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GHOST GARDENS: THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN ELECTRONIC ARCHIVES AND ARTISTIC RESEARCH

Abstract: Drawing on the works of Jaques Derrida (1930–2004) – principally *Archive Fever* (1995) and *Cinders* (1987) – and Mark Fisher's (1968–2017) *Ghosts of My Life* (2014) as interlocutors, I engage with concepts surrounding the electronic archive in artistic creation and research. I discuss my recent composition *Ghost Gardens*, a sixty-minute digital soundscape derived from the histories of Lascar sailors employed by the British East India Company during the 19th century, and current issues pertaining to climate change, habitat and species loss. I reflect upon the nature of the archive in a period of rapid environmental change, vanishing acoustic terrain and its preservation, through the lens of *Ghost Gardens* as a creative project which explores the intersection between sound, film, ecology and deconstruction in the digital domain. The creation of the soundscape has both utilised and generated digital film, audio and photographic archives, while the research process involved archival research pertaining to the East India Company. The sonic seascape forms part of a multi-layered, technologically enabled, interdisciplinary body of work; an ocean of sound that probes questions pertaining to the nature of recording and inscription of electronic documentation and retrieval.

Keywords: archive, Derrida, Fisher, DAW, Lascar, recordings.

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Introduction: 1ˢᵗ Archive

Ghost Gardens (Clare Lesser 2023)[2] is a sixty-minute digital soundscape derived from the histories of migration and exodus of Yemeni and Omani (Lascar) sailors, employed by the British East India Company in the 18ᵗʰ and 19ᵗʰ centuries, and current issues pertaining to climate change and rising sea levels in low lying countries and delta cities such as the Maldives, Mumbai (India) and Dhaka (Bangladesh). The title references both migrant memories of 'home' – encapsulated in the image of the garden, and the need to recreate those gardens in totally new environments – and the drowned habitations – and gardens – that have already been lost, from Medieval England's Dunwich to the contemporary Coromandel Coast (India). The soundscape is created from a vast array of technologically stored and recorded 'found' sonic objects – multiple field recordings of landscapes, peoples, plants and wildlife, made in the UK, Oman, Jordan, the UAE, and India.

The archival research for the project forms two layers: a base, that underlies *Ghost Gardens* and engages with maritime and coastal habitat exploitation and loss and the danger of the sea to all current and past global coastal societies. Archival materials pertaining to the East India Company held in the collections of the Royal Museums Greenwich[3] and the Scotland Street Museum were accessed digitally, providing information on labour conditions on the East India Company's ships, and – until very recently – the silenced voices of its sailors and their communities. Upon this base lies a superstructure of artistic research that engages with questions of memory; acts of recording and the digital storage of physical archives. This is explored through the extensive use of field recordings and of letters read by Lascar descendants embedded into its fabric.[4] The spoken letter interpenetrates – it could also be considered as 'over-determined' – between both research layers, connecting past, present and future, climate and historical narrative, through the conduit of the ocean voyage. Thus, this should not be thought of as a traditional scientific paper, but instead as a work of artistic research that, like *Ghost Gardens*, references and embodies archontic principles in its creation.

Ghost Gardens also has a parallel engagement with the rich the heritage of 20th century environmental 'music' and ecomusicology – another archive

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2   Ghost Gardens - A Hauntological Soundscape - YouTube.

3   Research guide F5: The East India Company | Royal Museums Greenwich (rmg.co.uk) The British Museum Asia Pacific and Africa Collections also hold extensive numbers of documents. As of 25.11.2023, these are inaccessible due to a recent ransomware attack.

4   A literal example of the archive speaking to the future.

– where the potential of plants, animals and landscapes as unmediated sound objects – rather than as products that are crafted into other instruments – has been explored in works such as *Child of Tree* (John Cage), and environmental works such as Annea Lockwood's *From the River Archive* (1973), Mieko Shiomi's *Mirror and Boundary Music* (both 1963), and Chris Watson's iconic *In St Cuthbert's Time* (2013). The catastrophic effects of coastal erosion and extreme flooding events, and the deliberate silencing of marginalised communities, are vitally pressing concerns today, and the memories of similar events from the past serve as ghostly warnings to a perilous future dominated by the effects of climate change and global warming. Through its incorporation and manipulation of contemporary and historical field and archival recordings, *Ghost Gardens* aims to evoke a temporal as well as a physical journey.

This paper considers the nature of the archive in a period of rapid environmental change, vanishing acoustic terrain and its preservation, through the lens of *Ghost Gardens* as a creative project which explores the intersection between sound, film, ecology and deconstruction in the digital domain. Drawing on key concepts from the works of Jacques Derrida – principally *Archive Fever* (1995) and *Cinders* (1987) – and Mark Fisher's *Ghosts of My Life* (2014), *Ghost Gardens* is an extended reflection in sound on the nature of the archive. It has both utilised and generated film, audio and photographic archives and forms part of a multi-layered, technologically enabled, interdisciplinary body of work; an ocean of sound that probes questions pertaining to the nature of recording and inscription and of electronic documentation and retrieval.

Exergue: Recorded Memory (2nd Archive)

> An exergue serves to stock in anticipation and to prearchive a lexicon which…ought to lay down the law and *give the order…*The exergue has at once an institutive and a conservative function (Derrida 1998, 7).

Intrinsic to the archive, yet in some sense, outside the archive, the exergue puts into play themes that may or may not be easily discernible, instead creating a system of terms and reference points that will provide an 'order' for what is to follow. The issues of climate discussed below, although central to *Ghost Gardens*, are embedded into its structure rather than presented as sonic narrative. Thus, every field recording is structural, but it is also always already lost. The moment of recording is past, even though captured in the suspended eternal 'now' of the archive. Already, the landscape for one of the field recordings has been erased, buried in mud after a cliff fall caused by a tidal surge.[5]

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5   Charmouth Beach, West Dorset, UK.

> So thorough has been the sea's erasure that almost the only historical evidence left is in documentary records (Deakin 1999, 206).

This sentence has horrifying resonances with recent flood events in Libya (September, 2023), Japan and Hong Kong, where, in the worst cases (Derna, Libya), the devastation will take decades to recover from. Historically, the combination of tide and storm has wreaked irreparable damage on communities and infrastructure countless times, and indeed, Deakin is not referring to any recent event, but to the beginning of a series of devastating floods that hit the English port city of Dunwich in the 14th century CE. Another storm surge would strike its beleaguered remnants in the 16th century, with the final – and permanent – blow occurring in 1740. Not only were many lives lost and buildings destroyed, but the landscape itself was forever changed; the port's former entrance blocked by a huge bank of shingle, and the only remaining building, the church that served Dunwich's medieval leper colony. Today's inhabitants are resigned to their fate, with a local ruminating: "In less than twenty-five years the sea will have reached the church and our farm. The church will go, the farmhouse and buildings will go, Benacre broad will disappear" (Deakin 1999, 205).

From the bronze age and earlier, sea facing communities have ever been at risk of inundation, but today's global communities must also come to terms with the imminent threat of rising sea levels as a consequences of climate change. On 27th July, 2023, wildfires and global weather trends during the first six months of the year prompted the United Nations Secretary General, António Guterres, to describe the current state of the climate as: "The era of global warming has ended… The era of global boiling has arrived."[6] From Benacre Broad (UK) to the Coromandel Coast (India), all low-lying coastal communities are at risk.

Of course, there is a sensory crisis at work here too, from the twin attacks of ever-increasing Anthropocene noise, and of the sounds that have been lost through habitat destruction and species extinction: there is a sense of great urgency to document and preserve soundscapes before they are lost forever. Composite artistic projects that utilise electronic sonic archives – with and without visual components – provide further means of preservation through the intersection of sound and film in the digital creative domain, while also implicitly commenting upon and probing questions of sonic ecology; histories of suppression; memory and nostalgia; acts of recording; and digital archivization.

Documents provide later generations with key witness accounts of such events. Indeed, if geography and community have been completely erased, documents are the only remains. Narratives take numerous forms, diary entries,

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6   Hottest July ever signals 'era of global boiling has arrived' says UN chief | UN News.

reports and contemporary descriptions, letters and drawings, but there are also marks on the landscape, tide lines, ruins and fragments, that retain the ability to convey information. In more recent times, photographs, film and sound recordings amplify our knowledge, housed in substantial physical repositories, or inhabiting the digital domain. These records are a vital, though bleak, inheritance for those who remain. Derrida notes that: "…the dead can often be more powerful than the living…" (Derrida 2006, 60).[7] Is this a sign of hope, that the living can learn from the past, redress old injustices and avoid future missteps, or does it merely elicit sobering images of endless cycles of futile repetition?

The British East India Company and the Lascars: 3rd Archive

Archives are also the repositories of hidden histories – of the voices that were never meant to be heard, but somehow have endured in paper and ink, despite history's habit of neglecting and suppressing such narratives. One such historically marginalised group is the Lascars: mariners who sailed for the British East India Company, across its many routes of trade and conflict. *Ghost Gardens* incorporates fragments of correspondence between a Lascar in early 20th century Scotland and his family in Oman, where life onboard ship is described in great detail.[8]

The history of the British East India Company forms a complex fabric of interwoven threads encompassing global trade on a scale hitherto unknown, politics, colonial empire building, and religious proselytising, and leaves a palpable legacy of traits that can be observed in the business – and wider world – today. As Das notes: "The modern corporation is, indeed, a child of the East India Company" (Das 2016, X). This short article is not the place to give anything other than a very brief historical overview of the company,[9] however, I will discuss the role of its private navy – The Bombay Marine – and the Indian, Yemeni and Omani Lascar sailors who worked on the company fleet, as their words, spoken by the voices of their descendants, are a key component in *Ghost Gardens*, as is the bosun's whistle, a form of signalling that is only found on naval vessels.

Established in England in 1600, by the time of its dissolution and effective takeover by the British crown in 1874, the East India Company had become a key component in British strategies for imperial domination in India and many of its other colonies. Set up originally to establish trade relations with India and

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7   Dead authors, dead works, dead sounds – all work on the presumption of loss, even the loss of loss in the digital domain.

8   Letter from a Lascar - GlaswegAsians at Scotland Street School Museum - YouTube.

9   There were also Dutch, French, Danish, Austrian, Swedish, Genoese and Portuguese East Companies, although the Portuguese and Genoese Companies were short lived.

countries further east, buying and selling spices, silk, porcelain, tea, and opium amongst other things, the Company soon began to exert political power over its geographical areas of operation, eventually controlling approximately a quarter of the world's population and half of its trade. It owned a considerable fleet of trading ships, but, most unusually, it also operated its own army and navy, both of which were fundamental to its expansionist agenda. Even its trading vessels were permitted to take prizes during the Napoleonic wars, thanks to the granting of *letters of marque*, while the Bombay Marine joined regular British naval forces on several occasions. Evolving from the company's original navy, the newly named Bombay Marine was active from the 1680s, undergoing several subsequent name changes as it passed form company to imperial control. Its purpose was to protect the company's trading vessels from attack by pirates, as well as ships from the Mahratta and Sidi states, becoming an important player in the Anglo-Burmese wars (1824-1885). As Wild notes: the Company "eventually built up a fleet sufficiently powerful to be able to go into action anywhere between the Red Sea and China" (Wild 1999, 54). The ships, both trading vessels and the Bombay Marine, employed huge numbers of Indian sailors, and Lascars, although the officer class was restricted to white Europeans.

Even for the officer class, life onboard ship during the 18th and 19th century was extremely challenging, but for those below officer rank, whether sailing in a fighting or trading vessel for the Company, the conditions were brutal. These sailors were known as the Lascars, a term originally used to describe a group from the Indian subcontinent, but soon becoming a blanket term to describe any of the company's non-white sailors, from India, the Arabian Peninsula, Somaliland, China, and other territories. Although Lascars were employed with contracts that promised monthly wages and a return passage at the conclusion of the voyage, the reality was very far from this model, with complaints of brutal treatment, the withholding of pay, and strandings in European ports with no means of return home, occurring with distressing regularity. The Company established hostels and missions for the Lascars in various European ports, but with no regulation or oversight, these were often little better than prisons or the workhouse. Desertion from ship was a common occurrence, with the Victorian missionary to the Lascars, Joseph Salter, recording "harrowing tales of mistreatment" (Visram 1986/2015, 35). Thus, although these stories have only recently become more widely acknowledged in the UK, a record of Lascar life in the Company and post migration and settlement across the former British Empire does exist, and is now being shared in projects such as the 2020 'GlaswegAsians exhibition at Scotland Street School Museum,' and the Wellington Trust's 2022 exhibition 'Lascars in War and Peace,'[10] while Mohammad Siddique Seddon's

10   Lascars – Britain's Forgotten Stories - YouTube.

The Last of the Lascars (2014), provides a comprehensive overview of the Yemeni Lascar community in Britain during the 19th–21st centuries.

Derrida, Fisher, and Archive as Creative Process: 4th Archive

Ghost Gardens is as much an extended reflection on the nature of loss across multiple circumstances as it is a soundscape evoking passages of time and travel. The work of Jacques Derrida and Mark Fisher provide illuminating interlocutors: Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1995/1998) and *Cinders* (1987/2014)[11] probe questions of the archive, archivization, recorded acts and acts of recording, while Fisher's *Ghosts of My Life* brings micro-sampling and digital storage into the conversation.

> There is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside (Derrida 1998, 11).

> But where does the outside commence? This question is the question of the archive (Ibid, 8).

Archive Fever and *Cinders* are two key texts in which Derrida deconstructs the archive by probing its structure, the 'consignation' and collation of its contents, issues of access and retrieval, and their relationships with concepts of memory and the self. He then considers further questions pertaining to the nature of recording and inscription – digital and physical – mediated by an extended contemplation of psychoanalysis' forms and systems of 'writing'. Derrida shows how an archive can never be considered 'finished' or closed. There is always the potential to increase its contents, to rearrange its internal – and external – structures. He presents the archive and acts of archivization as generative 'fabrics' (or grids) that create (weave) and house their contents, and the events from which they are drawn, using the televisual and radio news media's presentation – and shaping – of live events as an example of this process. We can observe similar, and disturbingly amplified, versions of this activity in contemporary, AI driven, social media.[12]

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11   Derrida considers digital archives in *Specters of Marx*, where he explicates the nature of hauntology. Fisher also covers this subject area in *Ghosts of My Life*, but due to considerations of space, I have chosen not to bring hauntology into the current discussion.

12   See, for example, Grafton Tanner's *The Circle of the Snake: Nostalgia and Utopia in the Age of Big Tech* (2020).

Derrida explains:

> The meaning of 'grid' does not achieve assembled totality. It crosses through. To establish a grid is to cross through, to go through a channel. It is the experience of permeability…such a crossing does not move through an already existing-texture; it weaves this texture, it invents the histological structure of a text of what one would call in English a 'fabric' (Derrida 2014b, 121).

And:

> …the archive, as printing, writing, prosthesis, or hypomnesic technique in general is not only the place for stocking and for conserving an archivable content of the past which would exist in any case, such as, without the archive, one still believes it was or will have been. No, the technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event (Derrida 1998, 16-17).

As the composite, creative product of old and newly created archives, stored digitally and physically, of written documents, sounds and images, *Ghost Gardens* resonates with these ideas. It describes journeys, Derrida's 'crossing through,' in the archival sense – for *Ghost Gardens* is itself an archive – through the passage of time from the 18th–21st century, through migrations of people, plants and animals, along ocean currents, and across an everchanging landscape, exacerbated by climate change. *Ghost Gardens* weaves a texture of past and present that looks to a seemingly pre-written climatic future.

Are the contents of the archive dead? Derrida thinks not, instead suggesting that the process of archivization makes a new, living event. Thus, dead becomes live, archived becomes performative, the archive is interactive, it speaks to the future, in the same way that *Ghost Gardens* speaks to its audience, and future audiences. *Ghost Gardens* is also, in a sense, a hidden archive, its many recorded samples having been subjected to extremes of processing, thereby overwriting their original sonic identities, creating instead, a new audible 'fabric,' in ghostly echo of the overwriting of historical narratives, and transformation of the planet. Thus, acts of recording and recorded acts are of prime importance in the creative process. As Derrida comments:

> What is involved in this phonographic act? Here's an interpretation, one among others. At each syllable, even at each silence, a decision is imposed: it was not always deliberate or sometimes even the same from one repetition to another. And what it signs is neither law nor the truth….Thus we analyse the resource this double text affords us today: on the one hand, a graphic space opened to multiple readings,

in the traditional and protected form of the book (and it is not like a prompt- book, because each time it gives a different reading, another gift, dealing out a new hand all over again), but on the other hand, simultaneously, and also for the first time, we have the tape recording of a singular interpretation, made one day, by so on and so forth, at a single stroke calculated and by chance (Derrida 2014a, 7–8).

Ghost Gardens uses a mixture of second hand, sonic found objects, and new ('live') recordings, made by the three artists involved in the complete project: myself (composer), sound artist João Menezes (technical advice) and film maker Alia Yunis.[13] Documentation comes in three principal formats: films (MP4s), sound files (MP3s) and retrieved audio and film sound (various formats, for example WAV). Before work in the DAW could commence, all were converted into MP3s. As with Derrida, this process was 'calculated and by chance', with some samples being recorded specifically for the soundscape, some repurposed from the film's audio and subsequently embedded into the soundscape, some were found objects from other sources – free libraries, YouTube and so on – while others were old recordings made by the creators, but never intended for this specific creative purpose. The archive that *Ghost Gardens* generated not only served the creative process, but also documented landscapes and animals that are fast disappearing, with the IUCN red list (2021) showing that "biodiversity is declining faster than at any time in human history. Since 1970, there has been on average almost a 70% decline in the populations of mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians".[14] We can also transfer Derrida's comments regarding the 'multiple readings' each (graphic) text allows, to the sound document itself. Each sample can be endlessly re-used, reinterpreted, and re-processed in a virtually limitless number of further permutations, "dealing out a new hand all over again."

As a further act of curation and archivization, the samples were divided and stored in the following sub-categories:

1. Footsteps: sand, shingle, asphalt, gravel, wood, earth
2. Birds: gulls, albatross, parrots, peacocks, egrets, frigate birds, petrels
3. Water: shore line, river, deep ocean, ocean spray, waves, rain, snow
4. Air: wind, in trees, on water, breeze, gale, storm howls
5. Ship: engines, sirens, horns, bosun's whistle, bells, ropes, wood creaking/groaning/snapping, metallic booming, storm in Lyme Regis with ships in harbour, flapping sails
6. Human: speech – UK, India, Oman, Scotland, whispering, cries, children

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13   Sound recordings were made in the UK, Oman, India, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates.

14   Biodiversity loss risks 'ecological meltdown' - scientists - BBC News.

7. Metal percussion: bells, chimes, gongs, singing bowls
8. Applied sounds: crackle, hiss.

Conceptual questions arise from the process of creative archiving:

1. Structure and format. How is the format of the archive structured by its contents and how do the contents adapt to the 'form' of the archive? In *Ghost Gardens* the use of different audio and visual files and formats (MP3s and 4s), made with phones, video cameras, zoom recorders, using a variety of microphones, and other methods of documentation had implications for transferral to the Ableton DAW. There are also the well documented issues of compression and file format (WAV for example) to take into account, all of which have implications for the final work.

2. When Derrida states that "archivization produces as much as it records the event", is the 'event' that Derrida speaks of – that is the creation of new objects in order to form a new archive – a curation? In *Ghost Gardens*, is it the act(s) of recording, or the composite creative work, or both, that is the event?

3. Is an archive 'dead' once it is formed, or does its interactive and transformative potential (as well as the accrual of new contents) give it endless life? *Ghost Gardens* can be performed multiples times in different environments and I could easily add or remove material or make other changes to what is currently there, keeping the work endlessly in 'play'.

4. Following on from question 3, are recorded samples used in the process of composition 'dead'? Derrida comments: "Let us guard against saying that death is opposed to life. The living being is only a species of what is dead, and a very rare species" (Derrida 2014a, 51). Perhaps recordings should be thought of simply as 'undead' sounds, pharmakoi, or zombies, who problematise the metaphysical spatial opposition of near and far and the temporal opposition of past, present and future.

5. Do the samples, taken out of original context, 'talk' to one another in ways other than the composer imagines, and how does the inclusion of pre-recorded 'found' audio materials sit within the archive? On the DAW itself there are subdivisions (micro curations) for the purposes of simplifying the visual 'score' and accelerating the efficiency of the composition process (Figure 1). Would it be better to build in deliberate obstacles to composition by removing these subsets?

Figure 1. Section of working DAW score for Ghost Gardens.

Fisher notes that "what we have lost, it can often seem, is the very possibility of loss" (2014, 144), with childhood tv programmes and obscure performances regularly turning up on YouTube. You Tube itself is a huge digital archive of course, but, like Derrida's performative archive, it is one that is fluid and ever-changing. As new items are added, old ones can no longer be traced through the usual search terms, even though they are still on the platform, while other content is removed for legal or personal reasons of the original uploader, only to reappear soon after from another source. We are all used to seeing 'this video is no longer available' and similar frustrating obstacles in our searches. As an archival labyrinth You Tube has a nasty habit of changing the paths of recommendation by which we often navigate its virtual documentation. So, although loss itself has indeed, for the most part, not been lost, it may at least have been diverted. Derrida expresses similar sentiments regarding "the accessible and the inaccessible, the notorious filterings of the Library of Congress" (Derrida 1998, 18). The archive as structure and system of rules, then, conserves, preserves, and commits to memory so that we may forget. However, archives decay, formats become obsolete, technological retrieval systems no longer work, and the memory of the process of retrieval as well as the object itself are lost.

A sonic evocation of loss is often signified through the presence of audio crackle, whether existing on a physical recording or having been applied to a mix – as I have in *Ghost Gardens*. Crackle is an interesting sonic phenomenon, that "invokes the past and marks out our distance from it, destroying the illusion that we are co-present with what we are hearing" (Fisher 2014, 144). Crackle, and hiss, place the listener in a temporal paradox, evoking lost futures, and present futures in the digital domain, simultaneously with the past, and have been used to great effect by artists such as The Caretaker, William Basinski, and Marc Richter, for example. *Ghost Gardens* uses crackle to reveal this temporal paradox, while also supplying sonic textures that sound like the sea, especially when the crackle and hiss have been stretched over long periods of time. Composing with archives presents interesting work choices too. Working with a visu-

ally dominated 'score', composition becomes more like horizontal painting, with time and line governing the proceedings.

Recordings and recording processes channel the domains of the audio-document and the processes and structures of memory. As with 'Letter from a Lascar', these are someone else's memories, but that does not make them any less compelling, instead providing a glimpse into a past that most of us are completely unaware of – a hidden history. According to Fisher, listening to the extreme micro-sampling of G.E.S. (Gesellschaft zur Emanzipation des Samples) feels like "coming upon other people's orphaned memories" and "witnessing stray frames from a film no whole version of which exists anywhere" (Ibid, 146). It's a very effective way of illustrating in sound hints of the suppressed, hidden and marginalised, such as the sailors on the Bombay Marine and British merchant shipping. In *Ghost Gardens*, speech and conversation are – deliberately – obscured, so that only single words and syllables can be clearly discerned for the most part, giving the impression of a narrative being tuned into, where it is impossible to quite grasp the thread of the story, breaking up into distorted and indiscernible phonemes when we try to listen in.

Derrida's contention that the living being is only a species of what is dead, and the dead archive is a pledge or promise to the future, problematises notions of differences in the status of recordings and 'live' sound, suggesting instead that they are part of the same process. Repurposing sound documents is nothing new of course, from their earliest days, records were more than just recordings, their inherent artistic possibilities as found objects having been explored by, for example, John Cage (33⅓, 1969), Pierre Henry (*Le Microphone bien tempéré*, 1970), Karlheinz Stockhausen, (*Gesang der Jünglinge*, 1955–56 and *Hymnen*, 1966–67) et al. Thus, audio-documents still communicate with their listeners, although more as sonic ghosts, perhaps, a living presence at one remove. Derrida explains:

> Perhaps he does not respond, but he speaks. A phantom speaks...this means that without responding it disposes of a response, a bit like the answering machine whose voice outlives its moment of recording: you call, the other person is dead, now, whether you know it or not, and the voice responds to you… (Derrida 1998, 62).

We respond to the audio archive by listening, by applauding, by congregating and by using. Even though in some sense we are 'talking' to the dead, or listening to echoes, ember like, the archive must, and will, always speak to the future.

> To record, to archive, is the promise of the future, to the future. The promise of the archive …as wager [gageure]. The archive has always been a pledge, and like every pledge [gage], a token of the future. (Derrida 1998, 18).

Conclusion: 5ᵗʰ Archive

> …the question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past. It is not the question of a concept dealing with the past that might already be at our disposal or not at our disposal, an archivable concept of the archive. It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what that will have meant, we will only know in times to come. Perhaps. Not tomorrow but in times to come, later on or perhaps never (Derrida 1998, 36).[15]

Without the electronic archive, *Ghost Gardens* would not exist. It utilises pre-existing archives, it creates new archives, it takes advantage of the meta-archontic tools of google and YouTube, while it is itself, a virtual archive, simultaneously old and new, near and far, undecidable and a little perplexing, questioning concepts of origins, memory, migration and return. And during its creation, it has shaped – and been shaped by – its own contents and structures, in acts of archival collation, storage and retrieval, simultaneously intersecting its archival layers with questions of history, ecology and sound, in a creative process that grafts past and present, yet speaks to the future in hopeful promise but also warning. Will the future be able to answer though?

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15   When archives open questions of temporal narrative, they disseminate seeds of doubt, of possibility, they shape the future, like self-fulfilling prophesies, especially when their contents are shaped with an eye to spectacle.

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GHOST GARDENS: THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN ELECTRONIC ARCHIVES AND ARTISTIC RESEARCH
(summary)

I introduce the principal themes of the archive, contemporary climate change, migration, and the hidden histories of Lascars – maritime employees of the British East India Company. I outline the impact of coastal erosion and catastrophic flood events on communities and indicate in what ways *Ghost Gardens* engages with these subjects. I discuss the importance of archival documentation in earlier environmental catastrophes followed by a brief history of the Lascars. I discuss the archive as a creative process and its status as an open and fluid entity. I indicate how these ideas intersect with Derrida and Fisher, covering access and retrieval, temporal and spatial approaches, memory, sampling, recording, and composing with a DAW as an archival tool and creative process. I conclude by placing *Ghost Gardens* within a wider temporal, archival framework, pondering questions of the future while engaging with the past. The paper itself is structured through a series of interconnected archives, with subsections and an exergue to elucidate the unfolding research processes during the creation of Ghost Gardens.