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Voice Over: archived narratives and silent heirlooms

Chris Dorsett

Abstract

Contemporary artists often apply experimental art practices to the museum environment. Examples abound, the idea is not new. However, in this paper my long artistic association with the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, now a matter of history, sits provocatively in the background of a recent engagement with the archives of London's Tavistock Institute, a project triggered by some family heirlooms dating from the 1940s. In response, I experiment with some short audio-visual artworks and give theoretical consideration to that which is conserved, and that which has been displaced.



Figure 1

I am looking at a photograph of a circular container. Its surface is pitted and scratched, not simply from use but also from age. There is a label. It says *Zen for Film*. If this is the famous artwork that goes by that name, then the canister will contain the reel of blank celluloid footage that featured in exhibitions and screenings by the artist Nam June Paik in the early 1960s. Those present at the time would have watched a patch of projected light flicker luminously on a gallery wall as the surface of the film deteriorated through wear and tear. I think about this as I look at the battered round object and realise that the actual artwork took place in the mechanism of a projector. It was not an object, it was an event-oriented piece made for repetition rather than physical preservation. Paik kept renewing the idea (there is, for example, a 1963 version called *Zen for TV*) indicating that the project could, perhaps should, be updated, even if the technologies involved had not been invented when the experiments began.

The afterlife of *Zen for Film* has been the subject of numerous articles by the museum conservator Hanna Hölling. She describes Paik's piece as non-hierarchical because each consecutive materialisation was as significant as its predecessor (Hölling, 2017, p.104). Later versions by other artists count as well. Indeed, Hölling treats all repetitions as a form of conservation - a bold step considering that a specific historical object would no longer be privileged as a unique work of art requiring preservation. A difficult proposition. And yet this is the challenge faced by contemporary art museums as they acquire, and then seek to conserve, multi-media installations and experimental performance works. This is the context in which Hölling advocates a radical approach. Her ideas are derived from an influential book written by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin that asked media historians to recognise the creative continuities that survive, even flourish, through technological obsolescence. The book in question, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999), argues that old and new do not compete when work undertaken in one medium is reworked in another. We are encountering instantiations not displacements. Thus Hölling calls each consecutive materialisation of *Zen for Film* a 'remediation'. When Paik's projected rectangle of light was replaced by a buzzing TV screen the medium changed but the content was conserved. Consequently, New York's Museum of Modern Art may well display the film's canister as a relic in a vitrine, but it was the singular coming together of a working projector, a projected rectangle of light, and a space in which to view what ensued, that became the generic entity referred to by Hölling. For her, *Zen for Film* 'is' its many remediations. Even if the first version was intended to be a one-off, what happened is now irrevocably tied to a long sequence of instantiations.

Philosophers and aestheticians, particularly those studying the ontological status of music, have given a vast amount of thought to this kind of 'one-many relationship' (Dodd, 2007, p10). Hence, if a musical composition aspires to many performances, then Paik's media works fall into a similar category because they presuppose future time-based realisations. An impressive array of twentieth century minds – Richard Wollheim, Nelson Goodman, P. F. Strawson – would have called this a type/token issue, in which the various public manifestations of Paik's media works are 'tokens', or particular instances, of a generally applicable media experiment, or 'type'. This way of thinking originates in the semiotic theories of Charles Sanders Peirce. In his 1906 notebooks he uses the word 'the' to set out a puzzling semantic distinction. There is only one 'the' in the English language, nevertheless it can appear again and again in a

page of writing and therefore must be a 'token' (Peirce, 1933, p.242). And so where is the original type? Given the emphasis we place on unique originals, it is hard to deny the relevance of this question to art forms that exist through re-occurrence: scores, performances and recordings in music (Harrison, 1975), and the production of prints from negatives in photography (Rohrbaugh, 2003). In the latter example, Guy Rohrbaugh builds his argument around a celebrated image by the photographer Alfred Stieglitz. Each of Stieglitz's prints, he says, is not simply a transmission mechanism but a distinct 'historical individual', a proposition that Hölling would surely support.

From the beginning Paik was working with a concept that tolerated mutability. He loaded his projectors with both 8mm and 16mm film stock, and used reels as well as loops. All of this contributed to the complex identity of 'the' original piece (Weiss, 2016, p111). However, it also turned out that this complexity remained identifiable as it mutated across a range of different media. Such proliferations are only possible within a social environment dominated by technologies of reproduction. Famously, Walter Benjamin (1936) had a great deal to say about this social reach as cinemas began to erode the sense of uniqueness and authenticity experienced in museums. The endangered type of encounter was, of course, called 'aura'. Something particularly relevant to viewing objects in collection-holding institutions.

But you are not looking at the *Zen for Film* canister. The battered round object reproduced above is a low-grade acetate recording inherited from my father when he died twenty years ago. I have a box of them. They were the product of his return to 'civvy street' following military demobilisation in 1946. That first postwar summer he set up a small business called *Repl records* with his two brothers and an uncle. They hoped to provide a 'voice letter' service at a time when nearly everyone they knew had been separated from their relatives by six years of wartime upheaval. Many family members, they rightly guessed, would remain dispersed for several years to come and, as a result, postal records would make money at popular leisure locations where people gathered in large numbers. In my father's paperwork from the period there are copies of letters seeking permission to set up recording equipment in Butlin's holiday camps. Despite these ambitions, the venture doesn't seem to have moved much beyond its developmental stage. The youngest of the three brothers, the one with expertise as a sound engineer, was still serving in the Royal Air Force and my family's attempts at exempting him from National Service seem to have failed. The paperwork also suggests that petrol rationing was a restraining factor. They were not always in a position to get to the locations where the records would be in demand.

Nevertheless, the equipment needed for the business was assembled and a number of test recordings and samples made. Throughout my childhood in the 1950s these records were stored in the loft of my family home. On rainy days I would play them on a discarded gramophone and listen to my father speaking at a time before I was born. A career spent reading art theory tells me that these encounters should be considered examples of 'punctum', the feeling identified by Roland Barthes when, shortly after his mother's death, he was overwhelmed by a photograph of her as a child. The young girl pictured before him knew nothing of the future son who looked at her now. The existential equivalence of what had been, and what would come to be, 'punctured' his relationship with her photographic likeness (Barthes, 1980, p.94).

The book in which Barthes elucidates this idea, *Camera Lucida* (1980), is about the scope that photography has to be much more than a semiotic token. These feelings must also occur in other types of mechanical reproduction. In my case, hearing my father talk with the whole of his life before him should have been devastatingly mixed up with the fact that he is already dead. However, the punctum concept (over-familiar and ready-to-hand) works too easily. The matter is rather more complicated. The last time I listened to the records I was a child and my father was still alive. By the time I inherited them the acetate had deteriorated to such an extent that most of the surfaces had turned to powder. The grooves into which my father's 1940s sound-world had been 'cut' could be brushed away with a finger. There were other forms of deterioration too. Some discs had become so brittle that the acetate was buckled and split in a manner reminiscent of the craquelure found on old master paintings. Correspondence from suppliers in my father's paperwork suggests that he experimented with a range of chemical additions to the acetate solution, which may account for the variations in condition. My silent heirlooms were heirs to the uncertain advance of reproductive technologies. These particular examples of the superlatively democratic repetitions that Benjamin championed had ceased to be repeatable. The acetate was a dead medium and, on this basis, I started to draw the records instead of playing them. My thought was that a drawing would be as silent as an acetate disc and this equivalence would be an opportunity for aesthetic growth, not a prolongation of the grief I had felt at my father's death.

Figure 2: Please see [HTML version for video content](#)

If I was to provide a verbal commentary for what I was up to, I would talk about my pencils standing in for gramophone needles. Around and around my hand would go in mimicry of a needle cutting a groove in the acetate. These undemanding kinetics kept me drawing. I produced more and more versions, each whirling graphic 'thing' becoming a substitute for the defunct sound objects. It was a curious indexical endeavour that seemed to retreat from graphic expression. The results had to be exactly the same size as the records. They had to be just as flat as well as just as silent. For me, these drawings have no status as individual works. But I did, as you have seen, string some of them together in a short video. When I did this the microphone was left on, approximating what happened when the records were made. Many of the *Replicord* tests contain nothing more than ambient noise. BBC broadcasts can sometimes be heard in the background. In the audio-visual piece above, it is the radio in my studio that takes on that role.

This would have been the end of the story if I had not, in 2017, examined a practice-based PhD on the artist Ivor Davies. This octogenarian Welsh activist and avant-garde practitioner had been a pioneering contributor to the seminal 1966 *Destruction in Art* Symposium. Consequently, significant works from a key period in his career were missing (explosives had been used). To address the challenge of curating a retrospective exhibition, Aberystwyth University organised a research studentship with the National Museum of Wales. Judit Bodor, an experienced exhibition-maker and fine art performer,

was the successful candidate who steered this interesting doctoral opportunity towards extremely high levels of practical and theoretical resolution. Having seen the drawings of acetate discs on my website, Bodor cited them as an example of remediation as we debated her project during the viva (Hölling's work on *Zen for Film* was central to her thesis). Where Davies' auto-destructive art had denied the curatorial team historical artefacts, Bodor initiated a process she called 'prolific preservation', which extended authorship to contemporary artists who then remediated (not simply 'recreated') unavailable pieces (Bodor, 2017, p.79). The connection made in the viva meant that my interest in replicating the circular presence of unplayable records was reconfigured as a philosophical argument. It was not that the drawings remediate 1940s sound recordings with new technologies, even though something like this clearly happened when ambient noise was inadvertently captured on a video soundtrack. Rather, it was that a once-noisy object flourished non-identically in an equally noiseless medium - a pencil drawing.

Thus an opportunity arose to think of traditional art objects (emanators of aura) as equivalents to mechanical replications (time-annihilating interruptions to daily life). Benjamin thought that modernity would erase the cult value given to conserved artworks, but remediation turns out to be a matter of entanglement rather than erasure. There is movement in both directions. The long reach of postmodernity has made it relatively straightforward to keep questioning the notion of technological progress. The freedom I have to repurpose the practice of drawing means that old methods are as good at displacing 1940s analogue recordings as an up-to-date audio technology.

Furthermore, there is a corrective to consider in relation to the socially isolating reverence that Benjamin associated with aura (Benjamin, 1936, p243). The anthropologist Charles Hirschkind (2001) undertook fieldwork in Egypt in the mid-1990s where he witnessed Muslims listening to audio-cassette tapes of sermons by popular preachers. What he encountered was a technological adjustment to an ancient 'tradition of ethical audition' (Hirschkind, 2001, p.623). He realised that reverential practices were not just surviving modernity, they were flourishing outside the devotional space of the mosques in the daily breaks taken by waiters and taxi drivers. Consequently, Hirschkind claims that Benjamin was mistaken about the character of modern life in an age of mass media and mass consumption.

It follows that revered museum treasures have also been changed by modernity. There is a spectacular example from the period in which my family's *Replicords* business was registered. The art historian Iris Lauterbach (2019) has recently published a book on the restoration of works of art looted by Nazi Germany. She reproduces photographs of famous paintings being liberated by the kind of military personnel my father hoped to send audio letters to. We see them retrieving major European artworks from underground bunkers and cavernous salt mines. They carry them across open countryside. They stack them on army vehicles, which then drive to Allied collection points that were, to all intents and purposes, transit camps for displaced objects.

Figure 3: Please see HTML version for video content

I started this drawing as I stood before *The Exposition of Moses* (1654), a painting by Nicolas Poussin in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. The figure is Amram, the father of Moses. He has turned away from the centre of the picture and appears to be distancing himself from what is happening. The complicated iconography to his right, which I haven't drawn, extends through biblical and ancient Egyptian symbolism to the main theme of the painting — the abandoned baby being cast adrift on the Nile towards a different historical fate from his father.

The gallery in which I made the sketch felt safe and secure. It is a place untroubled by the violent upheaval documented in Lauterbach's book. Just before Hitler's war, one could have viewed paintings in all Europe's museums like this. Nobody expected them to be stolen and stashed away in a manner that would be the nemesis of their aura. Stacked sideways-on, in row after row, materiality eclipsed interpretability. The artworks were demythologised, but also assigned a new level of unavailability. The non-attention-seeking status of stacked old master paintings is not, I think, European heritage awaiting a triumphant Führermuseum, it is simply a devastating act of displacement. Collection-holding could never feel the same again. In all the (postwar) years I have lived with Benjamin's ideas I have not before felt the need to stand in the Ashmolean Museum and consider what a brutal neutralisation of museological aura might actually look like. Lauterbach shows photographs of an artefactual version of 'bare life', the term that Giorgio Agamben adopted from Benjamin to probe the political use of human bodies in concentration camps (Agamben, 1998). We know what photographs of Auschwitz look like. The photographs in Lauterbach's book are not like this, but they date from the same moment of witnessing that occurred all over Europe as Hitler's forces withdrew.

Where do these thoughts lead? Well, the audio-visual pieces I made following my visits to the Tavistock Institute pick up the theme. I was invited to do this by Elizabeth Cory Pearce, an anthropologist then working at the Institute who realised that their archives held material that could be linked to the drawings I was making of my father's records. Here, a bigger, more extended story emerged about the postwar 'civvy street' in which the *Replicord* business came into being. The connection probably has little force as social-history but, in the context of my audio-visual experiments, it was fascinating to find amongst the Tavistock's papers a large memorandum prepared in June 1945 for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). It was destined for their head office in London. The contents outline the physical and psychological deprivations precipitated by military service, imprisonment, and enforced migration. It reminds UNRRA staff that displaced persons will not necessarily understand the effect their experiences have had. They will have been cut off from giving and receiving love and are likely to be simultaneously aggressive and promiscuous. Some will also have been complicit in their neediness. I made this video soon after my first visit.

Figure 4: Please see HTML version for video content

Reading the memorandum recalls the novels of Iris Murdoch. She worked for UNRRA and was stationed at its London headquarters in 1945. The extremely fraught human situations detailed in the Tavistock document seem to foreshadow the implausible circumstances that occur in her stories. Rosa Keepe, a central character in Murdoch's 1956 novel, *The Flight from the Enchanter*, has deeply-held political convictions that bring her into contact with two Polish brothers who are illegal immigrants in postwar London. Their status is entirely the consequence of being born on the wrong side of a line arbitrarily drawn across Europe by the Allies (Murdoch, 1956, p.229). Rosa pursues an affair with both brothers simultaneously. At the end of chapter six, as the three lay intimately together on a dishevelled bed, Rosa is told a tragic story about the suicide of a Jewish school mistress in occupied Poland (Murdoch, 1956, pp.64-74). This narrative reveals a disturbing degree of moral ambivalence and, as the story ends (on a note of black humour), the room is suddenly, and incomprehensibly, illuminated by a very bright flash of light. Murdoch does not elaborate this strange moment and Rosa's sense of bewilderment is vividly shared by readers of the novel. If you know this writer's wider philosophical interests it is possible that, on the one hand, the illuminated gap in the narrative is there to reinforce the vertiginous character of Rosa's existential freedom (Murdoch, 1992, p.445). On the other hand, it also suggests that an instantaneous act of moral reckoning has occurred (Murdoch, 1970, p.52). The latter interpretation prevails. Later it emerges that the promiscuous entanglement has been photographed, the consequences of which only take effect towards the end of the novel when the compromising image is used to blackmail Rosa's brother (Murdoch, 1956, pp.158-166). Remember that this story was written within a decade of Murdoch's time with UNRRA. The letters she wrote from one of their transit camps in Vienna described an infatuation with two twenty-four year old ex-prisoners of war. They were 'very wild and mad and bad' (Horner and Rowe, 2015, p.61). She admits to having recently slept with the younger of the two.

Figure 5: Please see HTML version for video content

This is not a tidy research narrative. I am guided by the experimental character of my audio-visual pieces. The transitions from image to image, or from one sound world to another, cannot be made more coherent by verbal explanations. Moments of incomprehension, in which you are unsure where it is you have arrived, are bound to occur. The technology I am using privileges this kind of uncertainty. Therefore the shift between the dense wordage of the Tavistock Institute's archives and a crowded display case at the Pitt Rivers Museum was not a carefully considered progression, and I would not claim to fully understand its implications. But the juxtaposition of words read in London with objects held in Oxford does prompt further thoughts about my long artistic involvement with the Institution in which I am now based as a Research Affiliate. This is something I can describe in more detail. It is at the Pitt Rivers Museum that the ethnomusicologist Hélène La Rue and I organised a sequence of exhibitions between 1985 and 1994. Together we explored the then expanding interface between experimental art practices and the museum sector. Now that I am back again, contributing to debates within this Oxford research community, I find myself involved (perhaps promiscuously) with two collection-holding institutions. The narratives I encounter in the Tavistock In-

stitute's files keep complicating my relationship with the material held at the Museum. One example concerns a prophet of the Zeme Naga tribe known as Rani Gaidinliu. She led a rebellion in the northeastern corner of British India that was suppressed in 1932. It wasn't until the end of the Raj nearly twenty years later that she was released from prison. In the meantime, a set of notebooks which had been confiscated from her by the colonial administration found their way to the Museum. As I understand it they have remained in storage since their arrival.

A decade ago the anthropologist Arkotong Longkumer came to Oxford to work on a project that would return photographic copies of the books to the disciples of Gaidinliu in present day Nagaland. In a recent article we learn from Longkumer that Gaidinliu's captor, J. P. Mills, described his sixteen year old prisoner as an uneducated girl who has 'taught herself to scribble' (Longkumer, 2016, pp.128). A reproduced page from one of the notebooks shows row after row of carefully executed graphic marks that have none of the careless and unrestrained characteristics associated with scribbling. Nothing here appears to have been done in a hurried or sketchy manner. However, if Mills' choice of terminology refers to illegible handwriting, then a further set of associations come into play. Presumably the colonial authorities thought it possible that anything they were unable to read was also likely to be seditious. Paradoxically, when the disciples finally encountered the photographed pages they too could not decipher what they saw. It seems that no one in Nagaland expected to be able to understand Gaidinliu's esoteric notation. She was a prophet - the contents of her books concerned the future freedom of the Naga people and, for the present, the unusable presence of 'the script' would be enough (Longkumer, 2016, p.136).

Untranslatability is a motif that runs throughout Longkumer's research. Interpretative processes continually fall short of their performative realisation, which seems entirely appropriate because Gaidinliu's message was, as far as we can tell, primarily a matter of anticipation and hope - everything will become decipherable 'when the time is right' (Longkumer, 2016, p.139). Longkumer builds on this perplexing situation by weaving together a wonderful analysis of postponement. From the perspective of my paper, his rehabilitation of Gaidinliu's confiscated books could be seen as an act of remediation in which the medium changes whilst the heightened sense of delayed realisation remains the same. Looking at reproductions turns out to be just as good as looking at the originals: it was 'the secret coded messages reportedly inscribed in the notebooks, rather than the notebooks per se, that were valuable' (Longkumer, 2016, p.136). Here Hölling's concept, if it fits at all, gains extension and reach: it is a postponed ending, not a re-occurring starting point, that has been remediated.

Figure 6: Please see HTML version for video content

The second chapter of Philip Rawson's book *Drawing* (1969) offers an extended discussion of the material supports that, in the process of making visual representations, receive the signifying alterations we call drawing. The range of physical surfaces Rawson considers take the reader well outside the practices identified by Western art his-

tory. Thus, the capacity that the physical world has to retain representations is a key factor in the evolution of drawing as a global phenomenon, and the surfaces on which drawings persist must be understood as different at distinct historical moments in accordance with particular geographic locations. This is, for Rawson, the real world tangling with the kinetic rhythms of mark making. Without a 'real-world' support there is no top and bottom, no above and below, or before and after. Consequently, there can be no authorial insistence on a meaningful format. With this in mind, I'm concerned that, following the Museum's lead, I rely on the term 'notebook' when referring to the Gaidinliu holdings. As an artist I should really pay more attention to the physical objects that allowed the young prophet to make one signifying mark after another as she constructed her notations, and expanded her message, to the Naga people. In Rawson's formulation significant mark-making requires a significant ground. Longkumer's article reproduces a photograph of an 'exercise book', these two words are clearly visible on its cover. Distinguishing this type of material support from the more general concept of a 'notebook' opens up a different avenue of engagement. Mills found it significant that no schooling was involved in the development of what he calls Gaidinliu's 'literary power' (Longkumer, 2016, p.128). I think it has significance too. But for rather different reasons. The inflected lines that everyone finds so hard to interpret, whatever message remains hidden, still cover the page with rule-breaking visual transgressions, which is a message of sorts. I say this because the history of drawing I encountered when I first went to art school was one long story of meaningful rule breaking and creative disobedience. This was mostly a feature of avant-gardism in twentieth century Europe and postwar America, although I remember being aware of the Chinese and Japanese calligraphic traditions in which cursive writing could be pushed to the edge of legibility, and therefore breach the reader's right to read what words say, for aesthetic purposes.

Longkumer thinks it possible that the Naga people of Gaidinliu's generation did not completely separate 'language from music, speech from song, and writing from drawing', an idea extracted from Tim Ingold's 2007 book *Lines: A Brief History* (Longkumer, 2016, p.133; Ingold, 2007, p.3). Certainly, for those who study drawings from an art perspective, the final pairing on this list is not difficult to accept. Literate cultures have always drawn in the direction they write. For example, scrolls in the Far East were worked from right to left and top to bottom. In the Islamic world too, where historical graphic practices reflected the perfection of line found in sacred script, everything also moved from right to left. Rawson is interested in the role played by muscle memory in such cases. For those who both write and draw, the 'schooling of the hand' is not just an opportunity for artistic refinement, it is also the occasion for creative circumventions that consciously seek to 'elude' recognisable calligraphic habits (Rawson, 1969, p.60). In Gaidinliu's case, it seems to be the transformative alliance forged between the perceived authority of a school exercise book (perhaps representing the coloniser's notion of literacy) and the empowering force of mark-making (a liberating personal calligraphy) that entangles her within a real-world, politically charged, situation. Some of her untranslatable 'language' employs carefully variegated symbols that appear to follow each other across the page from left to right. Is she mocking British writing habits? Longkumer makes many interesting points about this possibility. At another point Gaidinliu creates non-sequential blocks and clusters that Rawson would, I think, identify as a drawing process, even though there is no way of knowing if there was an intention to trigger some kind of aesthetic experience.

For my part, aesthetic sensibilities are most certainly in play with the marks I made all over Longkumer's article. What began as interpretative notation quickly became a sequence of free-floating diagrams that visualised counter-narratives within the published text. It seemed that my graphic interruptions could not avoid the tonal and spatial values I use when drawing. In this sense I know too much to simply mark-up the article. I know, for example, that the calligraphic flourishes in medieval European graphic work were derived from alphabetic word-units used in monastic scriptoria, and that it was a liberation from these formulaic procedures that created the tonal techniques on which my art school education was founded. How else, for example, could an unattached inky stroke in a Rembrandt sketch persuade me that it represents an extensive area of shadow that covers a good part of the drawing. Knowing this kind of thing is, in a way, crippling. As the more expressive versions of my record drawings show, I cannot even conceive of a graphite pencil operating like a mechanical stylus without succumbing to picture-making ambitions. And so, as my personal calligraphy encircled Longkumer's words, I found myself inventing pictorial spaces not usually seen in the typographic layout of an academic journal. As a result, the printouts of this absorbing ethnographic article started to operate as a material support for artistic experimentation. This is something I would like to develop. After all, photographic prints were workable propositions for Gaidinliu's disciples and my experiments could be contextualised by Longkumer's act of remediation.

But what if the Pitt Rivers Museum returned the actual exercise books to their rightful Naga heirs? When I presented the videos used in this paper at the Museum's *Visual, Material and Museum Anthropology* seminars I was told that this possibility was under consideration. If so, it seems likely that my graphic engagement with Longkumer's article would be given, creatively speaking, unexpected scope. Gaidinliu's books will cease to be present as museum objects in Oxford, a situation that reverses the direction of restoration discussed so far. Once the confiscated artefacts have been returned, a gap opens up for Hölling-like remediations in the museum. What will be remediated? Well, I guess it would be the unfathomable visuality that has been conserved for so long in this collection-holding environment.

Figure 7: Please see HTML version for video content

This really is not a straightforward narrative. My videos do not conclude or override my graphic experimentation. They are a quick way of finding out what happens when one image is linked into another in time rather than space. Thinking *through* a trans-media practice like this is a never-ending process. But my audio accidents do seem to stimulate the wider sensory context in which I develop my visual symbolism. For example, the music playing on the radio as I concluded the final editing stage of the Figure 5 video was the popular 'flower duet' from Delibes's nineteenth century opera *Lakmé*. I remember the announcer's conflicted feelings about this beautiful song, which occurs in the context of a British army officer seducing an underage Indian woman. This music, playing almost subliminally in the background of the video, seems to shape the

slow fade from displaced postwar Europeans to the religious objects from India that I encounter on a daily basis in Oxford. Of course, this outcome was entirely fortuitous, and the significance will be impenetrable to those viewing the video (it is not easy to identify the tune), but a conversation about complicity and aesthetic engagement has begun in my head, and I accept that this could be a pivotal discovery.

Similarly, there is more to say about the bell-ringers heard on the soundtrack of the last video. They are following a diagram attached to the tower wall of the nearby village church. I am reminded that in Gaidinliu's culture, her script could well have had more resonance as a song than a written message (Longkumer, 2016, p.126). So too with the bell-ringer's codified rows of numbers. They guide the striking sequences heard outside my window. There are even criss-cross lines that overlay the grid with alternative melodic patterns. These improvisatory additions, straying unexpectedly into my animated elaboration of Longkumer's article, make me think about the cross-sensory remediations common in Gaidinliu's community. Let us recall the colonial administrator who first confiscated her exercise books. J. P. Mills observed that she unhesitatingly moved from visual to aural modes of communication. When the prophet sent notated messages to her adherents, she often provided verbal commentaries to explain what her 'scribbles' meant. In the text you have been reading those missing words are, like the sound of my father speaking on the *Replicord* discs, just another displaced 'voice-over'.

Figure 8: Please see HTML version for video content

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The artist-curator **Chris Dorsett** is best known for a sequence of pioneering exhibitions held at Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum in the 1980s. Later, he organised 'interventionist' projects with museums in Sweden and Finland, as well as undertaking residencies in an Amazonian field station and the historic walled village of Kat Hing Wai in the New Territories of Hong Kong. As professor of fine art at Northumbria University he published extensively on the interface between experimental art practices and the museum/heritage sector. Dorsett's personal archive has recently been accessioned to the Pitt Rivers Museum. Web: <http://www.chrisdorsett.com>