Mass-Observation
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MASS-OBSERVATION

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[EDITORIAL NOTE.—The editors of the *Journal* are fortunate in securing this statement of the nature and operation of Mass-Observation in Great Britain. Mass-Observation is an interesting form of collective research and promises to carve out a new approach to the sociological study of group life.]

ABSTRACT

Many new techniques and some familiar ones are utilized by Mass-Observation in a unique continuing study of all England's social institutions. Volunteer field workers record their observations of important events and keep detailed diaries on the war as they experience it. Two urban areas are constantly under survey, and rural community studies are made periodically. Book-length reports on pubs, politics, religion, and the human side of industry have been published. Trained investigators are making separate continuing studies of particular institutions. Even at the blackest periods of the war, the record of war's effects on ordinary peacetime habits has been kept going. A library including important journals as well as many minor leaflets and bulletins published by assorted social groups has been built. Opinion-sampling methods are employed, but the techniques of observation and subjective accounts are being more and more depended upon for the recording of social change in Britain at the deeper, more significant levels.

Mass-Observation first started work in England in 1937.[1] Before that, sociological research in this country had been confined to a handful of individual studies covering the life of specific areas. No attempt had been made to make sociology a live interest to the people studied, and methodological experiment was very much in its infancy.

M.-O.'s object was to develop new approaches to the study of the habits, lives, and beliefs of the British, and to use the technique of anthropology, hitherto used in studying distant and little-known races, on the people at home.

The first move was to find out how far people were interested in the idea and

[1] Founders of the movement were two young men, both in their mid-twenties. Tom Harrisson was an ornithologist in his schooldays. Before he left school he had published a book on *The Birds of the Harrow District.* In his last term at school he went as anthropologist on the Oxford University expedition to the Arctic. Next year at Cambridge he organized an expedition of Oxford and Cambridge scientists to the Atlantic island of St. Kilda. He became more interested in the study of man and less in the study of birds and shortly afterward led an Oxford expedition to central Borneo. This expedition made the first ascent of Sarawak's highest mountain, Mount Mala, mapped large areas, and made many discoveries of new animals, birds, plants, and insects.

Here Harrisson had his first taste of primitive society, spending many months among the tribes of the interior and studying and taking part in their feasts and dances and funeral rites. The story of this expedition is told in Tom Harrisson (ed.), *Borneo.*

Immediately after his return from Borneo, Harrisson set off on his biggest and most difficult expedi-

to elicit their help. It has always been M.-O.'s policy to avoid the closed circle of academic aloofness and to interest the people they are studying in both the collection of the facts and their final correlation and interpretation. Letters were written to the press, explaining the idea, and asking for volunteers to help in the first job. On February 12, 1937, the first thirty observers—who had never met before and lived in widely scattered parts of the country—made the first embryonic M.-O. study. They wrote down in detail all that happened to them on that day.

M.-O. was well under way on Coronation Day, May 12, 1937, though it still had much to learn about method. On this day observers from all over the country, already numbered in hundreds instead of tens, again reported all that happened to them, all they thought and saw and talked about, from the time they woke up until the time they fell asleep at night. The machinery had not yet been developed for a proper sifting and analysis of the millions of words of material, but the results of this survey, *May 12th* (London: Faber, 1937), did give a picture of Coronation Day as ordinary people experienced it, which no other method then devised could have done.

Early in 1937 the first six field workers settled into work in a northern industrial town which was to remain one of the main study areas of M.-O. They devoted their whole time to the study of human activity in this one area, recording objectively what they saw and heard. Work in the first year was largely devoted to a study of some of the big mass habits, the extent to which they were practiced, and the motives and fulfilments behind them. First studies of smoking, pub-going, and the filling-in of football-pool coupons were made in this period. Results of some of these investigations and an account of the early work of M.-O. are given in Lindsay Drummond, *First Year's Work* (London, 1938). This book also contains a long chapter by Professor Malinowski, in which he welcomed the appearance of M.-O. and foresaw its development into a nation-wide intelligence service. Here, as an example of these early studies, is an extract from a chapter on smoking, summarizing people's motives for starting to smoke and for continuing to do so:

> In answering the question, "Why did you start to smoke?" half the Observers gave social or imitative reasons such as: "In order to be sociable," "Because other people did," etc. Forty-three per cent of the remaining answers were either, "Because it was forbidden" or "In order to feel grown-up." (Only 6 per cent of the females started in order to feel grown-up, as against 31 per cent of the males. It is natural that women, starting later, should emulate others of their own age rather than their par-

tion, to the New Hebrides. The first year was spent with five other scientists on the Island of Santo. The following year he stayed—the only white man—in the interior of the Island of Malekula, last Pacific island where cannibalism is still actively practiced. Here he lived among the natives as one of them. He made a full study of their culture and took a census of the whole population of the island. His record of this expedition is given in *Savage Civilisations* (London: Gollanz, 1937).

With the support of such bodies as the Royal Geographical Society, the British Museum, and the universities, Tom Harrisson traveled over much of the world into remote places studying the habits of distant people. It became clear to him that much of what he had been studying in these little-known races had never been studied among the British Islanders, and most of their beliefs, habits, and culture were understood far less than that of the natives of these islands.

From quite another angle Charles Madge, newspaper reporter and poet, arrived at much the same conclusion. Working on London's tabloid daily, the *Mirror*, at the time of the Mrs. Simpson crisis, he realized the great gulf of nonunderstanding which existed between the world of newspapers and the world of ordinary people in the next street. He threw up his job and joined Harrisson in launching Mass-Observation.

ents: the little boy's reason for wanting to smoke is often "to be like father.") Twenty per cent of the Observers gave more than one of these reasons: we can probably assume that all are in some measure component motives in the history of a normal smoker.

The next question was, "What made you continue smoking? Did you acquire the taste at once, or did you have to persevere? If so, why did you?" Half the Observers say they had to persevere, and of those who give reasons for doing so, the great majority give social reasons—that is to say, they went on smoking because they did not want to be "out of the swim." This reason is even more marked among women than among men.

The smokers were then asked: "What are your present motives for smoking?" Over half refer to habit, craving or nervous relief. Twenty-nine per cent give pleasure as their motive, and 19 per cent give social reasons. It is therefore clear that the pleasure-motive and the social-motive, which were equally important in making the novice continue his smoking, have dwindled away now that the habit has become settled—pure "habit" is now a sufficient motive in itself. "My present motive for smoking is to avoid the extreme discomfort which accompanies cessation," says one Observer. "I am actually not sure," another says, "of my present motives for smoking. I can best recall the belief that a cigarette soothes the nerves, and that it satisfied the nervous twitchings of my fingers." A third: "My present motive for smoking is simple enough to put. I simply cannot go without." A fourth: "I turn to a cigarette as to a friend."

The discomfort which smokers feel when deprived of tobacco is similar to social embarrassment. Suppose that a young man is among a crowd of smokers who offer him cigarettes, he too must smoke in order to feel at ease, and he must have cigarettes to offer round. If he is very young, the tobacco may make him feel ill, or at least he may be indifferent to it for its own sake. After a time he will associate the act of smoking with the feeling of self-confidence it gives him, to such an extent that even when alone he may light up "for companionship." Sixty per cent of the smokers say that they smoke more alone, and 14 per cent equally in either case. Three-quarters of the solitary male smokers are pipe smokers, which is interesing since a frequently mentioned disadvantage of pipe-smoking is that you cannot offer a pipeful of tobacco so easily as a cigarette. On the other hand, 85 per cent of the smokers agree with a statement that "offering a smoke is used for breaking the ice."

We saw that one common reason for starting to smoke was "because it is forbidden." In answer to a question, "Do you ever feel ashamed of smoking?" 86 per cent deny, often indignantly, that there is anything to be ashamed of: however, there is a minority of 14 per cent who admit that they are ashamed. But in answer to the next part of the question, "Do you feel that smoking is a bad habit?" 48 per cent admit that it is a bad habit, often adding, "when carried to excess." It is frequently compared to drinking, which has far more obvious moral implications. Smoking is half-humorously called "a vice," but it is a vice which society permits one to indulge. "Don't feel ashamed of it. Too common with everybody for that," says one Observer; and another says, "Can't say I ever feel ashamed of smoking, as it is indulged in by all the leaders of thought, industry, and politics as well as by the leaders of the Church, so I reckon I'm safe on that score, anyhow." Habits which in this country have not the same social sanction are condemned outright: "Chewing gum is a modern invention of the devil"; "Of course I don't feel ashamed of smoking. I don't see that in moderation it does any harm and it is far better than chewing filthy gum." The small guilt may replace a larger one: "If I did not smoke a few cigarettes a day, I should feel a great longing to do so, or to do something worse"; "I always felt daredevil over smoking, perhaps because of my education at a public school where smoking attains the interest of sex since it is forbidden"; "My first cigarette gave me sexual excitement, though this never happened again. My first pipe made me feel slightly drunk, though this too never occurred again."

An essential part of the social satisfaction obtained from smoking comes from certain tricks of behaviour which have become standardised through imitation. In many cases we may suppose this imitation to be barely conscious, but in some cases the young smoker makes a definite effort to acquire complete correctness in his smoking behaviour. . . . .

The first reception of M.-O. by press and public was one of considerable interest, plus some suspicion and some ridicule. Suspicion mainly centered round

the busybodying potentialities of this new method of studying the lives of the masses. Typically, G. W. Stonier in the progressive intellectual weekly, the *New Statesman and Nation*, visualized himself "being chased by three observers and their families" and drew a vivid picture of the typical observer with "a loping walk, elephant ears, an eye trained to key holes." These criticisms, mainly good humored, sometimes uneasy, often puzzled, but definitely interested, all helped to bring M.-O. to the notice of more and more people. By the end of the year there were some thousand voluntary observers on the lists, and special subjects for study were being sent out to them in monthly directives. At the same time the field work side was expanding. People who felt that the job was worth doing were working for very little, very erratic, pay and putting an immense amount of energy into the work.

Investigation was centered on two main study areas, "Worktown," a typical town in the industrial north, and "Metrop," a London borough. From time to time country units were set up to make intensive studies of small non-industrial towns and villages.

In 1938, with war apparently imminent, M.-O. concentrated much of its energy to recording the deeper feelings and reactions of ordinary people to approaching disaster and to the figure on whom hopes and fears centered—Mr. Neville Chamberlain. In the weeks surrounding the Munich Accord, specially intensive study was made of the mood of the people, and some of the results of this work are given in a long chapter in M.-O.'s third book, *Britain* (London: Penguin, 1938). Expressed in figures, this study shows the rapid rise and fall of Chamberlain's popularity from 1 per cent "anti-" on September 15–16, after his first flight to Berchtesgaden, to 4 per cent after his terms became known, and back again to 10 per cent after his "peace" pact at Munich on September 29. It records what happened and what people said in Downing Street, in the lobbies of the House of Commons, and in their homes during these historic days. It records the frantic fitting of gas masks at local centers all over Britain, the fantastic rumors which spread across the country, and the whole atmosphere of mixed bewilderment, chaos, logic, and semipanic.

M.-O. often uses standard interviewing and opinion-sampling methods in its work, but it differs from other opinion-sampling bodies in an increasing use of purely observational technique. On Nuremberg night, September 12, 1938, for instance, investigators were covering all the focal points in London where crowds gathered. They were not there, like the journalists, to get a good story, but to record exactly what happened and what people said and did. Here is an extract from one of their reports:

> Wherever I went on this path from Whitehall to St. James's Park the scraps of conversation were about Germany, Hitler, the last war. In all the talk groups where they were of mixed company, built up from those gathered around, the talk came down from the crisis to how they lived in the last war and the present conditions.
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> At about 5:45, when the office workers began to leave the offices, we saw a crowd begin to gather on the river side of Whitehall, this slowly from the 20 or so at 5:35 P.M., went on increasing until at about 9 P.M. there would be no less than 9,000 in and about Whitehall.
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> Every motor car which went up Downing Street was closely scanned by the police and the people peering at it. . . . . When the red van of the G.P.O. appeared there was some excitement. A woman: "They're bringing dispatches." Answered by a man: "Naw, lady, them's his love letters." Laughter, followed with one from a woman: "Who'd fall in love with Chamberlain's front teeth, not me, I want something to look at. . . . ."

Up at the theatre at the top of Whitehall, "Glorious Morning" is being played. We pass and see the dressed ones leave their cars, a crowd of 40 watching them enter. We hear "They've got a nerve on a night like this to be going to the theatre, haven't they?" A man of 40, ex-soldier: "Nuffing ever will worry them, it's all the same whether he has war or not, they come out all right, mate."

Then into Piccadilly. Here we see the first of the vans with the placard on the side; it screeches as it brakes to the kerb. The sellers make a drive to the back of the van, twelve of them all waiting to grab their bundles. The men are not slow to stand behind them, no asking for either of the three papers, they take the one it happens to be, it's the *Evening News*. The sellers shout "Here you are, lady, all about the Great Speech," then calling out at the top of their voices "Hitler threatens the Czechs," "Hitler will fight," "Here it is at last, Hitler's great speech," "Read the yellow dog's speech," then to one of the men a seller said, "The bastard."

They are selling very fast, people are stopping, you can see that the people on the pavement are not moving about the same. The Commissionaire at the Criterion Cafe is excited, he is looking over the shoulder of a man in evening dress to see what it is.

People are buying the papers and then stopping, moving on to the pavement edge to read them. Others, and these are the greater number, are stepping up to the windows, others into doorways to do the same. There is the same way of holding the papers, we see the papers held sideways, they are all reading the Stop Press news. This finishes at the point where Hitler is threatening the Czechs. Many of the same people are then moving back to catch the new papers, this time the *Star*, they do the same. Others are moving slowly along reading the papers sideways. Then the performance is repeated when the *Standard* arrived. . . . .

A man of 45, well-dressed, said viciously to the seller, "Shut up," as he called "Hitler's sensational speech." Then he walks on and observer followed to ask why. Reply, "I'm fed up with these sensation-mongers, they make it a lot worse than it is, in any event they don't help any."

As I walk about with the paper open, others, mainly the younger women, can seen be looking at the back of the paper, they then go and buy one.

Six-foot man, well-dressed, to the evening-kitted man on the door of the Criterion: "Well, what's he got to say?" Reply: "Oh, nothing, only it looks bad, he tells us what he thinks. It's a lot of angry phrases. I don't think anything will happen unless it's in the later editions."

In a group of 56 people, Observer counted those with and without papers; 39 had them, all of them the special editions. . . . . This was on the Criterion side, in a space of less than 4 minutes.

This book also contains an M.-O. study of "The Lambeth Walk," how it originated and what people liked about it in the dance halls. In Lambeth Walk itself investigators talked to cockneys about the origins of the dance, went to private parties in Lambeth at which it was danced and sung with variations, and incidentally unearthed much fascinating social history of this part of London which existed hitherto only in the memories of older cockneys.

Studies of all-in wrestling and a preliminary note on astrology—a subject which has claimed much of M.-O.'s attention during the war—are also included in this book.

In September, 1939, M.-O. had three major book-length studies scheduled for autumn publication. They were to be called "The Pub and the People," "Politics and the Non-voter," "How Religion Works and Doesn't," and "Blackpool." These four books covered three of the great mass institutions of Britain and studied in minute detail the fortnight's break in the year's round of work which centers in the North on the great holiday resort of Blackpool. Unfortunately, war intervened, and these books are still in the publishers' hands. But "The Pub and the People," already in page proof, will probably be ready very soon. It

deals with the whole question of pub-going, drinking, and the social fulfilments and atmosphere of the public house.

At the outbreak of war another big study of jazz, dancing, and dance halls was nearing completion and has been brought up to date during the war. This, too, is waiting for the end of the war for final drafting and publication.

M.-O. started the war with a panel of some fifteen-hundred volunteer observers all over the country, from all walks of life, and with all sorts of interests and beliefs. One of the first war jobs it began—on August 28, 1939—was to ask as many of these people as could spare the time and energy 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. A big nucleus of observers has been keeping this up all through the war. These diaries have proved of the very greatest value throughout the war and will be of even greater interest in compiling the social history of war on the home front when it is over. From them the impact of any event, any new wartime restriction, any speech or appeal, can be estimated in its effects on people's *private* lives and opinions. The gradual acclimatization of the housewife to wartime household difficulties, of the soldier to his new existence, of the war workers' and the evacuees' readjustments to their new way of life, are all detailed in these diaries in a way which the most careful external study could never achieve. Here, too, are firsthand accounts of the personal effects of air raids on people, written on the spot at the time the bombs were falling—under a kitchen table in a Birmingham fish and chip shop, in London shelters, and in Sheffield houses.

At the outbreak of war fifteen full-time, trained, scientific investigators were working in M.-O., each taking part in the routine day-to-day investigations of opinion, but each also concentrating on a special subject of which he was making a long-term continuous study. Art, sport, cinema, music hall, religion, jazz, fashion, shopping habits, astrology, and pacifism are a few of these. These studies have been kept up during the war and are, of course, greatly strengthened by the detailed information available about "normal" peacetime trends of feeling and belief.

But war naturally meant a certain refocusing of M.-O.'s attention on the more specifically wartime phenomena. Large studies were made of the army of volunteers enrolled in the Air Raid Precautions Services, their reasons for joining, and the sort of people they were. The human problems of evacuation from the cities, already studied in the false alarm of September, 1938, were again studied in detail in September, 1939—and again, of course, in September, 1940, when the big blitzes were at their height. But in the meantime, apart from a few weeks of almost total eclipse at the beginning of the war, peacetime activities carried on, in new forms and in different surroundings sometimes, but representing the desire of people not to make total war a total blackout.

M.-O.'s first major wartime publication, *War Begins at Home* (London: Faber, 1940), shows the impact of war on the norms of peacetime, the actual blackout of darkened streets and prowling air-raid wardens and the psychological blackout which at first fell on leisure pleasures of all kinds. This book describes how, gradually, normal life returned as the war kept away from home, and how lack of news instead of expected

momentous news started the period of "phony war" thinking which was so suddenly disturbed by the invasion of Holland and Belgium. Chapters in the book deal with the impact of war on dance halls and sport. The first feelings about rationing, effects of war on spending and saving, the rumors which persistently cropped up from nowhere in the early days, the effects of the first bits of official wartime propaganda, and the way commercial interests cashed in on the war in their publicity, are dealt with

This book appeared in March, 1940, in the calm before the storm and was exceptionally well received by the press and elsewhere. It had not been out long before the phony war gave place to Hitler's spring offensive.

The period from the invasion of Belgium to Dunkirk was the most intensively active of M.-O.'s existence. Detailed records of people's reactions to the news were kept daily, both through the direct method of questioning and by recording all sorts of overheard remarks and conversations in the street, in pubs, cafes, and buses. People were observed in their homes listening to the news on the radio, their day-to-day and sometimes hour-to-hour expectations and fears were recorded, and through the diaries long records of their private conversations and actions were collected. Rumors, including the first versions of the parachutist-nun with hairy hands which persisted for months later in various forms, were carefully collated and sifted each day. In March, M.-O. began asking the question, "What do you think of the news today?" a standard question which has been asked on at least two days a week for the whole war period. Analyzed in a standard scheme, answers to this question give one index to the blend of hope, expectation, interest, and forward-looking which help to make up that elusive quality, "morale."

Even at the blackest periods of the war—which are from the sociological point of view the most vitally interesting —M.-O. has kept up its record of war's effects on the ordinary peacetime habits such as pub-going, sport, dancing, and so on. The second period of intense organizational pressure occurred, of course, when heavy air raids began in autumn, 1940. The London blitzes and the complete upheaval of deeply rooted lifetime habits which they involved presented a unique opportunity for studying human beings under almost clinical conditions. The huge makeshift shelters and the tubes of London, the great halls full of evacuated people in the provincial towns, provided a section of humanity brought together by no common bond but the common danger. The blitz period, despite and even partly because of its human tragedies, was a field day for M.-O. Investigators spent days and nights in all the various types of shelters in London, keeping a careful record of all that was said and all that happened. In the most blitzed part of London's East End a girl investigator went to live in a vast railway goods yard, taken over by the people (as London's tubes were taken over), for shelter. Here were thousands of people in this high, empty, arched goods yard, with no conveniences of any kind, no sanitation, no food, no social amenities or organization, no common level of belief or interest. They came along early each evening before the sirens blew, with their bundles of bedding, and settled on the floor individually or in parties. The record which this investigator kept of the slow fluctuation of order into this chaos is perhaps one of the most fascinating sociological studies ever made. Here is a small descriptive section

from one of her reports, written on September 13, 1940, showing spontaneous entertainment beginning to grow up among the shelterers:

Entertainment.—None provided, but some arches provide their own. Entertainment of sort to be described takes place mostly in the middle shelters among the Cockneys. In one middle arch, on Friday, a girl played an accordion, while men danced burlesque dances round her. She was a tall, pale girl with long straggly hair, and played effortlessly, with a vacant face. Highly made-up, badly dressed, very poor.

A crowd of rubberers,[2] watching, were constantly being broken up by the wardens.

After a while, a man in the arch took hold of a woman's hat, and put it on back to front. Then he sidled up to his mate, Mae West-wise, and made some sort of wisecrack. The crowd roared. Gradually, the two worked up some spontaneous cross-talk, which it was impossible to hear from investigator's position. The girl got on to a box of lard, and played louder. The crowd joined in lustily.

In another shelter, a young coster was playing the accordion. He played it well—with fire. A coster girl, about 20, sang a gypsy melody in a clear, high, plaintive voice that would have sounded in place on the stage of the Holborn Empire. Young costers were grouped picturesquely all round the arch, centring the singer in a frame of faces and bodies.

Another archway was playing "Knees-Up-Mother-Brown," running round more and more furiously.

A crowd of drunken seamen (not uniformed) made a chain, and ran round and round the aisles, chanting sea-songs. All effort on the part of wardens to break them up proved fruitless.

Cards were played a good deal, particularly by the Indians, who squatted on the floor and didn't need rugs or blankets.

Not many people were reading—the light was bad. Most people slept.

At this time, too, investigators set off on five routes radiating from London into the remote countryside to record the second great evacuation from London.

[2] The word used for "rubbernecks" who wandered round the shelter looking for any interesting incident.

These are simply examples of some of the major studies M.-O. has made. It is impossible in the space of an article to give more than a broad idea of the scope of its work. A great many special jobs on wartime problems are combined with the continuing study of the effects of war on all sorts of normal social and communal activity. In the former category are the many investigations into the effects of government propaganda, which are summarized in the report *Home Propaganda* (London: Advertising Service Guild, 1941). The effects of individual leaflets, posters, broadcasts, etc., have been the subject of extensive investigation since war began, and an investigation into people's reactions to the first two posters issued by the government in September, 1939, was the first big job M.-O. did during the war. The effects of official instructions on what to do in invasion or if poison gas is used, attempts to educate the public in food matters, attempts to persuade them to carry their gas masks, to wear a white arm band in the blackout, to join the women's services, to eat whole-meal bread (since become the only available loaf); these are some examples of the sort of work M.-O. has done in these times.

One of the government's advertising campaigns urged people to carry their gas masks with them, another to wear or carry something white in the blackout, so that they could be seen by motor and bus drivers. Since the start of the war M.-O. has made regular counts each week of the proportion of Londoners carrying their gas masks at a number of standard places. Seventy-five per cent carried gas masks in September, 1939. In the following months the figures fell to 60 per cent in October, 35 per cent in November, and steadily down to under 5 per cent in March, 1940. Then, as the war

news became worse they rose, but only to a peak of 30 per cent with the fall of France. By August, 1940, they were again down to under 10 per cent, and again only went up to 30 per cent at the beginning of the blitz period in September. Toward the end of the blitz period in January, 1941, they were again down to between 5 per cent and 10 per cent. The Balkan offensive in April, 1941, only brought the figure up to 20 per cent, and from then on it varied between about 10 per cent and 1 per cent or less. At the height of the propaganda drive figures of 1 per cent and under were recorded in provincial centers. The campaign had no appreciable effect, and a steady fall in gas-mask carrying continued.

Another example of M.-O.'s investigations into the effects of official propaganda was the "Arm White" campaign. This was carried out on an extensive scale by advertisements in the *National Press*, rising to a note of increasing urgency. A typical advertisement showed the outline of a bowler-hatted man proceeding cautiously in the dark wearing a white arm band. Streamers across the black background said:

When walking after dark tonight,
For Safety's sake wear something WHITE.

A hand pointed to heavily leaded and underlined capitals announcing:

THERE WERE 1,146 ROAD DEATHS LAST MONTH—MOST OF THEM AVOIDABLE

Throughout this campaign, which lasted many months, M.-O. made counts of the proportion of people in London's blacked-out streets who were carrying anything white. From the beginning to the end of the campaign there was no appreciable improvement whatever in and during the whole period. An average of only one person in a thousand was wearing a white arm band in London, although this was the point primarily and repeatedly illustrated in advertisements.

In this book many other government publicity campaigns are examined, some of them, notably those of the Ministry of Food, having had a relatively good effect, some, like the above, having a practically negligible one. Suggestions are made as to why some campaigns failed and how failure could be avoided in future. The report was widely noticed in the press and very favorably received.

One of the latest major investigations, conducted for six months from October, 1941, was into the human side of industry. A lengthy report on this called *People in Production* was published recently (Advertising Service Guild, 1942). This book attempts to put the question of optimum industrial production into the context of human needs and desires. It shows how minor internal frictions within works and factories can affect efficiency, the effects of travel and shopping, difficulties, household worries, provisions for eating, rest and recreation within the factory, on-the-whole enthusiasm and morale of the factory worker. The results of this investigation, the most ambitious single job that M.-O. has tackled during the war, received very high praise from very diverse quarters in big business, medicine, the technical and trade press as well as the general press, and privately from numerous individuals in the civil service, politics, and science.

The Sunday *Observer* carried a long commentary on this report on its leader page (April 26, 1942) which included the following:

It is important that we should arrive at some definite conclusions about the immense process in which millions of British citizens are now engaged. No better guide could be found than the book just brought out by Tom Harrisson. His book, though it masquerades under an official

title, provides not only better reading than most fiction, but also a new and lively approach to one of the most vital problems of war and peace —the human factor in industry.

A loud noise needs to be made about that word "human." When we summon up figures of man-hours and machines we are apt to forget that the associations, tastes, nerves and metabolism of each human individual are vital factors of output. The bureaucratic or mechanistic yardstick simply will not do. In the words of the author of this book, "It is almost impossible to separate fact, feeling and fantasy..... Ideas that people have about what is going on determine their behaviour as much as, and often more than, what is actually going on in the thing they have ideas about. And if there is a gulf between the thing and the idea that people have about it, the popular idea is likely to modify and upset the thing itself, in the long run if not in the short one."

The *Times* industrial correspondent contributed a long article summarizing the report (April 18). The liberal *Manchester Guardian*'s first leader (April 17) was a commentary on it, and concluded:

The Mass-Observation report does show how much slackness and friction can be traced to the lack of the sense of urgency, to the failure to grasp the value of one's job, and more than anything else to the persistence of pre-war habits of mind. The skilled man is resentful at training a woman; the employer is resentful because he is compelled to put up a canteen; over all hangs the fear of an inevitable economic depression after the war. But the Government departments are often equally remiss. The Select Committee reports that one Production Department "clearly indicated that it did not regard the economical use of labour as its business." The Mass-Observation report quotes an official who said that his Supply Department was only a customer. "It's not our business to find out how efficient firms are or are not." We have all much to learn and not too much time to do it in.

The report was widely recognized as contributing something new in the study of the human side of industrial efficiency and mood. It is about to be brought out in popular abbreviated form by Penguin Books.

Much of M.-O.'s current work is concerned with people's ideas for post-war reconstruction both internally and internationally. A big investigation has just been completed on people's post-war housing needs, run concurrently in the main types of housing area—flats, housing estates, rows of houses, garden city, etc. Present needs and future hopes have been investigated in detail in all these areas, and much information made available for planners, who tend sometimes to be divorced from the actual desires of the people they are planning for. Post-war desires for educational reform, the social services, medicine, and politics are also being investigated.

Meanwhile, in the midst of these special jobs, the routine work of M.-O. carries on. There are one hundred major subjects, embracing every important facet of human activity, which M.-O. decided to cover at the beginning of the war. Here are some of these subjects:

Astrology	Pets
Amateur dramatics	Private conversations
Adult education	Private letters
Ballet	Photography
Bags and wrappers	Politics
Books and reading	Pacifism
Cinema	Pamphlets
Clubs	Radio
Children's stories	Rumor
Civil service	Religion
Civil defense	Services
Fashion	Science
Finance, saving, and spending	Schools
	Sport
Food and menus	Shop displays
Gardens	Temperance
Government propaganda	Theater
	Trade
Health and medicine	Trade-unions
Jazz	Works and factories
Music hall	Youth organizations

A regular watch is kept on all these items, and many more, as their impact is felt by people in their everyday lives. Since

the war began, thirty-three directives of half a dozen questions have been answered by the National Panel, on carefully selected key questions, making some two hundred detailed investigations undertaken in this way alone. The trained staff of investigators is continually on the job, working on a carefully arranged and indexed plan to keep information on all these subjects always up to date. Backing and expanding on these records are the diaries, running now into many millions of words, which supply a wealth of supplementary material from the personal experience of the ordinary people at home.

Another side to M.-O.'s work which is not observational, but without which the interpretation of the results of observations would be incomplete, is the war library. This contains the published material of the war, a cross-section of the innumerable written and printed things which people come across in their everyday lives and which help to form the opinions, feelings, and beliefs which M.-O. investigates and records. Besides the big journals and newspapers and major official propaganda, specimens are collected of the publications of all sorts of minor organizations, their leaflets, posters, catalogues, broadsheets, and bulletins. Ephemeral pamphlets, disappearing a few days after their distribution, the leaflets put out by shopkeepers, the posters and publications of temperance organizations and church bodies, pacifists, horticulturalists, and pet owners are all focused these days to varying extents on the war. Their effects on the people who read them and whose particular interests they represent may be just as great as that of national newspapers and big weekly and monthly periodicals. Yet it is the job of no central organization to preserve them. M.-O. realized the need for social history after the war to have access to this type of material and has been assembling this war library since 1939 with the help of its fifteen hundred observers, who assure specimen material from all parts of Britain.

There are thus three main levels at which M.-O. records human behavior and social change in wartime Britain: (1) through its trained staff of investigators, who record public opinion by reliable sampling methods and whose training in objective observation enables them to obtain an accurate record of external behavior; (2) through the National Panel of Observers, who report largely on their own opinions and subjective reactions, thus giving information about private opinion and feeling; (3) through the war library, which provides the background of published opinion and gives a key to the influences impacting on people and helping to develop the opinions and behavior recorded through (1) and (2).

It will be seen that M.-O. has set itself a fairly stiff task in recording the effects of this war, but, since it is the only organization which is attempting this job in Britain or which is equipped for it by pre-war experience, an ambitious program seems essential. The organizers of M.-O. feel that purely quantitative methods—the only methods used to any great extent by any other organization engaged in work at all similar—are inadequate by themselves for recording the social history of this war, though they have, of course, many uses and are used extensively by M.-O. itself. M.-O. seeks to get at the depth and quality of opinion, to find out what people are thinking and doing privately, among their friends, in their homes, and in their own minds.

M.-O. has no big, steady financial backing or grants. It lives by the jobs it

does for all sorts of official and unofficial bodies, for disinterested individuals, and by its own articles in the press and broadcasts over the B.B.C. Though it has developed a great deal since 1937, and has learned much through the special stresses and conditions of war, that part of its work which is most original is at the same time most experimental. There is still a great deal to learn and much experimentation in technique to be developed.

On many subjects there is a considerable difference between what a person will say to a stranger, such as a doorstep interviewer, and what he says in the privacy of his own circle of friends. This is particularly true in wartime when the social sanction against expressing, for instance, opinions critical of war leaders or of the direction of the war itself is exceptionally strong.

Since the war began, M.-O. has devoted more and more attention to indirect methods of approach, to overheard conversations, to purely observational work among people. Technique for this qualitative study of behavior and opinion at a more intimate level than that recorded by the doorstep interviewer is at present in an early experimental stage, but, though it has a long way to develop before it reaches technical perfection, it can be used in studying many questions where "interviewing" yields little result. For instance, the effects of war on religious faith, on feelings about death, on sex life, on people's more detailed beliefs about what they want in the post-war world, have been investigated in this way in recent months through the National Panel. In such cases either a more intimate approach than the doorstep interview or more time for thought than a verbal question allows is required. M.-O. is particularly concerned with people's behavior, 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 these 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.

MASS OBSERVATION
LETCHWORTH, HERTS, ENGLAND