

**Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. Cambridge, Mass., and London, MIT Press, 1996, 296 pp., 109 black-and-white illus., endnotes, index**

Cynthia Hammond

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DOLORES HAYDEN, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. Cambridge, Mass., and London, MIT Press, 1996, 296 pp., 109 black-and-white illus., endnotes, index.

[P]ublic space dedicated to women's history and to ethnic history, especially to projects focused on working women of color, claims political territory in tangible ways. Citizens can meet in these historic places and work together on new issues with the collective knowledge of earlier struggles. And this fosters a public realm where, at last, women are free to be ourselves and to see ourselves as strong and wise people, because we have represented ourselves this way.

Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 237.

Space, for Dolores Hayden, is more than three-dimensional; it is avidly lived and, as she is at pains to prove through her own activist work, has a history that is not so easily buried under the concrete and steel rhetoric of a modernist city. The above excerpt, from Hayden's *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, is an evocative bridge between her past work, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighbourhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1981), and her most recent publication. In *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, Hayden explores the forgotten stories of early-twentieth-century, communitarian living projects, organized by women whose eventual goal was financial remuneration for their unpaid "domestic" labour. In this more recent writing, Hayden presents her own collaborative work with "The Power of Place," the name given to an organization which promotes public history projects in Los Angeles. The above quote speaks of the fundamental importance of commemorating marginal histories and of the need for means of self-representation which are alternative to the modes offered within the dominant history of American colonialism.

Hayden's analytical reflections, such as the above quotation from the penultimate chapter, are always couched within a broader rubric of progressive, leftist politics. Consistently motivated by concern for untold or marginalized public histories, Hayden's work then and now is faithfully academic, pointedly anecdotal and politically pithy. With attentive endnotes which read like an annotated bibliography, Hayden's work is equally a dependable bibliographical source, which makes the publisher's decision to forego a bibliography regrettable.

Hayden is a professor of architecture, urbanism and American studies at Yale University. Previously, she worked in the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of California at Los Angeles. As a response to her years as a resident in the United States' second largest

city, Hayden established an interdisciplinary, collaborative public art/history collective called "The Power of Place" in 1984. In her own words, "[i]t was a small nonprofit corporation, and its purpose was to situate women's history and ethnic history in downtown, in public places, through experimental, collaborative projects by historians, designers, and artists." (xi)

The Power of Place, which had lodgings in the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at UCLA for "many years" (xv), drew from numerous shades and textures of experience. Each undertaking was strongly grounded in archival historical research, which branched out into studies on specific individuals, social movements, communities or buildings. The project coordinators benefited additionally from the skills of curators, architects, professional urban planners and, most importantly, from the input of community dwellers. Hayden emphasizes repeatedly that successful projects were the result of long-term commitments to mutual listening between academics, professionals and residents. Hayden's goal of a new form of urban preservation is, she feels, within the scope of recent, community-based public history, which focuses on regionalistic architectural tendencies, commemorative public art and landscape preservation. Through these means, says Hayden, we can find

new models of collaborations between professionals and communities, as well as new alliances among practitioners concerned with urban landscape history. Artists and designers are also active in the public work of connecting memory into the built fabric of the city. Their interventions in the urban landscape [...] can strengthen urban storytelling and enhance citizens' interest in history. (228)

Hayden is not overly sanguine about the effort involved in projects such as these. She ends her summary of the benefits of collaborative public history work with a note of caution within her enthusiasm, saying that "community process is crucial to the future of all these efforts." (228)

*The Power of Place* demonstrates the conviction that public history is a practice, not simply an object of study (xiii). With this position established, Hayden emphasizes the practical and narrative elements of her working experience within The Power of Place collaborations. The book is divided into two sections: "I – Claiming Urban Landscapes as Public History" and "II – Los Angeles: Public Pasts in the Downtown Landscape." The first acts as an extended introduction, establishing the various disciplinary fields necessary to a discussion of urban space in its current, complex manifestations. The second section describes the projects

undertaken by or through *The Power of Place*, in their research, planning, administrative, aesthetic and public facets. The book concludes with a brief epilogue concerning the cycle of tension in Los Angeles that appears, since the Rodney King incident of 1992, to be mounting in direct relation to the ever-widening gaps between a monied white minority and a diverse, economically weary majority. The post-verdict devastation of South Central Los Angeles marks an ominous new chapter in this city's history, should a new paradigm for the official treatment of space not be found.

The first section, essentially setting the interdisciplinary stages for Hayden's collaborations, commences with an insightful exploration of a 1975 debate between a social historian and a formalist architectural critic "about the definitions of public history and public culture in a democratic society" (6).<sup>1</sup> Hayden notes that this polarized polemic between class and aesthetic issues results in a dead-end opposition. On one hand, an elitist formalism supports the preservation of the "best" examples of a given architectural period or style, while on the other, an idealistic adherence to social issues arguably neglects visual beauty, or art historical designations of quality.

These positions are unsatisfactory, and fail to acknowledge the existence of mutual ground that disciplinary terminology tears asunder.<sup>2</sup> Returning from this debate (played out in the op-ed pages of the *New York Times*), Hayden notes that contemporary discussions on the preservation of public space/history/culture "take place in much more contested terrain of race, gender, and class, set against long-term economic and environmental problems, especially in the large cities of the United States" (6). These are not the generalizations of a "politically correct" urban history;<sup>3</sup> rather they are the riled progeny of generations of partial preservation movements, dependent upon a canon that is most wanting in its membership. What can be done? After presenting her readers with this discursive stalemate, Hayden names identity politics as the key player in the practice of public space (7). Chapters two and three of *The Power of Place* accordingly discuss the various initiatives taken in the United States and in Great Britain around the issue of community identity and identification with location.

These chapters, constituting Part One, construct an extensive literature review, establishing links between "cultural landscape history" (45) and the fields of urban geography, architectural history, social history, urban planning, women's studies and cultural studies. Hayden introduces the various, necessarily tangential means of tracking the archival history of vanished places: via fire insurance maps, trade union records, settlement houses, the vernacular language of extant local buildings. And she notes the less tan-

gible proofs of a place's impact, upon the bodies of residents and workers:

The experience of physical labor is also part of body memory. In a dusty vineyard, a crowded sweatshop, or an oil field, people acquire the characteristic postures of certain occupations – picking grapes, sewing dresses, pumping gas. (48)

From this point Hayden begins to establish a methodological position for the use of public art as a means to encompass and incorporate public memory. In chapter three, "Place Memory and Urban Preservation," she argues, following Lucy Lippard,<sup>4</sup> that public art is not simply or necessarily permanent, exterior sculpture but rather art that has a public content and context (68). Thus, art that engages a community's history, within the community's actual physical location, has the potential to resonate with the bodies which inhabit that space and have emotional, temporal and political investments therein. The most inspired and inspiring writing in this section is the descriptions of collective, community-based work. Readers learn about the British environmental collective, Common Ground, and their gentle and poetic regionalism, and the infamous "Porkopolis" event, a civic art competition in Cincinnati which resulted in a hard-won victory for a group of winged pigs to grace the entrance to the city. Hayden concludes her cogent medley of examples with *The New Charleston*, which was an exhaustive examination, within the inter/multidisciplinary collaboration of an artist, a poet and an architect, of one city and its rich African American spatial history. The exhibition involved musicians and "a detailed map of historic places of importance to African Americans – slave markets, the hanging tree, community centres" (69) which, painted on the floor, served as pedagogical cartography and demarcated a dance floor for visitors to the display. From these diverse cases, Hayden moves swiftly to Part Two and the crux of her interest: Los Angeles and the work achieved by *The Power of Place*. She writes:

My own purpose is to explore some ways that locating ethnic and women's history in urban space can contribute to what might be called a politics of place construction, redefining the mainstream experience, and making visible some of its forgotten parts. (xii)

From the outset, the author's firmly established mien is a signature mark on each page as she maps the very human links between "semi-public" and "semi-private" territories (35). These terms, found in chapter two, "Urban Landscape History: The Sense of Place and the Politics of Space," refer to the impossible demarcation of territory into

public and private, for how do we describe the private processes of spirituality that occur within the walls of a “public” shrine? Or the “world of shared meanings [...] couched in the language of small [...] territories between the dwelling and the street” (35)? *The Power of Place* exceeds a critique of the well-rehearsed public/private dichotomy in its discussion of city spaces. Hayden’s book clarifies the now-established theoretical position that a unilateral distinction between discrete “private” and “public” spheres is misleading and unhelpful.<sup>5</sup>

*The Power of Place* demonstrates that such descriptors are woefully insufficient to encompass the richness of everyday life and the complexities of urban history. The contingencies that individual subjectivities bring to bear on those spaces in which we live are, in Hayden’s professional work, the strongest weave in the cloth she shows us. To continue the metaphor, Hayden seeks not to unravel individual threads but rather to celebrate the composition of urban history in all its knotty diversity. What makes this book special, and unusual among texts that promote emancipatory social measures, is that it actually offers concrete suggestions, based on *The Power of Place*’s previous efforts, on how to embrace the power of social memory. The penultimate chapter and its endnotes are a wealth of practical information on establishing public history cooperatives and creating civic, commemorative art. Hayden is very skilled at showing the intimate connections between the larger philosophical issues involved in local activism, and the interconnecting, personal stories of struggle, failure and perseverance. Beside an illustration of an invitation sent out by *The Power of Place* to community members, asking them to bring to a workshop their old photographs, family histories, personal memories and “ideas about how to enhance the sense of place in downtown Los Angeles” (230), Hayden writes,

Often listening to residents will reveal intersecting themes of ethnic history, workers’ history, and women’s history [...] Artists can work with missing pieces, or erasures of important aspects of history, so as to reestablish missing parts in a story, from the scale of a coastline [...] to the presence of women [...] to the destruction of a barrio. (231-34)

While recognizing that a truly inclusive history is beyond the scope of her book, which she presents more as a collection of case studies towards further efforts in the construction of cultural landscape history, Hayden does seek the inclusive urban story. In the introductory chapter to Part Two, Hayden gives the reader a sketch of Los Angeles’ urban history, including a list of the “controversial” historical issues of “slavery, internment, deportation and economic

exploitation.” The brevity with which Hayden mentions these issues seems somewhat at odds with her exhortation that Americans reclaim the not-so-savory side to the American chronicle (96). The following chapters, however, reveal that Hayden’s aim is not so much to write a critical urban history of Los Angeles as it is to emphasize the agency and perseverance she encountered through her research. Hayden explores a variety of sites. She writes in-depth accounts of the leading citizen and midwife Biddy Mason (1818-1891), who was the first black woman to own property in Los Angeles; the Japanese fruit and flower farmers whose hard-won community life was violently dispersed through the internment camps of World War II; and the unionizing efforts of three Latina women during the Depression, played out in the Embassy Hotel, a large classicized building with ecclesiastical, political, commercial and pedagogical histories.

Hayden’s decision to write for a broader audience is one that occasionally costs her something of her earlier political edge. Her 1981 study of communitarian architecture and the organization of so-called domestic or “private” (unpaid) women’s labour in the United States in the early years of this century was notable for the energy and precision with which she directed her critique. Hayden made a concise and cutting case against the American government for offering financial incentives to married, white men to invest in single-family dwellings. The mass production of small, single-family dwellings in the post-World War II years were, according to Hayden’s research and analysis, a direct strategy against the growing industrialization and organized sharing of women’s domestic labour. Strangely, in *The Power of Place*, Hayden omits any reference to her past writing on such economically motivated, anti-socialist campaigns, even in the chapter which deals specifically with the changing face of Los Angeles with the rise of prefabricated homes (chapter five, “Workers’ Landscapes and Livelihoods”).

An absence like this is perplexing, as are the somewhat superficial treatments of atrocities such as the deportation of Mexican-Americans during the Depression, simply because we know (from her endnotes) that Hayden knows more than she is giving us in the body of her text. Granted, *The Power of Place* is, as Hayden makes clear in her preface, intended to be accessible to a variety of readers. At times, however, Hayden relegates the theoretical inquiry (that locates “controversial” issues within a network of contributing factors) to her endnotes. This decision is regrettable, as in fact that inquiry would foreground the analytical dimension that is present but at times muted in this text. From the point of view of an academic who seeks to unite theory and practice in her own studio production, I would welcome even more of Hayden’s considerable synthesizing abilities and the consequent expansion of her text.

These minor hesitations aside, *The Power of Place* should be commended for its inclusive stance, and for mining a decade of cultural studies' theorizing for a truly interdisciplinary methodology taken to its next step in the field. In short, Hayden is not just talking the talk, she is walking the walk. The stories in Part Two are always recounted against the backdrop of The Power of Place's efforts towards community involvement and commemoration. The Bidy Mason project, for example, was actualized on the very lot that had supported Mason's home and her sons' businesses. That space was, at the time of The Power of Place's involvement, a parking lot owned by the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency, who approached The Power of Place to commemorate Bidy Mason's life. The works realized included a book project by artist Susan E. King, a public history workshop and an article by Hayden, an installation by artist Betye Saar, and an 81-foot wall by architect Sheila Levrant de Bretteville. This wall was inscribed with salient text describing the life of Mason, her struggles and triumphs, her gifts to the growing community of Los Angeles. The wall also sought to situate Mason's achievements historically: winning her freedom from slavery in court and owning property were events in a life and period in which freedom and ownership for African Americans were not rights but tenuous privileges.

Projects such as the Bidy Mason wall, the most elaborate and interdisciplinary endeavour mounted by The Power of Place within this particular commemoration, describe a process of learning and listening, and a respect for the past which recognizes, as Hayden points out, that success and historical greatness are not designations solely for the "great men" of a conquering history. Skeptics could ask, why put so much effort into these low-budget and local initiatives? To her credit, Hayden does not engage with a defense of her politics. Her book stands strongest at the point where she assumes that the labours and triumphs of working classes and marginalized peoples are the concern of all. And a quick comparison with the public response to Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* is sufficient to emphasize the need for public art which actually speaks to the needs and histories of a given community. Hayden has chosen her larger site well. Los Angeles is one of the most culturally diverse cities in North America and one that, as she notes in her epilogue, is clearly

in great need of a new urban paradigm. Not a paradigm that will replace the skyscrapers and freeways, but a paradigm that assumes that people are the building blocks of community, that buildings contain memory, and that even lost buildings, lost communities may be found through the collective, cooperative and indeed aesthetic work of commemoration. To return to the initial quotation, the essence of Hayden's project is the agency within self-representation. *The Power of Place* offers a new, sensitive and practical means towards celebrating public memory as a form of community identification, activism and pedagogy. This emphasis on community involvement is not rhetorical. Hayden repeatedly urges the reader to take stock of a community's special knowledge of their location, its apocryphal texts, the ways of travel through its facets. Far from writing from the ivory tower, Hayden's work is thoroughly engaged and seeks to further the productive dialogue between academy, urban administration and those who give life to space.

CYNTHIA HAMMOND  
Concordia University

#### Notes

- 1 Herbert J. Gans was the social historian and urban sociologist, while Ada Louise Huxtable was the architectural critic. Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 2.
- 2 For discussions on the issue of disciplinary rigidity and the barriers that the notion of "specialization" puts around knowledge, see Cary Nelson and Dilip P. Gaonkar, "Introduction" to *Disciplinary and Dissent in Cultural Studies* (London, 1996); and Bruce Robbins, "The Insistence of the Public in Postmodern Criticism" in Robbins, *Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture* (London, New York, 1993), 84-117.
- 3 See Elsa Levisseur, review of *The Power of Place* in *Architectural Review*, 198 (Sept. 1995), 97.
- 4 Hayden quotes Lucy Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York, 1990).
- 5 See, for example, Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History," *The Historical Journal*, XXXVI, no. 3 (1993), 383-414; Elizabeth Wilson, "The Invisible Flâneur" in Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson, eds, *Postmodern Cities and Spaces* (Oxford, 1995), 59-79; *idem*, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (London, 1991).

BRUCE BARBER, SERGE GUILBAUT AND JOHN O'BRIAN, eds, *Voices of Fire: Art, Rage, Power, and the State*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1996, 210 pp., 2 colour illus., 54 black & white illus., paper.

When the National Gallery of Canada announced that Brydon Smith, Assistant Director of Collections and Research, had negotiated the purchase of Barnett Newman's *Voice of Fire* (1967) from the American artist's widow, Annalee Newman, for \$1.5 million U.S. (approximately