Observing, Collecting and Governing "Ourselves" and "Others": Mass-Observation's Fieldwork Agencements

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Observing, Collecting and Governing "Ourselves" and "Others": Mass-Observation's Fieldwork *Agencements*

Rodney Harrison

This paper explores the relationship between oligoptic visual economies and liberal technologies of government which emerge from a consideration of the field collecting practices of Mass-Observation (MO), a social research movement established in the years leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War which attempted to develop an anthropology of British "everyday" life. Focussing on MO's fieldwork agencements, *the paper shows how the project brought together museological methods of collecting and curating with new mechanisms of collective self-watching, and the ways in which these mechanisms became implicated in technologies of government through its archival operations. In the connections it drew between the liberal subjectivities of collective self-watching and surrealist aesthetic practices, MO played a significant role in shaping new governmental rationalities, with implications for both metropolitan and colonial populations, through its interlinked conceptions of "mass" and "morale". These formed part of a broader scientific–administrative–bureaucratic apparatus which facilitated the classification, ordering and governance of populations and "things" in this and later periods.*

Keywords: Governmentality; Fieldwork; Collecting; Oligoptic Visual Economies; Mass-Observation

Introduction: Museums, Oligoptic Visual Economies and Liberal Technologies of Government

Bruno Latour has drawn attention to the role of oligoptica, non-panoptic sites in which micro-structures of macro-social phenomena are assembled and from which "sturdy

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but extremely narrow views of the (connected) whole are made possible" (Latour 2005, 181). Oligoptica function through the associations which are made possible by the existence of multiple, overlapping visual spaces which facilitate rigorous inspection of parts of a whole. Building on this notion, Otter (2009) has charted the history of the development of a Victorian oligoptic visual economy in which the liberal subject became increasingly implicated in practices of self-observation alongside the development of a series of materially heterogeneous technologies of illumination and visibility which facilitated interconnected practices of collective, individual and practical inspection. He argues that the distinctive spatial, visual and practical organization that characterized Victorian British urban design, engineering and government administration were related to the development of liberal subjectivities of visual perception which were played out in a range of different quotidian contexts, all structured around the freedom to observe the self and others. He suggests:

> … there is nothing intrinsically liberal about a library, but a library organized spatially, visually and practically as a partly self-governing, partly overseen institution can be described as liberal in that it expresses the particular kind of organized freedom associated with Nineteenth century British liberalism. (Otter 2009, 260)

Citing Bennett's work on the exhibitionary complex (1995), Otter notes that museums represented one of the classic oligoptic spaces of Victorian Britain, in which the orderly crowd regulated itself through a process of self-monitoring (2009, 74). In this paper, I bring these perspectives to bear on Mass-Observation (MO), a social research movement established in the years leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War which attempted to develop an anthropology of British "everyday" life. Drawing on a mix of ethnographic and surrealist methodologies, MO helped formulate rationales for the governance of metropolitan (and to a lesser extent, colonial[1]) populations which could be argued to have been central to the shaping of wartime and post-war British public policy. From the outset, MO framed its project as a "museological" one; however, the implications of this framing have not been widely appreciated. Considering MO in the light of other contemporary field collecting practices, this paper explores MO's fieldwork *agencements*, focussing particularly on its methods of collecting and data gathering; the ways in which it operated as a centre for collection and calculation; the distinctive ways in which the relations between collector and collected were organized; and its orientation to reshape practices of governance. Drawing on Otter's arguments relating oligoptic visual economies to liberal technologies of government, I suggest that MO's fieldwork *agencements* operated both oligoptically and ambivalently in the relations of governance that it sought to produce. MO did this by extending the collective self-monitoring of the public space of the museum both to the quotidian, interior lives of the *individual* liberal subject, and through the new *collective* forms of self-knowing and self-regulating that it produced, to the population more generally (c.f. Foucault 2009). In doing so, MO was implicated in the development of new conceptions of population and "culture" as "surfaces of government" (cf. Bennett 2013b) through its development of the notion of the *mass*, which came to shape this particular conception of population, and *morale* as the "barometer"

(Harrisson and Madge 1940, v) by which the mood of the mass might be measured, and on which the practical application of an "anthropology of ourselves" might work to manipulate the sentiment of that population. I draw particularly here on the work of my colleagues Ben Dibley and Michelle Kelly, who show how morale was established simultaneously as an autonomous object of knowledge and as a field of intervention in the work of MO, through regulatory policy instruments, "from programmes of propaganda to policies of compulsion directed variously at rumour and 'dangerous talk'; gasmask carrying; evacuation planning; post-Blitz recovery, and so on" (in preparation). MO did this directly through its work over the period 1939–1941 for the Ministry of Information (MoI)'s Home Intelligence section, during which time the concept of morale emerged as a new "transactional reality" mediating relations between the governing and the governed, and indirectly through the governmental rationalities relating to its new conceptions of "mass" population. My concern is thus to trace the mechanisms by which MO's governmental rationalities were produced by bringing the collecting practices of the organization into comparative perspective with those of contemporaneous colonial and metropolitan museums and other forms of anthropological archives. Before coming to these concerns, I offer a brief history of MO as an aide memoire for the reader.

MO: A Brief History

MO was "founded" in 1937 in the immediate wake of the Edward VIII Abdication Crisis when the amateur anthropologist and ornithologist Tom Harrisson, who had recently returned from fieldwork in Borneo and Vanuatu, responded to a letter published in *New Statesman and Nation* by poet (and subsequently, sociologist) Charles Madge. Madge announced the establishment of the "Blackheath Group" whose "anthropology at home" sought to understand the reaction of the public to this crisis and similar contemporary events. This group included MO co-founder, poet and documentary film maker Humphrey Jennings and photographer Humphrey Spender who had been involved in organizing the first London International Surrealist Exhibition in 1936 and whose approach was strongly influenced by surrealism and notions of the collective unconscious (MacClancy 1995, 2001; Highmore 2002, 2007). Harrisson, who had already begun working in 1936 in the north of England in a factory in Bolton as an exercise in the participant observation of England's "natives" (Madge and Harrisson 1937, 10), combined his anthropological fieldwork practices with the more artistic and journalistic methods of Madge and Jennings, and the foundation of MO was reported in the same periodical briefly afterwards.[2]

MO quickly proceeded along two fronts. Harrisson initially developed and directed the "Worktown" (Bolton) and "Seatown" (Blackpool) projects, which were operated out of a house rented by Harrisson for that purpose in Davenport Street in Bolton. The Worktown project involved forms of relatively "covert" observation undertaken by a small number (generally somewhere around a dozen, although sometimes "up to sixty" according to Marcus 2001, 12) of paid (and sometime volunteer) Observers, who observed "others" under Harrisson's direction, keeping notes and making detailed

reports on their findings. Meanwhile a "National Panel" of part-time volunteer Observers was established and directed by Madge from his home in Blackheath, London. The National Panel was composed of volunteers who initially agreed to keep a diary, referred to as "Day Surveys", of all of their own activities and reflections on a single day, and subsequently to respond in writing to particular "Directives", open-ended questionnaires sent out to the National Panel by the team at Blackheath. The important distinction here is between the observation of "others" in the "Worktown" project and the observation of "self" in the National Panel (although sometimes members of the National Panel were also asked to interview colleagues and family members about particular issues in Directives).

Members of the National Panel were recruited through advertisements placed in magazines and newspapers, but also responded to radio programmes and popular pamphlets and books which were published recounting the aims and preliminary findings of the organization, which became a subject of national interest and frequent public comment as a result of widespread media coverage of the organization and its work. The size of the National Panel quickly swelled to over 2000 people (Harrisson and Madge 1940) as MO developed into a popular social movement in the months leading up to the beginning of the Second World War. Following the outbreak of war, the fear of the disruption of the postal service forced MO to stop sending regular Directives. National Panel members were instead urged to keep comprehensive diaries during this period, a task which almost 500 people undertook sporadically or continuously throughout the war. In addition, MO established a "War Library" in an attempt to salvage print items which reflected popular responses to the conflict. MO subsequently assumed an important political role when it publicly criticized government efforts to engender support for the war effort, and was commissioned by the MoI to provide information about wartime morale.

Conflict between the various founders saw Jennings part company with Madge and Harrisson in 1938 to concentrate on film making for the GPO Film Unit, which in 1940 became the Crown Film Unit, itself a part of the MoI. It was during this period that Jennings produced *Spare Time* (1939) (which included material filmed in Bolton) and *London Can Take It!* (1940), both of which explored themes and drew on documentary styles which had been central to MO. Madge subsequently departed in 1940, to undertake various research projects including a study of wartime economics for the Institute of Economic and Social Research (Madge 1943), before taking up the position of first Chair of Sociology at the University of Birmingham in 1950. In 1949, MO became a Limited Liability Company primarily concerned with commercial market research, by which time all of the founding members had moved on to pursue other interests, including Harrisson who accepted the position of Curator of the Sarawak Museum in 1947. Nonetheless, the founders of MO can all be seen to have contributed directly in their own ways to the wartime and post-war British state (Hubble 2006, 13)—Harrisson through his work with MO and the MoI, Jennings with the production of wartime propaganda films and Madge through his associations with Keynes and Beveridge and his work for the National Council for Social and Economic Research (1940–1942) and political and economic planning (PEP 1943), which

was influential in the formation of the National Health Service, in post-war planning and in the development of the African colonies. But of more lasting importance than these direct legacies were the new governmental rationalities it produced as a result of its fieldwork *agencements*, to which I now turn.

MO as "Collaborative Museum"

My discussion of MO as a set of "museum-like" collective practices draws on Bennett's (2009, 2010, 2013a, 2013b) outline of a framework for understanding the operations of museums as parts of anthropological assemblages which are mobilized through existing and emerging scientific–administrative and public–civic apparatuses for action back on the social (see further discussion in Bennett, Dibley and Harrison 2014). In considering MO's operations as a form of "collaborative museum", I also draw on Latour's (1987, 1991) description of the ways in which scientific knowledge is embedded through processes of inscription and translation, and Latour and Woolgar's (1979) observations of the recursive relationship between "inscription devices" and the "facts" which they are constructed to record and describe. Key here is the notion that not only do inscriptive devices embed social "facts", but these facts are themselves transformed in the act of translation and in the circulation of the tokens or "quasi-objects" by which they are represented. In this way, MO's collaborative watching and collecting practices can be understood as a "technology of the self" (cf. Foucault 1988; Rose 1999; see Savage 2010) connected to the development of broader rationalities of metropolitan and colonial governance "at a distance".

MO was concerned, from the outset, with processes of collecting, ordering, archiving and exhibiting. In one of its earliest formative statements of intent, Madge suggested that the aim of MO was to create a "collaborative museum" (1935, 16). This framing of the project was reiterated by Madge and Harrisson in the 1937 booklet *Mass Observation*:

> We shall collaborate in building up museums of sound, smell, food, clothes, domestic objects, advertisements, newspapers, etc. We shall also build up files dealing with problems of assimilation—the practical difficulties of an Observer in entering a new environment. He should be able to hear records of dialects which are strange to him. He should even be able to find in a field wardrobe the necessary outfit of clothing for effective assimilation. (1937, 35)

On the pamphlet's back cover the aim to "*collect* a mass of data based upon practical observation of the everyday life of all types of people and to utilize the data for scientific study of Twentieth century Man in all his different environments" (my emphasis) was again underlined.

MO conceptualized its "field" of collection in a number of ways: geographically, thematically and through the lens of its varied interests in the social sciences (principally sociology, anthropology, psychology and economics) on the one hand, and artistic movements (surrealism, poetry, photography and documentary film making) on the other. MO's strong interests in class also played a role in defining its field (Summerfield 1985; Hubble 2006; Hinton 2008; Savage 2008, 2010). MO employed a range of

distinctive collecting strategies, practices and methodologies which helped it to shape its conceptualization of this field.

> How does Mass-Observation propose to go to work? The field is vast, the task of collecting data is long and difficult. On these data science will one day build new hypotheses and theories. In the meantime, we must patiently amass material, without unduly prejudging or preselecting from the total number of available facts. All this material, all the reports from our Observers, carefully filed, will be a reference library accessible to every genuine research worker. (Madge and Harrisson 1937, 29)

The methods of MO were conceived as an answer to the complexity, size and nature of this field, with which it was interested in aggregate, rather than individual responses.

> … the field to be covered is … so apparently nebulous that the scientists have little more to offer than generalisations on method. Mass-Observation intends to work with a new method. It intends to make use not only of the trained scientific Observer, but of the untrained Observer, the man in the street. Ideally, it is the observation by everyone of everyone, including themselves. (Madge and Harrisson 1937, 10)

I have already noted that in recounting the work of MO and its methodologies it is conventional to distinguish between the "Worktown" (Bolton)/"Seatown" (Blackpool) projects and the activities of the National Panel. A distinction is also made between the forms of relatively "covert" participant ethnography undertaken by a small number of paid (and sometime volunteer) Observers who observed "others" under the direction of Harrisson and the Day Surveys, Diaries, Directive Responses (and later the War Library) which involved self-observation by volunteer Observers. In the Preface to *May the Twelfth: Mass Observation Day Surveys*, the relationship was described in these terms:

> The local survey starts with the whole-time research workers studying a place from the outside and working inwards, getting into the society, and so coming to the individual. The national plan 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 et al. 1937, x–xi)

However, as Liz Stanley notes, the picture was more complicated than it first appears:

> given the way the organization changed over time and the large number of internal fractures within and the loose structure of it, Mass-Observation was actually less of a unitary organization and more a set of interlinked practical, political and epistemological projects. Moving away from the level of public pronouncement and into the everyday conduct of the varied projects associated with Mass-Observation, what is revealed is an internally complex and highly differentiated kind of research organization, one marked by divergences and internal fractures as well as some common features. (2001, 9)

On the one hand, there was unity in approach across both arms of MO in the relationship between each "centre" and their respective "fields" (see further discussion below). On the other, there was a complicated mix of techniques employed by both of the operations, and these changed over time and in relation to the particular investigators involved and the subjects being researched, ranging from observation to direct questioning, focussing on both behaviour and opinion (Stanley 2001, 10).

The first methods to be employed by MO were the Day Surveys and the "ethnographic" surveys of Bolton and Blackpool. Harrisson's approach to ethnography prioritized direct observation over interviewing.

> Basically, my idea was not to take words into very much account anyway. It was the behaviour of people we had to study. I thought then (and think now) that the first training of a good Observer of human behaviour in your own society is by giving each person a pair of earplugs and then allowing him (her) to work out what people are doing, without him (her) knowing what these people are saying to each other. Willy nilly, though, one ends in words: thus this talk, thus the Archive I am talking about. (Harrisson 1971, 398)

The field observation and collection practices of full-time Mass Observers on the Worktown and Seatown (and later "Metrop") case studies were strongly influenced by Harrisson's own experiences undertaking ornithological surveys in Oxford in his youth and fieldwork in the New Hebrides/Vanuatu, along with the participant ethnography of Malinowski, the Lynds' *Middletown* study, Chicago School Sociology (see Deagan 2001) and the "penetrational" fieldwork methods used in the psychological research of Oscar Oeser (Stanley 2001; Street n.d.; Hubble 2006). They focussed explicitly on direct (and initially, on covert) observation, the recording of observed activities and overheard conversations which were catalogued in notebooks according to the times and places of observation, and covert photography. However, despite this focus on observation, the Worktown project also occasionally used direct and indirect interview techniques and even written questionnaires and surveys to collect information about particular themes in their work (e.g. see range of methods employed in Mass Observation 1943).

May the Twelfth: Mass Observation Day Surveys (Jennings et al. 1937) sets out the range of methods which were developed by the National Panel over the course of its first months of operation. The bulk of the book consists of carefully edited and juxtaposed reports from forty-three Mass Observers who had returned Day Surveys for the three months of 1937 prior to the Coronation, Directive Responses from seventy-seven members of the public who had responded to a questionnaire which had been circulated by the team and observations made by a "mobile squad" of Observers who recorded their observations of what was happening on the streets of London on the day of the Coronation of George IV. This occasion was presented as an important symbolic event during which the collective unconscious and repressed desires of ordinary citizens would be released (MacClancy 1995, 500). The book established the three main forms of information which were provided by the National Panel-the Day Surveys (1937–1938), Directive Responses (which ran throughout the period 1937–1949), and later the War Diaries (which were begun in 1939) when it was feared that the outbreak of war would make regular communication between Mass Observers and MO's centres of collection difficult. As the number of volunteer Mass Observers grew, the circulation of a regular Bulletin (titled *Us*) to Mass Observers, which fed back the statistical results of Directive Replies and topical or interesting examples of edited Day Surveys, Diaries or Directive Responses which had been received in previous months, provided an important means (in addition to the formal book-length

publications, newspaper and magazine articles and radio broadcasts) by which new Mass Observers were conscripted, and existing Mass Observers developed for themselves a distinctive identity (see also Savage 2010). These Bulletins, as effective "inscription devices" which transformed data into text for circulation (cf. Latour and Woolgar 1979), also established clear templates for Mass Observers to follow in their own writing. The importance of the circulation of these Bulletins is discussed further below.

Observers Observed: MO's Methodological Apparatuses as Oligoptic Technologies of Liberal Government

MO was launched with the following peculiar set of interests:

> Behaviour of people at war memorials.
> Shouts and gestures of motorists.
> The aspidistra cult.
> Anthropology of football pools.
> Bathroom behaviour.
> Beards, armpits, eyebrows.
> Anti-Semitism.
> Distribution, diffusion and significance of the dirty joke.
> Funerals and undertakers.
> Female taboos about eating.
> The private lives of midwives. (*New Statesman*, 30 January 1937)

MO's "Ground Plan for Research" (Madge and Harrison 1937, 50–60) explicitly cited topics (and hence objects of collection) gleaned directly from Cantril's article "The Social Psychology of Everyday Life" (1934), Robert and Helen Lynd's (1929) *Middletown* study, the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) and Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI)'s handbook for ethnographic fieldwork *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* (1929 edition) and a list of possible subjects sent in by Observers themselves. The influence of *Notes and Queries* in MO is significant and does not simply extend to the Worktown project. Indeed, the 1929 edition suggests that the fieldworker should keep a diary of the day's events, and if possible engage a "native" to do likewise (1929, 35–36). It is possible that this influenced Madge and Jennings in their formulation of the Day Survey as the original methodology for the National Panel, and MO's subsequent suggestion that volunteer observers might undertake to keep wartime diaries after the outbreak of war made regular communication more difficult. Similarly, the form of early editions of *Notes and Queries* as a list of questions is directly reflected in the form of Directives which were sent to members of the National Panel, which generally took the form of a list of questions on a variety of topics of interest which volunteer members of the National Panel were asked to respond to.

Mirroring recent discussions of the necessity of understanding the ontologies which are generated in and through the practices of collection as a way of "being" (Moutu 2007), Lorraine Daston has suggested that scientific observation might be productively viewed as "trained, collective, cultured habit … that guarantees the sturdy existence of a

world" (Daston 2008, 110). What was novel about MO as an oligoptic programme is the way in which it combined the observation of self and others with the process of collecting, and in this sense it operated both as a *technology of the self* through its establishment of models for self-observation and diary writing, and *collective habit* through its normalization of mass surveillance and opinion polling as popular pastime and "social" science. Central to this programme were the practices, technologies and techniques which provided MO with its modes of ordering its masses of "facts", which in turn provided templates for knowing and governing the population.

The focus on direct observation saw MO emphasize the use of mimetic recording devices, in particular "cameras" (Pickering and Chaney 1986, 36; Stanley 2001, 2008, 2009). Mass Observers were frequently referred to using the language of scientific instrumentation as recording devices themselves.

> … our Observers will each be watching the social reactions within their own local environment. They will be the meteorological stations from whose reports a weather-map of popular feeling can be compiled. (Madge and Harrisson 1937, 30)

> Government should be fully aware of all the trends in civilian morale. They need an accurate machine for measuring such trends; a war barometer. (Harrisson and Madge 1940, v)

> Through Mass Observation you can already listen-in to the movements of popular habit and opinion. The receiving set is there, and every month makes it more effective. (Madge and Harrisson 1939, 10)

In *New Verse*, Madge characterized the volunteer Mass Observer as "a recording instrument of the facts" and MO as "(i) Scientific, (ii) human, and therefore, by extension, (iii) poetic" (Madge 1937, 2; cf. Frizzell 1997, 25).

Volunteer Observers were frequently referred to as "subjective cameras", a textual device by which they were compared to (and subsumed within) the technologies which facilitate direct observation (see also Stanley 2001, 2008, 2009):

> The Observers are the cameras with which we are trying to photograph contemporary life. The trained Observer is ideally a camera with no distortion. Mass-Observation has always assumed its untrained Observers would be subjective cameras, each with his or her own individual distortion. They tell us not what society is like, but what it looks like to them. (Madge and Harrisson 1938, 66)

Similarly, the introduction to the London section in *May the Twelfth: Mass Observation Day Surveys* draws on the language of documentary film making to explain how the three types of Observer report—the forty-three day surveys; various responses to a questionnaire and the "Mobile Squad" in touch with MO headquarters by telephone —were arranged to ensure that "close-up and long-shot, detail and ensemble, were all provided" (Jennings et al. 1937, 90; cf. Hubble 2006, 121).

In addition to observing, MO similarly emphasized its role in *classifying*, *ordering* and *analysing* (Jennings et al. 1937, 414). The role of technologies of recording, replicating, classifying and ordering, in particular those technologies closely associated with the archive (see Spieker 2008) was also stressed. "Subjectivity" formed one axis along which Mass Observers were themselves ordered and classified, and whether they

were "full"- or "part"-time Observers formed another. Full-time paid Observers were involved not only in making field observations, but also in writing reports and helping to reorganize and interpret materials for publication. The relationship between field and centre, and the role of the centre in reorganizing, re-typing, reporting on and interpreting materials, in "making and mobilising cultural worlds" (cf. Bennett 2013a), was frequently underscored.

> The problems of co-ordination will grow greater with time. The immediate problem is to mobilise a numerous and representative corps of Observers, and to equip and maintain an efficient central organisation, in touch with all other relevant research bodies, however different their methods. (Madge and Harrison 1937, 45)

In addition to the classification of Observers by age, gender, class, occupation and geographical place of residence, Observers were identified by a number.

> To preserve the anonymity of the Observers, no names are given. Each Observer will be assigned a number for purposes of filing and identification. (Madge and Harrisson 1937, 50)

The relationship between MO and its technologies of storage and archiving are particularly relevant here. The technologies and techniques of filing, classifying, storing and retrieving information by way of card catalogues, filing cabinets and typewritten reports were important in facilitating particular modes of collecting and ordering vast quantities of written materials and file reports. The language of the MO archive, with its "File Reports" and "Directive Responses", is an artefact of this technocratic machinery.

> Mass Observation is particularly concerned with people's behaviours, their subjective feelings, their worries, frustrations, hopes, desires, expectations and fears. The complex machinery which it has built up for recording these things has developed now over a period of five years, and been strengthened by the experience of war. Though still in a highly experimental stage it is the only available machinery for recording social change in Britain at the deeper and more significant levels, and all its efforts are devoted to keeping this record as objectively and in as great detail as time and technique allow. (Willcock 1943, 456)

Perhaps most importantly, the process of MO was itself conceived of as a participatory (Hasenbank 2011) liberal technology which operated oligoptically, and in this sense was perceived to be both transformative and emancipatory:

> … for this labour there are immediate compensations. It will encourage people to look more closely at their social environment than ever before and will place before them facts about other social environments of which they know little or nothing. This will effectively contribute to an increase in the general social consciousness. It will counteract the tendency so universal in modern life to perform all our actions through sheer habit, with as little consciousness of our surroundings as though we were walking in our sleep. (Madge and Harrisson 1937, 29)

Thus the function of "feeding back" the results to Observers through the regularly published Bulletin *US*. While its circulation was disrupted during wartime, this Bulletin was circulated to volunteer observers to report back collective and noteworthy

results of Directive Responses, so as to "give reliable information about current trends in opinion, public and private, and in social habits and mass behaviour" (MO 1940). In this sense, it was integral to MO's production of morale as an autonomous object of knowledge and field of intervention (see Dibley and Kelly in preparation). Joyce (2013; see also Stoler 2009) has recently pointed to the importance of infrastructures of circulation such as the postal network to the history of the liberal government of the British state and to the making of what Latour (1987) would term centres of calculation, as well as the practices and material forms by which state bureaucracy is inscribed within and across them. The relationship of Directive to Bulletin establishes MO as a sort of self-regulating feedback loop. It emphasized the dual roles of the Mass Observer as simultaneously author/participant observer, informant/research subject and curator/audience member. It was assisted in doing so by specific technologies of communication—in particular those of the postal service—for collecting and distributing information and delivering observations, and those of mass communication—such as print media and radio broadcasting—for recruitment of Mass Observers and for the replication and dissemination of the Bulletins themselves. As inscriptive devices, the Bulletins provided translation of, and templates for, observing, collecting and knowing the "self" and "others".

From Shuffling and Organizing to Administering and Governing: File Reports, Index Cards and MO's Technologies of Information Management

I want to briefly consider MO's technologies and techniques of information management, as they provide a point of linkage between a range of other centres for contemporary and emergent scientific–administrative–bureaucratic programmes which operated across multiple sites which we are perhaps unused to considering together but which might be fruitfully brought into conversation with one another—from offices of colonial and metropolitan administration to museums, libraries and archives more generally (see Spieker 2008). Central to this connection are a common set of archival filing, indexing, storage and retrieval technologies relating to the standardization and mass production of 3×5 in. index cards and associated filing systems following developments in library cataloguing popularized by Dewey in the 1870s, and the increasingly widespread use of personal index card catalogues and filing cabinets for the storage of information in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. MO's varied centres of collection employed a complicated mixture of index card catalogues cross-referenced with files which carried varied forms of notation and coding both for reference and for the anonymizing of sources, each stored in a series of boxes and filing cabinets according to particular topics. These formed the raw materials for statistical processing, for the production of typewritten file reports by trained Observers and for the production of the fortnightly Bulletins which were sent to untrained Observers.

While much could be written about the index card as a form of information technology, the ways in which index cards allow museum curators to literally shuffle and recombine at will draws to mind Bennett's characterization of the work of museums, drawing on Latour (1987), as a "shuffle of things" (2013a). He does not

so much have index cards in mind here as the new networks which were established in the relationships between "museums and museum personnel, the institutions and practices of the public sphere, and the apparatuses of colonial administration" (Bennett 2013a, 40). But the literal possibilities of shuffling information facilitated by the use of standardized index cards to "compare" and "organize" cultures in particular ways (Morton 2012) open up a wider question about the ways in which this and similar administrative techniques (such as the use of parallel sets of ledger books) associated with early twentieth century museum anthropology contributed to the development of a broader administrative–scientific–bureaucratic apparatus in which the ability to shuffle and recombine representational tokens of parts of collections— of objects, persons, natural resources, colonial infrastructure, etc.—helped shape a conception of particular collectives (or "masses") for governing in particular ways. For example, there can be no doubt that Pitt-Rivers' and Balfour's typological arrangements, which subsequently influenced conceptions of the technological and labouring capabilities of particular cultural groups, were only made possible by such technologies for representing, ordering and rearranging information about museum collections (Gosden and Larson 2007). Similarly, in MO, the ability to be able to combine and shuffle information is equally implicated in shaping a sense of the population it describes. The importance of the index as an organizational technology to MO is illustrated, for example, in the use of five separate indexes organized according to different logics which accompany the May Twelfth Day Surveys, allowing the responses of Observers, and the book itself, to be accessed, re-organized and read in an almost infinite number of ways (see also MacClancy 1995, 502; Stanley 2001, 16). So we might think of the index as both an artefact of, and architecture for, a form of "archival habit" (after Stoler 2009) which helps structure various oligoptic processes of observing, recording, categorizing, cataloguing and archiving across many different sites of collection and calculation which has important consequences for the conception of populations as collectives and their administration and governance at a distance.

Spieker (2008) has considered in detail the ways in which bureaucratic and archival technologies connected with artistic practices throughout the twentieth century. Of particular relevance to MO is his discussion of the typewriter and card index and the role these played in representing the unconscious in the work of the *Bureau de Recherches Surréalistes*, an early surrealist group which involved various members who had direct contact with MO founders, including André Breton. For MO, the typewriter facilitates the orderly interpretation, reporting, standardization and replication of data through the file reports. The reproducibility of file reports through the use of the typewriter and carbon paper not only gave the reports an appearance of standardization but also allowed them to be replicated and distributed widely. The typewriter was a tool of translation which helped aggregate the handwritten notes of trained and untrained Observers, and inscribe the information in a standardized "official" form. Similarly, the coding of Observer reports for the purposes of anonymizing data (in addition to the separation of text and body which Kittler (1999) sees as a direct outcome of the typewriter as a media technology) played a dual role in MO. While we have perhaps become accustomed to anonymization of data as a form of

personal data protection for individuals (and there is clearly at least a sense of this in MO), here it performs an equally important function in disassociating the data from individuals so it might be aggregated, either statistically or in description, as "mass" information. The process of categorizing this information is not only an artefact of data management, but a way of characterizing the population in a way which allows it to be more effectively governed. Such technologies must be understood not only as forms of information architecture, but as elements of a broader oligoptic scientific–administrative–bureaucratic apparatus which facilitated the ordering, classification and management of people, objects and things. This becomes more readily apparent when we consider the ways in which MO was subsequently deployed in the production of morale as an object of knowledge which might be subject to active manipulation and governance through working on the collective conscience of the "masses".

Ethnography, Surrealism and the Governance of Morale

Mike Savage has recently argued that MO as a movement was instrumental in the emergence of a new *technocratic* lower-middle class fraction in Britain (Savage 2008, 2010; see also Summerfield 1985 on MO as popular social movement), which sought to distance itself from existing "gentlemanly, artistic, highbrow motifs in favour of a more technical, 'scientific' intellectual vision" (Savage 2010, 64). His work suggests that MO must be seen as a project in which novel ways of "speaking", disseminating (and exhibiting) newly emergent forms of cultural capital and modes of authority associated with representing "the mass" in the public domain were developed. He emphasizes the development of the social sciences in Britain within this context, associating the emergence of this new intellectual formation with, amongst other things, the popularity of the Left Book Club and the newly launched Penguin and Pelican paperbacks which covered science, current affairs and social issues in a technical manner, but were nonetheless cheaply available and became widely read amongst this new class group. While MO and its founders' (particularly Harrisson's) struggle for academic credibility in relation to contemporary British anthropology and sociology has received much attention in accounting for the relative invisibility of MO in histories of British anthropology (MacClancy 1995, 2001; Stanley 2001, 2009; Street n.d.; Hubble 2006), I want to emphasize another adjacent field—the aesthetic—which has perhaps received less attention in relation to the question of the conceptualization of population and the legacy of MO in the wartime and post-war British administrative–bureaucratic apparatus. Historian of Science Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent argues for the importance of exploring the mechanisms of demarcation and discrimination between science and rival forms of knowledge and "how the notions of science and the public have been mutually configured and reconfigured" (2009, 361). Similarly, understanding the ways in which forms of knowledge developed and were deployed in relation to these various fields in this period, when the modes of authority relating to the most appropriate methods for undertaking social scientific research were still very much open to question and in flux (see also Highmore 2006), might help us to account not only for the emergence of this new technocratic class fraction, but also for the specific ways of

understanding the population which were implicated in the development of the post-war British welfare state. I focus here on the ways in which the textual and aesthetic practices associated with the collection, reassembly and presentation of MO research —carefully edited collage, montage, juxtapositioning and an emphasis on the creative possibilities of *objet trouvé*—helped shape a conception of the "mass" as a population whose views could be collected together as a montage and edited in such a way that not only would a sense of a collective "atmosphere" emerge, but that it might in turn become the object of manipulation by way of the governance of morale (see further discussion in Dibley and Kelly in preparation). Importantly, these aesthetic practices also operated visually and in this sense relate to the broader oligoptic visual economy of MO on which I have focussed in the earlier part of the paper.

MacClancy (1995, 2001; see also Stanley 2001; Highmore 2002, 2006) has already discussed Clifford's (1981; see also 1988) work on surrealism and its influence on ethnographic methodologies, along with the various criticisms and corrections to this aspect of his work (Jamin 1986, 1991) in relation to MO, and it is not my intention to rehearse these arguments here. Instead, I want to pick up on another aspect of MacClancy's (1995, 2001), Hubble's (2006) and Highmore's (2007) analyses of MO in relation to the connection between surrealism, Freudian psychology and the material form in which MO collected, stored and subsequently presented its work. For example, I have already noted the use of the language of documentary film making in explaining the relationship between the Observer's reports in the London section in the publication of *May the Twelfth: Mass Observation Day Surveys*. The larger part of the book consists of the juxtapositioning of hundreds of edited observations made by anonymized individuals to the events surrounding the Coronation of George VI in 1937. Here, as elsewhere, the emphasis is on the presentation of everyday account as facts *en masse* so that a collective sense of public opinion might emerge. This approach was consistent with an emphasis on the importance of coincidence, and the creative possibilities of juxtapositioning in facilitating the emergence of distinct structures and patterns in the collective unconscious (Connor 2001). Similarly, the logics of filing, classifying, storing, retrieving, ordering and re-ordering made possible by its card catalogues, filing cabinets and typewritten reports find resonance in Jennings' documentary film making, Julian Trevellyan's surrealist photography and artistic montages made during his time in Bolton, and Madge and the other Blackheath group members' experimental collective poetry. MO's dream reports, and Directives asking Observers to keep dream diaries and to note the occurrence of spontaneous mental "images" (Miller 2001), also fall within this general field of interest. All demonstrate an investment in the visual aesthetic and material–textual practices of collage and montage, in the "shuffle" and juxtapositioning of masses of information, to uncover hidden aspects of the collective unconscious. While MO was of course large enough to accommodate a range of differing aesthetic and material–textual practices (for example painter and part-time paid Bolton Mass Observer William Coldstream's measured realism, which finds resonance with MO's experiments with social scientific objectivity), it is this methodology of montage as a way of both getting hold of and representing "mass" culture which dominates in the early work of MO and helps shape its distinctive conception of population.

Where this conception of "mass" culture gained particular traction governmentally, as a novel way of conceptualizing population, is by way of the alternative it offered to "class" for identifying and articulating cultural difference, and hence in producing new "working surfaces on the social". Kushner (2004) has convincingly argued against the widespread assumption that MO's anthropological methods targeted working-class populations as *de facto* colonial *indigenes*; indeed, despite its predominately middle-class membership it targeted and recruited members from across all class groups.[3] This needs to be understood within the context of a broader refashioning of the middle as the "ordinary" class over this period (see Savage 2010). What was distinctive about MO's conception of the "mass" was its simultaneous proximity to and distance from class categories and notions of the "everyday". Participants perceived themselves to be involved in actively reworking the relationship between individuals and society, based on a belief in the emancipatory potential of participation in MO alongside an exposure to forms of high culture, to build a new society with the capability to reshape itself through informed civic participation. As James Hinton notes,

> Mass Observers were exemplifying a modernity which linked reflexive self-exploration to participation in public affairs and, for many of them, an engagement with high culture. You did not have to be an upper-middle-class intellectual to feel alienated from mass culture or to find in engagement with high culture resources for a journey of hope: such feelings were shared by self-consciously enlightened individuals across the class spectrum … this dialectical process of reshaping, [would be] undertaken not by the powerful or the brilliant but by the creative energies of pretty ordinary people who were not prepared to settle for being *nothing but* ordinary. (2008, 235–236 original emphases)

It is within this complicated dialectic that Savage (2008, 2010) identifies the new interest in the potential for the social sciences as a tool of government which arose in the post-war period. In this way, it could be argued that the notion of the "mass" developed by MO helped to produce novel ways of conceptualizing the relationship between governors and governed, and of society more generally.

I have already made note of the complicated "looping effects" (cf. Hacking 1986, 1995) involved in participation in MO. What is important here is the idea of the collective unconscious as something which can be shaped, and hence manipulated, by *observation* and *collection* of the self and others. It was this sense of morale as an object of collective work, which was subject to being altered by access to particular forms of information, which may have led to MO and its founders' various side projects assuming such an important role in the conceptualization and governance of the British population. The complicated ways in which the relations between collector and collected were organized and ordered, and the ways in which the subjects of research could also contribute directly to the research process, were one of the key ambiguities which might perhaps account for the relative success of MO and its particular role in the development of a new technocratic class fraction (Savage 2008, 2010). But it seems possible that the idea of the Observer as a "subjective" camera—a *self-fashioning* liberal subject—and the sense of morale as an object which is open to manipulation and transformation would contribute directly to the large investment in wartime propaganda and the particular form in which this propaganda would take through the GPO/Crown Film Unit and elsewhere.

Conclusion: Knowing and Governing the "Mass"—MO, Morale and the Governance of Population in the Wartime and Post-War British State

Despite the relatively minor and anecdotal place given to MO in the history of the development of anthropology and sociology in Britain, it could be argued that the governmental rationalities established by MO's conceptualization of "mass" society and culture had a direct and lasting influence on the post-war British welfare state. It did this not only through the formation of a distinctive new technocratic middle class, which was subsequently central to the formation of post-war British social science (Savage 2010), but also through its extension of oligoptic visual economies from the space of the public museum to the interior and quotidian lives of "ordinary" people and through its particular ways of conceptualizing the "mass" as a population whose views could be collected, edited and manipulated by way of the governance of morale. This conception of the mass owed as much to the mixture of surrealist, "documentary" and journalistic textual and aesthetic practices by which MO collected and presented its data as to the information generated by MO and the work of its founders themselves. Perhaps even more importantly, a comparative perspective on the work of MO sees it emerge as one among many forms of expertise impinging on governmental relations to the population in wartime Britain, where such governmental relations are not directly able to be equated with the activities of the state or with the administrative procedures of the MoI, but in which the governmental rationalities which are established by its operations nonetheless can be considered to have had long-lasting influences on subsequent practices of social government.

The oligoptic visual economy generated in and through MO's fieldwork *agencements* was not limited to those aspects of its work which were directed at constituting individuals as self-governing subjects. What was most innovative about MO was the ways in which it emphasized new, *collectivized* forms of self-knowledge which sought to make the population self-governing. These stood in contrast to a range of other contemporary and emergent instruments for knowing population—opinion polls, surveys, census data, etc.—through the stress they placed on the need for these forms of collective self-knowing to constitute a part of the relations between the rulers and the ruled. Of course, these claims should not be taken at face value; they were a part of the rhetoric through which a meritocratic class fraction sought to displace the leadership of traditional "gentlemanly" forms of rule. But this collectivization of oligoptic vision represented a distinctive approach to observing, collecting, ordering, knowing and governing the population, which would become an integral part of metropolitan and colonial British post-war governmental rationalities.

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Notes

[1] A direct link is Charles Madge's work for the non-government organization PEP, which, alongside its influence in the formation of the National Health Service and British post-war planning more generally, was also involved in post-war developments in the British African colonies. But it is also clear that in the process of applying models of administration and social governance which were developed in the practical application of anthropology to colonial contexts and directing them towards the metropole, these models of social governance were in turn transformed and continued to develop in ways which were subsequently redeployed in both colonial and metropolitan contexts following the Second World War.

[2] For secondary accounts see Calder (1985), Pickering and Chaney (1986), Jeffrey (1998), Marcus (2001), Highmore (n.d., 2002), Hubble (2006).

[3] This is neither to imply that the concept of "race" did not occupy a significant place in the work of MO and its founders (see further discussion in Kushner 2004), nor that differences in the ways in which colonial and metropolitan populations were conceived were not implicated in its development of its field methodologies, as I have shown.

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