

## The Remaking of Archival Values

By Victoria Hoyle: Routledge, 2023. 242 pp. Hardcover.  
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When archivists think of professional values, they might recall Mark A. Greene, whose founding role in the development of the Society of American Archivists' Core Values of Archivists<sup>1</sup> was memorialized in the 2019 book *Archival Values: Essays in Honor of Mark A. Greene*.<sup>2</sup> They may also remember the 2011 Universal Declaration on Archives, in which the International Council on Archives aimed to summarize the purpose of and values behind archives.<sup>3</sup> However, in *The Remaking of Archival Values*, Victoria Hoyle disturbs these tidy schemas. She characterizes the archival field as caught between a traditionalism in which archives can be defined under the authority of professional organizations and the postcolonial ambitions of contemporary critical archival theorists who advocate for alternative ways of thinking that dismantle oppressive power structures.

Hoyle is clearly a proponent of critical archival theory and embraces the concept of liberatory memory work as applied by scholars such as Jarrett M. Drake and Michelle Caswell. Indeed, *The Remaking of Archival Values* can be seen as a direct response to Caswell's 2021 book, *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work*, which was also published as part of Routledge's Studies in Archives series. This series aims to expand disciplinary boundaries by showing how archives are in conversation with other fields. Like Caswell,<sup>4</sup> Hoyle describes archives as a "field on fire" with criticism and remaking of archival theories and values (p. 2). She also agrees with Caswell that legacies of oppressive systems in the archival field should be dismantled and replaced with more liberatory structures.

However, where Caswell's book is a provocation, Hoyle's is an interrogation. Frustrated by a lack of progress toward the application of a new set of values set forth by critical archival theory, Hoyle has inculcated a traditional values system, which she dubs the evidential orthodoxy (p. 26), deeply embedded in archival discourse. Through a carefully constructed discourse analysis of public history projects in and around York, interviews with archives practitioners, and her own previous experience as an archivist for a local government, she shines a light on assumed values surrounding the purpose and meaning of evidence and archives. Hoyle demonstrates how embedded assumptions about what makes a record authentic, or what counts as expertise, can impede progress toward a new, affective, liberatory, and inclusive conception of archives.

*Remaking Archival Values* is Victoria Hoyle's first book and an outgrowth of her 2018 dissertation, *Who Do Archives Think They Are? Archives, Community, and Value in the Heritage City*.<sup>5</sup> The "Heritage City" refers to York in the United

Kingdom, where Hoyle gained much of her professional archives experience. She served as York's city archivist from 2013 to 2017 and is currently a senior lecturer in public history at the University of York. The Heritage City comes up frequently in *Remaking Archival Values*; projects undertaken there are Hoyle's primary examples of archival praxis throughout the book, which speaks foremost to the experiences of archivists in the United Kingdom. But the tension between orthodox values that see an archivist's role as exerting control over archives to preserve the authenticity of impartial records and an emerging set of archival values oriented toward affect, social action, and justice has implications for archivists internationally, particularly in how archivists should approach collecting the history of minoritized peoples.

In setting up her analysis and identifying and describing opposing sets of values, Hoyle uses a distinct vocabulary that she lays out thoroughly in the first three chapters. This makes up about half of the book but is essential for understanding the later chapters. In a reimagining of heritage and museum studies scholar Laurajane Smith's "authorized heritage discourse,"<sup>6</sup> Hoyle coins "authorized archival discourse" (AAD). AAD represents a set of assumptions that are seen as natural but are rooted in and supported by colonial and patriarchal ways of thinking from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when archival practice was first standardized. Hoyle weaves AAD through descriptions of opposed paradigms of archival practice: "the evidential orthodoxy" and the "the affective alternative."

Hoyle describes the evidential orthodoxy as based on the works of Sir Hilary Jenkinson and T. R. Schellenberg, who championed impartial, objective archives. According to Hoyle, in the evidential paradigm, archives are viewed as evidence and are valued "for having capacity for objectivity and neutrality in reproduction of reality" (p. 32). Hoyle strongly disagrees with this philosophy and points out that evidence must be based on a shared understanding of the external world. In the case of archival institutions, this assumption of a shared understanding of what counts as evidence is rooted in AAD, a discursive system born of Western colonial and patriarchal power structures. The affective alternative, the second of Hoyle's paradigms, is less firmly established in archival practice and therefore less definable. It exists in opposition to AAD and challenges evidential orthodoxy by injecting an emotional dimension into archival research and beliefs of archival value. The affective alternative is supported by advocates of critical archival studies, who emphasize a liberatory model of practice that seeks to dismantle existing archival structures that collaborate with oppressive power structures. The affective alternative suggests new approaches like postcustodial collecting, community archives, and a subjective feminist ethic of care as antidotes to dominant Western archival theory and practice.

After defining her terms, Hoyle pivots to praxis. Here the scope of the book shrinks to her home territory of York. She precisely interrogates her own experiences and her interviews with other UK archivists for examples of AAD and the evidential and affective paradigms, hunting for places where progress has been made

and places where it stopped short. She writes at length about *York: A Gateway to History*, a project that failed again and again to live up to its inclusive ambitions. For example, a planned Community Advisory Group was meant to broaden the appeal of York's historical resources to include diverse constituencies like members of the community, representatives from local history societies, and equalities groups representing York's minority communities. In practice, the advisory group mostly attracted existing long-term users of the York City Archive, thereby replicating its existing power structures. In contrast, community-based projects like Hungate Histories and the social media group York Past and Present that focused on creating community around the memories, feelings, and affective values of people living in York were stifled by assumptions about how archives should be accessed and used. As archives staff, Hoyle herself was initially an authority figure standing between these community users and the archives, an experience that she reflects on with regret at various times throughout the book.

The chapter analyzing her seventeen interviews with other archivists from England and Wales is particularly revealing and proves that Hoyle's experiences in York have larger relevance. Hoyle makes her subjects speak their assumptions aloud by asking direct questions, including: How do you define archives? How does one become an archivist? Why are archives valuable? Their answers illustrate the tension identified in the introduction to the book. Although archivists are sympathetic to more liberatory practices, their ideas about their own professional identities are entrenched in an evidential paradigm that gave them authority, and the state-supported structure of the United Kingdom's archives pressures them to align with state goals. I think all archivists might benefit from asking themselves the same questions Hoyle asked of her interviewees.

Overall, *Remaking Archival Values* does much to further the conversations around critical archival theory and liberatory archival practices. The first three chapters, which focus on theory, offer a solid introduction to archival thought past and present. Reading this section and perusing the bibliography will bring readers up to speed on the discourse today. The evidential and affective paradigms along with the authorized archival discourse are helpful tools for future writers to use when evaluating their own institutions, programs, and practices.

The book's greatest weakness is one that Hoyle identifies: it is very geographically limited. After providing such a robust exploration of the theory behind her construction of archival values, Hoyle's examples of the AAD in practice and possible affective alternatives are strikingly small and limited almost entirely to York, one region of the United Kingdom. It is perhaps too small a proving ground for her theories; given that she admits most of the critical archival discourse is outside of the United Kingdom, a book-length discussion should have striven to look outside of the author's immediate area. It leaves room for other archives practitioners to use Hoyle's method of discourse analysis to look at their own country's archival

institutions or produce case studies measuring innovative programs against the contrasting evidential and affective paradigms.

*The Remaking of Archival Values* makes a significant contribution to the archival literature by interrogating why liberatory archival practices have not taken hold despite their increasing centrality to professional discourse. The book will be of interest to those within critical archival studies, critical heritage studies, community archives, and public history. Through an analysis that can be replicated in other locations, Hoyle unveils an adaptive and stubborn discursive system connected to a colonial past and reinforced today through governments, professional organizations, and archivists themselves. We are left to wonder whether shining a light on the elements of authoritative discourse will enable its dismantlement.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> "SAA Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics," Society of American Archivists (SAA), last revised August 2020, <https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics>, captured at <https://perma.cc/RU7E-G93H>.
- <sup>2</sup> *Archival Values: Essays in Honor of Mark A. Greene*, ed. Christine Weideman and Mary A. Caldera (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2019).
- <sup>3</sup> "Universal Declaration on Archives—UDA," International Council on Archives, November 10, 2011, <https://www.ica.org/resource/universal-declaration-on-archives-uda>, captured at <https://perma.cc/SSA2-UPUX>.
- <sup>4</sup> Michelle Caswell, *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 12.
- <sup>5</sup> Victoria Hoyle, *Who Do Archives Think They Are? Archives, Community, and Value in the Heritage City* (PhD diss., University of York, 2018).
- <sup>6</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006).