stilled, the dislocations inherent in multiplicity sutured into coherence. Space in this sense is inherently imbued with time. Space is a simultaneity of unfinished, ongoing, trajectories.

If time is the dimension of change, then space is the dimension of contemporaneous multiplicity. Moreover it is a multiplicity of trajectories of processes, not of static *things*. Space is therefore the dimension of the social. It poses that most basic of social, political, ethical, questions: how we are going to live together. Space presents us with the existence of others.

3. Space, time, identity, subjectivity

In this reconceptualisation of space it is imperative not to counterpose space and time. Rather, they need to be thought together, as necessary to each other (for an explication of this, see Massey 2005). It is, however, important to insist on their specificities, and not to relapse into some undifferentiated four-dimensionality. It is also important, in this

recognition of the specificity of each, that space is accorded as much attention as is time. One reason for stressing this point is that there has in recent years in some parts of the social sciences been a tendency to focus on time, and memory, and a certain inwardness. The argument here is not against such concerns; but it is that there should be complementary attention to space and outwardlookingness.

There has been a long history, in philosophy and elsewhere, of understanding subjectivity and identity in terms of time and temporality. Moreover this has been accompanied by an understanding of time and temporality as an 'internal' dimension. This attitude can be found in even the most unlikely of places. Thus Merleau-Ponty (1962), in spite of an overwhelming concern with engagement, writes 'we must understand time as the subject and the subject as time'. Gilles Deleuze writes of 'time as the basis of meaning and experience' (cf. Goodchild 1996). And Elizabeth Grosz (1995), as part of a critique of this position, reflects on Luce Irigaray (1993) who takes time to be the projection of 'his' interior – conceptual, introspective ... 'The interiority of time links with the exteriority of space'.⁷ It is possible to trace in this a connection to that imagination of space as 'out there' that was examined in the previous section.

However, coming on to the social-scientific agenda over recent years has been a reconceptualisation that could challenge this position: that subjectivities and identities are constitutively relational. That people do not have their beings before engaging in interaction, but that to a significant extent our beings, our identities, our subjectivities, are constituted *in and through* those engagements, those connections and disconnections, those practices of interaction. The impetus for this shift has come from many directions, many of them initially political: feminist, anti-racist, postcolonial.

Such a proposed reconceptualisation has the potential to raise a number of issues. *First*, it means that the spatiality as well as the temporality of our identities and subjectivities is something of consequence. (We are, constitutively, elements within a wider, configurational, distributed geography.) *Second*, that raises the question of what

is the geography of relations through which any particular identity is established and maintained. *Third*, that in turn raises (should raise) the question of our social and political relationship *to* those geographies through which our very selves are constructed. It begins to raise, in other words, the question of the geography of responsibility.

There have, of course, been some explorations of the geographies of identity. However, as intimated above, the tendency has been mainly to turn inwards, towards an appreciation of the *internal* multiplicities, the decentrings, maybe the fragmentations, of identity. Fiona Robinson (1999), in her book *Globalizing Care*, makes this point strongly, as she works to detach the notion of 'care' from its overwhelming focus on the familiar and the local. Moreover that concern to look inward was important, provoked as it was by the need to contest essentialisms, to insist on internal hybridities, and so forth. The same movement has taken place in relation to the identity of that specifically geographical entity – the place. Having established a global sense of the local the tendency has been to focus on the hybridities within, the global within the local, the political and ethical questions of hospitality. Again, these 'internal' issues are of vital importance.

However, there is another side to the geography of the relational construction of identity, of a global sense of place. This concerns the relations that run *outwards* from that identity. And that in turn raises the question of a wider, distanced, ethics and politics.

One immediate problem is that such a concern for the external relations of identity could be overwhelming and in consequence disempowering. It is simply impossible even to recognise, let alone to take up and respond to, all those threads by which any individual, or any place, is connected to the world. Indeed Frederic Jameson (1991) is critical of Jean-Paul Sartre (1981) at one point for apparently attempting to do just this. Sartre is struggling to evoke that sense of simultaneity (that notion of a simultaneity of stories as yet unfinished that is taken here to characterise space); he begins to point to 'other things going on right now'. Jameson's response is to point to the impossibility of this task, and to the fact that this impossibility can generate only

feelings of guilt for having left some things out. It is, he writes, just an empty gesture. On the one hand Jameson is surely correct that the attempt to list is futile. On the other hand that is not, fundamentally, what is at issue. Rather, what is at issue is an *attitude*, the scaffolding of one's self-conception, a stance in relation to the world. It is, I would propose, potentially a very geographical stance, an openness to a wider engagement with the world; an outwardlookingness.

The philosopher Henri Bergson wrote, in relation to temporality and history, of 'throwing oneself into the past', a form of self-positioning, after which, in such a mode, it would be possible to pick up the particular threads to be engaged with more specifically. It is something like that that is being proposed here. A throwing oneself into space; into an awareness of the planetwide configuration of trajectories, lives, practices ... into which we are set and through which we are made. With this wider awareness, it is then possible to prioritise.

4. Identity, space, responsibility

One approach to identifying such priorities and of turning the question of identity inside-out, as it were, can be drawn from Moira Gatens' and Genevieve Lloyd's book *Collective imaginings* (1999). In this work, Gatens and Lloyd develop a notion of responsibility, which they denote as 'Spinozan responsibility', that has characteristics of relationality, embodiedness, and extension. In the particular context of the argument of this paper it is the first and third of these characteristics that are of particular interest. Briefly, a relational responsibility implies that it derives from our constitutive relations with others. The connection to the propositions about the conceptualisation of space is evident. Further, a responsibility that has the characteristic of extension implies that it is not restricted to the immediate or the local. The connection to the argument about the external geographies of identity is evident.

The particular preoccupation of Gatens and Lloyd is extension in *time*. They are Australian philosophers concerned to think about issues of collective responsibility to Aboriginal society, on the part of present-day white Australians, for white Australia's past. They write

'In understanding how our past continues in our present we understand also the demands of responsibility for the past we carry with us, the past in which our identities are formed. We are responsible for the past not because of what we as individuals have done, but because of what we are'. As a geographer, my question to this insightful observation is: can this temporal dimension of responsibility be paralleled in the spatial and in the present? For as 'the past continues in our present', so also is the spatially distant implicated in our 'here'.

This, then, might be one possible way of opening up a configurational politics of responsibility for the nature and effects of that wider geography of relations through which we are made. It would, moreover, be built upon and supported by a conceptualisation of space as continually being constructed through the practice of relations within a coeval multiplicity.

There have in recent years been many apologies for *historical* wrongs. (It is, perhaps, part of Gatens' and Lloyd's aim to move away from the vacuousness of some of this.) However, facing up to *present* wrongs, including those equally distant but in space rather than in time, poses rather different, and in most ways more difficult, challenges. Once again, then, there is a distinction between space and time and, again, it is one that highlights the challenge of space.

There are four reflections, which can be made about this. *First*, a responsibility that is relational in the sense indicated by Gatens and Lloyd (and mirrored in the conceptualisation of space suggested here) but in which the characteristic of extension is geographical rather than historical, involves not only compensation for already unequal positions, but at least an address to the production of those positions themselves.

The *second* reflection arises from the juxtaposition of the arguments of Gatens and Lloyd with a recent position articulated by Iris Marion Young (2003). Young has addressed this issue of responsibility in an article subtitled 'Sweatshops and political responsibility'. Her empirical, political, concern is with the responsibility of US consumers towards producers in sweatshops in other countries of the world.

Once again, in other words, this is a notion of responsibility with extension, but in this case the extension is explicitly spatial. Young's concern is to move, as she puts it, 'From guilt to solidarity' (this is the main title of her article). She contrasts guilt and solidarity. In the case of guilt, she argues, if some are guilty then others are thereby absolved. In the case of solidarity (or political responsibility), however, this is not so. In this case there is no isolatable perpetrator but rather a chain of ordinary actions – the signing of forms, the research projects, the design of advertisements, the small investments, the purchase of sweatshop clothes – through which the current unequal world is produced. There are, then, similarities between YOUNG on the one hand and Gatens and Lloyd on the other in the sense that in both cases the concern is with 'extended' responsibility. However, Young does not tie responsibility to identity in the manner implied by Gatens and Lloyd. She specifies it, rather, in terms of participation in structural processes, in her case the structural processes that lead from our daily lives to global inequality. In other words, the nature of the relation of connectivity is different between the arguments.

Third, in her distinction between guilt and political responsibility Young engages explicitly with the different implications of extension in time on the one hand and extension in space on the other. Guilt, she says, is usually taken to refer to an action or event that has reached its end, and in consequence it tends to be backward-looking. It is concerned with the past. In fact, it would seem to be precisely from this that Gatens and Lloyd are trying to escape, by linking responsibility to identity. For them, the issue (the past treatment of Australian Aborigines) is *not* closed, but that is not for the reason that such treatment continues in the present. Rather, the issue is not closed (and we are thereby still implicated/responsible) because those past actions (by others) are part of what makes us what we are. This would seem to be a very helpful move.

However, there is one further, *fourth*, step in the argument. For there is another significant difference between responsibility over temporal distance and responsibility in the spatially distanced present.

This is that reparations for past events single out those events as having been 'abnormal'. Slavery, the holocaust, the treatment of Aborigines are defined as warranting recognition of some sort on account of having been deviations from normal, acceptable, behaviour. However, in the case of political responsibility for *present* relations, it is precisely often 'normality' itself that must be challenged. In the case of current global inequality, it is normality that is the disaster. As Young has it, 'In a blame ... conception of responsibility, what counts as a wrong is generally conceived as a deviation from a baseline. Implicitly, we assume a normal background situation that is morally acceptable, if not ideal'. 'Political responsibility' on the other hand 'questions "normal" conditions'. And that, I suggest, is what is imperative today.

This, then, is a challenge of space. It is about the full recognition of space as the dimension of the social (space as multiplicity). It is about the challenge of our ongoing, ordinary, constitutive interrelatedness, and thus our collective implication in the outcomes of that interrelatedness (space as relational). And it is about the possibility for a more configurational and outwardlooking stance (a recognition of space as continually being made) and therefore our responsibility for it.

- 1 This paper is the text version of the First Annual Lecture in Development Geography, presented at the University of Bonn, Germany, 27 June 2005 and was first published in *Erdkunde – Archive for Scientific Geography*, Department of Geography, University of Bonn, Germany, Volume 60, Issue 2, June 2006. This Lecture Series is organized by the Development Geography Research Group at the University of Bonn's Geography Department.
- 2 These propositions, and elements of the arguments that follow, are explored in more detail in Massey 2005. An early version of some of the themes can also be found in Massey 1999.
- 3 On coevalness, see Fabian (1983). Fabian's argument is concerned particularly with anthropology and the way in which it constructs (in part through manoeuvres with space and time) its object of study. There are, however, many constructive parallels with development geography.
- 4 'Political cosmology' is a term again drawn from Fabian (1983).
- 5 David Slater's recent book *Geopolitics and the post-colonial* makes this argument particularly clearly, and also draws out from it some of the lessons for development geography, in particular the need to learn *from* the global South.
- 6 This classic example is explored more fully in Massey (2005). It connects with a much larger argument about the connection so often established within philosophy between space and representation.

- 7 It is not the intention here to take up the line of argument, through Irigaray and Grosz, that links this counterpositioning of space and time with the question of the constitution of genders.

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Colophon

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