

## Professor Doreen Massey Keynote Lecture – GA Annual Conference 2010

*Alan Parkinson*

A highlight of the **GA Annual Conference** for many delegates was the keynote address on Saturday, given by Professor Doreen Massey.

The screen in the lecture theatre was folded away: there would be no PowerPoint to distract from what Doreen had to say...

A brief introduction by the GA's President, John Halocha, helped build expectation in the main lecture theatre and in the neighbouring lecture room, where those who were unable to obtain a ticket for the lecture could watch on a live video link.



Speaking with the aid of a few sheets of notes, Doreen began with a story of a recent visit to a bed and breakfast in the Lake District, with a view towards Skiddaw. Reading a pamphlet on the geology of the mountain led to a digression on the mobility of everything, even the ancient rocks that made up the mountain were migrants. If everything is constantly moving, then where is "here"?

She described her Manchester childhood which led to an appreciation that space has a political dimension, and that there were always issues of power involved in relationships between places, such as the "north" and the "south".

She also outlined the importance between knowing something as a fact, and a situation where the acquisition of that knowledge changed the way that you might look at the world, and enhanced your 'geographical imagination'.

Doreen went on to discuss the work that she had done in Venezuela, after Hugo Chavez became aware of her work on **power geometries**, which were used as the basis of political reform.

There were many sections which resonated with my work in curriculum making, particularly the marvellous section about the infinity of stories that exist at any given moment, and which can be accessed by a geographical imagination, through the 'geographical dimension' of space.

When we travel, we travel through an infinity of simultaneous stories, and maps are a surface over which the stories are played out. This resonated with me...

Some of my notes were also turned into 140 character 'nuggets' for Twitter, for those following remotely. A few of these might give a flavour for what Doreen had to say:

***If everything is moving then what is 'here' - Skiddaw made from 'migrant rocks'***

***We are one story in middle of ongoing simultaneity***

***Fredric Jameson: guilt of leaving things out – can't teach the whole of geography so be outward looking***

***Maps can give impression of space as a surface and fixed - travel is a journey through a million stories***

***Space is a cut across an infinite landscape of stories***

***Importance of space as a dimension (like time)***

***Geographers should be involved in debate over political change and local autonomy - difficult process***

***Need to connect academic and school geographers and connect with politics in broader sense***

***The power of doing - as a learning process***

***Power has a geography - linked to North-South divide***

***Geography offers a sensibility and perspective on the world***

***Geographical understanding doesn't take away the wonder of the world it increases it***

Others in the audience may have had a different response to what they heard and would perhaps have appreciated the references to Sartre's 'Nausea' or the work of American political theorist Fredric Jameson more than I did. Doreen did an excellent job of connecting their work back to the geographical milieu within which I am more comfortable.

This was truly an inspiring hour, and a reminder that we all need to keep learning. That is not about the acquisition of knowledge that we don't have, but the ability to engage with people and activities which open a window on familiar territory and offer us a different view of the landscape we occupy.