

# **Women's Mass-Observation Diaries:**

## **Writing, Time & 'Subjective Cameras'**

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This thesis has been composed by me, is my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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This thesis is dedicated to my father  
Frank William Salter  
(1947-2005)

## Abstract

This thesis concerns women's wartime diaries written for the radical social research organisation Mass-Observation (M-O) between 1939 and 1967, treating these as 'social texts' informed by social and temporal practices which also influence what 'a diary' is more widely perceived to 'be' as a genre of writing. It analyses the centrality of time and temporality to these social practices, to the relationship between writing and representation, and also to what it was to write a diary specifically for M-O and thus to position oneself as a 'subjective camera'. Chapter One overviews the genesis and activities of M-O, its co-founders' research perspectives and how these influenced activities in Worktown and the Economics of Everyday Life project and also in Blackheath, London. Blackheath activities are examined in detail because M-O's Directives and Day-Diaries were organised from there, the latter providing the material for Jennings and Madge's (1937) May Twelfth, the basis for their conceptualisation of 'subjective cameras' and also the starting point for the wartime diaries. Chapter Two discusses the origins of the wartime diaries, and analyses anthologies compiled using this material, the individual M-O diaries that have been published, and two attempts in the 1940s to produce M-O books from the diaries, discussing how previous uses have influenced my own analytic approach. Chapter Three examines the complications that M-O diaries make to popular understandings of the diary form, in particular by the multiple and diverse influences impinging upon writing a diary for M-O. A key example concerns overlaps between M-O diaries and letters, showing that epistolary conventions and practices are extensively drawn on by M-O and its diarists and that inscription of times and dates are central to this. Chapter Four examines temporal aspects of the diary-genre and analyses their writing 'over time' by focusing on the long-term diary written by Nella Last, what she did with time in its pages, and how the methodological approach I utilised for sampling and analysing it impacts on interpretation of temporal matters. Chapter Five analyses diary-entries written by different women for the same dates, exploring discrete specific temporal points to examine what is happening with time in relation to this, again reflectively commenting on the interpretational consequences of methodological strategies. The Conclusion considers M-O's idea of diarists as 'subjective cameras' and theorises its connections to time and diary-writing.

## Guide to Reader

The spelling, punctuation, grammar and emphases used in the manuscript Mass-Observation materials have been followed as closely as possible and are retained in the extracts used in this thesis, unless otherwise indicated. With some extracts (usually, but not exclusively, when quoting more than one diary-entry written by the same diarist in succession or when quoting from M-O organisational notes/letters), I have also attempted to retain their format to give an impression of the layout of the text, although I acknowledge that in most cases the word-processing of this thesis will have made a difference.

I have used ellipses to indicate where words from quotations have been excised and, to the best of my knowledge, all such editorial interventions are 'marked' in the text, although I of course recognise the likelihood of my own error. I have used square brackets to show where I occasionally insert additional and non-original text within the text of diary-entries and other quotations. And in a few cases I have enclosed a question mark within these square brackets to denote words in the original manuscripts that could not be confidently interpreted.

### Mass-Observation Abbreviations:

Mass-Observation	M-O
Mass-Observation Archive	M-O A
Diarist Number	D 5353, for example
Directive Respondent	DR 1061, for example
Topic Collection	TC
File Report	FR
WT	Worktown

N.B. Other abbreviations have been inserted in footnotes where relevant because of their infrequency.

~ Chapter One ~

Mass-Observation:  
Ordinary People and Their Lives

"... No war is ever like another – the dreadful slaughter of the First World War – the misery & squalor of the trenches, then the destruction of the cities, the terror of Air Raids. Then the next one – quick oblivion for many, & worse for the survivors – plunged back into the 'dark' age, a glum thought, at the root of so much 'discord' today. It was a pleasure to listen to Down Your Way – such a 'sane', balanced programme, just to listen to ordinary people & their lives"

D 5353, 17 September 1961

Such a sane balanced programme: Contextualising the PhD Project

This thesis has developed from my interest in women's lives and social practices involved in representing these, specifically autobiography and biography. It focuses on Mass-Observation's wartime diaries written by women, and it is important to indicate how these things came together and the often ad hoc events and experiences that influenced the 'sane balanced programme' of my PhD.

Firstly, while doing my BA (Hons) in Geography at the University of Northumbria, a lecture stimulated my interest in the contexts and meanings of ageing and specifically older women's lives – the 'aged' and its 'bodyspaces' grabbed my attention. Also relevant here are memories of my mother's mother, Ruby, who came to live (and die) with us in the late 1980s. Her death, and the way she made purposeful use of her last remaining weeks, made me intrigued with 'life' as a period of finite, yet malleable and usable, time. In her final weeks, Ruby told me stories of her childhood, of her life as a young woman in the 1930s, and of being evacuated to Bawtry, near Doncaster, with my mother during 1944. She made a point of this and seemed to be claiming and repossessing such things, rather than just representing them to me.



Secondly, I found a job around my hometown, Cambridge, for holidays from University. In 2000, I gained a position as a Care Worker, working with elderly and disabled people, mainly in their own homes. I did this job until early 2004 and was told many stories by the people concerned about their present and past experiences, including of World War Two. I was struck by the power of their stories and also the immense impact of the war on their lives.

Thirdly, when I began thinking about potential topics for my undergraduate dissertation, the lack of research concerning older women's lives, except with respect to health, made me think my newly found job might provide an access point to research the stories older women tell about their lives. The resulting dissertation was called Homespace and Identity: A Study of Older Women (Salter, 2002). For this, six older women talked about the space they called 'home', wherever and whenever that was located. I asked about their life-experiences, and if home was and had been important to them. We discussed and handled objects that they treasured or sometimes felt nothing about, including photographs of themselves and of other people/landscapes; mementoes and ornaments; items of clothing, a wedding dress belonging to one, a woollen scarf knitted by a relative owned by another. I analysed the interview transcripts and participant observation notes around their constructions of 'homespace' and identity. This interest continued during my MA in Human Geography Research at Sheffield University (2002-2003). For a required Research Methods course, I participant-observed at an Older People's home in Sheffield for several months and also organised a focus-group of friends to discuss what they thought about ageing. In addition, I also continued my job as a Care Worker.

I first came across Mass-Observation, a radical social research organisation established in the late 1930s in the UK, at this time. I read Ben Highmore's chapter 'Mass-Observation: A Science of Everyday Life' (Highmore, 2002: 75-112), on a course reading list. This starts with an intriguing quotation: "We shall collaborate in

building up museums of sound, smell, foods, clothes, domestic objects, advertisements, newspapers, etc.” (Madge and Harrison, 1937: 35). I instantly thought how interesting that archive of everyday objects would be, particularly given the strong connections with my earlier examination of objects in older people's 'homespaces'.

The MA dissertation incorporated my interest in older women's lives and life-representations, focusing on 'bodyspace' and clothing, and is entitled Bridging the Past and Present: Discourses Surrounding the Clothing of Older Women (Salter, 2003). For this, I conducted serial interviews with two older women, producing over fifteen hours of talk which was transcribed and analysed, and also designed 'Clothes Diaries' which they wrote for a week, about their daily choice of clothing. As part of our clothes-related discussions, the women told me many stories about World War Two. They also told tales of World War One, when both were children, although less frequently. Both women interlaced their 'war' stories with other tales and often used their wartime experiences as a point from which to weave other threads, about pre- and post-war experiences.

When writing-up my MA dissertation, I remembered Highmore's (2002: 75) comments about how, in late 1936 in Blackheath, London, a group of people "discuss[ed] the possibility of enlisting volunteers for the observation both of social happenings, like the Abdication and also of "everyday life", as lived by themselves and those around them" (Madge, 1976: 1395). Diaries were mentioned as one of the means Mass-Observation (M-O) used to inscribe life experiences, and I linked this to my use of 'Clothes Diaries'. Further reading then led me to M-O's use of observer writings, particularly diaries, in representing life experiences. My PhD research grew directly out of this, bringing together my interests in older women's life experiences and life stories, wartime women's lives and life-representations (such as diaries, letters, autobiography, and biography), and M-O itself. The next section of this chapter provides a short account of M-O's inception, and is followed by four

interrelated sections, each detailing a particular aspect of M-O and its research practices, and raising various of the themes to be examined later in this thesis.

### Establishing Observation Points

"How little we know of our next door neighbour and his habits. Of conditions of life and thought in another class or district our ignorance is complete. The anthropology of ourselves is still only a dream."

Madge and Harrison (1937: 10)

Mass-Observation, a radical popular social research organisation, originated from the coming together of intellectual ideas and socio-political convictions in the 1930s (Jeffery, 1999; Sheridan *et al*, 2001; Summerfield, 1985). It was sparked by Geoffrey Pyke's Abdication-fuelled desire for an "anthropological study of our own situation of which we stand in such desperate need" (Pyke, 1936). An in-depth study of the British 'masses' was also on the mind of Charles Madge, at this time a disillusioned journalist with the Daily Mirror and reasonably well-known poet (Marcus, 2001; Sheridan, 1984). He wrote to the New Statesman and Nation on 2 January 1937 expressing the wish to take up Pyke's idea of an 'anthropology of ourselves' in a letter, which the newspaper titled 'Anthropology at Home' (Madge, 1937). To achieve this, Madge, together with Humphrey Jennings and several others, had formed a group of volunteers, based at his home in Blackheath, London:

"... Only mass observations can create mass science. The group for whom I write is engaged in establishing observation points on as widely expanded a front as can at present be organised. We invite the co-operation of voluntary observers, and will provide detailed information to anyone who wants to take part.

CHARLES MADGE

6 Grottes Buildings, Blackheath, S.E.3."

Madge (1937)

Serendipitously, in the same issue of the New Statesman and Nation and remarkably on the same page as Madge's letter, was a long poem by Tom Harrison (1937a). Just back from the Melanesian Archipelago of the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), Harrison's poem was "a kind of Malekulan rhapsody" (Madge, 1976:

1395). It was intended to help promote Savage Civilisation (Harrisson, 1937b), a Gollancz-published book which had a role in establishing Harrisson's name in Britain as a disruptive voice (Heimann, 2003: 128). Harrisson, reading Madge's letter whilst in Bolton Public Library to check whether his poem had been printed, then visited Madge's Blackheath group to talk about his semi-anthropological research intentions in his Bolton project, concerned with everyday life (Heimann, 2003: 129).

A third letter to the New Statesman and Nation was published on 30 January 1937, signed by Harrisson, Madge and Humphrey Jennings (a poet, artist and soon to be eminent documentary film-maker), which consolidated their alliance and officially announced the formation of 'Mass-Observation' (Harrisson, Jennings, and Madge, 1937). In this, M-O claimed to have fifty observers already (presumably acquired through Madge's first letter) and called for volunteers:

"... Mass Observation develops out of anthropology, psychology, and the sciences which study man – but it plans to work with a mass of observers. Already we have fifty observers at work on two sample problems. We are further working out a complete plan of campaign, which will be possible when we have not fifty but 5,000 observers ..."

Harrisson, Jennings, and Madge (1937)

Tom Driberg<sup>1</sup> (an old school friend of Harrisson's) had seen Madge's first letter, and after visiting Blackheath himself, using his pen name of 'William Hickey', he lent support by writing a favourable piece about M-O in the Daily Express (Jeffrey, 1999). This, combined with supportive publicity in other newspapers – the Daily Herald and News Chronicle, for instance – helped draw in around a thousand volunteers from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, around half of whom returned the observational assignments given them (Madge, 1976: 1395).

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<sup>1</sup> Driberg wrote a diary and gossip column called 'These Names Make News' for the Daily Express between the late 1920s and 1943, which was signed 'William Hickey' after the late eighteenth century diarist (The Knitting Circle, 2001). See Driberg (1956; 1977) and Assinder (1999) for interesting discussions.

Mass-Observation's initial aims and objectives were explored in an introductory pamphlet by Madge and Harrison (1937), entitled Mass-Observation. On the back of this, the pair grandly claimed that M-O would perform "sociological research of the first importance, and which had hitherto never been attempted". Harrison's friend Julian Huxley (a prominent zoologist) backed this vision by writing a foreword stating that M-O's techniques were "... of great value ... [through which] ... big things will grow" (Heimann, 2003: 129). As a general statement, the portrayal of the co-founders as "consistently defiant, single-minded and unambiguous" in their varied statements to the public about M-O is true (Sheridan *et al*, 2000: 21). However, beneath this, some serious epistemological and other tensions existed which will be explored in the following sections.

I am particularly interested in M-O's organisational and contextual happenings, and the research methods and practices, especially the use of diaries, in Blackheath under Madge, and then later under Harrison; and will expand on these matters both here and in the next chapter. My specific interest is in the wartime diaries that women wrote for M-O from all over Britain. Although labelled 'wartime', sometimes these encompass considerable periods of post-war time. And although labelled 'diaries', they have many epistolary features, which I expand on later around the 'social practices' involved in writing and reading M-O's wartime diaries. The idea of 'social practice' (Barton and Hall, 2000; Bourdieu, 1977, 1980; Smith, 1987, 1990, 1993, 1999; Thompson, 1995)<sup>2</sup> facilitates exploring human agency in grounded detail in context, time and space.<sup>3</sup> The idea of 'social practice' also helps explore connections between forms of representation, material things, and social activities such as writing diaries and letters. Such matters are examined in detail in later chapters, although it is important to emphasise here that such practices

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<sup>2</sup> Work on writing and reading practices, often through the lens of 'literacies', has also emphasised the importance of 'social practice', including with regard to M-O. See Barton *et al* (1993), Barton (1994), Bloome *et al* (1993), and Sheridan *et al* (2000). See also Barton and Hamilton (1998), Barton *et al* (2000), Baynham (1995), Gee (2000), Hamilton *et al* (1994), Lemke (1995), and Street (1984, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> M-O conceived of a relationship between political/social change and people's experiences of society, perspicaciously regarding the "personal [as] political", something which became a major tenet of feminist thought (Summerfield, 1985: 442).

are pivotal to examining M-O's wartime diaries as life-representations produced through practices which use, as well as represent, time in all its many complexities.

### 'Worktown' and 'The Economics of Everyday Life' Project

"Not from imagination I am drawing  
This landscape (Lancs), this plate of tripe and onions,  
But, like the Nag's Head barmaid, I am drawing  
(Towards imagination) gills of mild,  
The industrial drink, in which my dreams and theirs  
Find common ground. I hear the clattering clogs,  
I see the many-footed smoke, the dance  
Of this dull sky ..."

'Drinking in Bolton', Madge (1939)

"The [Worktown] local survey starts with whole-time research workers studying a place from the outside and working inwards, getting into the society, and so coming to the individual".

Jennings and Madge (1937: iv)

On returning from the New Hebrides, around the same time that Savage Civilisation (Harrisson, 1937b) was published, Tom Harrisson set up an anthropological investigation of Bolton, Lancashire, employing similar observational skills in his examination of everyday life 'at home' to those he had used abroad and also in his ornithological activities. Through fieldwork based on behavioural observation, Harrisson aimed to document the social and political lives of 'the masses' in Bolton (which was first called 'Northtown' (Malinowski, 1938) and then 'Worktown'); in Blackpool (known as both 'Holiday Town' or 'Sea Town'), where many Worktowners went on holiday (Cross, 1990); in a London Borough known as 'Metrop' (Willcock, 1943: 448); and later in Worcester ('Churchtown') and Middlesbrough ('Steeltown') (Stanley, 2001).

Harrisson had a strong preference for observing 'behaviour', rather than measuring 'opinion'. In gathering a team of volunteers to observe and record "scenes, events, ... [and] ... overheard comments" (Ferraby, 1945a: 1), he mobilised

not only local Bolton people but also persuaded a diverse mix of people, some of whom became paid full-time observers, including: Humphrey Spender,<sup>4</sup> a photographer (Spender, 1982); William Coldstream and his friend Graham Bell, both realist artists; John Sommerfield, who produced the majority of material in The Pub and the People (Mass-Observation, 1943b; Stanley, 1990a); Stephen Spender, a poet; and Julian Trevelyan, a street artist, collage creator and writer; among others (Sheridan, 1984).

Harrisson's approach and techniques were also influenced by North American-based academic sociology of the time, despite his distrust of academic authority (Stanley, 1990a). The 'Chicago School' of sociology, particularly the influential 1920s empirical work by Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, resonated with Harrisson and informed his general approach. Although they later also employed quantitative techniques, the earlier phase of Chicago School used what were then quite distinctive qualitative social research methods, employing "personal documents, intensive fieldwork, documentary sources, social mapping, and ecological analysis" (Bulmer, 1984: 6), with W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's study of The Polish Peasant in Europe and America (1918-1920) the influential fore-runner (Bulmer, 1984; Stanley, 2008).

Perhaps of greater importance was Chicago School's focus on Chicago itself, mirroring the 'at home', 'here' and 'now' concern that underpinned the entire M-O enterprise. Especially interested in 'participant observation' (participating in a locality to observe and record it, but not necessarily interacting with the observed), Harrisson saw particular value in the work of sociologists such as Park, Burgess and McKenzie (1925) and Lynd and Lynd (1929) (Stanley, 1990a: 8; Madge and Harrisson, 1937). For Harrisson, interaction between the observer and observed was secondary to purely observing their behaviour, exemplified in his statement: "See

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<sup>4</sup> Humphrey Spender, a friend of Harrisson's, visited Bolton on several occasions, taking over 800 photographs of Worktowners' everyday lives and localities (Sheridan *et al*, 2000: 28). See Spender (1982).

what people are doing. Afterwards, ask them what they think they're doing, if you like" (Heimann, 2003: 130). Consequently, Harrison's approach to social research was quite different from that of contemporary opinion-sampling bodies, such as American polling organisations (Ferraby, 1945b), because of its "... increasing use of purely observational technique" (Willcock, 1943: 448) in focused and grounded studies. Harrison's period in Worktown was relatively short, however.

In November 1938, twenty-two months after M-O's inception, Harrison swapped organisational roles with Charles Madge. Increasingly swamped at Blackheath by the "mass of data, which had to be sorted, indexed and filed" (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 4), and having already decided to conduct a study of everyday economics, in particular savings and spending, in Worktown, Madge relocated there to live at Harrison's rented home in Davenport Street. From the outset in Blackheath, and like Harrison, Madge had favoured the observation of people's behaviour; but, unlike Harrison, Madge also saw observation as a means of gathering people's opinions as they were formed, and he took this with him to Worktown in late 1938.

Prior to Madge's arrival in Bolton, Harrison had already recruited Gertrude Wagner<sup>5</sup> and Dennis Chapman<sup>6</sup> to work on Madge's project. Later, Geoffrey Thompson,<sup>7</sup> Alec Hughes, Jack Carnforth and a pool of intermittent researchers joined Madge in Bolton (Stanley, 1992/3: 97). Madge aimed to examine factors influencing savings and spending at levels of income that encompassed most people in Bolton (see early memo WT46.B). Intended to be M-O's fifth book<sup>8</sup> and called

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<sup>5</sup> Austrian born Gertrude Wagner had contributed to the Marienthal project (Jahoda, 1933), and after arriving in England took part in a Pilgrim Trust project, Men Without Work (1938), producing a chapter about unemployed women in Blackburn (Stanley, 1992/3: 96).

<sup>6</sup> Before joining Madge, Chapman had worked with Seebohm Rowntree on his study of poverty in York in the 1930s, and then with Oscar Oeser and his research on unemployment in Dundee and women and men ex-jute workers (Stanley, 1992/3: 97).

<sup>7</sup> During WW1, Thompson worked on the Wartime Social Survey, a government project, later becoming the director of its descendent, the Government Social Survey (Stanley, 1992/3: 97).

<sup>8</sup> According to Bob Willcock (1943: 449), in September 1939 M-O had four books scheduled for publication: The Pub and the People; Politics and the Non-Voter; How Religion Works and Doesn't;



The Economics of Everyday Life, this work focused on the “actual observation of economic behaviour in everyday activities”, although the text was never completed (Stanley, 1992/3: 97). A desire to directly engage with ‘ordinary’ people’s experiences broadly characterised M-O’s research as a whole, linking directly to a shared epistemological stance discussed later. Madge continued this agenda in *Worktown*, yet his inquiry into everyday economics was very different from other M-O concerns, particular with regard to its organisation and research activities (Stanley, 1992/3: 96).

Madge and the other researchers working on ‘The Economics of Everyday Life’ conducted interviews with savings organisations and savers themselves (Stanley, 1992/3: 98). Direct interviewing was not something that any part of M-O had previously set out to do, although some ‘asking’ people did happen during Harrison’s tenure in *Worktown*. More familiarly, in addition to direct interviewing, Madge continued to engage with topics that are now seen as ‘more typical’ of M-O, such as the social function of the suit and the effect of Lent on retail sales (Stanley, 1992/3). In addition, Madge conducted a ‘special area study’ (WT36.C, F, I) that examined the occupations, spending and savings, and un/employment, of people dwelling in a set of streets in a working-class area of Bolton.

Interestingly, this ‘special area study’ also examined ‘opinion-forming’ via exploring the role of local and national newspapers, poster advertising, the church, dance hall, and local cinema in the residents’ everyday lives, as well as asking them about their opinions. It connected directly with M-O’s earliest and perhaps main agenda – that of examining and, importantly, distributing to the wider public, the opinions of the masses in order to rectify the lack of such study by the government, its agencies and the press (Stanley, 1992/3). As Stanley (1992/3: 98) points out, Madge’s ‘special area study’ of opinion-forming, like M-O more broadly, was

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and Blackpool. When Willcock wrote his article, the first title listed, The Pub and the People, was already in page proof and was published later in 1943. The other planned titles never materialised. Interestingly, Willcock makes no mention of the fifth book M-O planned, The Economics of Everyday Life.

radically anti-positivist in approach and centrally used Oscar Oeser's (1939) term 'functional penetration' (which includes what today would be called ethnographic and direct observational methods, including recording overheard conversations) (but see Stanley, 1981: 83).

'The Economics of Everyday Life' project continued until early 1942, although from mid-1939 Madge ran it mainly from London. There, Madge conducted a further savings and spending investigation (Madge, 1940), during which he became a protégé of John Maynard Keynes and Phillip Sargent Florence (Hubble, 2001; Stanley, 1990a). Around this time, 1940 to 1941, Madge's involvement with M-O lessened and the research into savings and spendings in Bolton was never completed.<sup>9</sup>

Much of the research Madge carried out in Worktown has met with very little analytic attention and has been barely published (but see Stanley: 1990a; 1992/3). The Harrison phase of research at Worktown has often been depicted as 'what M-O was', which elides organisational complexities with regard not only to 'base-swapping', but also with regard to Madge's later work in Worktown, as well as both his and Harrison's work at Blackheath. The privileging of Harrison's research, and indeed of Harrison himself, over Madge's involvement (Marcus, 2001; Sheridan, 2001) seems partly related to perceptions of Harrison's character. Indeed, Madge's departure from M-O was partly because of irreconcilable personal problems, mainly in terms of conflicting personalities and ambitions (Heimann, 2003; Sheridan, 1984).

However, it was more than 'personalities' which brought about Madge's disassociation from the organisation and influenced the subsequent elevation of

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<sup>9</sup> However, Madge continued his other savings and spendings work (Madge, 1943), joined PEP (the non-government organisation Political and Economic Planning) in 1942 (Hubble, 2001; 2006), and in 1947, after involvement with the Pilot Press (Hubble, 2001; Stanley; 1990a), became Social Development Officer for Stevenage (Stanley, 1990a). In 1950 Madge was appointed Professor of Sociology at Birmingham University (Calder, 1996; Hubble, 2001; 2006; Stanley, 1990a).

Harrison's Worktown to stand for M-O in general. Madge was apparently unimpressed by Harrison's "... decision to link the services of the organisation to government propaganda during the war" (Chaney and Pickering, 1986: 38; Sheridan, 1984). Madge and Harrison had quite different ambitions, with Madge gradually moving into academia.<sup>10</sup>

### Individual Observers in Their Social Surroundings

"[Mass-Observation in Blackheath] starts from the individual Observers and works outwards from them into their social surroundings. One aim of Mass-Observation is to see how, and how far, the individual is linked up with society and its institutions"

Jennings and Madge (1937: iv-v)

The group of documentary film-makers, painters and poets based at Madge's home in Blackheath included Humphrey Jennings, who was in a sense Madge's 'right-hand-man', and Stuart Legg. Both of them were involved in the British Documentary Movement and worked with the GPO (General Post Office) Film Unit (later known as the Crown Film Unit). Jennings and Legg were also Cambridge friends of poet Kathleen Raine, Madge's then-wife (Madge, 1976: 1395). The surrealist poet, David Gascoyne, was also involved. Even at this early stage, the group operated under the title 'Mass-Observation', a label suggested by one of the early observers in Blackheath and carrying the dual connotations of both observation 'of the mass' and observation 'by a mass of observers' (Madge, 1976: 1395).

With Gascoyne, Jennings and Legg, Madge had been involved in the British Surrealist Movement<sup>11</sup> and began M-O with the aim of collecting 'observer diaries'

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<sup>10</sup> Prior to Madge's move to Bolton, Harrison had become concerned about Madge's academic proclivities, exemplified in an undated memorandum from Harrison to Dennis Chapman which reveals that Harrison wanted Chapman to "counteract the somewhat academic tendencies of Wagner and Madge" (Stanley, 1990a: 16-17, drawing on 'M-O Hist: TH to DC, undated').

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Humphrey Jennings was a founder of the British Surrealism Movement and Stuart Legg's partner was a living exhibit at the Surrealist Exhibition of 1936 (MacClancy, 1995; see also MacClancy, 2001). See Ray (1971) on British surrealism; see Short (1966) on surrealist politics; see Levitt (1999) for a wide-ranging reading concerning the 'genders' and 'genres' of surrealism.

to be used for "... surrealist purposes, including exploring 'dominant images' to uncover the 'collective unconscious'" (Jeffery, 1999: 23; MacClancy, 1995). The early aim at Blackheath has been described as the construction of an "ethnographic surreality" of Britain (MacClancy, 1995: 509), in which "the seemingly simple project of observing everyday life transforms the literary activity of the observers from that of privileged individualism to that of co-author" (Chaney and Pickering, 1986: 40). A kind of emancipatory agenda, uniting observer and observed, therefore underpinned the early Blackheath vision, to be examined in more detail in the next section.

For Madge, there was great potential in the documentation of 'ordinary' people's everyday social realities over time – including their experiences, use of imagery and fantasies – to bring about social change. Harrison, however, was only partly interested in this (Trevelyan, 1957), focusing instead on how people behaved, reacted to problems, and formed views in the immediate present, rather than being concerned with how such views changed or became institutionalised over time (Chaney and Pickering, 1986). For example, Madge commented that M-O's more successful projects "... all deal with social prejudice – attitudes at the stage before they have crystallised into definite organised institutions", and argued that M-O was "... describing the mechanism by which institutions arise" (Madge, 1940: 5). Harrison more narrowly conceived of M-O as "trying to write [today's] history in the present" (Harrison, 1937c: 47). For Madge, then, 'temporality' was of great importance, which included seeing M-O as an organisation that engaged with "changes and trends over a period of time", to which task the recruited observers lent themselves (Lazarsfeld and Fiske, 1938: 608).<sup>12</sup>

The 'temporal' element to Madge's work in Blackheath, and indeed in 'The Economics of Everyday Life', relates directly to his desire to effect social change. Madge suggested that "... history and social self-knowledge could be served by

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<sup>12</sup> See Connor's (2001) discussion of Madge's preoccupation with temporality in his verse. See Sorokin and Merton (1937: 615) regarding "time as a necessary variable in social change".

organised collective observation” (Madge, 1976: 1395), and there was a politically-charged, social change dimension to Madge’s agenda. In this, Madge sought the collection of observer diaries from ‘ordinary hardworking folk’ (Sheridan, 1993a), in order to help construct a social history more inclusive of ‘ordinary’ people’s lives, as well as to help develop more equitable flows of knowledge between the leaders and the ‘led’ (Jeffery, 1999).

Madge’s sympathies for some elements of Communist philosophy, his related desire for social change, and his slowly growing reputation as a surrealist poet, influenced his early aims for M-O, as well as the initial kind of observer materials he sought: mass-observer ‘day-diaries’ or ‘day-surveys’, and the compilation of these, such as May The Twelfth (Jennings and Madge, 1937). Madge’s letter of 2 January 1937 to the New Statesman and Nation (Madge, 1937), for instance, used a surrealist lexicon, stating the group’s desire to apprehend “mass wish-situations”, including “the Crystal Palace-Abdication symbolic situation” (Heimann, 2003: 128).

Madge certainly was influenced by surrealism, and not solely in relation to its poetic concerns. Indeed, Madge became frustrated by the movement’s overly artistic and literary practices and abstractions, emphasising instead the potential it had to cross the art-science divide. This is mentioned in the 30 January 1937 letter to the New Statesman and Nation (Harrison, Jennings and Madge, 1937), as is creating a ‘science’ of mass-society by the establishment of a large group of people as “observation points”, which is also mentioned in Madge’s earlier letter (Madge, 1937).

Madge and Jennings shared a conception of social research grounded in what could be ‘found’, or rather the ‘empirical’. So, instead of being content to just debate the need for social change (as was largely the case with surrealist counterparts in Europe), they aimed to effect such change through the documentation of ‘real’

experiences of everyday life (MacClancy, 1995).<sup>13</sup> Madge continued to work from this methodological stance in his research on 'The Economics of Everyday Life' (Stanley, 1990a), and Jennings, likewise, upheld the importance of collecting 'real' experiences by representing them in a number of documentary films during the war,<sup>14</sup> with few questions raised about the relationship between the 'real' and its representation. A form of induction provided the over-arching methodology for their social research; grounding this in material social reality, rather than a surrealist-framework, was something Madge in particular desired.

When Mass-Observation was formed in 1937, Jennings had already been a member of John Grierson's GPO Film Unit in London for three years (Highmore, 2005). He had an interest in both documentary and surrealism from the outset, and so did Madge, albeit in a less explicit way.<sup>15</sup> Madge also had a keen interest in psychoanalysis and the relationship between psychoanalysis and surrealism/documentary. He was particularly interested in the workings of the 'inner' and how this could be examined through surrealist and documentary techniques, and was influenced by Freud's work and psychoanalysis in general (Raine, 1967: 47). So he set about using Blackheath's observer materials to examine what people said they 'thought' as much as what they said that they and others 'did'. Therefore, whereas Harrison was primarily concerned with 'behaviour' in the early days in Worktown, in Blackheath (and also later in Worktown) Madge was interested both in people's behaviours and their 'opinions'.

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<sup>13</sup> In line with this, Highmore (2005: 201) comments on how Jennings's and Madge's understanding of surrealism was "dedicated to the everyday – to the extraordinariness of the ordinary and the ordinariness of the extraordinary".

<sup>14</sup> Jennings directed several films including 'London Can Take It!' (1940), 'Heart of Britain' (1941), 'Words for Battle' (1941), 'Listen to Britain' (1942), 'Fires Were Started' (1943), 'The Silent Village' (1943), 'A Diary for Timothy' (1945), and 'Family Portrait' (1950). See Highmore (2005) and Jackson (2004).

<sup>15</sup> See Cowie (2001) and Miller (2002). For Hall (1972: 83) the documentary movement concerns a "... passion to ... present people to themselves in wholly recognisable terms; terms which acknowledge their variety, their individuality, their representativeness ...".

Madge and Jennings's concern with 'opinion' obviously connected to the context in which M-O was founded, the Abdication Crisis, culminating in one of M-O's early publications, May The Twelfth (Jennings and Madge, 1937). This used the surrealist technique of montage to piece together observers' diverse, simultaneous, often mundane, written reports, known as 'day-diaries' or 'day-surveys', of 12 May 1937, George VI's Coronation Day. The initial day-diaries lapsed after January 1938. At that time, observers were instead encouraged by Madge to comment on more topical matters and 'special' days, such as Christmas Day, Bank Holidays, Armistice Day, the Munich Crisis and its Aftermath, and the coming of war (Sheridan *et al*, 2000), effectively producing thematic day-diaries. And around the time of the Munich Crisis, particular attention began to be paid to the 'mood' of the nation, some results of which were included in Britain (Madge and Harrison, 1939), M-O's third publication (Willcock, 1943: 448). The shift to thematic day-diaries marks a point in the approach to research at Blackheath, taking place just before Madge's departure for Worktown and setting a topical tone that Harrison continued in subsequent work at Blackheath.

The day-diaries had started as part of the earliest 'directives', which the Blackheath group posted to M-O's expanding number of voluntary observers. M-O's 'directives' were not questionnaires as such; rather they "directed the attention of the Mass-Observers to the subject area which Mass-Observation was studying at any one time", ranging from 'smoking habits' to issues related to 'personal appearance' and what was on the Observers' mantelpieces, for instance (Sheridan *et al*, 2000: 75). Many of these subject areas were written-up in M-O's first two Madge-Harrison jointly edited texts, First Year's Work (1938) and Britain (1939). The 'directives' were intended as a medium through which respondents would observe and gather theme-based information concerning their own and others' lives. By January 1939 – two months after Harrison had taken over at Blackheath – the directives were posted

regularly each month to what then became known as the 'National Panel of Voluntary Observers'.<sup>16</sup>

From the start of the war in Europe in September 1939 to its end in May 1945, more than three thousand observers replied to at least one directive, although never more than 500 individuals responded during any one month (Sheridan *et al*, 2000). As part of the thematic directives, Harrison also issued the National Panel with the assignment of writing a 'Crisis Diary' in August 1939, which then led to the call for wartime diaries, discussed in detail in the next chapter.

When Harrison moved to direct operations in Blackheath in November 1938, to some extent he was constrained to continue the research Madge had been conducting, at least in the short term. Crucial to this was the accumulating collection of thematic 'day-diaries' and the replies to various targeted wartime directives. Harrison's call for full 'wartime diaries' followed. Harrison saw these as frugal methodological tools for gathering a large amount of detailed information about people's opinions and attitudes. Indeed, by the time Harrison came to gather information on 'morale' for the Home Intelligence Department of the Ministry of Information (an economically fruitful link secured through Harrison's friend Mary Adams), he not only sought the observation of peoples' behaviours, but combined this with the study of their opinions on, for example, the evacuation of children, the Blitz, the effectiveness of different government campaigns, air-raid precautions (ARP) and 'rumours' (Stanley, 1995a: 5).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ferraby (1945a: 1-2) describes the National Panel as "interested individuals" who respond to monthly directives; keep diaries; and make occasional special reports, and as comprised of people from "all walks of life" but "not a cross-section" as they are "better educated and more intelligent than the average". See also Lazarsfeld and Fiske (1938).

<sup>17</sup> See Britain (Madge and Harrison, 1939), War Begins at Home (Madge and Harrison, 1940); Clothes Rationing (M-O, 1941a); Home Propaganda (M-O, 1941b); People in Production (M-O, 1942); People's Homes (M-O, 1943a), The Pub and the People (M-O, 1943b); War Factory (M-O, 1943c); The Journey Home (M-O, 1944); and Britain and Her Birthrate (M-O, 1945). (See Sheridan, 1984: 45).



Here Harrison was to some extent continuing Madge's earlier agenda, but his increased engagement with opinions links to the broader social and political context in which he was then operating. That is, Harrison was adapting to the increasingly opinion-orientated research climate of the early war years, which was connected to a 'need to know' from the government, its researchers and 'the masses' themselves, about the 'morale' of the people. Also crucial here was the need for useful knowledge at the end of the 1930s and early 1940s, which connected with the war effort and thus possibly securing some funding (Harrison, 1976: 14).

In producing Britain and Her Birth Rate (Mass-Observation, 1945), under Harrison's tenure in Blackheath the researchers used "direct interviewing", "informal interviewing", "indirect interviewing", "observation", and "The National Panel of Voluntary Observers" in the investigation into "... finding out the real reasons why the birth rate was falling and throwing light on possible ways of stemming the fall" (Ferraby, 1945a: 1). Ferraby comments here that M-O's methods were "... designed to supplement limited numerical data by qualitative material which assists in the understanding of any figures obtained" (Ferraby, 1945a: 1). The 'supplementary' role of quantitative material to qualitative findings here is interesting, with Ferraby stating that M-O's qualitative material was able to "... bring dead figures to life and make the abstract concrete", finishing with the unequivocal statement "... the interpretation of results is more important" (Ferraby, 1945a: 6). However, whereas Madge's Blackheath had seen qualitative material, such as the day-diaries, as a stand-alone source from which to compile publications (e.g. Jennings and Madge, 1937), Harrison's Blackheath – although Harrison himself was largely absent, having been 'called-up' during 1942 and sent to Borneo (Harrison, 1959; Heimann, 2003) – pioneered the use of 'mixed methods', integrating numerical and 'wordy' materials, however unequally:

"If I have criticised what I call the "quantitative obsession", it is not because I am unaware of the great importance of statistical work, but because I am concerned at its undue dominance at present. ... It is clear that in most sociological research we

require an adequate admixture of words and numbers, of penetration<sup>18</sup> and tabulation, representation and interpretation ... But we must not be afraid to explore problems not at once open to quantitative measurement..."

Harrison (1947: 24)

Although Harrison retained overall control, from 1942 it was Bob (H. D.) Willcock who directed the research at Blackheath on a day-to-day basis, organising the ongoing wartime diaries, thematic day-diaries, and directive replies and their preliminary analysis, with John Ferraby as the key 'writer', who wrote up field research into reports and publications, including academic and methodological ones. This organisational switch marked the beginnings of a shift to a more 'rigorous' approach to the observer material, with issues of 'validity' and 'public acceptability' becoming important (Sheridan *et al*, 2000: 35; Willcock, 1943). Post-war, quantifiable data was increasingly privileged over qualitative data, with quantitative surveys in short consumer reports increasingly published (Sheridan, 2000; Stanley, 1995a). M-O all but abandoned its earlier approach – and also its diarists – on becoming a limited market research company in 1949, Mass-Observation UK Ltd. Its Managing Director was Len England (England, 1949) and its Research Director was Mollie Tarrant (Sheridan, 2000), with Harrison assigning his rights to the new company, although retaining those to the pre-1949 material (Marcus, 2001). In the late 1940s and early 1950s, M-O's move into the field of market research was seen as an encroachment by other market research agencies. The British Institute for Public Opinion (BIPO) (Shils, 1941), for example, responded by levying an attack on the organisation through Mark Abram's scathing chapter in Social Surveys and Social Action (Abram, 1951; Stanley, 1990a). M-O's 'scientific' claims were challenged and, among many other disparaging remarks, Abram described May The Twelfth (Jennings and Madge, 1937) as full of "boring and unrelated quotations" (Abram, 1951: 108).

At the cusp of M-O's move into market research, the staff at Blackheath were conducting research concerning British attitudes towards sexual behaviour, which

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<sup>18</sup> See Oeser's (1939) research on 'penetrative' research techniques (Stanley, 1992/3).

bore some connections to M-O's work on Britain's falling birth-rate, published as Britain and Her Birth Rate (Mass-Observation, 1945)<sup>19</sup> four years earlier. This research was influenced by a much larger American study conducted by Alfred Kinsey in 1948, and was entitled Little Kinsey: An Outline of Sex Attitudes in Britain (England, 1949; Stanley, 1995a; Stanley, 2001). 'Little Kinsey' was the first British national random sample survey of sexual behaviour to be carried out and made innovative use of its quantitative data (Stanley, 1995a). It also stressed the validity and value of using qualitative and quantitative data together.

'Little Kinsey' (Stanley, 2001) was made up of three related kinds of research, carried out in the cathedral city of Worcester, which became known as 'Churchtown'. Firstly, it involved observational research of courting and sexual behaviour in public spaces such as in dance halls, public houses, and pornographic workshops. Secondly, it involved the analysis of statistics for sexual offences. And thirdly, it involved (i) 'formal' interviews, conducted with 'executives', such as variously denominated clergy, concerning changes in sexual morality; and (ii) 'informal' interviews with all sorts of people who were unaware that the conversation they were having with a stranger was in fact an interview; these were to explore courtship and public displays of sexual behaviour, such as cuddling, kissing, petting, and so on (Stanley, 2001: 102).

M-O conducted similar research in 'Steeltown' (Middlesbrough) (Stanley, 2001). However, the research in both Churchtown and Steeltown was not completed. The observational element was quickly subsumed by what became three large national surveys: the 'Street Sample' (a national random representative survey of 200 persons); the 'Union Leaders' survey; and, a postal survey of M-O's National Panel. This data, however, was not contemporaneously published. Stanley (2001: 102) attributes this to three overlapping factors: organisational changes within M-O; the

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<sup>19</sup> See Lella Secor Florence's (1946) contemporary review of M-O's Britain and Her Birth Rate. Secor Florence married Philip Sargant Florence in 1917 and was very active in campaigning for and writing about women's rights, particularly with regards to birth control (Stanley, 1995a).

“intellectual problematics” which Len England as writer of ‘Little Kinsey’ experienced when attempting to combine the observational with the survey material; and external changes regarding the ‘acceptability’ of particular research methods.

‘Little Kinsey’ straddled both qualitative and quantitative approaches at a time when social research was increasingly in favour of the latter. M-O’s shift to quantification was not surprising, with the post-war reconstruction necessitating precise numbers of ‘who needed what’ or ‘who was doing what’ (Stanley, 1995a). It also corresponded with the more general ‘quantitative revolution’ which occurred across the 1950s and 1960s (Stanley, 1995a).

During the 1960s, Angus Calder used M-O material to examine the Common Wealth Party and subsequently to write about the Home Front in The People’s War (Calder, 1969). Calder’s (1969) use of M-O material met with some criticisms, which he responded to by agreeing that some caution must be shown, while adding that the data was perhaps the richest available to social historians interested in the period. During this research Calder was a postgraduate student supervised by Asa Briggs (Sheridan, 2000). Briggs, enthused by the potential that M-O’s material held, found a home for the collection at the University of Sussex in 1970 and invited Harrison to help organise it into a publicly accessible archive (Briggs, 1980): The M-O Archive was opened to the public in 1975, with the process of archiving and ‘framing’ continuing for some time after (Sheridan, 2000).

### The Observer as ‘Subjective Camera’

Coupled with the effects of the Great Depression and concerns about the international situation of invasions and wars, Britain in the late 1930s experienced disputes over class and privilege, all of which strongly influenced M-O’s conception of what a social research organisation should be about (Sheridan *et al*, 2000). According to Hynes (1976: 278), M-O epitomised these contestations and

confusions, being “at once literary and scientific, realist and surrealist, political and psychological, Marxist and Freudian, [and] objective and salvationist”. Madge, Jennings, and Harrison’s democratic visions of developing a ‘science of everyday life’ were a product of the times actively engaging with the (dis)illusions that characterised 1930s Britain. As Harrison retrospectively commented:

“In that time of European squalor, 1937-39, Mass-Observation at least did throb, and felt undefeated. Perhaps it was a peculiar contribution and why so many people who were young and tortured then think kindly of it today”

Harrison (1959: 162)

M-O had taken the everyday as its main concern and, importantly, emphasised the “necessity of knowing” about the lives of ‘ordinary’ people (Chaney and Pickering, 1986: 36; Jahoda, 1938: 209), and people’s own role in this. The political motivations that informed Madge, Jennings, and partly Harrison’s desire to create a democratic ‘mass science’ of everyday life that would enable this ‘knowing’ were noted earlier. There was a general view that the masses in Britain during the 1930s were denied facts and enveloped in superstitions (Jeffrey, 1999). M-O’s challenges to institutionalised science of the time involved Madge and Jennings striving to bridge the artist/scientist divide and receiving considerable criticism from academia and the press as a consequence (Jeffrey, 1999). Yet, M-O’s conceptions of ‘subject’ and ‘object’, ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’, were even more threatening and indicate something of M-O’s radical epistemological stance.

M-O in Blackheath took as its concern the ways in which the public – ‘the masses’ – were denied facts by the government and press (Jeffrey, 1999). Britain (Madge and Harrison, 1939: 8, 9), for example, states that “Fact is urgent – we are cogs in a vast and complicated machine”, followed by “it is because of this situation – the urgency of fact, the voicelessness of everyman [sic] and the smallness of the group which controls fact-getting and fact-distributing – that this book came to be

written".<sup>20</sup> Without grounded 'factual' information about the happenings in their own society, the masses were enveloped in superstitions, caught up in fantastical knowledges, and reverted to fatalism (Jeffery, 1999). Early Blackheath's interest in myths and superstitions, and how such superstitions served to reinforce divisions in society, partly related to contemporary institutionalised 'science' (Jeffery, 1999). As Madge and Harrison noted:

"As a result of the Abdication Crisis ... we realised as never before the sway of superstition in the midst of science. How little we know of our next door neighbour and his [sic] habits. Of conditions of life and thought in another class or district our ignorance is complete. The anthropology of ourselves is still only a dream ..."

Madge and Harrison (1937: 10)

Institutionalised science and scientific procedure were, according to M-O, complicit in the perpetuation, if not the creation, of these superstitions and fictions through the role it played in denying the public facts about their own existence and mystifying its agendas and methods of inquiry: 'Science' was thus viewed by M-O as something feared by the masses, particularly in terms of how it could be used in warfare, through deadly gases and a 'death ray' (Jeffery, 1999: 21; Madge and Harrison, 1937: 16-17). The mystification of science, and the resultant detachment from it that the masses experienced, was also seen by M-O as a product of academia's efforts to maintain its privileged position in the construction of knowledge (Jeffery, 1999). In the 1930s and 1940s, academic research practice was largely associated with what is today seen as the 'scientific mode of enquiry', wherein methods from the 'natural sciences' were regularly transplanted and applied to social enquiries, with 'science' and 'academia' thus viewed as almost synonymous.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The enterprise of creating a dialogue between the 'leaders' and the 'led' had just been preceded by the activities of the Left Book Club (LBC), formed by Victor Gollancz and colleagues in early 1936 (Gollancz published several M-O books and provided financial advances) (Jeffery, 1999), and also by Penguin Books' Penguin Specials which started in 1937, publishing Britain (Madge and Harrison, 1939) which sold over 100 000 copies in its first ten days of publication (see Branson and Heinemann, 1971; Graves and Hodge, 1940; Jeffery, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> See Rose and Rose (1976) and Rose (1994) regarding 1930s Left 'natural' scientists' attempts to include 'ordinary folk' in the research process.

M-O strove to demystify 'science' by gathering observations written in simple language (from full-time and voluntary observers in Worktown and Blackheath, and also from the National Panel) and using these to produce cheaply priced and widely available publications written in an accessible way.<sup>22</sup> M-O wanted to produce science of a kind that was truly accessible and therefore "for the masses", to borrow Pocock's phrase (1987: 416). It also wanted to create a science that would not be feared, that would not be used to exploit. Consequently, M-O was interested in ordinary people's relationships with science, exemplified in a chapter in Britain (Madge and Harrisson, 1939) entitled 'Astrology and the British Ass'.

Not surprisingly, M-O's stance on science and the research methods it developed met with a mixed response from academic commentators (Jeffery, 1999). May The Twelfth (Jennings and Madge, 1937), for example, met with considerable criticism (notably, from T. H. Marshall (1937), Marie Jahoda (1938), and Raymond Firth (1939)) and sold only 800 copies initially (Heimann, 2003). Woodrow Wyatt, a student from Oxford helping at M-O headquarters during summer 1938, analysed the initial press response to May The Twelfth, finding that the majority of negative critiques derided M-O's claims to 'scientificity' (Madge and Harrisson, 1938: 48-63). Evelyn Waugh commented that the publication was full of "a great deal of pseudo-scientific showmanship" (Waugh, 1937). The Spectator argued that "scientifically, [M-O are] about as valuable as a chimpanzees' tea party at the zoo" (cited in Jeffery, 1999: 24). However, considerable support was gained, including from the leading academic figure Bronislaw Malinowski, who wrote an appended chapter in Madge and Harrisson (1938) (Malinowski, 1938). Tom Driberg at the Daily Express also provided support by describing May The Twelfth (1937) as comprising "fine, objective reports". Similarly, the preface to May The Twelfth (Jennings and Madge, 1937: iii) notes that leading zoologist Julian Huxley had

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<sup>22</sup> M-O's publications were an important part of 'feeding back' information to society (Laing, 1980: 155-6; Summerfield, 1985: 440). M-O's 'US' magazine or bulletin, a broadsheet that quoted from the day- and wartime diaries, served the same purpose.

commented that the untrained mass-observers “would put many orthodox scientists to shame in their simplicity, clearness and objectivity” (all borrowed from Jeffrey, 1999).

Harrison's and Madge's approaches both in Blackheath and in Worktown included amateur observers, including local Boltonians in Worktown and members of the National Panel in Blackheath. In their democratic conception of social research, the subject of investigation would simultaneously be the investigator or observer of her or his own behaviour and subjectivity. The subject and scientist thus became synonymous, with observers acting as “meteorological stations from whose reports a weather map of popular opinion c[ould] be compiled” (Madge and Harrison, 1937: 30; see also Highmore, 2002; Jeffrey, 1999). Each observer's role was “to describe fully, clearly and in simple language all that he (sic) sees and hears in connection with the scientific problem he is asked to work on” (Madge and Harrison, 1937: 31). Harrison also saw collecting ‘facts’ as a way to enable some “sort of net” to be “spread to catch that fleeting, glinting aspiration, the essence of time” (Harrison, 1961: 277-80). M-O thus aimed to capture and distil for public consumption via its publications the zeitgeist of the 1930s and wartime Britain, in a way that positioned ‘ordinary people’ as central.

However, what differentiated M-O's approach from conventional social science practice of the 1930s and 1940s was not only its inclusion of ordinary people as researchers and researched, but also its conception of ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ in the research process, and how it conceived of the importance of the ‘mass’ aspect of ‘mass-observers’. For M-O, facts were not things ‘out there’ to be gathered from one true objective social reality via conventional scientific enquiry. Harrison and Madge both held by the facticity of observers' accounts, not as a form of ‘scientific objectivity’, but instead seeing each account as relaying representative facts about each observer's own social reality, thus “tell[ing] us not what society is like, but what it looks like to them” (Madge and Harrison, 1938: 66). For M-O,



'representativeness' did not hinge on achieving grand generalisations about society as a whole through gaining a random cross-sectional sample of observers in the conventional 'scientific' sense. Instead, each observer's account or diary-entry was in itself representative of a part of that observer's life experience, although not in a way that could be extrapolated and directly applied to other diarists' lives in any simple way. The overall M-O conception of social reality has much in common with a social constructionist perspective, in particular regarding the contingency of temporally, geographically, socially, culturally, and gendered 'situated knowledges', and social actors' own interpretations of the world around them. Here, for example, Alfred Schutz compares the actor's interpretation with the view imposed by a scientific gaze:

"What appears to the observer to be objectively the same behaviour may have for the behaving subject very different meanings or no meanings at all."

Schutz (1945: 210)

In portraying its observers as 'subjective cameras' (Jennings and Madge, 1937; Madge and Harrison, 1938; see also Calder and Sheridan, 1984; Highmore, 2002; Mercer, 1989; Sheridan, 1984; and Stanley, 2001), M-O's overall position was that understandings of social reality can be known only through subjective filtering lenses:

"Mass-Observation has always assumed that its untrained observers would be subjective cameras, each with his or her own distortion. They tell us not what society is like, but what it looks like to them."

Madge and Harrison (1938: 66)

Madge and Jennings also saw the practice of observing as a way for mass-observers to reassess and understand their own social situations, stating that:

"... in addition to special scientific uses, we believe that observing is itself of real value to the Observer. It heightens his power of seeing what is around him and gives him new interest in and understanding of it."

Jennings and Madge (1937: iv)

Madge and Jennings saw the practice of self- and other-observation – treating both ‘self’ and ‘other’ as ‘objects’ (Mead, 1934a) – as a means for the observer to expose the taken-for-granted elements of social life in order to challenge inequality: “The process of observing raises him [the ‘untrained observer’] from subjectivity to objectivity. What has become unnoticed through familiarity is raised into consciousness again” (Madge and Jennings, 1937: 3).<sup>23</sup> Here objectivity means a perspective that enables the observer to identify her own social situation, not to be detached from it, but as a subjective examiner. In this way, the observer, rather than being duped or mystified by the taken-for-granted, can see around it to that which could be changed; she or he can identify (and record) this objective reality, at least at that moment in time, and become empowered by doing so.

These objective realities were not, however, conceived of as separate from other people’s. Through macro-contextual influences and social practices, these are perpetually interconnected. Indeed, Madge, Jennings, and Harrison did not take the ‘individual’ as their main focus. It was rather “collective habits and social behaviour” which was the focus of investigation, and “individuals are only of interest in so far as they are typical of groups” (Madge and Harrison, 1937: 30; also see Jolly, 2001). As such, they sought to address the idea of a “collective social reality – a world which exists independently of individual will although it is only experienced in personal terms” (Chaney and Pickering, 1986: 37), and aimed to devise appropriate means to organise, record, display and distribute this reality (Laing, 1980).

All the observer materials that M-O gathered in Blackheath and Worktown were influenced by this idea of observers as ‘subjective cameras’ (Stanley, 2001). May The Twelfth (Jennings and Madge, 1937) is structured around it, and its montage of extracts to represent diverse, simultaneously occurring ‘objective

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<sup>23</sup> Jennings and Madge (1937) comment that writing ‘day-diaries’ was almost like training the respondents to become observers.

realities' on a particular day, was criticised for its lack of scientific objectivity (Jeffery, 1999). However, May The Twelfth certainly succeeded in presenting a myriad of perspectives concerning this single event. May The Twelfth also helped undermine the assumed need for a unified scientific mode of research performed by 'experts', by involving 'amateurs' in the study of their own lives. More generally, M-O employed both unpaid untrained 'amateur' observers and paid 'trained scientific observers' (Madge and Harrison, 1937) across its many projects. These observers were central to M-O's research, each one "not merely as a collector of information from other people, but rather ... someone who necessarily interpreted what was seen and heard and therefore what was recorded" (Stanley, 2001: 100-101). While such things may not appear particularly innovative in today's academic climate, when M-O began seventy years ago, the application of these ideas to social research must have appeared highly radical, not to mention irresponsible and disruptive (Stanley, 1990a; 1992/3: 96).

M-O's understanding of 'the masses' is also of importance here in terms of the different ways in which Madge, Jennings, and Harrison conceptualised 'mass-observer'. As Chaney and Pickering (1986: 35) comment, "... in any form of representation that is orientated to the social ... the very concept of massness itself will be of central importance". Broadly, M-O used the term 'mass' to include the experiences and opinions of 'ordinary' people, rather than make sweeping or generalised statements about 'the masses' per se.

All three co-founders, although in different ways, and probably the majority of staff in Blackheath and Worktown, were fairly Left-leaning in their political outlooks. 'Left' in the 1930s largely meant an affiliation with the Communist Party (CP) or marginal groups, such as the Independent Labour Party. Many CP members, as Madge and Jennings briefly were, were not Leninists or Stalinists, instead having sympathies for more truly Marxist as well as Socialist ideologies. People with their Left affiliation imagined 'the masses' as in some way the agents of social change.

Consequently, M-O, especially Madge and Jennings, set about collecting observations by 'the masses' about 'the masses' (Pocock, 1987). This more politicised implication of the term unfortunately does not feature in Laing's (1980) otherwise helpful discussion, however. Laing suggests that M-O used the term 'mass' in the five following ways (to which I would add 'mass as a force for change'),<sup>24</sup> some of which have been noted above:

1. '**New social conditions**' were arising in the early twentieth century to which the label 'mass' seemed appropriate, such as mass activities facilitated by the railway and mass-publicising by newspapers, the radio and film.
2. '**Mass as the Common Man**' [sic] refers to the demotic aspect of their research, wherein 'ordinary' people acted as the 'Objects' of investigation.
3. '**Mass as Observers**' refers to observers who observed others as well as themselves.
4. '**Mass collection and organisation**' of material.
5. '**Mass as Public**' to signify the public to which M-O's studies were addressed.

Adapted from Laing (1980: 155-6)

### Please Keep a Diary for the Day: Day-Diaries and 'May The Twelfth'

"When surveys were made by Mass-Observation of three normal working days, February 12, March 12 and April 12, 1937, it was found that each day had been carefully prepared before hand ... In the case of May 12, preparations were infinitely greater and more protracted. To understand the day, it is essential to devote some time to them"

Jennings and Madge (1937: 3)

May The Twelfth (Jennings and Madge, 1937) exemplifies early Blackheath's conceptualisation and utilisation of observers as 'subjective cameras'. It is also 'about time' and 'about place/space' and how to represent time and place/space in a diary-form, using diary extracts, and representing 'the day'. In introducing their methodological approach, Jennings and Madge emphasise two spatial domains in which different kinds of phenomena were observed: firstly, the "life of the streets, existing for that day only, called into being by an exceptional

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<sup>24</sup> See Chaney and Pickering's (1986: 35) related discussion of the concept of 'mass'.

occasion” and, secondly, “life at home, and in routine environments, disturbed and modified by the demands of the day” (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 89). Crossing these domains, and trickier to capture and analyse, were the “mass reactions to the events, the floating opinions and counter-opinions which they provoked, and the interactions of opinion among individuals and among groups” (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 89). To explore these domains, they employ a three-fold methodology.

Firstly, the voluntary observers provided ‘day-diaries’ or ‘day-surveys’ for February, March and April 1937. Harrison, Madge and Jennings had called for volunteers in their ‘introductory’ letter to the New Statesman and Nation on 30 January 1937, and continued to recruit observers from all over Britain via newspaper advertisements and word-of-mouth/snowballing techniques (Sheridan *et al*, 2000). On 12 February 1937, fifty ‘amateur’ observers had contributed to the first day-diary, which had been initiated by the Blackheath group through a directive. Those observers, and others that joined later, took part regularly on the twelfth day of each month, until the day-diaries lapsed in February 1938. In total, there were over five hundred responses by the end of 1937 alone, and, all in all, 279 women and 563 men completed at least one day-diary at some point from early 1937 onwards.<sup>25</sup>

The task for these observers was to “set down plainly all that happened to them on that day” between the time they woke and when they went to bed (Madge and Harrison, 1938: 7; Jennings and Madge, 1937). The observers were asked to observe themselves and others simultaneously, thus acting as ‘subjective cameras’ in whose ‘objective realities’ the observer and observed, subject and object, self and other, were united. And although the researchers at Blackheath were especially interested in “normal routine events” and “everyday things”, 12 May 1937, they were interested in the Coronation Day of George VI because it was “exceptional” and “almost wholly concerned with one event, which affected the whole country” (Jennings and Madge, 1937: iii-iv). Jennings and Madge (1937: iv) note that this

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<sup>25</sup> See [http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection\\_descriptions/massobsdaysurveys.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection_descriptions/massobsdaysurveys.html)

imposed some unity on the responses they received, providing an opportunity to study both crowd behaviour and also to 'test' their methodology on a 'special day' case study. In total, 43 observers sent in reports for 12 May 1937, some of which were more than ten thousand words in length (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 89).

The second methodological element involved issuing several thousand leaflets entitled 'WHERE WERE YOU ON MAY 12? MASS-OBSERVATION WANTS YOUR STORY' (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 89). These contained a list of questions for potential respondents to answer, including: basic personal information (name, age, sex, occupation, marital status, religious/political affiliation if at all); whether the respondent had or had not seen/wanted to see the Coronation procession; what the respondent did on 12 May, asking for a brief hourly description; whether the respondent believed it was beneficial to the country to have a Coronation; what the most stirring/odd/amusing incident was that the respondent saw/heard during the day; and, whether the respondent's neighbours had been interested in the Coronation and what they had directly said to the respondent about it (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 89-90). In total, 77 responses were received, along with other material sent in concerning "other people's opinions and days collected by Observers" (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 90).

The third methodological element involved a twelve-strong "Mobile Squad" of observers in examining the activities taking place in London between midnight on 11 May to midnight 12 May. Shifts were taken, and contact with M-O headquarters was maintained via telephone. Notes were taken "almost continually", from which detailed reports were written up; these reports along with others written by full-time paid mass-observers became known as the 'File Reports' (FR) (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 90).

Through these three methodological elements, Jennings and Madge (1937: 90) suggest that three types of focus were achieved: "close-up", "long-shot", "detail

and ensemble” and the majority of May The Twelfth is arranged around them. These terms obviously connect to the ‘subjective camera’ metaphor, in that they refer to ways in which photographs can be composed, reflecting the ‘spatial distance’ between the photographer and the ‘scene’, and the groupings of people/things within that scene.

The opening chapter on ‘Preparations’ shows incredible variation in detail amongst the extracts used. Having much in common with the techniques that documentary film-makers were using at the time, ‘Preparations’, like May The Twelfth as a whole, is built-up – through switching from frame to frame, from account to account, from place to place – through a montage of diverse and often contradictory press cuttings, personal experiences and perspectives (Jeffery, 1999: 23; Chaney, 1978). Through this process, layered and overlapping ‘objective realities’ are presented/constructed, emphasising both the agency of the individual and simultaneously “... assessing the significance of a common perspective” (Marcus, 2001: 10) across class-boundaries (Highmore, 2005). No other M-O publication in my view achieved this representation of diversity and commonality so effectively.

Two points in particular arise from the ‘Preparations’ chapter which relate to the ‘subjective camera’ analogy and have a bearing both on the later chapters of May The Twelfth and also on this thesis. The first point concerns ‘place’ and ‘space’. There were a huge range of locations from which press extracts, Mobile Squad, and voluntary observer extracts stemmed. One observer, for instance, whose job involved travelling to different parts of Britain, sent to Blackheath a diary from 5 March to 5 May, detailing all occurrences influencing and relating to the preparations for the Coronation that she encountered in Scotland, the Midlands and London (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 56-59). This observer could be likened to a travelling ‘subjective camera’ or, in cinematic terms, a “wandering camera”, when “the camera as a

narrating entity wanders on its own, detached from supporting the story through a character's point of view" (Johnson, 1993: 49; Chatman, 1985).

The second point concerns 'time'. 'Preparations' links to ideas surrounding the nature or composition of a 'day' itself. Jennings and Madge discuss how 12 May 1937 was not a stand-alone day; the 'lead up' to the day, signified explicitly in the preparations for the Coronation, was influential upon the day itself:

"When surveys were made by Mass-Observation of three normal working days, February 12, March 12 and April 12, 1937, it was found that each day had been carefully prepared beforehand. For example, newspapers, which play such a part in the life of a day, were produced on the preceding day, while a great part of their contents dated from earlier still. The day's big advertisements were planned months ahead, and so were B.B.C. programmes, films, plays, books, lectures, conferences, sporting events, religious services etc ..."

Jennings and Madge (1937: 3)

Relating this to the 'subjective camera' metaphor, an observer's written 'photograph' of a day does not stand entirely alone because contextual factors from the past influence its composition and the means and technologies through which it is constructed. From the perspective of a day – any day – on which preparation for the Coronation occurred, this was organised around an anticipated future day, so the future too is evoked in and contributes to the present. These issues 'about time' will be examined in later chapters in connection with women's wartime diaries. Across the chapters of May The Twelfth, the day as a period of fixed time is presented as comprised of multiple simultaneous 'times'. A comment from a particular time and place often contains traces of other times and places. This might be from the same day, as in "On this memorable day of May 12<sup>th</sup> my friend and I got up at 2.30 a.m. all bright and ready for the coming day's work" (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 103); or from other days, as one Mobile-Squad observer overheard "8.10 Corner of Hanover St. Woman tells husband 'You know, this is nothing like the Jubilee.<sup>26</sup> We couldn't get anywhere then'." (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 112).

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<sup>26</sup> Presumably the Silver Jubilee of King George V in 1935.



The extracts that Jennings and Madge include are deliberately diverse, comparative and contrastive and used to build-up chapters in an 'album-like' fashion, simultaneously presenting versions of the material social world from differently-positioned (spatially and socially) 'subjective cameras'. The result can be read in various ways, including looking at individual extracts, comparing two or more extracts, and looking at each chapter (or the entire publication, for that matter) as an accumulating whole, with each extract telling something about itself and those presented before and after it. This implies that the extracts combine in an editorially-produced narrative shape. This shape is also produced during the process of reading. For instance, although the extracts are about simultaneous 'objective realities', a reader cannot read them thus, because reading is a sequential – one-word-at-a-time – practice, albeit not necessarily in the order in which the text is presented. The narrative order of May The Twelfth also relates to Jennings and Madge's uses and constructions of 'time'. The chapters move through a chronological account of the happenings. Time and the temporal order of the day is thus used as a strong ordering device in Jennings and Madge's presentation of observational extracts as well as by the observers themselves.

Jennings and Madge use their final chapter to explain their approach to analysing the observer material on a 'normal' day, something which is also helpful in thinking about analysing M-O's women's wartime diaries, discussed later.<sup>27</sup> Jennings and Madge note that May The Twelfth is "arranged in a simple documentary way, without much attempt to suggest further possibilities of analysing the material" (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 347). They suggest that on any other day, when there was no national event to dis/unify people, day-diaries and other observer materials would have little or no common thread, and it would be the task of "social science to discover the unity, or lack of it, which is typical of a normal day" (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 347). Acknowledging little success in finding such unity for 12

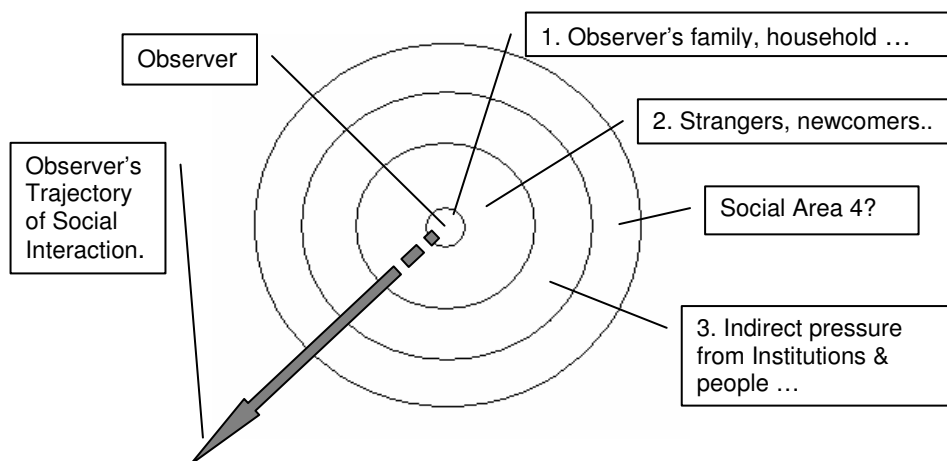
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<sup>27</sup> In relation, Stanley's (1995b) research on the M-O day-diaries provides a feminist reading of 225 day-diaries written by women and men between February and June 1937. She problematises constructions of 'gender' and discusses interpretational issues around writing and reading, querying the often assumed analytical transparency of these acts or practices and discussing the significance of her own epistemological bearings in conducting her research.

February, 12 March and 12 April, they suggest another way of approaching the day-diaries which is based on layers of social interaction (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 348-350), and later they exemplify their proposed method by analysing a small number of 'normal' 12 March day-diaries.

This method, presented visually in Figure 1.1 below, consists of three concentric circles, denoting layers of social interaction, in the middle of which the observer is situated. These circles make up the "Social Area of an Observer" (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 348). The circle immediately surrounding the observer includes family, relations, household, colleagues, friends, next-door neighbours, regular tradespeople or customers etc, "singly or in groups". The next circle includes "strangers, newcomers, chance acquaintances, people known to a second person, unusual tradespeople, unusual customers: singly or in groups" (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 348). And the next circle includes "people and institutions whose pressure and contact is less direct and personal, but no less effective", including: "classes, official persons, celebrities, people acting in a public capacity, ancestors, literary and mythological figures, public mouthpieces (newspapers, radio etc.) and such abstract collections as The People" (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 348-9).

Figure 1.1 The Social Area of an Observer



Adapted from Fig. 3 Jennings and Madge (1937: 348)

The first point of importance for my thesis here is the idea that the “Social Area of an Observer” can be understood with reference to the ‘subjective camera’ analogy, wherein the ‘subjective camera’ is located in the centre of these circles. By using different or layered subjective lenses, the observer can engage with each layer of the circle, always of course from their own standpoint. However, not mentioned by Jennings and Madge is the idea that, in engaging with the outermost circle, the observer’s lens cannot by-pass those circles closest; it must necessarily accommodate them. Put another way, an observer’s social horizon is filtered with reference to social interaction taking place in both of the closer circles, as indicated by the large arrow in the figure above. Jennings and Madge’s ideas are helpful regarding the wartime diaries because they help identify the trajectory of social interaction which diarists as ‘subjective cameras’ inhabit – trajectories inhabited not only over the course of a day, but also over longer periods of time.

The second point of interest concerns Jennings and Madge’s use of their model as a means of locating the ‘other’ in relation to the observer’s own social location. For them, it is through their relationship with varied others that the observer’s own location can be gauged. This is helpful in thinking about the wartime diaries and how the diarists use their descriptions of their interactions with others as a means of positioning and identifying their written selves.

Jennings and Madge (1937: 351-370) present three day-diaries for 12 March in their entirety, suggesting that these represent the “average working day of a mill-hand, a bank clerk, and a housewife” (1937: 351). I shall concentrate on how they analysed these, rather than their contents, in order to show how their model was employed and developed. The following is an extract from the account by a mill-hand, a 28-year-old, non-political, atheist, single man employed as a side-piecer at a cotton mill in Bolton. An extract, with Jennings and Madge’s notations on the right-hand side, is:

1<sup>2</sup> "My brother is in the hospital recovering from an operation  
 3<sup>2</sup> for appendicitis, he is to be removed to another hospital on  
 the outskirts of the town, Blair's Hospital. Mr. Blair was the  
 donor of the house which has been converted into a hospital  
 1 for convalescents. Asked questions about the whereabouts of  
 Blair's of a piecer, as I walked into the mill and up to the  
 eighth story in which room I work. The man gave me the  
 2<sup>2</sup> information, and said he knew because his father had been in.  
 he had been knocked down by a bicycle ..."

Jennings and Madge (1937: 352)

Here, 1<sup>2</sup> refers to the observer 'talking of people', in this case his brother, and thus the closest circle to the observer is denoted. 3<sup>2</sup> again refers to the mill-hand 'talking of people', but this time someone from Social Area 3. Then, 1 refers to the observer directly interacting with a man from work, therefore social interaction that is in the first circle. And, 2<sup>2</sup> refers to the same man from work talking about his father to the observer, thus being positioned in the second circle. They also go on to indicate some limitations and, usually in footnotes, add further superscript letters after denoting the 'Social Area of an Observer' such as: 'x<sup>p</sup>' to refer to a group being mentioned, 'x' again referring to 'Social Area' (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 357); '2<sup>a</sup>' to refer to a social problem (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 361). Indeed, they also suggest that a further concentric circle should be added, a 'Social Area 4', to signify where incidents "involving external physical factors (weather, animals, plaster falling from ceiling, etc)" cause a break in routine without any human intervention (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 367) (see Figure 1.1).

### A Conclusion: M-O, Subjective Cameras and Women's Wartime Diaries

In Chapter 5, I shall 'try out' Jennings and Madge's classification system regarding its utility and also its limitations in analysing M-O's wartime diaries. As a conclusion to this chapter, however, I shall explore some aspects of the relationship between Mass-Observation, Jennings and Madge's May The Twelfth (1937) and M-O's collection of wartime diaries, particularly those by women.

Similar to how M-O's day-diaries emerged as part of the early directives, the wartime diaries also began through a directive in August 1939. In this, Harrison communicated with the National Panel and asked them to write a 'Crisis Diary', something I will discuss further in the next chapter. In terms of relationships between the day-diaries and wartime diaries, firstly, their comparable genesis is important, because both forms of 'diary' were requested, rather than being spontaneous 'documents of life' (Plummer, 2001), being written at the behest of particular M-O staff. Madge and Jennings called for the day-diaries in February 1937, and Harrison for the wartime diaries two and a half years later in August 1939. Also, the fact that the day-diaries came before the wartime diaries is important, for Harrison would have known their utility, already had a 'day-diary-writing' National Panel as a resource on which to draw, and at least partly based his call for wartime 'diaries' on these factors. An interesting temporal relationship therefore exists between the emergence of the two diary 'forms' within M-O.

Relatedly, this temporal relationship is important in several ways. The two diary 'forms' did not overlap; by the time the wartime diaries were started, the day-diaries had already lapsed. As noted earlier, from February 1938 the day-diaries became thematic (Sheridan *et al*, 2000) and were still being conducted in this vein following Harrison's move to Blackheath and Madge's departure. The wartime diaries appear to have emerged through the convergence of this topical and thematic focus with the beginning of World War Two (Sheridan *et al*, 2000). Indeed, whereas the day-diaries were designed to engage with particular 'days', the 'length' (both anticipated and actual) of the war, as well as the fact it was an elongated 'special' event (within which 'normality' and the 'everyday' to some extent continued), necessitated an appropriate methodological response from M-O in Blackheath. The wartime diaries constituted this response, providing a means of engaging with behaviour, opinions, experiences and so on over a longer period of time than the day-diaries allowed. In a sense then, as well as a temporal relationship, there are also 'temporal differences' involved regarding the different ways in which each diary

'form' takes place over, represents and constructs 'time'. These temporal relationships and differences are particularly intriguing with regards to M-O's wartime diaries, as discussed in later chapters.

Furthermore, these temporal complexities are important with regard to the analysis of any kind of life-representation, whether through writing or other media. M-O's wartime diaries, including because of the lengthy time some were written over, lend themselves to the examination of such considerations and connect with my earlier interest in women's lives and their representations. This is not least because women were highly involved in Mass-Observation, in particular as diarists, but also organisationally, as paid observers and as writers 'writing-up' observer materials into publication drafts. In addition, the nearly thirty years between 1939 to 1967 (the longest period over which a woman diarist wrote for M-O) was extremely important regarding changes to women's prescribed 'roles' in British society. In the 1930s, the effects of the suffragette movement were still being felt. By World War Two, many women took up paid (and voluntary) employment outside of the home, usually in terms of war work; and this trend continued post-war, despite some reversals (Summerfield, 1984; 1993; 1998). During the war, some women were 'called-up', albeit not to military duties as such. Following 1945, Britain experienced massive changes of reconstruction, a strand of which included the partial reconstruction of women's roles in society. Then, from the mid-1960s, came the beginnings of a Women's Movement, which cemented the notion of women's equal rights in at least part of the social imagination. Some women continued writing their M-O 'wartime' diaries throughout these societal shifts; others were writing at points among them. Mass-Observation's 'collection' (in both the verb and the noun sense of the word) of women's wartime diaries therefore provides a fascinating means of exploring the practices involved in life-representation over this intriguing period, although this is not my focus in the thesis, which is rather on time and writing.

The day-diaries have a further bearing on the wartime diaries. When I first skim-read May The Twelfth, it raised several interesting questions for me. What exactly is this thing called a 'day-diary'? Is it a day 'pulled out' from a longer diary? Or is it a stand-alone day with 'the rest' of a diary unwritten or never conceived of? What difference does it make that no diary for the day before or after ever existed? How important is it to contextualise this 'one' day in the life of an observer? Because of my interest in 'lives', which by definition take place over time, I want to understand what is in 'past' days that lead up to and might contribute to 'one day', as well as what is in 'future' days that could connect back to that 'one day'. In effect, I want to grasp something of the 'narrative shape' that the observers give to their lives over time in a written diary-form, and some of the wartime diaries lend themselves to exploring this. However, day-diaries help in this endeavour too, for each seemingly 'stand-alone' day either explicitly or implicitly alludes to past and future days, as well as presenting a host of other interesting temporal features.

Furthermore, the day-diaries raise some important questions concerning 'self' and how this could be talked about with regards to the wartime diaries. What difference does it make that these day-long 'books of the self' (Fothergill, 1974) mention all sorts of other people? Does it matter that Jennings and Madge's analytical approach concerns those other 'selves' as much as it concerns the observer's self because of its focus on social interaction, and if so in what ways? What differences are there in these regards between day-diaries and the wartime diaries? In particular, what difference does it make that all this happens over and in time in the wartime diaries? These are among the issues grappled with in later chapters, because they all, in different ways, help illuminate the relationships between 'lives-as-lived' and 'lives-as-written' in the wartime diaries, and concern the social conventions and practices surrounding life-representation more broadly.

Finally, M-O's day-diaries also bear on the wartime diaries with regard to the diarists' roles as 'subjective cameras'. Conceptualising the day-diarists as subjective

cameras or 'observation points' relates to the idea that ordinary people wrote (took a written photograph) from different places at the same time, or at least on the same day. However, M-O's introduction of wartime diaries adds an additional layer by introducing an 'over time' dimension not previously acknowledged. This casts the wartime diarists as subjective cameras operating not only 'in' time, but also 'over' time, taking a sequence of written photographs or perhaps even rolling the camera forward.

By specifically deploying the wartime diaries, then, the "weather map of popular opinion" that M-O sought to compile from the material they gathered (Madge and Harrison, 1937: 30; Jeffrey, 1999) was clearly extended to include a strong and important 'in-time-over-time' dimension. This served to further locate the ordinary people who were writing M-O diaries as 'observation points', thereby adding more grounding to M-O's data and consolidating the basis from which to advance social change. In addition, the introduction of the wartime diaries also implies that M-O drew on popular temporal assumptions concerning what diaries as a genre 'are' in order to facilitate this. Such ideas will be developed later, while I shall now move on to explore the contextual setting of M-O's wartime diaries and the ways that previous researchers have used them.



~ Chapter Two ~

Mass-Observation's Wartime Diaries:  
'Speaking for Themselves'?

The Wartime Diaries: Setting the Scene

In a 'Crisis Directive' printed in red ink in August 1939, Tom Harrison issued the National Panel of Voluntary Observers with the assignment of writing a 'Crisis Diary' (Sheridan *et al*, 2000). The Abdication Crisis had triggered M-O's formation, as discussed in Chapter 1. Special Directives had been issued concerning the Munich Crisis in 1938 and, although Chamberlain had seemingly secured the peace agreement with Nazi Germany in September 1938 known as the Munich Pact, about a year later World War Two officially started. The 'Crisis Diary' was to be kept for a few weeks from around 22 August 1939 on (FR 621, FR 2181). However, on 28 August, just before the war started, and encouraged by John Ferraby, who was then a 'full-timer' at Blackheath, Harrison offered the National Panel the choice of continuing to respond to monthly directives, but additionally suggested Panel members might like to convert their 'Crisis Diaries into 'Full Diaries' (Willcock, 1943). These later became known as the 'Wartime Diaries', one of M-O's first war-related research focuses (Willcock, 1943).

In his 'Crisis Diary' communication, Harrison asked the Panel "to begin keeping day-to-day personal diaries of everything that happened to them, the conversations they heard and took part in, their general routine of life, and the impact of the war on it" (Willcock, 1943: 450). The Panellists were asked to keep their discussion of political events to a minimum, and instead "concentrate on the details of every-day life, their own reactions, those of their family, and people they met" (FR 621: Introduction, p.1). This call for 'full' diaries gave more responsibility to observers in terms of 'when' and 'what' to write (Kertesz, 1993). It also freed up some of the workers' time at Blackheath for other war-related work, a large part of

which concerned trying to secure funds to keep M-O's projects going and pay its full-time observers (Kertesz, 1993). The wartime diarists, despite the initial impetus from Blackheath, were in control of their own diary-entries, using their diaries to construct versions of the war and their written selves largely as they wished. They were, however, guided by the contents of Harrison's request, as well as how they perceived 'a diary' as a genre of life writing, the purposes they envisaged their diary being used for, their life experiences, and the means in terms of paper and ink, and time and space, which each diarist had available.

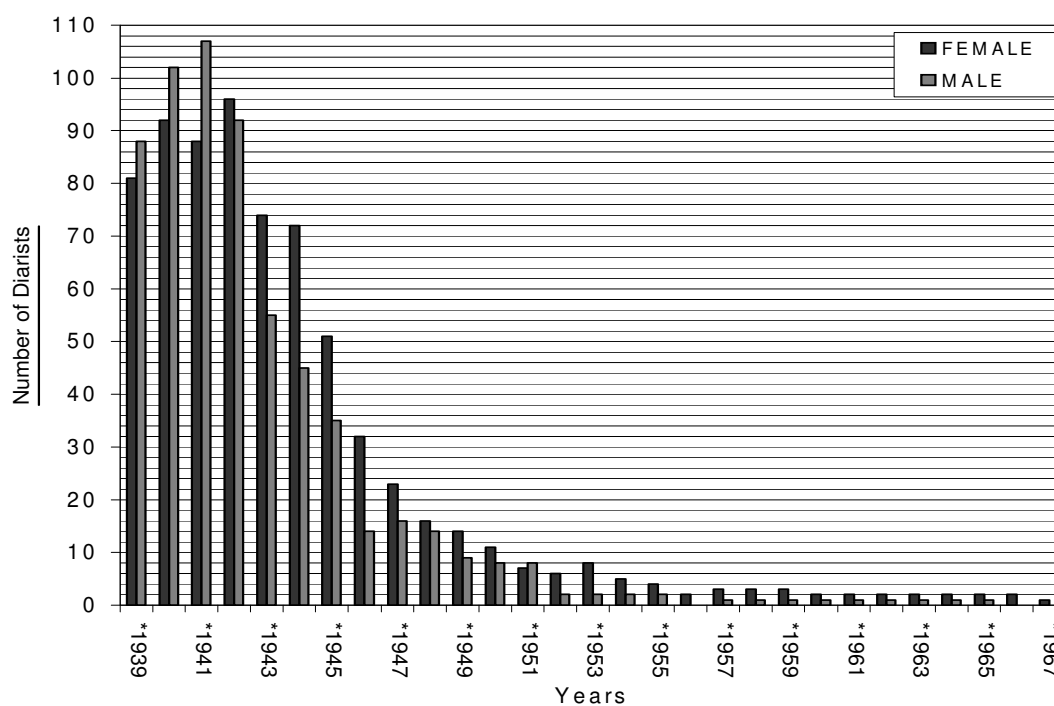
The lengthy time over which some diarists provided diary-entries helped M-O in its endeavour of recording social change in Britain. Although most stopped contributing instalments at the end of the war (see Figure 2.1), some continued to write well beyond this. One diarist, Nella Last, wrote almost continuously between August 1939 and February 1966 (although her diary-entries between January 1944 and April 1945 inclusive have been lost).<sup>28</sup> Nella Last (D 5353) is this diarist's real name, which I can use because Broad and Fleming (1981), in editing the wartime years of her diary, gained permission from her family (see also Broad and Fleming, 2006). I am also able to use the real names of four other women diarists: Naomi Mitchison (D 5378); Rachel Dhonau (D 5301); Olivia Cockett (D 5278); and Kathleen Tipper (D 5443), as the necessary permissions were gained when their M-O diaries were published (Sheridan, 1985; Malcolmson and Searby, 2004; Malcolmson and Cockett, 2005; Malcolmson and Malcolmson, 2006). Unless otherwise indicated, however, all other diarists have pseudonymous names because of the M-O Archive's regulations concerning anonymisation.<sup>29</sup> Another woman, Valerie Brunel (D 5445), was the longest writing diarist, writing between August 1939 and June 1967. The man who wrote the longest, Frederick Pacey (D 5076), began his diary in October 1940 and sent his final entry in June 1965. I am, however, unable to determine some basic information, such as where the diarists who continued writing post-1950 sent

<sup>28</sup> Additionally, no directive replies have survived for 1941 (Sheridan, 2000; Sheridan *et al*, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> Where other researchers have given pseudonyms to M-O diarists already, I have tried to keep to those for the sake of consistency (Aldrich, 2004; Garfield, 2005a; 2005c; 2006; Sheridan, 1990; 1991). I have entered the wartime diarists' 'Diarist Numbers' when using quotations herein and provide a full list of pseudonyms and Diarist Numbers in the References.

their entries, who was responsible for organising these, and whether some form of correspondence was maintained, because the present M-O has little information regarding this. The figure below shows the numbers of women and men diarists writing each year throughout the August 1939 to June 1967 period.

**Figure 2.1 Number of Wartime Diarists by Sex per Year**



Source: [http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection\\_descriptions/massobsdiaries.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection_descriptions/massobsdiaries.html)

Only a minority of diarists wrote continuously through and after the war, as did Last, Brunel and Pacey; indeed, these diarists are exceptions. Some diarists wrote ‘one-off’ entries, usually around the outbreak of war or during its early years. Kertesz comments, inaccurately, that “the number of diarists writing at any one time was larger during the first few months of the war than any other time” (Kertesz, 1993: 51). Although there were 169 diary-entries for September 1939, there were more in 1940, 1941 and 1942 (see Figure 2.1). The drop-off is attributed by Kertesz (1993) to the increasing demands and responsibilities that the war brought for

people. Also, diarist numbers fell fairly sharply at the end of the war, presumably because many diarists would have felt that, as the 'historical event' they were recording had ended, so should their diary-writing, which implies that the public event of 'war' was their main impetus. In addition, many diarists did not start writing at the outbreak of the war; many joined M-O sometime into the war, some writing for very short periods, others for longer, and some picking up their writing after intervals.

More men were writing M-O diaries than women during the early war years (1939-1941) and also in 1951, but for the remainder of the twenty-nine years the number of women contributing diaries was greater. The larger number of men's diaries between 1939 and 1941 is likely to be attributable to war being seen as a 'male thing' and that many men were facing volunteering or a call-up. The very small degree in which men's diaries outnumbered women's diaries in 1951 (there were just eight men writing compared with seven women in that year) is due to four women diarists ceasing to write at some point during 1950<sup>30</sup> and the number of male diarists remaining constant. Interestingly, five out of the eight male diarists writing 'wartime' diaries for M-O in 1951 in fact stopped writing in that year,<sup>31</sup> one of whom took up his pencil again after a more than two and a half year gap to write to M-O for the final time in June 1951.<sup>32</sup> Another male diarist stopped writing in 1952.<sup>33</sup> After 1952, only two male diarists continued to write diaries for M-O, one of whom stopped in November 1956,<sup>34</sup> while the other, Frederick Pacey, as already mentioned, continued until 1965.

The drop-off of male diarists after 1951 might at least be partly attributable to the evocation of national reflection associated with the 'Festival of Britain', which King George VI opened in early May 1951 – less than a year before his death. In

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<sup>30</sup> D 5313; D 5401; D 5447; D 5475.

<sup>31</sup> D 5033; D 5098; D 5139; D 5217; D 5471.

<sup>32</sup> D 5217.

<sup>33</sup> D 5216.

<sup>34</sup> D 5103.

order to 'lift the spirits' of a British society enveloped in the aftermath of a devastating war – food was still partly rationed until July 1954 – the Festival celebrated the centenary of the 1851 'Great Exhibition' and was intended as an exhibition and promotion of Britain's historical and contemporary contributions to society through the arts, industrial design, science and technology (Conekin, 2003). The Festival marked 1951 as a point of 'appraisal' in Britain's history, wherein the country's past achievements were recapitulated in light of its contemporary accomplishments (Conekin, 2003). Further to this, following an operation in September 1951, five months later George VI died. Elizabeth II was proclaimed Regent in February 1952 but was not crowned until the following year. These events combined, I believe, to effectively signal the culmination of an historical era to the broader population, which may have prompted some M-O diarists to stop writing their diaries, as had also happened at the end of the war itself.

Intriguingly, a one-off project concerned with the Coronation of Elizabeth II in June 1953 (Sheridan, 1984) produced a short-lived resurgence in female, but not male, diarists participating, although this tailed off rapidly. Some diarists wrote intermittently, leaving gaps of months and even years before writing once more. Of those diarists writing less regularly, their entries might involve considerable depth and detail, as with Olivia Cockett's (D 5278) diary (Malcolmson and Cockett, 2005). In all, nearly 500 women and men in total wrote diaries for M-O at points between 1939 and 1967. After 1967, no more diary instalments were received by M-O from the diarists who began writing during the war; indeed no more diaries were received at all until the new phase of M-O began in 1981.<sup>35</sup> I now turn to discuss why I have taken women's M-O diaries as the specific focus of my investigation.

Women's M-O wartime diaries constitute the focus of my research for a number of overlapping reasons. Firstly, although men's M-O diaries could equally

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<sup>35</sup> See Sheridan *et al* (2000) and Sheridan (2000). For a comparison between the early and post-1981 M-O projects see Sheridan (1993b) and Noakes (1996a; 1996b; 1998) with specific regard to war and memory.

well have formed its focal point, either by themselves or in comparison with women's diaries, because of their overall greater number (n. 242) I rapidly concluded that attempting to include both would be beyond the scope of a single thesis. The men's and the women's diaries could each justifiably form large research topics in their own right, and both deserve detailed analysis. Practically speaking, the quantity of detailed diary-material produced by men and women for M-O is immense: there are millions upon millions of words within thousands and thousands of diary-entries. Consequently, given the amount of material available, examining both sets of diaries could only be done in a superficial manner, skimming the surface of this incredibly rich material. Thus, although a "comprehensive survey and analysis of the [diarists] has yet to be done" (Jolly, 2001: 110, fn. 6), it is not my intention to provide this. I see my thesis as a preliminary to this, focusing specifically on the slightly smaller set of women's diaries (n. 237).

Secondly, the way the archive material in the Mass-Observation Archive (M-O A) is organised – that is, the 'archival frame' (Hill, 1993) used to organise and store M-O material – is both 'sexed' and 'chronologised' (Noakes, 1996a; Stanley, 1995b). This 'invites' a researcher to focus on women or men, rather than both. My choice to research the women's diaries rather than men's is in part because writing to M-O had a stronger appeal to women (although this was not so initially), with the Archive now containing a "... collection of women's writing for the period [1937-1967] which is unparalleled" (Sheridan, 1994: 103). This choice is also partly because focusing on women's diary-based life writings will help to correct the still strong masculinist bias within research on 'war' in the contemporary world. 'War events' during the twentieth century have had, and are still having, a marked and recurrent impact on the everyday lives of women and children 'at home'. This has only recently been addressed as a scholarly issue (Loipponen, 2007; Lorentzen and Turpin, 1998), although M-O's publication War Begins at Home (Madge and Harrison, 1940) investigated this more than sixty years earlier, as did its diaries in a hugely detailed and specific way.

A number of previous researchers have tackled and tried to publish on the diary material. Through discussing their approaches, and how they have represented 'the wartime diaries' and constructed views of the war, I shall draw out issues that are particularly relevant to this thesis, and in particular the methodological lessons that can be learned.

### Using the Wartime Diaries: The 1940s

During M-O's original phase of activity, when analysing the wartime diaries and fulfilling its intention of issuing "... findings in a form [that would] be of interest and value to Observers, the general public, and scientists" (Jennings and Madge, 1937: v), the staff at Blackheath encountered many indexing problems due to the diversity of the diaries' contents (Kertesz, 1993). It took a lengthy period of time to perform this basic form of analysis, as each new diary-entry generated more and more index subjects under which to classify all preceding, as well as current and future, diary material. Where to place diary-entries in this organic and always growing framework became increasingly problematic, including because each entry also contained constant cross-subject references (Kertesz, 1993). Despite such problems, between early 1940 and early 1942 the Blackheath staff managed to use the diaries to compile various reports. Weekly Intelligence Reports were prepared for the Home Intelligence Department of the Ministry of Information, which used diarists' comments on air raid precautions (ARP), air raids, shelters, and evacuation, expenditure, shops, housing, humour, Italy, morale, newspapers, propaganda, films/posters, and more, to inform the Ministry about ordinary people's views and experiences.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The Weekly Intelligence Reports are now stored as File Reports (Series D), including: for October 1940, FR 439 'First Weekly Report for Home Intelligence', FR 449 'Second Weekly Report for Home Intelligence', FR 459 'Third Weekly Report for Home Intelligence', and FR 466 'Fourth Weekly Report for Home Intelligence'; for November 1940, FR 477 'Fifth Weekly Report...', FR 493 'Seventh Weekly Report ...', FR 501 'Eighth Weekly Report ...', and FR 508 'Ninth Weekly Report ...'; and for December 1940, FR 486 'Sixth Weekly Report ...', FR 521 'Tenth Weekly Report ...', and FR 527 'Eleventh Weekly Report ...'.

In addition, during 1940 M-O's Blackheath staff compiled other reports using the wartime diaries as well as other observer materials, including:<sup>37</sup>

1. **Weekly Morale Reports**, concerning aircraft production, ARP, clothes, conscription, consumer goods, food, furniture and entertainment.<sup>38</sup>
2. **Local Morale Reports**, concerning air raids (both British attacks on Germany and German attacks on Britain), with a specific focus on Birmingham, Bolton, Hollesley, Ipswich and London.<sup>39</sup>
3. **Weekly Reports**, concerning agriculture, the Forces, evacuation, fascism and the BUF (British Union of Fascists), health, local government, morale, peace terms and victory.<sup>40</sup>
4. **Weekly Digests**, which were a summary of some findings on the kind of issues already mentioned.<sup>41</sup>
5. And, **Morale in April Reports** were compiled for April 1942, April 1943 and April 1944, concerning air raids, ARP, the blackout, communism, conscientious objectors, food and the Ministry of Food, and the Home Guard.<sup>42</sup>

In total, the staff at Blackheath compiled around 3000 File Reports between 1937 and 1955, many of which included summaries of materials generated by both M-O's paid observers and its National Panel. In addition, there were also two occasions during the early 1940s when particular members of staff at Blackheath attempted to compile a book using the diary material. The first was in 1940/1941 (FR 621) and the second in 1944 (FR 2181). Margaret Kertesz (1993) has examined these in some detail and the discussion following draws partly on her work,<sup>43</sup> but is based mainly on my own reading and analysis of these important File Reports.

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<sup>37</sup> All the preceding and following information on the File Reports was retrieved from the new M-O's website: [http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection\\_descriptions/massobsfilereports.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection_descriptions/massobsfilereports.html)

<sup>38</sup> Weekly Morale Reports (Series C) (between June and September 1940) included: FR 365, FR 301A, FR 356, FR 315A, FR 391, FR 381 and FR 338.

<sup>39</sup> Local Morale Reports (Series B) included: for June 1940 FR 301B, FR 308; for August 1940 FR 315B, FR 318, FR 339-41, FR 358, FR 366; for September 1940 FR 386, FR 396, FR 401, FR 416, FR 428, FR 429, FR 489; for October 1940 FR 441, FR 452, FR 462, FR 471; for November 1940 FR 478, FR 481, FR 489, FR 494, FR 502; for December 1940 FR 512.

<sup>40</sup> Weekly Reports (Series E) (between June and September 1941) included: for June FR 729, FR 765, FR, 738, FR 753; for July FR 794, FR 775, FR 802, FR 783; for August FR 811, FR 822, FR 832, FR 946; and for September FR 855, FR 862, FR 872, FR 881, FR 885.

<sup>41</sup> Weekly Digests (Series G) (between autumn 1941 and spring 1942) included: FR 899, FR 909, FR 927, FR 931, FR 947, FR 957, FR 965, FR 974, FR 982, FR 992, FR 998, FR 1016, FR 1018, FR 1044, FR 1045, FR 1061, FR 1108, FR 1109, FR 1110, FR 1114, FR 1123, FR 1139, FR 1145.

<sup>42</sup> Morale in April Reports included: 'Morale in April 1942' (May 1942, FR 1258); 'Morale in April 1943' (May 1943, FR 1672); and 'Morale in April 1944' (May 1944, FR 2087).

<sup>43</sup> Kertesz (1993) draws on 'M-O Administrative Papers (Methods and Fieldwork)' (1940) stored in the Archive.



In early 1941, the first attempt to draft a publication from the wartime diaries was undertaken by Yeta Lane, a full-time staff member at Blackheath,<sup>44</sup> entitled Drafts for a Proposed Book on War Diaries (FR 621). In this, Lane used extracts from wartime diaries sent by both women and men, producing two short synopses of the proposed structure in January/February 1941, both of which began with a short 'Introduction' that explained how the diaries came to be written. In this 'Introduction', Lane emphasised the diverse occupations and ages of people from whom diaries were (being) received, and suggested that, for most of the diarists, without their diary-writing, their "intimate lives and thoughts" (FR 621: Introduction p. 1) would never have been known about. She also stated that readers would find in the book "... an echo of their own emotions, poignant expressions of doubts, fears, and difficulties that are their own" (FR 621: Introduction p. 1). In addition, Lane commented upon the diarists' varied circumstances, writing from:

"... the kitchens of the unemployed, from barracks, canteens, hospitals, offices, colleges, universities, manor houses, exclusive addresses in Mayfair..."

FR 621: Introduction p. 1

Her concern with including diary-extracts from people writing in diverse geographical and social locations in a way mirrors Jennings and Madge's (1937) approach noted earlier, although her interest was a psychological one:

"For the psychologist this book provides a unique record also, because written down at the actual time when the individual's immediate emotional reactions were still operating, and the records convey the full emotional content, which would be unobtainable in any other way."

FR 621: Introduction p. 1-2

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<sup>44</sup> In 1941 Lane was also involved in producing M-O File Reports that drew on the wartime diaries, including: FR 574 (February 1941) 'War in December Diaries'; FR 598 (March 1941) 'War Diaries'; FR 619 (March 1941) 'Diary Extracts on the End of the War'; FR 756 (June 1941) 'First Reactions to Clothes Rationing in M-O Diaries'; and FR 773 (July 1941) 'Comparative Report on Wartime Diaries'; and Topic Collections, including TC 18/4/A, TC 29/4/E, and TC 32/1/A.

As well as connecting to Madge's interest in psychoanalytical issues, Lane's comment raises ideas concerning time, expressing the view that diaries as a genre of life-writing can engage with the present, with the 'now', the 'immediacy of experience', something which will be returned to in later chapters. The remainder of Lane's two synopses outline what she intended to include in the seventeen chapters proposed. There are minor variations between the two, so, for the sake of clarity and concision, I have tabulated their proposed contents and flagged the main differences between them.

Table 2.1 Yeta Lane's Two Synopses

(Adapted from FR 621)

<u>Ch.</u>	<u>Synopsis 1</u>	<u>Synopsis 2</u>
<u>Info.</u>	Typed; Dated 25 Feb. 1941 (& 25.1.41?); stamped 2 Mar 1941 by M.O.	Undated; Neatly typed; (Likely a polished version of Synopsis 1).
1	Opening with extracts from the diaries during "crisis week", and ending with the declaration of war. These extracts should cover each social class, and be taken from diaries written from London, from industrial towns, from small towns, and villages, and from a number of people who were on holiday at the time.	"Crisis Week". Emotional reactions, activities, affect on family life, health, trade, and business. Ending with the declaration of war, and reactions to this.
2	Evacuation and social change, "calling up" etc.	Immediate social changes caused by imposition of war conditions, mobilisation, black-out, evacuation, travel, health and finance.
3	Opens with a brief summary of events, and then extracts from diaries on rumour, reactions to developments, and general feelings about the war.	Opening with brief summary of the actual events of the war, and then diarists' reactions to these events. This would include rumour and expectations, and general sentiments about the war.
4	How the new conditions are affecting, and reacting on: The men. The women. The children.	Extracts showing how the change-over has affected the daily lives of (a) the men, (b) the women, (c) the children. Also reactions between various groups to the new conditions.
5	The first war news, reactions to increased control of news in the press, and on the radio, rumour, spying, evacuation from military zones. Blackout casualties, and transport difficulties.	How war news is received. Reactions to increased control of news in the Press, broadcasts, spies, evacuation from military zones, black-out casualties, transport difficulties, restrictions on travelling. Affect of war on occupations, political opinions, religion.
6	The first war-time Christmas	The first war Christmas, general conditions, states of mind, feelings about the new year.
7	Reactions to political and parliamentary affairs	Reactions to Parliamentary and political happenings. Feelings about Statesmen, feelings about the German people.

8	How evacuation is working out (education, health, etc)	How evacuation is working, also health, education, and family life.
9	How the war is affecting classes A., B., C., D. (contrasts)	How the war is affecting classes A., B., C., D. (contrasts)
10	Reactions after the fall of France, and evacuation of B.E.F. <sup>45</sup>	Feelings in Britain regarding the war in general (a) among civilians, (b) among members of the forces.
11	Feelings in Britain among civilians, and people in the forces.	How diarists were affected by the ascent of Churchill, and by Dunkirk.
12	Feelings after the big ["Victory"] <sup>46</sup> drive, and the ascent of C'hill. <sup>47</sup>	Reactions after Dunkirk and the fall of France. And a survey of general feelings prior to the "blitz".
13	The "blitz" begins	The "blitz" begins.
14	The "blitz" continues	"Shelter life and continuation of "blitz".
15	Reactions to food shortage	Rationing begins to be felt, food difficulties, rise in prices, sinking of ships, profiteering, war savings.
16	The second war-time Christmas	The second war-time Christmas. How it affected families, children, classes, shops. Religious feelings about celebrating the festival. Moods before, during, and after Christmas. General emotional atmosphere.
17	Trends in 1941.	Feelings in the New Year, trends of 1941.

These chapter synopses show Lane's intention to demonstrate the diversity of ordinary people's experiences and opinions. Topical additions have been added to several of them in the second synopsis, interestingly.

Chapter 1 in the first synopsis provides much more detail concerning the diversity sought from diary instalments than the opening chapter of synopsis two. It seems unlikely that diversity became less important for M-O, despite its exclusion from the second synopsis. Indeed, my impression is that geographical and social diversity became so important a consideration that all of Lane's chapters would have had to focus around this: it became a given and so is not explicitly mentioned in the second 'neatened' synopsis.

<sup>45</sup> B.E.F. refers to the British Expeditionary Force.

<sup>46</sup> "Victory" was added in pen by hand between 'big' and 'drive'.

<sup>47</sup> C'hill refers to Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister of the Government of National Unity, often referred to as the Coalition Government, between May 1940 and July 1945, and Conservative Prime Minister between October 1951 and April 1955.

In the summary of Chapter 4 in synopsis two, Lane added a note about comparing reactions between men, women, and children, rather than considering each group in isolation. Through this, she appears to emphasise the social interaction of social groups, something I noted earlier Jennings and Madge (1937) had highlighted in their 'alternative' approach to analysing ordinary day-diaries. 'Interaction' is an important element to much of the research organised from Blackheath because viewed as highly significant to the formation of people's opinions and reactions. The summaries of Chapters 6 and 17 in the second synopsis support this, with 'feelings in the New Year' having been added. Lane has also included 'the future' and projecting forward in time with 'trends' from the present situation in both versions of Chapter 17.

However, only two of Lane's proposed chapters were actually drafted: Chapter 1 on 'Crisis Week', and Chapter 13 on 'The "Blitz" begins'.<sup>48</sup> These drafts both take a loose narrative form, integrate diary extracts varied in length, and keep the editorial voice to a minimum, mainly just in introducing the extracts (Kertesz, 1993: 58). As Kertesz (1993: 58) notes, there is some editorial commentary in the 'Crisis Week' chapter, which implies that Lane was sometimes using diary quotes to back up a developing argument that hinged on exemplifying the diversity of diarists' experiences. However, in the 'Blitz' chapter, lengthier diary quotations are used with little commentary by the editor. These sizeable 'chunks' of diary material give a vivid picture of the blitz, grounding it in varied real life experiences.

Despite drafting two chapters, Lane then abandoned the proposed book. This may have been related to the increasing importance of everyday war work for M-O, over-shadowing work on the diaries (Kertesz, 1993). This conjecture, as Kertesz (1993: 60) also notes, is supported by a comment in an organisational note sent from Lane to Bob Willcock, dated 3 March 1941:

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<sup>48</sup> Page 11 of Lane's draft of 'the "Blitz" Begins' is missing from FR 621.

"Preliminary note on diary book: Suggest drafting chapter 1. if this layout seems possible. Held this up before sending as hoped to get more work done on it and elaborate a little before sending on. More will be done on it when we have got rid of this month's bulletin".<sup>49</sup>

Organisational Note included in FR 621

However, there appears to have been something more fundamental about the wartime diaries that impeded Lane's ability to produce a draft. In not imposing an analytic structure on the chapters, except for some temporal ordering, Lane was attempting to let the diaries 'speak for themselves' as much as possible, commenting explicitly on this in a note attached to the second synopsis:

"The most striking point about the diaries is that while written with no pretensions to literary style in the great majority of cases, and without much sense of the dramatic, they are, because of this very simplicity, most extraordinarily moving. For this reason they are to be allowed to "speak for themselves", as far as possible, and there will only be sufficient interpolation to aid in making them an intelligible whole."

Note attached to the second synopsis, FR 621

Lane explains this desire to allow the diaries to 'speak for themselves' in terms of their moving simplicity. It also directly connects with Madge and Jennings' emancipatory aspiration to enable 'the masses' to speak for themselves, not subsume the diverse voices of ordinary people in the agenda of 'scientific objectivity'. Attached to the first synopsis is another note, its contents overlapping considerably with the note just quoted, which adds a little more information as to the editorial difficulties Lane was facing:

"... They contain so much valuable material that the greatest difficulty will be one of selection in order to keep the book within a reasonable length, say 70, 000 words."

Last sentence of note attached to the first synopsis, FR 621

It seems that, because of the amount and diversity of diary material sent to M-O, writing a book which stayed within the remit of a 'reasonable length' became

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<sup>49</sup> M-O's monthly Bulletins were sent out to the National Panel and other Observers to keep them informed about the organisation's activities.

impossible. Reducing this diversity seemed unachievable and perhaps also undesirable. The second attempt at drafting for publication encountered similar problems, although based on a rather different editorial agenda.

The second attempt at producing a book from the wartime diaries took place in autumn 1944, to be called The Crisis: War in Diaries (FR 2181), as scribbled on the front page of several draft chapters. Celia Fremlin was commissioned to draft this; she was the main author of War Factory (Mass-Observation, 1943c) and, like Yeta Lane, a full-time observer in Blackheath (Kertesz, 1993: 60).<sup>50</sup> Fremlin produced ten roughly-drafted chapters, based around the information contained in a selection of women's wartime diaries written between the start of the war and 1942. She also drew on pre-war observer material in order to set the diary-extracts in context, although this was done only occasionally. In tabulated form below, I have summarised the topics Fremlin discussed in her ten proposed chapters:

Table 2.2 Celia Fremlin's Drafted Chapters (Adapted from FR 2181)

<u>Chapter No., Name, Length &amp; Layout</u>	<u>Topics and Focuses within Chapters</u>
<p><b>&lt;Unnumbered Chapter&gt;: 'The Crisis'</b> 10 typed unnumbered pages. 'Introduction' (Kertesz, 1993); dated Nov. '44 so written after other chapters</p>	<p>Concerns: end-of-the-world myths and the propagation of these myths; 'Crisis Diaries' (22 Aug – 3 Sept) containing a sense of doom and helplessness and the sense that "The Next War ... just can't happen" (p.5); 'busyness' as an important escape from these feelings, connecting to women protecting their homes from war and from the strain about to be put on the very existence of home life.</p>
<p><b>Chapter 1: 'The Generation that has No Time'</b> 10 typed numbered pages.</p>	<p>Concerns: middle-class women's 'busyness' relating to being needed by men and society more broadly; the "tremendous psychological switch-over" (p.9) society needs to undergo after the war, although the focus here is on women, for it concerns "... how to reconcile personal, individual relationships ... with a state of society which is aiming at reducing</p>

<sup>50</sup> Kertesz (1993: 60) suggests that Fremlin's 1944 publication attempt "was not drafted by a Mass-Observation staff member trying to fit in with other work". However, Fremlin's 'married' initials 'CG' appear on several Topic Collections from July 1942 and continue into 1944, such as: TC 47/13/C 'Aims in Life Survey' (1944), and TC 59/2/H 'Education Indirects' (1944). See [http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection\\_descriptions/massobstopic.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection_descriptions/massobstopic.html)

	individual interdependence to a minimum" (p.8); that "...only by understanding the size and nature of this switch-over can we come to any intelligent conclusion ..." and suggests "...by studying the behaviour the middle-class, the feelings and attitudes ... a little light to guide us in the construction of the post war world" may be found (p.9).
<b>Chapter II: 'The Great Contradiction'</b> 8 typed numbered pages.	Opens with >2 pages of diary-extracts that focus on "self-congratulation for hardships endured", which contrast the 1930s philosophy of minimising "hardship, pain and death" (p.13). Discusses: this "contradiction", "ambivalent psychological state" displayed in the "1920-39 attitude to war" (p.14); that she is not "as yet, implying any sort of political conclusion" (p.17), but is trying to "indicate the nature and magnitude of the emotional problem" (p.17); that "... in 1939; ... civilisation [was] filled with superfluous emotions, as its homes were filled with superfluous women" (p.17-18), linking back to Chapter 1.
<b>Chapter III: 'The Outbreak of War'</b> 15 typed unnumbered pages.	Concerns: a lack of "martial spirit" at the start of war; relief at war coming because it marked "the end of ... foreboding" (p.1); the first "attack" on the nation's <u>home life</u> as the evacuation of children (p.3), and then bombs; mothers' different reactions to evacuation as 'freedom' and/or losing 'their ... raison d'etre in society'. Uses: diary-extracts to show evacuation circumstances, devoting 5 pages to a "probably fairly typical" retired nurse writing in September 1939 (p.5-10); the extracts from 3 diarists in the reception areas (p.10-12) and 1 evacuated diarist (p.12-14), linking these with short descriptive sentences. Closes with a view to explore how far the State's responsibility for evacuees will be extended as the war goes on, and what the effects of this will be on the home.
<b>Chapter IV: 'The First Christmas'</b> 18 typed unnumbered pages.	Concerns: autumn 1939 tensions, "nerves, depression and hopelessness" expressed in the diaries (p.1), quotes 2 diarists to exemplify (one is Nella Last); the "hiatus in the war" as taking away from people "their normal responsibilities and functions in society" (p.4) and providing no alternative; Christmas 'saving' and 'spending', quoting housewives' varied decisions and views (Nella Last is cited twice); how new wartime social conditions mean that the rules of good house-keeping change (p.11); the cold winter's link to wartime suffering; 4 pages about Nella Last's description of the Jan-Feb 1940 blizzards across Britain (p.12-16); extracts from one woman in Birmingham and another in Sheffield. Chapter ends abruptly, no lead to next chapter.
<b>Chapter V: 'Shadows of Defeat'</b> 26 typed unnumbered pages.	Concerns: May 1940, feelings of threat of defeat; long diary-extracts from 3 "typical [women] diarists of the time": a mother living near London; the "same North country housewife quoted at length in the last chapter" (Nella Last); and a married woman of 36 "living in a fair-sized house in South London"; three tendencies identified: escapism, expecting defeat and "Parachutist and Spy scare". Some diary-extracts mention overheard dialogues, "diaries of this time are full of conversations and anecdotes of sorts" (p. 26). Chapter ends by asking how the mainly 'despairing, escapist, or timid' reactions were "to be changed in a few short days, to spirit worthy of that "finest hour"?".
<b>&lt;Unnumbered Chapter&gt;: 'Experience of Danger'</b> 23 typed unnumbered pages. Reads as though it should be Ch.6 & is dated "9/44".	Concerns: women working outside of the home after the 1940-41 raids; home no longer centre of family life, replaced by "vast factories and offices" (p.3); the Blitz coming "at an opportune time for canalising [women's] resentment and bewilderment" (p.3); women wanting "a community to belong to" and so went out to work, illustrated with diary-extracts expressing enthusiasm; some women's apathy towards work due to bombings and frayed nerves, examined by looking at factors around people being "exhilarated or ... cowed by physical danger" (p.7). Discusses danger as a psychological mechanism, enjoyable only if 'social'; case-study of 'Christine' in London in autumn 1940, her interaction with

	neighbours/friends as reliant on communication/transport networks which, when broken, leave her "marooned in an alien, unknown territory – her home!"(p.10); worse in inner London than in the suburbs, and for middle- and upper-classes than for the working classes; people with no definite job outside of the home, like housewives, suffered the most, exemplified by a long quote from 1 diarist in which her attempts at social inclusion are thwarted. No lead to next chapter.
<b>Chapter VII: 'Blasted Homes'</b> 10 typed unnumbered pages. Dated "9/44".	Concerns: "neighbourliness" and how the centre of community life cannot be shifted from office to home (p.1) because of the "bleak and comfortless" places homes were at this time (p.7); illustrates the feelings around such situations with 5½ pages of undated diary-extracts from the same diarist (p.1-7), described as "fairly typical of 'housewife morale' immediately after the blitz" (p.8), although some housewives were inclined to "let things go" (p.9), exemplified with extracts from 2 other diarists. No lead to next chapter.
<b>Chapter VIII: 'The Conscription of Women'</b> 11 typed unnumbered pages.	Concerns: the "little incentive" women had to "remain in ... battered and uncomfortable home[s] ..." (p.1); 'Conscripted' women were enthusiastic about working, exemplified with extracts from 3 diaries (p.2-3), but some related objections were raised: women not wanting to give up pre-existing jobs (2 diary extracts exemplify); the attitudes of interviewers at the Labour Exchange and ATS (6 diary extracts exemplify); and others objecting (e.g. family, friends) (3 diary extracts exemplify). Fremlin comments that it is interesting to read diaries which "quite suddenly" change from "entirely domestic" concerns to outside work (p.10); ends with the comment that "we must return now to the woman left behind at home ..."
<b>Chapter IX: &lt;Untitled&gt;</b> 14 typed unnumbered pages.	Discusses: housewives' experiences of goods shortages in 1941 and 1942, forcing them to "lower ... their standards of housekeeping ..." (p.1); food shortage specifically as it has "always been a sort of social measuring rod" (p.1), uses 11 extracts from women's diaries to exemplify their complaints and comments regarding food (p.1-7); suggests that food shortage reduced housewives social contact further, since having dinner guests was difficult (p.7), and by 1942; suggests that many were unwilling to have guests at all, quoting 6 extracts to exemplify (2 from Nella Last's diary). No lead to next chapter/Conclusion.

Fremlin's attempt to draft a book from the wartime diaries was more detailed and considerable than Lane's (Kertesz, 1993). Unlike Lane, Fremlin had a strong analytical agenda, set out mainly in her first two chapters. This agenda has a number of facets, three of which are most relevant for my thesis: Fremlin's overlapping concern with 'women', with women 'at home', and with changes in women's positions at home and in society.

Fremlin uses extracts from women's diaries as an index of the Crisis and the war more broadly and also as a way of mapping a "psychological switch-over" (Ch.1, p. 9) in family life and regarding women's role in society. Her concern with



'psychological' changes shows some relation to Charles Madge's interest in psychoanalysis, noted earlier. At the start of the war, women, Fremlin argues, "... did not have the simple piece of mental black-out available to men in the form of "I'll be called up soon" (i.e. "The future will be taken out of my hands")" ('The Crisis', p. 4). Women instead had to deal with the 'everydayness' of a war in which the future for them was uncertain, a future which, Fremlin points out, revolved around 'the home' and their place within it.

Fremlin's 'at home' focus connects with M-O's interests in general. She takes the home as a central aspect of women's lives as well as family life, and builds her emerging analytical framework around this. By being seen to be 'busy', Fremlin suggests that women are protecting more than their homes in a literal sense: they are trying to secure their social positions, which she argues are constructed in relation to society, men in particular. Fremlin thus views 'home' not only literally, but also metaphorically to connote women's social position more broadly. In her 'Experience of Danger' chapter, Fremlin maps one woman's relationship to her home and other people on the basis of social interaction facilitated by transport and telecommunications networks, and their breakdown during wartime. However, whereas in Lane's 1941 draft 'place' is a central tenet, in Fremlin's draft it is a minor consideration apart from marking some differences between London's 'inner city' and 'the suburbs'; indeed, she frequently omits where the diarists lived and wrote from.

Fremlin's draft chapters hinge more on time than place, implied in no small way by the title of her first chapter, 'The Generation that has No Time'. In her 'Crisis' chapter, she writes of 1920s and 1930s end-of-the-world myths as fundamental to myths of the 'Next War', with anticipated futures being constructed on a mythologised basis, linking perhaps to Jennings and Madge's (1937) concern with exposing the mythological elements upon which society rests. She also writes of time around preparing for and anticipating the coming of war in the early wartime

diaries, and then 'busyness' and having 'no time' as a means of coping with 'waiting' for the war to begin and also regarding events occurring during it.

Making sense of changes to women's social position over time is thus central to Fremlin's analytic framework, and she makes several attempts to tie the diary material to it in her unfolding sequence of chapters, as in the 'Experience of Danger' chapter, which begins with a three page analytical summary of its contents. Notably, however, Fremlin uses more and more diary extracts in her later draft chapters; and as her work progresses, a considerable amount of these come specifically from Nella Last's diary. By doing so, Fremlin partly loses the analytical thread introduced at the beginning. Her analytical schema was not complex enough to contain and harness all the diverse topics people wrote about and she did not complete the draft. In the end, she was swamped because unable to find a viable way through the vast array of, often contradictory, personal experience and opinion in the diaries.

Fremlin wrote to Bob Willcock on 14 September 1944 to give up the task:

"Dear Bob,

I think by now that you will have to come to the same conclusion as I have – to wit: that it is no use trying to publish this masterpiece as it stands. The longer I work with the diaries the more definite becomes my opinion that they should not be used on their own. They are essentially supplementary to more detailed investigations. Used thus, they provide invaluable quotations, sidelights, etc. But when you try to use them by themselves, you are up against the fact that you can't prove anything from them. Thus all you can do is illustrate from them points which are so obvious or well known as not to need proving; it is clearly impossible to bring in any novel or controversial matter within these limitations. And an M-O book without anything novel or controversial in it isn't up to much!

So I think it would be best if you kept this (as much of it is as any use) to incorporate in some bigger and better work which you will doubtless be undertaking in the near future. Don't you agree?

I'll be back in town on Monday.

Yours – Celia"

Celia Fremlin to Bob Willcock 14/9/44, FR 2181

A few months later, Willcock typed a note to be kept with Fremlin's manuscript as an explanation of its incompleteness, stating that:

"This MS was written by CG and completed about Nov. 1944. Based entirely on diaries, and originally intended for publication. Given up as inevitably too tendentious, owing to the nature of material. The report, however, would be a of<sup>51</sup> great interest in conjunction with other material of the period.

BW 25.2.45."

Note attached to FR 2181

Fremlin's and Willcock's notes both state the usefulness of the wartime diaries as a supplement to M-O data from other sources. As a stand-alone source, both view the diaries as problematic. For Fremlin, nothing could be proven and only obvious points could be made from the diaries. For Willcock, the diaries were too 'tendentious', presumably in the sense of them 'promoting' the particular opinions of each writer. Both comments imply that, used alongside other sources, the diaries could help support ideas or claims. Fremlin had attempted to do this in her draft, trying to fit the diarists' diverse experiences and opinions into her own interpretation of events. However, the diversity of the diaries and their contents presented her with too many particularities. Lane's attempt to write a book from the wartime diaries does not seem to have hit this problem, however, because she had striven to include as many, often contradictory, diary extracts as possible. But even so, this approach too became untenable because there was in effect no end to the diversities to be added to the already brimming drafts.

There are differences between Kertesz's (1993) interpretation of Lane's and Fremlin's rather different attempts and my own, some of which are indicated earlier in footnotes. However, two significant differences require more detailed discussion. The first concerns Kertesz's conflation of Lane's and Fremlin's drafts, while I think there are important differences between them. Thus although Kertesz recognises that in Lane's 1941 draft the editorial voice is more of a minimum, she implies that Lane's and Fremlin's analytical agendas are similar:

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<sup>51</sup> As noted earlier, I have included original typing errors.

"... both the 1941 and 1944 drafts would seem to have been planned in the lights of the authors' general knowledge about the home front rather than with reference to the nature of the diaries themselves. What the diarists had recorded of their experiences were then expected to fit in with the authors' own interpretation of events."

Kertesz (1993: 73)

In my view, however, these agendas are different, with Lane working from the diary material inductively to build a narrative thread, and Fremlin selecting extracts to illustrate a position she already has in mind. Kertesz does see Fremlin's attempt as "much more ambitious" because it "tries to harness the diaries to an argument, rather than using them in a descriptive fashion" (Kertesz, 1993: 61), and also (1993: 73) suggests that both drafts sought to let the masses speak, "made clear in the note to the 1941 attempt, and ... in the way the diaries are quoted in the later draft". In my view, however, the strong 'descriptive' nature of Lane's draft is more in keeping with M-O's aim of letting the masses 'speak for themselves'.

The second difference between Kertesz' approach and my own interpretation concerns how we understand the diary as a form or genre. In her discussion of 'The Diary as an Historical Source' (Kertesz, 1993: 71-79; Kertesz, 1992), at several points Kertesz emphasises the "personal nature of diaries" (Kertesz, 1993: 71), taking this and also immediacy as definitional characteristics of the genre. Kertesz does partly recognise the role of 'audience' in affecting the diarists' writings, for instance stating that a diary is a "self-portrait, and as such it is a construction of self for the reader, whether the latter be Mass-Observation or the diarist herself" (Kertesz, 1993: 73-74). She also suggests that a diarist can portray two kinds of 'self': an "increasingly full and coherent" 'self' built up through a diary's serial form (Kertesz, 1993: 74; Fothergill, 1974), as compared with "a fragmented multiplicity of images" (Kertesz, 1993: 74; Didier, 1976; Fothergill, 1974; Rendall, 1986). However, whether coherent or fragmented, Kertesz assumes that a 'self-image' is constructed in a diary and that "the more of a diary one reads, the fuller the picture of the diarist one gains" (Kertesz, 1993: 74). In contrast, it seems to me that notions of a coherent self are actually read into a diary; it is not immediately 'there in the text'

waiting to be discovered. Self is a social as well as individual construction, and involves the reader as well as the writer and the text. This is a point more fully developed in later chapters, for it is crucial to my own approach to analysing M-O's women's wartime diaries.

Overall, the attempts at publishing from the wartime diaries by Lane and Fremlin failed for different surface reasons, but the overload of diverse and 'tendentious' detail was certainly a factor for both. As diverse 'subjective cameras', the wartime diarists were clearly pointing up such a wealth of perspectives in their wartime diaries that Fremlin's draft could not harness them into a cohesive argument, and Lane's draft could not satisfactorily include or organise them into a linear book format. From the 1980s, there have been several publications of M-O materials, but no attempts to work with or analyse and publish from the 479 wartime diaries. When attention finally turned to the wartime diaries, this took the form of publishing (selections of) individual diaries and anthologies based on specific time-periods, and also diaries perceived as 'interesting' or 'special' in some way. There has been no recognition, however, that selecting 'interesting' or 'special' diaries is actually antithetical to the emancipatory agenda of early the M-O project, a point I shall return to. Now I shall turn to a discussion of this 'anthologising' activity.

### Anthologising the Diaries

Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, when research by Calder (1969) and Addison (1975) reawakened interest in M-O's observer materials, M-O's wartime diaries have been used largely in a superficial way, 'dipped' into to search for passages to illustrate events or to back-up analytical claims (Bloome *et al*, 1993; Kertesz, 1993). Some researchers, however, have drawn on the wartime diaries in varying degrees to compile and publish anthologies.

Calder and Sheridan's (1984) M-O anthology Speak for Yourself uses extracts from observer materials gathered between 1937 and 1949. It includes extracts from: notes made by full-time paid and voluntary observers based in Worktown, Blackpool and Blackheath which were written up into File Reports; newspaper clippings; the M-O Bulletin; as well as a small number of day-diaries and wartime diaries. Its eight chapters follow each other chronologically, and concern 'Worktown, Blackpool and London, 1937-1939'; 'The Blitz and its Aftermath, 1940-1943'; 'The Forces, 1940-1945'; and, 'Aspects of Politics, 1940-1947'. Chapter V is devoted to 'Women, 1937-45' (Calder and Sheridan, 1984: 151-186), consisting of 35 pages which start with notes from a full-time Observer, Penelope Barlow, who spent a number of weeks working and observing at a Lancashire Cotton Mill in 1937. It then moves through a National Panel Member's thoughts on 'class'; two wartime diarists' entries, one for 3 September 1939 and another regarding 'Digging for Victory' in 1941, which was a government campaign to encourage people to become self-sufficient in terms of food; and then a National Panel member's comments on her marriage in 1944. Next, extracts from FR 2059 concerning 'factory girls' in 1944 by Diana Brinton Lee (who also was a diarist) are provided. Finally, following an interesting set of photographs (some a wartime diarist's own, another of an observer 'observing', and the last of a full-time observer with her daughter), some of the National Panel's views on 'equal pay for women' are given, requested via a M-O Bulletin in February-March 1945. Here, the Panellists' diverse views are sandwiched between Calder and Sheridan's editorial commentary, which is in fact characteristic of the book's format as a whole.

The editors introduce their chapter on 'women' by stating that:

"By the latter half of the war, women outnumbered their male counterparts in the composition of the national panel of Observers. The contributions they were sending in were longer, more regular and more detailed than those from men. Despite the changes brought about by war, life for the majority of women was dominated by the private sphere: the home and the family. Here was a means of self-expression – writing diaries, letters and personal reports – in keeping with women's traditional skills and inclinations, which at the same time enabled them to transcend their domestic insularity and speak out through the collective voice of Mass-Observation. There was another special appeal which Mass-Observation had for women. Its

insistence on the importance of the details of everyday life and the value of recording even the mundane and routine activities gave a new status to the daily preoccupations of most women engaged in housework and childcare..."

Calder and Sheridan (1984: 151)

Clearly, Calder and Sheridan are drawing on assumptions concerning women's associations with the "private sphere" and women's "traditional ... inclinations". They do so to emphasise that diary-writing can be a means of "transcending domestic insularity" and a means of reaching out into the social world through the collective voice of M-O. Given the frequent depiction of diaries as a 'private' and 'personal' genre, Calder and Sheridan's description of M-O's wartime diaries as a form of social interaction is telling about the porous nature of the genre boundaries within which 'diaries', and indeed all other 'types' of life-writing, are situated. They go on to state that:

"The central core of Mass-Observation's full-time staff was also preponderantly female in the 1940s. Originally the team had been composed mostly of men but conscription and other demands had gradually whittled down their numbers. Bob Willcock still directed the research but the reports and observations conducted at the time are marked with the initials of mostly female investigators: Mollie Tarrant, Celia Fremlin, Priscilla Novy, Gay Taylor, Stella Schofield, Nina Masel, Marion Sullivan, Doris Hoy, Diana Brinton Lee, Veronica Tester, and many others..."

Calder and Sheridan (1984: 151-152)

Women thus played a large part in all types of M-O activities, except running it, although Mollie Tarrant is an exception here because, as noted in Chapter 1, she became the Research Director of M-O Ltd. following its transformation into a market research company in 1949 (Sheridan, 2000). Tarrant, like a number of other women in the immediate war/post-war period, was well-trained in quantitative research methods and played a part in the positivist revolution taking place across the social sciences and social research more broadly at that time – as noted earlier, a revolution that contributed significantly to the demise of the 'original' M-O (Stanley, 1995a).

Overall, Calder and Sheridan's (1984) anthology 'show-cases' the diversity of early M-O's observers, diarists, topics of study and research methodologies. The wartime diaries are underused and also represented as only a small proportion of the material the M-O A contains. However, Calder and Sheridan's (1984) final chapter, VIII, 'The Tom Harrison Mass-Observation Archive', lists the sorts of material the Archive contains, acting as guidance for potential researchers. This was not incidental, for M-O launched its 'new' phase of research in 1981, and it was the first anthology to be published following this.

Six years later, Sheridan focused specifically on women in Wartime Women: An Anthology of Women's Wartime Writing for Mass-Observation 1937-1945 (Sheridan, 1990). Also organised chronologically, this anthology consists of 23 short chapters divided into five parts: (1) Writing for Mass-Observation; (2) If Hitler Comes ...; (3) War Becomes a Way of Life; (4) Appealing to Women?; and (5) Towards a New World for Women? A detailed twelve-page "Introduction" pre-figures these sections, and begins by suggesting that in the twentieth century women have come onto the "stage" that is war, being empowered through its reconstructive social implications albeit only through the "machinery of destruction" (Sheridan, 1990: 1). Women in Britain who worked inside or outside of the home were almost as likely as soldiers to be killed during the various Blitzkrieg; war affected 'home' just as much as 'abroad', with women being conscripted into war work and, often in addition, becoming 'domestic soldiers' (Purcell, 2004, 2006, 2008) employed, among many other spaces, on the 'kitchen front' (Grisewood *et al*, 1942). Sheridan (1990: 2) thus "tells the stories of women mostly still in traditional 'women's jobs'", including those working at home.

This anthology raises two sets of issues relevant to my thesis concerning Sheridan's discussion of her choice of extracts and practices of editing,<sup>52</sup> and the claims made about writing styles and also 'audience'. Firstly, Sheridan writes that

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<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Bunkers (2002) and Jolly (1995) on editing practices.



her selection of extracts from women's M-O writings was an "idiosyncratic process" and that "someone else with the same remit would almost certainly have chosen quite different pieces" (Sheridan, 1990: 5). With many thousands of writings not included, Sheridan acknowledges that her selection is neither representative nor necessarily 'the best of the crop'. Rather, it was based on including "different forms" of material, and that, because she finds 'autobiographical'<sup>53</sup> writing most appealing, she has "deliberately given more space to diary extracts, long questionnaire replies [i.e. directive replies] and letters than to the drier 'objective' style of the [File] Reports" (Sheridan, 1990: 6). Indeed, compared with Calder and Sheridan (1984), Sheridan's 1990 anthology includes far more diary material, although she also includes extracts from File Reports concerning women and women's organisations, not least because "working-class women's voices in the Archive are more often represented by the professional Mass-Observers" in such reports (Sheridan, 1990: 6). This anthology is an amalgam of M-O observer materials; but, moreover, it is an amalgam of different women and different women's views, because Sheridan tries to include women of:

"different ages, classes and geographical origins; there are married, single and widowed women, women with and without children, women doing different kinds of war work and women with different political perspectives."

Sheridan (1990: 6)

Sheridan also acknowledges having some "favourite" women writers, in particular Nella Last, Muriel Green (D 5324) (an 18-year-old garage assistant from a village in Norfolk) and Amy Briggs (D 5284) (a nurse in her early thirties from Leeds) among others. Here Sheridan admits to having "great difficulty in cutting down" the diaries of the latter two (Sheridan, 1990: 6). There is something important about the connections between sentences and paragraphs within a diary day, and also between diary instalments, that makes breaking-up the text difficult. This perhaps relates to the narrative that is shaped by temporal connectivity, something discussed

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<sup>53</sup> See Sheridan (1993b) for a consideration of M-O as a form of autobiography, and see Sheridan (1996) for a consideration of M-O as 'life history'.

in a later chapter. Sheridan also comments on further editing issues which are pertinent to my inclusion of diary-extracts in later chapters of this thesis.

Sheridan states that “almost any changes to the original text (even transferring it to printed form) can be construed as a form of violence to the author’s intentions” (Sheridan, 1990: 11). However, a publishable book has to be edited into something both “readable” and “sellable”, and so some degree of “interference with the raw material” is necessary (Sheridan, 1990: 11). Sheridan implies that such editorial “interference” may be a ‘good thing’ because, she argues, in being “too purist in these matters” a “disservice is done to the writers” because:

“... most of the M-O material was written in quite difficult conditions, often in haste and without the opportunity to go over the text and correct mistakes.”

Sheridan (1990: 11).

Sheridan comments that she has therefore corrected spellings and ‘improved’ some punctuation, and, although mostly retaining original grammar and the diarists’ uses of emphatic punctuation, she has broken longer passages into shorter ones, removed some “repetitious and extraneous” references (indicated by three dots) and used square brackets for editorial comments and to indicate unclear or missing words (Sheridan, 1990: 11). These amendments are common-place in editorial practice, although often little discussed, and Sheridan recognises the dilemmas they pose by describing herself as ‘consoled’ by the fact that the “unedited archive remains for anyone who wishes to examine the original texts and who has the time and material resources for such an enormous task!” (Sheridan, 1990: 11).

Sheridan’s editorial decisions are of course entirely understandable, but placed me in a quandary about whether to amend diarists’ writings to meet perceived ‘standardised’ English. The quote from Sheridan above was helpful, however, in bringing home to me that it is the things ‘taken-away’ by standardisation which I am

interested in, namely the “conditions” of writing (i.e. place, space, materiality) and the sometimes hastiness of writing (i.e. time), both of which significantly contribute to diarists’ writing styles. These factors of space and time are an important aspect of diary-writing, and thus of the stories written and how they come to be read. As a consequence, in my use of diary-extracts throughout this thesis I have literally ‘typed-out-what-I-read’, word-for-word, spelling-mistake-for-spelling-mistake, grammar-for-grammar, and punctuation-for-punctuation. At times my efforts were thwarted by my computer’s spell-checker and queried by its grammar-checker, and of course by my own errors. However, I wanted as much parity as possible between the original diary-extracts and my typed representations, for this is pertinent to the key themes of my analysis regarding time and space.

Sheridan (1990: 6) suggests that M-O diarists’ varying writing styles reflect the “ease or difficulty” with which they “reproduced their thoughts on paper”. To some extent this is true, but my examination of the wartime diaries suggests that the connections between ‘writing styles’ and ‘thoughts’ are mediated by contextual (spaces and times) and social (people in spaces and times) factors. In parenthesis, Sheridan (1990: 6) suggests that this ease or difficulty has “almost nothing to do with the intrinsic interest of what they wrote”. This again may be partly true, because both Sheridan and I find women’s writings ‘intrinsically’ interesting. But what then makes some women’s writings more interesting than others? What is it that drew Sheridan particularly to Nella Last, Muriel Green and Amy Briggs, amongst others, and me to Nella Last? Widely reading in the wartime diaries, I conclude that this is at least partly related to writing style: there is something about Last’s way of writing, for instance, that particularly captured me as a reader as well as a researcher. The way in which she wrote sometimes frustrated but always enthralled me. Her attention to everyday details, recipes and sewing, descriptions of acquaintances, driving around Lancashire, reflections on the past and future and on her letter-writing, among many other things, were written in an engaging fashion and particularly appealed to me. This is discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

In addition, Sheridan states that 'audience' is explicit in some diaries and implicit in others, and that the diarists' written senses of audience connect to their constructions of Mass-Observation and what they perceive as "proper Mass-Observing", arguing that in the wartime diaries:

"... there is the clearest expression of the relationship between M-O and its correspondents. It was a relationship which at one and the same time facilitated writing and yet imposed upon it a specific context."

Sheridan (1990: 9)

Some diarists, Sheridan notes, tried to engage the staff at Blackheath in explicit dialogue, with, for instance, Muriel Green teasing Harrisson by writing: "We have always wondered why the cannibals did not eat Mr Harrisson" (Sheridan, 1990: 8). She also, interestingly, flags up that diarists sometimes used the "excuse of Mass-Observing to get into conversations" with people face-to-face (Sheridan, 1990: 9). Such things convey the fact that epistolary conversations or dialogues necessarily take place over time in the case of M-O's wartime diaries, which are in some respects like letters, also over space and between people. Such exchanges usually begin with one party prompting a correspondence, exemplified in Sheridan's (1990: 267) suggestion that researchers interested in M-O and potential new observers should write to the Archive, noted too in Calder and Sheridan (1984), as well as in Harrisson's initial call for the diaries. These ideas concerning epistolarity and correspondence are examined in detail in the next chapter.

During the 1990s, no M-O anthologies based on the wartime diaries were published. Following the millennium, however, a number of M-O anthologies have been published and at least two were being worked on in 2007 (Koa Wing, 2008; Purcell, 2008).

Simon Garfield has edited a trilogy of anthologies based on a selection of M-O wartime diaries. The first, Our Hidden Lives... (Garfield, 2005a), looks at the

immediate post-war period from Victory in Europe (VE) Day in 1945 to the genesis of the National Health Service (NHS) in 1948. It is based exclusively on the wartime diary-writings of five diarists, two women, Maggie Joy Blunt (5401) and Edie Rutherford (D 5447), and three men, B. Charles, George Taylor and Herbert Brush.<sup>54</sup> Garfield's (2005c) second anthology, We Are At War..., is again based on five particular diarists, this time diaries from August 1939 through to those written during the Blitz in October 1940. Maggie Joy Blunt appears again, but the other diarists are different from those in Garfield's first anthology and, apart from Christopher Tomlin, are all women, pseudonymously named Pam Ashford (D 5390), Eileen Potter (D 5382) and Tilly Rice (D 5396). Garfield's (2006a) third anthology, Private Battles..., uses diaries from November 1940 to May 1945. Here excerpts from Maggie Joy Blunt's and Pam Ashford's diaries are used, but two new male diarists make an appearance: Edward Stebbing and Ernest Van Someren, the heirs of whom had agreed that their real names could be used (Garfield, 2006: 5).

Garfield's trilogy raises a number of issues concerning the selection of diary-extracts, as well as related issues concerning space and time. Although having initially planned his first anthology to cover the war years, when he began his archival examination Garfield realised there was little research on the immediate post-war years and that, given the fact many diarists stopped writing at the end of the war, the lesser quantity of materials would make a publication on this period more manageable. After the warm reception of Our Hidden Lives,<sup>55</sup> Garfield decided to tackle the war years, focusing on the fourteen months following August 1939 in We Are At War (Garfield, 2005c). Garfield's trilogy is therefore interesting in terms of the order of 'time-frames' examined, for its "Star Wars sequence – the sequel appearing before the prequel", as Garfield calls it, makes a difference to how the books are read (Garfield, 2005d, Paragraph 1, Lines 3-4). This is particularly so with Maggie Joy Blunt's writings, the only diarist in all three anthologies, for readers read

<sup>54</sup> I am unable to provide Diarist Numbers for the male diarists that Garfield (2005a; 2005c; 2006) includes. However, for the women diarists he cites I have identified their Diarist Numbers through my own archival research and familiarity with their writings, geographical locations, ages, occupations, and the time-scales over which they wrote.

<sup>55</sup> See also <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/cinema/features/our-hidden-lives.shtml>

the apparent 'end' of her diary-writing life (her last diary-entry was in fact in April 1950) before its 'beginning' (that is, the anthologies will have been read in publication sequence by initial readers – it will be different for later ones). This ordering is important, for it partly resembles my examination of Nella Last's wartime diary, discussed in Chapter 4.

Garfield suggests that his anthologies can be read in two rather different ways: as "the history of the period" told through the diarists represented in each volume (Garfield, 2005b, Paragraph 10, Line 14), and as "character studies" (Garfield, 2005b, Paragraph 11, Line 1). For myself, the former is most prominent, for not only are his extracts introduced with a small amount of 'this was what was happening at the time' commentary, but also, as he states on his website, "Inevitably, [his] selection has been influenced ... by the entries that advance the narrative in the most fluent way" (Garfield, 2005d, Paragraph 17, Lines 3-5). Garfield does not describe the exact nature of this narrative, but I assume he means the 'plot' of each anthology as a whole, as well as of each diarists' written life. This plot is contingent upon Garfield's selections of the diarists' comparable and contrastive experiences over time, which he orders in a chronological, day-to-day, month-to-month fashion, mimicking the assumed form of a diary (this is the common format used as a framework for the anthologies based on diaries).

Garfield makes two further interesting claims concerning the selected wartime diarists. He suggests the common link is that "they are all sincere" (Garfield, 2005b, Paragraph 13, Line 8). The 'sincerity' of M-O's diaries is something that has occupied previous researchers, including Kertesz (1993) and Sheridan *et al* (2000). However, it is not central to my thesis, since my considered view is that actually there is no means of knowing if these diaries are 'sincere'. He also suggests that the diarists wrote "without an eye on future publication" (Garfield, 2005b, Paragraph 13, Lines 8-9), which again has been discussed by Kertesz (1993) and Sheridan *et al* (2000). The diarists did know, however, that extracts from their

diaries could be used in M-O's publications at the time. Diarists Muriel Green and her older sister Jenny Green (D 5323), for instance, scoured local libraries and bookshops around their Norfolk village to check that M-O publications were available, feeling a sense of proprietary interest in War Begins at Home (Mass-Observation, 1940), sifting the publication for their own diary-extracts and competing with each other over who was quoted the most (Sheridan, 1990: 8). At least some if not all diarists, therefore, had an eye to the public distribution of their diary-writing at the time. This is because M-O made an explicit point of wanting to widely distribute the observer materials they generated; this was an important part of their earliest agenda, mentioned in the previous chapter, and would have been known to the diarists. The potential for public usage of extracts from the wartime diaries is important to my thesis because it provides another facet to the idea of M-O's diaries as 'correspondence', again discussed in a later chapter.

Considering these anthologies together, no single view of the war is presented. Rather they all strive for diversity in representing people's views and experiences. Indeed, 'perspectival diversity' (Stanley, 2004) seems partly to guide their editorial agendas, so that 'the war' is constructed as a multifarious amalgam of voices, spaces, places, perspectives, and people. On top of this perspectival agenda, Sheridan's (1990) anthology provides the most identifiable additional stance, for her feminist approach is evidenced in her decision to focus specifically on women's M-O writings, and also in including writings from women who were actively involved in the war effort, whether undertaking wartime work outside of the home or on the 'kitchen front'. Garfield's trilogy too has an additional agenda, to include diarists who 'wrote well', perhaps due to his background as a journalist and writer rather than academic.

Interestingly, across these anthologies, little space is provided for indifference or for the 'abstainer', so that the war is presented as an all-consuming, all-encompassing event (which it most likely was for most). Through the editors'

selections, then, the wartime diaries are presented as written by people that felt strongly about the war effort, albeit in varying degrees and with different emphases. This certainly relates to the fact that, to become an M-O diarist, people had to actively volunteer and 'want to' participate. However, as M-O's agenda strongly prioritised including all 'subjective cameras' as equal, it is odd that abstainers and the disengaged are so entirely unrepresented.

Also and importantly, in all the anthologies the diaries are presented as unproblematic sources for gaining information about the writers' wartime experiences. Indeed, they are treated as 'records of fact', with the relationship between the 'real-world' and its representation taken as a tacit mirror. This seems odd for the most recent, by Garfield, considering intellectual changes and currently strong ideas about anti-referentialism which prevail in academic discussions of life-writing. Alongside this, the editors of the anthologies all make significant changes to the manuscript versions of the diaries they include, and this affects how readers interpret them, although the editors do not acknowledge this. In particular, 'corrections' of the results of 'hastiness' remove many of the signs of the temporal dimensions of writing; time is of the essence regarding diary-writing, so this is an important and consequential editorial intervention. Also, as noted earlier, the focus of the anthologies on 'interesting' or 'special' diarists was not what original M-O was interested in, indeed is antithetical to the M-O political and ethical project. Interestingly, this antithetical focus has continued, with several 'special' individual M-O wartime diaries being edited and published, which I now discuss.

### Publishing Women's Wartime Diaries

Part of Nella Last's diary, Nella Last's War: A Mother's Diary 1939-45, was published in 1981 (Broad and Fleming, 1981). Naomi Mitchison's diary, Among You Taking Notes: The Wartime Diary of Naomi Mitchison, was published in 1985 (Sheridan, 1985). The sole male-authored M-O wartime diary to be published so far, Edward Stebbing's Diary of a Decade 1939-1950 (Stebbing, 1998), appeared in



1998. A few years later, Robert Malcolmson redirected attention to editing and publishing of individual diaries, the result being publication of three further women's wartime diaries, those of Rachel Dhonau as Wartime Norfolk: The Diary of Rachel Dhonau 1941-1942 (Malcolmson and Searby, 2004), Olivia Cockett as Love and War in London: A Woman's Diary 1939-42 (Malcolmson and Cockett, 2005), and Kathleen Tipper as A Woman in Wartime London: The Diary of Kathleen Tipper 1941-1945 (Malcolmson and Malcolmson, 2006). Malcolmson is currently (in October 2007) editing the years 1946 to 1949 of Nella Last's diary for publication, and may include a postscript to 1952.

Whereas Last's and Mitchison's diaries had to be significantly 'trimmed' to publishable length – for instance, Sheridan's (1985) edition of Mitchison's diary represents only one tenth of her writing over the war years – Cockett's diary was published as "complete and unabridged" (Malcolmson and Cockett, 2005: xi). Dhonau's published diary is said to omit only sixteen words from the original manuscript for 1941-1942 in order to preserve the anonymity of a possibly still living person, although she wrote until February 1944 and stopped "literally, in mid-sentence" (Malcolmson and Searby, 2004: xiii, 239; Malcolmson and Malcolmson, 2006: xvii, fn. 10). Tipper's diary, however, was edited in a more pronounced way, with Malcolmson and Malcolmson (2006: xvii) breaking it into three parts: in Part 1 (1941-42) and Part 3 (1944-45), they selected excerpts that "highlight[ed] conditions in Wartime London" and omitted what Tipper wrote about events she did not directly experience. In Part 2 (1942-1944), however, the editors seemingly "reproduce[d] (with one small exception) her whole diary for this period", although in several places they "summarised several weeks of the diary" and also provided an 'epilogue' which condensed Tipper's writing between April 1945 and 1 February 1947 (Malcolmson and Malcolmson, 2006: xvii; 183-195).

Cockett's, Dhonau's and Tipper's diaries were all supplemented with other materials. For instance, in producing Love and War in London ... (Malcolmson and

Cockett, 2005), Malcolmson supplemented Olivia Cockett's M-O wartime diary with a number of her directive replies. He also used materials outside M-O, particularly three "private journals" (held by Cockett's niece Hilary Munday), mainly written before late 1940. These additional sources, Malcolmson and Malcolmson (2006: xvii, fn. 10) suggest, "augment the testimony of [Cockett's] diary itself".

Malcolmson also provided extracts from other mainly women diarists (both M-O and non-M-O) in his discussion of Cockett's February 1940 and September 1940 diary-entries; and he used contemporary sources, such as newspapers, to "amplify" as well as "clarify and enlarge upon matters" mentioned by Cockett herself (Malcolmson and Cockett, 2005: xi). In preparing Rachel Dhonau's M-O diary for publication, Malcolmson and Searby (2004: xiii) similarly include occasional excerpts from her directive replies to "elaborate on or supplement remarks in her diary". They included comments gained from Tim Dhonau, her eldest son, who "shared ... his memories of family and personal papers in his possession"; Peter Brooks, a Sheringham local historian; the BBC Archives; Norwich Local History Library as well as various University libraries (Malcolmson and Searby, 2004: ix-xiiv). Malcolmson and Malcolmson's (2006: viii) edition of part of Tipper's diary similarly drew on other sources and people: they met, telephoned and exchanged written communications with Kathleen Tipper herself and her sister Joyce Tipper. And in July 2004, Tipper wrote a three-page summary of her recollections for 1943, as she had not written her M-O diary during that time, and the content of this was used in italics in the chronological published order of the diary (Malcolmson and Malcolmson, 2006: 73).

Consequently, all of these diaries as edited for publication are rather different from the M-O manuscript 'originals', being added to, subtracted from, edited and otherwise changed although represented as 'the thing itself'. Interestingly, five of these six published M-O wartime diaries were written by women, which perhaps says something about the convention of associating diaries, and 'private' writing more broadly, with women. These published women's wartime diaries raise various considerations important to my thesis, and in what follows I shall look across them. Although the content of each is fascinating and important, this is not my focus.

Instead, I shall concentrate on the editorial practices employed, because these importantly impact on how these diaries are read, and from my reflections on this have informed how I have used diary-extracts in my thesis.

An important aspect of the editorial practices concerns decisions about presentation. All five of the published women's wartime diaries share a similar format, moving forward chronologically through the particular war years it is concerned with. Days, months and years are variously separated by emboldened, italicised, underlined or larger typefaces, the same purpose being served by paragraph breaks or editorial commentary, which is sometimes italicised in a smaller typeface or footnoted. Although in the original diaries the diarists often separated their diary-entries by following the convention of writing the day and date above each entry, in the published versions the paragraph-spacing, italicisation, and also editorial commentary, serves to visually break-up the entries in a significantly more emphatic way. And on this latter aspect, in all five published wartime diaries, editorial comments are variously placed at the start of chapters, between or within extracts (for instance, in Sheridan's (1985) use of square brackets within the text), and/or below extracts in footnotes, and are italicised or entered in different/smaller typefaces in order to mark them apart. Visually as well as interpretationally, the editorial 'voice' is marked and stands out.

Also each published diary results from a 'translation' of the manuscript. What is published has a rather different layout and 'look' from Naomi Mitchison's closely typed quarto pages, Nella Last's mostly double-sided hand-written letter-paper sheets, Olivia Cockett's sometimes typed but mostly hand-written snappy paragraphs, Rachel Dhonau's inscriptions on lined writing paper and Kathleen Tipper's typescript entries, which were most likely typed-up from hand-written notes written earlier the same day (Malcolmson and Malcolmson, 2006: xvi). These differences in presentation affect the way in which readers read through the manuscripts and interpret the things being written about, and perhaps also the

diarists' lives more generally. However, they are 'vanished' by the format published in.

Another important editorial practice concerns what kinds of materials are selected for inclusion in the published version. I have already mentioned some of Malcolmson's editorial practices regarding Kathleen Tipper's diary. Sheridan (1985: 21) notes that Naomi Mitchison produced two diaries during the time she wrote for M-O, sending an edited version to Blackheath headquarters. In producing the published version of Mitchison's M-O wartime diary, Sheridan draws mainly on her 'top' copy, namely the one which was not sent to M-O. Sheridan's reasoning is that Mitchison's copy was fuller and uncensored, which raises the question of why Sheridan selected it and whether in fact the 'top' copy was a M-O diary at all. This 'top' diary does not seem to have been in direct response to Harrison's call for diaries; and there are important differences between the two versions, for Mitchison had self-edited the M-O version in line with the audience she perceived would read it. Consequently, Sheridan's use of Mitchison's 'top' copy removes this audience-specificity, thereby 'vanishing' at least part of Mitchison's relationship with M-O and her envisaged readers.

In producing the published version of Nella Last's M-O diary, Broad and Fleming (1981) included only the entries written between 'bedtime' 3 September 1939 and the early morning of 15 August 1945, and so excluded the remaining twenty years of writing. This had an important and direct impact on my reading of Last's original diary. When producing their book, the editors had employed students and archive staff (from discussions with the current archivists) to transcribe Last's wartime entries into typed format. Subsequently, to preserve them, many if not all of the wartime entries written by women and men were microfiched. Mainly, the original diaries were filmed; but with Nella Last's wartime entries, the microfiche was in fact made from Broad and Fleming's typed transcripts. Initially I thought that Last had herself typed her diary, until I asked to look at her post-war entries.

Working on the manuscript, I noticed differences between the original and the typed version. Errors in spelling were evident, as were gaps where words could not be deciphered, and sometimes incorrect words had been inserted. My focus was not on the 'mistakes' in Broad and Fleming's (1981) version, but that such transcribing issues led me to transcribe with as much detailed accuracy as possible.

I also became intrigued by Broad and Fleming's 'false-start' to Last's diary. Nella Last in fact began her wartime diary on 30 August 1939, and not 3 September 1939. Their decision to start 'the diary' with the day on which World War Two was declared is not surprising, but their exclusion of the comments Nella wrote before bedtime that day is. In these she mentions that her son Arthur, home from Manchester for the weekend, had noticed "a growing feeling against Jews – particularly foreign Jews" (D 5353, 3 September 1939). Perhaps Broad and Fleming (1981) believed this would not be a desirable beginning to their book or perhaps other factors were involved, but there is no mention or explanation of the omission.

Nella Last's War... was published by Falling Wall Press. Its publisher, Jeremy Mulford, provided a paragraph on the 'Preparation of the Text' at the rear of the book and an 'uncorrected' excerpt (Broad and Fleming, 1981: 318-319). Mulford initially believed that Last's writing should not be altered, because "the slips and the grammatical irregularities, the inconsistencies of convention (in rendering of money, numbers, etc.), the lack of punctuation at times, and the frequent use of 'and' or dashes or both in some passages" were to be expected in a huge body of work (Mulford in Broad and Fleming, 1981: 318). His view initially was that to correct and standardise Last's writing would "deprive it of some of its immediacy and personal quality" (Mulford in Broad and Fleming, 1981: 318). However, he came to agree with Broad and Fleming that the diary "... should receive the sort of attention that a text would normally be given if the author were still alive – correction of spelling and punctuation, regularisation of conventions, occasional changes to sentence structure, etc." (Broad and Fleming, 1981: viii). Similarly, in editing Naomi

Mitchison's diary, Sheridan corrected typing and spelling errors and removed some "detail and repetition", indicated by ellipses (Sheridan, 1985: 21); and Malcolmson inserted missing letters and corrected typographic errors, punctuation and made consistent capitalization, with the editorial aim of "consistency and clarity" (Malcolmson and Cockett, 2005: xii). All done with good intention, but leading to 'ur-diaries' translated from the archive manuscripts.

References to the 'hurried' way in which these diaries were written are frequently made by their editors. Relatedly, the reader's comprehension (or otherwise) of 'unexplained references' are highlighted by Broad and Fleming (1981) and Sheridan (1985). Both points connect to time and what the diarist does and does not do because of it. Unlike autobiographies, as Sheridan notes, diaries usually have "no reassuringly confidential asides to guide the reader", and her editorial agenda is presented as providing such asides without "interfering with [the] sense of continuity" (Sheridan, 1985: 21). Broad and Fleming (1981: 312-314) strive for something similar, indeed, including a glossary which lists "slang and proper names other than people". Sheridan's idea of 'continuity' between diary-entries being important is interesting and I shall return to it in a later chapter.

Ideas about space and place are also evoked around the circumstances in which these diaries were written. The five published women's wartime diaries are by women living in very different parts of Britain with very different experiences of the war. While Nella Last writes mainly from Barrow-in-Furness, Lancashire, she sometimes writes whilst on holiday – her visit to Scarborough in June 1947 perhaps being the most memorable. Naomi Mitchison writes mostly from Carradale House, near Campbeltown, on the Kintyre Peninsula, West Scotland, although her busy political life, and that of her husband, often takes her to Glasgow and London, from where she also sometimes writes. Olivia Cockett writes mostly from Brockley near Lewisham in London, and Kathleen Tipper writes from quite near to Cockett, as well

as from Central London whilst at work. And Rachel Dhonau writes mainly from the coastal village of Sheringham on the North Norfolk coast.

Knowing about place is seen as important, editorially. Sheridan comments about visiting Carradale House when editing Naomi Mitchison's diary, that "There can hardly be a better way of researching the background than by absorbing first hand the atmosphere of the place itself" (Sheridan, 1985: 22), so gaining a 'picture' of the surroundings in and about which the diarist wrote. This connects to 'materialising' the places and spaces written about in diaries more generally, and I too felt it was important to 'picture' where Nella Last lived and visited Barrow-in-Furness and other towns in the Lancashire isthmus. Nella Last died on 22 June 1968 (Hinton, 2004), so I was unable to meet her. In this regard, Sheridan comments on how she was "particularly fortunate in having Naomi's advice and encouragement" (Sheridan, 1985: 22), while Malcolmson and Malcolmson (2006: viii) similarly mention the value of meeting Kathleen Tipper "on five occasions". Themes concerning time and space/place recur, and 'correcting' a diary with regard to repetitions, as some of these editors have, removes some of the very things that I find engaging, namely the time, place and context in which the diarists wrote.

'Self-study', 'self-observation' and 'self-exploration' are all usually seen as important aspects of diaries. Malcolmson, for instance, states that Olivia Cockett wrote about emotions, largely her own, proposing that she was "psychologically inclined" to do so, with this the "product of introspective personalities" (Malcolmson and Cockett, 2005: 4). For him, Cockett's diary portrays a "self in the making" (Malcolmson and Cockett, 2005: 1-2). However, Malcolmson indicates that Cockett also pursued "the deeper meanings of life ... through reading, listening to music, contemplating the natural world, and being with people she loved" (Malcolmson and Cockett, 2005: 1), suggesting a more 'public' dimension to her self-making. What interests me about this is that Malcolmson draws on the often repeated public/private dichotomy which frames many discussions of autobiography and life-writing more

broadly. He suggests, for instance, that “blending of public and private was a crucial feature of many wartime diaries” (Malcolmson and Cockett, 2005: 3); and also that there is “something of a public dimension even to very personal journals” (Malcolmson and Cockett, 2005: 2). However, Malcolmson still assumes that the ‘private’ characterises diaries, that they are by nature a ‘private’ form of life-writing and that this is a key characteristic of the diary as a genre. Later chapters will problematise this assumption in a root and branch way concerning M-O’s women’s wartime diaries and ‘the writing self’ within them.

Taken together, the five edited and published wartime diaries and their editors’ discussions concerning them, together with the M-O’s anthologies discussed earlier, provide interesting ideas, some of which are examined later. In all these publications, the content of the diaries are focused on, rather than the social practices involved in writing them, particularly those developing over time. This is perhaps understandable, given that the readership which the editors targeted is a ‘popular’ and mainly non-academic one (Sheridan, 1990). Some scholars have, however, focused on M-O’s diary material rather more analytically, notably Liz Stanley’s (1995b) work on the 1937 day-diaries and Margaret Kertesz’s (1993) study of the wartime diaries, discussed earlier. Yet there is still little consideration of the ways in which people have practiced and utilised this form of life-writing over time (Sheridan *et al*, 2000; but see Jolly, 2001), or indeed in time, both of which will be discussed in later chapters.

### A Conclusion: M-O’s Wartime Diaries, Editing, Time and Genre

M-O started its wartime diaries for good reasons connected to its overall project. As noted earlier, there were reasons related to an economic organisational strategy. Many of the wartime diarists not only already contributed directive replies, but had also written day-diaries, and thus were practiced at corresponding with M-O and knew the terms of the correspondence and the procedures and purposes involved. M-O drew on and enlarged this pool of volunteers in order to provide a



methodological response at, and regarding, a particular moment in time. Requesting wartime diaries freed-up M-O staff time by passing over a good deal of responsibility to the diarists themselves, and it also enabled M-O to keep collecting an expanding body of material from a large number of ordinary people living in many different places. Asking for 'full diaries' was a continuation of M-O's emancipatory research agenda, but it also marked a significant departure – the 'extraordinary' event which M-O and its diarists faced was not a one-day Coronation like 12 May 1937, but an event with no precise end, and one that was generally thought would last at least some months if not years. Calling for 'full diaries' set up research with an ongoing focus, fulfilling the organisation's wish to keep a social record over an undetermined and lengthier period of time than the day-diaries allowed. In so doing, M-O's wartime diarists became 'subjective cameras' who operated 'in-time-over-time', adding an important 'over time' dimension to M-O's data, that would strengthen its knowledge-base by broadening its temporal scope. Significantly, M-O's request for the wartime diaries not only drew on an established relationship of correspondence between M-O and many of its volunteers, but it also intimated a duration to this correspondence – war diaries – built into which was an element of feedback, an important aspect of early M-O's emancipatory agenda (Laing, 1980; Summerfield, 1985: 440), with reciprocity of exchange also being a characteristic of correspondence, of course.

One way in which M-O fed back information regarding its activities and findings to its volunteers was through its US magazine, a broadsheet that was posted out and which contained excerpts from the wartime diaries as well as other M-O materials. Initially this magazine reported on the unfolding analysis of the wartime diaries. However, because of the increasing volume of diary-material which could not easily be condensed, it experienced overload. Also, as discussed earlier, M-O attempted to feed back on the wartime diaries to a potentially broader audience through the two 1940s drafts for publication by Yeta Lane and Celia Fremlin. And beneath the surface differences, these efforts both collapsed under the weight of detail, diversity and volume.

What followed some forty years later were anthologies and 'whole' diaries based on the wartime diaries. These publications sidestepped concerns regarding content and volume overload, by imposing simple frameworks of radical selection. As noted earlier, however, these frameworks are 'anti-original' M-O, or rather antithetical to early M-O's emancipatory agenda, in several respects. The editors are concerned to select 'special' or 'interesting' diaries, while it was the viewpoints of ordinary people which were central to early M-O's activities. The editors also concentrate on one or a select few diarists, which does not provide the breadth of 'subjective cameras' that original M-O sought, and in fact valorises special lives, particular 'observation points' and specific viewpoints, rather than being focused on the multiplicity of 'the masses' that early M-O was concerned with.

The ways that the editors have published from the wartime diaries is also antithetical to the original M-O agenda in ways that directly relate to time and temporality. The editors, for instance, frequently select specific time periods of diary-writing to include in their publications; mostly it is the wartime years which form the focus, even though some diarists wrote far beyond this time, such as Nella Last. The 'special' time of war is basic to most of the editors' selection policies, which was perhaps another reason why Broad and Fleming's (1981) edition of Nella Last's diary starts on 3 September 1939. As a result, not only are particular lives valorised, but M-O's activities as an organisation and over a broader stretch of time is lost sight of.

Furthermore, all the editors present their publications around a simple temporal structural line. They treat time unproblematically by each using the chronological, sequential and linear convention often taken as typical of diary-keeping. This relates to them seeing the diaries as containers of 'facts' about, and referential of, the lives of the diarists at the time of writing. It also assumes that each diary-entry, because supposedly necessarily fixed to a particular calendar date, can

be 'lifted' smoothly into another document. Also, by 'correcting' the content of the diary-entries, the editors remove some of the diarists' temporal markers, rubbing out the signs of 'hastiness', for instance, although these are features that help make the diaries what they 'are' in a fundamental way, as discussed in the chapters following. These temporal markers also point to the spatial circumstances in which the diarists wrote, and when they are removed this serves to further disconnect the texts from the contexts of their writing. The use of a simple temporal line, and also the 'correction' of content, reframes the wartime diaries, significantly altering how they are read and interpreted by making them fall 'in line' with a perceived 'correct' order of things.

These various editorial practices hone women's wartime diaries into a more cohesive shape. However, unifying their temporal diversities and sometimes disparities suppresses the complexities both structurally and in terms of content, in their presentation of 'the war' and its occurrences. Entirely unintentionally, it also counteracts M-O's aim to use the diaries to embrace diversity and difference by implying that a straight-forward and singular temporal line frames or underpins the course of time and history. M-O's conceptualisation of observers as 'subjective cameras' was intended to directly rebut such an approach, seeing the wartime diarists neither as purveyors nor mirrors of a singular, cohesive version of time and history, but instead being the means of demonstrating diverse and sometimes competing accounts. In short, the editors present a simple relationship between time, the wartime diaries and indeed diaries in general. The time-related editorial practices deployed in producing the published M-O anthologies and 'whole' diaries also assume a 'sameness' about the way the wartime diarists treat and use time in their diaries, with editorial practices working to consolidate this. In so doing, the 'over time' dimensions that the introduction of wartime diaries added to early M-O's 'subjective camera' analogy is considerably diminished.

The methodological and analytical problems discussed so far regarding the published M-O anthologies and 'whole' diaries have been 'good to think', because

they have helped me realise possibilities regarding my own analytical approach in the chapters following, however, which I will conclude this chapter by sketching out.

The importance of researching the original manuscript wartime diaries stored at the M-O A, instead of working with published secondary materials, came resoundingly to the fore, has underpinned many of my ensuing methodological decisions, and facilitated my research focus. My analytical approach to the wartime diaries entails examining in detail the specific writing practices that the diarists use and also wrote about in their diaries (including how this interfaces with reading practices), rather than being content-focused or exploring only particular predetermined topics. Broadly, my approach concerns attending to the wartime diaries as a 'form' and as part of a genre, with the aim of understanding what they 'are'. And again, this necessitates exploring specific writing practices rather than reading 'content' or 'topics', for which the published diaries might have been sufficient. Given my emergent research concerns, they were not.

My conclusions about the problematics of the already published wartime diaries and M-O anthologies also led me to realise that I wanted to develop an analytical approach which is more in-keeping with early M-O's emancipatory agenda. Therefore, throughout this thesis I do not wholly focus on 'special' or 'interesting' diaries, or indeed entirely on World War Two as particularly 'special'. What is deemed 'special' arises in the quotidian of the wartime diaries themselves, so that sometimes public 'special occasions' are not so for all of the diarists, as I discuss in Chapter 5. And instead of focusing on the few, my research has sampled widely across the range of M-O women's wartime diaries and times in and in relation to these.

My research interest developed particularly in connection with time, temporality and space. As indicated, important aspects of this have been removed from the published diaries. Consequently focusing on the 'uncorrected' manuscript

diaries allows me to engage with these features 'as they are written' in the chapters that follow, by exploring in detail the writing practices involved. This, in turn, provides a more empirically-stable ground from which to explore how the M-O wartime diaries as a form or genre intersect with popular assumptions concerning what a diary 'is'. And by a 'more empirically-stable ground', I mean that in each case I am dealing with, and reporting on herein, each diary is as close to how it was originally written as possible, so the comparisons in this sense are like with like. Time and temporality are discussed in all the chapters following.

M-O's wartime diaries are an 'occasioned' diary 'form' and are also part of a genre, as a hybridic form that developed in this particular organisational and political context, something I discuss in Chapter 3. However, in conclusion here I want to respond to the idea of M-O's wartime diaries 'speaking for themselves', an idea noted earlier in the chapter. Firstly, as already discussed, the editorial decisions regarding the published 'whole' M-O wartime diaries and the selections in the M-O anthologies clearly mediate the narratives produced and how these can be read, and indeed they invoke particular kinds of narrative through their omissions and additions which are not those by the diarists themselves. The manuscript diaries are thus 'translated' and transformed in the editing and selecting process, which immediately calls the idea of them 'speaking for themselves' into question. Secondly, reading the manuscripts of these diaries helps to counter some of these transformations by enabling analysis of the texts 'as they are', without the obscuration of (some) layers of interpretation and translation, allowing the reader, in short, to read what the diarists actually wrote. However, it would be incorrect to conflate reading the manuscript diaries with access to either 'experience' or the 'real views' of the diarists in any referential way. Things are clearly not this simple, because the diarist's 'experiences' and 'real views', let alone 'intentions', cannot be determined for certain: her 'voice' is not 'there in the text' for all to hear in the same way. Indeed, assuming that a text is a 'mirror' to the diarist's 'voice' serves to conflate the important differences between the life world and its representations. The text is not a portal but a mediator of information, which means that the reader's

interpretive activities are very important and require detailed consideration, as discussed later in the thesis. Thirdly, and extremely important to its mediation, is understanding the context of writing a diary for M-O and also the 'nature' of a M-O diary as a 'form' in an organisational and broader social and temporal context. Indeed, proposing that the wartime diaries can 'speak for themselves' diminishes the significant influence of the setting in which the diaries were elicited, written, sent and archived. Indeed, it removes many of the interesting contextual, circumstantial, temporal and social things that this thesis is concerned with. Of course, comprehending the wartime diaries in context involves exploring where they 'sit' with regard to other diaries, something I return to in the Conclusion to this thesis. Comprehending and getting the measure of M-O's women's wartime diaries also necessitates exploring the ways that the diarists themselves write about the context, and not just the text, of their writing and how they position their day in and out and weekly writing practices with regard to popular ideas concerning what a diary 'is'. What are the implications here regarding the M-O wartime diaries as a 'form' and the M-O project and its combination of epistolary activities, diary-writing, the observations of its 'subjective cameras'? I now turn to discuss genre issues more fully.

~ Chapter Three ~

'M-O! Please Note':  
Mass-Observation's Diaries and the Diary-Genre

"... the writing process itself can and should be written into the very cultural history that M-O was constructing."

Jolly (2001: 124)

Introduction

Having now situated M-O's women's wartime diaries within their organisational and publication contexts, this chapter looks at these diaries in relation to popular understandings of the diary-genre, including that a diary is a 'private' text and has associated features such as confidentiality, trust and secrecy and in relation to questions of genre more broadly. It then examines the strong social influences that impacted on diary-writing for M-O, and also explores how M-O diaries overlap with letters. Overall, it argues that M-O's wartime diaries are best understood as social rather than private texts and that M-O as an organisation and also its diarists, multiply drew on epistolary conventions and practices.

'Mrs Higham - & my diary, are my only confidants at times':<sup>56</sup> M-O Wartime Diaries as Private Texts<sup>57</sup>

How do M-O diarists situate themselves<sup>58</sup> concerning the popular perception of diaries as 'private' texts?<sup>59</sup> Ethel Harcourt,<sup>60</sup> a 35-year-old self-described

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<sup>56</sup> D 5353, 14 August 1960.

<sup>57</sup> The broad argument of this chapter was presented at the IASH Life-Writing Seminar, University of Edinburgh, November 2006 (Salter, 2008a).

<sup>58</sup> As in Hellbeck's (2004), Paperno's (2004) and Sherman's (1996) studies of diaries, my examination too has been prompted by an interest in "what diary-writing meant to the diarists themselves" (Paperno, 2004: 567).

<sup>59</sup> Cottam (2001) discusses diaries as private texts and links her discussion to their assumed 'feminine' status, which is echoed, for example, in Blodgett (1988: 19; 1991; 1992) and Martens (1985). See Bloom's (1996) discussion of 'Private Diaries as Public Documents', and Carter (2006).

housewife from Huddersfield in Yorkshire, for instance, treats her wartime diary as a place in which to mention happenings that, because of the war and general public views at the time, should otherwise be kept quiet about. One example here is that she writes about the imminent departure of an acquaintance, referred to as 'Sidney H', to take part in the then clandestine Allied Campaign in Norway, between April and early June 1940. Partly this transgression occurs because Harcourt perceives her diary to be private space, commenting on 30 April 1940 in parenthesis that she is:

"(... quite aware of the necessity of keeping things like this quiet but this diary is purely personal and private)."

D 5391.1, 30 April 1940

Harcourt here seems to be drawing on the assumption that a diary as a 'private' text is a confidential one in which she is able to write about happenings that in other circumstances and to other people, would be 'hush-hush'. Here, Harcourt's M-O diary is presented as a trusted space in which secrets can be divulged.

Nella Last similarly uses her M-O diary as a space in which to write about things she does not want certain other people to know, or rather to be burdened with, in 1960 writing that:

"I never ask questions – not even from Arthur or Cliff, feeling they will tell me if they want me to know – I never tell – write my 'troubles' – I would if they grew too much but they have their own, on reflection, Mrs Higham - & my diary, are my only confidants at times – with 'reservations'."

D 5353, 14 August 1960

For Nella Last, her M-O diary was a partial confidant, a space to write about the 'troubles' she feels have no place in her letters to her sons Arthur and Cliff. Bringing together her letter- and diary-writing here helps to elucidate her perceptions of her M-O diary. In January and February 1966, for instance, concerning the difficulties

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<sup>60</sup> I came across this diarist during my primary examination of the diaries. She is not listed in the searchable database of 1939-1967 diarists on the M-O A website. See [http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection\\_descriptions/massobsdiaries.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection_descriptions/massobsdiaries.html)



she experiences in writing 'bright' letters to her sons, Last writes in her diary that:

"... I try & write as brightly as I can to both Arthur & Cliff, don't let them know how distressed I feel sometimes, Cliff so far away has his own worries ..."

D 5353, 8 January 1966

In a diary-entry just over three weeks later, Last reiterates the same sentiment, but this time mentions the precise thing she tries to keep out of her letters:

"... I wrote awhile. I do find letter writing difficult, nowadays, trying to pour courage & confidence into poor Arthur, & not unduly upset Cliff with being too gloomy, & my own dark gloomy thoughts in my tired head."

D 5353, 31 January 1966

In striving to keep these "dark gloomy thoughts in my tired head" from the letters to her sons, Last uses her family letters with reticence and positions her M-O diary as a repository for them.<sup>61</sup> She also portrays her worries as personal issues requiring a confidant, whether her M-O diary or her friend Mrs. Higham:<sup>62</sup>

"... I'd a shadow on me, Arthur's letter was so despondent. I never discuss very 'personal' problems like Arthur's health & my worry, but it tightened the atmosphere a little somehow. Perhaps if I had someone in whom to confide, I'd shed some of my worries, but that's the way of me ..."

D 5353, 1 February 1966

Another M-O diarist, Naomi Mitchison (D 5378), in a note written to Tom Harrison in 1972, retrospectively referred to her M-O diary as an "invisible shoulder" to "cry on" (Sheridan, 1985: 20), with Last's comments a more restrained variant of this.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Hartley (1999: 187-188), in writing about the function of mother's letters to their children as "surrogate maternal comfort" during WW2, discusses how "suppression and reticence" governed the advice given in women's magazines, which indicated that women should "invent pious and noble fictions of themselves on paper".

<sup>62</sup> Last often refers to her friends/acquaintances in formal terms in her diary, for example as "Mrs. Higham" and "Mrs. Atkinson", which echoes a convention of address common at the time of writing and shows the reader Last's awareness and use of 'appropriate' ways of conducting social interaction.

<sup>63</sup> Perhaps echoed here is the popular assumption that diaries are used when other avenues of communication are prohibited, which links to depictions of diaries as 'sanctioned' texts, deployed by women because of the censorship of their opinions in a patriarchal society (Blodgett, 1991: 3).

Nella Last writes that treating her M-O diary (and indeed Mrs. Higham) as a confidant is not without "reservations".<sup>64</sup> As in her letter-writing, Last holds something back and does not equate confiding with full candour, as Harcourt seems to. In part, this is seen as just "the way of me" (D 5353, 1 February 1966) and in part links to Last's sense of how the content of her diary might be read. The response of a perceived audience seems to influence the content of her diary and also the way she practices her diary-writing:

"Please don't mind pencil – I write in bed & when lying down find a pencil more convenient. I'll do M-O or keep a diary always but it will have to be on the terms of indifferent writing & a pencil I'm afraid."

D 5353, 4 September 1939

"I think this will be enough for this 'diary' so will send ~~enough~~ another. Its not very 'exciting' but its my life & all I can write about."

D 5353, 7 September 1939

Last's awareness of an audience or reader might seem to conflict with describing her M-O diary as a confidant, but it is actually congruent, because she uses it to confide things she does not want to burden certain other people with, not as a secret space for herself. By confining her "dark gloomy thoughts" to her diary, Last is able to keep them out of her letters to her sons and hence maintain a "bright" persona who "... always tr[ies] to interest and amuse [her] boys" (D 5353, 25 August 1942). On at least one occasion, however, Cliff undermines this by reading part of her diary: "Cliff sat writing for a while before going out to an old boy's dance at the Grammar School ... when he said suddenly and in such a queer way, 'Don't change, Dearie – ever – fight hard against changing.' I felt startled and wondered what he meant, and he said 'I've been looking at your Mass-Observation diary. Are you really growing different – harder and less tolerant?'" (D 5353, 9 January 1941).

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<sup>64</sup> Nella Last's letter-writing was influenced by protocols of censorship operating on post during the war, shown in her avoidance of "... exact details ... or talk of camps and troops..." (D 5353, 17 January 1941) and her agreement on a "little code" to use in letters to Arthur (D 5353, 26 January 1941).

In addition to this, Last receives other benefits from writing her diary and letters, particularly in being able to practice writing as a hobby and have a kind of writing career, albeit not writing the books she had longed to write as a child:

"Anyway I've got some letters written "home" ones I can write in pencil while in bed. ... I've always envied authors & if I could have been clever would have written books. I write quite as much as the average novelist but they are only long rambling letters to my brother & boys & to friends at Christmas! I've a very uneventful life & no news but my 'own folks' like the home news & we exchange views on each & every subject."

D 5353, 19 September 1939

"...my letters & writing are my one hobby & link with the boys ..."

D 5353, 21 September 1949

"[Cliff] once begged to be 'kept in the picture over something or other so I've written in a 'gossipy' way. ... he wrote 'remember you longing to be able to write for a career?' – 'you always said you 'lacked something' – who cares about novels anyway, the letters you've written to me alone must be staggering ..."

D 5353, 12 January 1965

Ethel Harcourt, by contrast, writes about things generally considered unmentionable or clandestine, rather than, in Last's case, to keep things specifically from her sons. Harcourt appears to equate privacy with 'secrecy', another popular assumption about diary-writing (Gristwood, 1988; Taylor and Taylor, 2004), for unlike Last, she represents her diary as having an exclusive privateness, or perhaps as having the 'public' expelled from it. Interestingly, however, in the final sentence of Harcourt's 28 May 1940 diary-entry she checks her frankness and candour by writing that:

"A silly thought occurred to me. What if Mass Observation were a fifth column activity, what information they could draw from the unsuspecting public. The War make some<sup>65</sup> think silly things."

D 5391.1, 28 May 1940

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<sup>65</sup> This is Harcourt's phrasing in her original diary.

Harcourt was not alone in these concerns. Another M-O wartime diarist, Yvonne Foreman, similarly expressed alarm that her diary might have value for Britain's enemies:

"I do not know what happens to time these days. It seems to be continuous. The first thing that goes down is my shock when I learned that M-O was too informative – Deep down in my consciousness that had struck me as we really gave the people's thought as no newspaper could, so like the Saint in Patino our motto must be taken from what the Angel told him – "Write them not".<sup>66</sup>

D 5394, 11 June 1940

In a 'covering letter' attached to the diary-entry from which this comes, Foreman worries it might fall into the hands of "any one which might hurt the Country" and that she herself would be 'stamped on' by the government because of this transgression. This attachment is clearly a letter and follows letter-writing conventions. It establishes an addressee, "Mr Harrisson", and conveys thanks for receipt of a previous communication from him. The letter closes with "yours sincerely" and her signature, and just before this Foreman also indicates that she expected a response to her letter by wanting Harrisson's approval for continuing to write her diary:

"Dear Mr Harrisson.,

Thank you for your letter. Apart from personal anxiety connected with my son's health the real reason why I stopped the Diary was because like us all these days I was afraid of-a-giving information away to any one which might hurt the Country - & - Perhaps having foot down on me.

It was disturbing the pastime being stopped. Even to intimate friends I stopped writing or speaking War at all.

This was due to the silent column business.

It is strange the Mol's<sup>67</sup> people were so clumsy at getting people's views & antagonising them. However, I know Mass Observation is an independent affair. I am, however, going to the Country whenever I can fix up a suitable place because my lease is out & my son will be better in the Country. ... In view of moving, my views perhaps would not be of much value, but I shall hope to hear from you shortly that it is perfectly alright to continue this Diary.

I enclose the instalment – I left off.

Yours sincerely,  
[personal name]"

D 5394, 17 August 1940

<sup>66</sup> See Revelations 10: 4 in the Bible.

<sup>67</sup> Ministry of Information.

Foreman's phrasing implies she perceives her diary as a space for 'speaking War', despite Harrison's request that the diarists should "concentrate on the details of every-day life, their own reactions, those of their family, and people they met" (FR 621: Introduction, p.1). In addition, her comment that, if she found a "suitable place" in the country, then her views would "not be of much value" to M-O, shows her understanding of how spatial location influences diary-writing, or rather its content, and her perception that M-O staff shared this view, which certainly was the case for Jennings and Madge (1937), as noted earlier.

The concerns of both Harcourt and Foreman over the 'silent column business' roughly coincide with a circular letter sent from Blackheath to the diarists and observers in early June 1940. This mentioned the discontinuation of its US magazine because both M-O and the Government feared it might be used by the enemy (Kertesz, 1993: 52). Olivia Cockett, comments on this in her diary-entry for 6 June 1940, writing that:

"Having dropped my attempts as a Diary I have been spurred to fresh enthusiasm by the circular letter from M-O, dated 1<sup>st</sup> June. It was very disappointing to hear that US would not arrive for a time, but we had already discussed the possible value to the enemy of its objective picture, and were not surprised that 'High authority' had blocked it."

D 5278, 6 June 1940

Whereas Cockett was 'spurred to fresh enthusiasm' by M-O's letter, it does not seem to have affected Harcourt or Foreman in the same way (they do not specifically mention it in their diaries). Foreman, for instance, queries the permissibility of writing a diary for M-O and then after June 1940 stopped writing for eighteen months. She recommenced in January 1942 and then wrote her diary intermittently for the remainder of that year. Ethel Harcourt's first and last diary-installment for M-O, in nine hand-written, almost calligraphic, pages covers the period 23 April to 28 May 1940. The fact that Harcourt stopped writing for M-O after this perhaps implies that her comment about M-O being 'too informative' was

the reason. Of course, there could be other reasons, but it is suggestive that her diary-entry closes on this note. For Caroline Blake, a 61-year-old retired nurse from Steyning in Sussex, however, such worries were not a factor in the discontinuation of her diary between November 1939 and June 1940, commenting that she "... dropped the diary because life here went on so evenly there seemed nothing to say. Then I had the doctor for high blood pressure and he told me to lay off typing even gardening for a time ..." (D 5399, 24 June 1940). Blake's association of 'evenness' with having 'nothing to say' suggests that she used her diary to inscribe 'events' that were a break from her normal routine. Similarly, Valerie Brunel from Otley in Yorkshire writes that "There really doesn't seem much point in writing this diary. Nothing happens. We are out of things here" (D 5445, 6 September 1939).

Had Ethel Harcourt not included her 'silly' comment on M-O's possible Fifth Column connections in her 28 May 1940 entry, her description of her M-O diary as 'purely personal and private' could be interpreted as her thinking she was writing an entirely private text. However, this closing comment raises complications regarding both the private/secret link and the relationship between M-O's diaries and 'a diary' as a genre of life-writing, four aspects of which I want to comment on.

Firstly, Harcourt's allusion to privacy could be partly a performance,<sup>68</sup> allowing her both to invoke the popularly perceived 'private-and-thus-secret' nature of a diary and to legitimately transgress this. In other words, Harcourt draws on this convention in order to justify her transgression; it is not something that overall determines her diary-writing, but is used to achieve particular purposes.<sup>69</sup> Some diarists explicitly justify or explain their transgressions of such perceived conventions in their diary-writing, making the norms they envisage more visible. In Mr. Brown's War ... (a World War Two diary which was not written for M-O), for instance, Richard Brown writes about contravening the convention that a diary is

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<sup>68</sup> See Knowles (2005) on privacy and authenticity as performance.

<sup>69</sup> Todorov (1976: 160) argues that genres exist because, in being transgressed, "the norm becomes visible – lives – only by its transgressions".

secret when he told his wife, Dora, he was keeping one. He justifies this as necessary to his marital relationship:

"Am afraid I told Dora the other day that I am running this diary. A weak moment. Still, one ought not to have secrets from one's dear wife, Richard, and one can still talk to oneself."

Richard Brown 12 January 1940  
Millgate (1998: 20)

Secondly, Harcourt could perhaps be using the assumed status of a diary as a 'private', as well as 'personal', text to give credibility to the contents of her writing. That is, by depicting her M-O diary as 'private', she could be implying that it was more closely connected to the 'truth' about her lived experiences or, in other words, is more credible. This is an inference rather than being explicitly written by Harcourt, but there is enough ambiguity in her comment to support this reading, and it would also help explain why she wrote at the top of the first page of her diary-entry the heading "True copy of my own personal diary" (D 5391.1, 23 April 1940).

Thirdly, another complication arises here concerning the status of Harcourt's M-O diary as a 'true copy' of her 'personal' diary. By asserting this, Harcourt implies that she has not revised but just copied it and that her M-O diary mimetically represents the content and even the form of the 'other' diary,<sup>70</sup> despite being sent to an external audience, the staff at Mass-Observation. Of course, by adding this heading to her M-O diary, her non-M-O and M-O diaries are presumably different to this degree at least. It is also possible that in copying her personal diary, she simply wrote 'purely personal and private' without thinking of the implications. However, that she continues by commenting that, if read by the 'wrong' people (post was often inspected by censors during World War Two),<sup>71</sup> it could possibly compromise Allied interests, seems connected to the perceived character of diaries as spaces to confide

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<sup>70</sup> See Knowles (2005) and Stanley and Dampier (2006). As with Naomi Mitchison's 'top' copy of her M-O diary, discussed in Chapter 2 (Sheridan, 1985), I do not have access to Ethel Harcourt's 'other' diary and therefore am unable to provide a comparison. My transcriptions, then, could be a copy of Harcourt's copy, so to speak.

<sup>71</sup> See Hartley (1999: 188, 194, fn. 28) and Sheridan *et al* (2000).

things. In a way, then, Harcourt does not perceive M-O as a 'public' entity jeopardising her sense of privacy until her final comment. Interestingly, in a way the reverse of Harcourt's position, another M-O diarist, Esther Walker, also states that she takes a copy of her diary.<sup>72</sup> This was presumably to keep one for herself, and she facilitated this practice by typing her entries, which, she writes, also saves paper:

"Going to try to use the typewriter again for this diary, though it's a rickety old thing, because it takes up less paper than handwriting, and paper is getting expensive. Also I can take a better carbon copy"

D 5383, 26 June 1940

Fourthly, on closely examining Harcourt's phrasing of 'personal and private', I conclude she perceived a different meaning for these terms. She uses 'private' to connote secrecy and to imply that her diary is to be concealed from other people. Yet her diary, like all M-O diaries, was sent to Blackheath to be read by M-O staff and potentially used in publications and reports prepared for the Government, and Harcourt would have certainly known that it would not remain private, as indeed is evidenced in the last sentence of her entry for 28 May 1940, quoted earlier. Her differentiation of the personal and the private helps illuminate this complication of the whole M-O diary-writing project.

In relation to M-O's women's wartime diaries more generally, 'personal' as a descriptor does not necessarily connote secrecy and concealing a diary or its contents from others; it suggests an individual perspective, a view of the world from a personal viewpoint or, in M-O's terms, an 'observation point' (Madge, 1937). This understanding of 'personal' in relation to the wartime diaries connects with Jennings and Madge's (1937) emphasis on the importance of each subject's view of the social world, and their intention to collect as many of these in diaries as possible.

Harrison's later call for wartime diaries also drew on this idea and there was

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<sup>72</sup> M-O diarists sometimes sent their entries to people besides M-O staff, with Victoria Pinkerton writing "I am sending the Mass-Observation papers to Los Angeles – that attorney may find them interesting as an account of wartime organisation" (D 5271, 6 November 1942), and Stebbing (1998: 330) writing "I cannot recall how I sent my diary, since it was quite lengthy – did I send carbon copies?"



absolutely no intention for the resulting diaries to be 'private' in the sense of unavailable to other people, unavailable to M-O. 'Personal' also suggests that feelings about privacy and secrecy could be orientated to by the wartime diarists according to their varied perspectives as 'subjective cameras'.

In this connection, instead of perceiving her wartime diary as a personal outlet, Olivia Cockett values the fact that her diary-writing for M-O was more impersonal than letters to friends:

"Damn the sirens in my head – I have a lovely new R.V. book on the Importance of Living<sup>73</sup> & can't read it because of them in the silence. Even the ~~fami~~ familiar scratching of this pen helps keep it away. I should really write to three girl friends who are almost done but this impersonal M-O is more relieving: & they are too sane to want to receive my reactions (M-O! Please note) as their's will be so much the same I know: & glib blah we abhor."

D 5278, 4 September 1939

For Cockett, the fact that she was asked by M-O to focus on her own and other people's reactions to external events, and perhaps because of this, she finds writing to 'this impersonal M-O' in her diary as 'more relieving' than writing letters to her friends. In contrast, Nella Last treats her M-O diary-writing as a source of relief because she can write about at least some of her personal troubles. However, both Cockett and Last do find some kind of 'relief' in writing their M-O diaries,<sup>74</sup> albeit for different reasons, although not all M-O diarists seem to have felt the same way. Moira Crompton, a 63-year-old retired teacher living in London and Buckinghamshire, for instance, wrote in her final diary-entry that "This war diary – thank goodness – can now be laid aside for ever" (D 5402, 7 May 1945).<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Cockett's mention of Yutang's (1937) book suggests an interesting connection between her philosophising and M-O's distrust of the 'scientific mode of enquiry'.

<sup>74</sup> Additionally, Mitchison wrote "Everyone writing letters. I say I will write my diary and keep sane" (D 5378, 1 September 1939), which suggests she perceived diary-writing, as opposed to letter-writing, as facilitating 'sane' responses to events going on at the time. Comparably, Gristwood (1988: cover) notes that Mae West wrote that "I always say, keep a diary and someday it'll keep you".

<sup>75</sup> Crompton's final entry was written on Victory in Europe (VE) Day. Perhaps perceiving this point as a fitting time at which to stop writing their 'War' diaries, other women diarists also stopped writing for M-O in May 1945, for instance Irene Hart (D 5272), Alice Croydon (D 5307), Judith Foster (D 5310) and Ethel Schreiber (D 5478).

Five days later, Cockett again reflected on the letters she feels she should be writing to her friends, explaining she has 'not had the heart to write to' them, implying that the personal connection with her friends makes the burden of letter-writing greater:

"I have heard from one of my three closest girl friends that she will be Red Cross in Devon; the other two I have not had the heart to write to, nor they to me, though probably they are carrying on normally as far as possible; but we have so often implored that this wouldn't happen, we should probably just weep if we met, at the tremendous pity of it all."

D 5278, 9 September 1939

Writing nearly a year later, Cockett expressed a similar sentiment concerning the relief she gained from writing a M-O diary. Having been late for work and chastised by her seniors, she comments:

"Blasted awful self esteem & vanity wounded, I suppose: writing like this has practically removed the sense of grievance, though: another point to M-O."

D 5278, 10 June 1940

Like Nella Last, Olivia Cockett here uses her diary to unburden her grievances. However, unlike Last, Cockett implies that this happens because her diary-writing is impersonal. Cockett's M-O diary does not seem to be a confidant in the (rather different) ways that Harcourt and Last treat theirs: rather it is a space where she 'impersonalises' events, making them more explicable by (re)constructing them in written format. This is fairly explicit in the following:

"WAR DIARY  
Monday June 17<sup>th</sup>.

Last instalment finished on Sat. last: when I read it over on Sunday before posting, I could see it suffered badly from being written in the office, very one-sided picture of my life & reactions ...

... I am still so immature in my attempted 'philosophy' that I find it difficult to put into words how & why it is so very important to me: but over & over again I am trying

to "see life steadily & see it whole"<sup>76</sup> through the midge-cloud of War & work & social surface. I shan't mention this again, it's too vague, however huge it is to me. And I guess that M-O finds quotidian reaction to events more easily classifiable, though I know they're not more important. My whole conviction shouts passionately that if everyone would concentrate more on contemplation, synthesis, contentment, more actual results would be achieved ... in line with a deeper desire than – warfare."

D 5278, 17 June 1940

Cockett's comments here point up another shared feature of M-O's wartime diaries. In this entry she wrestles with the possibility that her writing is somehow not in keeping with M-O's concern with 'quotidian reaction', which she recognises are 'more easily classifiable'. She also laments the 'one-sided picture' which she thinks is the result of writing her diary while in her office, for she sees life as a 'whole', part of a broader philosophy than she thinks M-O's remit allows.<sup>77</sup> In a sense, then, Cockett both appreciates and appears to be frustrated by M-O's desire to engage with the 'nitty-gritty' of everyday life, with making sense of what she calls above "the midge-cloud of War & work & social surface" presented as being just as important as any quotidian reaction.

The way these diarists use, problematise and rehearse ideas about 'private' and 'personal' also indicates the individual diarist's agency among the influences on her diary-writing, and also points up the part that other people played as influences on, and also 'characters', in the practices of their diary-writing. Harcourt's use of 'private' and 'personal' as descriptions of her diary, Last's description of hers as a partial confidant but with 'reservations', and Cockett's of hers as 'impersonal', suggest how varied M-O diarists' perceptions of their diaries were regarding the private/public relationship, and that their practices were considerably more complex than popular views of diaries as by definition private in the sense of personal and secret space.

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<sup>76</sup> Found also in Forster's *Howard's End* (1910), this phrase appears in Nussbaum (1988a: 128) who cites Stauffer's (1930: 55) comment that "The diary makes no attempt to see life steadily and see it whole. It is focused on the immediate present, and finds that the happenings of twenty-four hours are sufficient unto the day ...". (see Stauffer, 1941). Cockett certainly read other life-documents, noting Keat's letters and Havelock Ellis's autobiography, among others (D 5278, 20 June 1940).

<sup>77</sup> Jolly (2001: 115) suggests that Naomi Mitchison's M-O diary was a "practice as well as a representation of [her] philosophy".

'Was very pleased to get Diarist letter from M-O – feel kept in touch':<sup>78</sup> M-O Wartime Diaries as Social Texts

Another important way that the M-O diaries complicate the 'private' dimensions of diary-writing concerns the many social influences impacting on them. Such influences start with the fact that their very existence was due to a request by Harrison. M-O diarists were, then, writing to and for a specific audience, M-O, which each diarist knew about but responded to somewhat differently.<sup>79</sup> Diary-writing for M-O involved the individual diarist writing about her social world for social and political reasons, 'by definition' making the designation of M-O diaries as either private or public texts in any binary way problematic (Jolly, 2001: 111).<sup>80</sup> It is important, therefore, to explore how the different diarists constructed their sense of audience and reader,<sup>81</sup> not least because this helps to illuminate what they perceived their M-O diaries to 'be' in an ontological sense. For instance, Olivia Cockett provided a particularly vivid sense of audience or reader in the extracts from her diary-entries for 4 September 1939 and 10 June 1940 above, and referred to things perceived as particularly interesting for M-O by commenting: "M-O! Please note" and "another point for M-O.". On 6 June 1940, she also thanked M-O's US magazine for its advice about putting aside "daily details of news", writing that she "had been trying to ignore the daily details of news in papers & on the air: a remark in US that they might lead to nervous-breakdown-types made me think: now I listen & read & ponder, but talk as little as possible, & try never to pass on horrors. I have found I don't dream so violently since trying this, so Thank You, US" (D 5278, 6 June 1940).

Cockett's expression of thanks here implies that she trusts as well as takes on board this advice, that she 'gets something out of' her exchanges with M-O. Also,

<sup>78</sup> D 5278, 16 June 1940.

<sup>79</sup> See Sheridan *et al* (2000: 196-197, 229-232) regarding different audiences for M-O material.

<sup>80</sup> Bloom (1996: 25) although helpfully suggesting that "many private diaries are actually public documents", strives to identify the features of, what she calls, "Truly Private Diaries". As Paperno notes, many scholars appear to perceive "an inherent connection of all intimate writings to the axis privacy-publicity" (Paperno, 2004: 569; see also Randolph, 2004).

<sup>81</sup> Nella Last, as well as other diarists, uses inverted commas around particular words seemingly to problematise them (see Mulford in Broad and Fleming (1981: 318).

when thanking Harrison for the letter received, in the extracts below Cockett mentions his reference to the usefulness of her diary and connects this to a broader emancipatory agenda in which assistance is provided to some unspecified future audience. At least part of Cockett's sense of the purpose of her diary lies in this and both entries strongly indicate a degree of reciprocity between M-O and her diary-writing and, again, this is an explicit statement of something which occurs across the women's wartime diaries:

"Thursday June 27 11.15am Thank you for the letter, T. H.: hope you're right about the material being of some use: haven't got a very strong missionising impulse, but should be heartened to think that someone, somewhere, would someday be helped somehow by something I've done – Some sentence! Funny that we've become so brightly cynical that any mildly idealistic or helpful remark usually sounds priggish!

I am returning the envelope as it arrived, to show an example of some G.P.O humour: & by the way, it's BREAKSPEARS Rd, sorry about my writing!"

D 5278, 27 June 1940

"Dear Mr. Harrison,  
Thanks for the acknowledgement of the last bit of diary. You say you are interested in the points regarding morale and Government ..."

D 5278, 18 July 1940,  
Letter prefacing Cockett's July diary-entries

Cockett refers on a number of occasions to her epistolary relationship with M-O, including that receipt of a M-O circular letter in June 1940 had re-started her diary-writing, which had stopped in May 1940 (D 5278, 6 June 1940). Indeed, in several diary-entries for June 1940 she mentions receiving correspondence from M-O, its effect as a stimulant to her diary-writing, and the reassurance she feels about being kept in touch and the reciprocity involved:

"Was very pleased to get Diarist letter from M-O – feel kept in touch: so will forward this instalment accordingly."

D 5278, 16 June 1940

"Was cheered to get another Diarist letter last night – the reassurance about officialdom one – do send further little notes as often as funds allow: they spur one

on & make one feel in touch; US leaves a great gap, emotionally! And I find my convictions & arguments relying on previous US facts, feel the lack of topical facts very much. However, ... it's understandable."

D 5278, 23 June 1940

Also in June 1940, Yvonne Foreman expressed a similar sentiment, writing:

"I felt very pleased with myself this morning when I got my letter from M-O – a mixture of Julian Evelyn – Sir Philip Gibbs, but there is not much starch in me now although I am keeping silent except to my son."

D 5394, 14 June 1940

However, not all M-O diarists were keen to engage in an explicitly epistolary relationship with M-O. For instance, Rose Brown, a "Middle class married woman. 39. housewife" living in Blackheath, London, (D 5342, 11 November 1941), wrote in capitals at the bottom of several of her diary-entries written between August 1939 and July 1943: "PLEASE DO NOT ACKNOWLEDGE THIS DIARY" and "PLEASE DO NOT ACKNOWLEDGE".

Like Yvonne Foreman's diary-entry for 17 August 1940 quoted earlier, Olivia Cockett's entry of 27 June 1940, provided above, also used the initials T.H. to refer to Harrison. In an entry three days earlier, Cockett wrote that it was in fact Harrison to whom and for whom she was writing, stating:

"... don't know why I even bother to write this thought down for Harrison, except that it got me so hot to hear the BBC allowing such idiocy. ..."

D 5278, 24 June 1940

For Cockett, then, as well as Foreman, mentioning an explicitly named person within the diary is part of what a M-O diary 'is' and they write their M-O diaries to, as well as for, this person. Nella Last too demonstrates her awareness of an audience for her M-O diary, although she does not mention any specific individual. She sometimes invokes a 'Reader', writing, for instance, that "I sat awhile by the open casement,

with my mind a montage of odds & ends of conjecture. It's a blessing to reach the end of the day now, & feel another day is over without a 'storm' breaking, always so fervently do I pray for all & any 'Reader', that 'strength of purpose & wisdom can be granted them.'" (D 5353, 12 August 1960). Or, more frequently, she invokes an audience in the general sense of M-O, for instance, commenting near the tenth anniversary of writing her diary, that:

"Just about 10 years since I was asked to write an M. O diary, a long long time. I can never understand how the scribbles of such an ordinary person, leading a shut in, dull life, can possibly have value. No 'adventure' nothing spectacular, day after day, week after week, till the formidable total of 10 years – 3,650 entries – I cannot believe it!"

D 5353, 2 September 1949

Ten years earlier, Last had referred to her relationship with M-O in a similar way while mentioning that William Hickey's newspaper column had been a spur to her starting her diary. There she had suggested that her diary was at least partly intended to be useful to the Government, writing that:

"... it was partly to Wm Hickey<sup>82</sup> I managed to find time to write M.O. Diary. He stressed the point that the Gov would find M-O. invaluable. Never can see just how but although not clever am 'bright' enough to trust people who are!"

D 5353, 22 September 1939

That the Government might potentially find M-O 'invaluable' is part of her finding the time to write for M-O as well as showing her awareness of a possible readership for this. The relationship of trust between M-O and its diarists was consolidated because it was perceived by many of them as doing something to help the war effort, stated in Last's comment on M-O being 'invaluable'. She and many other M-O wartime diarists brought a sense of obligation and duty to their side of the relationship:<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> William Hickey, a.k.a. Tom Driberg.

<sup>83</sup> For many Holocaust diarists, writing a diary was a "national obligation" (Young, 1987: 406).

"The last entry in my diary was dated December 30<sup>th</sup> but the last instalment I sent to M-O was the 13<sup>th</sup>. I don't know why I stopped writing sheer laziness I presume. However I see the Directive that M-O still wants diaries so I must make an effort".

D 5445, 23 May 1940

"Re Mass Obs:- I read in US that all diaries & papers had to go to Chancery Lane. Then I receive cards from Ladbroke. I asked when visiting to Grotes' & have had no reply. Sweet times but I'll do my best somehow."

D 5296, 24 May 1940

"Apologies for my neglect of this diary"

D 5447, 4 March 1945

"P.S:- Is my diary really necessary? I feel this is a question we must all ask? I have quite enjoyed writing it, but I feel now it will get duller and duller – and that I shall be quite glad to end it – I am afraid too I have been very lazy over the directives lately ...."

D 5337, 11 November 1945

"How dreadful I haven't written my diary all this time. Haven't been well, and what with dealing with Xmas and one thing and another, have just let it slide. Nothing very interesting has occurred ..."

D 5337, 31 December 1945

(writing after having left a gap from 17 December)

"Letter from M.O. saying they do really want diaries. So I must do what I can. That will be to record main event of day, as just now not time for more ...."

D 5318, 9 November 1946

What a M-O diary 'is' for their writers, then, at least partly depended on how they envisaged the audience or reader for these and the purposes to which they thought they will put them. This was of course not the only influence, because the way in which M-O diary-writing was practiced and, in turn, what a M-O diary was perceived to be, was also affected by wider social influences. There are three ways in particular that social influences impacted on M-O diaries which I want to comment on: how other people influenced the diary-writing; the social circumstances of sending diary-entries to M-O; and other people as 'characters' within these diaries.



Firstly, the presence and influence of other people can affect the practices involved in writing a diary. At 3.30 am on 4 September 1939, for instance, Olivia Cockett hand-wrote her diary-entry for M-O rather than typed it "... because of the tap tinkle for Mother & Father below" (D 5278, 4 September 1939). Cockett here altered her diary-writing practice so as not to disturb her parents, showing that other people's physical proximity can influence the mechanics (and possibly the content) of writing. Edie Rutherford, writing from Sheffield in Yorkshire, makes a comparable comment, with "Husband returned to work so I can use typewriter again and catch up with this diary properly" (D 5447, 12 February 1945). Similarly Nella Last, on 10 September 1949, mentioned that she wrote while sitting in bed and that "I don't get on anyone's nerves there when I scribble" (D 5353, 10 September 1949). A later comment by Last showed that the 'anyone' referred to here is her husband William and his dislike of what he perceived to be her perpetual 'busyness' (D 5353, 27 April 1956). And just over two years later, Last again commented on the influence that her husband had on her writing, this time concerning his irritation over her 'scratchy pen' and that she therefore went elsewhere to write:

"When my husband is irritable he complains my pen 'scratches' when I write - & as it's a Waterman 'ball point' Arthur bought me last Xmas, and that for most sounds he is rather deaf, I think it is just a variation of the 'you excite your brain too much by your everlasting writing', a kind of 'resentment' I think to any 'interest' in which he isn't included & would never write to the boys if I didn't. It makes me bring my writing to bed - or go in the front room."

D 5353, 9 June 1958

This last extract also indicates that other people can be involved in providing the material artefacts used to write diaries.<sup>84</sup> This Waterman pen replaced another pen; a Parker that her son Arthur bought "when he got his Higher Grade Inspectorship, when he was in Ireland" (D 5353, 6 May 1957). The fact that the

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<sup>84</sup> Barton and Hall (2000: 1) discuss the importance of the role of material artefacts, as well as the "texts, the participants, the activities ... in their social contexts". Over the past few decades, the 'narrative turn' has brought to the fore the composition and form of life documents, by arguing for the "artifice of biographical story telling [to] bec[o]me visible", and suggesting that "the very act of assembling the story bec[o]me a part of the story" (Plummer, 1995: 111; Stanley, 1992b).

Parker pen was a gift affected its meaning for Last, as did the fact that she had spent "... at least 30/- at different times " to help her write her diary and letters (D 5353, 6 May 1957). And she also wrote about her acquisition of stationery, particularly paper and envelopes, with their rising cost and also postage costs an ongoing concern, writing in September 1939 about how "paper jumped from 3' or 4' a sheet to 9' " (D 5353, 3 September 1939).<sup>85</sup> In December 1940, Last commented that "If I buy a reel of cotton or a packet of envelopes it's 'gone up' in price & down in quality. I foresee a very great simplicity after Xmas" (D 5353, 8 December 1940).

Secondly, other people could also be involved in M-O diary-writing regarding the transit of diary-entries to M-O headquarters. Other people the diarist knew could accompany her to the post-box or post office, which Nella Last commented about in several entries, for instance writing that "... I said I was going to the post box, & I needed a lettuce. My husband came, saying 'it only looks like a short let up of the rain, it will do for his evening walk'" (D 5353, 21 June 1958). And sometimes, other people posted diary-entries for the diarist (see for instance D5353, 15 December 1965). Encounters with or observations of postal staff were also sometimes written about in the diaries:

"The postman this morning said that 'though I don't hold with war we must go on fighting' What are we fighting for say?" I "why Freedom of course" "That's all very well but we don't seem to have much freedom" "ah – but we have more than they have in Germany" "Well I don't think its much use fighting for freedom under Chamberlain I said" "Oh no – he ought to go" agreed the postman ..."

D 5445, 29 September 1939

"The village store is busy and the local postal staff over-worked, thanks to the influx of visitors. Rumour is busy with tales of evacuees."

D 5350, 9 September 1939

A third way in which social factors influenced M-O wartime diaries involved other people written about in the diaries as characters in them, positioned according

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<sup>85</sup> Where Last uses ' after a numerical value it refers to 'pence' in pre-decimalised British currency, being a replacement for the term 'D'.

to the story that the diarists are telling. For instance, on several occasions Nella Last writes vividly about her Grandmother, commenting about her Grandmother's attitude towards life, her strength, and the way she taught Nella to 'give':

".. my Gran died at about 76 & she was a charming interesting woman ... Somehow you always had the feeling of strength with her yet she was small & slight. ... My gran never had much but she would always give & taught us it was our duty to do so ..."

D 5353, 24 September 1939

"My Gran's home philosophy ... reflected in her 'do the best you can and pass on, her advice & warning if a 'mean' action was contemplated which could cause regret ..."

D 5353, 22 April 1956

And in contrast, her comments about her husband, William, are also vivid but used as a foil in a negative way, compared with Last herself:

"... nothing I did pleased him. I gave up & settled to letter writing – another fault. He 'couldn't for the life of me see what you get out of your everlasting scribbling, the sound of the pen is enough to set my teeth on edge'."

D 5353, 8 January 1953

"I'd like to stay up to hear the Election results at Luton, fell flat, my husband said 'why worry', 'it is nothing to do with us.' I must try & get out of the 'snappy come back' – I said 'no man is an island' - & his bewildered stare & 'what has an island got to do with Luton', could have made me laugh – if I'd not realised how every day sees him further away from such."

D 5353, 7 November 1963

The positioning of 'characters', including of course the diarist herself, in the wartime diaries are for a present-day reader textual constructions, which arise from the diarist's inscriptions. But of course at the same time these are actual (once) living persons, behaviours and real-world events. In short, the diaries are premised by reference to real people and real life that existed outside of the diary and were real in their consequences. Therefore, while I accept the force of arguments about textual construction, I also insist on the ultimate referentiality of this diary-writing.

Each M-O diary involves more than one person being represented. There is not just the diarist; many other selves are present in them through the diarist's interpretive gaze. However, the fact that many, perhaps most, diaries contain a wide array of people in addition to the diarist is often absent from scholarly discussions, with diaries being depicted as primarily a medium through which the self of a diarist is represented or 'graphed', as a "book of the self" in the singular (Fothergill, 1974: 62), and where the self, if not cohesive, is divided or fragmented (Didier, 1976; Kristeva, 1984; Rendall, 1986; Stanton, 1984: 17).<sup>86</sup> The analytical emphasis has been largely on the representation and construction of self, with the shifting presence of many other people 'vanishing' from sight, because of perceiving the diary as a locus for self-reflecting and self-making in the diarist's writing practices.<sup>87</sup> Diaries nearly always involve more than just a self writing about a self. Not only are other people represented, but most diarists are not usually, and sometimes at all, immersed in self-reflection and self-making. Indeed, in M-O wartime diaries, these other selves are crucial to understanding the written self that a diarist constructs, because they are represented according to the diarist's situation as an 'observation point' (Madge, 1937), as a 'subjective camera' (Jennings and Madge, 1937). In other words, the diarist's ontological position includes how she positions herself over time in relation to a range of 'others' in her writing.

Nella Last's diary provides a useful example. She constructs a written and readable self by recording remarks other people have made about her, using these to construct a version of her written self that she perceives as desirable, often hinging on running a good home, being a good housewife, and remaining busy and useful.

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<sup>86</sup> For discussions that query and rework the idea of 'selves as singular' see, for example, Bourdieu (1987), Järvinen (2004), Plummer (1995) and Stanley (1992b). Fothergill (1974: 62) also suggests that since the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century "the non-linear book of the self has tended increasingly to prevail over the more traditional [linear] format", which conjures up the different ways that time can be deployed in life-writing, which I discuss later.

<sup>87</sup> That 'private' writing is somehow axiomatic of self has become an interpretive convention, which relates to 'centred', essential, coherent, individualised versions of self (Gusdorf, 1956; Lejeune, 1975; Olney, 1972) and the 'canonical' positioning of this set of ideas (cf. Friedman, 1988: 35; cf. Plummer, 2001: 90). See Porter Abbott's (1984) and Martens' (1985) implicit assumption that the diarist's 'character' equates with an essential self "whether or not it can be achieved in text" (Nussbaum, 1988b: 135; see also Duyfhuizen, 1986).

When writing about this, Last often uses her version of quotation marks to invoke seemingly directly quoted conversations:<sup>88</sup>

"My next door neighbour ... said my bright washed curtains 'showed hers up' & that 'perhaps I was right' when I said it will help us forget the war if we 'carry on as usual'".

D 5353, 17 December 1940

"My husband made us laugh when he got in from the garden, he stood & gazed at the table & said 'it looks wicked in war time to have such a spread'".

D 5353, 6 March 1943

She also quotes such remarks to portray herself as a competent worker in reference to her volunteering at the local Red Cross shop. One instance concerns Mrs. Burnett, a woman Last states she has been at "cross purposes" with since childhood. Mrs. Burnett came to the Red Cross shop having promised Last a "'cartload' of ... blitzed things'" when she was bombed out. But, having found little to be salvageable, Mrs. Burnett made a donation of £5 instead, to Last's surprise and pleasure:

"She said 'I'd like to give you more – will do later on. I'd like to tell you Dearie how I admire your work & the way you have stuck it since the war' & she patted my hand".

D 5353, 1 March 1943

And in addition, Last also sometimes questions positive remarks about her that other people have made, pointing out the disparity between this and how she perceives herself:

"Arthur my elder boy' thinks it a 'wonderful philosophy' of mine ... but its not – its just a kind of fear to look ahead ..."

D 5353, 19 September 1939

"I read Arthur's letter with mixed feelings ... When he spoke so lovingly of me 'always giving strength & courage in a difficulty' or the 'serenity & peace you always

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<sup>88</sup> With reference to Stebbing's (1998) M-O diary, Jolly (2001: 113) suggests that the transcription of dialogue into the body of M-O diaries reveals the "stamp of M-O's observational' methodology".

have in such measure'. I felt tears roll down my face for the lovely person my poor laddie imagined. Knowing how depleted of ordinary vitality I couldn't believe I'd had any to send in the letter I'd sent ..."

D 5353, 15 December 1952

Last's practice of quoting from conversations or correspondence<sup>89</sup> involves her using other people's comments to construct a written version of herself, with the 'other' seemingly playing the key role in this.<sup>90</sup> That is, self-construction is done in an indirect way, through quoting the views of others so that they, rather than Last herself, are positioned as the source of what is 'really' her self-perception. And in constructing her written self like this, Last is validating this self, methodologically-speaking, by providing direct evidence and so proof. It is also worth adding that, in writing her diary in this way, Last was perhaps also responding to M-O's request for the opinions and reactions of other people to be included in the wartime diaries, with this persisting into her post-war diary-writing.

Incontrovertibly, then, amongst other things, the M-O women's wartime diaries are clearly spaces in which other people are represented and purposefully used by the diarists in writing their self-constructions. Other people are present in a multiplicity of ways, as are the social circumstances in which the diaries were written and sent to M-O. These 'documents of life' (Plummer, 2001) are better understood as social texts rather than as private ones.

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<sup>89</sup> For Guerlac (1980: 1415), the most mimetic modality of distance in narrative mood is "reported speech and dialogue". Hence, by including excerpts from conversations, Last imbued her diary with an immediacy in this sense.

<sup>90</sup> Mead counters the way that self has been depicted as a 'diachronic' phenomenon, stemming from either the individual or the social at any moment in time, viewing self instead as something that cannot be prised apart from the social or 'generalised other' (Mead, 1934a: 216-228), for "selves can only exist in definite relationships to other selves" (Mead, 1934a: 227).

Diary Letters?<sup>91</sup> M-O Diaries and Epistolarity

As well as M-O's wartime diaries considerably complicating popular assumptions about privacy and the diary-genre, they also have some of the characteristics of letters and letter-writing. I have already noted in passing examples of overlaps between M-O's diaries and letters,<sup>92</sup> and will now discuss in more detail two aspects of this. The first concerns M-O's epistolary activities outside the wartime diaries but which influenced the form and sometimes the content of these. The second concerns the shading or 'morphing' between the diary and the letter that is apparent within the structure and text of the diaries themselves.

The origins of M-O lay in the epistolary form, as commented earlier, with Charles Madge (1937) writing to the New Statesmen and Nation in early 1937 in response to Geoffrey Pyke's (1936) letter published at the end of the previous year; and shortly afterwards, the official announcement of M-O's formation was also made in a letter (Harrison, Jennings and Madge, 1937). And when M-O later called for volunteers, the people who became known as the National Panel of Volunteer Observers wrote letters to M-O expressing their interest in participating. Panel members in turn were sent letters by M-O's Blackheath staff, in the form of directives and day-diary instructions, and they then sent their responses to these back through the postal system.<sup>93</sup> From its beginning, then, M-O was founded on epistolary activities, which were central to facilitating Blackheath M-O's research agenda and associated assembly of written life-documents.

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<sup>91</sup> The conventions used during the editing process also concern "inconsistencies of convention" that the M-O diaries present in relation to diaries as a genre. Broad and Fleming (1981: vii) demonstrate this point describing the wartime diaries as "letter diaries" and, twelve lines below on the same page, as "diary letters", perhaps deriving from Nella Last's own labeling of the letters that she writes to her sons as "diary letters" (D 5353, 25 August 1942; Broad and Fleming, 1981: 214).

<sup>92</sup> See Jolly's (1997) edited set of 1942 letters from women welders that were collated and posted to M-O in 1943; also see Bailey's (2007) edited correspondence concerning a private magazine produced by the Cooperative Correspondence Club (CCC) between 1935 to 1990, donated to the M-O A. See also Jolly and Stanley (2005).

<sup>93</sup> Sheridan (1985) discusses the importance of the national transport and postal systems in facilitating the correspondence between M-O and its wartime diarists.

The wartime diaries, too, were also initiated by a correspondence,<sup>94</sup> once again between M-O staff and the Panel, with the August 1939 Directive being posted with a letter, in which Harrison asked the Panel to write 'full diaries' as an extension of their 'Crisis Diaries', which were to be posted in regular instalments back to Blackheath. These diaries were solicited by and sent to M-O, and given the framework in which M-O worked and made its 'calls' to prospective Panellists, this made a difference to how writing them was perceived by the diarists. But does this make M-O's wartime diaries a different type or form of diary from other diaries? I will return to this question later in the thesis, while here I shall concentrate on teasing out the various characteristics of and strategies in diary-writing for M-O as the basis for this later discussion.

During the first years of the war, the wartime diarists, as the participating members of the Panel had become known, occasionally received personalised correspondence back from M-O staff, often to acknowledge receipt of their instalments, but sometimes to make more specific remarks about their diaries, as implied in Olivia Cockett's: "Thank you for the letter, T. H.: hope you're right about the material being of some use ..." (D 5278, 27 June 1940). M-O staff and the diarists were therefore taking part in a dialogue, in which each responded in writing to previously received written communications from the other party, a very letter-like exchange. M-O's responses to its diarists later became fairly infrequent. Some communication was continued through M-O's US Magazine,<sup>95</sup> however, and also more than a year after the war had ended M-O staff sent out a letter asking the diarists to keep on writing, which Vanessa Chambers from Coventry commented on in her diary: "Letter from M.O. saying they do really want diaries. So I must do what I can..." (D 5318, 19 November 1946).

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<sup>94</sup> In the post-1981 phase of M-O activities, the term 'correspondent' replaced 'respondent' as a means of referring to members of the Panel of Observers (Sheridan *et al*, 2000: 76).

<sup>95</sup> Irene Grant comments on this form of communication, writing "Re Mass Obs:- I read in US that all diaries & papers had to go to Chancery Lane..." (D 5296, 24 May 1940).



M-O's epistolary activities were clearly important to the genesis and ongoing receipt of the diaries, providing an important means through which the relationship between the organisation and its volunteer writers was established and conducted. This relationship, in turn, influenced the ways in which diarists wrote their diaries for M-O. As in the diaries quoted above, Cockett and Chambers directly responded to M-O's letters, and these letters and their own responses to them were intertextually entwined with diary-writing. This influenced not only the practice of writing a diary for M-O, but also the content and structure of entries. In the case of diary-structure, Cockett's and Chambers' responses to M-O's communication came at the beginning of their respective entries, closely paralleling a structural convention of letter-writing.

M-O also engaged in epistolary activity in other aspects of its research, in particular in corresponding with observers who were not members of the National Panel. One example here involves a full-time observer from Corfe Castle in Dorset, who called herself 'B.R.S'.<sup>96</sup> B.R.S. provided a diary-like commentary on the celebrations and parades taking place just before, on, and just after Victory in Europe Day (VE) across London.<sup>97</sup> This observer, presumably a woman because mentioning a husband on 12 May 1945, wrote a collection of 'miscellaneous information' in an A5 notebook and also sent an accompanying covering letter. This undated letter was written on a small piece of paper, headed "'Joint Council for Monetary and Economic Research' ... London, W.C.2."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> I have changed this observer's initials to 'B.R.S' in order to preserve her anonymity, which follows Jennings and Madge's (1937) comments regarding the importance of this.

<sup>97</sup> Source: M-O A: TC 49/1/D 'VE Week Recorded by Volunteer Observers, May 1945'. I actually came across this report in Box 1/C, but have referenced it according to the reference given on the M-O A website.

<sup>98</sup> The Joint Council for Economic and Monetary Research was founded in 1943 and by 1948 became known as the Economic Research Council. Today, its website states that "Its origins go back at least ... to the 1930s, when a number of prominent people, concerned at the poverty around them in the midst of plenty, started questioning the use in Britain of a monetary system that had failed the nation in the past and was liable to go on perpetuating the sequence of boom, slump, boom of the 1920s" (paragraph 1, <http://www.ercouncil.org/about.html>).

"Dear Mr. Willcock

Herewith a collection of miscellaneous information – I hope it's legible – it's unconnected owing to extreme lack of time - & I shd. think somewhat incoherent, but I can honestly say I've done my best in the circumstances.

I look forward to seeing your Report in due course - & I'll let you know when I'm back, & can do more interviewing.

Yours sincerely but somewhat exhausted Observer

[B.R.S.]."

B.R.S., c. May 1945

Letter accompanying Observer's Report of VE Week  
(TC 49/1/D)

B.R.S.'s letter clearly utilises the conventions of addressing a letter to a specific correspondent, here 'Mr. Willcock', and 'signing off' with the letter-writer's name, here in initialised form. B.R.S. in the body of her letter refers to the content of the notebook that the letter 'covers', commenting on its possible illegibility and incoherence, writing that she had done her 'best in the circumstances'. In addition, B.R.S. intimates that she expected to see a M-O Report using her contribution, and also that she would let Bob Willcock know when she was back, so she expected this exchange to continue.

As well as its strong and clear epistolary dimensions, B.R.S.'s 'miscellany' and its relation to her diary is interesting in several ways, not least because it raises in an explicit way things present more implicitly in the women's wartime diaries more generally. I now move on to discuss some of these.

The content and format of B.R.S.'s lined bound hardback notebook raise questions concerning time and the moment of writing. She wrote a header to the first page of her M-O chronicle of V.E. Day, as she calls it:

"V.E. Day:

May 8<sup>th</sup> 1945

London: Marble Arch, Park Lane, Hyde Park, Victoria

[B.R.S.]

Also: Week Following

(see other end of book for "subjective" account written up in evenings)"

B.R.S., 8 May 1945 TC 49/1/D

In the diary-entry for 8 May 1945 (V.E. Day), and also in her other entries, B.R.S. wrote about the non/celebratory happenings in various places in London. Sometimes she separated her discussion into place-related sections. For example, on 9 May 1945 (or "V, +1" as she calls it),<sup>99</sup> B.R.S. wrote towards the end of her entry: "I must do a little on Trafalgar Square, as I am standing right on top of the steps & it's too good to miss" and then described the crowd surrounding her (B.R.S., 9 May 1945, TC 49/1/D). It appears then that B.R.S. was writing at that immediate moment, with little temporal and spatial distance between the 'moment of experience' and 'the moment of writing' (Stanley and Dampier, 2006), something I discuss further in the next chapter. This was facilitated partly through the portability of her writing equipment, a neat hand-bag-sized notebook, and partly because of how she used it. For instance, B.R.S. wrote in the front of her notebook things that happened on V.E Day and the days that followed during the daytime, while at the back she wrote her 'subjective' accounts written up during the evenings, writing as the header at the back of the notebook: "Evenings in V-Week (see other end for day reports)" (B.R.S., TC 49/1/D). Interestingly, her entries in the back of her notebook are much shorter than those at the front, suggesting either a relative reluctance to engage with the 'subjective', or more likely practical difficulties in maintaining a separation of 'subjective and 'objective' aspects.

Although trying to separate 'day' and 'evening', B.R.S.'s entries in fact involve some interesting overlaps:

"May 9<sup>th</sup> (or rather, May 10<sup>th</sup> 1 A.M)

Last night, "V.E. Night" itself, it was of course physically impossible for your observer to write any account, subjective or otherwise, of any sort or kind. I have a hazy recollection of re-turning down the Edgware Road at a late hour with a bottle of port ¼ full under my arm, & singing (if I remember rightly) "Lily Marlene", but as someone said at breakfast (11 A.M.) in a café today. "It seems so long ago!" (They were commenting on the fact that they had lunched there the day before.) ..."

B.R.S., c. 9 May 1945, TC 49/1/D

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<sup>99</sup> Describing dates according to their proximity to VE Day is also seen in Moira Crompton's (D 5402) entries: "1. VE Day May 8" and "V.E. Day 2" for 9 May 1945, after which she reverts to her regular "10<sup>th</sup> May"-style dating. The perceived pivotal character of VE Day to both writers is clearly implied, both also incorporate how they hear about dates in the media in their diaries.

B.R.S. begins this entry by justifying having not written her experiences of V.E. 'Night' at the time or as soon as possible after it, because inebriation had made it impossible for her to write when she perceived she should have. And in a similar way, M-O wartime diarist Maggie Joy Blunt, an architect from Slough and London, implies that she would have written her diary as close to the moment of experience as possible, but her pen failed her: "At that point last night my pen & I gave out – I was feeling exceedingly tired & sorry for myself. What I was about to record was – RW had a violent argument with a young woman (A.) ..." (D 5401, 3 May 1945).

In the quote from B.R.S. above, the date is followed in parenthesis by "or rather, May 10<sup>th</sup> 1 A.M", so her entry for V.E. 'Night' was in fact written the next day. Her belated acknowledgement of the importance of specifying the precise day (and time) of writing connects to a similar concern in May The Twelfth (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 351), as well as popular assumptions that there is a greater validity to entries written close to the experience being 'recorded'.

In the front of her notebook, B.R.S. wrote a twelve-page narrative-entry about the "Eve of V.E. Day: Monday May 7<sup>th</sup>". She closed this by commenting:

"I shall now abandon my usual "Diary" style of writing & lapse into the rather jerky form adopted (apparently) by ~~most~~ some M.O-Chronicles – so here goes."

B.R.S., c.7 May 1945, TC 49/1/D

Following this, her writing is indeed rather different from her earlier narrative-style. However, it is her statement about abandoning her "usual "Diary" style" of writing to the "jerky form" that is particularly intriguing because of her comment about "~~most~~ some M.O-Chronicles". That is, B.R.S.'s remark means that she had seen some of the writings produced by other Mass-Observers and had used them to guide how she wrote her diary at this point, and it is particularly interesting that B.R.S.'s V.E. Day/week chronicle is so similar to those found in May The Twelfth (Jennings and

Madge, 1937). B.R.S. seems to have been a full-time observer for M-O, as indicated by her letter to Willcock about doing “more interviewing” (B.R.S., c. May 1945, Letter accompanying Observer's Report of VE Day, TC 49/1/D). In addition, she might possibly have seen and drawn on the content and structure of the diaries themselves as guidance, for what she describes as her “collection of miscellaneous information” resembles the way many of them are written.

Returning to the epistolary aspects of the women's wartime diaries, traces of epistolarity are found in other aspects of M-O's work. For instance, M-O's organisational notes, which are stored with the File Reports at the M-O A, sometimes take the form of letters. A letter from Celia Fremlin to Bob Willcock dated 14 September 1944, addressed from 50 South Hill Park, for example, prefaces the contents of the Report it is attached to (FR 2181). In mentioning this in Chapter 2, I drew on this letter to comment on the possible reasons for Fremlin's failed 1944 attempt to write a diary-related book for publication, as did Kertesz (1993). Fremlin's letter also adds meaning to the File Report in two additional ways.

Firstly, the fact that her note was indeed a ‘letter’ shows that letter-writing was an ordinary M-O organisational practice, used not only to contact diarists but to facilitate its other research. It also suggests that Fremlin was at some spatial distance (albeit still within London, in NW3) from her addressee, Willcock, and so had to communicate with him by letter. Relatedly, that Fremlin posted her draft and her letter (most likely together) to M-O parallels the way that diarists posted their diary-entries with covering letters sometimes attached.<sup>100</sup> Secondly, reading her letter influences how the content of the File Report is interpreted and understood. Because her letter was positioned as the first page of the Report, it was the first thing that I read. It therefore set the terms of reference for reading the remainder of the Report, adding not only meaning to the content but also structuring my gaze. However,

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<sup>100</sup> Makkonen (1999: 244) notes that non-M-O diarist Etty Hillesum's diary was ‘covered’ by a letter written in German and dated 8 March 1941, which is not included in the abridged edited published version (Hillesum, 1985).

although Fremlin's letter prefigured the content of the File Report in my reading, it was in actuality written 'after the fact', after she had finished the draft Report, to summarise her views about the process and outcome of her work and to explain its discontinuation.

Fremlin, B.R.S. and some M-O wartime diarists framed their writings in an epistolary way, either by 'covering' them with a letter and/or by writing about epistolary practices within the text. This tells a lot about how the writers perceived and constructed their audience (and how they got their writing to that audience), and also about the social conventions which impacted on their diary-writing. However, although the M-O A retained these covering letters, storing them in the same boxes/files with the diaries to which they were attached, perhaps the most obvious epistolary identifier is not available for study. This is, the envelopes in which these writings made their journey across space and time and arrived at Blackheath in. Stored in the Archive 'naked', then, the diary-entries have been stripped of an important and indeed essential part of their epistolary 'nature'.

I now want to explore some of the ways that 'the diary' and 'the letter' often shade into each other within the women's wartime diaries. That is, it is not just a matter of 'covering letters', but of the porous and hybridic forms that both took in the M-O context.

Many of the wartime diarists wrote their addresses at the top of the first page of their usually weekly set of diary-entries, some at the top-right as is now conventional letter-writing practice, and some at the top-left. Constance Bell (D 5414) from Essex, for instance, wrote her name and address at the top-left of her diary; Patricia Crosby (D 5291) from London wrote her name and address at the top-left and at the top-right "Continuation of Diary". Other diarists wrote variants of this, with Mary Baidon (D 5349) on 10 May 1940 writing her name, address in London, age, occupation at the bottom left of some pages and heading her May 1940

contribution with “Instalment of Diary” written and circled in black ink. Many also wrote their full name (often also their marital status), their age and their occupation. M-O staff had requested diarists to include some of this information, and it is interesting that many of them adhered to this request and made it a regular part of their diary-writing practice. Nella Last, for instance, always included such information at the top of the first page of her diary week, while Esther Walker included it on the cover page to her diary, writing: “WAR DIARY, 17 – 29 June, 1940. [name] ... [address] ... Croydon, Surrey. Civil Servant. 25” (D 5383, June 1940).

As already mentioned, some of the diarists directly addressed a named reader at the beginning of their diaries. For example, Olivia Cockett began one of her diary-entries with “Thank you for the letter, T. H” (D 5278, 27 June 1940). Other diarists did this at the start of covering letters accompanying their entries, with, for instance, Yvonne Foreman writing “Dear Mr. Harrisson” (D 5394, 17 August 1940). Some diarists addressed a reader later in their diaries, with Irene Grant, for example, complimenting Harrisson himself by writing “Tom Harrisson’s letter in News. Good! – clear-sighted for so young a man! I’m one of the mugs who thought Mr. Healy knew” (D 5296, 29 May 1940), and Olivia Cockett writing more generally in parenthesis “(M-O! Please note)” (D 5278, 4 September 1939). These examples further point up the importance of audience, and the social more broadly, for the people who wrote a wartime diary for M-O.

Some of the diarists also ‘signed off’ their diaries in an epistolary way, with Amy Briggs, for example, writing “cheerio M-O” (D 5284, 15 December 1944) and others including such things in their covering notes: for instance, Valerie Brunel wrote “very sincerely yours ...” (D 5445, 17 June 1941) and Yvonne Foreman “Yours sincerely” (D 5394, 17 August 1940). At least one diarist included a ‘P.S.’ after her diary-entry, writing “P.S:- Is my diary really necessary?” (D 5337, 11 November 1945), with the P.S. another conventional letter-writing practice. This

particular diarist also signed off her typed diary-entry in hand-writing, writing on it “[Beatrice Hope], age 63’. From Fritwell, Bicester”, with yet another epistolary characteristic being not only signing letters, but also hand-signing those that are typed or word-processed.

Nella Last quoted parts of letters she received from, and also conversations she had with, her sons and other people. Many of the other diarists too included excerpts from their correspondence and also from conversations, some of them also including segments of ‘overheard’ discussions. Many diarists similarly included comments they read in newspapers, heard on the wireless and later on the television. However, unlike excerpts from correspondence and conversations, these are rarely put in inverted commas or speech marks. Geraldine Langhorn, for instance, wrote “Walking in the streets, listening to people’s conversations, one continually overhears “I saw it in the papers” as tho’ that proved the truth of the statement. Popular education has made us a nation of silly sheep” (D 5350, 21 September 1939). Also, Olivia Cockett graphically wrote “4.30: Just been to the lavatory: usually evacuate only in the early morning: feel pleasantly virtuous if my bowels move again later in the day. Reminded me of an overheard air-raid remark yesterday “The people downstairs in our house said they took no notice of the warning. But I heard the cistern go 4 times & drew my own conclusions”.” (D 5278, 27 June 1940). There is an interesting connection here to Harrison’s pre-Blackheath activities in Bolton, when a team of volunteers had observed and recorded “scenes, events, ... [and] ... overheard comments” (Ferraby, 1945a: 1). The wartime diarists seem to have taken Harrison’s request further, by including not only direct speech but also written commentary, particularly parts of letters. Perhaps both the epistolary origins and the continued epistolary transmission of the diaries to Blackheath encouraged the diarists to ‘think letters’ as they wrote. And perhaps, as noted earlier, the diarists also perceived that in doing so they were thereby responding to M-O’s request for the opinions of other people to be included in the wartime diaries.



Maggie Joy Blunt certainly saw her M-O diary as a space in which to include significant extracts from letters she received. Sandwiched between Blunt's entries for 6 and 21 May 1945, for instance, are separate pages, the first dated June 25 1945 at the top left, under which is written "Further extracts from S's letters from Italy" (D 5401, 25 June 1945). At the top right, Blunt used the abbreviation 'M.O.D' to refer to her Mass-Observation Diary, which struck me because of its resemblance to the Ministry of Defence short-form. Under this, she filled around one and a half sides of lined writing paper with excerpts from a letter from 'S' in Rome from 'AFHQ CMF'.<sup>101</sup>

"Sunday May 6<sup>th</sup>

.... I have, urged on by Lyn, answered an Ad in this weeks N.S. for a job in a Publishing Form. ... it is good for one's morale to make this kind of effort when one feels in a rut as I do.

[new page] June 25<sup>th</sup>, Monday  
M.O.D

Further extracts form S's letters from Italy ...

...

May 1<sup>st</sup>. *I got your letter today dated April 26<sup>th</sup>. Pretty good mail service. ... I'm scribbling this on my bed in the tent. I shall probably head North very soon & mail will chase me again ...*

May 7<sup>th</sup>. *Weakly scribbling still --- Radio says expect announcement hourly of end of war in Europe, thank God. Little celebration here. Much political talk. ...*

June 19<sup>th</sup>. *... In tearing up a pile of old letters I saw a MO Directive you sent me in May. No. 3 was 'Write as the spirit moves you on Peace'. ... Peace for me when it comes, means time – and the means – 'to stand & stare' – ... Yet I would not sell my memoirs[?] of comradeship from Tobruk to Paris. Nor for the beer drunk at the Royal Oak would I complain of insolvency. ... For me yesterday's sunshine is worth tomorrows storm which may never break ...*

[End of separate pages]

Monday May 21<sup>st</sup> ..... Spent this morning in bed & having lunched (cold mutton, potatoes, cabbage, lemonade, biscuits & cheese, coffee.) I sit in the garden, but it begins to cloud over – the sky I mean ..."

D 5401, 6 May, 21 May and 25 June 1945  
[italicisation added]

Blunt's inclusion of sizeable extracts from letters is interesting on several counts. Firstly, she appears to have selected excerpts in which S both steps-back

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<sup>101</sup> Refers to Allied Forces Headquarters, Central Mediterranean Forces.

from his situation to write reflectively about its broader ramifications, and also writes about the act of writing. Secondly, Blunt implies that diary-writing is neither an uncomplicated nor a clear-cut means of representing the present. She appears to include a separate page dated 25 June 1945 quoting S's May and June diary-entries amidst her May entries, and interestingly she organised her entire 4 May 1945 diary-entry around quotes from various other people. Thirdly, Blunt's inclusion of an extract from S's letter dated 19 June 1945 shows that S is aware that Blunt writes for M-O. It is likely that S knew about Blunt's M-O diary-writing, as well as writing in response to directives, and may also have known about her use of his letters in her diary. But whether he did or did not, M-O diary-writing and letter-writing clearly had a strong reciprocal relationship.

The wartime diarists also often use their diaries to record or reflect on writing, reading, sending and receiving letters. Lorna Caruthers from Manchester, for example, writes on 19 February 1945 that she had received "Two letters from Norbert to-day, one dated the 4<sup>th</sup> Feb. & one dated 13<sup>th</sup>" (D 5261, 19 February 1945), while Nella Last frequently mentions her letter-writing activities, often in a way that emphasises the volume of these:

"Of course letter writing is a big item now for I have to write one to my brother & two to each of the boys each week & they demand long newsy letters. Then there is always a letter coming – quite three a week from the boys friends who 'drop a line to good old No. 9 Ilkley Rd' & with Cliff having so little time I generally get them to answer. I tell them the news of Cliff & things in general. Ruth asked me what I did with all the stamps she brings!..."

D 5353, 13 November 1939

Another M-O diarist, Caroline Blake, portrays the hectic epistolary exchange between herself and other people in the following:

"I had a letter from my sister in New York, who writes me twice a week. She felt it cruel to tell me what they were doing, when England might be blown to pieces before I got the letter. I wrote and told her to write as usual, all the gossip as to what she was doing. ... Then I wrote a letter to a newspaper there, which has printed several of my letters in the past, describing a demonstration we had last week on

how to deal with an incendiary bomb ... I said, whatever comes before they received the letter, that was a picture of England preparing to face the Nazi horror."

D 5399, 24 June 1940

These epistolary activities included Blake writing to people and organisations outside of her familial and intimate relations, as with her reference above to the letters she wrote, which were sometimes published by a USA newspaper.<sup>102</sup> Towards the end of the war, Blake commented again on writing to newspapers:

"June 29 1944 How terrifically fast the days go. I thought I was writing here every day. I wrote a letter to Mr Gordon, editor of Sunday Express, told him it did not need acknowledging, but he very kindly wrote and thanked me for my "interesting letter." I had written what I thought of the doodle bug ... He writes that "even your opinion upon the doodle bug and the places it has hit, isn't anything like accurate." I am glad to know that, and tho he says he cant tell me the facts, he does say that the damage and casualties are almost fantastically infinitesimal ... He says papers are sent daily to Eire and Lisbon, and Germans there send extracts at once to Germany. (I was pleased

Mass Obs. Diary Continued

June 29 1944 (continued) by the unconscious compliment contained in his "even your opinion")."

D 5399, 29 June 1944

Clearly, Blake valued Mr. Gordon's 'unconscious compliment'. Relatedly, by repeating his description of her correspondence in quotation marks – an "interesting letter" – she used his complimentary remark to imply the worth of her letters to the readers of her diary. In addition, she comments on the practice of diary-writing in her statement "How terrifically fast the days go. I thought I was writing here every day", suggesting that daily-writing was an 'ought', although, as she notes, she had actually last written a diary-entry six days earlier. Her comment perhaps raises the popular assumption that diary-writing is a 'daily' activity, although more simply it could have resulted from her thinking that M-O staff expected her to write every day.

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<sup>102</sup> Another diarist alluded to her published comments, writing "Haw Haw. I'm ashamed of my nice remarks in US about him" (D 5296, 29 May 1940).

### A Conclusion: Hybridity, Context and Time

As a conclusion to this chapter, I shall pull together various of the points about conceptualising the wartime diaries as a 'form' or genre which have been dealt with. The M-O women's wartime diaries are social texts through and through and they and letters share many overlaps, including concerning seriality, sequence and temporality. However, I start by contemplating these diaries as 'in between' private and public forms of writing.

Clearly, M-O's wartime diaries are neither wholly 'private' nor wholly 'public', in the commonly understood sense of the terms. These diaries present and utilise a broad range of 'in-betweens', which problematises framing them according to such binary distinctions. Furthermore, the wartime diaries are not individualistic or solipsist. They are certainly not devoid of 'self', or selves. And, they also inscribe various evocations of the 'other', a wide range of other people. Rather than private or public, these diaries are more pertinently understood as social texts, occasioned by M-O's request for 'full' diaries to be written at a particular historical juncture, and they bear many signs of social influences impacting on writing a diary in the specific context of M-O.

In addition, the overlaps between the wartime diaries and letters, and epistolarity more broadly, also marks their positioning as social texts. The content of the diaries has many epistolary features, such as covering letters, included extracts from letters, and the diarists' comments on writing, reading, sending and receiving letters, as discussed earlier. These shadings between M-O wartime diaries and letters also exist the other way around too, with letters routinely having some 'diary-like' features. The existence of such overlaps demonstrates that it is neither easy nor desirable to define the precise limits or boundaries of 'different' genres of life-writing (Stanley, 1992b; 2004). Appreciating boundary traversals between life-writing genres does not, therefore, signify a problem but rather a possibility in an

analytical sense. That is, M-O's wartime diaries are best understood through engaging with such fascinating traversals, not least because this helps make sense of the particular organisational, conceptual, political and temporal circumstances in which the diaries were initiated and then continued to be written.

While M-O's wartime diaries are often covered by and invoke letters, this is actually of relatively minor significance, although always interesting, because all diaries to a greater or lesser extent invoke and overlap with letters. Of more considerable significance here is that, for M-O, organisational practices and epistolarity coincide in a multitude of mutually constitutive ways. As an organisation, both in addition and with regard to its wartime diaries, M-O utilised an array of epistolary practices and their associated conventions in conducting its research, as discussed earlier. The activities of the M-O's wartime diarists as 'subjective cameras' were, therefore, fundamentally framed in epistolarity, making it perhaps all the more to be expected that the content of the wartime diaries would demonstrate epistolary features. The rich epistolary framing of M-O's organisation and research overall is important and also relates to something even more significant about the wartime diaries as a whole, however. What it points up is that the M-O diary as a form overlaps with epistolarity, which I shall now discuss.

As a 'form', the M-O wartime diaries presume a reader, whether this reader is addressed explicitly or not. For the diarists, having their M-O diaries read formed part of the terms of the 'epistolary' organisational relationship that they 'signed up' for with M-O. Had the diarists not had this promised reader held out to them from the outset, then the diaries would most likely have been rather different kinds of texts. Furthermore, as part of this fundamentally epistolary relationship, the wartime diarists all had to be prepared for regular posting – envelopes and stamps had to be bought, etc. – and the diaries then needed to be sent to M-O headquarters using the postal service, relying on its collection times and staff. M-O diaries were therefore also social texts in terms of their regular reliance on other people and a large reliable

organisation for transit. The subsequent arrival of the wartime diaries at M-O headquarters occasioned several layers of response from the M-O staff. On the front-page of the diary-entries, M-O staff often noted 'Received on' and then the date, which perhaps facilitated sending quick acknowledgements of receipt back to the diarists, at least in the earlier period. At times, fuller responses were posted from M-O to the diarists, usually after more time, and these letters sometimes responded directly to the particular content of the diary-entries themselves. The M-O staff also often responded by reading the diary-entries received, although this was probably not always the case once the diary material began to amass and overload occurred. M-O also responded by using selected content from some of the wartime diaries in various wartime publications and drafts, as noted earlier, including US. Receipt of a set of diary-entries at Blackheath thus had broad ramifications, in terms of underpinning their feedback to an audience encompassing but wider than the individual diarist, and which at a very basic level assumed a reader for the diaries in the context of reciprocal epistolary exchanges about these.

Each time the diarists sent an instalment to M-O, then, its receipt occasioned responses, and each time M-O responded, this occasioned further responses from the diarists: the wartime diaries have epistolarity at their heart. This to-ing and fro-ing set the terms on which the wartime diarists agreed to, and practiced, writing their diaries for M-O. It frames and characterises their relationship with the organisation, and also the way that 'being a diarist' was conducted over time. M-O's 'subjective cameras', clearly, were not 'out there' observing and writing and sending their diary-entries to M-O in a one-way direction. Rather, the diarists' activities were informed by the knowledge that they were in correspondence with M-O, whether or not they received a direct response to each particular set of diary-entries they sent in.

This makes the M-O wartime diaries somewhat unusual. As a form, they are rather different from most other diaries, in that the epistolary organisational context of their solicitation and production sets them apart because it conditioned their

structure, content and all other aspects. This context is specific and extremely important to understanding what a M-O wartime diary 'is'. Its significance for interpreting the diaries also marks their position as social texts: they were solicited, written, received and used in a markedly social and political context and need to be understood as such (Garfinkel, 1967). The earlier chapters of the thesis have been crucial to contextualising the M-O wartime diaries, setting up a platform from which this chapter and those which follow build. That these are Mass-Observation diaries is crucial and should not be forgotten or seen as incidental.

The epistolary context of M-O's wartime diaries is fundamental to the diaries in a way that is much more significant than providing a backdrop, as I have already discussed. Indeed, the fact that the wartime diaries are 'hybrids' of diaries and letters is very much the result of the diaries having been occasioned by M-O. In other words, the epistolary framework in which M-O conducted its research and the organisation's context and agenda brought about or even 'made' the hybridic character of the wartime diaries as a 'form'. The occasioning of the wartime diaries at a particular moment in time and for a particular purpose necessitated a 'form' that would fulfil M-O's social and political agenda, and the perceived qualities of diaries and letters could be amalgamated to achieve this. Indeed, the existence of this hybrid itself constitutes a response to the social context and epistolary relationship that M-O and its diarists were in. Even the most 'diary-like' of the M-O wartime diaries are hybrids. The result is that the M-O wartime diaries are as much epistolary as diaristic, and in fact are both simultaneously in changing combinations over time.

The hybridic form of the M-O wartime diaries also directly connects with M-O's emancipatory agenda. By operating between people over space and time, the diaries dissolve any sharp distinction between self and other, producing writing which rests fundamentally on interaction and exchanges between M-O and its diarists. There were reciprocal exchanges of responsibility: put colloquially, the ball was in M-O's court at one point, and in the diarist's at the next. Seriality is one of the

definitional characteristics of correspondence, with each party taking turns as writer and recipient/reader, and seriality in this sense is one of the definitional features of M-O's wartime diaries too, as I have indicated. This closely involved 'ordinary people' in the data gathering process and related to M-O's perception of its volunteers as both observing other people and observing themselves in the construction of grounded knowledge. Clearly, then, the hybridic form of the wartime diaries is part and parcel of M-O's engagement with the 'ordinary' and quotidian, and not with so-called 'special' lives.

Both letters and M-O's wartime diaries have time 'written in' to them: both are definitionally serial and sequential kinds of writing around sequential exchanges. The particular hybridic form that a M-O wartime diary 'is' has time as well as epistolarity at its core. They were written and sent 'over time', there were time delays when they were posted, further time passed for M-O and the diarists to respond. The diary-entries themselves are serial and sequential and have a largely linear chronological structure focused on a succession of days. Within the content of these entries, there are various evocations and constructions of time, such as dated headings; sentences, paragraphs or occasionally larger proportions of entries framed in either past, present or future verb-tenses; and indeed there are written remembered or projected scenes which seem dislocated from the moment at which the diary-entry itself was written.

Time is clearly 'written in' to what a M-O wartime diary 'is' as a hybridic form. The form both demonstrates and is the result of a particular and occasioned amalgam of temporal features regarding letters and diaries, which centres around their serial and sequential qualities and the temporal circumstances in which the M-O wartime diaries were incepted and written. The 'serial' aspect of the M-O wartime diary as a form includes an ongoing and successive over time quality. It invokes the idea that wartime diary-entries, like letters, are written one after another over time with turn-taking involved, and this provides the framework for the successive and



continued writing of entries over time. The 'sequential' aspect of the form of a M-O wartime diary adds an interpersonal quality to this 'over time' exchange. As a form, a M-O diary operates in a sequential way between people over space and over time, which makes the form inherently social as well as temporal through its incorporation of such epistolary dimensions. However, it also adds a further temporal dimension by including a diaristic sequential quality regarding a succession of entries written over time at points within the epistolary sequence. The notion of 'sequence' in this sense also implies something of an 'order' or 'pattern' to, or a 'fitting together' of, the diary-entries over time and raises questions concerning how to conceptualise this, which I discuss fully in the chapters following. The temporal circumstances in which the M-O wartime diaries originated and were written is also invoked by, and indeed pivotal to, the hybridic form of a M-O diary. These circumstances occasioned the hybridisation of letters and diaries, which at a fundamental level involved initiating particular kinds of seriality and sequencing that would serve to underpin the form itself, making it, in fact, a kind of temporality in its own right, which I discuss in a later chapter.

Sequence, seriality and temporality are of the essence, then, to M-O's 'diaristic epistolarity'. In Chapters 4 and 5, I shall explore these and other temporal issues regarding M-O's wartime diaries in more detail, among other things in order to show more clearly how time is implicated in the diaries as a hybridic form. In the chapter which now follows, I shall look at a small number of wartime diaries in detail, examining and discussing their 'over time' features, with a particular focus on Nella Last's diary, while Chapter 5 will explore some additional temporal aspects of a wide selection of the women's wartime diaries.

~ Chapter Four ~

'Shaped by the structures of our time':  
Temporality, Women's Wartime Diaries  
and  
'Telling the Time'

"Our lives are always shaped by the structures of our time, material as well as cultural. What is interesting once we have defined those structures is how we managed to live our lives within and beyond them and how we struggle for change. Wartime women made certain choices and felt in certain ways about war and about how they should live. That is why looking at contemporary women's writing is so important if we are to understand the choices through their eyes."

Sheridan (1990: 3)

Introduction

Time and temporality played an important part in what M-O diarists perceived their wartime diaries in a very fundamental way to 'be'.<sup>103</sup> Nella Last (D 5353) found time to write her diary and also directives for M-O, prompted by remarks in William Hickey's newspaper column, and she was also concerned about having insufficient time to answer letters and a shortage of spare time more generally. Vanessa Chambers (D 5318) commented on the lack of time available for writing anything more in her diary than the day's main event. B.R.S. justified what she perceived as her incoherent "hasty & inadequate" commentary on VE Day by stating this was due to an "extreme lack of time" (B.R.S., c. May 1945, Letter accompanying Observer's Report of VE Day, TC 49/1/D). Beatrice Hope lamented the gaps in time in writing her diary and described these as "dreadful" (D 5337, 31 December 1945). And in describing the gaps in her M-O diary, Caroline Blake (D 5399) attributed these to the speedy passage of time, although she strived to write

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<sup>103</sup> For 'time' regarding M-O's post-1981 directive replies, see Jerrome (1994) on change and continuity in family life in relation to social gerontology; Shaw (1994) on the everyday ethics of time and punctuality; and Mace (1998) on ways in which time is involved in mother's literacies as well as different registers of memory. Jolly (2001), in contrast, has focused on three particular wartime diaries, including Nella Last's, as well as post-1981 M-O material, and Savage (2007) has compared 1948 and 1990 directive responses concerning social class and ways of understanding change.

daily. Letter-writing and diary-writing became enmeshed for Nella Last and she incorporated diary-writing into her letters and set aside time in which she did both. In contrast, Maggie Joy Blunt (D 5401) and Olivia Cockett (D 5278) depicted their diaries as taking time away from letter-writing, which suggests there were constraints on the writing time available for many diarists and that their time had to be apportioned, so that Nella Last's copious diary- and letter-writing over a substantial period is all the more distinctive.

As a result, examining how the M-O diarists constructed and deployed time facilitates looking at associated epistemological issues. The crucial issue concerns what a diary 'is' as a genre of life-writing and how time and temporality are inscribed in this. M-O wartime diaries are, by and large, chronologically-written, with their contents ordered according to consecutive and sequential dates; and this is echoed in how editors of M-O anthologies have presented diary extracts and also in the organisation of edited and published individual wartime diaries, as discussed in Chapter 2. By being structured in a chronological, day-to-day, month-to-month fashion, these publications follow the 'conventional' form of a diary. Irina Paperno suggests that, although many other aspects change over the time a diary is written, the diary "is committed to the calendar, day after day", chronology appears to remain constant (Paperno, 2004: 562). Chronology, then, seemingly provides a clear and irrefutable structural as well as temporal order, and it appears to endow diaries with a coherent 'plot' which is organised in and through time, not only for the diarist but also for any later readers.

The dating of M-O diary-entries structured my reading of them, by providing a tool for my research in two key respects. Firstly, such dates structured how I read 'over time' through these texts, because chronology provided the basis of the sampling procedure I designed to examine Nella Last's diary in depth. And secondly, particular dates also provided a basis for comparisons, by enabling comparison of diarists' entries for specific dates and time-periods. Following a discussion of some

general issues concerning time and diaries, I shall then explore in detail my 'over time' engagement with diary-writing (and reading) in working on Nella Last's M-O diary; and then, in the chapter which follows, I shall explore the temporal dimensions of the wartime diaries in a different way, by following Jennings and Madge (1937) in May The Twelfth and examining a range of writing on particular days. Overall, although I started by using time as though an entirely straight-forward matter, immediately its complications and ambiguities became apparent.

### What a diary 'is'

Dates and times are of course important to assumptions about what a diary 'is'. Chronology seemingly provides diaries with a structure through which an incremental story is told (or is read as such) and a series of entries given order and coherence. Discussions of edited and published diaries suggest, however, that things are not so simple as chronological structure being a guarantee of immediacy of writing.<sup>104</sup> Liz Stanley and Helen Dampier (2006: 26) point out that, in popular understanding and some, if not all, scholarly theorising, "the epistemological standing of diaries is rooted in their assumed ontology, which rests upon the time and space of writing", where "the scene of what is written about" and "the moment of writing" are assumed to be exactly the same, something which they problematise.<sup>105</sup> Diaries are certainly often assumed to:

"... contain facts about the present (and no foreknowledge of the future) and to have been written at or close to the time of their occurrence; their "periodic structure" ... is seen as tied to the recording of "daily events as they occur" ..."

Stanley and Dampier (2006: 26)<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> See, for example, Finlay and Fenton (2002), Fothergill (1974), Nussbaum (1988a), Rendall (1986) and Rousset (1983).

<sup>105</sup> In relation, see also Dampier (2005a; 2005b), Stanley (1987; 1992b; 2000; 2002; 2006) and Stanley and Dampier (2005).

<sup>106</sup> For such assumptions, see Blodgett (1988; 1991; 1992), Culley (1985), Felski (1989), Fothergill (1974), Gristwood (1988), Simons (1990); but for discussions that query and revise this see Bunkers (2001; 2002), Bunkers and Huff (1996), Makkonen (1999), Knowles (2005) and Plummer (2001).

However, their examination of Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo's (1905) published diary (about her experiences as a volunteer at Irene concentration camp near Pretoria during the South African War) shows that the assumed-to-be direct relationship between 'the moment of writing' and 'the scene of what is written about' does not exist here.<sup>107</sup> Brandt-Van Warmelo's diary was in fact, as her archived letters show, retrospectively produced but written in a way that strongly implied it was written 'at the time'. They use this perhaps extreme example of something often more subtly present in diary-writing to question assumptions about temporality and 'dailiness', proposing that these are artifices of writing, something discussed further in my next chapter. Problematising these assumptions is equally instructive regarding M-O's wartime diaries, as I go on to indicate.

The assumption of immediacy or closeness between 'the moment of writing' and 'the scene of what is written about' or, more broadly, the moment of inscribed experience, has several components. Firstly, it has been taken to characterise a diary as a more 'authentic' or true representation of events and happenings than any texts written at a greater temporal/spatial remove, for "the effect of sincerity", as Rendall (1986: 58) notes, "remains essential to the diary".<sup>108</sup> Blodgett (1991: 1) states, for instance, that diaries "without distortion by an intermediary ... reveal what women take to be true about themselves, their world, and its representability". And echoing this with regard to M-O's wartime diaries, Jolly (2001: 114) suggests that, because diarists Naomi Mitchison (D 5378) and Nella Last (D 5353) use 'zoom lenses' to show, rather than narrate, events in their diaries, by writing detailed scenes of happenings, their accounts have "a more 'mimetic' relationship with events".

Secondly, the assumption of immediacy has also been taken to imply that a diary is a spontaneous form of life-writing, with minimal premeditation or artfulness (Fothergill, 1974: 40; Rendall, 1986: 58), with this too seemingly guaranteeing

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<sup>107</sup> Knowles (2005) and Bunkers (2002) have discussed the idea of 'faux' diaries, while Stanley and Dampier (2006) use Baudrillard's notion of a 'simulacrum'.

<sup>108</sup> Fothergill (1974: 10) more ambiguously suggests that diaries are "not necessarily 'truthful' – in the sense that a court of law recognises truthfulness – but they are actual, true to life".

sincerity. Indeed, diaries are not generally thought to have any formal organisation apart from chronology, such as plots, themes and characterisation (cf. Fothergill, 1974; Rendall, 1986), something that M-O diarist Olivia Cockett alludes to in the following comment about 'disjointedness':

"Now that I've begun this Diary again it fills in odd moments: which partly accounts for the disjointed effect."

D 5278, 7 June 1940

Kate O'Brien's contemporaneous book on English Diaries and Journals indeed stipulated that such matters should be outside of what a 'good diary' is:

"A good diary is not necessarily literature; for of its nature it must be free of most of the disciplines and tests of a work of art. Vision, imagination, passion, fancy, invention, scholarship, detachment, and the steely restraints and consciously selected embellishments of form and of design – none of these has a vital place in diary-writing."

O'Brien (1943: 7-8)

A third assumption is that diaries engage with 'the present': they are generally taken to be written about the present in which the diarist is writing, and thus to represent this in a broadly referential way, which is something also problematised by Stanley and Dampier (2006; see also Salter, 2008b). Diaries are assumed to contain 'narrative time' and to be oriented towards the present.<sup>109</sup> More strongly, retrospection is sometimes denied as a characteristic of diary-writing, with Philippe Lejeune, for instance, suggesting that a diary does not fulfil the conditions of autobiography because its narration is not "retrospectively oriented" (Lejeune, 1982: 193). More recently, Lejeune has gone further, to suggest that "a diary is turned towards the future" rather than the past (Lejeune, 2001: 103), a stance which is seemingly corroborated by M-O diarist Eva Sampson:

I wonder what the future has in store for us, all the diaries will sound so different, in the future."

D 5420, 11 May 1940

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<sup>109</sup> Stanley and Dampier (2006). See particularly Ricoeur (1980; 1984; 1985; 1988).

And even when diaries are not written immediately or as close to the moment of experience as possible, they are often still characterised as having “nonretrospective immediacy”, a term which Rendall uses regarding Samuel Pepys and James Boswell's diaries, which as he notes were written up from ‘at the time’ notes into a daily diary format after the event<sup>110</sup> (Rendall, 1986: 58).

This practice of ‘writing up’ is much written about but infrequently witnessed ‘in the flesh’. It was however something I saw when a woman next to me on an aeroplane took two notebooks from her hand-luggage after take-off. Consulting a small notebook, which appeared to contain scruffy notes, she proceeded to write clear, crisp, past-tense sentences in a smarter notebook. She began by writing under an already-written date heading for the previous day (29 July 2006), then added something to the day before that (28 July 2006). Finally, she wrote a future dated heading (31 July 2006). This woman's ‘daily’ entries in her diary were clearly more complicated temporally than writing about the ‘here and now’ as this occurred. It is difficult to know whether any of the M-O wartime diarists wrote their diaries like this, because the diary-entries I looked at did not comment about this in them. However, it is clear that some diarists did make additions to previous diary-entries before posting them to M-O, as in Olivia Cockett's parenthetical comment that:

“My brother & his wife & 2 year old baby are still managing on A.F.S: he doesn't yet know if he personally is exempt from military service (10.6.40 He is now)”

D 5278, 6 June 1940

It is also shown in Eva Sampson's addition of a dated comment in the following:

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<sup>110</sup> Boswell wrote that: “My method is to make a memorandum every night of what I have seen during the day. By this means I have my materials always secured. Sometimes I am three, four, five days without journalising. When I have time and spirits, I bring up this my Journal as well as I can ...” (Boswell, 25 October 1764) (Boswell, 1953: 52).

"I told my husband to put his cards on the table & find out where he stands, he'll lose nothing by it, they won't be able to say he walked out on them at the ROVER AEROWORKS...

... Whatever service we labour in today, it all joins in the centre. (MON MAY 27<sup>th</sup>) Have learned that the Rover standing wage is £4.12 + the extra is overtime...".

D 5420, 24 May 1940

These examples raise questions about the nature of the 'present' in diaries,<sup>111</sup> and provide further grounds for rejecting Lejeune's characterisation of diaries as devoid of retrospection. Further examples are found in Nella Last's diary, as she often wrote about events remembered from the past, as did Caroline Blake. Both women's diaries indeed contain a great deal of retrospective comment, often triggered by events in the present. Blake, for instance, writes:

"... the men now seem impatient to be "in it" Have a crack at 'em," as some say ... How I love and respect them. Just as I did the common soldiers I nursed in Rouen in 1916. Ordinary, decent men and women, willing to work all their days, only asking peace and their home and a right to earn a living."

D 5399, 24 June 1940

An example from Nella Last not only flags up the triggering effect on memory that events in the present can have, but also that the past can act as a comparison through which diarists can make sense of the present and also think about the future:

"I sat so still, barely conscious of Leo's drone about prospects & 'position' in life, the past nearer than the present, my mind such a queer jumble as I contrasted the light hopes & plans of those 1934-39 days with the realities of today. Of Doug a self centred silly old bachelor. Jack Gorst fat & indulgent, with dull fishy eyes, of Ken Sladen who came home to a wife who had gone off the rails, & is in a home for chronic alcoholics, of several who look beaten & disillusioned, of some, like Cliff, who have managed to make the grade in another land across the sea. I wondered what lay in store for Leo, & his generation – our little Peter & his."

D 5353, 19 August 1948

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<sup>111</sup> The length of 'the present' is highly contested: some suggest it is the extent of short-term memory, others that it has the duration of an event, or that it has no duration at all (see Mayo, 1950; Ricoeur, 1984). Mead's (1932) version of 'the present' as becoming or emerging is also helpful here.



Assumptions about diaries as authentic/sincere, spontaneous and non-retrospective, then, are closely associated with the chronological format that diaries are conventionally structured around. In fact, all three characteristics are dependent upon this and how it is put into practice, which is prototypically around dailiness.<sup>112</sup> The wartime diarists overwhelmingly adhered to the chronological format, usually dating their entries sequentially over time, although as I shall show they complicate time in a variety of other ways. Daily-writing was generally perceived as something they ought to do, as shown by the comment from Blake's diary quoted earlier (D 5399, 29 June 1944) and Cockett's comment:

"Can't think of any more general details: If I don't begin daily soon, it will never happen!"

D 5278, 6 June 1940

However, not all the diarists I read wrote every day and it seems that daily-writing was aspired to rather than rigidly practiced. Ethel Harcourt, for instance, did not write daily, but did write in a way that accounted for the days she had not written on, as evidenced in this undated series of extracts from her diary:

"The hour has come – Germany invaded Holland, Belgium and Luxemburg in the early hours of this morning.<sup>113</sup> The War for us has really begun. ...

Winston Churchill as the new Prime Minister ... What a farce it all is! ... To return to the topic of the day. The news is ... alarming. ....

It is four days since I wrote that Holland had been invaded<sup>114</sup> – I now write she is conquered, defeated having lost all her Air Force and 100, 000 men. The fighting continues fiercely ...– but my God! A country in four days.

Every morning when I wake, I heave a sigh of relief, and think, another night gone and we are still safe. We are now forming a new Corps to deal with parachute

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<sup>112</sup> Ponsonby suggests that a diary is "the daily or periodic record of personal experiences and impressions" (1923: 1; see also 1927a; 1927b). Fothergill (1974: 9) suggests that diaries "...day by day strive to record an ever-changing present". Bunkers (1987: 11) suggests that "a diary is by definition a day-by-day record of existence"; and Blodgett (1991: 2) that "the diary's essential property as a form is its more-or-less dailiness, so that a diarist cannot know how her book will proceed into the future". Titles have followed, including: Blodgett's (1988) A Century of Female Days; Bunkers and Huff's (1996) Inscribing the Daily; and McCarthy's (2000) article "A Pocketful of Days".

<sup>113</sup> Germany invaded Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg on 10 May 1940, and thus I presume that Harcourt's entry was written on this day.

<sup>114</sup> Given the above, I presume this entry was written on 14 May 1940.

troops landing in this country – a possibility we should have scoffed at a year ago, but in view of current events it is a very real danger....

The greatest battle in the history of the world may commence at any moment on the Western Front.

It is a few days since I wrote in this diary and things have worsened. ... Any day now we may be mercilessly bombed ... American reports say that when Hitler gets the channel ports he will call on us to surrender. What a hope little Adolph! We would sooner die."

D 5391.1, c.10 May 1940

Harcourt's accounting for the passage of time here is achieved through continuity of narrative, and it induces a sense of closeness to the events she is describing despite – or because – of not being dated. This is perhaps surprising, given that the dating of diary-entries is assumed to be the prime means of claiming "I am Here and it is exactly Now" (Fothergill, 1974: 9). This effect is even more pronounced when "word and event ... coalesce in the act of writing itself" (Rendall, 1986: 58), as in the following present-tense extracts from M-O diaries:

"There are planes overhead now – make my tummy afraid tho' they must be English of course & I shall try to sleep. 3.45am."

D 5278, 4 September 1939

"Some beastly cats are howling as I write. I wonder why cats have to be so dismal in their love-making? Which reminds me that I have been preoccupied again this evening with the sex problem as applied to myself. The more I think about marriage, the less cheerful it seems."

D 5383, 28 June 1940 9.20pm

"I am writing this listening to the broadcast from the Cenotaph."

D 5303, 11 November 1945

"Monday Nov 11<sup>th</sup>.

The bulb (electric light) in the sitting room, where I have the only coal fire for this evening has given out & as it is a screw-in type & I have no spare, I write, romantically, by the light of two candles."

D 5401, 11 November 1946

Although Esther Walker (D 5383) and Olivia Cockett (D 5278) are extremely precise in 'timing' their entries, this is not the case with every wartime diarist. For instance, Nella Last commented in the summer of 1945 that: "I seem to have been in a mix up. I have had two 4ths of Aug, this year & just discovered it's the 6<sup>th</sup> today" (D 5353, 6 August 1945). Ethel Harcourt's one-off diary-entry for April/May 1940 is also rather confusingly dated. At its beginning Harcourt wrote "23 May Budget Day", followed by consecutively-dated entries until 30 May. After this, she wrote a series of undated indented paragraphs, some quoted earlier. Each of these paragraphs pertained to the happenings of days in sequence, something which is implied by her comments on the daily weather. Within these paragraphs, however, Harcourt acknowledged that she had actually not written on every day, as already noted. And following this, the next dated entry is given as "Mon 20 May", seemingly going back in time, and then after this the next indented paragraph is labelled "Friday" and the next and final one, "Tuesday May 28<sup>th</sup>" (D 5391.1, April/May 1940). On an initial reading, I concluded that Harcourt had used her diary in a rather haphazard chronological way. But looking at other information sources,<sup>115</sup> I realised that 'Budget Day' was in fact on 23 April 1940, and reading this date onto the diary makes the remainder of Harcourt's entry make sense chronologically, although it also implies that perhaps it was written well after the event, during May.

With hindsight, what I find odd is why I thought it important to 'correct' Ethel Harcourt's chronology and estimate dates on which her undated entries were written. I seem to have been less interested in what Harcourt actually wrote, and more in some external standard against which I evaluated her use of temporality. What difference does this make and why did I feel it necessary? I felt I 'had' to, as an academic researcher, and the fact that diaries are prototypically understood around chronological ordering underpinned this. What are the analytical benefits and costs to examining a diary according to chronological time? What different approaches are there and what advantages do these have? These and related questions about diary-writing 'over time', its chronological ordering, and the reading practices engaged in

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<sup>115</sup> See, for instance, [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/about/about\\_speech\\_dates.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/about/about_speech_dates.cfm)

by myself as a researcher, are examined in what follows and then addressed specifically at the end of the chapter.

In order to facilitate my exploration of the 'over time' issues involved in M-O diaries and diary-writing, because most of the diaries are fairly short, I need to examine those that were written over relatively long periods of time. For this purpose, Nella Last's diary provides an appropriate source. It is not the absolute longest M-O diary, as noted in Chapter 2, but it is the most voluminous and is generally seen as particularly reflective. As noted earlier, I am aware of good reasons for not picking out 'special' or 'interesting' diaries from the pack, not least because this is antithetical to the original M-O project's emancipatory agenda. Also, it does not make it easy to compare or contrast the diary to the rest of the M-O wartime diaries. What examining one long diary does enable, however, is an engagement with its 'over time' features. For instance, I am interested in how a diarist as a 'subjective camera' conducts her diary-writing and her detailed writing practices over time, whether and to what extent these change, how a diarist writes about perceiving time and using time over time and changes in this, and the ways in which a diarist constructs a 'temporal economy' and how this develops over time. Also of considerable interest to me are issues regarding how to actually go about researching and analysing a 27-year-long diary. I shall now turn to these and other related issues.

Nella Last's Diary: 'a long long time ... day after day, week after week ...'<sup>116</sup>

Although material from Nella Last's M-O diary has been cited already, for contextualisation purposes I shall introduce her 'diary-writing life' in more detail here.<sup>117</sup> A self-described middle-aged housewife who lived with her husband William in a 1930s semi-detached home in Barrow-in-Furness (Lancashire, England), Nella Last began writing a diary for M-O in August 1939. Having

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<sup>116</sup> D 5353, 2 September 1949.

<sup>117</sup> See Hinton (2004) for biographical details.

responded to directives since the beginning of that year,<sup>118</sup> and having written three day-diaries in 1938, Last replied to Harrison's August 1939 'Crisis Directive' and began to keep a diary for M-O, writing on almost every day of almost every week for nearly twenty-seven years, sending her last instalment to M-O in February 1966 (although her entries between January 1944 and April 1945 are missing). For Nella Last, therefore, her wartime diary-writing became a long-term project, and discussion of her wartime and also her post-war M-O diary is central to the rest of this chapter, which focuses on diary-writing 'over time', its development and changes, and the incremental inscription of information and seeming continuities in this.

During two periods of pilot work in the M-O Archive (March 2004 and December 2004), I identified various women who had written diaries for lengthy periods of time. Prompted by my long-standing interest in ageing and representations of it, Charles Madge's concern for finding ways to explore social change, duration and longevity appealed to me, and I perceived time as a "necessary variable in social change" (Sorokin and Merton, 1937: 615), and time more generally as an "important parameter in social analysis" (Adam, 1989: 458). Although not the woman diarist who wrote the longest, Last's diary stood out for me in terms of the sheer volume of writing, the depth of everyday detail written about, the length of time she wrote over, and the regularity of her contributions. Volume, length, regularity and the 'ordinariness' of her writing attracted me because, combined, these features seemed extraordinary.<sup>119</sup> Relatedly, given her considerable volunteer work, and large amount of cooking, sewing, house-keeping, and letter-writing, I was interested in how she had managed to engage in diary-writing for M-O in such an 'extraordinary' manner.

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<sup>118</sup> Nella Last responded to fifty-six directives from January 1939 to December 1945, and also sent accounts of her dreams to M-O.

<sup>119</sup> See Stanley's (1984: 2) comparable comment about editing Hannah Cullwick's diaries: "Of course in a way the existence of her diaries makes her extraordinary; but this is a quality conveyed only retrospectively, for she continued in exactly the same kinds of activity as any other woman doing a similar job of work ... For me, it is precisely her 'ordinariness' that makes Hannah 'extraordinary'."

I was also attracted to Nella Last's diary because of its format and presentation. Her 'weeks' were organised in a highly routinised fashion, running almost always from Friday morning to Thursday evening, and starting a fresh page on every Friday.<sup>120</sup> Her entries were written on similarly sized and weighted writing paper throughout most of her diary-writing life. And the (changes in) pens and pencils she used to write produced not only visual differentiations, but were also sometimes commented upon in the diary itself. And having taken much pleasure in reading the 'war years' of Nella's diary (Broad and Fleming, 1981), when looking at the original manuscript (that is, not the war years on microfiche, but the original paper sheets) I found a number of inconsistencies. This made me think about issues concerning the process of transcribing, the use of diary extracts in published and other 'translated' forms, and editorial choices and selections, as discussed in Chapter 2. It also led me to an interest in seeming 'continuities' in people's diary-writing over time and whether chronology is central to continuity or whether other factors play an important part, an examination of which Nella Last's lengthy diary lends itself to. Before discussing this, however, I want to outline the procedure I used to examine it, given its voluminous character.

During my main period of research (January to June 2005) in the M-O A, and due to time restrictions and the volume of Last's diary, I used a method of sampling across it which purposefully deployed the chronological conventions and 'dipped' into diary-entries written at pre-determined intervals, rather than engaging with the diary in its entirety or by using pre-chosen themes. More specifically, I examined a month in detail from each of the consecutive years in which she wrote; and, for each of these months, I fully transcribed a whole week and noted extracts from the remainder, which produced around fifteen typed A4 pages for each of the twenty-eight years of transcriptions. Initially I hand-wrote these, but I soon found that word-processing was essential, because of the volume of material and because I could perform keyword searches on the result and also cut and paste.

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<sup>120</sup> Last accidentally transgressed this 'diary-week' format in 1966 by continuing her Friday 28 January entry on the same page as Thursday 27: she corrected this by striking through the former and copying out the same text again on a fresh page.

My sampling started with the last entry of Nella Last's diary (February 1966). It then moved sequentially 'backwards' through her years, months and weeks of writing,<sup>121</sup> such as February 1966 'Week 4' then January 1965 'Week 3', December 1964 'Week 2', November 1963 'Week 1', October 1962 'Week 4' and so on. The result is outlined in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1 Sampling Nella Last's Wartime Diary**

	<u>Month &amp; Year Sampled</u>	<u>Full Transcription</u>	<u>Additional Diary-Entries Read or Transcribed</u>
1	Feb 1966	Week 4	
2	Jan 1965	Week 3	
3	Dec 1964	Week 2	
4	Nov 1963	Week 1	
5	Oct 1962	Week 4	
6	Sept 1961	Week 3	
7	Aug 1960	Week 2	
8	July 1959	Week 1	
9	June 1958	Week 4	
10	May 1957	Week 3	
11	Apr 1956	Week 2	
12	Mar 1955	Week 1	
13	Feb 1954	Week 4	
14	Jan 1953	Week 3	
15	Dec 1952	Week 2	
16	Nov 1951	Week 1	
17	Oct 1950	Week 4	
18	Sept 1949	Week 3	<u>September</u> : Week 1 (to cover the 10 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Last writing a diary for M-O) (partial transcription)
19	Aug 1948	Week 2	
20	July 1947	Week 1	
21	June 1946	Week 4	<u>November</u> : Week 2 (to cover Armistice Day) (partial transcription)
22	May 1945	Week 3	<u>February</u> : All Weeks (to cover the Hamburg, Dresden and Würzburg Bombings) (partial transcription) <u>May</u> : All Weeks (to cover VE Day & non/celebrations) (partial transcription) <u>August</u> : All Weeks (to cover Hiroshima & Nagasaki bombings and VJ Day) (partial transcription) <u>November</u> : Week 2 (to cover Armistice Day) (partial transcription)
23	Apr 1944	Week 2	Diary lost between Jan 1944 – April 1945

<sup>121</sup> There are echoes between my 'backwards' approach, and Last's analeptic orientation and discussion of 'remembering' in her diary (Salter, 2008b), See also Virginia Woolf's (1976) 'weaving backwards' process of remembering and also Claudia's 'laying on her death bed' reflections in Lively's (1987) Moon Tiger.

24	Mar 1943	Week 1	<u>November</u> : Week 2 (to cover Armistice Day) (partial transcription)
25	Feb 1942	Week 4	<u>November</u> : Week 2 (to cover Armistice Day) (partial transcription)
26	Jan 1941	Week 3	<u>November</u> : Week 2 (to cover Armistice Day) (partial transcription)
27	Dec 1940	Week 2	<u>May &amp; June</u> : All Weeks (to cover Dunkirk and the Fall of France) (partial transcription) <u>November</u> : Week 2 (to cover Armistice Day) (partial transcription)
28	Nov 1939	Week 1	<u>August &amp; September</u> : All Weeks (to cover The Declaration of War) (full transcription) <u>November</u> : Week 2 (to cover Armistice Day) (partial transcription)

I thought it important to vary the months and weeks examined, so as to engage with as broad a range of annual, monthly, weekly and daily events and experiences in Nella's writing life as possible. However, although this gave me some understanding of her writing for each year of her diary and facilitated an examination of her diary-writing 'over time', it was also problematic in four particular ways.

Firstly, I realised that on two occasions my sampling frame 'closed in' on itself, with January 1965 and December 1964 and also January 1953 and December 1952 both being examined, which left little distance between the sampled months. But this also had advantages, because I could then examine the relationship between two consecutive months of Nella's writing, adding a further dimension to exploring possible continuities in her diary-writing over time.

Secondly, having decided to examine the first, second, third or fourth week in particular months of Nella Last's diary, I also soon realised an intermittent 'Week 5' existed. Hence, in some of the Archive storage boxes I was faced with five weekly sets of writing, each of which Nella herself had grouped together by sewing strands of wool or thread through the pages along the left-hand side. I therefore adapted my sampling procedure by reading through and noting details from these 'extra weeks' as and when they arose.

Thirdly, the diary-entries written between January 1944 and April 1945 inclusive are missing from the Archive, so I was unable to sample Nella's diary for



April 1944, as my sampling procedure designated. To compensate for this gap of sixteen months, I looked at her response to an April 1944 Directive<sup>122</sup> and found this to be rather different from her diary-writing; in this Nella wrote in a far less detailed manner, writing short sentences that summed up the views of other people rather than building up something of a story.

Fourthly, I became rapidly aware that rigidly adhering to the sampling procedure meant that potentially interesting dates and times would be excluded if they fell outside the frame, such as 4 October, Nella's birthday. Therefore I made a point of reading and noting material from such dates as I became aware of them. In addition, because of my curiosity about how Nella Last navigated the practice of diary-writing over time, I realised that particular dates might be important regarding not only the topics of her entries but also the length she had written about them. Thus, for example, when I examined Week 3 of September 1949, I also looked at Week 1 and found that Nella had mentioned her ten-year diary-writing anniversary:

"Just about 10 years since I was asked to write an M. O diary, a long long time. I can never understand how the scribbles of such an ordinary person, leading a shut in, dull life, can possibly have value. No 'adventure' nothing spectacular, day after day, week after week, till the formidable total of 10 years – 3,650 entries – I cannot believe it! ..."

D 5353, 2 September 1949

As a consequence, and also because sometimes I became so absorbed that I 'ran over' into consecutive weeks, I gathered additional material to that produced by the sampling frame. I also gathered further material from Nella's diary through my second sampling procedure, a 'day-based' examination of a range of women's M-O wartime diaries discussed in the next chapter but with the result noted in the right-hand column of Table 4.1.

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<sup>122</sup> Nella Last (DR 1061), reply to April 1944 Directive (DR 97).

Producing this table helped to delineate my two sampling procedures, and more simply it also told me 'what I'd got' by presenting visually the dates around which my approximately 225,000 words of typed notes and transcriptions from Nella Last's diary were organised and the additional diary-entries I had read and on what dates. It also depicts the order that this took, which, as noted earlier, was 'backwards'. This 'backwards' approach was important for a number of reasons, in particular because I was curious to see how the Last diary ended and if she acknowledged it would be her final entry, which she did not (see Lejeune, 2001). In the event, this felt a little like reading the end of a novel before the beginning. Also, having done so, this 'hindsight knowledge' influenced the interpretive lens through which I read all earlier (by date order) diary-entries. In February 1966, around two-and-half years before she died, Nella was obviously ailing, and as I read her diary from this time I began to wonder what had led to this. Knowing that the earlier days, weeks, months and years were accessible to me, I wanted to explore this.

In a perhaps perverse way, my reading backwards emulated some aspects of how Nella had written her diary. That is, Nella would not have known the connections between her present and future diary-entries in advance, and, by reading her diary backwards, I did not know any connections between the present entry I was reading and past entries until I encountered them. Also, it was important to start as close as possible to my own 'present', because this eased me into understanding past cultural references by improving my knowledge and understanding. While Nella Last when writing her diary had moved forward through a series of 'presents' or 'near pasts', much like complicated 'snapshots' taken of each day, week, month and year, my reading of her diary moved backwards across a series of 'pasts' that were brought into my present through reading and subsequent writing about this.

However, it was even more complicated than this, because Nella's diary evoked various 'pasts' and various 'futures' in its construction of sequential 'presents' or 'near pasts'. This has already been noted and is discussed further later

in the chapter, but it is important to mention here that its existence made me question Dorothy Sheridan's (1993b: 29) statement that "[M-O was] ... much less concerned with the retrospective element of full life stories and memories and much more concerned with accumulating over a long period of time sets of writing about contemporary experience". Clearly, both memories and anticipated futures had a place in Nella Last's 'present', and her own concerns as a diary-writer coexisted with her perceptions of M-O and its concerns. Reading her diary chronologically 'backwards', therefore, brought these matters to the fore, enabling me to more clearly appreciate the connections between pasts, presents (or near pasts) and futures as inscribed in it. It also allowed me to appreciate the influence that chronological ordering has on the representation of experiences and other people. This reversed trajectory of my reading practices on the Nella Last diary has thus provided a rich temporal seam along which I can examine multiple aspects of her diary-writing over time,<sup>123</sup> which I shall now discuss.

I shall start with three diary-entries written at approximately ten-year intervals across the period Nella wrote her diary: 12 August 1960, 27 October 1950, and 13 December 1940. Comparing these entries suggests some dimensions of the narrative shape of her diary-writing over time. Each entry begins with a comment on the weather, with 12 August 1960 described as a "nice bright day", 27 October 1950 as having "a bitter east wind & heavy gray skies", and 13 December 1940 as "wild and stormy". In fact, most of Nella's diary-entries throughout begin with a comment on the weather, which locates what she wrote in these circumstantial immediacies. Then, after commenting on the weather, in each entry she wrote about her morning activities, which in 1960 involved going to the centre of Barrow-in-Furness and then onto Walney Island "to walk on the Break Water" (D 5353, 12 August 1960). These activities, as well as her car drives along "the Coast Road" with her husband

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<sup>123</sup> Regarding how M-O diarists Amy Briggs (D 5284) and Muriel Green (D 5324) write their diaries over time, see Sheridan (1990: 8-9).

William<sup>124</sup> were frequently mentioned in her diary, particularly after the war, although they did not always occur in the morning. The entry for 1950 explains that she felt ill with “face ache & ... ear ache” when waking up that day, and so instead of going out, kept herself busy at home, having “tidied around & cleaned inside of the downstairs windows & machined the new facings on Arthur’s pants turn ups, & got them pressed, & the felt hats [she had] left in water tightly wrung through the wringer & later pressed out flat ready for cutting” (D 5353, 27 October 1950). And the 1940 entry comments that she had “nothing in particular to go out for”, so she decided to “finish off odds & ends of sewing for [her]self including two ‘new’ blouses out of outworn summer dresses” that morning (D 5353, 13 December 1940). Writing about the activities that occupied her, and hence accounting for how she spent her time, was clearly an important ongoing concern in Nella Last’s diary-writing (and see Baggermann and Dekker (2006) regarding Otto Van Eck’s comparable concerns).

Next, again in each of the three diary-entries and as was her regular practice, Nella wrote about particular incidents and then more general thoughts that she perceived as relevant to, or that occurred on, the day on which she wrote. In the 1960 entry, following the pre-lunch trip out to the Coast Road, Nella wrote about the wide variety of cars registered at “many different parts of England & Scotland” parked along the way (D 5353, 12 August 1960). She then wrote reflectively about the “anxiety there must be amongst holiday makers as to whether they could get from anywhere needing a sea trip” by linking a comparable remembered experience of her own “from Southport a few days after the break out of the first world war when a 3 ½ hour journey took most of the day as [her] train was shunted several times to clear the main line for unexpected traffic” (D 5353, 12 August 1960). Nella then connected these by writing: “What senseless frustration & worry there seems nowadays” (D 5353, 12 August 1960).

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<sup>124</sup> See Nella Last’s entries for 26 October 1962, 18 and 23 September 1961, 12, 14 and 15 August 1960, 5, 7 and 8 July 1959, 23 June 1958 and 23 May 1957. Her first mention of the Coast Road, according to my sampling, was on 23 June 1946.

As this indicates, Nella Last's diary includes not only comparative reconstructions of present and past happenings but also ranges across personal experience and broader social experience even within one entry. In her 1950 entry, Nella wrote about a "big halibut head", which she asked her husband to chop with an axe so that it would fit into her saucepan; William, however, "split it long ways – no better to get it in a pan, - and splitting the wooden stool in two" (D 5353, 27 October 1950). Following this, and similarly to the 1960 entry, she then more reflectively comments, this time on William's behaviour, that "The idea of such a 'practical' man doing such a daft trick, gave me a sick shudder, & reminded me of many 'mindless' tricks" (D 5353, 27 October 1950). And, in her 1940 diary-entry, she writes about a visit from an acquaintance, Isa Hunter, who tells Nella that her "guests", "two soldiers – Welsh boys", had now left (D 5353, 13 December 1940). Writing about this, Nella explained that at first the soldiers were "very nice in every way", then on their second visit they "asked for three helpings of everything", while on their third visit, "the married one brought his wife back from leave & asked if she could be 'put up for the night'" and that a "huge pile of luggage was taken upstairs & Isa's bedroom criticised & rearranged to suit cot & a baby of two banged & hammered at everything in sight" (D 5353, 13 December 1940). Again, as with the 1960 and 1950 entries, Nella then commented more broadly on the situation, this time on evacuation, writing that "When Isa was speaking it seemed to open up a vista of the miseries of evacuation" and then related these concerns to herself by writing that "I'd never have a woman I'd never seen dumped on me – I'd rather have three children" or "two Naval men but added cooking & work would mean giving up Centre & I feel I do good work there for the wool fund" (D 5353, 13 December 1940). This concern with evacuation occupied the remainder of Nella's diary-entry for 13 December 1940, which ended with:

"My husband said 'why worry so much – there are hundreds of houses in Barrow with more room than we have & no boys to think of coming home' & he says too that I should be content with work at Centre. I agree & am content - & then when I am dusting my two unused rooms I feel so guilty & think of homeless ones ..."

D 5353, 13 December 1940

Nella's discussion of 'holiday anxieties' on 12 August 1960 and the 'halibut head' on 27 October 1950 combine incidents and related reflections and more closely resemble the 'usual' narrative shape of her diary-entries than the focus on evacuation for 13 December 1940. Typically, her entries are ordered around temporal markers, such as eating times and leisure times. In the entry for 12 August 1960, for instance, after commenting about 'holiday anxieties', Nella wrote about her work in making "babies woollies" to give to Mr. & Mrs. Higham, whom she had hoped to meet whilst driving on the Coast Road (D 5353, 12 August 1960). Nella's rendezvous with the Highams was unsuccessful, however, so she left the woollies in the Highams' front porch. Interestingly, Nella mentions in the middle of this entry that Mrs. Higham telephoned "after tea" about the woollies. So, rather than writing this entry strictly according to the chronology of events, she included the denouement of the 'woollies and Highams story' – Mrs. Higham's telephone call – in the chain of events of that particular micro-narrative, abandoning the strict chronology of events but maintaining the structure of the micro-narrative.<sup>125</sup> The entry then re-connects with the main chronology, providing her customary detailing of what precisely she and William ate for tea, despite her having already mentioned Mrs Higham's post-tea telephone call: "We had fish for tea. I got a small bay codling for 1/- off a boy ... It was ample for a good tea, with bread & butter & there was sponge sandwich & small cakes" (D 5353, 12 August 1960). Nella then followed this by writing about her and her husband's choice of television and/or radio entertainment for the evening (D 5353, 12 August 1960), which, especially in the post-war years of her diary, became the device for narrative closure she typically used. It also suggests that she wrote at least part of her entry in the evening, as in the following from around two years earlier:

"...Tonight I sat writing & raising my eyes when I heard an odd little noise. I saw Ann outside Mrs Atkinson's gate – which was closed – against which she leaned heavily with her back & 'swayed'. It only has a little catch at the top - & a bolt in the middle at the bottom & her 'bump, bump', seemed to give the gate increasing 'sway'. Then

<sup>125</sup> For Mace (1998) and Jolly (2001), although chronology is perhaps the defining characteristic of diaries, diaries are actually a site in which diarists work with it and renegotiate it to their own ends.

there was a crash & a scream. I resumed my writing but could see both up the road & down from the bay window & there wasn't any one – or anything in sight.”

D 5353, 9 June 1958

In her entry for 27 October 1950, however, Nella wrote more precisely according to the chronology of events over the day, relating incidents and reflections closely to the temporal markers that she set up. Following her comment on William's botched-job of the 'halibut head', for instance, she writes about what she prepared and ate for lunch that day, which then locates the 'halibut head' incident in the morning for the reader. After lunch Nella and William both had their customary rest, and then Nella set about sewing a "little cot quilt" during the early afternoon. Nella described how this activity was interrupted by an incident, a visit from her next-door neighbour Mrs. Atkinson, who came round to borrow "a shilling for the meter" (D 5353, 27 October 1950). Mrs. Atkinson stayed for some time, talking with Nella about her daughters Norah and Margaret and how her home feels "dead" without their presence. Nella quoted several remarks from this conversation, drawing her account to a close with a comment about her own children: "I said 'you're lucky. I've not seen much of my two for years at either Xmas or New Year'", to which Mrs. Atkinson replied "oh boys are different, you always expect girls to cling to home" (D 5353, 27 October 1950).

The close of this conversation is marked by a "noise from the bedroom above" made by Nella's husband preparing to come downstairs, which adds a corporal, almost audible, quality to the entry at this point. The imminence of William's presence downstairs has a striking effect on how the remainder of the incident plays out and how Nella inscribes it. The conversation is wrapped up speedily, and written about using a speed-related lexicon, as Mrs. Atkinson "grabbed parcels, scarf & gloves & rose hastily saying 'I'll have to be off to make tea'" (D 5353, 27 October 1950). Nella then wrote that she realised "with a sigh" that Mrs. Atkinson did not mention William once. This incident and Nella's reflection on it takes this diary-entry up to the Lasts' own tea time, and Nella then wrote exactly

what tea consisted of before mentioning, as usual, their entertainment choice for the evening. The entry ends with Nella returning to her sewing, describing her cot quilt in detail and writing that “it looks really good”, as well as describing herself as “really suited” with the alteration she had made to Arthur’s turn-ups and stating that it had been done in “real tailor fashion” (D 5353, 27 October 1950).

Although Nella’s use of temporal markers is very interesting, providing information about the ‘temporal economy’ (Jolly, 2001: 120) she inscribed, there are other equally interesting features too. In particular, her writing down Mrs. Atkinson’s remark concerning boys being different and by implication not wanting to “cling to home”, and her “sigh” at Mrs. Atkinson not mentioning William in their conversation, are poignant. With regard to the former, there are many passages which imply her feelings about her sons living away from home, particularly Cliff who emigrated to Australia soon after the war, but also Arthur who worked in Manchester and then Belfast as a Tax Inspector. In 1942, for instance, Nella wrote about an unnamed woman who had bought two of her handcrafted dollies – “Ronnie & Bonnie” – for her granddaughter in London, writing that “Like myself she feels rather lost now her family have grown up & away & she has two lovely grandchildren she rarely sees & can only send presents to” (D 5353, 1 March 1942), while there are many comments about her letters and later telephone calls to bridge the distance between herself and her sons.<sup>126</sup>

In her 27 October 1950 diary-entry, however, Nella does not mention such sentiments and if I had read it in isolation I would not have appreciated that Mrs. Atkinson’s comment would have struck a tender chord with her. In other words, this is an implication I have ‘read into’ it, not something immediately ‘there in the text’ for every reader to interpret in a similar manner. The basis for this interpretation comes from other diary-entries, because reading her diary over time has enabled me

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<sup>126</sup> For instance, Last writes “... I often wonder if I’d ever see Cliff again, that London was a good distance away with fares expensive, but in my heart agreed when [Mrs. Higham] spoke of the link with letters, & the knowledge they were there” (D 5353, 22 January 1953).



to perceive a number of such implications. These inferences, including regarding her sons' absence and her worries over William's detachment and general lack of interest, are ones I have made by linking together comments inscribed at temporally different points. Although my comment here is about a single day, 27 October 1950, it is connected through my interpretive practices to the other days, weeks, months and years on which Nella writes her diary. Importantly, my interpretation is in fact not the product of the 'dailiness' of Nella's writing, because it does not hinge on particular days as discrete time periods. So although her diary is written as a long series of 'days', and 'dailiness' is characterised as absolutely pivotal to the diary as a form of life-writing, as a reader my interpretations use thematic rather than temporal connections across the entries. Moreover, what I am left with is actually an overall impression of Nella's diary, rather than a detailed dated series of events and incidents.

Paradoxically, then, despite my knowledge of the diary deriving from research using a sampling procedure based on (reverse) chronology, what results is not bound to chronology, whether read backwards or forwards. I know things by virtue of being able to find them by using chronology and the data set formed by my notes and transcriptions; but I remember things about this diary in a different way. My memories of it are neither 'held' nor retrieved in a strictly chronological form, which is something I think Nella would have agreed with, given her comments that "Minds or memories are odd" (D 5353, 10 September 1939) and that "Memory is a curious thing" (D 5353, 28 August 1948). However, my memories of Nella's diary are not haphazard or disorganised. Whilst reading and thinking about her published diary and its manuscript form, and later through re-reading my notes and transcripts,<sup>127</sup> I picked up threads that seemed important and remembered those. Those that I most recollect pertain to the micro-narratives in which Nella reflects on incidents and her own situation more broadly, some of which were outlined above, and the comments in which she reflectively takes stock of herself and her personal situation. Consequently, I was attuned to comments or implications regarding the

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<sup>127</sup> See Huff (2000) regarding the 're-visioning' aspects of reading manuscript diaries.

absence of Nella's sons and her husband's social ineptitude, amongst other reasons because these were frequent topics which Nella reflected on and constructed her written self in relation to. These 'moments of reflection' are highly related to the 'at the time' incidents that she also wrote about in her diary-entries, as I commented earlier, but whether such incidents triggered reflection, or whether Nella wished to reflect and used these incidents as a prelude to this, is unclear.

In addition to gaining a good sense of the 'narrative shape' of Nella Last's diary-entries over time, my backward chronological way of sampling what she wrote also facilitated my perceiving what I came to call 'narrative threads' and 'micro-narratives', that is, her representations of specific people or particular incidents over time, calling them this because of her frequent use of sewing and mending terms and analogies. An 'over time' approach enables studying these narratives and their construction, as with Nella's accounts of her Aunt Sarah (born c. 9 August 1864, died c. May-September 1957), middle sister to Nella's mother Margaret (b. c.1861), and Aunt Eliza (b. c. 1868), each of whom Nella writes about in varying detail and in various places in her diary. These sisters were the progeny of "Gran", the grandmother (b. c.1834, d. c.1909) that Nella often wrote fondly about as a "charming interesting woman" (D 5353, 24 September 1939) and who had had a strong influence on her life. According to Nella, Aunt Sarah resembled Gran not only in appearance – "Gran's eyes were 'so blue and clear' Aunt Sarah has dark brown eyes but there is some resemblance" (D 5353, 24 September 1939) – but also in character. Aunt Sarah lived in Spark Bridge, near Ulverston, which Nella referred to as 'Sparksbridge' throughout her diary. This small village is approximately thirteen miles from Barrow-in-Furness taking the most direct route, but, when visiting Aunt Sarah, Nella and William often preferred to take the Coast Road (today the A5087) "round the lakes" (D 5353, 10 September 1939).

I now want to discuss Nella's representations of Aunt Sarah. Other people in the diary (such as her sons Cliff and Arthur, her husband William, her Gran, her

neighbour Mrs. Atkinson and one of her daughters Margaret, as well as her friend Mrs. Higham and some other colleagues from the W.V.S. Rest Centre, Red Cross Shop and the Canteen)<sup>128</sup> are mentioned so often and in such detail that over-viewing what Nella writes about them would not be possible to detail here. On the other hand, many other people, such as salesmen, the shopkeeper and the butcher, are only referred to in passing, and her comments on them are more perfunctory. My sampling procedure provided twenty-six references over twenty-four years of Nella's diary-writing (see Appendix 1).

I first 'met' Aunt Sarah in the entry of 28 November 1963, which comments on her having things in common with Australians. Having already read the published war years version of Nella Last's diary (Broad and Fleming, 1981), I immediately connected this to Cliff being in Australia, which Nella frequently wrote about, including through references to the Australian magazines sent by Cliff and read eagerly. In this Nella also mentions the comment Cliff made in a letter, that "kindness should always be passed on if not actually returned", a belief Nella inherited from her Gran as well as Aunt Sarah. Nella appears to have found reassurance in Cliff's comment, and such thoughts also provided her with a prompt for remembering, for she immediately then wrote "... its amazing how little things do come back – little kindnesses & good will" (D 5353, 28 November 1963).

The second encounter with Aunt Sarah came in the 7 September 1961 entry, which concerns the "odd little consolations" she gave to William, and also that she was "old" and for some reason pitied (D 5353, 7 September 1961). The third entry, for 1 September 1957, states that Aunt Sarah had recently died, having lived "till nearly 93", at some point between 21 May and 1 September 1957, because the 21 May entry had commented that she "looked astonishingly well" (D 5353, 21 May 1957). The first and second comments read about Aunt Sarah, then, concerned a

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<sup>128</sup> Hinton (2004) notes that Nella Last joined the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) before the war and by January 1941 was working on its Hospital Supply Committee. In Spring 1941, when the Barrow Blitz caused organisational difficulties at the Barrow branch, she initiated the resumption of hospital supply work, and took on increasing work at a Mobile Canteen and a Red Cross charity shop.

posthumous person, which explains, although implicitly, Nella's pity and her reflection following Cliff's letter. When Aunt Sarah was alive, she was presented as someone in an everyday relationship with Nella, although she sometimes also triggers Nella's reflections on wider issues. In the April 1956 entry, for instance, Nella visited Aunt Sarah and wrote about their conversation concerning Sarah's misgivings of Royalty. Also, having written in October 1950 about Aunt Sarah's shopping package of "margarine, cheese & dripping", Nella then wrote more broadly about William 'shunning' visits to her Aunt because of what Nella perceived to be his "fear" of "old age & death" (D 5353, 14 October 1950).

Rather than continuing to trace impressions of Aunt Sarah through my backwards readings, I now want to address the question of what doing this tells me as a reader. The meaning given each extract is enhanced by my reading each subsequent extract, as well what surrounds it in the diary-entry from which it comes. In other words, the most recent (in terms of my reading) representation of Aunt Sarah was filtered by and interpreted through the previous one. Or to put it another way, in my backwards reading, the past is read through the lens of the present,<sup>129</sup> the reading present, for I knew the outcome of an incident in Aunt Sarah's life before I knew that the incident had even taken place. A key example concerns Aunt Sarah's accident in 1939, when she was "knocked down by a car on Tuesday night, [and her] arm & left side very bruised" (D 5353, 18 November 1939). However, using my sampling frame, the first mention of this I came across was a May 1957 entry, when Nella writes that "... oddly enough, since the accident to her arm & shoulder, her face had plumped out, & grown pink & white, lost the sallow, wrinkled look" (D 5353, 21 May 1957). At this stage, I wondered what accident had befallen Aunt Sarah, although I knew she had recovered well. And even in the second entry I read, April 1956, I was no wiser as to the cause: "No sign of her 'breaking up' after her accident, as the doctor had feared" (D 5353, 20 April 1956). Indeed, I had to read

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<sup>129</sup> Mead (1932: 2) comments that the "past must be set over against a present within which the emergent appears, and the past, which must then be looked at from the standpoint of the emergent, becomes a different past" and also that "from every new rise the landscape that stretches behind us becomes a different landscape" (Mead, 1932: 9-10).

thirteen more entries, the equivalent of seventeen years, before Nella specifically mentions the car accident.

Perhaps if I had sampled and read Nella Last's diary at shorter intervals, it is possible that Aunt Sarah would have been mentioned on additional occasions. However, the way I worked tied me to particular dated entries. Of course any claims from what I collected and gathered could be questioned on the basis of what this approach might have missed. Nevertheless, there are analytical gains as well as losses, as follows.

Firstly, in reading about Aunt Sarah's accident backwards, finding out the effect of the accident and then its cause was just as important as determining when it occurred. Chronology was, however, still important to understanding Aunt Sarah's accident, because in order to find out its cause, after realising its effect, I needed to go back in diary-time (although forward in my reading) and this required reading consecutively and chronologically through Nella's references to Aunt Sarah until I found a comment that marked the beginning of the micro-narrative thread: "Aunt Sarah has been knocked down by a car on Tuesday night, arm & left side very bruised" (D 5353, 18 November 1939). Having found this, I felt some satisfaction because I had pieced together a complete micro-narrative, joining up its end, middle and beginning. In turn, what this shows is that chronology is not the only ordering mechanism at work in Nella's diary, because for a reader finding the start and finish of the accident was at least equally important to my interpretational activities and practices.

Secondly, had I read the diary in the chronological order it was written, this would have introduced me to an 'alive' Aunt Sarah in Nella's diary on 2 September 1939, rather than the 'deceased' one I first encountered in 1963. Sarah's age would have progressively increased; I would not have known almost from the start of my reading that she lived until age 92 in 1957. I would also have read Nella's

chronologically first reference to her in a non-specific way as “an aunt living about 12 miles away” (D 5353, 2 September 1939) and then, eight days later, as a “very old Aunt who was rather disappointed she had no evacuated children ... Aunt Sarah” (D 5353, 10 September 1939). A conventional chronologically-forward reading would have introduced me to an unnamed relative, then her naming, and I would probably also have noticed that Nella's memories of Aunt Sarah became more reflective and more sentimental after her death. Conceivably, reading Nella Last's diary chronologically-forwards instead of backwards would have shifted the focus, shifted to her as a writer engaged in building narrative threads and developing character, rather than emphasising the interpretive work of the reader.

Thirdly, when re-reading my transcriptions of Nella's diary chronologically-forwards, however, I perceived a progression in Aunt Sarah's character development. In 1939 Nella commented that “She has the most wonderful philosophy of life I have ever known & ... said a time was coming when we must all be kinder to each other & help each other more” (D 5353, 10 September 1939), a sentiment partly echoed in Cliff's letter quoted by her in 1963 – “you always used to say a kindness should always be passed on if not actually returned” (D 5353, 28 November 1963). She also commented on Aunt Sarah's enactment of this philosophy in everyday life, writing about, for instance, the “odd little ‘consolations’” that Aunt Sarah gave to William (D 5353, 7 September 1961). Aunt Sarah was also characterised as a careful person who took pleasure in Nella's thrifty shopping (D 5353, 14 December 1940) and kept her cottage “neat & trim” (D 5353, 8 December 1952). These later attributes are ones Nella valorised in her diary-writing, hinging on running a good home, being a good housewife and remaining busy and useful. In building up the character of Aunt Sarah, Nella was providing an estimation of these qualities and was thereby constructing her own written self.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Continuity in identity, Humphrey *et al* (2003) argue, is a central if often unrecognised theme in much biographical material, although contra postmodernist ideas about fractured and multiple identities. Interestingly, Last seldom uses the present-tense but when she does it is often in reference to what she perceives to be continuous or permanent character traits: “I'm a self-reliant kind of person” (D 5353, 3 September 1939) and “I realise ... when Arthur talks of my ‘serenity & courage’ how hollow I am ...” (D 5353, 25 December 1952).

Overall, there is an implicit assumption by Nella of accumulated knowledge on the part of any reader, with each additional mention of Aunt Sarah adding an incremental piece of the picture she is constructing. Reading the diary backwards, I did not at first perceive this interpretation; and clearly both a forward-reading, and a backward-reading, are valuable sources of insight. At this point, I want to think about Nella Last's diary as one continuous narrative and compare its beginning and end by looking at the first three diary-entries that she wrote (30 & 31 August, & 2 September 1939) in relation to the last three (22, 23 & 24 February 1966). Having now discussed many entries between these temporal points, I am interested in what this might add to my understanding.

Nella began each of her final three diary-entries typically, with a comment on the weather, writing that 'Pancake Day' in 1966 was "so damp & dreary" (D 5353, 22 February 1966), that the following day "torrential rain" fell "all day" (D 5353, 23 February 1966), and that the next day was "Another soaking wet day till late afternoon" (D 5353, 24 February 1966). This confirmed my earlier observation that Nella's regular practice was to write about the weather in this way. However, reading her first three diary-entries, the weather is in fact mentioned only in connection with 'The Crisis', when she wrote that "the weather is still so oppressive – real crisis weather & makes people jumpy" (D 5353, 31 August 1939). This suggests that while commenting on the weather at the start of her diary-entries became a regular practice it was not there in any set way at the outset.<sup>131</sup>

That Nella Last developed an approach to diary-writing is shown also in the use of temporal markers which she framed her writing around, as noted earlier. In her final three diary-entries (as indeed in many others over the whole period), these markers relate to her preparation and consumption of lunch and tea and choice of

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<sup>131</sup> Jolly (2001: 116) suggests that Last's perceived audience for her writing "quickly became domesticated" in the three day-diaries she wrote for M-O during 1938, so much so that when we read her wartime diary "we can almost forget she was writing to M-O at all".

television/radio entertainment in the evenings. However, such markers are in fact not present in Nella's first three diary-entries: entertainment choices are not mentioned at all, nor are there any comments about the preparation and consumption of food. Indeed, she only mentions food in one of these first diary-entries and this only in relation to observing people near particular shops and reflection about her appetite:

"Downtown this morning no one seemed to be talking of anything but food & I saw as many prams parked outside Woolworths, Liptons & Marks & Spencer as on a busy Friday afternoon. Inside it was the food counters in Woolworth's & M & S that were the busiest ... Wish I liked meat and stout & had a good appetite to 'keep up'. Will try & drink more milk."

D 5353, 31 August 1939

Nella's practice of using temporal markers – writing about food, eating times, evening entertainment choices, and comments on the weather – developed and became regular over time, then. They were not just 'there' as an a priori of diary-writing, but things she chose to make use of and which were institutionalised in the way she structured her entries.

There is also an interesting difference in the focus of the two sets of entries. In her final three entries, the scope of Nella's writing was narrowly home-related or directed towards small-scale local concerns:

"Neither of us feel like fixing the date to begin Spring Cleaning by having the sweep... my husband had one of his daft spells & planed a strip off the garage door because the damp tended to make it stick."

D 5353, 22 February 1966

"I'll take my husbands watch to the watch makers but dear knows how long it will take to get repaired."

D 5353, 23 February 1966

"I got my ironing done at least – woollens do take a long time to dry this weather."

D 5353, 24 February 1966



And this circumscribed focus is alluded to in an earlier comment that:

"On reflection I feel more concerned with a number of 'little', as against 'important' things."

D 5353, 7 July 1939

However, by contrast, her first three diary-entries were concerned with much broader and 'big' happenings, such as war news, the W.V.S. and how the war was affecting her family:

"... not heard a lot of 'Crisis' tales to-day only that two Cruiser liners have put in & the Mount Clare & her sister ship – to be refitted for troop ships and two of the Isle of Man steamers are to be equipped for Hospital ship."

D 5353, 30 August 1939

"... went down earlier to the W.V.S. meeting, I got a real surprise for the big room was filled with eager women who settled down to swab making or evacuation blankets."

D 5353, 31 August 1939

"I knew my younger boy [Cliff] had to go [to war] in a fortnight but now when it looks as if he will have to go any time & at such a time I realise he's going."

D 5353, 2 September 1939

Obviously, Nella's diary-writing in 1966 compared with 1939 reflected to some degree the events of the time and her concerns in relation to this. Even so, in 1939 her interests and attention were generally far wider and she certainly did not write entirely about her individual concerns, as she did in 1966. This is in part because Nella wrote her diary for M-O differently in 1966 compared with 1939, and the changes occurred steadily and incrementally, developing her own distinctive writing practices such as comments on the weather and using temporal markers. These eventually became routine in Nella's diary-writing. Thus, in November 1939 around a third of her diary-entries have at or near their beginning a comment, quirkily- or eloquently-expressed, concerning the weather. By December 1940,

around half the entries begin like this. And in the later years, the clear majority of her diary-entries begin like this.

At the same time, it is also likely that the differences are because Nella's social world and her interest in 'outside' events and persons contracted. Her ties with W.V.S activities and colleagues loosened after the war, and with people more generally as she grew older. Nella wrote, however, that she was not happy with "turning ever inward" (D 5353, 29 January 1953) and that this was often a matter of contention between her and William:

"I heated soup & sliced tomatoes – beef, but wasn't interested. I felt in one of my 'slowed down' moods. I rested when my husband did. I'd have liked to go out, but could tell he wasn't keen."

D 5353, 17 September 1961

"When I think of my so busy life of a few years ago – my toy making, making my own clothes & lots of little 'charity' works, my letters – and the baking & cooking I used to do, it's a puzzle how I got it all done – and somewhat of a reproach at times. I take so much longer to do things – often the effort is more than what I accomplish. To be ready to go out, read aloud, watch Television seems at times a 'this is your life'. My busy days folded away for ever. Perhaps its how age takes a toll - & worry."

D 5353, 24 September 1961

Throwing further light on this, Nella also wrote about William not wanting her to go out and leave him on his own. In the first quote below she puts a rare positive slant on this and hints at her resignation at 'turning ever inward' as she and William grow older together, while the second is more characteristic:

"All my married life I've had more or less of a 'resentment' at times, at the quite candid statement that he was never happy when we were apart, that 'I don't want anyone else's company but yours. I don't see why you want to go out so & so, or go to so & so on you own. yet now, as I grow old, I forget the 'restrictions', even 'frustrations', & grow more & more to see the beauty of a love, that sees no change in an ageing tired face, asks nothing further of life, than to go quietly down hill together."

D 5353, 14 March 1955

"When people are 'set' so firmly, its bad enough when they are young - & healthy, when old, it amounts to an assertion 'I never want to go anywhere without you, why should you go,' - & he could make himself really ill with a scene."

D 5353, 18 April 1956

During the early years of her diary, Nella wrote more about wider contemporaneous happenings, not surprisingly given the dramatic wartime events, whether the Hitler assassination attempt (D 5353, 9 November 1939), leadership troubles during the Barrow Blitz in May 1941 at the local W.V.S branch (Hinton, 2004) or local W.V.S. internal struggles at the Rest Centre (D 5353, 11 March 1943). Yet, unlike the first three diary-entries, those for the war years quickly ceased to record war-related 'facts and figures'.<sup>132</sup> Had I read just the beginning and end of Nella's diary, I would therefore not have noticed the speed at which such comment became excluded. In writing about a W.V.S. meeting only a few days before the war started, Nella wrote something that casts interesting light on her swiftly changing diary-focus:

"I felt as if I stayed in I'd 'worry' so went down earlier to the W.V.S. meeting ... It was odd to me that there was so little talk of the big issues – just a planning of how household affairs would be arranged to enable as much time as was needed to be given."

D 5353, 31 August 1939

Initially Nella found it "odd" that the W.V.S. women were concerned with "just" the organisation and planning of "household affairs" to free-up their time for the W.V.S. She had expected them to talk more about "the big issues", those that formed a large part of her diary-writing at the time. However, after committing herself to "give every hour to Service as long as the War lasts" (D 5353, 10 September 1939), Nella soon realised that she too needed to plan her household affairs to provide the time for this and thus took onboard the W.V.S. women's attitude, as she implies in the following:

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<sup>132</sup> But see Richard Brown's World War Two diary which is immersed in such things (Millgate, 1998).

"I've got lots of plans made to spare time so as to work with the W.V.S"

D 5353, 4 September 1939

"Resting for a while & looking at papers. Writing to the boys & getting my next weeks programme mapped out. With all day Thursday & Tuesday afternoon at W.V.S. Centre and gas course & lectures for an hour each morning I have had to plan meals carefully so as to be able to have an easily prepared meal each day ..."

D 5353, 24 September 1939

"Being on Committee means more time down at Centre – have to go all tomorrow. I'll get less done at home but like to be down there working & if I plan carefully I can arrange meals for two – or three-days ..."

D 5353, 6 November 1939

Here too, going beyond the first and final diary-entries showed me that this organising and planning became a regular diary topic for Nella, and rapidly eclipsed commenting about disembodied 'war news' in favour of the tasks she was doing at home, for the W.V.S., and her sewing work:

"I dressed a doll out of some fancy dresses for my butcher's wife – a 'memory' doll as it's really lovely for I had such beautiful stuff to work on ... I made her wig of fawnish wool with a fringe & soft loops over ears & a low knot sticking out of her bonnet at back – a lot of work for 2/6 d, but she smiles so gay & merry & is such a nice dollie I feel my work has not been wasted & it's tea & sugar for a whole week of two afternoons & two mornings – more if I've a poor attendance to make tea for. ..."

D 5353, 18 January 1941

Accounting for how productively she used her time became important to Nella Last's diary-writing from the early war years through to the 1960s. Developing a routinised narrative shape for her diary-entries and posting these regularly to M-O became part of accounting for time. Even when her regular involvement with the W.V.S ceased in June 1946 – "Neither of us could believe that after all this time we had no war work at all on our minds, that we can plan every day with out leaving out those for Hospital Supply, Red Cross or Canteen. Mrs Higham said 'I hope I'll not begin to grow old as well as fat!'" (D 5353, 6 June 1946) – Nella continued to write

in a way that focused on everyday activities, with her sewing and mending and her letter-writing featuring highly, and also shopping and preparing meals, the latter not surprisingly given that rationing of at least some foodstuffs continued until 1954. By that time, Nella had been writing her M-O diary for around fifteen years and her diary-writing practices were routinised and ingrained, also perhaps reflecting the circumstances of her life and the 'regularised' path it came to take.<sup>133</sup> Throughout, Nella continued to employ temporal markers in most of her diary-entries, which importantly organised her representation of daily activities in the diary.

Comparing Nella Last's first and final diary-entries helped highlight that a speedy change occurred in her writing practices. This was not apparent to me reading chronologically through her diary. However, at the same time, realising this required me to know something about her diary-writing 'in between', and to know something about the connections between a sequence of her diary-entries, not just a few entries written at two very different points in time.

In practical terms, the way I sampled Nella Last's diary-entries was not straightforward to use, not least because it involved working against the 'archival frame' (Hill, 1993) in which the M-O wartime diaries have been curated and stored. For instance, to sample her diary, I first had to determine which storage boxes I needed, because the women's diary-entries are ordered alphabetically and stored accordingly in one or often more boxes for each month of each year in which the diarists wrote. Next, I had to request each box I required from the store. Time governed this procedure: 'Material Request Forms' had to be handed in by a particular time each day; and also there were only certain days of the week that the Archive was open. To examine the diary-entries commented on here I had to request twenty-eight storage boxes, given to me one-at-a-time because of Archive regulations. And then, in each box I had to search amongst many diary-entries in order to identify Nella's writing. This latter procedure became increasingly speedy,

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<sup>133</sup> Jolly (2001: 120) suggests that as Last grew older her diary seems to have helped her to "endure a numbing routine", as a means perhaps of banishing the "vertigo of the end" (see also Lejeune, 2001).

not only because the small rectangles of card, attached via brass paper clips to each diary-entry with the diarists' surnames on, facilitated this, but more particularly because I became familiar with Nella's hand-writing and the general look of her diary-entries and could spot her entries in the boxes.

Further complications arose when, using my backwards-sampling procedure, I finally reached the wartime years of Nella's diary. The post-war years of all the M-O diaries are available only in their original manuscript versions.<sup>134</sup> However, the wartime years are not only stored in their original manuscript form, but also on microfiche.<sup>135</sup> This, however, is not an unmediated 'copy' of the original manuscripts, something which became evident when examining Nella's contributions. The text that the microfiche was taken of, and which represents 'Nella Last's Wartime Diary', was in fact the transcribed, typed version produced by Broad and Fleming (1981). Once I reached the war years of Nella's diary and was then asked by the Archivists to consult the microfilmed version instead of the original manuscript for reasons of preservation, I was alerted to considerable differences between these versions, as mentioned in Chapter 2. The microfiche was not only two-dimensional – that is, I could not see the writing on the other side of the page and thus developments in a particular diary-entry – but also using the microfiche reader encouraged me to read and handle the diary differently from the manuscript version. Of particular importance here, I realised that in using the microfilmed version for some of the war years, I was producing transcripts of rather different versions of Nella's diary-entries, produced at different times and for different reasons and with significant differences in 'the words on the page'.

The sampling procedure used to facilitate reading Nella Last's diary was further important to my analysis because, by its nature, it meant that time became a

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<sup>134</sup> Although some early M-O material is currently (2007) being digitised, it is unlikely that all the post-war diaries will be included.

<sup>135</sup> Done in the 1980s, to help prevent the original manuscripts from deterioration and also to make these microfilms commercially available. However, although on microfiche, the wartime diaries do not form part of the commercially available package.

central consideration for me. Also, in using it, other diarists' writings were continually under my gaze and literally in my hands. Occasionally I read some of these when I had finished my 'Nella quota' for the day. Sometimes I 'landed' on them and was engaged by a catchy sentence or unusual hand-writing into reading further. Doing so, I was startled by the variety of ways of representing the same day, week, or month – not only did the substantive content vary tremendously, but also the format, presentation, and writing materials were very different. As a consequence, I began to wonder, if I 'went with' instead of 'going against' the archival frame, what I would find out about diary-writing for M-O and about time and diaries more widely. This resonated with Jennings and Madge's (1937) analytical approach to the day-diaries collected for 12 May 1937, in which they compared and contrasted the diary-writings of a range of people over that specific day. I was interested in what light their procedure might throw on the general run of wartime diaries. I therefore transcribed the diary-entries written by a diverse group of women diarists on some specific dates, the analysis of which I shall discuss in the following chapter. In the section following, however, I continue focusing closely on what one particular M-O diarist, Nella Last, did with time in her diary. Then in the conclusion, I shall draw back from the detail, to discuss what can be learned more generally about 'telling the time' from the materials discussed in this chapter.

### Discussion Time: Temporal Issues in Reading the Nella Last Diary

So far, this chapter has examined how various M-O diarists constructed and deployed time in writing M-O wartime diaries, with time and temporality playing an important part in what they perceived their diaries to 'be' and how they negotiated the practices involved in writing them. In particular, I have focused on Nella Last's diary, discussing its narrative shape, the temporal markers she organised her entries around, some micro-narrative threads I perceived in her sequence of entries, and various methodological and other issues in my reading her diary. Three broad points arise from this which I now discuss. The first concerns what Nella 'did' with time in her diary, which I explore through the 'narrative anachronies' in her diary-writing,

especially its prolepses and analepses. The second concerns Nella as an ageing woman in relation to her diary-writing practices. And the third involves a brief reflexive and evaluative return to the 'backwards' chronological sampling frame which was used to examine her diary 'over time'.

Firstly and succinctly, Nella Last did complicated and interesting things with time in her M-O diary. Far from just representing a series of simple 'heres and nows', her diary articulates a number of temporal complexities which I now explore to show the fascinating range of relationships that diaries have with time. In discussing this further, I shall also explore some of the 'narrative anachronies', the time-related story-telling or narrative structuring devices, which are present in Nella's diary. In his Narrative Discourse, Gérard Genette (1972: 35-47) describes various anachronies<sup>136</sup> in Marcel Proust's (1913-1927) Remembrance of Things Past. Two such anachronies – prolepsis and analepsis<sup>137</sup> – are particularly instructive when examining Nella's diary, providing me with a means of working through the "complicated play of temporal levels" in her writing (Guerlac, 1980: 1416).

In several places in her diary, Nella Last writes about the future, projected or anticipated occurrences that may or will happen. These proleptic comments constitute 'flash-forwards', and refer to "any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later" (Genette, 1972: 40). The prolepses in Nella's diary range in length or extent, but are usually no more than a few sentences or even a single line located at particular and often resonant places among her comments. They also have a varying temporal range and can "reach into ... the future, either more or less far from the 'present' moment" (Genette, 1972: 48). For instance, as already noted, in her 12 August 1960 entry

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<sup>136</sup> Genette (1972) discusses other anachronic devices, such as 'ellipsis' and 'paralipsis'; see also Guerlac (1980).

<sup>137</sup> Bloom (1996: 29) suggests that a public private diary, which is oriented towards external readers, includes "foreshadowing and flashbacks; emphasis on topics rather than chronology; repetition of philosophical themes and pervasive issues ... and other stylistic devices. All of these techniques help to develop and contextualise the subject, and thus aid in orienting the work to an external audience".



Nella flashes-forward in her 'woollies and Highams' story to include 'tea time' earlier than its strict chronological order so as to incorporate the denouement of this micro-narrative, Mrs. Higham's telephone call. This is an example of a prolepsis with a rather short reach into the future, just part of a single day, used to conclude a micro-narrative in a way that made sense in story-telling terms. Similarly, in the next example Nella uses another prolepsis – again a telephone conversation with Mrs. Higham – to flash-forward and provide the crux of her micro-narrative concerning three boxes sent to the Red Cross Shop:

"I'd to tidy up when I got in - & another parcel of oddments were brought for the shop & someone leaving town, giving up a large house to retire into a cottage phoned to say 'three large boxes of 'rubbish' were being sent to the Red + shop – later Mrs Higham phones to tell me 'rubbish' was the best description of the contents.!"

D 5353, 5 May 1945

However, sometimes her proleptic comments reach further forward into the future, as in the following examples:

"I should have been one of the tea hostesses at the club meeting this afternoon, but Mrs Higham asked me to change with her, for she will have a magistrate's meeting next month."

D 5353, 1 March 1954

"Mrs Higham was delighted with the basket full of slippers, dollies bonnets & shoes & the bunny I'd made, she is going to get a pattern for a monkey from handicraft class. I wish I'd something to make one. I've never made a monkey. I'll keep the pattern, I may get a bit of suitable material before I want to make toys before next year for the Hospital."

D 5353, 2 November 1950

"...as it was so hot I decided I'd better wash the three blankets I'd taken off the beds. I'll be very busy next week & I don't like soiled things lying."

D 5353, 9 May 1945

"Heard a woman say lightly today that she 'wondered what she would be doing & what would have happened this time next year'. God is good when we do not know ahead."

D 5353, 13 November 1939

Nella's prolepses, however, as the last example here shows, do not always refer to particular dates in the future: sometimes she reflects on how present events might map out and is then understandably imprecise about time. Two other examples are as follows:

"Sometimes I think war's real evil is what it does to peoples minds more than their bodies. The aftermath of this one bears out my ideas, there seems so little to look forward to, all seems in the far future, out of reach with a rough unknown country to traverse before we reach that 'land of promise', - travel it too in worn shoes or 'utility' ones – or some poor souls in bare feet."

D 5353, 8 June 1946

"Our 46<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary – unbelievable – makes one think of 'a thousand ages in Thy Sight' – was written by some one who was bewildered by the swift passage of the years. I wonder if at last, the tangle of Suez is going to begin to unravel? After Hitler's 'domination' I never thought his like would ever trouble the world. I never want to look 'ahead', but in this case I'd love to read what history will say of the whole queer muddle..."

D 5353, 17 May 1957

Clearly, then, Nella's comments about the future not only reach across varying expanses of time, hence representing diverse 'tempora' or stretches of time (Pranger, 2001: 387), but are also framed in a number of time 'tenses', which, taken together, help to organise the time structure or temporal order of her diary (Roberts, 1999: 22; see Adam, 1990: 37; Schutz, 1945: 214-215). It is worth therefore considering Nella's comment in the final quote above about 'never wanting to look ahead', which helps contextualise her proleptic remarks, and perhaps also explains why there are, at least in the material I sampled from her diary, far fewer prolepses than comments about the past, the analepses I discuss shortly.

In the following quote, Nella writes that she is pleased she can look forward to Cliff's visit home from his military training, but is very much aware that after this he will go on active duty overseas:

"Cliff did not come home tonight & I'm glad now for I can look forward to it all next week. In his letter he said they have got identification discs & pay books for overseas. I cannot sweep the sea back with my little broom however I try. Soon the sea will be up to my door – my baby will have to go! – like all other mothers 'babies' & we cannot hold the clock back. I have the feeling sometimes that I don't want Xmas to come & go – if I could do so I would clutch at & hold each day a little longer."

D 5353, 10 November 1939

Here, Nella connects the sea allegorically to time, using it to evoke the future as an encroaching force that brings Cliff's departure closer. She writes explicitly that she does not want "Xmas to come & go", she does not want the future to come and that she wants to "clutch at & hold each day a little longer", which I shall discuss shortly. In the following, she expands on the reasons for 'never wanting to look ahead':

"I fell into a train of thought, fear dominates & rules us all today ... All my life I've had to make some kind of effort, since I was crippled by an accident at 5 years ... Yet I could honestly say I was never conscious of 'fear' – there was always tomorrow, - the boys would grow up, my husband have the business. I saw to it that, however hard, I saved a little for bad times, & hoarded oddments all the year for Xmas or holidays. Up to the First World War, & for a few years after, I'd sublime faith we had finished with war, that the one we had 'won' was to end all wars. Doubts grew – shadowed, but did not 'poison' the last war bewildered people like myself, by its 'suddenness', - that was not 'sudden' to really thinking people. All people of my generation – say from 50 onwards, are fearful, - we know what war means, in taking our sons, if they come back, it was as if they had been robbed of all the day spring of life. Now, God pity us, on top of memories of wars, there's the deadly growing menace of the H bomb – and, equally as bad, 'germ' warfare, which I so feared & thought inevitable in 1939 & onward. ..."

D 5353, 4 March 1955

"I pinned them ready to stitch, feeling that 'uplift' that only feeling 'satisfied' with oneself can bring. Granted it was a very very faint uplift, but at least I have managed to renovate these good, well-cut clothes Arthur sent my husband ... It gave me a nice little 'warm' feeling – confidence? Faith that I was at last going to be able to master nerves & 'fears'? – any way, a great great comfort. The worst that can happen I think, is to lose faith, - in oneself, our leaders – most of all in 'tomorrow'."

D 5353, 18 May 1957

"...In desperation I turned on the Light Programme – the Adam's Singers<sup>138</sup> ... I sat down & listened to the gentle, 'sweet' voices, as they sang the years ~~ago~~ away for

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<sup>138</sup> 'Sing Something Simple' with the Cliff Adams Singers was a half hour radio programme that began in 1959 on the BBC Light Programme (see <http://www.whirligig-tv.co.uk/radio/musicprog.htm>).

me. ... I caught an echo of other days, days however sad in the First World War, when – what was it we had? – difficult to describe except in the word 'faith' – in the future, - what a glib spell binder was Lloyd George to be sure, in some way, we felt we had faced the worst that could possibly happen, that there would never be another war, etc, how naïve we were. I let my mind float away on the gentle melody, with the nasty cold worm of fear I think we all have, that never was the whole world in such tension, distrust & fear, & at a time when we read more newspapers, - news print - & views of people who know – or in positions to weigh up, we have so little."

D 5353, 10 July 1959

Clearly, Nella's comment about 'never wanting to look ahead' relates to her fear of the future, more specifically to fears about the "chaotic state ahead" (D 5353, 11 May 1945). These fears were to some degree a product of her socio-temporal location in post-war Britain, when there was widespread uncertainty about the direction the changes taking place in society might take. In 1948, she wrote "how many 'epochs ending' had been the result of war, & those that followed, had not had a lot more to offer" (D 5353, 16 August 1948), and a decade later that "In these 'insecure' times, people don't want further 'insecurity'" (D 5353, 22 June 1958).

For Nella, having faith in the future was integral to being able to 'look forward', and she alludes to this in writing that soldiers in receipt of the Red Cross parcels sent by the W.V.S. "said it was not just the food, but the looking forward to something that kept them going" (D 5353, 11 May 1945). For her, being able to 'look forward' and have 'faith' in 'tomorrow' was integral to keeping going through the rough times, further indicated in her comment that there was an inevitability to the flow of events because they take place according to "God's Plan", or a "Blueprint", a view which she writes was derived from her Gran:

"...simple faith in what Gran called 'God's plan' & broadcaster called 'Blueprint'. The boys 'skit' me often for my love of 'old days & ways' but in these dark days words of my Gran's – and deeds – comfort & help me more than the words of any preacher or priest ... any way I don't believe in latter, not one bit. Just as in Nature there are 'no rewards & no revenges – just consequences' so I feel it is in LIFE – not just the little span of life we live here but the underlying spark that is in us."

D 5353, 22 January 1941

Given her perception of this inevitability, Nella found solace in the idea that “everything passes”, a term she uses at several points in her diary, including:

“I love stars, they always seem to make me feel a ‘everything passes’, to walk under the stars has always given me a ‘quietness’ that nothing else ever did.”

D 5353, 7 October 1950

Relatedly, Nella's fear of the future and desire to “hold the clock back” and “clutch at & hold each day a little longer” (D 5353, 10 November 1939) can be found elsewhere in her diary, as in:

“Arthur my elder boy thinks it a ‘wonderful philosophy’ of mine to try & ‘take each day as it comes & do the best I can with it’ but its not – its just a kind of fear to look ahead: - a woman who sees all the simple joys turning into luxuries that no amount of money could buy.”

D 5353, 19 September 1939

There is an implied connection, then, between Nella's “fear to look ahead” and her desire to “hold each day a little longer”, encapsulated in the following:<sup>139</sup>

“I've only heard the remark ‘I wonder what the New Year will bring’ once & by the way it was ‘hushed up’ it might have been an obscene expression. I wonder if everyone is learning to ‘take a day at a time’. Me, I like to fill my days so full that when I undress I feel I lay, not only my clothes aside but also my day – like a brick on a wall that ‘protects’ me in some way – from thinking & worrying over things that I cannot alter or abate. I thought my ‘wall’ was a new wartime thought but Arthur says I've always had it & once told him that ‘life itself was a wall & that bricks left out or carelessly laid made the wall less secure & able to stand up to the storms of life’. I don't remember – it must have been a long time ago, strange how we can forget & others remember our words – strange & a little terrifying too.”

D 5353, 27 December 1940

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<sup>139</sup> Similarly, Malcolmson notes Olivia Cockett's attention to the present moment, and compares this to non-M-O diarist Phyllis Warner's comment that “In war-time there is only the present moment, and it offers a brief Halt in Paradise, one enjoys it with intensity unknown in days of peace” (Imperial War Museum, ‘Journal of Phyllis Warner’, September 1940-February 1942; Ref. No. 95/14/1, 1 September 1940) (Malcolmson and Cockett, 2005: 118, fn. 11).

The physicality implied in 'laying aside' her clothes is carried through to 'laying aside' her days, and indeed Nella was literally able to lay her day aside, by turning over or setting aside sheets of writing paper. This 'laying aside' of a day was an embodied practice enacted through her daily diary-writing.<sup>140</sup>

Turning now to a discussion of analepses in Nella Last's diary, it is interesting that her philosophy of "today is the day that matters" (D 5353, 10 January 1941) did not preclude considerable reflection on the past. Indeed, she describes the past as in a way 'belonging' to her:

"I'd a queer feeling of unreality when I thought of it being Cliff's 46 birthday – the photos of him at 20 & in his Lts uniforms in the War seem to 'belong' to me more."

D 5353, 13 December 1964

It is indeed striking that Nella's diary contains a large number of analepses, wherein she writes about events retrospectively, 'flashing-back' to represent past occurrences, something Genette describes as "any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment" (Genette, 1972: 40). Her analeptic comments, like her prolepses, can be a single line to a few sentences long, but overall occupy a larger proportion of her diary than prolepses.<sup>141</sup> In her entry for 12 August 1960, already discussed, having mentioned Mrs. Higham's post-teatime telephone call earlier, Nella then re-connects with the main chronology, detailing what she and William ate for tea. So, although her inclusion of Mrs. Higham's call is proleptic, coming earlier than a strict chronology would dictate, her re-connection with the main temporal order requires an analeptic

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<sup>140</sup> See also Caroline Blake who, comparably to Last, writes "... Instinctively, ever since Hitler took power I have known what was brooding over us, and in my small way have fought it ... Now it has come. I know all about it, but I only live from day to day" (D 5399, 24 June 1940).

<sup>141</sup> Other M-O diaries I have read parts of seem less analeptically-orientated than Last's, however. For instance, the future forms the focus of Beryll Swain's comment that: "The thought of having no more war seems strange ... My husband & I will have to set about building ourselves a permanent way of living instead of a precarious day to day makeshift & though we are looking forward to it tremendously..." (D 5380, 5 June 1944); and also Maggie Joy Blunt's comment that: "Tomorrow & tomorrow & tomorrow stretch before me. Infinitely more full of promise and interest than the war years have been. I feel that new & exciting events await me ..." (D 5401, 4 May 1945).

manoeuvre, here a short reach back in time. Two more examples of short analepses in Nella's diary are:

"On the News at 1 o'clock, the announcer said snow had already started in the Lake District - & was 1 inch thick. Albert had told me earlier the hills were all white topped, so many dreadful accidents already ..."

D 5353, 14 December 1964

"Went down to heat Bengen I'd made earlier & came to bed."

D 5353, 15 August 1960

There are also points in her diary when Nella's analeptic comments reach further back into the past, as in the following examples:

"Last week a few 'party' if not actual 'Xmas' oddments lingered in shop windows – today every sweet shop & the end of Woolworths big stall, were filled with Easter eggs, from 4'1/2 to 10/6!"

D 5353, 17 January 1953

"I reflected as I did it, that this time last year I'd my husband downstairs – he'd had several weeks in bed, with a thrombosis 'block' in his leg. Time seemed slow in passing, but looking back it really doesn't seem a year ago, time seems to pass so much quicker now – for every one, young or old."

D 5353, 18 December 1964

"We remarked on the few fireworks set off before Bonfire night these two last years."

D 5353, 4 December 1964

"... The first 'horror' to enter my life, was the Boxer Rebellion, & as a small child I saw dreadful pictures of scenes in China, when a gamekeeper's son who had been to Liverpool, brought back copies of the 'Police Gazette'. I was old enough to realise there was a different world outside the quiet one in which I lived."

D 5353, 31 August 1959

The last quote here refers to Nella's memories from well before she began to write her diary, constituting what Genette (1972: 49) describes as "external

analepses". Interestingly, Nella often uses these comments in a comparative manner (Roberts, 1999: 22) to think reflectively. Sometimes she reflects to negatively compare the past and present, writing for example that:

"It's rare to see a smart or what we used to call 'a well turned out' youngster. A crew hair cut, duffle coat & jeans, to me are sheer horror, how girls have changed, before the war girls would have shunned the weavers."

D 5353, 7 June 1958

She also, however, comments about continuities between past and present, such as:

"Only the sheep cropping the grass disturbed the stillness until ... the cows seemed to decide to go slithering & slipping down to the water hole in the side of the hill. I followed them down & saw the water hole was the same as when I was a tiny child – not a hoof print different – as I could see."

D 5353, 30 September 1939

Overall, then, Nella's diary contains many time complications that challenge any assumed simple reference between diaries and the 'world out there'. Clearly, her diary exhibits not only many 'temporal distortions' (Todorov, 1966) but also "infidelities to the chronological order of events" (Genette, 1972: 29). Indeed, some of the anachronies in Nella's diary show not only that 'the scene of what is written about' does not always correspond with the events taking place at 'the moment of writing' (Stanley and Dampier, 2006), but also that the moment of writing, the writing present itself, is composed by different time orientations (Schutz, 1945: 214-215), which Nella uses to varying ends. Rarely, then, is the 'present present' (Ricoeur, 1984) engaged with by Nella without reference to other time perspectives, and it is her negotiation of these in her diary-writing that helps locate her within the M-O project as a 'subjective camera' (Jennings and Madge, 1937). Furthermore, there are complex separations between the past, present and future in diary-writing, and these temporal perspectives inform each other in the process of understanding and representing experience. Nella Last's diary-time, then, evokes 'lived time' if, as



Usher (1998: 22) has suggested, this is perceived as “a simultaneous inter-penetration of the past, present and future”.

Diary-time is not, however, the same as experiential or ‘lived time’. Diaries are a form of representation and there is always some kind of time-lag between ‘the moment of writing’ and the ‘the scene of what is written about’ (Stanley and Dampier, 2006). Succinctly, it ‘takes time’ for diarists to represent in writing their account of experiences.<sup>142</sup> Often, this time-lag is assumed as minimal, underpinning the view that diaries engage specifically with ‘the present’. And indeed some diary-entries may have been written very close to the ‘moment of experience’, as in the following excerpts from the M-O diaries of Maggie Joy Blunt and Esther Walker quoted earlier:

“... I write, romantically, by the light of two candles.”

D 5401, 11 November 1946

“Some beastly cats are howling as I write.”

D 5383, 28 June 1940 9.20pm

Nevertheless, it still ‘took time’, however minimal, for the diarists to assess this experience and inscribe it in their diaries.

Nella Last’s analeptic orientation is a particular example of something much more general that characterises diary-writing, and perhaps all forms of representation more broadly.<sup>143</sup> Are, then, all diaries to a greater or lesser extent to be seen as depositions concerning the past and, if so, what are the implications? I will return to this later, but it is important to note here that discussion in this chapter shows that

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<sup>142</sup> Butterfield (1984: 162) writes that “observation takes time: the time-lag is due both to neural processing by the observer and, for sight, hearing and smell, to the transmission of signals to our sense organs”; however, I part company with him when he writes “We can however almost always ignore this time-lag”. See also Mabbott (1951).

<sup>143</sup> Mead (1932: 3-4) notes something similar in writing that he is “proceeding upon the assumption that cognition, and thought as part of the cognitive process, is reconstructive, because reconstruction is essential to the conduct of an intelligent being in the universe”.

Nella Last's writing is not only 'about time', but also occurs 'in time', a point I shall develop in Chapter 5.

A second point raised earlier concerns Nella as an ageing woman, specifically her changing embodied location 'in time' as she writes her diary. Nella was obviously ageing as she wrote – she began her diary about a month before her fiftieth birthday (hence her use of 'Housewife, 49' at the top of her first diary-entry) and stopped when seventy-six in February 1966 – and the content as well as the way she practised diary-writing was influenced by this, as well as by episodes of ill-health. For instance, the following extracts involve Nella commenting on her age, appearance and sense of age-related changes:

"...there's something to say for quiet & 'peace', when you get to 80 – or on the way!"

D 5353, 9 January 1965

"When your 71<sup>st</sup> birthday draws near, & the knowledge in the ordinary of things you mightn't have a lot more birthdays, coupled with an ingrained hatred of seeing everything growing so shabby, you tend to get a 'ah what the hell' feeling about hoarding, cut to specks of the gathering shadows of wondering, not 'if', but 'when' all hell will break loose"

D 5353, 13 August 1960

"...under it all was a some what ashamed feeling that as I got older I often felt really bad tempered."

D 5353, 12 June 1958

"I had no gray hair in my glossy thatch – or very few – before the War but if I keep on 'graying' I'll be white by Xmas!"

D 5353, 25 September 1939

The influence of Nella's ageing can also be seen in her representation of space. Nella's social space, that is, her interest and engagement in 'outside' events and persons, contracted as she grew older, which, as noted earlier, is shown when comparing her first and last diary-entries and is epitomised in her comment that: "Televisions – wireless – Common Market. Cuba trouble etc etc, were as far away as

moon travel, so far away they seemed” (D 5353, 8 October 1962). Relatedly, her interest in and movement across physical space also contracted, particularly as her bouts of illness became more frequent and incapacitating. And, Nella's comments about 'travel' and the demise of her plans for this provide further insights into the general contraction of her social and physical space:

“On the rare occasions I permit myself to look forward to 'after the war' I plan to read & read as I used to do – read about all the places I 'planned' to visit when young, 'hoped' to see as I grew older & now know I shall never do so.”

D 5353, 7 December 1940

The timing of this comment in Nella's diary is significant. Fifteen months into the war and with considerable travel restrictions in place across Europe and the Far East, travelling was more than difficult.<sup>144</sup> However, Nella's certainty about never visiting places she had once, however idealistically, planned to, seems related to age rather than war. The following excerpt, nearly twenty-five years later, shows Nella explicitly connecting her declining interest in the holiday adverts she once found engrossing with age and William's lack of initiative:

“I must be growing old, one holiday advert held the slightest interest – that of a Dutch service of 'botel' ship, where one could 'live' on a ship – 50 – 100 people, & cruise the rivers of several countries ... It looked an old or 'lazing' persons ideal, though I realise I could never go on any kind of holiday when my husband now lacks the slightest initiative in anyway & I'd have all the 'care' of both of us in every way...”

D 5353, 3 January 1965

She expresses the crucial factor as her responsibilities, that she would have “all the 'care' of both of us”. But her own age plays a part, while the following extract from more than a decade earlier indicates that another factor might have been involved too:

“I can hardly realise we are mid way into the second month of the year, with being ill, & this odd 'Manana' feeling that wraps me round like a mist, the days 'slide' past.

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<sup>144</sup> But see Bielenberg (1968).

I've had spells of 'couldn't care less' – who of us haven't? – but if I'd energy, I would feel concern. I seem to have lost completely every 'enthusiasm', every 'longing'. I read the glowing Travel adverts as dispassionately as those for gas coke, as yet I cannot even whip up interest in Arthur & Christopher's proposed visit about Easter."

D 5353, 4 February 1954

Here Nella writes that it is the enthusiasm and longing to travel that she lacks, which, interestingly, she broadens out to not being even able to "whip up interest" in receiving a visit from her son Arthur and grandson Christopher. She attributes this to illness which, in turn, made her perceive that time was 'sliding' past.

But times do indeed change. Just over three years later, Nella's health had improved and she writes about her worries about potentially not having a car anymore and what this represents:

"...Lately I've had a growing impression that it won't be long before [William] is unable to drive, - I dread that day, knowing so well he would 'just give up' ... I know that if my little 'contacts' of pleasant people in shops, G.P.O., & the Library would cease to a degree, as well as little trips to Walney & the Coast Rd. I wonder what I would do. No one ever 'visited' much. He gave people the impression he was 'watching the clock till we went' as one friend said. ... if it was not for Mrs Higham – who understands, & like Mrs Salisbury 'takes no notice', & my brother's monthly visits, I'd feel a bit 'lost'. If I could only recapture that 'interest' in sewing & making toys, I'd be thankful."

D 5353, 23 May 1957

In a later comment, Nella also blames William's inertia for not wanting to move to a cottage in the country when, like Mr. and Mrs. Higham, they could have done: "I was happy for them both, we should have made such a break, only my husband's dislike – fear of change prevented it" (D 5353, 12 August 1960). So, although in February 1954 Nella wrote that it was her illness that led her interest in travelling and socialising to wane, in May 1957 and August 1960 she attributes this to William and distances herself from such views.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> "... My husband belongs entirely to the past, he is really out of place in any 'changes', he hates an ornament going, ... he strives to replace it with one the same." (D 5353, 14 May 1945).

In Nella's diary-entries, there are many comments about 'far off' places, which post-war are often linked to Cliff living in Australia. However, as she becomes older, and William becomes increasingly inert, her physical ability to travel declines, and when ill even her imagined travels contract. It is important, therefore, to recognise that this contraction of physical and social space is connected to Nella's experience of ill-health as well as ageing, as with:

"I thought I'd stop aching when winds stopped but today my knees & ankles felt red hot. Hope to goodness my fingers are not affected as they were that dreadful time two winters ago when I could not hold a needle or pencil."

D 5353, 9 November 1939

"... at times aching fingers are another drawback."

D 5353, 14 Aug 1960

The arthritis in Nella's fingers mentioned in her early diary-entries became more severe as she aged, impeding her ability to write, and also making her notoriously bad hand-writing even more difficult to read than earlier. This clearly indicates how important it is to think of Nella as a woman who not only wrote a diary almost every day for nearly twenty-seven years, but who lived and aged over this time.

This I think also throws further light on Nella's orientation towards the past. As she aged, her anticipated future contracted, and the past that she had lived and written about expanded. This helps explain the large number of analepses in her diary, as she literally gained more memories to write about and compare with the present,<sup>146</sup> which she referred to as her "store of memories" (D 5353, 15 September 1939). She was an ageing woman, middle-aged at the start of her diary and older-aged towards the end, with her life-course and her 'writing life' intersecting. This is significant in contemplating her position as a 'subjective camera' (Jennings and Madge, 1937), informing the way she framed the world at the times of her writing.

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<sup>146</sup> See Sorokin and Merton (1937). Scottish poet William Soutar (1954), who kept a diary between 1930 and 1943, also mentions the idea of a backwards trajectory extending with age.

But of course, it was not exclusively advancing age that encouraged Nella to write her diary in the way she did, and the practice of diary-writing itself was also influential, as commented earlier.

Thirdly, I now want to explicitly address the question raised earlier concerning the analytical benefits and costs of examining a diary 'over time', as compared with different approaches that might have been adopted. My 'backwards' chronological reading of Nella Last's diary gave me 'hindsight' knowledge which influenced my reading and interpretation of her earlier (by date order) diary-entries. By implication, then, as Ricoeur points out, in "reading the ending in the beginning and the beginning in the ending, we also learn to read time itself backwards, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences" (Ricoeur, 1984: 67-68). Had I sampled Nella's diary chronologically 'forwards', would I then have learnt to read 'time itself' forwards? Certainly I would have come across each diary-entry in the temporal order it was written, and so perhaps have grasped the accumulative, incremental quality of Nella's diary as she wrote it; and also my reading practices then would have more closely followed Nella's writing practices. Nevertheless, given my earlier discussion about the complicated prolepses and analepses in Nella's diary, whichever direction I had read her diary in, I would have still faced a complicated array of time perspectives in many of her entries. My 'backwards' approach seems to have made relatively little overall difference to how I engaged with and interpreted any diary-entry on its own. However, in terms of comprehending and perceiving connections across entries, it was very important, particularly regarding my interpretation of accumulative, incremental, comments in Nella's writing, a point I return to shortly.

As noted earlier, although I used a (reverse) chronology to gather and organise my data, notes and transcriptions, my understanding and memory of Nella's diary is not tied to a strict chronological form, and, paradoxically, it was my rather strict chronological approach which highlighted this. Later, I will expand on how the

incremental way in which Nella wrote her diary influenced the indexical way that my understanding of her diary was pieced together. Here, however, I shall consider if I could I have read Nella's diary over time in a different and better way.

Perhaps, for instance, I could have taken a thematic approach, exploring diary-content by looking at 'time discourses', as Katie Holmes (1994; 1995) did in discussing temporality in 1920s and 1930s Australian women's diaries by using Tamara Hareven's (1982) ideas about industrial time, domestic time, biological time and individual time.<sup>147</sup> In fact, Nella's comments about the rhythms of nature, mechanisation and her body would have lent themselves to this approach rather well. What might I have learnt about Nella's diary-writing over time had I taken such an approach? A thematic approach would have involved using her diary as a portal to find out 'about time', to examine the representations of time within its pages – which I have engaged with in several places but which has not been my sole concern. My approach has been more akin to that of Baggermann and Dekker (2006) regarding Otto van Eck's diary, which included 'time discourses' such as 'clock time', but broadened out to consider the practice of diary-writing and its accounting for time spent on particular (useful) activities.<sup>148</sup> Certainly Nella comments on the time she spent on such activities, including diary-writing, her use and representation of clock time and seasonal time, and the implications of her depictions of time-related objects in her diary, with one such entry concerning William's watch being broken: "We were late up, the latest thing to go wrong is my husband's watch, & he didn't know the time" (D 5353, 23 February 1966); and these would all lend themselves to such an analysis.

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<sup>147</sup> See Adam (1990; 1995). See also Brockmeier (2000: 51) for a discussion of how people use six "narrative models of autobiographical time" in their autobiographical narratives: "the linear, circular, cyclical, spiral, static, and fragmentary".

<sup>148</sup> Finlay and Fenton (2002) note that diaries have been widely used, to provide a log or record (e.g. Coxon, 1988); as a means to 'map progress'; to explore the diarists' understandings of their experiences of time (e.g. Lewis, 1959; Betz and Skowronski, 1997); and how the diarists reflect more broadly.

However, my approach differs from Baggermann and Dekker, as well as Holmes. I have engaged with complications not only in how time is represented, but also how it is used in diary-writing. Even if there was an index to Nella Last's diary, any thematic approach, whatever the themes might be, would still require 'framing' in order to read and analyse it. That is, some kind of a sampling frame, even if a fairly loose one, would be needed, with attendant problems as well as possibilities. If my time had permitted, it might have been interesting to devise an altered chronological approach, perhaps sampling Nella's diary over a shorter period, looking more closely at a handful of years, perhaps just the war years, as Broad and Fleming (1981) did, and compare this with the approach discussed here. My view is that this would have been interesting and useful, but it would still have involved disadvantages as well as advantages. For instance, although I could have gained a perhaps more detailed examination of the temporal features of Nella's diary over a number of years, I would have also developed a narrower understanding about the broader and over time issues. However, I could perhaps have rejected a chronological approach altogether, opting, for instance, for a 'snowballing' procedure and then weaving a path between the connections I happened upon. But where would such an approach have started, how would the process have been organised and what criteria would have guided the choice of entries made? Here too there are advantages, but also disadvantages. For instance, by not being organised around chronology, such an approach might miss the important ways that chronology is used as well as challenged in the structuring and writing of the diary.

Overall and recognising its limitations, my chronologically-structured sampling frame has, I think, two clear advantages over these other options. Firstly, it has provided order and consistency to my examination of Nella Last's diary, an even-handedness in my treatment of the sheer volume of her writing and the fact that I could not even look at it all; it has prevented me from focusing too much on specific concerns. Secondly, the chronology used to organise this sampling frame echoes (as well as reverses) the conventional structure of diaries, including Nella's, which meant that there was a correspondence between the method and the material



being investigated. Also and importantly, the method, by its deployment of chronology, itself became an aspect of my interest in 'time'. In short, my method echoed my research focus, and helped throw light on the chronological way diaries are, superficially at least, usually ordered. Enmeshing the thematic interest with the method (thereby making the theory part of the practice) was both instructive and fulfilled the purpose for which it was intended.

Could a 'perfect' reading frame be devised based on the entirety of Nella's writing? Given its enormous volume, and the limited time which is available to most researchers, most research on it would have to engage with limited portions of the diary rather than the whole. Given this, the chronological way the diary is stored in the M-O Archive lends itself to devising the kind of sampling frame I designed and used, although I hope I have rebutted any idea that this frame was adopted easily, without considerable reflection, and awareness of the disadvantages as well as advantages. And it has told me much about how Nella Last's diary has used time, as well as being located in it, her telling of time.

### Telling the Time: A Conclusion

Earlier in the chapter I mentioned my reading practices, by which I refer to the acts of understanding and methodological interpretive choices made which went into reading and analysing Nella Last's diary (Israel, 1998; Stanley, 1990b; Ricoeur, 1988).<sup>149</sup> The chronological methodological lens I devised to dip systematically into and examine her diary importantly influenced how I pieced together my understanding of it, by conditioning my reading practices and impacting on the analytical inferences made from these. It mobilised my interest in diary-writing 'over time' by requiring me to look at fairly evenly-spaced 'moments of writing' over a

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<sup>149</sup> Similarly to Israel (1998), I also observe Stanley's (1990b; 62, 63-64) suggestion that to approach texts using a 'feminist biographical method' requires the researcher to "make visible in their text their 'acts of understanding' and foreground interpretive choices" (Israel, 1998: 13). Relatedly, Ricoeur (1988: 160) suggests that the 'act of reading' is the "ultimate mediation between configuration and reconfiguration" of the relationship between experience as lived and that invoked in narrative, both historical and literary. See also Gerhart (1989) and Ricoeur (1984).

lengthy period in one particular diary, and thereby put a particular slant on what 'over time' meant for my reading practice. This approach reflected my interest in connections between diary-entries over time, and also influenced what I found out about this. There are two particular points I want to draw out about this.

Firstly, deploying this method led me to read the entries that Nella Last wrote at considerable temporal removes. Although I was confined to a month at a time, because of the way the diary is archived, this covered twenty-eight years by the time I had finished the process. My 'after the fact' reading of my research materials, occurring after this fieldwork was completed, had an important effect on the way I interpreted the Nella Last diary itself: I was able to 'leap' across expanses of time, and through this I began to perceive connections between temporally-distant entries in an analytical move that took them out of the chronological sequence of the original diary.

Secondly, the 'backward' move of my reading, as compared with the seemingly 'forward' trajectory of Nella Last's writing, not only indicates a difference in order, as noted earlier around my knowing the outcome of Aunt Sarah's accident before its cause, but something else too. This is that, as a consequence of reading backwards across her diary, I gained a kind of fore-knowledge of both the past and the future that surrounded each of Nella Last's 'writing presents'. Therefore I began to infer connections between these 'writing presents' in a way that appeared to be contingent on their setting in a chronological sequence, but which in fact relied on the forwards and backwards prolepses and analepses that Nella Last inscribed, and also those which characterised my own reading practices and consequent interpretive work.

My interpretive work, then, did not take place strictly according to chronology. And another intriguing consideration is raised by this, regarding the reasoning which underpinned why I initially perceived the connections between

Nella Last's diary-entries as 'continuities'. Not only did I read continuous 'narrative threads' into her diary, but also, when reading it as one long narrative to examine how her writing developed over time, I interpreted these connections as 'continuities' between the evenly spaced diary-entries examined. Eventually, I realised that my conceptual and methodological lens had assumed continuities, had expected to uncover 'storied' causes and effects and plots; and, in turn, this suggests that I had initially perceived Nella Last's diary to be a kind of book with an ongoing story-line,<sup>150</sup> in which I perhaps had been influenced by Broad and Fleming's (1981) published version. This perhaps also underpins my use of 'instalment' instead of 'entry' of her diary-writing, in producing earlier drafts of this chapter.<sup>151</sup>

To assume these connections were continuities would infer that Nella Last not only had 'threads' of a story in mind and was engineering their continuance, but also that she directly had a reader (not herself) in her mind/pen whilst writing, a reader who would read the continuities in the way she foresaw. With hindsight, however, I realised that this inference was a product of my reading practices, and hence was a 'textual artifice' (Stanley, 1995b: 98). Although at times Nella, like other M-O diarists, had a reader aside from herself in mind/pen, as discussed in Chapter 3, this does not mean either that this was constant or that she was forming continuities in her writing for them. It is indeed also unlikely that Nella was forming continuities for herself, because in repeating the details of particular tasks, such as cooking a chicken, or writing about how many dollies she planned to make, her diary accounts for her activities on each day as requested by M-O headquarters.<sup>152</sup> These

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<sup>150</sup> Makkonen (1999: 241) writes, with regard to Ety Hillesum's diary, that "The reader of course is looking for plot partly because the diarist is looking for one, both for her life and for the text aimed at representing it" (See Hillesum, 1985).

<sup>151</sup> Yvonne Foreman and Valerie Brunel both refer to their diary-entries as instalments, which implies they perceive some connections between them, writing in letters prefacing their entries: "Dear Mr. Harrison ... I enclose the instalment – I left off. ..." (D 5394, 17 August 1940) and "Dear Mr Willcock ... I'm sorry this is a longer instalment than you asked for ..." (D 5445, 17 June 1941).

<sup>152</sup> However, Suleiman (1996: 236-237) comments that "the accumulation of entries produces, gradually, the sense of several stories unfolding for the writer herself. As the diarist realises that her diary is producing a series of stories, she allows these stories to determine the further direction of her diary. In so doing, she is moving closer to what a novelist does", while M-O Observer Nina Hubbin's (1985) review of Sheridan's (1985) Naomi Mitchison diary, states that "Gradually, as the "dear diary" aspect takes over, something very remarkable happens. You feel you are being drawn into a novel

activities may appear to represent 'continuity' because I have read the beginning of an activity and then its end often over a series of entries, or because similar activities and events are discussed often, but in fact these were actually written as discontinuous comments. The continuities are not 'there in the text', then. In the text, such activities are actually discontinuous inscriptions, although of course they were ongoing in Nella's life at the time. To conflate connections with continuities is referentially to conflate textuality with the material experiential world, whereas textuality is but a (relatively small) part of this.

Perceiving 'continuities' is an artifice, not only of the way diaries are typically structured and written, around 'dailiness', but also the chronological structure of my conceptual and methodological approach and the reading practices this has engendered. Relatedly, it was encouraged by the way that the linearity of chronology implies cause and effect, or at least is given the quality of "chronological hierarchy" (Pike, 1976: 333). But these things alone do not entirely explain my perception of continuities. Having read a number of non-M-O published diaries (as discussed in the Conclusion), I became aware that invoking or even forcing continuity between diary-entries is a common feature of editing. Indeed, it is also a feature that editors who have published from the wartime diaries have engaged in. In editing Naomi Mitchison's diary, for instance, Sheridan writes that she did not want her editorial commentary "interfering with [the] sense of continuity" (Sheridan, 1985: 21); and Garfield comments that "Inevitably, my selection has been influenced ... by the entries that advance the narrative in the most fluent way" (Garfield, 2005d, Paragraph 17, Lines 3-5). Similarly, I too initially inferred that a 'plot' could be detected or, rather, that the increments of information I read in Nella's diary could be (re)assembled into a plot-like structure through my reading and that this was 'really

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rather than a series of unpremeditated jottings – an epic saga in which the strong-minded, mother-earth heroine struggles to chart her own principled course through conflicting social pressures" (quoted in Jolly, 2001: 115-116).

there'. Perceiving continuities, then, is linked to ideas about the structure of a life 'as a whole' in 'conventional' biography.<sup>153</sup>

In this last section of the chapter, I have addressed three particular concerns. Firstly, although chronology may provide a structuring framework, it is only one framework amongst many other ways of representing, using and also analysing time as it is invoked and deployed in diary-writing. Examining Nella Last's analeptic and proleptic practices has pointed this up and shown that memory and anticipation are not confined to chronological ordering. Secondly, my understandings of 'plot' were initially constructed around a perceived tight connection of causality with chronology, while later I became aware of the impact of my reading practices on this. And thirdly, the connections I perceived across Nella's diary are not actually 'real' continuities and need to be understood rather differently. Here I find ethnomethodology's notion of 'indexicality' very helpful, particularly Garfinkel's (1967; see also Stanley and Wise, 1993: 137-148, 191, 219) discussion of its part in the often taken-for-granted, implicit way that interpretations are made of social life.

In reading all the particular diary-entries written by Nella Last which I sampled, I began to make inferences about how each one was related to the preceding and following entry. Much like piecing together a jigsaw puzzle, I built on my preliminary interpretation of one entry by reading another, then interpreting both entries in light of each other, to form some conception of the shape of the diary that was emerging. And this was expanded with each further entry I engaged with. Of course, this was not 'the real shape' of Nella's diary, but one conditioned by the procedures of my approach and the interpretational work stemming from this, for each diary-entry was 'indexical' to the contextual setting in which I read it, as well as to the context it was produced in. Gauging an entry's meaning and how it 'fitted into' the overall shape that was emerging therefore required considerable interpretive

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<sup>153</sup> See Israel (1998) and Stanley (1992b) regarding the questioning and reworking of 'biography' as a concept. See Israel's (1990) use of a 'kaleidoscope' metaphor in examining the multiple representations of women's lives and life-writings, and Stanley (1987) for a somewhat different use of the metaphor.

work on my part. Understanding the emerging shape of Nella's diary therefore involved an iterative, interpretive and cumulative set of activities. And these rested on perceiving each diary-entry as an increment of 'indexical knowledge', or a set of 'indexical knowledges', that acted as an index to the diary as a generalised whole, of which each entry was a part, but where the whole could only be speculated on using the parts as index.

How I make sense of the indexical knowledges that Nella's entries provide is contingent on the location and context of my reading practices. Conventions influence how I find significant, and piece together, indexical knowledges being formed into a general understanding. In Dorothy Smith's (1999) terms, disciplining ideologies inform the social practices deployed. What results is an overall understanding of the Nella Last diary, with each indexical increment of knowledge underpinning a relative 'observation point' (Madge, 1937) which I used to orient myself as a 'subjective (reading) camera' (Jennings and Madge, 1937). In Garfinkel's words (1967: 5), "time for a temporal indexical expression is relevant to what it names. Similarly, just what region a spatial indexical expression names depends upon the location of its utterance". Put differently, the indexical references I perceive in Nella's diary-entries have been re-cast in light of those informing my reading practices, engaged in around half a century later than her writing of these.

In this complicated interpretive work, I had to deploy methods that would be followable and understandable to other readers, or else my analysis would not be credible<sup>154</sup> (or indeed creditable). My interpretation needed to follow from what I gauged to be organised and plausible explanations of events and their connections over time. To do this, my unfolding interpretation had to make sense of not only the contextual settings inscribed in Nella's diary, which included a considerable amount of plausible inference on my part, but also those in which my reading took place.

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<sup>154</sup> See Israel (1990: 41) regarding readers not having "complete interpretive license", and also the importance of "historically variable limits of the sayable, tellable, writable, and thinkable" (Israel, 1998: 17).

Hence my elucidation of the methodological framework devised to examine the diary and acknowledgement of the conventions that influenced my interpretations.

Appreciating that Nella Last's diary and my interpretation of it are both 'occasioned', are both indexical to the socially-organised settings in which they were produced, of course does not mean they are somehow 'the same'. But it does recognise that both have grounded, material, social, temporal and spatial qualities, which hints at a "contextual register of reference" (Eakin, 1988: 688-689), a referring back and forth between life and text which I shall discuss further in the next chapter.

'Repairing' this indexical work, in order to show the practices of interpretive sense-making I engaged in, in fact characterises the nature of my connection-making 'over time' across the sampled Nella Last diary-entries. This 'repairing' involved consolidating my interpretations, not only into a general impression of this particular diary, but also into a coherent emerging thesis or argument that my research was trying to build and claim, which closely links Nella Last's diary, M-O wartime diaries more generally, the M-O idea of 'subjective cameras', the inscription and uses of time and the temporal order. And because indexical knowledges are not fixed, for interpretation is ongoing, the shape of these things and how they intermesh is a 'becoming'. In particular, Nella Last's diary itself presents a field of plausible interpretational potentialities, the actualising of which depends on readers, more particularly on the (changing) set of indexical knowledges that readers and their reading practices draw from this.

Overall, this chapter has shown that 'telling the time' tells the reader about how the M-O diarist as a subjective camera operates over time, giving the analogy a sequential temporal quality which derived from the diarist's epistolary relationship with M-O and is reinforced each time she posted a set of diary-entries to M-O. It also tells the reader that the M-O project at least partly continued its side of the relationship with the diarist for a considerable period of time. No 'end' was decided

upon, and M-O, although considerably changed, continued to receive and store diary-entries until the last diarist (Valerie Brunel, D 5445) stopped writing in June 1967.

'Telling the time' also tells the reader that diary-writing can, and indeed does in the case of Nella Last, change over time, but also that there can be routinised aspects which have important roles in structuring the diaries. The diarist as a 'subjective camera' can therefore develop regular writing practices over time, and these intersect with her emergent construction of a temporal economy in this writing. It also tells the reader that time and the temporal order in the M-O diaries are not fixed, they are deployed by the diarist to fit with her (changing) requirements and needs. Hence, the diarist is temporally-discerning and temporally-capable and uses time in different cross-cutting ways in her diary-writing, which points up that there are different aspects to the temporal order in the M-O diaries. Yet how the diarist uses time is actually of comparatively minor importance; of more significance is that the diary is in, over and of time, and is a temporal order in its own right.

The conjunction of Nella Last's diary and its temporal features with M-O's conception of 'subjective cameras' and the epistolary framing of the project as a whole, is of considerable importance. Last's M-O diary, like all the other M-O wartime diaries, is irrecoverably marked by the broad epistolary framework of M-O. It was solicited through, and she joined through, letters; it is comprised of entries/instalments that were regularly over many years sent; she explicitly indicates a reader in places, and generally presumes some kind of broad response. As noted in the previous chapter, the importance of the fact that the diarists wrote their diaries in the context of M-O's epistolary framework cannot be overstated. Nella Last's diary points this up, for she did not just write for 27 years, but was engaged in an epistolary relationship over this time, from which her diary directly resulted. Last's diary shows that M-O's 'subjective camera' idea incorporates not only an 'over time' dimension, but also, because of the epistolary framing, provides a strong sequential dimension which, although it alludes to chronology and thus continuity, is not the



same as these. While chronology is a surface-level structuring device in diary-writing, the M-O diaries as a 'form' are tied to an epistolary sequence, with each of their entries providing a 'snap shot' of the diarist's social world. In short, the hybridic nature of 'a M-O diary' depends on this sequence. How these 'snap shots' are perceived to fit together 'after the fact' of writing, however, depends considerably on the reader's interpretation. 'Telling the time' has also pointed out that temporal disjunctures are built into writing a M-O diary-entry, both between the happening of an event and the writing about it, and also between its writing and its reading or archiving.

In the next chapter I shall examine 'more about time'. In doing so, I shall look across a broad range of M-O's women's wartime diaries which were written on particular dates, so as to explore the advantages and disadvantages of working in this way, rather than looking at one particular diary over time as most of this chapter has done. To what extent do the issues raised here transfer to other M-O women's wartime diaries? Are these similar to or different from Nella Last's? And can additional insights on time come from working on the diaries in this different way? These are among the questions to be considered.

~ Chapter Five ~

More About Time:  
Across the Wartime Diaries, In Time & Over Time

"I wonder if everyone is learning to 'take a day at a time'."

D 5353, 27 December 1940

Introduction

This chapter continues to focus on time, temporality and diary-writing in the framework of M-O and its idea of observers, including its wartime diarists, as 'subjective cameras'. However, it does so in a rather different way from Chapter 4. Here I shall analyse diary-entries written by different women, although doing so on the same dates, using these to examine what is done with time in them, and to reflectively comment on the interpretational consequences of my methodological strategy for selecting and reading them. My approach in this chapter echoes Jennings and Madge's (1937) concerns in May The Twelfth and their framing of the day-diaries as engaging with "collective time", rather than providing "life records" (Jolly, 2001: 119), which latter has more in common with my approach in Chapter 4. By examining a wide range of women's wartime diary-entries, I want to throw light on the multiple viewpoints of the M-O diarists as 'subjective cameras', and thus on the "multiple realities that all bear on social life simultaneously, thus forcing an approach that transcends dualisms and dichotomous thinking" (Adam, 1989: 458). Succinctly, in the previous chapter and from a broad base of women's wartime diaries, I went on to focus on Nella Last's gaze on events, following this back and forth over time, whereas here my concern is with many more women observers and how they variously represented the 'same' moments in time.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> The analysis in Chapter 4 could be termed 'diachronic', since it focused on movements back and forth over time, whereas the concern of this chapter could be termed 'synchronic', as it focuses on seemingly fixed points in time (Harkin, 1988: 120). However, this is too simple a division and many overlaps between synchrony and diachrony exist, as the unfolding discussion shows.

By focusing on specific dates and a range of diary-entries for these, many interesting temporal issues in addition to the proleptic and analeptic shifts in time commented on in Chapter 4 are raised. Of course, such 'over time' temporal shifts do appear in these diary-entries for specific dates, but more is going on in them than this, and it is this 'more' I am concerned with here. In this chapter, then, I shall try to 'freeze-frame' (Kern, 1983: 30), focusing on numerous women's M-O diary-entries for the same days, rather than exploring just a small number of diaries. And whereas I drew on chronology, seriality and sequence in Chapter 4 to frame my approach, here I use the popular view that a diary is 'by nature' written daily and make particular days, or rather dates, the units of my investigation. Again, this echoes Jennings and Madge (1937) in May The Twelfth, where they focused on day-diaries written on that one particular day, although there are of course important differences between these day-diaries and M-O's wartime diaries, differences which are addressed later.

The interpretive work in Chapter 4 strongly informs the concerns of this chapter in important ways. In Chapter 4, I used time as the central organising principle in examining the temporal dimensions of the wartime diaries, in particular through using a 'backwards' chronological sampling frame to select, read and analyse one specific diary, Nella Last's, over a long period of time. In doing so, I found that the complicated inscriptions of time apparent in her diary helped destabilise popular assumptions about what a diary 'is'. A diary may be presented in a chronological, successive, day-to-day way, with temporal markers organising the entries, but these markers are by no means fixed. Nella Last's diary, I showed, deploys a range of proleptic and especially analeptic shifts that undermine its on the surface strict chronological structure, and by so doing it problematises any assumed 'by definition' exclusive concern of a diary with 'the present' (Salter, 2008b). These findings point to three further concerns which are especially important to this chapter. Firstly, different relationships and temporal distances between

representation and experience – particularly between ‘the moment of writing’ and ‘the scene of what is written about’ (Stanley and Dampier, 2006) – can exist in diaries. Secondly, the ‘moment of writing’ and indeed the ‘writing present’ is importantly, but also complexly, related to diary-writing. And, thirdly, the kinds of interpretive work involved in analysing such temporal features of diary-writing, discussed in relation to indexicality at the end of the last chapter, need to be developed. These broad concerns are engaged with at points in what follows, starting with a discussion of my methodological approach to exploring a range of women’s wartime diaries, outlining the way that ‘time’ is central and explaining why Armistice Day, 11 November, became a focus for my ‘day at a time’ approach, although later in the chapter I discuss and compare diary-entries for other key occasions as well.

### A Day At A Time

Explaining my methodological approach in analysing a range of wartime diaries in this chapter is important for several reasons. I want to make clear what part of the collection of diaries at the M-O A were sampled, and why and how I engaged with this data in the ways I did. I also want to account for my epistemological bearings in doing so, concerning what kind of knowledge this has produced and its limits. Also, the way I have chosen to look at these diaries has conditioned, if not determined, the conclusions drawn, something made starkly clear to me around my initial expectation of finding clear plot-like continuities in Nella Last’s diary, as discussed in Chapter 4. Exploring these things also helps make clear how an understanding of these diaries was pieced together, by explicating some of the indexical knowledges used in so doing.

In setting up my ‘day at a time’ approach to exploring across many of the M-O women’s wartime diaries, I made a preliminary list of events that took place during and just after the war on a day or a set of days which I thought would be interesting to look at. The seven events I finally arrived at were:

- 1) The Declaration of War
- 2) Dunkirk & the Fall of France
- 3) D-Day
- 4) Hamburg, Dresden & Würzburg (Fire) Bombings
- 5) Victory in Europe (VE) Day
- 6) Hiroshima, Nagasaki & Victory in Japan (VJ) Day
- 7) Armistice Days

The diary-entries I ended up working on for these dates are tabulated below (see Appendix 2 for more detail):

**Table 5.1 Wartime Events and Diary-Entries**

	<u>Events</u>	<u>Number of Diary-Entries Examined</u>
1	<b>The Declaration of War:</b>	
	Late August 1939	5 diary-entries
	Early September 1939 (3 <sup>rd</sup> especially)	6 diary-entries
2	<b>Dunkirk &amp; the Fall of France:</b>	
	May 1940	7 diary-entries
	June 1940	5 diary-entries
3	<b>D-Day:</b>	
	6 June 1944	5 diary-entries
4	<b>Hamburg, Dresden &amp; Würzburg Bombings:</b>	
	February 1945	3 diary-entries
5	<b>Victory in Europe (VE) Day:</b>	
	8 May 1945	4 diary-entries
	VE Day Directive Replies Box DR 97	4 directive replies*
	Topic Collection 49/1/D 'VE Week Recorded by Volunteer Observers, May 1945'	1 observer diary**
6	<b>Hiroshima, Nagasaki &amp; Victory in Japan (VJ) Day:</b>	
	6, 8 & 15 August 1945	5 diary-entries
7	<b>Armistice Day (11 November):</b>	
	November 1939	17 diary-entries
	November 1940	14 diary-entries
	November 1941	14 diary-entries
	November 1942	15 diary-entries
	November 1943	11 diary-entries
	November 1944	10 diary-entries
	November 1945	11 diary-entries
November 1946	11 diary-entries	

\* For VE Day, I examined the directive replies sent in by four of the same women who wrote the diaries I examined.

\*\* I came across this woman's observer diary by chance.

Once I started, two important decisions had to be made immediately: which of the many women's diaries archived for these dates I would select and examine, and how to actually analyse the selected entries for these dates chosen.

The first decision initially seemed straight-forward: I would take one storage box containing diary-entries written by a number of women for a specific month of a specific year at a time. And in each box, I would look at entries by women of different ages, from different locations and class-backgrounds (roughly gauged by their occupations). In deciding who these women would be, I used M-O's cross-referable finding aids containing the wartime diarists' real names and their periods of diary-writing, to check across the diaries by age, location, time of writing and respondent number, in order to find a suitable cross-section of women.<sup>156</sup> Also, because Jennings and Madge (1937) had included volunteer observer reports from overseas, I wanted to do this too. However, the wartime diarists were overwhelmingly British, which led me to select in advance some events that had taken place abroad, so only in this sense did I replicate the overseas aspect of May The Twelfth.

However, in the event, it was less these procedural pre-decisions and more the visual aspects of the diaries in the boxes that affected my selection. The wide variety of material factors involved in writing M-O diaries intrigued me: some were typed, others hand-written in fountain pen, pencil, biro; some were on foolscap paper, others on A5 letter writing or note-paper, or on the back of circular letters or paper from workplaces; some 'looked like a diary' as I had imagined diaries to look, but others not at all; and some entries were twenty or more pages long, while others were a paragraph or even a sentence. I decided, therefore, to select a variety of different formats and to note their specific features as I was working on them. I also

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<sup>156</sup> Rose (2000: 559) points out that archival catalogues are a "key organiser of archival space". See Sekula (1986), Brothram (1991), Pinney (1992), Hill (1993) and Steedman (2001) for related discussions.

selected entries by women at different stages in their M-O diary-writing lives. For some women, I examined their first entry (which was not necessarily written in August/September 1939), and for others their last. I also examined diary-entries by women who had diary-writing lives of different lengths, including some who wrote just once, and some who had written for part or all of the war, and sometimes after it as well. As with Yeta Lane's (FR 621) and Celia Fremlin's (FR 2181) rather different analyses of the wartime diaries discussed in Chapter 2, I too strove for a diverse mixture of diarists and diaries, but not purely on the basis of socio-economic, occupational, locational and age signifiers. Diverse diaries and diary-writing lives were equally if not more important to my own investigation. Overall, I examined diary-entries written by 80 different M-O women wartime diarists, which is just over one third of the total number of women who wrote for M-O at points during the 1939-1967 period (see Appendix 3 for information about the diarists).

The second decision, about how actually to analyse the selected entries from the dates chosen, had also initially seemed quite straightforward. I started with 'The Declaration of War', focusing on 3 September 1939, the day World War Two officially started, intending to examine that day in isolation. But soon I realised that, in order to understand what was written on this day, I needed to look at the days around it. A variety of persons and incidents were mentioned by diarists that could only be comprehended by looking at the previous day and also, although I had planned to be strict about this, the previous day to this, with both of these too seductive and often analytically too important to ignore. I was also interested in how the diarists started their diaries, so keeping to just the one day for everyone felt too restrictive. Therefore I examined the very first entry that five women diarists had made, and also I read, noted and partly transcribed the remainder of the entries for August and the whole of September 1939 made by each of the five. I operationalised my work on the other dates similarly, because I soon realised that what was written, and sometimes the events themselves, often straddled more than one or two days. Therefore I ended by examining a few diary-entries before and after each of these key dates, although, as an experiment, I did (try to) stick to examining one isolated

day for Armistice Day. My focus on this, therefore, came about for happenstance and procedural reasons.

An Armistice marked the end of World War One, with a peace agreement signed between Germany and the Allied nations on 11 November 1918 at 11 a.m. This precise time has remained significant, as in the phrase “the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month” to denote Armistice Day<sup>157</sup> commemorations. As a commemorative act, a period of silence at 11 a.m. was introduced in November 1919, and later extended (Gregory, 1994; Veterans Agency, 2007). From 1946, many commemorative services were shifted to what then became known as Remembrance Sunday (the Sunday nearest to 11 November in any year). Another strand of commemoration has been the sale of poppies<sup>158</sup> and poppy-selling has continued to be a commemorative practice, albeit contested,<sup>159</sup> to the present.

I was particularly drawn to Armistice Day as an exemplar around which to discuss my sampling, reading and analytic practices because of the importance placed on a specific ‘moment in time’, that is, 11 a.m, during which many people could be expected to be involved in communal commemorative activity. The majority of the seventeen women whose diaries I sampled for 11 November 1939 had lived through World War One and had been ‘there’ during the very first Armistice Day.<sup>160</sup> And when they wrote their 11 November 1939 diary-entries, they were in the early weeks of another World War, a war that must have shown them that the notion of ‘The War to End All War’ had been a fallacy. 11 November 1939 was

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<sup>157</sup> After World War Two, Armistice Day became known as ‘Veterans’ Day’ in the US (1 June 1954). In Britain and Commonwealth countries, the title ‘Remembrance Day’ was given to Armistice Day in 1946 and ‘Remembrance Sunday’ was also introduced.

<sup>158</sup> Moina Michael, inspired by John McCrae’s (1915) poem *We Shall Not Sleep*, latter re-titled *In Flanders Fields*, conceived the idea of the ‘Flanders Fields Memorial Poppy’, selling the first on 9 November 1918 (Great War, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Gregory, 1994; Michael, 1941; Royal British Legion, 2007).

<sup>159</sup> As an alternative to scarlet poppies, white peace poppies have been worn on Armistice Day since 1933 and were, at that time, produced by the Co-operative Women's Guild (CWG). In 1934, the Peace Pledge Union (PPU) also began to distribute and promote white poppies (Peace Pledge Union, 2007).

<sup>160</sup> Noakes (1996b, 1998) in working on M-O’s Falkland War material, also examined the writings of correspondents who had first-hand experience of WW2.



the first wartime Armistice Day – a contradiction in terms. What did these seventeen women write about Armistice Day? Did they write about their memories of the first Armistice Day? What did they do on this day? The diary-entries I sampled provide interesting information about these and related questions, and they also raised issues concerning memory and remembering and how they are inscribed in diary-writing. Armistice Day made 11 November an extraordinary day, as the 1937 Coronation had 12 May that year, again evoking Jennings and Madge's (1937) work, with both commemoration and coronation often described as occasioning a sense of community and kinship amongst British people. What did people do on this extraordinary day? Were ordinary routines suspended and if so for what? The sampled diary-entries again provide interesting information about such questions.

### 'We bought our poppies from Ena on Thursday': Social Interaction in Wartime Diary-Entries

As well as transcribing the seventeen diary-entries for 11 November 1939, I also annotated these using the two-layered classification that Jennings and Madge (1937) had devised, regarding the 'Social Areas' and 'Social Incidents' that their day-diarists wrote about (outlined in Chapter 1). I did this for interest's sake, as a kind of test of Jennings and Madge's approach and to see what might be gained from using it. As now discussed, I found it helpful in some limited respects, but overall too restrictive and static concerning the things I was most interested in, in particular regarding time. But the reasons for this are instructive and interesting.

The 'Social Area of an Observer' is comprised of three concentric circles, each denoting a layer of social interaction: Social Area 1 (the circle immediately surrounding the observer) includes people closest to the diarist; Social Area 2 includes "strangers, newcomers, chance acquaintances, people known to a second person, unusual tradespeople, unusual customers: singly or in groups"; and Social Area 3 includes "people and institutions whose pressure and contact is less direct and personal, but no less effective" (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 348). Represented as

superscript numbers to the right of the 'Social Area' number (e.g. 1<sup>1</sup>) are 'Social Incidents', referring to events/incidents that in some way diverged from the normal routine of the day, an "occurrence of sufficient importance to be recorded by the Observer at the end of the day", and could include conversations, encounters, or "a piece of information which enhanced the Observer's social consciousness" and so on (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 349). Subscript 'p' refers to mentioning a group according to 'Social Area' (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 357); and '1a' indicates a break in the diarist's routine (Jennings and Madge, 1937: 353). The outcome of my use of Jennings and Madge's classification in annotating the seventeen diary-entries is summarised in the following table:

**Table 5.2 Classification of Wartime Diary-Entries for 11 November 1939**

<u>Diarist No</u>	<u>Notes on Diary-Entry &amp; Diary</u>	<u>Social Area &amp; Social Incident</u>			
		<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>Other</u>
5242	Wrote Oct and Nov 1939.	1 <sup>1</sup> 1 <sub>a</sub>	2 <sup>1</sup> 2 <sup>2</sup>	3 3 <sup>1</sup>	2 <sup>P</sup> 3 <sup>P</sup>
5275	14 sides of typed-writing for Nov 1939; used both sides of paper, uneven in places suggesting she removed it from typewriter between entries; 5-20 paragraphs per day; wrote Oct 1939-May 1940, & intermittently until Jan 1946.		2 <sup>1</sup>	3 <sup>2</sup>	2 <sup>P</sup> 3 <sup>P</sup> 2 <sub>a</sub>
5276	30 sides of hand-writing for Nov 1939; wrote Aug 1939-Dec 1939.	1 <sup>1</sup>	2 2 <sup>1</sup> 2 <sup>2</sup>	3 <sup>2</sup>	3 <sup>P</sup>
5291	18 sides of typed-writing for Nov 1939; quirky style; thin pink copy paper; wrote Aug 1939-Dec 1939 & May 1940-June 1940.	1 <sup>1</sup>	2 <sup>1</sup>		2 <sup>P</sup>
5296	43 sides of hand-writing for Nov 1939; black fountain pen; some damage to corners of paper; scraps of paper; wrote intermittently between Sept 1939-April 1952.	1 <sup>1</sup> 1 <sup>2</sup>	2 <sup>2</sup>	3 <sup>2</sup>	2 <sup>P</sup> 2 <sub>a</sub>
5306	5 sides of hand-writing for Nov 1939; wrote Oct 1939 & Nov 1939, Oct 1940, & July 1944-Nov 1944.				3 <sup>P</sup>
5312	12 sides of typed-writing for Nov 1939; A4; wrote Aug 1939-Aug 1940.	1 <sub>a</sub>		3 <sup>2</sup>	3 <sup>P</sup>
5324	9 sides of hand-writing for Nov 1939; entries for 11-16 November missing – 2/3 of a page is ripped out; wrote Aug 1939-Aug 1945, some gaps.	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
5332	13 sides of hand-writing for Nov 1939; lined paper; wrote Aug 1939-Feb 1940.	1 <sup>1</sup> 1 <sup>2</sup>	2 <sup>1</sup>	3 <sup>1</sup> 3 <sup>2</sup>	3 <sup>P</sup>
5333	43 sides of hand-writing for Nov 1939; notepad, roughly 1 page per day; wrote Aug 1939-Sept 1942.	1 <sup>1</sup> 1 <sup>2</sup>			
5342	15 sides of typed-writing for Nov 1939; messy; wrote Aug 39-July 1943 (1 month missing, Jan 1941)	1 <sup>1</sup> 1 <sup>2</sup>		3 <sup>2</sup>	
5348	23 sides of typed-writing for Nov 1939; wrote Sept 1939-Mar	1 <sup>1</sup>			

	1941, some gaps.	1 <sup>2</sup>			
5353	c. 60 pages of hand-writing for Nov 1939; wrote Aug 1939-Feb 1966, with some gaps.	1 1 <sup>1</sup> 1 <sup>2</sup>	2 2 <sup>1</sup>		
5363	22 sides of hand-writing for Nov 1939; wrote Aug 1939-Apr 1940.	1 <sup>1</sup>	2 <sup>2</sup>		
5366	9 sides of hand-writing for Nov 1939; long entry for 1 & 2 Nov, then much shorter daily entries; wrote Aug 1939-June 1940.	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
5445	36 sides of hand-writing for Nov 1939; in ink on both sides of hole-punched paper; dates in margin; wrote Aug 1939-Jan 1967, with gaps.	1 <sup>1</sup> 1 <sup>2</sup>	2	3 <sup>2</sup>	
5448	5 sides of typed-writing for Nov 1939; wrote Nov 1939, Jan 1940, June-July 1940 & Sept 1940.	1 <sup>1</sup> 1 <sup>2</sup>			

Muriel Green (D 5324) did not write on 11 November 1939, and Veronica Nicolson simply wrote “Bought poppies as usual. Afternoon to see a double wedding at the church. The first I have now seen” (D 5366, 11 November 1939), which cannot be coded using Jennings and Madge’s classification. The seventeen diarists did not mention Social Area 4 in their entries for 11 November 1939, although Harriet Riley, a 47-year-old married woman living in Wales, later wrote: “Awful night, rain & dead leaves on the floor make it difficult to walk, wind & rain, dirty yet a few more people about” (D 5242, 14 November 1939), which indicates Social Area 4.

Below is a brief extract from Nella Last’s 11 November 1939 diary-entry which I have coded:

“Sat Nov 11.

A strange Armistice - & for some unknown reason sent my mind swinging back to that first one. I was living with my elder boy (1<sup>2</sup>), then five years old, in a tiny thatched cottage in the New Forest, about nine miles out of Southampton. My husband (1<sup>2</sup>) had joined the R. N. M. B. R<sup>161</sup> and Depot-shy, was in Southampton Water. He (1<sup>2</sup>) had a shore billet for a few months & used to come on leave nearly every week. It was a month before my Cliff (1<sup>2</sup>) was born & on the 10<sup>th</sup> my husband (1<sup>2</sup>) had days leave & told me (1<sup>1</sup>) that there was gossip on the ship that there was something afoot for the stewards (2) were sent from Officers Mess ...”

D 5353, 11 November 1939

Jennings and Madge’s focus on social interaction comes from their perception of a diary as a space in which people complexly relate to others, as noted earlier.

<sup>161</sup> Royal Navy Marines Boat & Rescue.

However, as noted above, applying their classification to the selected diary-entries for 11 November 1939 raised a number of interesting considerations and issues and was by no means unproblematic.

Firstly and most obviously, the annotations made the different ways in which 'Social Areas' and 'Social Incidents' were written about by these seventeen diarists immediately visible. For instance, in a short diary-entry for 11 November 1939 by Jessica Anderson (D 5333), a 30-year-old single woman engaged in domestic duties in Huddersfield, Social Area 2 and Social Area 3 were not discussed at all. Her focus was exclusively on Social Area 1 and mainly concerned her direct contact with people from this social sphere (hence 1<sup>1</sup>) or talk about people from this social sphere (hence 1<sup>2</sup>). Harriet Riley (D 5242), however, wrote about her interactions with people in all three Social Areas; whereas Elsie Prince did not mention her interaction with people from any of the Social Areas, but commented that "very few people now carry gas-masks", which I have coded as 3<sup>p</sup> to denote her reference to a group, albeit an informal one (D 5306, 11 November 1939).<sup>162</sup> Such differences in ways that the 'Social Areas' and 'Social Incidents' were written about are perhaps because people's social interaction on 11 November 1939 varied considerably, but also perhaps because the diarists perceived the function of their diaries in rather different ways. That is, at least in part the variations highlight differences in the diarists' approaches regarding what and who they considered it appropriate to write about.

Secondly, while the use of the classification scheme makes the area and incident of social interaction visible, what it does not indicate is the proportion of the diary-entries that were devoted to each 'Social Area' and each 'Social Incident', and so it removes from sight the very different degrees of emphasis given by the diarists. It might be possible to get at this, for example, by using a more detailed content analysis, which could produce percentages of Social Areas/Incidents reports in each

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<sup>162</sup> The other sampled diarists show similar diversity, with, for instance, Marjorie Clifton (D 5448) and Sara Lipton (D 5348) both writing solely about Social Area 1, Patricia Crosby (D 5291) writing about both Social Areas 1 and 2, and Ada Barrows (D 5276) about all three Social Areas.

diary-entry, such as 20% of an entry concerns 1<sup>1</sup>; 75% concerns 1<sup>2</sup> etc. However, dividing up an entry or a sentence into aspects which are Social Area and aspects which are Incidents in a general either/or way is extremely problematic, as I discuss later.

Thirdly, coding the seventeen diary-entries itself proved difficult. It was a time-consuming and complicated procedure, not least because it was sometimes difficult to determine which 'Social Area' to code, because overlaps existed. For instance, Marjorie Clifton wrote in her diary-entry that her brother-in-law Bill "was on duty in the evening as Special Constable" (D 5448, 11 November 1939), which meant that he could have been placed in either or both Social Area 1 and Social Area 3. It was also difficult sometimes to determine the kind of relationship a diarist had with the people mentioned, because some used the subjective personal pronoun 'we' before, or even instead of, referring to the person more specifically, as in the following from Gabriella McKay in Surrey: "On the way back we stop at a garage to have bulb of head lamp changed for stronger one. Husband asks garage owner "Have you any petrol for driving purposes". No answer" (D 5363, 11 November 1939). At other times, the use of forenames and initials for people proved confusing in identifying their relationship with the diarist. Rose Brown, for instance, wrote "We bought our poppies from Ena on Thursday, who was to be selling all this morning. K & I listened to the service but were not impressed" (D 5342, 11 November 1939). Whether Ena was a close friend or relative or a chance acquaintance is unclear from this diary-entry alone, as is K's relationship to Brown. However, because Brown has used a personal name and initial, I have assumed that both "Ena" and "K" were Social Area 1, although I acknowledge that other coders might interpret this differently.<sup>163</sup> My interpretation was confined to what I read on this one day, and so who Ena and K were had to be gathered from this single diary-entry; and it might have been different if I had examined the diary-entries for the day before or after, or over a longer time period, something I return to shortly.

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<sup>163</sup> I found from a later diary-entry that K was Brown's home-help.

Fourthly, although Jennings and Madge intimate that the addition of a 'Social Area 4' would take into account incidents in which diarists were directly affected by external factors, this did not in fact encompass the more general comments which the diarists wrote about both their (non-peopled) surroundings and the objects in those material landscapes. Because of this failure, their schema of social areas is problematic, because much can be learnt about a diarist's situation as a 'subjective camera' through how she represents her perceptions of surroundings, circumstances and objects, and how she links this to her interaction with people. For instance, the following extract is from Harriet Riley's detailed account of the happenings at a Cenotaph in Swansea, Wales, on Armistice Day in 1939. It is organised not only around her visit to the Guildhall, but also her observations whilst at the Cenotaph, particularly concerning a Police Inspector and his Police-chauffeur:

"Went to Guildhall ... Clerks standing about ... reminded me it was nearly eleven ... I arrived at cenotaph at 2 minutes to 11, prayers were being said, there were 6 Policemen 2 Inspectors at the top gate, 4 Policeman at bottom gate. The Mayor, 2 Inspectors, Air-Man (new recruits) & 5 Women were on the right-hand side & 10 to 15 people the other side (no more at one minute to eleven). An Inspector arrived in a car, got out, (left the door open, traffic side) his Police-chauffeur dashed out the other side to rush to his assistance, smooth down his coat, re-tie the tin hat firmly on his shoulder ... after his toilet was completed, he casually walked across the rest of the road to the cenotaph, (another servant walking at his side carrying a wreath of poppies), the chauffeur began to follow them & had to dash back to close the car of the door. ... This group arrived at the cenotaph 1 min past eleven ... The Mayor then ... laid the wreath, the bugle sounded & the show was over... "

D 5242, 11 November 1939

In the following extract, Rachel Dhonau writes that there are fewer crosses in a church Garden of Remembrance than usual, using this observation to add weight to her conversation with the 11 November collectors:

"A great deal of feeling about Armistice day collections. One of the collectors said no end of people were refusing to give anything, saying that it was nothing but a mockery. I notice that in the Garden of Remembrance in the church, there were perhaps 50 crosses, where before I have seen as many as 500."

D 5301, 11 November 1943

And in the next extract, Victoria Pinkerton writes about her experiences of a Remembrance Sunday Service, describing her annoyance at the commotion:

"I did not go out for any Remembrance Sunday Service there may have been, but some of it I think came under my window. First, I was amazed to see a line of private cars ... they don't usually park here. Then there was an awful thump of drums – a group of young soldiers thumping and later breaking into a gay and noisy tune, and the villagers ... hurrying along with them. Thoughtless little devils, probably, or Sacrifice of some later carnage – who knows? Forgetting the two minutes' Silence (that mockery of God and creator of cynicism when one looks back to the 1914-18 war) I went out in the sun and rain and colour of the falling leaves. Two youths passed me, blending with the colours."

D 5271, 11 November 1946

Clearly, interactions concerning landscapes with and without people in them were important in these diarists' experiences. That Jennings and Madge's classification fails to record such things means that important albeit circumstantial detail is systematically omitted.

Nella Last's diary-entry for 11 November 1939 further illuminates this point. Writing about preserving some beech leaves by using "toilet glycerine" instead of "commercial glycerine", Nella mentions that she liked to "keep a few" chrysanthemums "on Cliff's dressing table ... for he always loved to wake up & see them". This has (necessarily) been flatly coded as 1<sup>2</sup>. However, it gains considerably more meaning in relation to the great effort Nella made to preserve 'home' as it had been before Cliff was called-up some weeks earlier, in the hope he would return safely, and to maintain the illusion of his continued presence, thus evoking, in Pranger's (2001: 378) phrase, his "simultaneous presence and absence". Thus in the final sentence of the entry for this day, Nella wrote that Cliff "... left his riding boots out by wardrobe & I have left them there. I clean them at odd times & as Ruth & I say it looks as if Cliff is nearer ..." (D 5353, 11 November 1939).<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> "When people live in memories, they never seem 'dead'" (D 5353, 31 December 1964).

This raises a further aspect of social interaction that Jennings and Madge's (1937) classification fails to take into consideration: social interaction in absentia, between diarists and other people where they are not interacting in a face-to-face way with them at the time. This includes social interaction taking place over a spatial and temporal distance, such as through letter-writing (Kauffman, 1986), and indirect or impersonal forms of interaction, including for instance with the broadcasters of news, discussed later. The complexities and significance of the following, for instance, are missed by Jennings and Madge's classification:

"Mail from Australia. Such a thrill, 2 letters from Mother H. Sept. 12<sup>th</sup> & Oct 5<sup>th</sup>. So the last one was not a bit overdue if it came all the way by sea."

D 5342, 11 November 1939

"Spoke to Kathleen on the phone. Says she is very bored & is feeling eye strain as a result of reading too many books. Talked about the aftermath of the war & what chaos there will be."

D 5341, 11 November 1940

"Spent all the evening writing letters"

D 5314, 12 November 1942

"Letter from F.W.W, Alan's friend, who was "called up" last week ... No news yet from Alan, after 6 weeks. I think Freddie W.W must have written to me to make up for Alan's long silence."

D 5423, 11 November 1942

"At 11 o'clock I discovered that I was making a telephone call and I expect other people found themselves doing something similar. It is very difficult to realise that it is Armistice day, with no two-minutes silence."

D 5443, 11 November 1942

These diarists all write about social interaction in absentia on 'the day' in their own rather distinctive ways; they are precisely 'subjective cameras'. However, recording



the fact of the complicated spaces and times these diarists write about is not possible using Jennings and Madge's classification, although clearly important.

Fifthly, and of considerable relevance here, Jennings and Madge's classification does not take into account the relative times and duration at which social interaction occurs. It has no means of distinguishing between writing about social interaction near the moment of writing and about things which took place in the past, and things that took two minutes and those taking two hours, for instance. In Nella Last's diary-entry for 11 November 1939, for example, her comments about people from Social Area 1 mostly concern long-past events, concerning her husband telling her the "gossip on the ship" about the World War One ceasefire and her son Arthur, then five, asking her "where has [the War] gone to ...", and only one of her four mentions of interactions with people from Social Area 2 took place close to the time when she wrote this diary-entry. Other diarists, including Vera Peterson and Helena Simpson, also write about the past, but in a different way about a different past from her:

"This diary was unexpectedly interrupted as an urgent summons came from my sister who two small children have developed whooping cough. I travelled by night to London ...

By 9. a.m. I was in a small Surrey village,..."

D 5281, 19 November 1941

"...The week in London was good fun ... One morning I walked seven miles, seeing Tower Bridge, the Monument, Fleet Street, St. Paul's and the rest."

D 5410, 9 September – 27 November 1946  
(Received 7 December 1946)

Other diaries engage with multiple times in the same entry. Thus although written predominantly in the present-tense (which is, in fact, unusual compared with the other diaries sampled), the following entries from Amy Briggs also allude to the future:

"Nov. 5<sup>th</sup> "Bad news – Reg is coming home for 7 days. ... Doesn't come on Wed. Three cheers! ...

Nov 6<sup>th</sup>: ... "Been at home 20 mins; when the trouble begins... Go to work heart-broken. Dread home-time & think very, very seriously of ending myself. Met at 10p.m. by R, who mutters at me all the way home & then starts onto me as soon as I get in. If I had no children I'd run away. As it is, I can't bear it any longer. I wonder what I'll do when the war is over?...

Nov. 9<sup>th</sup>: Sunday! More trouble. More arguments. Dinner over & off for work by 1.30 p.m. ... Home again at 10.20p.m. ... R. starts again. I can't bear it any longer. When he's gone back I'm going to do all that he accuses me of – flirting on the way home & having male friends. I wouldn't care a damn if it was true, but I never go out. One thing I'm certain of – instead of turning down all these offers, in future I'm going to accept them (maybe!) ..."

D 5284, 5-9 November 1941

Elsie Prince's 1944 Armistice Day entry, indeed, combines her reflections about the present, the past and the future in the space of just a few sentences:

"Nobody here seems to keep up Armistice Day apart from the buying of Poppies. Strange that this part of the Remembrance should be the one to last. One remembers an Armistice Service broadcast before the war when a person caused an interruption by protesting. I recall the sound of the horses' hoofs on the pavement. I wonder what happened to the interruptor. Did he go to an asylum and is he still in? ... There was that other person who threw a gun in the path of King Edward VIII ... Why must people protest? ..."

D 5306, 11 November 1944

And Alberta Maythorpe writes about the circumstances of the present in which she is writing, before reflecting on the past and then asking a number of questions that invoke the future:

"November 11<sup>th</sup>."

I am writing this listening to the broadcast from the Cenotaph. I can't understand how it has carried on all those between years and yet so little was done to make a "land fit for heroes"! I wonder if we'll make a better go of it this time? Or are we going on remembering on the "11<sup>th</sup>" after every war? I don't see much point in it, except that a great majority of people like a show ... But why not let the dead bury the dead, and just make certain that they are dead to some purpose for a change? Will we ever learn?"

D 5303, 11 November 1945

The temporal complexities of these entries cannot be classified using Jennings and Madge's schema, thus excluding extremely interesting aspects of the wartime diaries. In addition to this, the nature of their classification system points up – indeed structured – the kind of knowledge they expected and perceived diaries to be able to relay. In particular, their coding system *de facto* assumes that, by engaging with one day, other times are excluded by definition, and hence that the social interaction recorded takes place in the present (both temporally and spatially). The implication, then, is that for Jennings and Madge diary-writing engages only with the present. As a result, I became interested in whether it was possible to adapt their classification scheme to account for the different time periods of social interaction recorded in the diaries and how this might be done. The wider question of the utility or otherwise of what turned out to be a rather superficial and one-dimensional classification scheme (and which is in fact a form of content analysis) will be considered later.

### 'The picture was so real': Classifying Time

Adapting the classification system that Jennings and Madge (1937) had devised to take into account the different times at which social interaction occurred, initially at least, appeared relatively straightforward. Below I have coded some extracts using *outlining* to denote social interaction in the past, *engraving* to denote social interaction in the present, and *italicisation* to denote social interaction anticipated in the future, as follows:

"This morning at lunch I was reminded that it is armistice-day. I said (1) that I thought the whole ceremony was sheer mockery, for we are (3<sup>p</sup>) at war again. I have thought for years that it should be dropped. If the ceremonies were not so military I should not mind so much. I spent a normal day on duty and a quiet evening knitting, reading etc. I heard the Queen's (3) speech and thought it quite good. The programme was good all the evening not too blatantly national. I think we should (3<sup>p</sup>) all try to think internationally, and there will be no real peace until we do (3<sup>p</sup>)."

D 5312, 11 November 1939

"...The picture was so real I smelled the thin sweet smell of some late yellow roses I had in garden & seemed to feel the cool air through my thin navy & white spotted dress. It had a square cut neck & there was a three cornered tear in the sleeve. Arthur (1) clutched his old horse & his big brown eyes looked up at me and I explained the War was over (1<sup>1</sup>). He pondered for awhile & then asked seriously 'where has it gone to – for it must have gone somewhere Mom! (1<sup>1</sup>) If I had looked ahead for 21 years I could have said 'It's gone away to get stronger & crueller & then take your little brother (1<sup>2</sup>) who is not even born yet!

Strange to say I found Aunt Sarah (1) in a rather emotional 'do you remember' mood. I can (1<sup>2</sup>) never realise she is 75 for her mind & intellect is crystal clear – for past or present & she loves to have a listener – equipped with a pencil & handful of paper to 'answer' her..."

D 5353, 11 November 1939

"On the bus this morning, a group of restless small children (2<sup>P</sup>) on their way to school, were all on one seat... It is also Armistice Day, & at work there was nothing to mark it. I didn't remember until 11.30, then I offered up my usual prayer with an extra one for our fighting soldiers (2<sup>P</sup>). I haven't even a Poppy, because I haven't seen anyone selling them."

D 5261, 11 November 1943

"Armistice Day. No recognition all day. Forgot 11 silence. Mother happily washing up (1). I have never observed it. Hope it will be dropped. Wonder, however, what next Nov 11<sup>th</sup> will bring"

D 5318, 11 November 1943

However, I soon found it was more complicated.

Firstly, while the adapted coding system shows the presence of past, present and future in Nina Smith's (D 5312) and Nella Last's (D 5353) 1939 extracts, it does so problematically because it elides the complexities involved in how they write about them. Although 'the past' and 'the future' may predominate in Smith's entry, and 'the past' in Last's, analysing how they moved between these temporal perspectives and deployed them at particular junctures in their writing is more fruitful than flat generalisation. The complexities of how Smith writes about Armistice Day in moral terms, for instance, are lost in bald statements about 'the present' and 'the past'.

Secondly, by using the coding system I was able to code only Vanessa Chambers' (D 5318) "Mother happily washing up" in her 11 November 1943 entry. However, she does in fact evoke both the past and the future in this entry, in ways in which social interaction is not the focus, and these are missed entirely by Jennings and Madge's classification. Also, regarding Lorna Caruthers' (D 5261) 11 November 1943 entry, she comments on the outcome of a lack of social interaction – "I haven't even a Poppy, because I haven't seen anyone selling them" – but there is no way of accounting for this in the classification procedure.

Thirdly, categorising the diarists' comments as referring to the past, the present or the future was in practice thorny. Indeed, even identifying the present at which diarists were writing could itself be quite complicated. In 1946, for instance, Helena Simpson (D 5410) wrote a long entry that spanned 9 September to 27 November, and identifying the precise dates on which, and about which, she was writing proved impossible. Less extremely, Martina Crawley (D 5314), writing in November 1943, did not date her 11 November entry, but I was able to identify it as such via her regular practice of including a menu of the food she had eaten or prepared on that day at the end of each entry. And the content of Nella Last's entry for 11 November 1939 makes identifying when she was writing in a precise sense difficult, because her remembered experiences around the first Armistice Day envelop the present. Or rather, these had in a way become her present, most strongly so in her writing about 11 November 1939 – her 'writing present' – as a future time, that "If I had looked ahead for 21 years I could have said 'It's gone away to get stronger & crueller & then take your little brother who is not even born yet!'" (D 5353, 11 November 1939). What this raises is that the 'writing present' in which she was situating herself was not coterminous with the moment of writing, something I discuss later.

Clara Woodbury, a nurse, writing about the Service at the Cenotaph she attended in November 1938, commented on having seen "tall guardsman ... standing

in the heat in their heavy uniforms”, watching “the pigeons wheeling round overhead against the blue sky” with the “only sound ... the click of the newsreel camera man on the roof of a building near by” (D 5344, 11 November 1943). Her graphic way of writing about remembered feelings and sights seemed to bring them closer to her writing present and hence to my reading present. However, her sudden switch of tense and comment that “I saw the Lord Mayor’s procession and the King & Queen driving to the opening of Parliament. It was the first and will probably be the last time I shall see any of them” provided a ‘tug’ which rather abruptly returned me as a reader, and presumably her as a writer, back to the ‘writing present’.

Perhaps the strongest reminder of the ‘writing present’ comes through the specific dates given by most diarists to their entries. Even though the contents may travel in complicated ways between constructions of the past, the future and the present, these dated headings emphasise, albeit sometimes misleadingly, a moment of writing in the present. That is, the convention of dating diary-entries suggests the apparent synonymy of ‘the scene of what is written about’ and ‘the moment of writing’ (Stanley and Dampier, 2006). Many of the M-O 11 November diary-entries raise questions about this, because although their ‘moment of writing’ seems conventional, the ‘moments of experience’ they inscribe involve memory and remembering, and also projection, with limitless temporal breadth to what might be written about. Dating diary-entries, an important part of their structure and organisation, is a key device in establishing a sense of immediacy, but this immediacy as I have indicated may not necessarily be tied just to ‘the present’ because so many other times may be written about.

Another interesting consideration here concerns when precisely comments written in the present-tense refer to. Most of the sampled M-O diary-entries for 11 November are written in the past-tense, apart from a few, like Amy Briggs’ entries. Towards the end of Nina Smith’s 11 November 1939 entry, however, she stops writing in the past-tense, as in her comment about discussion at lunch and her

“normal day”, and then she moves into a kind of moral tense that is removed from ‘ordinary time’. And Nella Last’s entry of the same date writes about recent events in the present-tense, although she introduces this section using the past-tense, writing “Strange to say I found Aunt Sarah in a rather emotional ‘do you remember’ mood”. This meeting with Aunt Sarah was remembered, albeit, I assume, from only shortly before, perhaps earlier the same day, although there is no definite information about this. This is indicative of something I commented on in the previous chapter, that, as Stanley and Dampier (2006) suggest, there is always a temporal and sometimes also a moral distance between writing and the events that compose the inscribed experience. Even when writing about the most recent of social incidents, there is prototypically a time delay between a diarist experiencing and then writing.

‘The present’, I am proposing, is actually not accessible through diary-entries (Salter, 2008b). That said, such incidents and experiences are often ‘made present’ in the account written, and this ‘present-making’ or re-presentation is significant in itself.<sup>165</sup> What the diarist chooses to write about in her ‘present’ diary-entry, how she chooses to re-present it, constitutes her ‘take’ on things at that particular time, her perspective as a ‘subjective camera’. It is not only the topics that a diarist writes about and the comments she makes on the circumstantial and material factors that go into writing her diary, for her writing practices indicate the particular ways she constructs the relationship between writing and experience. What this immediately raises is whether the length of the temporal distance between experience and writing matters, and at what point, and if this could be built into my adapted version of Jennings and Madge’s (1937) classification.

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<sup>165</sup> Morrison (1978: 194, 197) usefully writes that the present is not “an immediate moment between future and past. It is rather a kind of taking cognizance of what “has presence” within the context in which we act on our possibilities. The original phenomenon of the Present is therefore a “making present” which is guided by the future and the past”, and suggests that “presencing” is the fourth dimension of time, “as past, present and future are all ways of presencing”. For related discussions see Gunn (1982: 17) and Muldoon (1991: 256).

In reading across the M-O diaries, it was often possible to distinguish approximately between long-past and more recent incidents, according to how the diarists framed their writings. The dates provided in the entries sometimes helped in this, as in the following from Caroline Blake:

“Several of the men here of the late twenties are now registered and waiting for their call-up ... How I love and respect them. Just as I did the common soldiers I nursed in Rouen in 1916 ... On Sept. 6 1914 enlightenment came to me, and I knew there was nothing else for me to do, but come back and work here as long as I was needed.”

D 5399, 24 June 1940

The terms used to describe temporal shifts and the time of the memory evoked, where mentioned, were also helpful, as in Nella Last's description of her mind as “swinging back” as well as her direct reference to Armistice Day 1918 as “the first one” (D 5353, 11 November 1939). But I also drew on the more subtle information gathered from reading other entries on the same date to cast light on the particular diarist and the entry being read. Through this, I learnt much about the style in which particular diarists tended to write, the kinds of topics they discussed and the recurring people mentioned. However, frequently I was unable to work out the temporal distance between an experience and its representation, because not only were dates often unspecified, but also I did not have enough contextualising information to be able to place the occurrence in time.

Regarding Nella Last's diary, however, this was different because of my familiarity with her entries over many writing years. When reading in her 11 November 1939 entry that, when something happened, her son Arthur had been five-years-old, I could calculate that the incident recalled was long-past, and similarly so when I read that the Last family had lived in the New Forest when something had occurred. In writing about events closer to 1939, information which helped time-location included the names of people and the things about her life mentioned (such as Cliff having been enlisted), which helped gauge the likely proximity of these to the moment of writing. Nella Last's use of verb tenses also provided a hint, but it



was more her specific comments on persons and circumstances of her life that guided my interpretation, by helping me draw on information gained from reading other parts of her diary. With the other diarists, I just did not have this breadth of reading to draw on.

Adding yet another layer of coding to Jennings and Madge's classification, however, proved difficult. Although I introduced extra codes, this not only looked muddled, but doing so could not specify the probable length of temporal spacing precisely enough. It was difficult, indeed often impossible, to distinguish between long-past and comparatively recent events, which made me question what these temporal categories actually referred to. When does an incident fall out of the recent past and into the long-past?<sup>166</sup> When does a represented event become a memory, as memory is ordinarily understood? Of course, I had developed some ideas about this from reading the diarists' entries, but accounting for them in Jennings and Madge's classification scheme, albeit augmented, resulted in something clearly inadequate.

Also, concurrently, I realised that more important and significant was the moment in which events, at whatever degree temporally-removed, were brought together by the diarist and re-presented in what they wrote in their diary-entries on this. Briefly, the main inadequacies I found with Jennings and Madge's schema are that: it does not indicate the proportion of a diary-entry devoted to particular Social Areas and Incidents, and does not allow for overlaps between them, making coding problematically an either/or matter; it does not take into account the importance of how diarists interact with landscapes (whether peopled or not), despite the addition of Social Area 4; it fails to consider the significance of social interaction enacted in absentia; and, importantly, it has no means of accounting for time and duration regarding interaction, assuming *de facto* that diaries are all about present interaction and, even with my adaptation, provides no satisfactory means of identifying

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<sup>166</sup> See Mayo (1950) and Mabbott (1951) on people's sense of duration and experience of time.

interaction in the past, present and future or gauging the length of distance between writing and the experience it is 'of'.

In spite of all the problems and, as it turns out, fundamental inadequacies, nonetheless using and trying to augment the Jennings and Madge classification system taught me several useful things. The diary-entries I read for 11 November 1939 contained diverse representations of the same or parallel or similar events, and my attempt to focus just on this day in fact highlighted the considerable perspectival diversity between the diarists (Stanley, 2004). However, although I had endeavoured to focus by looking at entries for one particular day, time was certainly not as 'still' as I had initially pre-supposed, in assuming that 'a day' was a discreet time-frame and could be bracketed off from the days, weeks, and so on that surrounded it. And so, although helpful in examining some rather one-dimensional aspects of social interaction, neither Jennings and Madge's (1937) classificatory system nor my various adaptations of it could express the many complications and subtleties that reading the diary-entries revealed. Moreover, this schema was not easily, and in some situations not at all, adaptable to include all the complexities of time. This is not only because it was designed to 'capture' social interaction in the present, but also and more importantly because time is never so simple as just time present, past and future.

Whereas Jennings and Madge were examining diaries written only once, on one day, the day-diaries, the diaries discussed in this chapter were often written over longer periods of time, and there were strongly-signalled connections between the diary-entries. Focusing on 'a day' in isolation, but doing so concerning diaries that were written both before and after this entry, had the ironical effect of highlighting the interconnections between days and the considerable interpretive work and indexicality required to understand all the references made in even one day's writing.

### One Day And Another

While reading the diary-entries for the dates selected, it was difficult to focus just on the day(s) ascribed to the 'event' by official histories, despite my best efforts to do so. Regarding the entries for 11 November for each of the eight years I was concerned with, on occasion I just carried on reading until some kind of apparent 'end-point' in a diarist's micro-narrative was reached, or (and often the same) until the thread of her story made sense to me. Because the days before and after the 'event' date were mostly also available in the archive, often on the same page of writing or on the reverse of a particular page and visible due to the thinness of the paper used, this influenced my reading and led me to search for connections between these days. Also and importantly, in order to comprehend some entries for 11 November, I had to look at the entry for the preceding day, because sometimes it did not make sense on its own. In this regard, re-reading the entries for 11 November which I transcribed in isolation from other days (see Table 5.3), it was difficult to understand some events, meanings and references to various people mentioned in them.

As a consequence, I devised a counter-procedure, which involved introducing an explicit 'over time' element to my reading of the diary-entries sampled for the various 11 Novembers. For each of the eight 11 Novembers between 1939 and 1946, I examined the entries written by between ten to seventeen women, selecting diverse diarists as noted earlier. Several diarists' writings were sampled on only one 11 November; but because I was interested in potential connections between diary-entries over time, I also selected a number of diarists who had written on more than one 11 November, with the most contributions being the seven written by Nella Last. The result is shown in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 11 November M-O Diary-Entries Over Time

Diarist No.	Years in which Diarists wrote entries on/near to 11 November sampled							
	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946
5239								
5242								
5244								
5247								
5254								
5256								
5261								
5265								
5267								
5271								
5275								
5276								
5281								
5282								
5283								
5284								
5291								
5295								
5296								
5301								
5303								
5306								
5312								
5314								
5318								
5324								
5325								
5329								
5331								
5332								
5333								
5337								
5338								
5341								
5342								
5344								
5348								
5353								
5363								
5366								
5372								
5376								
5378								
5390								
5401								
5402								
5403								

5408								
5410								
5423								
5443								
5445								
5447								
5448								
5462								

Key:

	Diary-entries for a single 11 November sampled
	Diary-entries for two November 11s sampled
	Diary-entries for three November 11s sampled
	Diary-entries for more than three November 11s sampled

In comparing a number of entries from 11 November 1940 and 11 November 1941, connections in the topics written about were not particularly evident, but connections in the diarists' approaches to diary-writing were. On 11 November 1940, for example, Joan Stanton-Fox, a 65-year-old woman from Orpington, wrote her diary on what appeared to be ripped-out pages from an old diary dated "February 1918, Tuesday" through to "March 1918, Thursday". And on 11 November 1941, Stanton-Fox again re-used paper, and on the back of a small scrap that was the continuation of her first page appeared: "Feb 26<sup>th</sup>: Thank you so much for the book token, I greatly appreciate the kindness", which she signed off with her personal name (D 5325, 11 November 1941). For this diarist, then, there were decided 're-cycling' elements in her use of writing materials over time, by re-using paper,<sup>167</sup> perhaps for reasons of thrift or scarcity, to write her entries in these two consecutive years.

Comparing Stanton-Fox's diary-entries for these two 11 Novembers shows that most of the content actually concerns the previous day, 10 November. On 10 November 1940, she had spent the night in Chislehurst Caves,<sup>168</sup> hiding with a friend

<sup>167</sup> Similarly, 74-year-old Clarissa Lang, writing from Essex, comments in her one-off entry for M-O that "When note paper and envelopes seem short we recondition envelopes so that they might be used again" (D 5339 (undated) June 1944).

<sup>168</sup> Near London, Chislehurst Caves were used during World War Two as a natural shelter and, in some cases, a temporary residence.

from the bombs that were thought would fall more prolifically as Armistice Day loomed, and this forms most of what was written about on 11 November. And although she did not write on 11 November 1941, the next day Stanton-Fox wrote about the “great excitement ~~today~~ yesterday my Morrison Shelter came...” (D 5325, 12 November 1941), striking through ‘today’ to correct when this happened. On 11 November 1945, Edie Rutherford, in Sheffield, wrote: “Shd have mentioned yesterday that I cant think of anything better than the entire Spanish Cabinet to be destroyed, and am real sorry the effort failed” and that “yesterday a friend brought me a bunch of beautiful chrysanthemums” (D 5447, 11 November 1945). And in the one entry I sampled from Dorothy Emerson, on 12 November 1940, she wrote “Missed yesterday mainly thorough laziness, but quite uneventful for an Armistice Day. Mrs W said first thing that we must remember 11 o’c, but I felt unwilling to observe the silence and was glad that it was forgotten” (D 5295, 12 November 1940). Clearly, then, the entries in many women’s M-O wartime diaries are as frequently concerned with events of the previous day as those of the dated day of writing.

Unlike Stanton-Fox, Rutherford and Emerson, civil servant Ruth Stapleford’s use of ‘today’, ‘this evening’ and ‘tonight’ several times in her five 11 November entries suggests a concern for writing ‘on the day about the same day’. However, these co-exist with her using a complicated array of verb tenses, as well as non-temporally specified events, which undermines that she is only writing ‘on the day about the same day’. An example is: “... the best item of the day was that coming home at dinner time I met my doctor, & she now recognises me – since I went for the blood transfusion – and gives me such a friendly acknowledgement” (D 5338, 11 November 1943).

Rose Brown’s diary-entries for the month of November 1940 are followed by six sides of paper entitled “Weekly Report of Raid Happenings”. These include a paragraph for 11 November, in which she mentions “one of last nights bombs ... just by Blackheath Station” (D 5342, 11 November 1940). Consequently her diary

includes two different accounts of 11 November, written fairly simultaneously it seems, one concentrating on her more personal daily activities and the other picking out and detailing the air raids she witnessed or heard about from other people. Separating out her experiences in this way has some similarities with B.R.S.'s account of the days around VE Day, discussed in the previous chapter (B.R.S., c. May 1945, Observer's Report of VE Day, TC 49/1/D). Brown and B.R.S. not only both wrote two rather different accounts of the same day, but also excluded particular things from their 'primary' diaries – for B.R.S., this was a post-hoc evening summary of her experiences and feelings; and for Brown, a summary of air raids.

Not all of these Mass-Observation diarists explicitly, or even implicitly, referred to Armistice Day and related commemorations in their 11 November entries, although my choice to use the term 'Armistice Day' in looking at those entries pre-presumed that this was how they would all see this day. More accurately, I should have referred to it just as '11 November'. Jessica Anderson, for instance, does not refer to Armistice Day at all, instead writing about, among other things, the difficulty of trying to buy 'no. 9 needles' in Kirkburton (D 5333, 11 November 1939), while Dina Coxon concerns herself with the arrival of her Aunt on the train and the "Awful fog" that will be "very disappointing for Auntie" (D 5265, 11 November 1942).

Rose Brown's entries for 11 November in 1939, 1940 and 1941 refer to Armistice Day in an unenthusiastic way throughout, commenting in 1939 that she was "not impressed" by the Service on the radio, in 1940 that she was "Glad armistice day not being kept, would seem silly while in a war", and in 1941 that she "nearly forgot it was Armistice Day" (D 5342, 11 November 1939, 1940 & 1941). However, Clara Woodbury's three consecutive 11 November diary-entries suggest something more complex, in 1943 and 1944 devoting around half of her 11 November entries to a description of Armistice Day, but apart from her opening sentences her comments in both concern two remembered Armistice Days, when she was child, and when she attended a Service at the Cenotaph in 1938:

"Armistice Day today and how little it seems to mean now. I remember when I was a child at school how important a day it seemed with the Service at the War Memorial & all the gay red poppy wreaths, and the 2 minutes silence. I went to the last Service at the Cenotaph in 1938 & then coming so soon after Munich when we obtained a brief respite it seemed to have a greater significance. ..."

D 5344, 11 November 1943

"It is Remembrance Day, and we all forgot about the 2 minutes silence at 11 o'clock. I remember when I was at school what a solemn moment it was, and how I used to think of those who had lost their lives in the Great War; not that it meant anything personal to me but I thought it was the right thing to do. I remember too being at the last service at the Cenotaph and wondering as I stood in the crowd how long it would be, before we were fighting again."

D 5344, 11 November 1944

Woodbury's 11 November 1945 account is different, however, mentioning that it was "Armistice Sunday" and that the "two minutes silence at 11 ... were sheer agony [and she] ... wished [she] had not gone" (D 5344, 11 November 1945).

Like Rose Brown, Ruth Stapleford wrote from her home in Morecombe about Armistice Day rather similarly in four of the five 11 November diary-entries. She was not enthusiastic about the wartime commemorations and commented on her own and the general lack of observation of the day. She found this odd, writing in 1943 that: "It seemed strange to have Armistice Day again without celebration" (D 5338, 11 November 1943). However, Mary Cockerton engaged with 11 November in a far less consistent way, mentioning Armistice Day in her 11 November diary-entries for 1939 and 1945, but not in those for 1942 or 1944, although in 1944 she did write "Looked in at centre re Poppy Day" (D 5275, 11 November 1944), so I could infer that the commemorations that year at least had some bearing on her day's activities.



On 11 November 1943, Clara Woodbury,<sup>169</sup> wrote about her practice of diary-writing, suggesting both her sense of normative expectations about this and also the variability in how she actually responded to these:

"11.11.43

I am often ashamed of these badly written accounts often I fear badly spelt scrawls I send in, but I write them in all sorts of odd moments and have no time to consider what or how I am putting things. I just cannot devote a regular half hour of the day or night to writing this. ... In the early hours of this morning I had a rare lull of peace and shut myself in the linen-room ... but when I came to sit down with a pen in my hand I could not keep awake. ...

The scraps of paper I write this on are always being thrown hastily into the small case amongst the rest of the paraphernalia I bring hopefully on duty with me every night. As I get a sudden call from the ward or hear some suspicious sound, the junk I collect in my case increases from one lot of nights off to the next. ..."

D 5344, 11 November 1943

Here Woodbury connects what she perceives to be her "badly written accounts" and "badly spelt scrawls" directly to considerations of time. Similarly B.R.S.'s remark that her Report is "unconnected owing to extreme lack of time" (B.R.S., c. May 1945, Letter accompanying Observer's Report of VE Day (TC 49/1/D)), and Cockett's comment that "Now that I've begun this Diary again it fills in odd moments: which partly accounts for the disjointed effect" (D 5278, 7 June 1940), also comment on the scarcity of time. Having to make the most of "odd moments", because she is not able to "devote a regular half hour of the day or night to writing", is part of Woodbury's explanation, for this means that she has "no time to consider what or how [she is] putting things" in her diary. Her concerns about lack of time are also reflected in her use of words such as "hastily" and "sudden call", and also, by implication, referring to the paper she writes on as "scraps of paper".

These comments raise two aspects of time and diary-writing that Woodbury perceives as particularly important. One is writing regularly, preferably at the same time each day. The other involves taking the time to think about what to write and

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<sup>169</sup> Elsewhere she wrote about reading Thomas's (1931) *Tenement in Soho ...*, as "a diary of his daily life" (D 5344, 11 November 1945). Her occupation as a nurse is a concern of Thomas's diary, suggesting Woodbury had an interest in life-writing which may have informed her M-O diary-writing.

therefore producing crafted diary-entries. By implication here, then, there are largely implicit normative codes of good practice that connect time and diary-writing, involving using time as well as representing it, in an organised, regular, purposeful fashion; and I will discuss this in more detail later in the chapter.

### 'A Day' and its Problematics

So far, this chapter has examined 'more about time' in M-O's wartime diaries by exploring what can be learnt about temporal practices through making particular 'days', or, rather, dated diary-entries, the unit or locus of investigation.

Using Jennings and Madge's (1937) scheme for classifying social interaction was problematic in a number of ways, as I have commented. However, it is also important to recognise that its organising principles show that Jennings and Madge did not perceive diaries as 'private' texts, instead seeing social interaction with a variety of people as important to the diarists' observations as 'subjective cameras', and thus to the representation of the social world they inscribed. Time, however, does not feature in Jennings and Madge's classification, and my attempt to introduce it, around a detailed reading of time issues in the diaries both in this and the last chapter, pointed up some intriguing analytical issues. These include the (de)stability of an easily identifiable 'writing present'; the ways that diarists write about the practice of remembering; how they 'account for time' in their diaries; and also how such matters relate back to M-O as an organisation. Largely implicit so far, I will discuss these issues next.

#### (i) The (de)stability of the 'writing present'

Ideas about linearity, sequence, duration and causality underpin most people's understandings of time as 'objective' (Adam, 1990; Glamann, 2001). Certainly the chronological structure that most M-O diaries are organised around encourages interpreting them as successive sequences, of equal temporal spacing,

with 'a day' being the unit of writing. Each diary-entry, then, is apparently stabilised in time by being tied to a date which on the face of it "firmly fixes the present moment" (Pike, 1976: 338). Consequently, its dating appears to guarantee the moment of having been written, and also that its remit is confined to that specific date, as noted earlier.

Nevertheless, as indicated by my earlier discussion of the 11 November 1939-1946 diary-entries, inside any dated entry the 'writing present' is frequently neither easily identifiable nor so stable as it may first appear, raising questions about the relationship between writing and the experience it is 'of'. Both this and the previous chapter provide many instances of slippages, of gaps between 'the moment of writing' and 'the scene of what is written about', prototypically taking the form of prolepses and analepses. This can also be written about in spatial terms, when the 'scene' written about is spatially-displaced from the 'place' of writing, as in Mary Cockerton's comments about "More gains in Africa. Oran and Casablanca", "Germans occupy[ing] the rest of France and Italians land[ing] in Corsica" and "Axis air-borne troops sent to Tunisia" (D 5275, 11 November 1942); and in Nella Last's frequent comments about Cliff in Australia.

These spatially-displaced scenes are to some extent also temporally-displaced, and temporal shifts and slips from the 'writing present' can have different temporal (and spatial) reaches. A brief verb-tense change in a sentence can indicate a time earlier/later the same day, for example, or there can be greater shifts, including to before writing a diary started, and these can also vary in extent (Genette, 1972: 48-49). Here, for instance, sometimes a diarist may allude briefly to another time, as in Cockerton's comments about planting bulbs and that "Last year only about 110<sup>th</sup> [bulb came up], but I have got more, and paid more this time" (D 5275, 11 November 1945); or they may write longer reflections on the past, as in Nella Last's comments on Hogmanay parties, particularly the one she hosted in 1938, mentioned in her diary-entries on 31 October 1962 and 31 December 1964.

Through my having focused on a number of diaries written on a single day, the complicated connections between 'a day' and the days, weeks, months, years, that surround it in fact became more visible than when reading one diary over time. The diarists are not always concerned with social interaction taking place in the 'writing present' and only very rarely are they concerned with social interaction taking place at 'the moment of writing'. Examining in detail the social interaction being written about highlights the presence of varying temporal distances between 'the moment of writing' and 'moments of experience'. However, the complicated times of social interaction inscribed into the diaries could not be 'captured' by adapting Jennings and Madge's (1937) coding scheme, and I found writing about such things in a discursive analytical manner much more telling.

In working on a range of diaries 'a day at a time', I realised the importance not only of how 'the moment of writing' relates to 'the moment of inscribed experience', but that this is a key structuring device in diary-writing:

"...If I had looked ahead for 21 years I could have said 'It's gone away to get stronger & crueller & then take your little brother who is not even born yet! Strange to say I found Aunt Sarah in a rather emotional 'do you remember' mood."

D 5353, 11 November 1939

Here, having written about her memories, Nella Last suddenly pulls her diary-narrative much closer to the 'writing present'. This happens often in the M-O diaries, albeit in different ways, because they shift back and forth in time and slip closer or close to the 'writing present' before slipping away once more.

The writing present does not necessarily correspond directly with 'the moment of experience', it can refer to the near past and near future surrounding 'the moment of writing', and it is best seen as the broad contemporary location of the diarist. This is materially-grounded and influenced by local as well as wider discursive practices and conventions; and these impact, albeit in a contested and

varied way, on how people perceive, read, write, interpret.<sup>170</sup> Their location of course conditions the knowledges that the diarist or reader utilises. A diary is a meeting place for such things, a 'cultural artifact' (Paperno, 2004: 569; Randolph, 2004) that is the product of cultural forces constructing the 'diary-genre' and how people interpret and use<sup>171</sup> this, and hence it is a means of examining such forces.

In the following extracts, four M-O diarists comment on their sense of the importance of the cultural times and circumstances in which they write:

"The time before the war seems an age away. All is turmoil & destruction & sickening of heart. Something fantastic & Wellsian abt. the parachutist ... Chamberlain spoke like a man on Sat. When he had done we looked almost gleefully at each other & said "Well, we certainly do live in some times!"

D 5349, 15 May 1940

"The storm seemed to fit in with the times and my own mood"

D 5394, 11 June 1940

"Apart from the fact of work I'd hate to run away from the history-in-the-making & the opportunity of seeing life under extraordinary conditions."

D 5278, 29 June 1940

"How every decade has its moods, its interpretations of life & living. Same with music, art, building etc."

D 5353, 15 March 1955

How the diarists' respond to such matters informs their viewpoints and especially their activities as 'subjective cameras' within the M-O context. The specific pencil-

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<sup>170</sup> Such things occur through conventions and orthodoxies that can be textual and textually-located and which come into existence in the grounded contexts of writing (Smith, 1987, 1990, 1993, 1999; Stanley, 1992b; Swindells, 1995). The feminist auto/biographical approach, developed by Stanley (1992b), explicates these contexts, including 'reflexing' on its own production process, for it takes the 'intellectual autobiography' of the researcher as entwined with knowledge construction.

<sup>171</sup> Relatedly, White (1991: 145) writes about the "techniques of analysis developed by the social sciences of their own time to identify the social forces at work in the agent's milieu."

to-paper moment is set in the context of the broader 'writing present', which is always 'there' because these 'at the time' circumstances influence the diarists' 'moments of writing' and the reader's 'moments of reading'.<sup>172</sup> They form a kind of lens through which the diarist perceives her temporal and social world and also through which she interacts with them. The result is a nexus of mind, self and society which denotes her (sense of) place in the world (Mead, 1934b), an autobiographical standpoint.<sup>173</sup> And the context in which these things occur and frame them is provided by M-O and its project, to which the diarists 'signed up' each and every time they posted instalments of their diaries.

The writing present serves as the reference point from which analeptic and proleptic shifts in a diary's temporal order are written, as in Beatrice Hope's succinct comment "Armistice Day – What memories it brings back" (D 5337, 11 November 1945). Present experiences prompt the diarists to remember and write about associated memories, which can be of things as well as people, with both present in Clara Woodbury's immediate contrast between "Armistice Day today" and "When I was a child", and the triggering of a long account of November 1938 (D 5344, 11 November 1943). The present channels reconstructions of the past, making events 'present' through re-presenting them at the time of writing.<sup>174</sup>

In emphasising what he calls the 'present of present things', Ricoeur (1984: 11) implies that the writer's view of the contemporary social world at the time of writing is responsive to her/his surroundings and thus 'embodied' in it. The writing present provides a link between writing and embodied experience, between representation and perception, and it is therefore a site at which a relationship can be

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<sup>172</sup> See Plate's (2004: 46) discussion of 'the reading self' regarding Phyllis Rose's and Annie Leclerc's "narratives of the writer as reader"; see also Pearce (1997) and Roos (1994).

<sup>173</sup> Pike (1976: 331) suggests that the autobiographical standpoint refers to "the fixed, present moment", whereas Weintraub (1975: 824) suggests it represents a "point in time ... located on the lifeline of the writer". See Kern (1983) on (Western) conceptions of time, Burton (1996) on Bakhtin and temporality, and Morrison (1978) on time and the 'unity of consciousness'.

<sup>174</sup> For useful discussions, see Eakin (1985), Jolly (2001), Pike (1976), Pranger (2001) and Ricoeur (1984).

found between the inscribed self and the inscribing living self (Barthes, 1977; Eakin, 1988; 1999; Roos, 1994), as “with every assertion of a temporal present there is an equal assertion of a self that lives that present” (Muldoon, 1991: 264). In other words, ‘the moment of writing’ constitutes the perspective of the diarist at the time as a ‘writing self’. Eakin (1988: 683) not only suggests that writing a textual self became a focal event in Henry James’ life, but also that when writing his letters the present was overwhelmingly important, for he deliberately changed the facts of past events to make them congruent with his ‘writing self’. Succinctly, Eakin (1985: 56) comments that “the play is of the autobiographical act itself, in which the materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of present consciousness”.

Akin to Eakin, my interest lies, not in verifying ‘as fact’ the content of the wartime diaries, but rather in understanding the reworking of memories from the past so as to serve the needs of the present and the way people write these memories. This underscores the significance of ‘the moment of writing’ as the site from which remembering, and writing about this, takes place. M-O diarists write about the practices involved in remembering in various interesting ways. I now discuss this, drawing predominantly on entries for some of the other six events I was interested in and sampled, as well as 11 November.

(ii) ‘Were times more gracious?’ M-O diaries and remembering

Just as ‘the present’ in diary-writing is complicated, so too is ‘the past’ and the practices involved in representing ‘it’, as noted by various of the M-O diarists I read, including Olivia Cockett:

“At tea Gus talked of her schooldays & said “Isn’t it amazing how much you remember when it’s so long ago.” Actually, 5 years!”

D 5278, 12 June 1940

Here, Cockett ironises the way that young Gus perceived five years as 'so long ago', and some two weeks later she wrote about a collective and competitive use of memory to remember songs from World War One:

"There's been a competition in memory here this afternoon: songs of the last War: several sung right though, & now a residue of hums & whistles & "How did that one go?"

D 5278, 27 June 1940, 3pm

In the next extract, 24-year-old Ethel Bedwell mentions the differences between what she remembered about World War One, compared with 30-year-old Sam:

"I asked Sam whether he remembered the last war – he is 30 – his chief memory was when he was at school, the headmaster announced from the rostrum that when an air raid lasted up to midnight they would attend school late the next morning & the boys started cheering – the master was furious ... I remember only the Armistice Days & the Empire Days ..."

D 5244, 8 November 1940

A few days earlier, Bedwell had also commented interestingly on memory. Connecting Bonfire Night with Flanders poppies, she suggested that the war had brought the first Armistice Day (when she was 2) closer to the present, making the years between them "a sort of form or sequence", which implies continuity and almost cause and effect:

"... Remember, remember – fireworks & Flanders poppies. Always connected with each other in my mind, & both having much the same meaning for me – a show, excitement, fate-day – 30 years or 300 years ago, what's the difference to me? And yet this war has brought the last one much nearer to me; because suddenly the years have appeared in a sort of form or sequence, from then until now. I can't go back further than then though."

D 5244, 5 November 1940

And this sense of days being experienced as a continuous sequence also appears in the following from Yvonne Foreman, quoted previously in Chapter 3:



"I do not know what happens to time these days. It seems to be continuous"

D 5394, 11 June 1940

As with Nella Last altering the strict order of activities in telling her 'woollies and Highams story', M-O diarists Patricia Crosby and B.R.S. explicitly comment that their inscriptions of near-past memories may not necessarily correspond with the order in which events and activities took place:

"I keep leaving gaps in the diary. I had better fill in as I remember things, although they may not be consecutive."

D 5291, 8 May 1940

"I have a hazy recollection of re-turning down the Edgware Road at a late hour with a bottle of port  $\frac{1}{4}$  full under my arm ... I remember a few thoughts & feelings I've had during the day & can only put them down at random."

B.R.S., c. 9 May 1945, TC 49/1/D

In appreciating the potentially non-consecutive way in which diaries can be written, Crosby's and B.R.S.'s comments imply that remembering is not strictly chronological, something I noted regarding my own experience of remembering details about Nella Last's diary in Chapter 4. In both extracts, the moment of writing as the point from which remembering takes place is highlighted. Added to this, Joan Stanton-Fox's comment below shows that the moment of writing can also be a site at which remembered scenes are given point and significance and possibly also becoming the locus for remembering in the future:

"Strangely enough the first hymn was Rock of Ages for me & I thought, how true, we were in these cleft rocks, - what a memory that hymn will be, - always when I hear it I shall see before me that strange scene."

D 5325, 11 November 1940

The extracts above show that complex issues concerning remembering and memories are self-consciously involved in diary-writing. They also show that

remembering and writing about remembering are complicated intertwined practices, both of which take place at the moment of writing. With regard to the latter, quite a few of the M-O diarists I read recognised that their inscribed memories were to some degree temporally 'distorted', and their comments implicitly or explicitly represent their attempts to make sense of and account for such 'distortions', as well as remembering, as requested by M-O.

Crosby's and B.R.S.'s comments above, for instance, suggest that both women assumed that their diaries should be written according to the correct chronological temporal order in which the experiences occurred. By implication, then, their comments on 'consecutiveness' and 'randomness' are an attempt to account for not adhering to this order, to the reader, as well as implicitly concerning the diary-writing conventions the diarists perceive themselves to be working within. And the implied reader here is M-O, perhaps even particular figures in it, suggesting that many of the wartime diarists had a similarly strong sense of the organisational context and expectations arising from it.

Accounting for time, and using time to account for other things, are important aspects of writing a diary for M-O and highly implicated in people's ideas about being a 'good' diarist in this organisational context. With regard to remarks in Clara Woodbury's entry for 11 November 1943, B.R.S.'s letter accompanying her Observer's Report of VE Day (B.R.S., TC 49/1/D), and Cockett's 7 June 1940 entry, all noted earlier, there are normative codes of good practice that connect time and diary-writing, which involve using time, as well as representing it, in an organised, regular, purposeful fashion, and which involve accounting for time and also using time to account. Seeing themselves as fulfilling the perceived requirements involved in contributing a M-O diary certainly included the diarists acknowledging that time has passed between experience and writing. And sometimes it also included an attempt, perhaps implicit, to account for the effect this had on the shape of the

memory that has been inscribed, as in Nella Last's: "were Edwardian summers warmer, times more gracious? Or only so in memory?" (D 5353, 26 July 1947).

There are, then, interesting ways of accounting for time, and using time to account, in the M-O diaries, some of which involve normative but variously practiced codes of good practice, and some of which involve writing movements over time, between the past, present and future. And, such accountings for time take place from the perspective of the moment of writing. There are some additional temporal issues going on at the moment of writing, which I shall now briefly examine.

(iii) 'Till 12 read Sitwell in bed'<sup>175</sup>: accounting for time?

What are the ways in which different diarists write about using and apportioning time, and how do diary-writing and the moment of writing intersect with this? Earlier I commented on the issues that arose around my taking one particular date as a discrete temporal point to see what is happening with time in a range of diaries. Doing this with entries dated 11 November for a number of years, I found my attention pulled towards representations of the past, present and future in these entries, and how those times were constructed at the moment of writing. Although informative and certainly important to the temporal framing of diary-content, examining the entries like this played down other interesting 'temporal things' that go on at, and are constructed from, the moment of writing. Another way of examining time and diary-writing, then, is required if 'more about time' in the M-O diaries is to be explored further. So I now turn to how the diarists describe their use and value of time, and also how the moment of writing is constructed, in particular how the diarists write about fitting diary-writing into their days and lives. Through this, more insight into the diarists' perspectives at the moment of writing can be gained, throwing yet further light on them as 'subjective cameras' within the M-O context (Jennings and Madge, 1937).

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<sup>175</sup> D 5278, 29 June 1940, 9.45am.

Most of the sampled diaries comment on the writer's activities at and over particular times of day, writing about broad portions of time, such as 'evening', 'afternoon', 'morning', etc., and frequently using 'spending' in various forms to frame their descriptions:

"Spent all the evening writing letters."

D 5314, 12 November 1942

"Spent yesterday afternoon, after usual numerous chores, baking cake to take to office for my birthday on Wed. Tho I ses it mysen, it looks good."

D 5447, 25 February 1945

"Spent this morning in bed & having lunched ... I sit in the garden, but it begins to cloud over – the sky I mean. The washing was done this morning – and next door too, had dried & been taken in – Now we all rest – indoors or out. It looks as though I may have to go in at any moment."

D 5401, 21 May 1945

The past-tense 'spent' in all three extracts here points to a distance between the moment of writing and the moment of experience. But whereas Edie Rutherford (D 5447) evokes both the previous day and the following Wednesday at the moment of writing and Martina Crawley (D 5314) evokes the evening of the day she is writing on, Maggie Joy Blunt (D 5401) writes about sitting in the garden, by implication, at the moment of writing. Again, departures over time from the moment of writing are evoked in these extracts, but how the diarists use the verb 'to spend' shows up other interesting temporal considerations too. For instance, its use indicates their awareness that time is something that is 'used', and thus can be used-up or 'spent' on particular activities, and, by implication, is finite and hence needs to be apportioned appropriately, which I return to shortly. Sometimes, however, the diarists are more precise in writing about the particular time at which an event or activity took place:

"This morning about 5 a.m. I was wakened by the drone of a 'plane. That I must record is my most unpleasant feeling of raid warnings. The thumping of my own heart when I am wakened suddenly from sleep."

D 5394, 14 June 1940

And sometimes the diarists are very precise in writing about the time and duration of particular activities, such as in Harriet Riley's entry for 11 November 1939 discussed earlier, and in the following from Olivia Cockett:

"Last night spent 6-7 picking peas & carrots & cooking them – meal: 7-8 Peg came & talked - she was at home in the air raid ... and they all slept in the Dining room after the first half hour in the cellar – 8-9 we ate & talked of the office & the war – hoping Russia would turn on Germany (wish-fulfilment) 9-10 enjoyed one another's body – 10-10.30 walked in the cool twilight & parted regretfully: then till 12 read Sitwell in bed.

D 5278, 29 June 1940, 9.45am

The diarists' comments about broad general time and clock time help in understanding how they use their time, and in some cases, such as in Blunt's implied diary-writing in the garden, help to provide more information about the activities directly surrounding the moment of writing itself. Indeed, in the following extracts more precise information about the time of the moment of writing can be gathered, as it is possible to see where diary-writing fitted into the diarists' days:

"Turned out a lovely day by the afternoon and evening, and after tea, after I'd written part of this diary ..."

D 5383, 21 June 1940

"Didn't have time to do this diary yesterday. Just as I was about to get down to it, 2<sup>nd</sup> post came, bringing 2 air letters from S.A. enclosing letters for me to send on to my young sister's p.o.w. brother in law in Germany – the family having just got his address thru. Having done that and bustled abt, it was time to get off to work – it always is somehow!"

D 5447, 27 February 1945

The actual time of the moment of writing, as well its duration, is represented even more exactly in the following from Amy Briggs:

"Spent exactly 1 hr, writing my M.O. diary up to date. Can't do it at home & have to wait for peace & quiet at work, before I can write. Now 2.30 a.m. Getting my relief at 3.15a.m."

D 5284, 17 November 1941

This information regarding the precise 'timing' of diary-writing is instructive, throwing light on the diverse ways that diarists fitted writing into their lives, organised their time to do so, and also on how close to the actual events their writing took place. It also provides a helpful way of examining some of the different ways in which the diarists interpreted Harrison's call for wartime diaries and practiced the task.

There is a value-laden temporal economy of time-use inscribed in M-O diaries (Jolly, 2001),<sup>176</sup> concerning the ways in which writing fits into this overall economy. This indicates the grounds of an alternative way of examining time that is not based solely on chronology, or measuring time spent on particular activities, or the intersections between the past, present and future, but which attends to the writing itself. There are more commonalities than differences between the temporal economy of how the diarists indicate that time 'should' be used, although of course how they inscribe these ideas differs. Clearly, using time effectively by implication involves keeping busy, whether physically and mentally, by doing tasks given social or personal value. Using their diaries to record how their time is apportioned and 'in/appropriately' used, as well as to organise and plan their activities during lived time, is an important part of the perceived morality of the temporal economy for the M-O diarists. This feeds into their ideas about the right thing to 'do' with time, and closely connects with normative codes of practice regarding diary-writing, which they utilise and work with so as to construct a temporalised, diarised representation of some of their lived experience. How the diarists enable, spare, hope for, waste, and value time, among other things, can be seen in the following:

"Fairly cheerful now there's plenty to do; regret not having time to scribble Diary of people's remarks, which are sober yet stoic."

D 5278, 4 September 1939

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<sup>176</sup> With regard to Nella Last's diary, Jolly (2001: 120) writes that "the diary goes beyond a handbook for 'home economics' in performing itself a kind of temporal economy in its attempt to measure, hoard, spend and save a lifetime".

"I pop them all into my case hoping always I may have time to write a letter... That year I was in a post where I had a good deal of spare time in the morning..."

D 5344, 11 November 1943

"She has to spend most of her mornings running about for something to eat, going two or three times to one shop, & wasting time in queues."

D 5240, 10 August 1945

And a more detailed commentary about too much, spare and wasted time is provided by 65-year-old Caroline Blake. Somewhat defensively, she writes that doing crossword puzzles is not a 'waste of time', despite 'The Brains Trust'<sup>177</sup> saying to the contrary:

"A question some weeks ago [on the Brains Trust] was to ask if doing crossword puzzles showed intellect or developed the mind. They all sneered at such things, and said it was a waste of time. (Doing such puzzles, at least, requires concentration, and more real thought than listening to music, attending cricket matches or football games (watching them) or playing cards ...) The one great advantage of finding pleasure in doing cross-words is, that the solver needs no help from anyone in their amusement. Elderly people who find pleasure in doing them in their (all-too-much) spare time are not a nuisance to others ... But these lordly creatures of the Brains Trust hadn't a good word to say for cross-words.)"

D 5399, 8 June 1944

The moral nature of the temporal economy of diary-writing is apparent in this extract from Maggie Joy Blunt's diary:

"... I am spending the morning in bed, reading the papers which repeat last night's broadcast news ... Have cancelled a hair appointment, instead to have an early (salad) lunch & then get up, shall light kitchen fire, tidy the kitchen, go into the village, return to a kitchen tea, maybe have the kittens down, wash a very large collection of soiled "smalls" & look out material for backing two new cushion squares for the sitting room – That is my programme. Cooking, of course, & perhaps "do" the bedroom if I have the energy ... Why do people "wonder what I do with myself all alone"? This day's programme leaves me no spare time at all for any other work unless I had done it in bed this morning which I admit I have "wasted" – The radio has been on & will be while I am indoors lest I miss some important gobblet of

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<sup>177</sup> See <http://www.whirligig-tv.co.uk/radio/brainstrust.htm>

information. One of the dangers I think of having the news brought to one so quickly is when history is being as dramatic as it is at present is that it makes one want & expect life to move with the speed of a film towards some happy conclusion. The intervals seem tediously unnecessary & one is apt to forget that after the happy conclusion one has to get up and go out into the fresh air home."

D 5401, 5 May 1945

Firstly, the way Blunt writes here suggests that, in addition to reading the papers while in bed, she is also writing her diary. It also connects diary-writing with the 'programme' of how she will spend her day doing activities and chores, which, she comments, will leave her with 'no spare time'. Secondly, her comments indicate that she is slightly annoyed by other people's somewhat negative remarks about how she spends her time, asking why they "wonder what [she] do[es] with [her]self all alone", and her ironising of "wasted" as well as use of "admit". Clearly she knows the normative codes concerning how time 'should' be used, and relates to these in a complex way. Thirdly, in addition to her descriptions of time-use, Blunt also reflects on the passage and speed of time 'out there'. Portraying the war as having dramatic film-like qualities, she connects the rapid way that news is brought to people with the expectation that a 'happy conclusion' will be arrived at; the perceived progression of the war is connected to the pace at which information is transmitted from the media to the masses. Her use of the film metaphor continues in writing that the intervals in time when nothing dramatic happens appear "tediously unnecessary". Clearly some association with Ethel Bedwell's notion that time is "a sort of form or sequence" (D 5244, 5 November 1940) and Yvonne Foreman's sense that time "seems to be continuous" (D 5394, 11 June 1940) is implied here, but what Blunt's comment directly points up is that a sense of 'history', which is entangled with kinds of 'social' time (Adam, 1990) perceived to be outside the text, is also constructed in the pages of her diary.

The moral aspects of the temporal economy of diary-writing discussed above implicitly and sometimes explicitly have two further dimensions connected to the broader aspects of their diary-writing. The first is that, implicitly here, and explicitly



in other entries by M-O diarists, these are indeed war diaries and this legitimates their existence and more precisely the time spent in writing them. The second is that these are Mass-Observation diaries, and again both implicitly and explicitly, the diarists are aware of the communal nature of the exercise and, relatedly, of M-O's emancipatory agenda. And this too legitimates these diaries and the time spent writing them. I now move on to discuss in more detail the connections that the wartime diaries have to Mass-Observation.

#### (iv) Social times, the news and Mass-Observation

M-O's interest was not in the perspectives of individual diarists, but rather how these related to each other, with the organisation's main aim outlined in the earliest directive of c. June 1937 as "making Observers conscious of each other's lives" (Jolly, 2001: 124, fn. 60). Despite differences between the co-founders' approaches, discussed earlier, all were to some extent concerned with social collectivities, to "see how, and how far, the individual is linked up with society and its institutions" (Jennings and Madge, 1937: iv-v). The co-founders may have conceptualised this differently, with Harrison concerned mostly with people's 'behaviour' in the early days of Worktown, and Madge with behaviour and 'opinions' whilst at Blackheath (and later in Worktown), but nevertheless an interest in how society and individuals were linked was common to both. As a consequence, I shall now explore various diarists' comments about how they interact with the 'social times' in which they live, that is, with the 'writing present', including how 'social time' (Adam, 1990) appears in their diaries. This directly connects with the social context in which M-O and therefore its diarists operated, the organisation's emancipatory agenda, and relatedly to M-O's framing of the wartime diaries as engaging with collective social time.

That M-O diaries are social texts is important to their genesis, to the way they are written, to their function, to understanding them; and an important part of their social character connects to time. The diaries present complex mixtures of 'public'

and 'private' times, so that exploring how the diarists represent social time enables the social structures embedded in, and thus the signs of, the writing present in their diary-entries to be explored. In doing this, I shall draw on the range of diarists that wrote for three more of the seven 'events' I sampled; these are the start of World War Two, the Fall of France, and VE Day.

How the diarists wrote about their roles in, and relationship to, 'history' shows up differences in how they perceive the social times in which they lived and wrote, the writing present. Olivia Cockett, for instance, emphasised her keenness to be part of 'history-in-the-making',<sup>178</sup> writing about 'history' as something going on around her in London, of which she was a part but from which she could 'run away' if she wanted:

"Mother asked me to go [to America on a Government scheme] the other day ... Apart from the fact of work I'd hate to run away from history-in-the-making & the opportunity of seeing life under extraordinary conditions."

D 5278, 29 June 1940, 9.45am (already quoted)

Cockett rejects 'running away', portraying the time and place in which she writes as 'extraordinary', and, by implication, it is at this 'extraordinary' social time, and in this particular place, that history is 'made'. 'Seeing life' under such conditions, she comments, is an opportunity not to be missed and one that she wants to take part in. Different diarists showed that the social times were important, but they positioned themselves rather differently in relation to them. Eva Sampson, for instance, wrote that "our faith must shine more strongly than ever in the hope that these reverses will be checked in time" (D 5420, 22 May 1940), while Valerie Brunel and Moira Crompton described the relatively 'background' role that the war played in their lives:

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<sup>178</sup> See also Pam Ashford's (D 5390) 10 September 1940 diary-entry: "... This supreme moment in the nation's history did not come in my great grandparents' time, it is not something lying in wait for my great-grandchildren, but it is here in my time." (Garfield, 2005c: 363).

"Actually living from day to day takes up so much of our energy that though the war is in the background it doesn't intrude."

D 5445, 30 September 1939

"At the end of the last war my mother was about my age now, but she was very much more intimately involved than I am."

D 5402, 8 May 1945

However, writing in VE week, B.R.S. prises apart the writing present and her 'mental' and 'emotional' responses to it:

"It's been a queer day – is it Peace-time, War-time, - does it make one think of pre-war-post-war-or what? I suppose the answer is simply that it is War-time, & we are going on with much the same jobs in much the same way. But: in spite of knowing (mentally) that it is not likely that we shall see any change for the better just yet – or nothing appreciable – I feel (emotionally) a sort of satisfaction which now & again still, even, approaches elation."

B.R.S., 14 May 1945, TC 49/1/D

In the following two extracts, the diarists use time to make sense of the writing present, by comparing past and present. In 1939, Valerie Brunel compares the starts of World War One and World War Two, while in 1945 Maggie Joy Blunt compares the end of World War Two with its start:

"Read the Daily Worker – It's all like 1914 – A war for Freedom."

D 5445, 6 September 1939

"Important news, important as those days at the end of August in 1939 preceding the declaration of war ... Television of a different kind, expectancy, preparations being made for a change in our way of living."

D 5401, 1 May 1945

The 'news', whatever source it comes from, clearly played an important role in how Brunel and Blunt made sense of 'the writing present', and for other diarists it was one source of information among others, shown in the following, written from a small village in Cornwall:

"The wireless news is one link with the outside, the other being the many aeroplanes from the near aerodrome. But although I shall be back in Town on Tues, it is difficult to visualise the London view"

D 5349, 10 May 1940

However, the way that the diarists write about responding to the news is not straightforward. Brunel, for instance, writes about waiting for the news before going to bed, which implies she adjusts her routine to incorporate it: "We stayed up for the news – late news and then I went to bed" (D 5445, 2 September 1939). Other diarists, conversely, write about the news as something they cannot escape, as pervasive and repetitious, as in the following from Geraldine Langhorn on the day war was declared:

"In this tiny village one does not, alas, escape from the braying wireless set. Many cottages have it on at full blast with the news, repeated again and again. If only one could escape from the "vain repetition". My host echoes – in strident terms – the Daily Mail news ... the devoted reader never seems to notice any change of view, just mouths afresh whatever "his" paper tells him. I am disgusted with mankind. They cheer for Edward VIII or George VI, Chamberlain or Churchill, War or Peace, as instructed. The old men are the most belligerent. It is as though they wanted to sacrifice their sons."

D 5350, 3 September 1939

Caroline Blake takes things further by suggesting that the speed and density of the news she is bombarded with prevents her from contemplating and, importantly, writing about it:

"... the bad news came so thick and fast that I simply could not write or think about it ... I haven't listened to the wireless for three weeks for news, and very little otherwise."

D 5399, 24 June 1940

Nella Last's comment below suggests that it is the role of 'clever' people to 'sift' and use the news, and also implies that what is broadcast is propaganda and so listening to it is just wasting time:

"[My husband] has come up stairs to tell me the 'horrifying' things broadcast & tonight as I was coming upstairs he said 'wait & listen to what is said'. I said 'no thanks I'm not interested & I've some letters to do'. He was cross & I got crosser & at the finish I said 'Talk like that is only for very clever people who can sift it & be in the position to return propaganda or for idle people who have time to listen.". I can only do so much thinking & I've no time to waste it on silly lies."

D 5353, 1 June 1940

Olivia Cockett makes similar points in the following:

"There's too much repetition of the News: it beats on people – they listen every time in case there's something fresh: twice a day would be plenty for B.B.C. news. Especially as the Home Front News is beginning to be doubted."

D 5278, 24 June 1940, 3.10pm

Interestingly, three days later Cockett remarks on her bodily reactions to hearing news, which helps explain why the repetitious news broadcasts 'beating' on her were so unwelcome:

"Gardened. Then listened to 1 o/c News: descriptions of single combats in the air: felt all my muscles tighten & set, leaden face & quivering nerves; horrible: these "glow inside the enemy aeroplane" "rear gunner silenced" make me squirm in disgusted horror: can't see it as anything but tortured flesh, singed hair, screaming agony of a person – not an 'enemy'. HATE this inflicting of pain ..."

D 5278, 27 June 1940

However, on another occasion, Dunkirk, Nella Last had a very different response:

"This morning I lingered over my breakfast reading & rereading the accounts of Dunkirk evacuation ... I forgot I was a middle aged woman who often got up tired & who had backache – the story made me feel part of something that was undying & never old – like a flame to light or warm but strong enough to burn & destroy trash & rubbish..."

D 5353, 5 June 1940

The diarists used information from news-sources as pieces of indexical knowledge (Garfinkel, 1967), to orientate themselves in time, to comprehend what was going on in the writing present and to inform what they wrote in their diaries.

This provided some of the building blocks for their snapshot of “what [society] looks like to them” (Madge and Harrison, 1938: 66), while how they pieced together and responded to these bits of information at the moment of writing their diaries denotes their ‘take on things’ at the time, their positions as embodied and writing ‘subjective cameras’ for M-O (Jennings and Madge, 1937).

And as Last’s use of “silly lies” (D 5353, 1 June 1940) and Cockett’s comment that “Home Front News is beginning to be doubted” (D 5278, 24 June 1940, 3.10pm) quoted above suggest, this led many of them to reflect on the ‘truth’ of the news and the ‘purity’ of news-sources, as well as how information is taken on board by other people, as in the following from Geraldine Langhorn and Olivia Cockett:

“Walking in the streets, listening to people’s conversations, one continually overhears “I saw it in the papers” as tho’ that proved the truth of the statement. Popular education has made us a nation of silly sheep.”

D 5350, 21 September 1939

“Few people will talk of the facts in a reasonable broad way, they get irritated: but they will swap wild rumours and make spiteful suggestions for as long as you like”.

D 5278, 30 August 1939

The M-O diarists’ concerns for the veracity or otherwise of ‘facts’ clearly echoes Jennings and Madge’s (1937) ambition to free ‘the masses’ from superstition, rumour, myth and falsehood. And, as discussed earlier, M-O pin-pointed news-sources, as well as scientists and the government, as the source of ‘mystifying’ society (Jeffery, 1999; Jennings and Madge, 1937; Madge and Harrison, 1937; Madge and Harrison, 1939). By presenting themselves as ‘in the know’, Last, Langhorn and Cockett implicitly differentiate themselves from the ‘nation of silly sheep’ or the swappers of ‘wild rumours’, and “poor puzzled people” (D 5350, 14 September 1939), because they are not willing to “pull comfortable wool over [their] own eyes” (D 5278, 29 June 1940, 9.20pm).

Cockett puts a further slant on this, in the following extract, also partly quoted in Chapter 3, by implying that M-O's magazine US provides a source of accurate information and guidance, which had encouraged her to 'listen & read & ponder' rather than 'pass on horrors':

"As the Flanders battle grew, faces lengthened, tempers shortened: a radio appeared in the office, and now the 1 o/c News is a daily feature I cant escape.

I had been trying to ignore the daily details of news in papers & on the air: a remark in US that they might lead to nervous-breakdown-types made me think: now I listen & read & ponder, but talk as little as possible, & try never to pass on horrors. I have found I don't dream so violently since trying this, so Thank You, US."

D 5278, 6 June 1940

This implies that M-O was an alternative source of knowledge and more trustworthy than others, which corresponded with Blackheath's emancipatory aim to feedback information to 'the masses' in "augmenting 'the social consciousness of the time'" (Summerfield, 1985: 443), as discussed in Chapter 1. M-O's use of diaries helped in this role of being an alternative mediator of knowledge. Cockett explicitly states that 'a remark' in M-O's US magazine 'made [her] think', for example. By implication, then, the information that M-O provides prompts the diarists to think about what is going on and their part in it, thereby nullifying the rapid and dense assault of 'bad news', and enabling them to ponder the quality and veracity of the kinds of information they encounter. Writing a diary for M-O also helped to provide the time and space required to do this thinking, by legitimising the use of their time to digest observations and sift out bias, and to write about their informed views in their M-O diary-entries.

Indeed, trying to equip its diarists with the tools necessary to evaluate and differentiate different sources of knowledge was central to early Blackheath's concern with problematising the 'taken-for-granted-ness' of events happening in the writing present. Blackheath wanted its diarists and observers to be empowered through observation (Jennings and Madge, 1937: iv), as discussed earlier, and this

required their awareness of issues regarding observation and representation. Set within the overall frame of 'facts' adding to "the social consciousness of the time" (Madge and Harrison, 1937: 47-48), the M-O instruction to its volunteers specifically to write diaries – first day-diaries and then continuous diaries – is extremely telling. It points up the M-O concern for pinning opinion and behaviour, and experience in general, to particular times, as in Jennings and Madge's (1937: 350) comment that the purpose of the day-diaries was to "discover what happened to each Observer on the particular day". It also suggests that the diarists should attach their experiences to time, or rather, 'the times', and that doing this was part of being a good diarist.

A further issue for the diarists raised in Jennings and Madge (1937), as discussed earlier, was the instruction from M-O that bias could stem from time-lags between experience and writing, and so the relationship between experience and time had to be accounted for accurately. To be 'in the know', then, about the potential for temporal bias, and countering this through temporal accuracy, also formed part of being a good observer and was facilitated by M-O's specific deployment of diaries sent to the organisation at very regular and pre-specified intervals. Important here is the idea that the veracity of 'facts' could be open to doubt if their provenance was not established, by being located in time and space through the embodied individual diarists writing at or close to the moment. Being able to localise the M-O diary entries in time and in space was an important part of establishing the value of the 'data' itself, retaining the sense of the diarists as diverse 'observation points' (Madge, 1937), which in turn facilitated mapping links between these various 'subjective cameras' in order to plot "weather-maps of public feeling in a crisis" (Harrison, Jennings, and Madge, 1937). This was the crucial dynamic in M-O getting an empirical handle on the social times, the writing present, in which both M-O diarists and M-O as an organisation were located.



There are two points I want to pick up here regarding the importance of temporal issues to early M-O's activities. The first concerns pinpointing the diarists' writings in time and how this relates to ideas concerning 'historical time'; and the second concerns early M-O's conception of 'objectivity' and how this feeds into 'historical time'.

Firstly, as just noted, time and space were central to Blackheath's empirical-grounding of 'facts', by localising diversely situated 'subjective cameras' within their particular 'objective social realities'. By striving to include as many and as diverse a range of 'observation points' as possible, and gathering diaries from these people, M-O sought to create a body of empirical data that would demonstrate the bias in conventional information sources, and to counteract this by throwing light on the interesting ways that ordinary people are "cogs in a vast and complicated [social] machine" (Madge and Harrisson, 1939: 8).<sup>179</sup> Doing this requires localising people and their experiences and views in time and space to show how they relate to the broader emerging picture of social time and history. Regarding this, Jolly suggests:

"the diary's potential to explore the self in time presents the relationship between private and the public, the individual and collective, as more than 'longitudinal data'. Instead, it can present an insight into the relativity of historical time itself."

Jolly (2001: 120)

The act of pin-pointing people as 'observation points', then, marks the interface between individuals and society, between mind, self and society, as Mead (1934b) has phrased it, and provided M-O with the means to emphasise the existence of an alternative, more inclusive, understanding of social reality, which was clearly fundamental to early Blackheath's emancipatory stance.

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<sup>179</sup> Regarding the relationship of diaries with history, Ponsonby (1923: 1) comments that "A diary ... is of course a very different thing from history, although some of the older diaries have been of great use in furnishing the historian with facts and giving him [sic] examples of contemporary opinion".

Secondly, M-O's particular and radical conception of 'objectivity', discussed in Chapter 1, was important to this.<sup>180</sup> Any assumption that it used diaries because their chronology and immediacy could deliver up 'objective facts' should be suspended, because it conflates M-O's radical re-working of objectivity and its very different position from positivism. Its conception of 'objectivity' drastically contrasts with the narrow focus of the positivist version, not least in terms of the number and range of 'objective realities' it was willing to recognise, seen as necessary if M-O was to "doubt and re-examine the completeness of every existing idea about "humanity"" (Harrison, Jennings, and Madge, 1937). It entailed encompassing all events and persons as 'objects' of investigation and filtered into the idea of M-O's 'subjective cameras'; it was also reflected in use of the diary format, although in different ways.

Time not only forms an object of study for the M-O wartime diarists and Blackheath, but it was also strongly and relatedly implicated in the organisational conception of 'objectivity'. By encouraging the diarists to take themselves as objects of study, Blackheath's notion of objectivity pointed up the importance of the diarists' perspectives at 'the moment of writing' in shaping their representations of the social times in which they lived. That is, it emphasised their role as temporally-situated 'subjective cameras'. This 'writing moment' formed the temporal framing for the diarists' representations of their social worlds. For M-O, then, time was simultaneously an 'object' of investigation and also a 'subjective' filtering lens. 'Being objective', in Jennings and Madge's sense, flattened out the subjective/objective distinction and did not involve any sharp distinction between self and society, public and private, extreme events and the everyday, here and there

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<sup>180</sup> Regarding 'objective time', see Kern (1983). Adam (1990) notes that in Western social theory 'natural time' is typically contrasted with 'human time', and although definitional differences exist, the same can be said for 'social time' and 'objective time'. For Muldoon (1991: 261) historical time is a 'third time' that "reinscribes lived time on cosmic time through the procedures of connections, namely the calendar, succession of generations, archives, documents, and traces". This is helpful in thinking about diary-writing as collapsing objective and subjective notions of time.

and – centrally – now and then.<sup>181</sup> Blackheath's notions of 'subjective camera' and 'objectivity' entailed a collapsing of binary thinking in favour of exploring the interfaces between things, of which 'the moment of writing' as such a meeting place provides the key example.

An interest in 'interfaces' clearly relates to M-O's concern for seeing all aspects of social life as important 'objects' of study. And this, in turn, corresponds with its emancipatory principle of seeing all people as 'subjective cameras' and equally purveyors of social knowledge, while also recognising – indeed valorising – the contingent nature of observation and the temporal, social and geographical contexts it took place in. But does the particular 'timed and spaced' interface between M-O and its diarists mean that the M-O wartime diaries are a different form of diary to those not written for M-O? How do these diaries compare with other diaries written at the same time but not for M-O, or with those written during other wartimes, and indeed, with those written at other times altogether? I shall discuss this in the Conclusion, but now I want to draw together and briefly discuss the main conceptual points regarding time and diary-writing raised in this chapter.

### A Day At A Time: A Conclusion

Earlier in the chapter I mentioned the importance of detailing which part of the collection of the M-O wartime diaries I sampled and how I engaged with this data, in order to make clear the epistemological basis of the work I did on it and thus the parameters of the knowledge claims this has produced. The way I approached and understood my examination of the diary-entries written by the 80 different women whose diary-entries I read around the same days and dates has certainly conditioned, if not determined, the conclusions I have drawn from this. This was also something which I pointed up around my initial expectation of finding clear plot-like continuities over time in Nella Last's diary, discussed in Chapter 4, where I initially

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<sup>181</sup> Jennings and Madge (1937: 350) did, however, show some concern for separating feelings from this mixture, asking the diarists to write their feelings down after the day's events in their day-diaries, and only if they were "sufficiently important or noteworthy for record".

assumed that her writing would move forward in a continuous way with each entry developing closely from the last. I soon realised, however, that Last's writing over the medium- to long-term was in fact discontinuous, and it was I who had tried to read continuities 'into' it.

This chapter has built on the idea of difference within a greater whole, doing so by looking closely at entries written by a number of different diarists on or around the same dates, taken from what has usually been the longer diaries written by them. By doing this, the considerable work that a reader has to do in order to link particular diary-entries to someone's diary as a whole, in order to link a diary-entry written by one person to one written by another, and indeed to link a small number of diaries to the whole set of wartime diaries written by women, has been clearly demonstrated. In addition, and referring back here to discussion in Chapter 2 about the 'content overload' experienced by Yeta Lane and Celia Fremlin in trying to write their books, and by the compilers of M-O's US magazine (of whom Lane was one), this chapter expresses the results of my attempt to work with the detailed and often lengthy diary-entries written by many different ordinary people and not become overwhelmed by the sheer volume of content.

My investigation across these 80 diaries in this chapter was conducted after having carried out and written up my detailed study of one M-O diary in Chapter 4, which influenced the kinds of temporal features I was interested in (Stanley, 1995b: 87). At first my attention was pulled towards the 'over time' features of diary-writing, which, although of course important even in a single diary-entry, as discussed earlier, also served as the impetus for my wanting to examine particular things 'about time'. This earlier interpretive work on Nella Last's diary provided a set of indexical knowledges that I have also drawn on to inform the analysis in this chapter, showing precisely how important it has been to make these interpretive links as part of understanding the wartime diaries 'full stop'. In a very real sense, this is

knowledge that I, as a 'subjective camera', have constructed through my gaze on the diaries.

What follows in this concluding discussion to Chapter 5, then, needs to be read in this context of how my emergent knowledge about the wartime diaries has been assembled. With this in mind, in what follows I shall discuss the main conceptual points regarding time, M-O diaries and diary-writing which have been raised in this chapter, and show what looking in close detail across many M-O wartime diaries has added to my ideas regarding time and how I understand and theorise it.

With regard to time and temporality, looking across many M-O diaries on the same dates has shown that important temporal features arise in addition to those concerning shifts in and over time, the main focus of Chapter 4. For instance, my use of Jennings and Madge's (1937) classification schema, albeit problematic, helped to show that there are different relationships and 'distances' between representation and experience across the different diary-entries examined for the same dates, differences which are constructed according to the particular diarists' 'take' on things at the moment of their writing, their perspectives as 'subjective cameras'. These different relationships and 'distances' are a key structuring device in M-O diary-writing, not only operating to elucidate the 'over time' features, as discussed in Chapter 4, but also to throw light on diary-entries written by different women on the same day or date. That is, exploring the temporal dis/junctures between writing and experience opens up the importance of the 'moment of writing' in diary-writing, as a site or 'moment' which is in fact not strictly bound to the particular time, day or date it is typically labelled as 'being'. It is also a locus for much else happening, temporally speaking.

The notion of 'a day', then, as a discrete unit of time, which over its course binds together 'experience' and the writing it is 'of', is more than wobbly. It does not

wholly make sense for the M-O diarists, because many of them frequently write in ways that contravene such temporal and experiential borders, and this may disturb readers' understandings of a tacit 'diary pact' when its breaches to this become apparent. Where it does begin to make sense for both writer and reader is if 'a day', or more specifically 'a date', is perceived as a surface-level 'framing' or 'organising' device in diary-writing, and within which other times, sometimes many other times, are invoked, or rather made present, and in which other temporal features are constructed or represented. A day or date in fact does not represent the 'moment of writing' but instead frames it, and in so doing it (often, usually) implicitly if not explicitly represents the moment of writing as adhering to a particular, definite and known chronological temporal order, and indeed as adhering to a particular, stable moment within that order. And this is despite the clear temporal instability of 'the experience' which the moment of writing is concerned with. This 'framing' provides the diary-writers with a basic structure around which to write about and organise their experiences, and also any future readers with a surface-level temporal order to assist their reading, which is something that M-O as an organisation perhaps anticipated when requesting the wartime diaries. Indeed, deploying the artifice of 'dailiness' in diary-writing provides regular intervals along a simple temporal line, around which comparisons can be based, a methodological and ontological constant in a sea of temporal complications, which M-O perhaps saw as a necessary variable in plotting what it called its 'weather map' of its diarists as 'observation points'.

Also with regard to time and temporality, looking across many M-O women's wartime diaries has added to my conceptualisation of the temporal order or temporal economy and its moral 'nature' which is implicated and represented in M-O diary-writing. Chapter 4 pointed up the existence of this temporal economy in relation to Nella Last's diary, but looking across many more of the women's wartime diaries has shown that the temporal economy is in most respects shared between the M-O diarists, albeit written about in diverse ways. The largely implicit but sometimes explicit normative codes of good practice embedded in this temporal economy are ones that connect time and diary-writing, and involve using and representing time in

particular ways. They are indeed social codes, contingent on the ways that diary-writing (and interpretation) and the diarists themselves are embedded in a particular social milieu with associated conventions and discursive practices. The social milieu or context in which M-O and its diarists were operating is extremely important to the epistolary framing of 'a M-O diary' as a form, as I emphasised earlier. Conceptualising the M-O diaries as a hybridic form 'occasioned' by this context, as I do, enables looking at the social forces and conventions operating at the time. Reading and analysing across many diaries for the same days has the consequence of pointing up some of the temporal issues regarding diary-writing that informed the M-O diarists as a collective body of people writing in a broadly shared political and social context, and hence informs the idea of 'a M-O diary' as a form.

Looking across many M-O women's wartime diaries, then, has also added to my conceptualisation of the diary/letter hybridic form of 'a M-O diary'. As an occasioned form, the hybrid is a meeting place for social forces and conventions operating at the time, which further points up its connection to, and indeed contingency on, a particular social context. It was by examining time, temporal and epistolary issues regarding diary-writing across many women's wartime diaries that I formed a broader understanding of the form of 'a M-O diary' as a socially-coded hybrid, which incorporated various temporal dimensions, including aspects of moral time. This was possible because looking across many M-O wartime diaries emphasised the 'collective' nature of the diaries and diary-writing, which my focus on one M-O diary 'over time' in Chapter 4 had not done. From this, it became even clearer that the hybridic form of 'a M-O diary' facilitated M-O's particular collective epistolary relationship with a broad base of different diarists. This reinforced my earlier argument that paying attention to the hybridic form of the M-O wartime diaries, which as I have shown includes important and multiple temporal and epistolary aspects, is absolutely fundamental to comprehending what the diaries 'are', how they work, and the activities of the wartime diarists as 'subjective cameras'.

Conducting the analysis I have across the women's wartime diaries has not only followed M-O's emancipatory agenda by, in my own way, seeking multiple 'objective realities' via exploring the viewpoints of multiple 'subjective cameras', but by doing so I have sought to add to the idea of the diarists as 'subjective cameras'. This chapter has emphasised the idea that the diarists are not the same, and no one of them is superior to, or more special or more interesting than, the others. Every ordinary person's view of their social world, other people, and of themselves has equal worth in the 'weather map' of collective social time that M-O sought to investigate and represent. Looking across many wartime diaries, then, has shown the powerfulness and essential validity of the break-down of the division between objective and subjective ways of framing the social world that M-O's research and its overall project was so concerned with. Other scholars too have noted M-O's role in 'confusing' seeming binaries, as in Hynes's (1976: 278) comment that the early organisation was "at once literary and scientific, realist and surrealist, political and psychological, Marxist and Freudian, [and] objective and salvationist", as quoted in Chapter 1. But the significance of M-O's incorporation of subjectivity within its radical conception of objectivity, as well as its incorporation of self within its understanding of society, has received little comment (but see Stanley, 1990a; 2001), despite their centrality to M-O's emancipatory agenda and significance with regard to their 'subjective camera' concept.

M-O's willingness to incorporate as broad a range and number of 'subjective cameras' and their 'objective realities' as possible in representing a view of the collective social times was not clearly apparent to me when reading and analysing Nella Last's diary in Chapter 4, however. Looking across many diaries has therefore added to the concept of 'subjective camera' a strong sense that each diarist is inextricably bound to a collective epistolary practice and project, and has provided me with a much clearer sense of the diarists as M-O diarists. By looking across the diaries, the sequential features of this collective epistolary activity did not seem especially important, unlike in Chapter 4 and working on one diary. However, the breadth of ordinary people involved in this collective epistolary exchange at any one



time was strongly brought home to me and through this I gained a clearer sense of how these 'subjective cameras' were indeed part of a project. And it is from this which my conviction that 'a M-O diary' is a particular and collective form or sub-genre of the diary discussed above was gained.

Looking in detail at many M-O diaries for the same days has also added some further important temporal dimensions to the 'subjective camera' idea. It has shown me that each diarist as a 'subjective camera' was writing very much from their specific embodied locations 'in time over time': although mentioned in Chapter 4, its importance to M-O women's wartime diaries as a 'collective' was not stressed there. Interestingly, the significance of this became apparent to me only when reading in a focused way many of the diaries, rather than just one. One point I want to make regarding this is that locating a diarist by reference to other diarists, as well as according to her particular temporal and spatial locations, importantly draws attention to the differences between diarists' 'viewpoints'. That is, it is by contrast and comparison between them that the differences become apparent. It also stresses that these viewpoints, although often different, actually connect to conceivable or rather to credible ranges of perspectives which centrally hinge on normative codes that influence society at the time of writing. Exploring perspectival diversity, then, pointed up another connection to the embedded 'in' time and space and society quality of the M-O 'subjective cameras' by emphasising the contingency of their perspectives on the social codes operating in their 'writing presents'. In short, the wartime diarists' perspectives are relative to each other and are given considerable meaning in interpretation through appreciating and exploring this relativity, particularly if the interpreter's concern is with looking across the women's wartime diaries, as mine has been in this chapter. Importantly, this relativity is conditioned by the context in which M-O and its diarists operated as well as by the particular people its activities involved.

A related point regarding the 'in' time embodied and embedded quality of the M-O's wartime diarists which has been emphasised in this chapter concerns my realisation that, by reading across many of the women's diaries, understanding something about the diarists as 'subjective cameras' involved exploring where the diarists stood in relation to one another by actually drawing on the temporal and spatial circumstances of their writing. Importantly, not only could the diarists not sufficiently be located without reference to time and space, but also this locating could not be done without reference to what and how the diarists themselves wrote about their temporal and spatial location, and hence could not be done in a 'disembodied' fashion with time and space cast as independent variables 'out there', pluckable and impossible in interpreting and using the diaries. 'What the diarists had written' concerning the temporal and spatial circumstances of their writing was of key importance in locating them in the emerging 'weather map' my exploration was developing, and these circumstances were highly and reciprocally contingent on the diarists' perspectives at the moment of writing; that is, on their lenses as 'subjective cameras'. In short, time and space were in reciprocal and relative relationships with the perspectives deployed by the M-O women at the time of writing their wartime diaries – and this is incorporated in what it was to 'be' a 'subjective camera'.

The relative positions of the M-O wartime diarists and of their representations of time and space are further reinforced by the fact that the 'weather map' of the diarists as 'observation points' was responsive to each additional or lost 'subjective camera'; it was not in stasis. In other words, the emerging map 're-aligned' with each addition or subtraction, and hence the relativity and furthermore the interdependency of the emerging representation of the diarists as a collective and each individual diarist was emphasised, which further reinforces the extent to which M-O's deconstruction of oppositions underpinned the organisation's conceptual and practical activities. The responsiveness to context and diarists, then, further emphasises the particularity of 'a M-O diary' as a 'form', for time, space and M-O diaries are not fixed over time or in time.

In addition, this chapter has added weight to the view put forward in Chapter 4 that, as 'subjective cameras', the diarists invoke and deploy various 'reaches' and 'extents' of time in their diary-entries. It has done so by showing that, across many diaries, this takes place in multiple ways at the moment of writing, and this in turn points up the multiple viewpoints of the wartime diarists. Examining time in and around the diary-writing by many women, then, provides another means of appreciating the 'perspectival diversity' (Stanley, 2004) of the wartime diarists that the diaries represent. In addition, examining time shows up the multiple ways in which the diarists practice diary-writing and deploy and represent time and temporality according to their particular viewpoints as 'subjective cameras'. This representational diversity is, therefore, a further indicator of perspectival diversity, and also suggests that the shape of the resulting diaries echoes M-O's emancipatory concern for diversity, difference and inclusivity.

The 'subjective camera' idea has acquired another temporal layer through the research and discussion in the chapter, involving the fact that performing the activities required of 'subjective camera' for M-O required people 'making' or 'finding' the time to do so. That is, in its own right being a 'subjective camera' is a temporal feature of M-O diary-writing, so to speak. One point regarding this is that being a 'subjective camera' 'took time' away from other things, and hence the concept indicates the status of the M-O women wartime diarists as embodied individuals 'living in time' and apportioning time to particular activities, one of which was being a 'subjective camera'. This, in turn, reinforces the idea that the activities of the 'subjective camera' were discontinuous, taking 'written pictures' when time could be found or made, which further emphasises the considerable interpretive work required for readers to piece together these pictures and form continuities across them.

Another point regarding the 'subjective camera' as a temporal feature of M-O diary-writing is that writing a diary for M-O legitimated the diarist's use of her time

on this activity, which again invoked the significance of the temporal economy in and around writing a diary for M-O. This, in turn, provided the diarist with time to think about the value of the direct and indirect experiences she had and how to use and represent them, which involved a fairly sophisticated awareness of temporal issues regarding observation and representation. It also involved directly considering the importance of pin-pointing experiences in time, because it was this that was needed for M-O to show how its observers and what they were doing related to the broader emerging picture it was providing of social time and history. In short, finding time and spending it on being a 'subjective camera' involved using it wisely, with temporal awareness and with temporal accuracy in representation, because the plotting of the 'product' M-O envisaged beyond the diaries – their 'weather map' – fundamentally relied on this.

Thinking along these lines has encouraged me to look for connections across the many M-O women's wartime diaries I have examined in exploring what 'a M-O diary' 'is' in an ontological and conceptual sense, rather than, for instance, looking at the diaries to find out about the diarists' lives or for 'facts' about 'what society was like' at the time they were writing their diaries. Finally, therefore, I want to comment on what looking across all these women's wartime diaries for the same dates has added to my ideas about 'a M-O wartime diary' as a particular and occasioned diary/letter hybrid form.

As discussed in an earlier chapter and stressed again above, the epistolary context in which M-O and its diarists operated is central to what an M-O diary 'is', and to understanding it in relation to diaries more generally. Not only were these diarists willing to write to/for M-O, some of them for long periods of time, but every one of them was willing to conduct this broadly epistolary exchange in a way that involved using a distinctive form of 'diaristic epistolarity'. In a sense, then, M-O's epistolary framing and the 'form' of a M-O diary were as radical as its emancipatory political and social agenda, and were certainly part of, and indeed helped facilitate,

breaking down oppositions in favour of inclusivity. The form of 'a M-O diary' was not only a crucial feature of the M-O wartime diaries project, but it was a hybridisation that was agreed to, sanctioned, by the diarists themselves, and it was an important means of traversing the researcher/researched binary by making the M-O wartime diarists part of the core epistolary framework and activity of M-O research. And this core framework, as commented in Chapter 3, had time at its heart, in part because time and temporality are 'of the essence' with diaries and letters, and in part because the hybrid form of these genres was used by M-O and its diarists both in time, and over time. Taking Chapters 4 and 5 together, then, what I have proposed shows that analysing the M-O wartime diaries needs to position time, temporality and its version of epistolarity as absolutely central and fundamental to what the M-O project was about.

In what now follows, I shall conclude the thesis by drawing together many of the main issues raised so far, in order to consider the relationship between M-O's women's wartime diaries, 'a M-O diary' and 'other' diaries, and to argue precisely what it is about time that is so fundamental to this.

~ Conclusion ~

On Time, Diaries and Mass-Observation

"Mass-Observation was intriguingly, outrageously and abidingly original."

Sheridan (2001: 25)

I shall conclude this thesis by drawing together various of the main issues raised concerning the M-O wartime diaries as a 'form', to argue precisely what it is about time and seriality that is so fundamental to this. I have argued that the form of 'a M-O wartime diary' is hybridic and that time, temporality, epistolarity and the context of its diaries as texts are central to this. In what follows, I shall outline these conceptual points and comment on 'other' diaries in relation to them, that is, diaries that were not written for M-O. In doing this, I present an argument for the distinctiveness of 'a M-O diary' as a form, more specifically that this form is that of 'diaristic epistolarity',<sup>182</sup> and that understanding this distinctiveness is crucial to understanding M-O's wartime diaries and the M-O project as a whole.

An important aspect of the distinctive hybridic form of the M-O women's wartime diaries relates to their status as social texts, occasioned by M-O's request for 'full' diaries at a particular historical juncture, and hence bearing many signs of social influences impacting on writing a diary in the specific context of M-O and the start of war. The M-O wartime diaries were neither wholly 'private' nor wholly 'public', in the commonly understood sense of the terms. Rather, they present and utilise a broad range of 'in-betweens', which problematises framing them according to such binary distinctions. These diaries were also not individualistic or solipsist,

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<sup>182</sup> As a form, 'epistolary diaries' have been given some attention, including by Kagle and Gramenga (1996) and Hoogenboom (2001), however I do not use this term here, because I am arguing for the distinctiveness of the M-O wartime diary as a form, and that the M-O form, while related to 'epistolary diaries', remains specific and distinct.

even while they richly inscribe 'self' and other selves, and strongly relate to the times as well as the particular social milieu of their writers.

The overlaps between the M-O wartime diaries and letters, and epistolarity more broadly, also marks their positioning as social texts. The diaries have many epistolary features, such as covering letters, included extracts from letters, as well as the diarists' comments on writing, reading, sending and receiving letters. By featuring such marked overlaps and 'in-betweens', the M-O wartime diaries demonstrate that it is neither easy nor desirable to define the precise limits or boundaries of distinct separate genres of life-writing (Stanley, 1992b; 2004). Appreciating the existence of rich boundary traversals between life-writing genres does not in my view signify a problem but rather a possibility in an analytical sense. That is, M-O's wartime diaries are best understood through engaging with such fascinating traversals, not least because this helps make sense of the particular organisational, conceptual, political and temporal circumstances in which the diaries were initiated and then continued to be written.

As I noted earlier, while M-O's wartime diaries are often covered by and invoke letters, this is actually of relatively minor analytical significance, because all diaries to a greater or lesser extent invoke and overlap with letters. For example, in a diary-entry for October 1790, Fanny Burney wrote in her diary about James Boswell reading aloud to her part of a letter he had received from Samuel Johnson (Gibbs, 1940: 275); in an entry for 23 June 1800, Dorothy Wordsworth wrote about walking to a local town to see if any letters had arrived, and for 10 October 1800, about reading Southey's letters (Wordsworth, 1987: 31, 47); in an entry for 17 September 1855, Fanny Duberly wrote about the letters produced by a press correspondent used as leaders in The Times which brought her and others 'cheer' (Kelly, 2007: 249-250); while in an (undated) entry for March 1942, Etty Hillesum wrote about how her friend Han was bothered by her correspondence with her friend A (Hillesum, 1996: 94). However, what is of considerable analytical significance for this thesis is

that, for M-O, organisational practices and epistolarity routinely coincided in a multitude of ways and this was necessary for it to function and persist. As an organisation, both in addition and with regard to its wartime diaries, M-O utilised an array of epistolary practices and their associated conventions in conducting its ongoing research activities. Within this, the activities of M-O's wartime diarists as 'subjective cameras' were fundamentally structured in and through epistolarity. The epistolary framing of M-O's organisation and research overall is as important as it is because it underpins, indeed it gave rise to, the wartime diaries as a distinct form or sub-genre. The M-O diary as a form does not so much incorporate epistolarity as, ontologically-speaking, epistolarity is an essential part of its being, is fundamental to what a M-O wartime diary 'is'.

As a form, the M-O wartime diaries presumed a reader, whether this reader was addressed explicitly or not. For the diarists, having their M-O diaries read formed part of the terms of the epistolary organisational relationship they had 'signed up' for with M-O. This reciprocity of exchange was very important, not least the 'response' aspect of the interaction, which had a marked impact on the wartime diaries, whether individual diarists wrote about this or not. The M-O wartime diaries were written to a living actual reader/audience, as well as sometimes imagined future readers. The readers that the M-O wartime diarists were promised were considerably different from the imagined addressee Kitty of Anne Frank's non-M-O wartime diary (Frank, 1947) and to the Certain Miss Nobody that Fanny Burney addressed her entry dated 27 March 1768 to (Gristwood, 1988: 3). The addressees that non-M-O diarists Georgina Lee, who often wrote to 'you' in her diary, because she was writing her diary to/for her young son Harry (Roynon, 2006), and Victorian maid-servant, Hannah Cullwick, who was writing at Arthur Munby's behest (Stanley, 1984), had in mind were living, but their diaries did not invoke the broader organisational and social audience that the M-O diarists did. The M-O wartime diarists had this promised 'real' reader held out from the outset and frequently realised through epistolary exchanges about their writing, and this marks the wartime diaries in an indelible way.



The M-O wartime diaries are different from most other diaries, in that the epistolary organisational context of their solicitation and production set them apart by conditioning their structure, content and framing. This context is specific and extremely important to understanding what a M-O wartime diary 'is', because the hybridic form of the wartime diaries directly connects with M-O's emancipatory social and political agenda. Operating between people over space and time, the diaries dissolved any sharp distinction between self and other, are a kind of writing which rests fundamentally on interaction between M-O and its many diarists, and engage 'ordinary' people in research and an emancipatory agenda, and also in 'making history'.

A central aspect of the particular occasioned hybridic form of the M-O wartime diaries concerns time and temporality. Both letters and M-O's wartime diaries have time 'written in' to them: both are definitionally serial and sequential kinds of writing; they were written and sent 'over time'; there were time delays when both were posted; further time passed for M-O and the letter recipients to respond; and so on. The diary-entries themselves are sequential and have a largely linear chronological structure focused on a succession of days. Within the content of these entries, there are various evocations and constructions of time, such as dated headings; sentences, paragraphs or occasionally larger proportions of entries framed in either past, present or future verb-tenses; indeed there are written remembered or projected scenes which seem dislocated from the moment at which the diary-entry itself was written.

Various of these temporal features are also apparent in non-M-O diaries, although I shall later emphasise the greater importance of the differences.<sup>183</sup> Precise date headings, for instance, are used to organise diary-entries in the diaries written by

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<sup>183</sup> In making the following comments, I refer to published versions of the diaries concerned. Given the discussion in Chapter 2, I am of course aware of the impact of selection and editing, and that manuscript versions may well differ.

Richard Brown (Millgate, 1998), Hermione Ranfurly (Ranfurly, 1995), William Soutar (Soutar, 1954), Betty Armitage (Webley, 2002), Anne Frank (Frank, 1947), A Woman in Berlin (Anonymous, 2005), Mary Butts (Blondel, 2002), as well as in 'diaries' as diverse as Thatcher Ulrich's (1991) life of Martha Ballard 'Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812', Duff's (1980) edition of Queen Victoria's Highland Journals, and in The Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff (Blind, 1890). And some diarists write undated entries, such as in Fanny Burney's diary (Gibbs, 1940) and in Christabel Bielenberg's (1968) diary-based autobiography. Whether diarists, those who wrote wartime diaries for M-O included, write on a daily, regular or intermittent basis is similarly diverse, and so too are analeptic and proleptic manoeuvres in these; memories are recounted, futures are projected. Anne Frank and Christabel Bielenberg include background biographical foreword material which serves an analeptic purpose. Frank's has a foreword of sorts, contained within the space of a diary-entry dated 20 June 1942, which details her family background and ends with the comment "and here I come to the present day" (Frank, 1947: 16); while Bielenberg's is written under the actual heading 'Foreword' and dated 1968, as indeed, it appears, was the whole of her account of life in Germany between 1932 and 1945, although being based on her 'diary notes' from the time (Bielenberg, 1968: 9). The anonymous A Woman in Berlin (Anonymous, 2005) is written by and large in the present-tense, serving as much of a contrast to other non-M-O diaries as Amy Brigg's (D 5284) similarly written M-O wartime diary poses to the other M-O wartime diaries I read.

There are also pointers in non-M-O diaries regarding the precise moment of writing, with A Woman in Berlin (Anonymous, 2005: 186) commenting on 9 May 1945: "Moving along – now I'm writing at night, by candlelight, with a compress on my forehead", and Fanny Duberly writing on 6 May 1855: "The expedition to Kertch is returned, and, at the moment that I write, is it off to Balaklava harbour" (Kelly, 2007: 171). And there are also comments that account for the days that the diarists have not written on, with Georgina Lee writing: "These last 8 or 10 days have been such busy ones getting into the house, that I have lost all count of time" (6 May

1917) (Roynon, 2006: 217) and twenty-five days later, that "Just a week ago since I last wrote" (31 May 1917) (Roynon, 2006: 218).

Clearly, then, there are similar concerns at work in writing diaries for and outwith M-O, which shows that shared normative codes of practice regarding diaries as a genre inform diary-writing in general, although of course not in uniform ways. However, it seems to me that while these similarities are to be recognised, they are not so important as the differences. While time appears in the content and structure of non-M-O diaries, with the M-O wartime diaries time and temporality are key to their actual form. That is, time is fundamentally written into what a M-O wartime diary 'is' as a particular hybridic form. This form both demonstrated and was the result of a specific amalgam of temporal features regarding letters and diaries, which centred around their serial and sequential qualities, and the temporal circumstances in which the M-O wartime diaries were conceived, solicited and written.

The wartime diaries have a diaristic sequential quality, regarding a succession of entries written over time at points within the epistolary sequence of dispatches to, and acknowledgements from, M-O. The notion of sequence here also suggests something of an order or pattern, or a 'fitting together', of the diary-entries over time. This raises questions concerning how to conceptualise this, which were explored by focusing in Chapter 4 on one woman's lengthy M-O wartime and post-war diary against the backdrop of a broader group of diaries, discussing its narrative shape, the temporal markers used to organise entries, some of the micro-narrative threads I perceived in the sequence of entries, and various methodological and other issues in my reading this diary. Three broad points arose from this: the first concerned what this diarist 'did' with time in her diary, which I explored through the 'narrative anachronies' in her diary-writing, its prolepses and especially its analepses; the second concerned the diarist as an ageing woman in relation to her diary-writing practices and her changing embodied location in time; and the third concerned the importance of 'reflexing' and evaluating the 'backwards' chronological sampling

frame which I used to examine her diary 'over time' and considering its interpretive implications.

From this examination, it became clear that 'diary time' is not the same as experiential or 'lived time'. Text and life are different, however contextually interconnected, and this difference connects to (and depends upon) time. Diaries are a form of representation and there is always some kind of time-lag between 'the moment of writing' and the 'the scene of what is written about' (Stanley and Dampier, 2006). Succinctly, it 'takes time' for diarists to represent in writing their account of experiences, although this time-lag is often assumed as minimal or unimportant to content, as Stanley and Dampier (2006: 47, fn. 17) have noted with regards to Judy Simons' (1990) use of Fanny Burney's tales of the Battle of Waterloo. And this frequently underpins the view that diaries engage specifically with 'the present'. Relatedly, the importance of recognising the M-O women wartime diarists as ageing women in changing and embodied locations over the time from when they started writing their diaries to when they stopped was emphasised. Writing for M-O 'took time' in a material and literal sense, and hence appreciating the contextual interconnectivity, or a 'contextual register of reference' (Eakin, 1988), between life and text is crucial to understanding M-O diary-writing.

My detailed examinations of M-O women's wartime diaries – both focusing on one diary over time and on larger numbers for particular points in time – has shown that how the diarists used time was interesting but of comparatively minor importance compared with the fact that these diaries are in, over and of time, and 'are' a temporal order in their own rights. This temporal order is not tied ontologically to linearity or chronology. Indeed, chronology is a surface-level structuring device in M-O diary-writing, and the M-O diaries as a form are tied to an epistolary sequence, with each of their entries providing a 'snap shot' of the diarist's social world. Of course, other diaries too may host epistolary aspects other than in their content, such as Hannah Cullwick's diary (Stanley, 1984). However, the

hybridic 'nature' of a M-O diary depends on this and was occasioned by an organisational context and sanctioned by a set of people who saw themselves as part of this. How these snap shots are perceived to fit together 'after the fact' of writing, however, depends considerably on the reader's interpretation; and this, I have argued and hopefully also shown, can be delineated by using the concept of indexicality.

Furthermore, although the M-O women's wartime diaries are often presented in published versions in a chronological day-to-day way with strong temporal markers organising the entries, these markers are by no means fixed. The diaries actually contain a range of proleptic and analeptic features that undermine their on the surface strict chronological structure, and by so doing problematise any assumption that diaries are by definition concerned with 'the present'. Indeed, 'the present', I have argued, is not accessible through diary-entries. However, such incidents and experiences are often 'made present' at the time of writing in the account written, and this 'present-making' or re-presentation is significant in itself. This points to three further important concerns. Firstly, different relationships and temporal distances between representation and experience – particularly between 'the moment of writing' and 'the scene of what is written about' – can exist in diaries. Secondly, the 'moment of writing' and indeed the 'writing present' is importantly but also complexly related to diary-writing. And, thirdly, the kinds of interpretive work involved in analysing such temporal features of diary-writing, discussed in relation to indexicality, need to be thought about regarding the analysis of diary-entries written not only over time but also on the same dates by different M-O women wartime diarists.

In working on a range of diaries 'a day at a time', some intriguing analytical issues were pointed up, which included the (de)stability of an easily identifiable 'writing present' in the M-O wartime diaries; the ways that M-O diarists wrote about the practice of remembering; how they 'account for time' in their diaries; and also how such matters relate back to M-O as an organisation. In discussing these, I

emphasised the importance not only of how 'the moment of writing' relates to 'the moment of inscribed experience', but also that this is a key structuring device in diary-writing. I also stressed the significance of considering the specific pencil-to-paper moment in the context of the broader 'writing present', which is always 'there' because these 'at the time' circumstances influence the diarists' 'moments of writing' and the readers' 'moments of reading'. They formed a kind of lens through which the diarist perceived her temporal and social world and also through which she interacted with them. The result is a nexus of mind, self and society which denotes her (sense of) place in the world, an autobiographical standpoint. The context in which these things occurred and which framed them is provided by M-O and its project, to which the diarists 'signed up' every time they posted instalments of their diaries.

In looking at diaries that were not written for M-O, however, there is often little or no contextualising information available about the diarists' writing lives, whether they wrote for a particular cause or purpose, how the editor 'found' the diary and organised sampling, editing and presenting extracts, among other matters. In Lewis's (1998) anthology of soldiers' war diaries and letters written between 1775 and 1991, for instance, none of this information is given, although he does note when an entry was a diarist's last. The context of the diarists' lives and life-writing are removed, and indeed supplanted by the extracts being ordered according to 'public' rather than everyday war events, from the American War of Independence to the first Gulf War. In Taylor and Taylor's (2004) anthology, war diarists from the seventeenth century to the present-day are quoted in the format of a calendar year, in which diary-extracts from vastly different periods are placed under months, pulled from the context of the diary they came from and indeed from the war around which they were written. This has an odd decontextualising effect, particularly for me with regard to the two M-O women's wartime diaries (those by Naomi Mitchison and Nella Last) which are quoted within it. Their role as M-O wartime diarists is mentioned only briefly in the 'biographies' section at the rear of the book, and even then Mass-Observation is portrayed as a mere 'prompt' to their writing, with no

allusion made to the diarist-M-O epistolary relationship and exchange, or to the impact of this relationship on the diaries themselves.

My analysis of a range of diaries 'a day at a time' showed that remembering and writing about remembering and memories are complicated intertwined practices, both of which take place at the moment of writing. With regard to the latter, quite a few of the M-O wartime diarists I read recognised that their inscribed memories were to some degree temporally 'distorted', and their comments implicitly or explicitly represent their attempts to make sense of, and account for, such 'distortions', as well as remembering, as requested by M-O. I argued that this 'accounting for time' connects to the fact there is a value-laden, moral even, temporal economy of time-use inscribed in M-O diaries. This temporal economy indicates the grounds of an alternative way of examining time that is not based solely on chronology, or measuring time spent on particular activities, or the intersections between the past, present and future, but which instead attends to the writing itself.

There are more commonalities than differences between the temporal economy of how the M-O wartime diarists indicate that time 'should' be used, although of course how they inscribe these ideas differs. Clearly, using time effectively by implication involves keeping busy, whether physically and mentally, by doing tasks given social or personal value. Using their diaries to record how their time is apportioned and 'in/appropriately' used, as well as to organise and plan their activities during lived time, is an important part of the perceived morality of the temporal economy for the M-O diarists, and these discussions, as I noted earlier, are typically framed in terms such as spending, saving, hoping for, wasting and valuing time. This feeds into ideas about the right thing to 'do' with time, connecting in turn to being a useful and efficient person who makes the most of their time, in both writing and living. These ideas are also associated with normative codes of practice regarding diary-writing, which the M-O diarists drew on, re-worked and used so as to

construct a temporalised, diarised representation of (some of) their lived experience for M-O.

These codes were certainly mediated by being specifically M-O diarists: that is, the diarists drew on a temporal economy that was connected with M-O's social and political emancipatory agenda. The temporal distance between writing and the events that composed the inscribed experience were assigned a moral dimension and, even when writing about very recent things, the time delay between experiencing and writing was often invoked as moral time. A moral dimension is sometimes apparent in other diaries that are also framed in war, with, for instance, Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo's 'after the fact' so-called diary adjusting experiential facts in line with her moral and political perspective at the moment of writing (Stanley and Dampier, 2006), while Christabel Bielenberg (1968) writes about her experiences in an autobiography some 25 years after the events, but from her diary notes, and writes this in a way that implicitly and sometimes explicitly flags up moral dilemma and contradictions within Nazi Germany during the war from her perspective of the (much later) moment of writing. My impression is that Brandt-Van Warmelo's overtly (from the evidence of her letters) political diarising attempts to 'correct' the past, whereas the M-O wartime diarists were in a very important sense trying to inform the future so that the mistakes of the present and indeed the past would not happen again. Succinctly, their sense of change is forward-facing, whereas Brandt Van-Warmelo's is retrospective.

The different relationships and 'distances' between representation and experience across the different diary-entries examined for the same dates related to differences which were constructed according to the particular diarists' 'take' on things at the moment of their writing, their perspectives as 'subjective cameras', which included a moral or ethical dimension that had a direct connection to being M-O diarists and actively empathising with (and indeed 'signing up' to) M-O's social and political emancipatory agenda. These different relationships and 'distances' were



a key structuring device in M-O diary-writing, and exploring the temporal dis/junctures between writing and experience opened up the importance of the 'moment of writing' in diary-writing, as a site or 'moment' which was in fact not strictly bound to the particular time, day or date it was usually labelled as 'being', but was contingent on the broader contextual 'writing present' and being an M-O diarist within this. The notion of 'a day', then, as a discrete unit of time which binds together 'experience' and the writing it is 'of' is more than shaky. A day or date does not represent the 'moment of writing', but frames it. It is a surface-level framing device, and it is not 'of the essence' to the temporal economy involved in writing a diary for M-O.

As I have stressed, the largely implicit normative codes of 'good' practice embedded in this temporal economy are more important, they connect time and diary-writing by using and representing time in particular ways. They are social codes contingent on the ways that diary-writing (and interpretation) and the diarists themselves are embedded in a particular social milieu with associated conventions and discursive practices, and in particular that the diarists are M-O diarists in this context. Rather than focusing on the individual diarists, then, I have, like M-O, been more concerned with the way in which the wartime diaries are part of a broader project concerned with 'ordinary lives' and a politicised 'anthropology of ourselves'.

Conceptualising the M-O diaries as a hybridic form 'occasioned' by this context facilitates looking at the social forces and conventions operating at the time, I have proposed. Looking across many wartime diaries has shown the powerfulness and essential validity of breaking-down the division between objective and subjective ways of framing the social world that M-O's research and its overall project was so concerned with. Other scholars have noted M-O's role in 'confusing' seeming binaries, but in my view do not go far enough in recognising that the M-O project not only confused, but in fact dissolved, binaries through its incorporation of subjectivity within its radical conception of objectivity, as well as its incorporation of

self within its understanding of society. Furthermore, the breadth of ordinary people involved in this particular collective epistolary exchange at any one time was extraordinary and strongly brought home to me how these people as 'subjective cameras' were part of a project.

Importantly, the wartime diarists cannot be adequately located without reference to time and space, and this in turn cannot be done without reference to what and how the diarists themselves wrote about their temporal and spatial location. Time and space were rather in reciprocal and relative relationships with the perspectives deployed by the M-O women at the time of writing their wartime diaries – and this is incorporated in what it was to 'be' a 'subjective camera' who wrote a M-O wartime diary. This wider responsiveness to social context further emphasises the particularity of 'a M-O diary' as a form, because time, space and M-O diaries are not fixed relatively over time or in time. Performing the activities required of 'subjective camera' for M-O, and literally doing the work of the hybrid form, required people 'making' or 'finding' the time to do so. Consequently, being a 'subjective camera' in its own right occasioned temporal features of M-O diary-writing, so to speak.

What I have argued in this thesis, then, is that analysing the M-O wartime diaries needs to emphasise that these are M-O diaries and are strongly epistolary in character, and to position time and temporality as absolutely central and fundamental to what the M-O project was about. The form, structure and context of the wartime diaries makes them extremely complex, so that a flat reading of them 'as content' alone would be fundamentally flawed, as it would not take into account the particular 'timed and spaced' interface between M-O and its diarists. Recognising hybridity, time, seriality and epistolarity, and context is key to the 'distinctiveness' of the M-O wartime diaries. I can finish in no better way than by providing some extracts from the M-O women's wartime diaries that invoke these essential points:

"I wonder what the future has in store for us, all the diaries will sound so different, in the future."

D 5420, 11 May 1940

"The time before the war seems an age away ... "Well, we certainly do live in some times!"

D 5349, 15 May 1940

"The last entry in my diary was dated December 30<sup>th</sup> but the last instalment I sent to M-O was the 13<sup>th</sup>. I don't know why I stopped writing sheer laziness I presume. However I see the Directive that M-O still wants diaries so I must make an effort."

D 5445, 23 May 1940

"Having dropped my attempts as a Diary I have been spurred to fresh enthusiasm by the circular letter from M-O, dated 1<sup>st</sup> June."

D 5278, 6 June 1940

"... should be heartened to think that someone, somewhere, would someday be helped somehow by something I've done ..."

D 5278, 27 June 1940

"I am often ashamed of these badly written accounts often I fear badly spelt scrawls I send in, but I write them in all sorts of odd moments and have no time to consider what or how I am putting things ..."

D 5344, 11 November 1943

"The thought of having no more war seems strange ... My husband & I will have to set about building ourselves a permanent way of living instead of a precarious day to day makeshift & though we are looking forward to it tremendously, it will mean a lot of hard work & difficult decisions to be made in rather a chaotic & uncertain world ..."

D 5380, 5 June 1944

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<sup>184</sup> Version of Blodgett (1991) published for the British market with an altered title.

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#### **General:**

<http://www.massobs.org>

[http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection\\_descriptions/massobsstudies.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection_descriptions/massobsstudies.html)

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library//massobs/index.html>

#### **Wartime Diaries:**

[http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection\\_descriptions/massobsdiaries.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection_descriptions/massobsdiaries.html)

#### **Day-Diaries:**

[http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection\\_descriptions/massobsdaysurveys.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection_descriptions/massobsdaysurveys.html)

#### **Directives:**

[http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection\\_descriptions/massobsdirectives.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection_descriptions/massobsdirectives.html)

#### **File Report Series:**

[http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection\\_descriptions/massobsfilereports.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection_descriptions/massobsfilereports.html)

#### **Topic Collections:**

[http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection\\_descriptions/massobstopic.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection_descriptions/massobstopic.html)

#### **Other:**

<http://www.ercouncil.org/about.html>

[http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/about/about\\_speech\\_dates.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/about/about_speech_dates.cfm)

<http://www.whirligig-tv.co.uk/radio/musicprog.htm>

<http://www.whirligig-tv.co.uk/radio/brainstrust.htm>

## List of the Original Material Examined from the M-O Archive:

### **File Reports:**

FR 621

FR 2181

### **Directives:**

Moira Crompton (DR 1056). Reply to Victory in Europe Day Directive, May 1945 (Directive 97).

Nella Last (DR 1061). Reply to April 1944 (Directive 87); Reply to Victory in Europe Day Directive, May 1945 (Directive 97).

Sylvia Rampton (DR 2903), Reply to Victory in Europe Day Directive, May 1945 (Directive 97).

Maggie Joy Blunt (DR 3320), Reply to Victory in Europe Day Directive, May 1945 (Directive 97).

### **Topic Collections:**

B.R.S.'s 'Observer Diary' stored in TC 49/1/D 'VE Week Recorded by Volunteer Observers, May 1945'.

### **Wartime Diaries:**

- Boxed entries denote the real names of diarists, which I am able to use because their diaries have been edited and published, at least in part.
- Italicised entries refer to those diaries I have examined but have not referred to directly in the thesis.
- \* refers to pseudonymous names given to the diarists in Aldrich (2004), Garfield (2005a; 2005c; 2006) and/or Sheridan (1990; 1991), which I have also used in the thesis.

**List of the M-O Wartime Diaries Examined by Diarist Number and Diarist Name:**

D 5239	Eliza Murphy
D 5240	Nancy Slater
D 5242	Harriet Riley
<i>D 5243</i>	<i>Miriam Connington</i>
D 5244	Ethel Bedwell
<i>D 5246</i>	<i>Mary Quince</i>
D 5247	Amy Brink
<i>D 5253</i>	<i>Norma Crookes</i>
D 5254	Jessica Farthing
D 5256	Matilda Gnash
D 5261	Lorna Caruthers
D 5265	Dina Coxon
D 5267	Anna Potton
D 5271	Victoria Pinkerton
D 5272	Irene Hart
D 5275	Mary Cockerton
D 5276	Ada Barrows
<u>D 5278</u>	<u>Olivia Cockett</u>
D 5281	Vera Peterson
D 5282	Rachel Long
D 5283	Beryl Summers
D 5284	Amy Briggs*
D 5291	Patricia Crosby
D 5295	Dorothy Emerson
D 5296	Irene Grant*
<u>D 5301</u>	<u>Rachel Dhonau</u>
D 5303	Alberta Maythorpe
D 5306	Elsie Prince
D 5307	Alice Croydon
D 5310	Judith Foster
D 5312	Nina Smith
D 5313	Mavis Shackle
D 5314	Martina Crawley
D 5318	Vanessa Chambers
D 5323	Jenny Green*
D 5324	Muriel Green*
D 5325	Joan Stanton-Fox
D 5329	Daphne Tailor
D 5331	Rosemary Johnson
D 5332	Beatrice Price
D 5333	Jessica Anderson
D 5337	Beatrice Hope
D 5338	Ruth Stapleford
D 5339	Clarissa Lang

D 5341	Kathleen Woods
D 5342	Rose Brown*
D 5344	Clara Woodbury
D 5348	Sara Lipton
D 5349	Mary Baildon
D 5350	Geraldine Langhorn*
<u>D 5353</u>	<u>Nella Last</u>
D 5363	Gabriella McKay
D 5366	Veronica Nicolson
D 5372	Elizabeth Stevenson
D 5376	Kathryn Epsom
<u>D 5378</u>	<u>Naomi Mitchison</u>
D 5380	Beryll Swain
D 5382	Eileen Potter*
D 5383	Esther Walker
D 5390	Pam Ashford*
D 5391.1	Ethel Harcourt
D 5394	Yvonne Foreman
D 5396	Tilley Rice*
D 5399	Caroline Blake*
D 5401	Maggie Joy Blunt*
D 5402	Moirra Crompton
D 5403	Rona Monk
D 5408	Paula Selby
D 5410	Helena Simpson
<i>D 5412</i>	<i>Natasha Minton</i>
D 5414	Constance Bell
D 5420	Eva Sampson
D 5423	Sylvia Rampton
<u>D 5443</u>	<u>Kathleen Tipper</u>
D 5445	Valerie Brunel
D 5447	Eddie Rutherford*
D 5448	Marjorie Clifton
D 5462	Cynthia Frinton
D 5475	Bernie Oyston
D 5478	Ethel Schreiber

## Appendix 1:

### Nella Last's comments regarding her Aunt Sarah

"... I scribbled a little letter to Arthur & wrote an A.M to Cliff – he hadn't got mine, telling him about his fathers illness & bed downstairs. ... he said 'tread on the waters' – you always used to say a kindness should always be passed on if not actually returned, & I find myself, remembering, - & its amazing how things do come back – little kindnesses & good will. I find Australians – real Aussies – have lots in common with Aunt Sarah, than I'd have believed possible!"

D 5353, 28 November 1963

"Poor old Aunt Sarah & her odd little 'consolations' – her loving 'you know Will, as we get older, our heads can't stand things'. I'm conscious so often I've lost a great deal of 'patience'. Always when a person dies there's regrets, of 'loving words unsaid' ..."

D 5353, 7 September 1961

"My mother's birthday, & if she had lived she would have been 98. All the rest of the family lived till well over 80. Aunt Sarah, till nearly 93."

D 5353, 1 September 1957

"Aunt Sarah looked astonishingly well, oddly enough, since she had the accident to her arm & shoulder, her face had plumped out, & grown pink & white, lost the sallow, wrinkled look. She was busy weeding the wee strip of garden at the front, after paying her customary visit up the row of cottages, to lend papers to two 'poor old things, bedfast you know dear' – one 80, the other 82 – she herself is 92! ..."

D 5353, 21 May 1957

"...[Aunt Sarah] is a remarkable old pet ... a pile of newspapers – as a family we love them & I could tell she was dying for a real 'gossip'. ... On & on she went about this & that ... I was brought up to date with family & village news till I felt I was dazed! No sign of her 'breaking up' after her accident, as the doctor had feared."

D 5353, 20 April 1956

"..I write twice a week to Aunt Sarah, wishing I could visit her every day. I always have her in my mind, her petulant self pitying rather I fear will keep the kindly neighbours from climbing in."

D 5353, 6 April 1956

"I feel concerned about Aunt Sarah, her letter was 'brave', but I could read behind the lines ... Its useless trying to get her – Aunt Sarah – to think of coming to Barrow, not even when she was younger did she like to go far from her home ...."

D 5353, 10 February 1954

"I can tell poor Aunt Sarah feels the cold badly ...These last few months ... I've noticed with a little sadness how she is growing 'weary' of living so long, - she feels things 'get on top of me'. Yet it's wonderful for anyone of 87 to wash & cook so well & keep her cottage trim & neat."

D 5353, 8 Dec 1952

"... package of margarine, cheese & dripping for Aunt Sarah, but Will reluctant to go but he shuns going lately & I don't like to insist. I often feel the 'fear' he has, is of old age & death."

D 5353, 14 October 1950

"Today there was 8' for a wee parcel of dripping, kippers & a big leek, for Aunt Sarah".

D 5353, 21 September 1949

"We sat by the fire & listened to Aunt Sarah's gentle voice talking of what she had read in the papers of crowded holiday resorts & trains."

D 5353, 6 August 1945

"... Aunt Sarah at over 80 has enough to do with her two little cottages & her old cousin, who to our eyes is failing. We only stayed for a short visit & then went on to the Lake.

D 5353, 8 May 1945

"I gave Aunt Sarah a good scolding but know I wasted my breath! She is going twice a week to her younger brother's house to see all is well with him now his daughter Mary has had to go & bake & prepare dinners & take them & she rarely gets a lift & its over two miles away - & she is 76 & not too well now."

D 5353, 28 February 1942

"I baked a cake for Aunt Sarah's Xmas parcel"

D 5353, 18 December 1940

"Aunt Sarah's guests in the next door cottage have decided to stay till Spring as the elder one has a bad heart ...."

D 5353, 14 December 1940

"Aunt Sarah was delighted with my 'shopping' with the £1 my brother sends for that purpose although there was not the variety & value of former years for all the shops ask 'are you a registered customer' for lots of goods like peas, smaller tins of salmon & fruit, etc. ..."

D 5353, 14 December 1940

"... Aunt Eliza always looks back on 'all she has done for her children, neighbours & friends & says they have all forgotten her. Aunt Sarah is so busy doing little things every day for people I don't think she ever thinks about their cause & effect & if she 'will be better thought of'."

D 5353, 3 June 1940

"... poor Jerry is quite alright ... Aunt Sarah's cousin – who is nearly 70 is as sore & jealous of Jerry as can be...."

D 5353, 1 June 1940

"We found upset & confusion at Sparksbridge for Jerry [Sarah's neighbour] has gone – into Army Aunt Sarah says."

D 5353, 25 May 1940



"Aunt Sarah has been knocked down by a car on Tuesday night, arm & left side very bruised."

D 5353, 18 November 1939

"Strange to say I found Aunt Sarah in a rather emotional 'do you remember' mood. I can never realise she is 75 for her mind & intellect is crystal clear – for past or present & she loves to have a listener – equipped with a pencil & handful of paper to 'answer' her. When she gets in a talking mood I think she forgets she is deaf & dislikes to be shouted to."

D 5353, 11 November 1939

"Found Aunt Sarah very hot & bothered: she hates sewing poor lamb ..."

D 5353, 30 September 1939

"No long run this afternoon but if we can always get a gallon of petrol it will take us to see Aunt Sarah every week. Bless her! She is talking of restocking her old hen house next Spring & perhaps going in for table rabbits – and by then she will be 76!!..."

D 5353, 24 September 1939

"[Cliff] prefers a tramp over the hills with a pal – or even just Aunt Sarah's old dog..."

D 5353, 14 September 1939

"This afternoon we went - in pouring rain for a run round the Lakes ... Called on our way back to see a very old Aunt who was rather disappointed she had no evacuated children ... She has the most wonderful philosophy of life I have ever known & she said a time was coming when we must all be kinder to each other & help each other more. I pointed out perhaps she could do more for the children all round if she had none in the house & she agreed – said she had written to all she knew asking for clothes that if big could be cut down."

D 5353, 10 September 1939

"We took the usual weekly groceries for an aunt living about 12 miles away & found her busy 'getting things ready' in case they brought her any children whom no one could put up. She would 'really not like more than four as winter is coming on & washing & drying is such a problem' – and she is 75!!"

D 5353, 2 September 1939

## Appendix 2:

### M-O Diarists, Directive Respondents & Observers Examined by Date/Event

#### August 1939:

D 5246  
D 5278  
D 5341  
D 5353  
D 5445

#### September 1939:

D 5278  
D 5341  
D 5350  
D 5353  
D 5378  
D 5445

#### April/May 1940:

D 5253  
D 5291  
D 5296  
D 5349  
D 5353  
D 5391.1  
D 5420

#### June 1940:

D 5278  
D 5383  
D 5394  
D 5399  
D 5414

#### D-Day June 1940:

D 5339  
D 5344  
D 5353 (missing)  
D 5380  
D 5399

#### Hamburg, Dresden Fire-Bombings February 1945:

D 5261  
D 5275  
D 5447

#### V. E. Day:

D 5353  
D 5401  
D 5402  
D 5423

#### VE Day Directive Replies, Box DR 97:

##### 4 Directive Replies:

DR 1056  
DR 1061  
DR 2903  
DR 3320

#### Topic Collection 49/1/D

1 Observer Diary B.R.S.

#### Hiroshima & Nagasaki:

D 5240  
D 5243  
D 5275  
D 5353  
D 5403

#### Armistice Days:

#### November 1939:

D 5242  
D 5275  
D 5276  
D 5291  
D 5296  
D 5306  
D 5312  
D 5324  
D 5332  
D 5333  
D 5342  
D 5348  
D 5353  
D 5363  
D 5366  
D 5445  
D 5448

**November 1940:**

D 5239  
D 5244  
D 5295  
D 5324  
D 5325  
D 5333  
D 5341  
D 5342  
D 5353  
D 5378  
D 5390  
D 5402  
D 5445  
D 5462

**November 1941:**

D 5247  
D 5254  
D 5256  
D 5281  
D 5284  
D 5301  
D 5325  
D 5331  
D 5338  
D 5342  
D 5353  
D 5376  
D 5401  
D 5462

**November 1942:**

D 5239  
D 5256  
D 5261  
D 5265  
D 5271  
D 5275  
D 5283  
D 5314  
D 5329  
D 5338  
D 5353  
D 5402  
D 5410  
D 5423  
D 5443

**November 1943:**

D 5261  
D 5267  
D 5282  
D 5283  
D 5301  
D 5314  
D 5318  
D 5337  
D 5338  
D 5344  
D 5353

**November 1944:**

D 5261  
D 5275  
D 5284  
D 5303  
D 5306  
D 5318  
D 5331  
D 5344  
D 5372  
D 5443

**November 1945:**

D 5275  
D 5283  
D 5303  
D 5337  
D 5338  
D 5344  
D 5353  
D 5403  
D 5408  
D 5443  
D 5447

**November 1946:**

D 5271  
D 5318  
D 5338  
D 5353  
D 5372  
D 5401  
D 5403  
D 5410  
D 5443  
D 5445  
D 5447

Appendix 3:Background and Writing Lives of the M-O Diarists Examined

Diarist No.	Year of Birth	Occupation	Household Status	Residence	First Entry	Last Entry	Total No. Monthly Diary-Entries
5239	1917	Aerodynamist, p/t Civil Servant & housewife	M F1941	Monmouth, Wales & Winchester, Hampshire & Bolton-le-Sands, Lancs	Sept 39	Apr 49	98
5240	1897	Teacher	S	Watford, Hertfordshire	Aug 39	Jan 54	159
5242	1892	Housewife, voluntary worker	M	Sketty, Swansea & Glamorgan, Wales	Oct 39	Nov 39	2
5243	x	x	S	Blackpool, Lancashire & London	May 45	Sept 45	5
5244	1916	Civil Servant	S	Harrow, Middlesex	Aug 40	Dec 40	5
5246	1911	Organiser; Assist. at Local Council Care Committee	S	Purley, Surrey	Aug 39	Dec 40	5
5247	1915	Secretary, housewife, mother	M	Earley, Berks	Nov 41	Sept 43	20
5253	1896	Bookshop assistant; housewife	M	Edinburgh, Midlothian, Scotland	Apr 40	Jan 44	11
5254	1902	Domestic, housewife	M	Stockport, Cheshire	Oct 41	Oct 42	6
5256	1909	Teacher (infants)	S	Manchester, Lancashire & Thornaby-on-Tees, Yorkshire	Nov 41	Feb 46	46
5261	1916	Clerk in factory	S	Manchester, Lancashire	Sept 41	Apr 45	43
5265	x	Listener, researcher, translator for BBC	x	Truro, Cornwall	Nov 42	Nov 42	1
5267	1923	Forces, WAAF	S	Farnham, Surrey	Nov 44	May 43	13
5271	1896	Clerk, Local Govt.	S	Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk	Nov 42	Aug 48	53
5272	1884	Musician, farm worker	M	Durham, County Durham	Sep 41	May 45	27
5275	1890	Film strip producer	M	London, SW11	Oct 39	Jan 46	39
5276	1906	Masseuse	S	Redhill, Surrey	Aug 39	Dec 39	5

Diarist No.	Year of Birth	Occupation	Household Status	Residence	First Entry	Last Entry	Total No. Monthly Diary-Entries
5278	1912	Civil Servant	S	London, SE4	Aug 39	Oct 42	23
5281	1895	Domestic, housewife	M	Helensburgh, Dunbartonshire & Cirencester, Gloucestershire	Jul 41	Sep 44	6
5282	1891	Teacher	M	Chepstow & Monmouth, Wales	Aug 39	Oct 45	64
5283	1887	Nurse companion	R	Claverham, Bristol, Gloucestershire	Sep 39	Dec 46	55
5284	1909	Nurse companion	M	Leeds, Yorkshire	Oct 41	Dec 44	10
5291	1908	Journalist & writer	W	London, W2	Aug 39	June 40	7
5295	1910	Cookery demonstrator	S	Margate, Kent	Aug 39	Mar 41	20
5296	1885	Domestic, housewife	M	Gateshead, County Durham	Sep 39	Apr 52	89
5301	1910	Housewife, mother, Food Office Clerk	M	Sheringham, Norfolk	Jul 41	Jan 44	31
5303	1922	Typist, shorthand	x	Stanmore, Middlesex	Aug 44	Jan 46	18
5306	1891	Domestic; housewife	M	Burnley, Lancashire	Oct 39	Nov 44	8
5307	1908	Stenographer, Press Agent	S	Birmingham, Warwickshire	Jul 41	May 45	34
5310	1913	Teacher (science)	X	Brentwood, Essex	Sep 44	May 45	9
5312	1901	Nursing Sister & tutor	S	Chester, Cheshire	Aug 39	Aug 40	10
5313	1905	Domestic worker	M	Hassocks, Sussex & Dartmouth, Devon	Sep 39	Dec 50	100
5314	1901	Domestic, housewife	M 1943	Tayvallich, Argyllshire, Scotland	Dec 40	Oct 45	35
5318	1887	Domestic, housewife	M	Coventry, Warwickshire	Oct 41	Jan 49	66

Diarist No.	Year of Birth	Occupation	Household Status	Residence	First Entry	Last Entry	Total No. Monthly Diary-Entries
5323	1914	Garage assistant	S	Snettisham, Norfolk	Aug 39	Aug 41	13
5324	1921	Garage assistant, apprentice gardener	S	Snettisham, Norfolk & Dorset & Suffolk & Gloucestershire	Aug 39	Aug 45	68
5325	1876	Retired, office work, housewife	W	Orpington, Kent & London, NW1	Feb 40	Apr 45	46
5329	1912	Domestic, housewife & mother	M	Bournemouth, Hampshire	Sept 41	Feb 43	10
5331	1906	Shop assistant	x	Dewsbury, Yorkshire	Jul 41	Jul 46	44
5332	1905	Teacher	S	Cullercoats, Northumberland	Aug 49	Feb 40	7
5333	1909	Domestic duties	S	Shepley, Huddersfield, Yorkshire	Aug 39	Sept 42	38
5337	1882	Domestic, housewife	M	Fritwell, Bicester, Oxfordshire	Apr 43	Dec 45	33
5338	1892	Civil Servant	S	Morecambe, Lancashire	Aug 41	Dec 59	210
5339	1870	Domestic, housewife	M	Leigh-on-Sea, Essex	Jun 44	Jun 44	1
5341	1916	Shorthand typist, hospital library assistant	S	Liverpool, Lancashire	Aug 39	Feb 42	24
5342	1903	Domestic, housewife	M	Blackheath, London, SE3	Aug 39	Jul 43	47
5344	x	Nurse	S	Blackburn, Lancashire	Jun 43	Sept 46	39
5348	1897	Teacher (music), housewife	M	Rotherham, Yorkshire	Sept 39	Mar 41	18
5349	1905	Journalist	S	London, SE 26	Aug 39	Apr 44	17
5350	1890	Teacher and reporter	D	London N5	Aug 39	Sept 39	2
5353	1889	Domestic, housewife	M	Barrow-in-Furness, Lancashire	Aug 39	Feb 66	298

Diarist No.	Year of Birth	Occupation	Household Status	Residence	First Entry	Last Entry	Total No. Monthly Diary-Entries
5363	1913	Domestic, housewife, mother	M	Shackleford, Surrey	Aug 39	Apr 40	9
5366	1894	Domestic, housewife	M	Croydon, Surrey & Cambridge, Cambs	Aug 39	Jun 40	11
5372	1892	Domestic, housewife	M	Minehead, Somerset & Sevenoaks, Kent	Oct 41	Sept 47	72
5376	1900	Teacher	S	Burwash Weald, Sussex	Aug 39	Sept 45	58
5378	1898	Writer, farmer, housewife & mother	M	Campbeltown, Argyllshire, Scotland	Sept 39	Aug 45	66
5380	1917	Voluntary worker and clerk	M	St. Albans, Herts & Glasgow, Lanark.	Nov 43	Sept 44	10
5382	1898	Social Worker	S	London, S4	Aug 39	Aug 40	10
5383	1916	Civil Servant	S	Croydon, Surrey	Sept 39	Jun 40	3
5390	1903	Correspondent, Foreign shipping	S	Glasgow, Lanark	Aug 39	Sept 45	63
5391.1	1904	Domestic, housewife	M	Huddersfield, Yorkshire	x	x	x
5394	1894	Domestic, housewife	M	London, W5	May 40	Dec 42	11
5396	1903	Writer and artist	M	Port Isaac, Cornwall	Sept 39	Jan 41	13
5399	1879	Retired nurse	S	Steyning, Sussex	Aug 39	Mar 47	55
5401	x	Architect	x	Slough, Buckinghamshire & London	Dec 39	Apr 50	82
5402	1882	Retired teacher	S	London, SW9 & Gt. Missenden, Bucks.	Aug 39	May 45	63
5403	1923	Librarian	S	Evesham, Worcestershire	Jul 44	Jul 47	35
5408	1866	Retired teacher	S	Brighton, Sussex & Bingley, Yorks	Sept 39	May 55	102

Diarist No.	Year of Birth	Occupation	Household Status	Residence	First Entry	Last Entry	Total No. Monthly Diary-Entries
5410	1915	Secretary, Private & Forces, WAAF	S	Manchester, Lancs & Altrincham, Cheshire	Jul 41	Sep 49	45
5412	1898	Tea her	S	Beckenham, Kent & London	Jan 41	Dec 42	18
5414	1916	Clerk	M 1940	Grays, Essex	Oct 39	Sept 40	7
5420	1902	Domestic, housewife	M	Birmingham, Warwickshire	Sept 39	Dec 47	66
5423	1896	Domestic, housewife	M	Bradford, Yorks	Aug 41	May 53	31
5443	1905	Office worker	S	London, SE9	Aug 41	Jan 47	48
5445	1900	Domestic, housewife	M	Otley, Yorkshire	Aug 39	Jun 67	323
5447	1902	Housewife, clerk	M	Sheffield, Yorkshire	Aug 41	Dec 50	110
5448	1911	Domestic, housewife	M	Chedale, Cheshire	Nov 39	Sep 40	5
5462	x	x	M	Belfast, Northern Ireland	Mar 40	Nov 41	15
5475	x	Retired film maker	M	Wareham, Dorset	Mar 50	Nov 50	9
5478	1899	Housewife, Civil Servant	M	Corfe Castle, Dorset & London	Aug 39	May 45	51

Sourced and Adapted from:

[http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection\\_descriptions/massobsdiaries.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection_descriptions/massobsdiaries.html)