

Remembering Doreen¹

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I’m writing this short post after reading an email from OU colleague Steve Pile confirming that Doreen Massey did indeed pass away on the afternoon of Friday 11 March 2016. I saw earlier tweets to the same effect and tweeted myself, and now it’s for sure.

Doreen has accompanied all of my academic life. I read her book *Spatial Divisions of Labour* as an undergraduate (still an outstandingly important text, in my view). She examined my PhD thesis (and told me I needed to write a methods section at the end of it. . . .). I met her on and off as I worked on feminist and cultural geographies in London and Edinburgh after my PhD. I joined The Open University in 1999 and in the following years I worked with her on an OU geography module on globalisation and on a small research project on public art in Milton Keynes. And even after she retired, for some time anyway, she often was in her OU office just down the corridor from mine, working on talks and projects and politics, always ready to discuss and engage.

She wasn’t always an easy person to work with. She could be very critical; she could insist on things being done her way; she didn’t like any kind of admin. She could also, far more often, be incredibly warm – to everyone and anyone, absolutely – and she was one of the most charismatic speakers I have ever heard. I remember her tiny frame absolutely filling one enormous lecture hall with energy and passion, extemporising from handwritten notes, intensifying the entire space. I can hear her voice now, and her laughter.

Some of her ideas – spatial divisions of labour, relationality, a global sense of place, throwntogetherness – have transformed huge swathes of human geography and beyond. So many of us simply would not be doing what we do and how we do it without her work, even if many of us are doing different things from her. Her work transformed human geography’s ideas, but she also transformed many scholars as people, supporting them, pushing them, inspiring them. And that’s not even

¹ This contribution has been published in the blog *Visual/Method/Culture* by Gillian Rose. It was posted on March 12, 2016. [URL: <<https://visualmethodculture.wordpress.com/2016/03/12/REMEMBERING-DOREEN/#COMMENTS>>. Consulted on May 20, 2016].

to start on her political work, from the Greater London Council to the Kilburn Manifesto.

I think it's that massive humanity – including its flaws – that made me realise, this morning, after reading those tweets, that it had literally never crossed my mind, even though I knew she was ill, that she might die. Her energy, commitment, the sheer intensity and consistency of her engagement, somehow made such an outcome an impossibility. But it's happened and I feel a massive absence now, a silence.

My tweet said RIP. But actually, now, I don't want to think of her resting in peace. I much prefer to think of her arguing on, being thoughtful and awkward and sometimes difficult, never ever taking things for granted, always thinking towards openness and a different kind of future.