



‘Subjective Cameras’: Authorship, Form, and Interpretation of Mass Observation Life Writings

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Abstract

The Mass Observation Archive contains a wealth of different forms of life writing created between 1937 and the mid-1950s, and again from 1981 to the present. This life writing, by contributors with differing intentions and levels of commitment, is fragmentary, dispersed across the archive, and takes varied forms. To make full use of the richness of this writing, it is necessary to know who the authors were, how their texts were generated, what forms of life writing resulted, and how they may be interpreted. This contextualising overview first outlines the specific and distinctive forms of life writing which MO initiated and encouraged; the social profile of their authors, and their self-perceptions of their identities; the writers' motivations; and their relationship to the Archive. It then explores some of the ways in which scholars have used and interpreted this rich material, both as a resource for investigating specific topics, and as a collection of life writings open to comparative analysis as narratives of self-construction and records of biographical trajectories.

Keywords: Mass Observation, life writing

I read in the *News Chronicle* articles about the work, and especially the account by an ordinary housewife of her day. Mass-Observation, it was something to talk about, the things I do in the house are monotonous but on the 12th day are different somehow, letting the dog out, getting up, making the dinner, it makes them important when they have to be remembered and recorded. It is in the nature of scientific work, but not necessarily by experts, and I am interested in science. It also widens my horizons. I had never really wondered what people had on their mantelpieces, and maybe these reasons are vague but I like the work, it gives me a sense of importance, whether justified or not I don't know.

A young woman, housekeeper for her father, who began a Day Diary in 1937 (Sheridan 1994, 103-4)

The Mass Observation Archive contains a wealth of different forms of life writing created between 1937 and the mid-1950s, and again from 1981 to the present.¹ This life writing, by contributors with differing intentions and levels of commitment, is fragmentary, dispersed across the archive, and takes varied forms. These forms are shaped by a complex dialogue between the requests and suggestions made the Mass Observation (MO) organisers, and the intentions of the contributors (including their perceptions of the archive and its purposes). To make full use of the richness of this writing, it is necessary to know who the authors were, how their texts were generated, what forms of life writing resulted, and how they may be interpreted.

This article offers an overview of these issues, drawing on the work of many previous scholars, as well as my own reanalysis of key MO statistical data. It first outlines the specific and distinctive forms of life writing which MO initiated and encouraged. It then examines the social profile of the contributors, their self-perceptions of their identities, their motivations for writing, and their understanding of their relationship to the archive and its potentialities (highlighting in particular the work of Dorothy Sheridan and her co-authors). Finally, it indicates the changing ways in which scholars have used and interpreted this rich body of material, both as a resource for investigating specific topics, and as a collection of life writings open to comparative analysis as narratives of self-construction and records of biographical trajectories (pioneered by James Hinton).²

Forms of Life Writing in the MO Archive

The two major forms of life writing within the MO Archive are diaries and Directive replies.³ Initially MO, in soliciting writing from its nascent National Panel, asked participants to complete a Day-survey listing 'everything they did from waking to sleeping' on the twelfth day of each month, starting in February 1937.⁴ From June 1937, some Day-surveys asked observers to address specific topics (on the press, reading and books: Hinton 2013, 77). These texts combined questions on designated topics – which 'required the panel members to gather opinions of friends and acquaintances as well as voicing their own views and experiences' – with a request 'to record their everyday life in a loosely directed diary form' reporting their conversations, dreams, and local events (Highmore, 89). The monthly Day-surveys produced so much material that MO decided to suspend them after January 1938, concentrating for the rest of the year on surveys of special days (e.g. Christmas Day, the Munich Crisis).⁵ From January 1939, the Panel were issued with regular monthly Directives asking them to report their observations of and opinions on a wide range of specified topics (e.g. on smoking, margarine, and different aspects of opinion formation including advertisements).⁶ Diaries and Directive replies can be seen to have emerged, as separate but not entirely distinct forms, from the initial, more capacious/amorphous, Day-surveys.

Since autumn 1937, Panel members 'had been encouraged to keep daily diaries during periods of "national emergency"', material which contributed to the analysis of the Munich crisis in *Britain by Mass-Observation* (Hinton 2013, 139). The idea of diary-keeping was revived on the outbreak of war, and produced a substantial body of writing. In August 1939, the National Panel members were invited to send in a 'Crisis Diary' and then offered 'a choice between continuing to answer Directives ... or writing day-to-day diaries covering all aspects of their war-time lives' (Marcus, 14; cf. *Courage*, [2-3]). Whereas the Day-surveys of 1937/8 were confined to single days, and the subsequent 1938/9 diaries to short-term emergencies such as Munich, the wartime diaries concerned a 'special event' – the war – potentially of indefinite length, 'for the duration'. (Salter 2008a, 44)

The diaries (both Day-surveys and wartime diaries) and the Directive responses were different, though at times overlapping, forms of life writing.⁷ The diaries were distinct from a standard personal diary in several ways. They were commissioned texts. In some cases, nothing might have been written without the prompt from MO; in other cases, MO may rather have provided a rationale for an individual's diary-writing which might have happened anyway. The initial Day Surveys were not

continuous, but confined to a single day each month. For some writers, such as the young woman quoted above, this made that day stand out from the mundane routine. In the case of the wartime diaries, authors were asked specifically to write about various aspects of the war.⁸

However, it is clear that diarists, while responding to directions from MO, also interpreted these prompts in their own ways and to suit their own needs.⁹ This could be true even when they paid close attention to the wider MO project – reading its publications, and following press coverage. Their understanding of what MO was about varied considerably in sophistication. When possible, MO staff tried to encourage diarists by responding to what they sent in; for some diarists such contact was highly valued, while for others diary-writing had taken on a life of its own with little regard for how it was received.¹⁰

There is another quite distinctive dimension to these diaries: once they were sent in to MO (usually monthly) the diarists did not see them again. Thus, unless they kept a carbon-copy or other duplicate, they could not refer back to earlier entries when compiling a fresh one.¹¹ While for the historian this makes them especially valuable, by limiting the potential for rewriting or reinterpreting immediate responses in the light of retrospection, it makes them different from other long-term diaries where such reconsideration by their authors may have been possible.¹²

The Directive pointed the attention of Mass Observers to the topic MO was currently investigating.

By the end of 1939, the M-O directive had developed into the standard form of a series of questions or guidelines, often containing a commentary and feedback on earlier directive replies. It was designed to prompt the respondents to gather information about their lives and to observe others around them. In effect, the directives invited correspondents to produce detailed reports combining experience and opinion¹³

Mass Observers could respond actively to these requests. Tony Kushner, in his study of replies to two Directives on the theme of race, comments: 'At their most interesting, the respondents engaged with the construction of the questions and their own answers to them.' (2004, 112; cf. Calder 1985, 133-5)

The term 'Directive' was retained by the revived MO Project. Sheridan, Street and Bloome suggest that *questionnaires* operate at a more structured level, and risk producing short, uninformative answers mirroring the question posed.

The discursive directive, despite its name, is capable of eliciting long discursive essays on a subject in a way a more structured questionnaire cannot, and may be responsible for ensuring the correspondents feel able to contest and adapt the space that is created for their reply.¹⁴

MOP Directives are circulated (usually) three times per year.¹⁵ Researchers on diverse topics have identified two important characteristics of the Directive responses. They are shaped in part by the formulation and language of the Directive itself.¹⁶ A significant number of correspondents respond to the themes of the Directive with (more or less fragmentary) autobiographical writing. 'The narratives that the directive generated from some female correspondents read like words waiting to be told. Stories spill out.'¹⁷ Kaeren Harrison and Derek McGhee comment (30):

While the M-O correspondents do not provide a whole life story, they do offer readers a glimpse in to their lives and an impression of their personality and character at different points in time, and at different stages of their life. This autobiographical expression is often multi-generic, that is, they exhibit and exploit many genres: those of the letter, the diary, the novel, the soap opera, TV talk shows, the movie. It is also fragmentary and partial, and while the responses are interesting for what they reveal, they are also fascinating for what they do not.

In order to make proper use of these diverse texts, it is necessary to understand who their authors were, their self-perceptions and motivations.

The MO contributors, their self-perceptions and motivations

From the start MO, like all such research using qualitative biographical sources, was troubled by, and challenged over, the issue of representativeness. *Whose* were the voices through which they sought to assess public opinion? MO at times fudged these questions: partly because they genuinely wished to gather texts from across the whole social spectrum (including the three-quarters of the British population which was then working-class), and wanted to convince themselves they had succeeded; and at times because they needed to claim such an outcome in order to secure funding from external patrons.¹⁸ However, later research has considerably clarified the overall profile of the Panel membership, and of their different patterns of participation (by genre and over time).

Almost 3,000 respondents wrote for MO between 1939 and 1945.¹⁹ Of these, one-fifth responded only to the Day-Surveys (1937-8), and three-fifths replied only to Directives (1939-45). Of the remaining fifth, 2% wrote only Diaries, 7% replied to both Day-surveys and Directives, 11% were Directive respondents who also kept a Diary, and 3% had contributed to all three forms of MO prompt (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Numbers of Respondents contributing different combinations of life-writing format

<i>Respondents who contributed:</i>	Diaries, Directives & Day-Surveys	%	Diaries & Directives only	%	Diaries & Day-Surveys only	%	Directives & Day-Surveys only	%
Men	40		168		0		138	
Women	43		153		0		75	
?								
Total	83	2.8	321	10.7	0	0	213	7.1

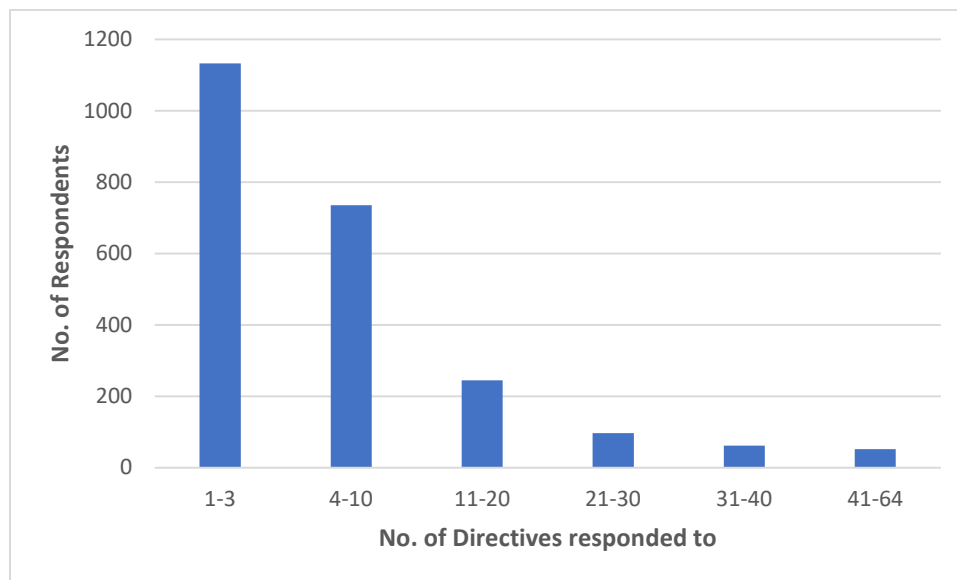
<i>Respondents who contributed:</i>	Diaries only	%	Directives only	%	Day-Surveys only	%	Total
Men	34		1165		385		1930
Women	25		541		162		999
?					67		67
Total	59	2.0	1706	56.9	614	20.5	2996

Table 2: Total numbers of Respondents contributing each life-writing format

<i>All Respondents</i>	Diaries	Directives	Day-Surveys
Men	242	1511	563
Women	221	812	280
?			67
Total	463	2323	910

The degree of engagement of MO participants varied considerably. Of those responding to Directives, a fifth answered only one, a half no more than three; yet a fifth answered eleven or more, a tenth 21 or more (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of Directive Respondents per Response Frequency



Levels of participation in MO fluctuated. James Hinton suggests that by the outbreak of war the National Panel, created in 1937, had about a thousand effective members, of whom at best fewer than half would respond to a given Directive.²⁰ About 1,200 further respondents were recruited during the war; in total, over 2,300 responded to one or more wartime Directives. (Courage, [4]) After initial wartime disruption, the numbers responding to individual Directives peaked in the first half of 1942 (533 in May); thereafter, the trend declined each year.²¹ Over 150 contributors sent in diaries during August and September 1939; and although the monthly total fell over the course of the war, more than 450 individuals wrote an MO diary at some point between 1939 and 1945.²² Some both wrote diaries and answered Directives.²³

The gender, age and geographical profiles of the National Panel are clear. From 1937-40, two-thirds were men; then, as conscription took effect, this proportion fell to a little over half (1942-5). (N. Stanley, 155; Hinton 2013, 269) However, this gender pattern varies with the form of writing. Of those who responded only to Day-Surveys, Directives, or both, two-thirds were men. But of those who kept wartime Diaries, a half were women (see Table 3). Suggested reasons for this divergence include the supposedly greater propensity of women for the self-reflective form of diary-keeping; and the specific effect of wartime conditions, bringing greater disruption to the lives of men who were conscripted.²⁴

Table 3: Gender difference among Respondents, by life-writing format

<i>All Respondents</i>	Diaries	%	Directives and/or Day-Surveys only	%
Men	242	52.3	1688	66.6
Women	221	47.7	778	30.7
?			67	2.6
Total	463		2533	

The men were on average younger than the population as a whole; the women older. (Hinton 2013, 268-70; N. Stanley, 159-163). Women tended to be single, or older married women with grown-up children; the demands of child-care made contributing harder for young mothers. (Summerfield, 443) Geographically, south-east England was over-represented, while the north of England, and especially Scotland and Wales, were under-represented. (N. Stanley, 162-4)

Most MO respondents gave their occupation. Nick Stanley's analysis of the occupational profile concludes that the core of the Panel were two lower-middle-class groups: clerical workers (shopkeepers, teachers, authors, journalists), and technical workers (scientists, engineers, doctors and dentists) among the men; clerks and teachers among the women.²⁵ Many had secondary schooling (on scholarships), few had been to university. Most read widely; the desire to extend their education was part of their reason for joining. (Summerfield, 441-3)

Overall, the imbalances of the class and geographical composition of MO's National Panel were what might be expected of a self-recruiting survey; although it made repeated efforts to broaden its membership. (N. Stanley, 160-7) MO's National Panel – 'young-ish, left-leaning, and preponderantly middle class' – should be understood, suggested Angus Calder, not as representative of the whole British population, but as a valuable source of information about this specific group. 'The very ways in which the panel was unrepresentative may have made it a better instrument for detecting long-term tendencies than, and suggesting them to historians now, than a more perfect sample of the population could have been.'²⁶

In the first thirty-two years of the revived MO Project (1981-2013), more than 4,500 correspondents took part; many writing at great length and over many years.²⁷ Unlike the original National Panel, where men predominated, MOP has consistently recruited many more women; this pattern, like the small numbers from Afro-

Caribbean and Asian backgrounds, has proved very difficult to shift, despite efforts to do so.²⁸

How did these contributors to MO see themselves and their social position? The term 'ordinary people' (and its cognates) – whether used by MO to describe its (desired) contributors, or by Mass Observers about themselves – forms a *leitmotif* in the history of MO, both in its origins and in the revived MO Project. In a BBC radio talk about MO in 1939, Madge and Harrison referred to 'ordinary hardworking folk', meaning those who were not middle-class professionals.²⁹

However, when this identity, whether ascribed or self-asserted, is examined more closely, tensions within it become apparent. These relate to an issue which has often been identified in discussions of non-elite life writing: to what extent does the very choice to write about one's life mark one out as *extra-ordinary*? Hinton, analysing responses to the June 1939 Directive on class, many of which emphasised the 'cultural distinction' of the writer, suggests: 'The founders of M-O wanted to listen to the voices of "ordinary" people. Their paradoxical achievement was to provide a platform for individuals many of whom were anxious to establish, precisely, their lack of ordinariness.' He comments: 'Most of those claiming cultural distinction ... were aspiring to inhabit a social space existing independently from the structures of social class. Few, however, believed that this was easy to do, and most were well aware of the claims that class – as against culture – made on their identities.' (2008, 233, 229)

In keeping with the greater self-reflectivity of MOP, Dorothy Sheridan, Brian Street and David Bloome conducted a study of the first decade of the Project's life writings – based on the replies to a Directive on 'Literacy Practices and the M-O Project' (issued in spring 1991), and subsequent interviews with 35 of those who had responded to the Directive (conducted in 1992/3) – framed by the approach of New Literacy Studies.³⁰ This framework reveals several key issues about MOP contributors – their self-perception, understanding of audience, and reasons for participating – which illuminate how their texts relate to many other forms of writing produced by non-elite authors.³¹

When the project was relaunched in 1980, an emphasis on being 'ordinary' was there from start.³² Sheridan, Street and Bloome note that, although the correspondents come from a wide range of backgrounds, 'in our interviews and in their written responses to the directive, the phrase "ordinary" person came up again and again'.³³ Several of the correspondents reflected on this term as part of their *self-perception*. Mrs Martin acknowledged the difficulty of defining it: 'I think ordinary really, you think of yourself as someone who hasn't perhaps achieved fame, or great success; just live a

sort of normal, everyday life, going to work and with your family.' (Sheridan et al., 174; cf. 188) Sheridan, Street and Bloome concluded that '[a]n "ordinary" person was primarily defined by what it was not'. When people describe themselves as ordinary, they 'see themselves as standing for (or representing) a particular voice, or set of voices, which do not as a rule get the opportunity to be heard on a public platform.'³⁴

The study investigated the *audience(s)* to which the MO writing is (imagined to be) addressed, and the ways in which this may shape the texts. Sheridan, Street and Bloome invited their correspondents to say how they imagined the MO team.³⁵ The first director of the revived MO Project, David Pocock, had attempted to reply personally to all respondents to a given Directive. Through this textual exchange, some correspondents clearly formed a strong bond with him as a personification of the Archive.³⁶ After Dorothy Sheridan took over, the increasing number of MO correspondents made it impossible to reply to them all personally in this way. Some clearly found this change difficult.³⁷ Despite these practical difficulties, Harrison and McGhee concluded in 2002 that Sheridan 'has established a personal relationship with all of the panel members and has invested much in the way of resources both in terms of time and emotion' (30).³⁸ For other correspondents, however, the impersonal nature of the Archive gave them greater freedom to express themselves.³⁹ But through the Archive – whether personified in its successive directors or imagined as anonymous – many correspondents also addressed more remote audiences: their children and grandchildren, historians and researchers, future generations.⁴⁰ Whichever of these audiences was imagined most prominently, the very existence of the Archive as repository and intermediary helped to legitimate the project of writing about the self.⁴¹

The imagined audience was closely linked to the correspondents' *reasons* for writing.⁴² These ranged from the personal (using MO writing as a space for self-reflection, leaving a record of one's life) to the strongly public and political.⁴³ Political motivations might be immediately contemporary: speaking after a decade of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, several correspondents emphasised that they wished to articulate a different set of values.⁴⁴ But motivations might also be longer-term: a wish to contribute to the writing of an alternative history.⁴⁵ Mr Russell connected the past and present of MO. He had read *Puzzled People* (Mass Observation 1947) and other early MO books which 'started to make real for me a recent past which had formed me but which I knew very little about. I also discovered that ordinary people are not blind slaves but can project a knowledge of the world in "good sense" terms, hence possess the potential to change it.'⁴⁶ For Mr Russell, personal and public motivations were combined: 'I'm writing my autobiography, and it will gain value and significance precisely because it won't stand alone as the record of a single,

ignominious 20th-century life but will enjoy a collective, historically-based context.'⁴⁷ There is a clear overlap between these public/political motives, and one important strand of 'life writing from below' which can be traced continuously from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century.⁴⁸

Sheridan, Street and Bloome's inclusion of nine case-studies of individual correspondents (ch. 5) allows the reader to see how the different aspects of context, audience and motivation are connected in practice. They enrich this approach with a piece of textual analysis, taking the account written by Mrs Wright of her court hearing for refusal to pay the Poll Tax, and showing how 'literacy practices are implicated in power relations and processes'. Mrs Wright uses this and her other MO writing 'not just as a source for future historians, but as a means for claiming that the lives of people like her have value and need to be valued'.⁴⁹

Interpreting MO Life Stories

The Observers are the cameras with which we are trying to photograph contemporary life. The trained observer is ideally a camera with no distortion. Mass-Observation has always assumed that its untrained Observers would be *subjective* cameras, each with his or her own individual distortion. They tell us not what society is like, but what it looks like to them.⁵⁰

Despite this rhetorical invocation of the Mass Observers as 'subjective cameras', the conceptual and methodological tensions and uncertainties within MO meant that Harrison and Madge, though sensitive to its value, never found a satisfactory way to analyse this wealth of life writing. Kushner suggests that it was Harrison's wartime successor as head of MO, Bob Willcock, who 'put greater stress on the subjectivity of its volunteers' writings and observing, and, for the first time, ... state[d] explicitly that their lack of objectivity was actually an asset rather than a liability' (2004, 12 [quoted], 108-9, 153-5, 158-60).⁵¹

As increasing numbers of researchers have made use of both the MO and MOP life-writing materials in the Archive, a significant body of methodological reflection on ways of working with this unique collection has been developed.⁵² Scholars have pointed to its complex structure, within which making connections between an individual correspondent's various contributions, while sometimes valuable, can be laborious.⁵³ They have particularly emphasised the three-way, reciprocal relationship between the Mass Observers, the Archive, and the researchers who use it.⁵⁴ All Mass Observers have an image (explicit or implicit) of both the Archive itself, and future

potential users of their writings. The nature of the communication between the Archive which sends out Directives, and the Observers who send in their responses, gives the latter a quasi-epistolary character.⁵⁵ Although, as has been seen, individual Observers' motivations vary, it is clear that many have a strong, even passionate, commitment to (their understanding of) MO's purposes.⁵⁶ Consequently, they do not respond passively to the lead set by the Directives, but may either circumvent it (by taking their own direction in responding to its themes), or openly challenge it.⁵⁷ Anne-Marie Kramer argues that Mass Observers 'have "dual vision": as well as recounting their personal experiences, they also document or "bear witness" to contemporary social life'. This prompts them 'to link personal knowledge and social observation in a way which facilitates reflexivity, and so generates valuable sociological knowledge and insight'.⁵⁸

Researchers have found distinctive qualities in different formats. Ben Highmore, concerned with the development of conceptions of 'everyday', emphasises the value of the *day-surveys* in particular.

If these "special directives" allowed a number of particular issues to be investigated, they didn't offer the range of materials that the day-surveys produced. By taking one specific day, and seeing how it is being lived and dreamed across the country, by people unknown to each other, the full "totality of fragments" of the everyday could be envisaged. These day-surveys took the basis of commonality (everyone experienced the same day, the same coronation) to emphasize the diversity of the lives being lived. (92)

Kushner, focussing on MO's *Directives* of race, highlights its 'desire for subjective responses ... emphasised ... when the directive added the instruction to "write down the first thing that comes into your head"', with the result that 'individuals, using an admittedly sketchy life history approach, constructed their past and present attitudes' (2004, 110-1). In contrast to this emphasis on immediacy of response, Hinton, analysing the longer-term *wartime diaries*, and their intersection with the monthly Directives, suggests a form of self-development through life writing: 'Regular diary writing fostered the diarists' capacity to respond to such questions by articulating the ambiguous, unresolved, contradictory nature of the thoughts and feelings involved in their own ongoing projects of self-fashioning.' (2010, 3)⁵⁹

The *interplay* of diary and Directive, as different forms of life writing which can be complementary and mutually illuminating, is evident in two of the biographical subjects in Hinton's *Nine Wartime Lives*. He comments that: Mary Clayton's 'writing

for MO, ... more than for any of the other diarists, was discreet to the point of secretiveness. ... What [she] gives us is the *made* self, the product, not the process, although something of the latter can be inferred from her full and honest responses to some of the more searching monthly directives.' (2010, 73; original emphasis) Similarly, Ernest van Someren made little use of his diary to explore his emotional life. 'It is to Mass-Observation's credit that its intrusive regime of monthly questionnaires extracted from this emotionally reserved man rather more than he bargained for: most of the discussion of his inner life derives from material elicited by the directives, rather than from the diary itself.'⁶⁰

Researchers have increasingly focused on the complex textual qualities of MO documents as life *writings*.⁶¹ Margaretta Jolly has offered a comparative analysis of three of the wartime diaries, suggesting that '[a]ttention to the formal aspects of the diaries illuminates the uses of the genre both for the writers and for the readers' (112). She explores the diarists' sense of audience and use of voice, as well as the varied time frames (public and private) they employ. Andrea Salter (2008b) develops a detailed analysis of the temporal structure of one of these diaries, that of Nella Last.⁶²

Consequently, scholars have sought appropriate ways to read these texts. Louise Purbrick notes that she 'attempted to pay close attention to the construction of meaning within the writing as well as its conditions of production. Often the most fruitful passages did not answer the directive directly but were prompted by it into their own narrative.' (2008, 10) In comparing responses to two Directives on class, from 1948 and 1990, in order to test sociological claims about changes in patterns of class identification, Mike Savage argues that 'the apparent constancy of content looks very different when we examine the form of the letters. The meanings of class identity rest in their latent, ambivalent, and opaque character, the way that they reveal as well as conceal.... [I]t is the form, rather than the content, of class talk which is important.'⁶³

While many previous scholars had used a range of MO material (including life writings) as one among several sources for their specific research topic, in *Nine Wartime Lives* (2010) James Hinton took a different approach, seeing the diaries as a way of exploring the process, gradually becoming more common during the early decades of the twentieth century, of the construction of the modern self (3-5, 7-8).⁶⁴ He comments that:

It is only in recent years, with the growth of interest in the history of "the self", that it has become possible to approach the diaries in search, not of snippets illustrative of more general experiences, but for what cannot be discovered elsewhere: the ways

in which individuals sought to construct a coherent sense of their own identities. (17)

The book, which Hinton terms an 'experiment in historiography' (1), takes the form of a series of vivid, fluently-written biographical essays on individuals who kept substantial wartime MO diaries. He selected nine diarists (six women, three men, all but one born between 1886 and 1904, drawn from a broad spectrum of the middle class, in three different English regions). Together, they *illustrate* the range of MO volunteers; but they are not *representative*, even among the MO diarists (since they wrote for so long, revealing so much of their inner lives). Nevertheless, Hinton suggests, as 'exceptionally self-reflective people, they can provide us with access to a cultural world that others inhabited with less self-awareness'. (17)

Historiographically, he situates this approach as one which employs the resources of cultural history to challenge the model of the formation of subjectivity presented within much postmodernist writing. By 'collapsing subjectivity into discourse', Hinton argues, postmodernist historical narratives 'risk neglecting the moment in which culture was confronted by experience: the creative moment in which an individual, struggling to make sense of him- or herself in the world, will bend, select, recombine, amend or transform sources of meaning available in the public culture.' (19) Through what he terms a 'biographical turn', it becomes possible to trace the diverse ways in which individuals absorb, process and rework the various discourses present in their society. While bringing out the distinctive individuality of each diarist, Hinton traces shared themes across their lives – about family relationships; religious and political beliefs; responses to the experience of war as variously opportunity, constraint and theatre of extreme violence; and the significance of writing for MO. Here I will highlight two issues on which *Nine Wartime Lives* casts valuable light: the continuing influence of powerful Victorian ideological and emotional patterns well into the twentieth century, as well as some of the cultural changes which began to erode them (134-5).⁶⁵

Firstly, gender relations. The portraits of the six women reveal the powerfully patriarchal assumptions on which many marriages were built.⁶⁶ This was most starkly evident in the case of Eleanor Humphries, whose demanding husband dominated her life (89-93, 107, 109). Whereas Humphries accepted this role, regretting only his lack of appreciation (89, 109), Nella Last came to criticise her own earlier acquiescence to her husband's demands (46). Nevertheless, several of the women were able to mobilise different resources to create opportunities to pursue their own interests and self-development – Last despite marital conflict, Gertrude Glover and Mary Clayton more

easily because their husbands were more accommodating (83). These opportunities arose largely through these women's engaging in public activities – which the demands of war ironically made both more necessary and more acceptable.⁶⁷

Secondly, religious and moral values. Religious beliefs among this group are strikingly eclectic. Though many subscribed to a nominal Christianity, they often interpreted it in individual ways. Ernest van Someren rejected the fundamentalism of his Plymouth Brethren upbringing, and was eventually drawn to 'the Quaker rejection of scriptural authority and formal creeds' (138-40, 144-5). Several of the women combined a formal adherence to Christianity with diverse spiritual or secular beliefs.⁶⁸ Working alongside, and to some extent replacing, religious faith as a source of meaning and guidance was the influence of what Hinton terms 'popular psychology', which played a significant role in enabling some of the women to secure greater freedom of action. For Nella Last, the help was immediate and personal. When she suffered a nervous breakdown in 1937/8, she was helped by her local doctor who understood psychology (30-1). Lilian Rogers had not wanted children; but after she had a daughter, she was determined to bring up her child differently. She read psychological literature, and felt that she had achieved something. Rogers later enrolled in an evening class in psychology, which she regarded as the start of her emancipation. 'Her interest in the psychological ... marked the beginning of an intellectual voyage which ... opened out into wider ethical, social, and spiritual concerns.' (114-5, 120)

Hinton draws attention to the ways in which each of these women sought to negotiate greater freedom for themselves, within the constraints of their marriages. He interprets Lillian Rogers, as she reported herself to MO, as 'a pioneer of modernity in her own social milieu' (135).

By paying attention to the links between her conventional class and gender identity, her unconventional sexual behaviour, and the untutored intellectual curiosity that led her to delve deep into herself and her world, we can glimpse the instabilities of modern selfhood and the sources of the more complicated relationship between self and multiple identities that were to explode into the cultural revolution in the 1960s and beyond. (112)

Like Sheridan, Street and Bloome for the MO Project, Hinton also explores the meanings for his authors of writing for MO. When these diarists reflected on the purposes of their writing, a wide range of personal aims was apparent. Nella Last believed diary-writing met some public wider purpose, though she was not sure what

that was.⁶⁹ Hinton suggests that it enabled her to respond to tensions in her daily life and articulate things she could not say in person.

It was not just the promise to MO which kept the diary going. The hour or so she spent last thing every night writing up her day provided a kind of meta-existence, a space in which she could reflect, evaluate and monitor her life.... The diary allowed her to contemplate her own doubleness, the mask of cheerfulness and the misery within, and to articulate a Nella who was both and neither of these women.

But diary *writing* was also valuable for its own sake: Last was sensitive to, playful and at times experimental with, language (47-9). Eleanor Humphries did her MO writing in secret, since her husband was hostile to the family letters which she also enthusiastically wrote (91). Though she reported conscientiously and at length to MO, Hinton suggests that its wider aims meant little to her. Diary writing was a way to analyse her feelings, but 'mostly it was simply the act of recording itself that she found so pleasurable' which provided 'a therapy, a source of private calm and composure' (107-10, quoted at 108).

Nine Wartime Lives is successful on two levels. By tracing individual writers across their various contributions to MO, it demonstrates the value of linking up the documents produced by individual Mass Observers, dispersed as they are within the structure of the Archive, to compose (albeit fragmentary) biographies. Recontextualised in this way, specific diaries entries and Directive responses reveal different layers of meaning than when isolated passages are used as evidence within thematic studies. These differences may stem from varied responses according to MO format, or to the topic addressed; or represent contradictions within, or diachronic change in, the author's perspectives.⁷⁰ By juxtaposing the resulting portraits, similarities and differences of experience emerge.⁷¹ (In his latest book, *Seven Lives from Mass Observation* (2016), Hinton similarly uses the MOP writings of correspondents born in the 1920s and 30s to explore their responses to social, economic and cultural changes in Britain from the 1960s to the 1980s. Here too, he found that 'the most systematic contrast between the life experiences ... lay across the fault line of gender'.⁷²)

MO's founders initiated a form of potential dialogue with their correspondents, though the innovative genres of day diary and Directive. In a significant minority of cases, Mass Observers took up the invitation to write self-reflexively about their lives. In doing so, they revealed a variety of motives, and demonstrated a willingness to

challenge MO's categories. Commenting on one wartime diary, Nick Hubble suggests the author displays:

an implicit recognition that the self-reflective act of writing a diary as part of a collective enterprise is irrevocably distancing her from her younger less reflective self It was the particular form of self-reflexivity generated by the practice of writing about themselves for Mass Observation that allowed the diarists to recognise that they were agents of history, which is to say that they became aware of themselves making history through the process of going about their everyday lives, and thereby gave them the confidence to pronounce on public matters with an authority they would not otherwise have had in a hierarchical society.⁷³

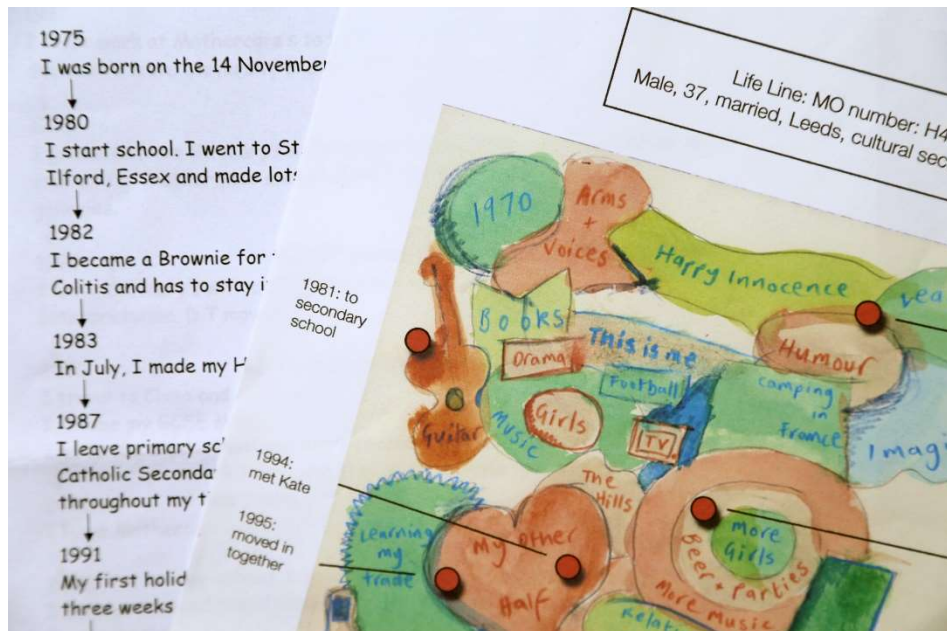
The result is a rich archive which – eighty years later – scholars have developed a range of methodologies to explore. Building on this legacy, the revived MO Project has brought a new self-awareness to the creation, development and maintenance of a long-term life-writing archive. Taken together, Hinton's two volumes of quasi-collective biography – with their portrayal of gradual, uneven but nonetheless evident changes in values and opportunities, together with the work of other recent scholars, demonstrate the value of the life writings in the MO Archive as source for social and cultural history.

Life Writings in the Mass Observation Archive

Mass Observation (1937-67): Nella Last's Diaries



Mass Observation Project (1981+): a male contributor



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T. G. Ashplant is a Visiting Professor at the Centre for Life-Writing Research, King's College London. He is a social and cultural historian, with a research interest in life writings as a source for exploring the construction and transformation of class and gender subjectivities, and their relationship to political identities. He has edited the cluster 'Life Writing "from Below" in Europe' (*European Journal of Life Writing* 7 [2018]); and has co-edited (with Ann-Catrine Edlund and Anna Kuismin) *Reading and Writing from Below: Exploring the Margins of Modernity* (Umeå: Umeå University and Royal Skyttean Society, 2016). He is author of *Fractured Loyalties: Masculinity, Class and Politics in Britain, 1900-30* (London: RiversOram, 2007); and co-editor (with Gerry Smyth) of *Explorations in Cultural History* (London: Pluto Press, 2001).

Notes

I wish to thank Fiona Courage (Curator) and Jessica Scantlebury (Senior Archive Assistant), and Dorothy Sheridan (formerly Director), of the Mass Observation Archive (MOA) for their generous responses to my queries; and Elspeth Graham and the anonymous *EJLW* reviewer for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

Further discussion of issues concerning the context and character of MO's life writings, and their editing and publication, can be found in the four related articles published in this volume.

All emphases in quotations are in the original texts.

¹ For the Mass Observation Archive, see <http://www.massobs.org.uk/>. Almost all the Directive responses and Diaries from 1939-50 have been digitised as images by Adam Matthew Digital (together with other MO material, and supporting contextual information), and can be accessed via subscribing libraries: see <http://www.massobs.org.uk/moo>. Wright has explored how this digitisation, combined with the use of keyword searches (performable only on OCR'd text, currently available only for materials originally typewritten), carries the danger of skewing the demographic profile of MO respondents readily 'visible' to researchers. My thanks to Anna Davin for this reference.

² I have not attempted to illustrate the richness of this writing here; extensive quotations and close readings can be found in many of the studies cited below.

³ For the term 'Directive', see below pp. 19-20. While diaries and Directive responses comprise the bulk of MO's life writings, the Archive contains some other examples. The Worktown team (studying Bolton) held thematic writing Competitions (Hinton 2013, 36-8; Gazeley & Langhamer, 159-189), and used correspondence from wrestling spectators (Snape, 1424) and questionnaires to cinema-goers (Jones, 455). Teacher contacts of MO collected secondary-school children's essays on 'When I Leave School', a proleptic form of life-writing imagining their futures (Barron and Langhamer).

⁴ Courage, [1-2]; Hinton 2013, 10. Madge offered training to those sending in Day-surveys (ibid., 64-6).

⁵ Hinton 2013, 73-4, 77-8, 86-7; Highmore, 89-90; Sheridan et al., 33. Salter 2008a, 22, terms these surveys of special days 'thematic day-diaries'. 43 Day-surveys of Coronation Day from Panel members formed part of the raw material for MO's first book, *May the Twelfth*. (Hinton 2013, 66); cf. Jennings and Madge, 345-414; N. Stanley, 281-313.

⁶ Calder 1985, 124; Salter 2008a, 22-3. For a complete list of Directives, 1939-45, see <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/DirectiveQuestionnaires>. The topic-based survey on smoking was used in *First Year's Work*. (Madge and Harrison 1938, 8-24) Kushner 2004 analyses responses to two Directives on race (June 1939 and June 1943), which he shows was a key MO concern from its inception.

⁷ On the links and differences between the Day-surveys and diaries, see Salter 2008a, 45-6.

⁸ Salter 2008a, ch. 3 argues that the wartime diaries are 'best understood as social rather than private texts', and that MO as an organisation and its diarists 'multiply drew on epistolary conventions and practices' (94; cf. 131, 269-70).

⁹ 'Because MO's invitation to write was open-ended and non-directive, each diarist had to find his or her own way of writing, and to create a voice with which he or she was comfortable. Many diaries are fairly impersonal in tone and reveal little of the writer's emotional life or intimate relations. At their best, they report with accuracy, and sometimes in detail. A few diaries offer passages that are candid and self-disclosing, and occasionally they shed light on that person's pain and unhappiness that may well have been conveyed nowhere else.' R. Malcolmson 2014, [2].

¹⁰ For the wartime diarists' perceptions of and responses to MO, see: Hinton 2010, 107-8 (Humphries); 111-2, 121-2, 133-4 (Rogers); 173-4 (the Waltons); Kertesz 1993, 52-3; Sheridan et al., 72. Sheridan 1990, 7-9, discusses how the 1937-45 diarists imagined their audience, including their (often thwarted) efforts to meet key MO figures. Hinton 2013, 272-3, describes the regular MO bulletins giving feedback (on previous Directives and MO's ongoing work) to those who answered wartime directives; as well as letters, and even book tokens and books, sent to individual respondents. Olivia Cockett valued and was encouraged by such communications: R. Malcolmson 2008, 27, 99, 104, 188. Hubble 2010 cites a detailed example of one diarist's active sense of involvement. Salter 2010, 58-60, stresses what she terms 'the broadly epistolary relationship that existed between M-O and its diarists, the ongoing exchanges of writings in a mutual reciprocal "dialogue"' (58); cf. Salter 2008a, 132-4. For the MO Project, Sheridan et al., 70-1, 142-3, 148, 197, 205-6.

¹¹ At one point, Harrison seems to have envisaged wartime diarists having access to them after the war: Hinton 2013, 275. Jean Lucey Pratt did re-read her MO diaries, probably from carbon copies:

Garfield 2015, 517. Cockett kept no copy, and was sometimes unsure when she had sent in her last entry: R. Malcolmson 2008, 24, 33, 36, 76, 88, 190.

¹² Cf. the preservation of expressions of anti-Jewish sentiments: P. and R. Malcolmson, [7]. Sheridan 1998, 7-8, discusses an MOP correspondent negotiating the return and replacement of her introductory self-portrait. 'Mrs S, and other writers like her, do not simply write to *reflect* their lives but rather to change them.'

¹³ Sheridan et al., 75. Hurdley 2014, 6, 21, reproduces a 1937 Directive on the contents of Mantlepieces.

¹⁴ Sheridan et al., 75. Correspondents use writing for MO 'as an opportunity to create a range of social identities that are complementary to (or parallel to) the social identities inscribed in the directive': *ibid.*, 249. Appendix Bi lists all Directives issued by the (revived) M-O Project from summer 1981 to autumn 1999, and Bii gives five sample Directives: *ibid.*, 315-29; an updated list of Directives is at http://database.massobs.org.uk/projects_database/directivesList/.

¹⁵ Researchers have drawn on these Directive responses for a range of topics: Kushner 1996 (perceptions of ethnic difference); Noakes 2002 (gendered attitudes to the Gulf War); Baker & Geiringer (the impact of the adoption of early personal computers on modes of writing, and the configuration of the home). Directives sometimes include a topic commissioned by an external researcher: see Purbrick 2003 and Purbrick 2006, 11-12, 190-3; Busby; Harrison & McGhee; Langhamer 2007; Kramer. Formulation of the topic is then negotiated between Archive and researcher, to ensure it complies with MOP's style of address to its correspondents and the relationship that establishes: Kramer, 2 para. 3.2; Busby, paras. 7.1-7.2. For the implications of the *position* of the commissioned questions within the overall Directive, see Harrison & McGhee, 26-27; cf. Kushner 2004, 130, on differential levels of response to parts A and B of a Directive.

¹⁶ Kramer, 2 paras. 2.2-2.3; Busby, para 9.1; Hurdley 2013, 55-7. Savage 2007, paras 3.5-3.7, compares the style of Directives on class from 1948 and 1990; Hurdley 2013, ch. 2, on mantlepieces from 1937 and 1983.

¹⁷ Purbrick 2003, 217; cf. the example in Purbrick 2006, 6-8. Cf. Miller, 42; Langhamer 2007, 177-8; Sheridan 1993a, 23; Hurdley 2013, 56. Noakes 1998, 80-82, compares MO writing with oral history and autobiography.

¹⁸ Efforts to broaden profile, and doubtful claims made: Hinton 2013, 61, 270-2; N. Stanley, 166-7.

¹⁹ Nick Stanley's pioneering study of MO in 1981 first offered a comprehensive statistical overview of the composition of the MO Panel. Since then, research in the Archive has produced further information which modifies his findings. Except where otherwise stated, the figures given here are based on my own analysis (including some amendments and corrections) of a database of MO respondents kindly made available by Fiona Courage and Jessica Scantlebury (MOA). These figures are subject to a small margin of error, since the database is not entirely consistent due to gaps and uncertainties in the underlying data. Hence my figures differ from those given by other authors. Moreover, the *actual* number of respondents is necessarily understated, since almost all materials from 1941 have been lost.

²⁰ The Panel displayed an erratic pattern of recruitment (1937: 570 respondents; 1938: 280; 1939: 1,071), boosted by the initial launch, and later by further publicity after publication of the Penguin Special *Britain by Mass Observation* in February 1939. N. Stanley, 155-7; slightly different figure for 1937 in Sheridan et al., 33. In June 1939, 442 responded to the Directive on race, almost 400 to that on class: Hinton 2013, 267-8.

²¹ The number of respondents reached 400 (early 1942), and a peak of 533 (May 1942), falling to 190 in early 1945: Hinton 2013, 267. Nevertheless, a significant number continued writing after the war, the last diarist ending in 1967 (Salter 2008a, 12). A further 960 new respondents contributed from 1946-50, of whom 681 (71.8%) were men. 'By 1948 those writing were nearly entirely comprised of professionals, senior clerks, and middle class housewives.' (Savage 2007, para. 4.2).

²² From January 1940 to mid-1941, the number of monthly diary contributors had settled at c.80: Hinton 2013, 140.

²³ 'Panellists were regularly asked to consider starting diaries: and diarists were advised to prioritize their diaries over directive replies if they felt they had no time to do both'. (Hinton 2013, 272).

²⁴ Kushner 2004, 23-4, points out that MO's founders, although sensitive to class, race and locality as sources of subjectivity, did not originally consider gender; war conditions later alerted Harrison to women's separate needs and views. L. Stanley 1995 explores the complexities of a gendered reading of 1937 Day-diaries; Noakes 1998, 87-101, discusses gender differences in four wartime Directives.

²⁵ N. Stanley, 166-9. A large group of women described themselves as housewives (though they may have been in paid work before marriage). There were also some working-class men, largely manual workers in manufacturing, with less time to devote to MO than lower-middle-class respondents because of longer hours of work. (Summerfield, 443) Stanley's occupationally-based class analysis can be complemented by the discussions of the complex self-attributed class positioning of those 379 Mass Observers who responded to the June 1939 Directive on class in Hinton (2008; 2013, 267-72) and Savage (2008).

²⁶ Calder 1985, 133-5. This suggestion has been supported by later detailed research by Kushner 2004 on race, Savage 2008 on changing class identifications, and Hinton 2010 on emergent modernity (discussed below). Cf. Sheridan et al., 33.

²⁷ Pollen 2013, 219. For detailed figures on participation 1981-2000, see Sheridan et al., 49, 57.

²⁸ For details of recruitment to MOP, Sheridan et al., 52-60; Sheridan 1993a, 14. On differences between male and female MOP correspondents, see Purbrick 2006, 8-12; Noakes 2002, 226-231; Hurdley 2013, 74-6; Hinton 2016, 164-5. 'The MOP panel was heavily weighted towards older people, and two-thirds of those writing for over twenty years or more from the 1980s were already over fifty when they began.' Hinton 2016, 3. Fuller detail on MOP respondents can be found at: <http://database.massobs.org.uk/>.

²⁹ Madge and Harrison, 1939 radio script, quoted in Sheridan et al., 34.

³⁰ Sheridan et al., ch. 4 and Appendixes C & D, give details of the research aims and methodology. Ch. 5 presents a set of dialogues with nine of the interviewees; themes from the dialogues are highlighted *ibid.*, 138.

³¹ The study also explores the *contexts* of writing, including both the temporal frame and spatial setting (when do the authors have/find time to write? where: alone or in company?), and the scribal habits (how does writing for MO fit with the authors' other writing practices: family or business letters; accounts; a personal diary; letters to the press; writing in the course of a job ...): Sheridan et al., 140-204; cf. Baker and Geiringer, 302-6. One of the original Mass Observer's diaries 'were often submitted in the form of copies of letters to his sister': Garfield 2004, 6-7. Pratt wrote MO diaries alongside her personal journal. Her shifting feelings about the relationship between the two, including her sense of what she could not reveal to MO, and occasional distrust of its politics, can be traced in her journal: Garfield 2015, 191, 353, 396, 405, 408, 422, 429, 448, 489-90, 518, 563. Other MO contributors also kept personal diaries: see Doreen Bates, ix, 1, 123, 129, 258, 305; Cockett in R. Malcolmson 2008, 7, 9-10, 13-14, 49-50, 80-81, 126, 150-151, 172, 205-206, 220, 235. Cockett sometimes wrote her MO diary at her workplace, and noted how this affected its contents: *ibid.*, 68-69, 76, 100, 121, 178. While the constraints revealed are less marked than those facing non-elite writers in earlier centuries, for many creating the necessary conditions for writing about the self required considerable effort. (Ashplant 2015, 278-9)

³² A letter in the *New Statesman* in 1981, soliciting new contributors, stated: 'The experience of "ordinary" people is of particular interest.' Sheridan et al., 48; cf. 174.

³³ Sheridan et al., 138. Cf. the young woman's 1937 self-description quoted above.

³⁴ Sheridan et al., 214, 217. Purbrick concluded that: "'ordinary" is a collective identity shaped by the common experience of the dual work/family destiny and shared position outside the spheres of economic, political and cultural influence' (2008, 10), so that: 'to claim the identity "ordinary" in the

way that Mass-Observation correspondents call themselves "ordinary people" recognises their marginal position in relation to official institutions at the same time as it places them securely and centrally within the "mainstream" culture of everyday life' (Purbrick 2006, 24; cf. 14 n.32).

³⁵ See the Spring Directive 1991, question 12, in Sheridan et al., 339. Kramer, paras. 3.3-3.4, also discusses this issue, from a perspective twenty years later.

³⁶ Pocock authored and signed Directives issued in the 1980s: Sheridan et al., 65-6. Purbrick 2006, 191 reproduces one of his Directives. Cf. Shaw, 1396-1401, on different responses to the male Director and his female successor.

³⁷ In the 1990s, all Directive respondents received a standard acknowledgment, but only about a quarter a personal note: Sheridan et al., 70-1. Some correspondents articulated their imagined addressee: Sheridan et al., 197, 206. Cf. Shaw.

³⁸ They explore (30-31) some of the ways Sheridan established such relationships, and the responses this evoked in correspondents. Sheridan et al., 85, comment that her Directives were 'more reflective and less observational'; cf. Kushner 2004, 21; Hinton 2016, 1-2.

³⁹ Mrs Safran: 'I don't really think of the audience when I write at all. It's mostly the things you would like to say and you don't really have a chance to say'; Mr Russell: 'One of the great benefits is that I'm speaking to a stranger, to this anonymous outfit ..., and I feel a lot less inhibited than I would do in conversation': Sheridan et al., 166, 197.

⁴⁰ Children and grandchildren: Sheridan et al., 148, 153, 189; historians and researchers: 148, 155-6, 157, 182; future generations: 156. Cf. 216-7, 229-31.

⁴¹ Mrs Wright: 'it's flattering, really, to think that somebody's going to sit there and read it all ... to know that somebody is interested. I feel as though nobody's interested in my opinions, really'; Mr Reed: 'It has given me a marvellous confidence writing for M-O and I feel I have an audience for all my petty qualms ... It is a platform that a working man would never have in everyday life, exhilarating When writing for the M-O I'm getting myself across in a way to an audience, although it's archives, you're speaking to a group.' Sheridan et al., 142-3, 205-6; cf. 232. Cf. Noakes 1998, 82-85, on wartime women diarists' sense of entitlement to speak.

⁴² 'Writing for the M-OA is a voluntary act, and compared to other kinds of writing, such as writing for publication, it is unprestigious and altruistic': Purbrick 2006, 13; cf. Hinton 2016, 2-3. Nevertheless, for some, finding MO publications, or even a single sentence of their own quoted, was important evidence of their contribution's value: Hubble 2010. Such a quotation encouraged a disappointed correspondent to resume her MO diary after several months: Garfield 2015, 460. For detailed discussion of (often multiple) motives, see Sheridan 1993a, 19-24; non-motives: 18-9. She emphasises correspondents' desire 'to accommodate ... problems of the human condition by putting them on paper, by being "a Writer"' (24). Correspondents' perceptions of the Archive, and its self-presentation: 25-30.

⁴³ Mrs Friend: 'When I die I want to leave things ... I want them to say well ... she did this writing for the Mass-Observation'. Sheridan et al., 156; cf. 158, 163, 166.

⁴⁴ Mrs Safran found it an opportunity to write down a 'dissenting voice'; 'I've been very unhappy with what's happening here politically So it's just nice to feel there's some kind of channel for this feeling, that you can write down what we think and feel'. Mrs Martin wrote because 'I'm hoping to give a different view of events to people in the future ... [t]han the media for instance, and the sort of official establishment.' Sheridan et al., 165-6, 178; cf. 151-2, 191-3; Pollen 2013, 220; Hinton 2016, 93; Jolly, 112-3 (on Edward Stebbing's wartime diary).

⁴⁵ Mr Barrow: 'the history of ordinary people has to be written while it's happening as there is no surviving source material otherwise'. Sheridan et al., 158; cf. 144, 175, 196, 199.

⁴⁶ Sheridan et al., 195. They conclude that: 'Writing as an ordinary person for M-O can be viewed as attempting a reconstitution of a hierarchy of authority There is a sense in which writing about and by ordinary people gives value to ordinary people, makes lives count that are usually lost in

aggregations of statistical data for marketing and political purposes.' 218; cf. 213, 216-7, 279, 283. Value of the link between the original MO and MOP, Sheridan 1993a, 15.

⁴⁷ Sheridan et al., 195; cf. 158. 'Asked whether they had ever thought about writing autobiographies, several ... replied that they saw their writing for MO as a form of autobiography, perhaps a superior form' (Hinton 2016, 6). Hinton 2013, 174 notes that a 'spirit of laying down data for the historical record was common among the volunteer war diarists.'

⁴⁸ Ashplant 2015, 280; 2018, 12, 22. For a similar complex of motives in the 1937 Panel, see Jolly, 111.

⁴⁹ Sheridan et al., 251-257, quoted at 253, 257. The Poll Tax (officially termed the Community Charge) was a flat-rate per-capita tax on every adult, introduced by the Thatcher government in England in 1990. Refusal to pay was one form of resistance by those who thought it regressive and inequitable.

⁵⁰ Madge & Harrison 1938, 66. The untrained observers, the 'subjective cameras', formed the overwhelming majority of diary-keepers and Directive respondents. For the individual-as-camera as a quintessential Thirties image, see Cunningham, 327-333. Feigel, chs 2 and 4, links the tension between objectivity and subjectivity, the real and its representation, in MO with the ways it is evident throughout the (literal and metaphorical) camera-works of thirties documentary film-makers and writers. R. Malcolmson 2014, [2], comments: 'This acceptance of the legitimacy of subjectivity in social observation was of signal importance, and it must have been one major reason why diary-keeping came to be promoted by MO as a promising tool of both social and self-observation. ... The pursuit of science ... facilitated the production of a particularly personal form of writing.'

⁵¹ For two failed attempts to analyse the wartime diaries, in 1941 and 1944, see Hinton 2013, 274-5, 316-20, 335; Salter 2008a, 56-68. P. & R. Malcolmson, and R. Malcolmson 2014, offer excellent overviews of the wartime diaries' strengths.

⁵² On MOP see Sheridan et al., chs 1-3; Pollen 2013; Pollen 2014; *Sociological Research Online* 2014.

⁵³ Busby, paras. 9.1-9.3. Langhamer 2019, 211, comments: 'A substantial core of volunteers maintained their relationship with Mass-Observation across the war years, and they were not infrequently asked repeat questions. The Directives therefore offer a unique longitudinal autobiographical data source allowing for the charting of the changing views of individuals on specific topics over time. They also facilitate the contextualisation of one specific response through recourse to the writer's other contributions.' Cf. pp. 27-8 below; Harrison & McGhee, 33. On the conceptually shaping effects of the Archive's structure, see L. Stanley 1995, 87-88; Kushner 2004, 250; on practical difficulties posed for biographical research, Hinton 2016, 169 n.19. On the materiality of the physical documents, see Harrison & McGhee, 33; Moor & Uprichard; Sheridan 1998, 7.

⁵⁴ Pollen 2014 refers to 'shared ownership'; Kramer to 'negotiated relationships'. On the complexities of this relationship, see Sheridan 1998, 2-5.

⁵⁵ Salter 2010 explores silences in this relationship, caused by the absence from MOA of MO staff's personal communications to wartime diarists. Cockett both phoned and wrote to Harrison in response to such communications: R. Malcolmson 2008, 25, 120-1.

⁵⁶ 'In response to the Directive question "why did you join Mass-Observation?" sent to the Panel in 1937, members repeatedly wrote of their desire to contribute to science, to improve social conditions, to train their powers of observation.' Jolly, 111. Miller, reading the dream reports submitted in 1939-40, suggests that 'the dream directives ... sometimes occasioned an excessive attachment to the project that itself seems socially meaningful'. He goes on to read the dream reports as perhaps providing 'access to the *affective* and *phantasy* life of biopower, as it was experienced by individuals' (39-42, quoted at 39).

⁵⁷ Kramer; Sheridan 1993b, 36 ('The correspondents feel themselves to be genuinely participants. It is (also) their project and they are entitled to criticise.');

Pollen 2014, paras.6.1-6.5. Cockett's personal and professional experiences led her to contact MO suggesting specific topics it might explore (wartime birth-rate, extension of Income Tax): R. Malcolmson 2008, 184, 199-200.

⁵⁸ Kramer, paras. 5.1-5.13, quoted at para. 5.1. Directive responses on wedding presents led Purbrick 2003 to question understandings of the nature of gift giving; those on gardening (1998) led Raisborough & Bhatti to challenge some feminist theories of resistance and empowerment.

⁵⁹ 'In asking panel members to keep [wartime] diaries Mass-Observation made it clear that they were as interested in the diarists' observation of their own feelings and behaviour as in the behaviour of others.' The diarists also received monthly Directives 'many of which invited critical self-examination on intimate issues'. (Hinton 2010, 3) An enquiry for the secularist Ethical Union into the 'aims of ordinary people in life' (in 1944/5) 'encouraged the diarists to look as deeply as they could into the sources of their own selfhoods'. (Hinton 2013, 320-4, quoted at 320; 2010, 3) For detailed discussion of the wartime diaries, see Salter 2008a.

⁶⁰ Hinton 2010, 151; cf. below p. 30, and note 65. Van Someren is one of four Mass Observers whose wartime diaries are excerpted in Garfield 2006.

⁶¹ Wright, 130-1, examines the differential effect on the account of a day's activity of recording it by typewriter rather than handwriting.

⁶² Raisborough & Bhatti, 467-473, reproduce and discuss extensive passages from one of the responses to the Gardening Directive. Hurdley 2013, 60-8, offers close readings of Directive reports on Mantlepieces from 1937, and 1983 ('The list has a bare poetry about it.... It is tempting to flesh it out, to the life (and death) of a man': 65; reproduced: 66-7).

⁶³ Savage 2007, paras. 6.3-6.4. Harrison & McGhee, 31-3, discuss the MOP correspondents' 'different writing styles and strategies', and ways of reading them.

⁶⁴ In the following paragraphs, page references to this book are given in the text and notes. In all but one case, Lilian Rogers, MO respondents' real names are used (Hinton 2010, 3, with 230 n. 1).

⁶⁵ A further issue is specific to the war itself. Two of the three men were pacifists before the war; their MO writings reveal how they each negotiated their change of stance during the war. See Ernest van Someren (138, 147-151); Denis Argent (155-8, 162-3, 166-8).

⁶⁶ Five of the women were married when they joined MO. Mary Clayton had divorced when quite young, and during her MO years shared her life with a business partner and friend (74-8, 82).

⁶⁷ See on Last: 28-33, 38-9, 44, 49; Glover: 51, 53-5, 60-1; Bertha Walton: 174, 182-7; Rogers: 116-8, 127, 134.

⁶⁸ See on Last: 42-4; Glover: 64-6, 70-1; Clayton: 73, 81-2; Rogers: 123, 125-7.

⁶⁹ On Last's diary, see also Salter 2008a, 147-89.

⁷⁰ Cf. the dialogues in Sheridan et al., ch. 5, cited above note 38.

⁷¹ Hinton sketches (83-4) a revealing comparison of the lives of the three women born in the nineteenth century; cf. 109.

⁷² Hinton 2016, 164-5. The background to this book is discussed in Hinton's article in this cluster.

⁷³ Hubble 2010, [4], discussing the diary of Muriel Green (a pseudonym; not one of Hinton's subjects).