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## Review of Ghosts of Archive

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## Review of *Ghosts of Archive: Deconstructive Intersectionality and Praxis*

By Verne Harris. London: Routledge, 2020. 320 pp. Hardcover. \$159.96.  
ISBN: 978-0-367-36107-5

Verne Harris is an adjunct professor at the Nelson Mandela University and served as the Follett Chair at Dominican University in Chicago from 2018 to 2019. He has served in South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and was Nelson Mandela's archivist between 2004 and 2013. Harris previously served as the deputy director for the National Archives of South Africa from 1993 to 2001. Harris has spent his career sharing his professional experiences working in a country in transition from apartheid to democracy. *Ghosts of Archive* is an honest and engaging text that focuses on deconstructive theories as they relate to archive and its practitioners to address social justice and creating a space for all voices. The book is a reworking of a decade's worth of enquiry. The text utilizes previously published articles and lectures into one cohesive fusion of Harris's belief that the work of archive is intertwined and inseparable with social justice.

The central argument for the text is that archive is created by ghosts, it is constructed for them, modified by them, and reinterpreted by them. While practitioners of archives do not all have the same personal and professional ghosts to answer to, they must all strive to create a more open world that listens to the ghosts that come to our hallowed halls by creating halls a little less sacred that are open and accepting of all both as creators, users and potentially abusers of the records and memories.

In deference to Foucault's and Derrida's theories, Harris uses archive to denote memories and records as a way to affirm the past, present and future, versus archives which generally denotes a group of records or a place where records are kept. The author draws extensively on deconstructivism theories throughout the text especially Derrida's "hauntology," the concept that elements from the past return and are always present, like ghosts. Harris believes that "hauntology theory" is a call to action to archive as a social justice praxis by addressing the ghosts, both known and unknown, in memories and records.

As a center of social justice praxis, the archive can be both potentially oppressive as well as potentially liberating. Harris states it is fundamental that practitioners recognize that they are not impartial custodians but active shapers and by their inclusion and exclusion of what records are preserved they are choosing sides, creating this potential oppression or liberation. Liberation can also be created by

resisting the use of blueprints and orthodoxies to control access to records which often exclude individuals and communities.

Harris further states that practitioners should work to identify the voices and the narratives “ghosted” by power, by engaging in a form of banditry with the structural powers of privilege afforded by archive. He details his own experiences and journey that have allowed him to work subversively within structures of power to help find, and preserve these memories and records. Harris notes failures in his journey as a way to emphasize that the fight to free the ghosts is not always rewarding but still should be the focus of practitioners, and that archive is neutral but can be both guilty and innocent.

*Ghosts of Archive* is an important book that should be required reading for practitioners in archives and graduate programs. It’s wonderful weaving of deconstructive theory and autobiography. The author has created a compact text that provides a wealth of insight on how archive can act as a vehicle for social justice.

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