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The Observers Observed: Reflections on making a film, *The Day War Broke Out*, with the Mass Observation Archive

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CHASE
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Elizabeth Chappell, Simon King, and Dominique Baron-Bonarjee

Introduction

Bringing to light the suppression and self-silencing of ordinary people in eras dominated by censorship and suppression; finding out what 'speaks to us' in the interstices between the official discourse of the archive and personal stories of those whose lives are contained and collected there; documenting the embodied experience of previous generations and finding its traces in our measuring of movements today: these were the pre-existing research interests that we brought to the CHASE Summer School: Making Films of Your Research with Smart/iPhones and Digital Cameras, held on 22-28 July 2019.

Elizabeth Chappell is a life historian engaged in an ongoing iterative interviewing project with survivor families in Hiroshima; Simon King is a socially engaged arts practitioner who investigates lived experience through walking, and Dominique Baron-Bonarjee is a dancer and contemporary arts practitioner reflecting on data collection and cultures of surveillance. Sharing a common heritage as children of parents who had first-hand experiences of living either through World War Two or its immediate post-war period, we were also naturally drawn to the themes that had been advertised by the Summer School ('...you will spend time at the Mass Observation Archive and the Newhaven local history museum ... as well as learning the specific skills needed to make your film'). As Derrida points out, archives can seem to hold the ultimate 'authority' for knowledge producers — they are often conceived of as the ultimate ne plus ultra in terms of source credibility. Arguably, however, that depends on how, as researchers, we engage with the contents of archives. What questions do we ask of the archive that coincide with or diverge from what was deemed valuable by previous generations? What are the gaps? When we applied to the course, we all had experience of working with the archive but we were also mindful of the 'impact' agenda of our respective institutions. Broadly speaking, this agenda emphasises widening participation and communicating research so that it can be

shared easily. We had already published in digital formats, from e-publishing to blogs, podcasts, tweets etc. Making a film would, among other things, extend our reach in terms of impact skills.

We met in a serendipitous way on the second day of the course in The Keep Archive's Special Collections room, pouring over boxes and boxes of personal recollections pre-selected and placed before us by the curators and archivists specifically for the purposes of the project. We responded to the opportunity to feature war diaries (although three other projects were on offer, which were not related to war) and as we excitedly read aloud extracts from the diaries to one another we also shared our own research stories and, in a short space of time — between the morning break and lunch time — discovered an unexpected degree of synergy in our research positions and backgrounds. This seemed a good starting point from which to engage with the efforts of the original mass observers of the 1930s.

The theme of the war diaries had been introduced to us by the Special Collections archivist, Karen Watson but Elizabeth Chappell was cognisant of some of these diaries from previous research. She was curious as to whether she could find a particular diary entry that had captured her imagination. It was by a 24-year-old female civil servant from Croydon and dated from the outbreak of war on 3rd September 1939. Finding the original in the archival box, it turned out, was an unexpected hook that helped script the film and hone its themes and focus as the week progressed.

There was also a coincidence in terms of anniversaries. The year we were working in, 2019, marked the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of World War Two. The memory culture of the last decade (2010s) has consistently brought war to our attention with major anniversaries of both World War One and Two. Thus, issues of secrecy and censorship, coercion and the way in which societies choose to remember were to the fore in our thinking as we started to work.

The heterogeneous value of narratives of everyday life — whether written, photographed or embodied — formed the basis of our own self-reflective research interests, but also formed the basis of the material placed in front of us. It was discovering the nexus between these ingredients which gave impetus to our film project. This paper asks whether our observations of the Mass Observation Archive, represented in the form of a short, scripted film, have an effect on the way we come to view the significance of everyday experience in times of crisis. Could the collaborative film we made come

to be seen as a valuable contribution to current preoccupations around communicating participation, official discourses and inclusivity, more broadly? These concerns map very well onto the focus of this article which is the result of our convivial engagement and collaboration with the aim of inspiring further creative projects.

Mass Observation: a dialogical intervention

As the title indicates, Mass Observation (hereafter M.O.) emerged out of the broader sociological and documentary impulse of the 1920s and 1930s. The aims of the founders, anthropologist Tom Harrisson, writer and future Professor of Sociology Charles Madge, and film-maker Humphrey Jennings, were, broadly speaking, to 'shock' the public out of the assumption of a homogenous experience of the everyday on the part of the largely silent but newly enfranchised majority. From its inception in 1937 until the mid-1950s, M.O. recruited hundreds of both paid and unpaid observers of 'everyday behaviour' to respond to 'directives' i.e. questions, starting with a consultation about people's opinions on the out-of- the-ordinary coronation of the George VI. The resulting Archive consists of an eclectic mix of surveys, questionnaires and autobiographical diary entries, which was active from 1945 until 1951 and then again from 1981 until now.

Three times a year, 'panel members', meaning those who have committed to being volunteer writers — are invited to respond to open-ended and discursive questionnaires (directives) about subjects ranging from international and domestic political issues to everyday personal practices and experiences. Such issues have included the Falkland and Gulf Wars, the NHS, Brexit, women's experiences of menstruation and more recently, Covid-19. Once a year, too, panellists and members of the wider public are asked to provide detailed one-day diaries, in honour of Mass Observation's 'first call' to reflect on the coronation of George VI on May 12, 1937. Millions of typed and hand-written materials have been amassed representing the contributions of over thousands of volunteer writers. The focus from the beginning was to get at the uncensored (due to anonymity) feelings of those whose thoughts, according to the founders, were not being adequately reflected in the media of the time. The founders were responding to what they saw as a gap in representation and hence the margin-

alisation of large swathes of society. Such an invitation to candid self-reflection was unprecedented.

As historian Sara Ahmed has pointed out, M.O. was an innovation in historiographic methods. Such open methods of consultation with the general public were to become especially controversial during wartime as the government tried to clamp down on M.O. in the 1940s. The directives did not just ask the diarists their views about personal matters but also their views on public issues such as the conduct of war: 'What are your personal feelings about death and dying?' (May 1942) and 'What is your feeling about the bombing of Germany?' (December 1943). In 1945, these questions were followed by 'How do you feel about the peace now?' And 'how do you feel now the war is over in Europe and how does this compare with how you expected to feel?' We might be used to such 'feelings-based' research regarding public events now — especially given the proliferation of social media — but the deliberate commissioning and collection of letters, diaries and ephemera i.e. autobiographical material, from non-elites was an unparalleled innovation in European historiography of the time.

Mass Observation asked questions very different from the questions asked by typical marketing or public opinion surveys. As M.O. archivist Dorothy Sheridan pointed out, Madge, Harrisson and Jennings invited their 'observers' to narrate their lived experience: doing so, they provided access to a reality which would have been difficult to come by via any other means.[1] Diarists were requested to 'use their diaries as cameras', zooming in on aspects of their lives that the directives chose to steer them towards — this struck us as a prescient method, especially considering the contemporary rise of the 'selfie'.[2]

The aim was to represent reality as it seemed to the mass observers rather than 'how it really was.' The protagonist of the narratives was thus not so much the 'reality' that the M.O. observers observed outside, as their own thoughts, feelings and actions. Mikhail Bakhtin averred, echoing the discussions around quantum physics of his day, that, no observation is possible without a self-awareness of the time, place and position of the researcher.[3] M.O's qualitative research method, which the founders billed as a 'new science' in their first directive, initiated one of the first mass social scientific research projects of the 20th century. As social historian David Kynaston has written, the way in which people recorded their

[1] Dorothy Sheridan, 1993, p. 28.

[2] Sheridan, 1992, pp. 36-37.

[3] Holquist, 2002, p.36.

feelings in the anonymised and uncensored space of M.O. goes against the methodology behind official narratives. It was such conventional narratives that Walter Benjamin felt should be 'overpowered' when he called for 'wrest[ing] tradition' away from 'conformism' in his essay Uber Den Begriff der Geschichte.[4] In this sense, then, the M.O. founders were ahead of their time, placing the significance of ordinary people's experience at the heart of society's concerns.

But memory cultures do not necessarily last. At certain points, societies prefer to forget and it was indeed the vast ambition of the project, the multifarious polyphony of M.O's current Archive, which came under pressure later in the 1950s and 1960s as the children of the war generation were understandably more oriented towards forgetting than remembering the restrictions, heartbreak and privations of the war years which are recorded in these diaries in such detail. It was only later propagators of the 'shared authority' view of historiographic method, who, from the 1970s onward, found sympathy with what seems to be one of the underlying concepts of M.O. If the 'camera' was as often pointed (albeit with careful curation and direction) by those who had been historically the recipients rather than the agents of history, then that would offer a different, potentially transformative perspective, one that could, potentially, help prevent 'history' from repeating itself.

Observing the Observers: Communicating our narrative

How were we to distil some of these complex questions which have preoccupied historians and archivists, especially in recent years, into a short research film? Film, as an intimate medium offers the illusion of a 'window in' to another person's soul: it is uniquely suitable for the showing and reading of personal diaries. Celebrating the fragmentary, the 'roughly hewn', the hurried, became a catalyst for the short. The stories of these imagined others could be further construed through the materiality of their writings. Some wrote handwritten diaries on airmail letter paper; others were on official-looking see-through low-quality grey typing paper — a clue as to the social differences and scarcities brought about through war. The materiality of the letters with the variation of handwriting and typed script, perhaps speak to us even more movingly now, in an age dominated by digital communications.

[4] Quoted in Esther Leslie, *Overpowering Conformism* (London: Pluto Press, 2000) Preface, p.vii.

We had our own restrictions to deal with as we only had six days in which to finish a polished product — the seventh, would be taken up with showing our work to others at a film screening at the University of Sussex. In terms of selection therefore, we did not have the luxury of film-makers with time set aside for Research and Development. We could however find a relatively broad selection from the observers who had been preselected for us in terms of age, location and profession — to provide a glimpse of the diversity, polyphony and scope of the Archive. In addition, by 'zooming in' on short extracts of their work, we found the uniqueness and situatedness of the voice of each of the correspondents, when read aloud, would draw the audience in to the idiosyncratic richness of this historic 'archive of feeling', offering unexpected perspectives on the theme — 3rd September 1939, literally, the day war broke out. Simon King's 'remembering' of the tune 'Don't Ask Any Questions (I'll Tell You No Lies)' by Brian Lawrance and his Lansdowne House Orchestra, provided us with a soundtrack which was uncannily suited to our theme. The objects we found displayed in the Newhaven Museum, were visually complementary. We found a mass-produced glass tumbler from a discontinued set dating from 1937 showing the uncrowned King's face. The tumbler happened to be displayed alongside an official coronation cup featuring George VI. The encounters we made with one another juxtaposed with cultural objects and paraphernalia provided by CHASE, were the ingredients we used for making the film.

The Australian feminist Rosi Braidotti has argued that the self is continually reinvented through affective encounters in what she terms a practice of nomadism: crossing borders both the 'real and the conceptual', between self and other. If we were to adopt a methodology for our process, this would be it. As we walked, talked and worked through the week, we encountered more relics and records of people's lives from an age of scarcity and crisis which chimed with our own diverse narratives, constructing a film that we felt would be of intrinsic interest to our imagined audience. We chose 'observers' who resonated with our themes directly. Two of them are middle-aged and clearly self-conscious about conveying the import of their observations for future readers (as children of World War One). The male provincial schoolteacher is very antipathetic to the effects of censorship coming into force in 1939 but nevertheless questions M.O. about whether he is 'observing' correctly. G.H. Langford, a professional

and a Londoner, tells about her fear of her phone calls being monitored. By contrast, the 24-year-old female civil servant from Croydon, seems to be simply reacting to an entirely new (to her) situation. Her perspective, alongside powerful images drawn from her responses seem fresher and perhaps more 'authentic.' As curator Kirsty Pattrick explains in the film, it is in the details of the personal, local, reactions to a larger global picture, that we can find clues as to the 'reality' of wartime Britain. We thus took a small, very specific 'fragmentary' corner of the war experience in which to understand a research question related to the much larger 'whole context' of our theme — the value of lived experience in a time of crisis.

In practice, however, our experience of making the film and what we derived from the process differed according to our own particular practices. Thus, the second half of this paper will be divided into our individual reflections on the above themes as case studies. While Elizabeth Chappell and Simon King produced *The Day War Broke Out*, Dominique Baron-Bonarjee contributed to the making of that film, but also explored the related theme of data gathering and surveillance, a theme generated by the contents of the pre-selected boxes provided by the Mass Observation Archive curators, in a separate film, *The Measure of Leisure*, which she reflects on here.

Case Study 1: Disruptive narratives of disrupted times – Elizabeth Chappell

The work of the journalist, life historian and oral historian run in parallel. They are all a part of the drawing up of the first draft of history which aims to ensure that the colour is not 'drawn out' of lived experience. This Herodotean concept, our desire for descriptive immersive narratives, connects past and present and exists across cultures. However, as Walter Benjamin noted in 1920s Europe, this was something which was in short supply in the interwar years, post-World War One. 'Experience has fallen in value,' he wrote. He felt that the ability to communicate a shared life experience had been imperilled by then-new forms of technological conflict: 'Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent not richer, but poorer in communicable experience?' he asked in 1920.[5]

[5] Walter Benjamin, 1992, p88.

The ability to narrate concretely requires us to be rooted in time and place.

The curators of M.O.'s 'scientific' project also drew on human beings' natural tendency to record at times of crisis — as circumstances change, illness strikes, or, as death draws near — moments when the world changes for us personally, when the ordinary takes on extraordinary significance. As Paul Ricoeur writes, public experience becomes personal at such times.[6]

Thus, we are not just discovering via our cognitive senses, nor is it simply personal or collective, we are engaged in a relational process. As a narrative researcher, I am concerned with the whole context in which personal lives are situated and wanted to find out what was the best way we could convey the importance of M.O. in our contemporary moment. For me, the appeal of M.O., was prima facie, the way it placed apparently peripheral voices at the centre. Also, the uniquely intimate medium of film could convey the singularity of expression which leaps out of the Archive's contents. As Benjamin also writes: 'Collections unlock themselves when a single piece is brought to voice.'[7]

The single voice which turned out to be my way in was that of diary entry number D5383, created by a 24-year-old civil servant living in Croydon, Surrey at the start of World War Two.

On Sunday 3rd September, she wrote:

> The sun is shining, the garden never looked prettier, never so bright and gay; Tiger lies out there in the sun; all looks happy and peaceful, but it is not: war has broken out between Germany and England, beastly, beastly war, brought on by that devil in human shape, Hitler.[8]

I quote this short fragment, which was the fragment that first drew me to the work of Mass Observation long before I encountered its reality in the Archive, as a way of articulating something about the way the construction of narrative works to disrupt expectations, just as the moment of war upturns the expectation of the everyday. The perfect balance of the triptych of the first part of the sentence with the second part, combined with the transformation wrought by the concluding phrase, is perhaps a 'stereotype' of evil intruding on pastoral bliss. The diarist is acutely aware of the (to her) strangeness of the shared experience she was living through, that of the outbreak of war. In a later entry, the

[6] Paul Ricoeur, 1991, p36.

[7] Marx, Ursula, et al., 2015, Preface, np

[8] Mass Observation Project diary extract, Sunday 3rd September 1939

civil servant describes looking out of the window and seeing the ‘weird figure’ (of an ARP warden) parading up and down as well as the frustration her mother felt being woken up by sirens. Her feelings are those of depression at the breaking up of family life. These are new experiences for her, although they are all-too familiar to our other two middle-aged observers. Their diaries are more complaining in tone: they are concerned about shortages and the restrictions on freedom of information and expression. This silencing, what we might term the ‘deprived landscape of storytelling’ was becoming all-too familiar.

In other circumstances, coeval with these diaries, the then invisible diarists, Anne Frank and Ettie Hillisum were also writing, knowing that this was possibly their last opportunity to record their thoughts and feelings in a candid way for the future. Thus, M.O., by providing an opportunity for narrativity, was able to gather personal data about silence and disruption. The absence of free talk is as notable as the presence of news announcements in the diaries from this period. This content, it could be argued, as we encounter our own crisis-ridden times ‘anew’ is invaluable as a refractive prism.

‘Gentle Reader’ writes Robert Burton, in the preface to what is arguably the first ‘modern’ work of autobiography, The Anatomy of Melancholy. The appellation implies a trustful intimacy with the unknown reader and our observers felt able to engage in similar trustful dialogue with their curators about the process of curation: ‘If you wish me to “observe” in a special way or report on any points not quite cleared this time, please let me know.’ [September, 1939 Schoolmaster, 32. Llandovery, South Wales].

This kind of engagement, in my view, between observer and curator, tells us something about the nature of the curatorial process itself, i.e. the contract between the gatekeepers and the volunteers. Others have read this engagement differently. Were the observers being encouraged to ‘spy’? Was Mass Observation just one of the early warnings of a now-burgeoning surveillance culture? Whatever our interpretation — the Archive is validated by the long-term engagement with it by its diarists and the long-term relationships some of them built up with M.O. It is a relationship which is carefully guarded and maintained by today’s curators, one of whom, Kirsty Pattrick, we interview in the film. In my interview with her therefore, I decided to focus on both the status of the volunteer

writers now, and at the Archive's inception, as well as the status of their reflections on the 'everyday' in a time of crisis.

Case Study 2: The interpellation of the personal and the public — Simon King

As a walking arts practitioner who has elsewhere used public-archival and family-biographical photographs and letter-form correspondence to construct hermeneutic narratives around civilian memories of the Home Front, I am particularly drawn to questions about the contradictory nature of everyday experience in times of crisis.[9]

Reading these accounts again in late summer 2020 affords me a resonant parallel to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic — a crisis which, perhaps through the operation of subjective 'durational' time (Henri Bergson's concept seems particularly apt here), has served to place further distance in my recall of the research, discussion and decision-making in the production of the film.[10] Over twelve months on, I endeavour to piece together the elements that informed our thinking then, particularly in relation to the form and content of the film — looking back at what we captured through our recent exchange of emails, telephone calls and meetings on Zoom.

My encounter with one particular diary entry, in this case of Gillian Langford (who can be named due to the prior publication of her diaries), afforded me a 'way in' to exploring this parallelism. Gillian Langford (in response to the directive of M.O. to keep a war-time diary) reports on a conversation about the wearing of masks:

> The female who replied to my question [...] kept saying 'I regard my gas mask as my life belt, so will you when you have one'. I did not point out that I didn't need a lifebelt any more than I wanted a gas mask. She kept saying now you don't want to be a casualty and give trouble, do you? Finally, she said, 'you can't go to the cinema without one you know'. I retorted 'if the cost of living goes up by leaps and bounds as it has already done, I shan't be able to afford a cinema entrance fee, so I still shan't want a gas mask'– and I still have none. [Gillian Langford, 3-18 September 1939]

Langford's deft and waspishly class-centred character assassination — an extract from one of the many

[9] Simon King, 2018, pp. 249-266

[10] Bergson writes: 'Pure durée is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live.' Bergson, 1910, p. 100

pages we researched for the film — reinforces for me the value of such historical accounts of crisis. The individualised diary and letter mode serves as an alternative mode of knowledge, an 'archive of the everyday'. This is to be read alongside and sometimes against, or in opposition to, official history. As Walter Benjamin writes, each generation is engaged in a dialogue with the tendencies toward conformity offered by society.[11] Langford's opinionated insistence on non-conformity and intolerance of officialdom continues:

> My hostess, whose faith in the National Govt. and the truth and purity of the English press was once so profound, keeps saying 'you can't believe in anything or anybody NOW.' [...] How everyone enjoys brief authority especially if it entails wearing a uniform! A.R.P. workers in those hideous steel helmets that make all wearers look ridiculous, popped up from the darkness again and again with exhortations and warnings delivered in authoritative manner, or with unsought, unasked directions for our journey. [Gillian Langford 3-18 September 1939]

Apparent here is Langford's scepticism if not downright hostility towards the directives of National Government and, as I also imagine, towards the hard-to-avoid series of Home Front propaganda posters exhorting civic responsibility and fortitude produced by the Ministry of Information in late summer 1939.[12] A picture emerges of a woman not afraid to question the government's top-down 'command and control' of its civilian population. Its uncomfortable parallel to the present is hard to avoid: for example, in the mix of rational critique, anti-vax sentiment and conspiracy theory surrounding the Conservative government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic since March 2020.[13]

Though this parallel did not inform our thinking in the Archive, we were aware that our choices of extracts to include were necessarily selective and individual. Within the limitations of the production process of a film, however, we were liable to use timesaving methods, to make decisions that might work for the story we wanted to tell. As film-makers, we did not have time to explore alternative methodologies. Like the diary respondents we were aware of the limitations of our position and perspective on life, responding as we were to the 'directive' of the CHASE summer school.

Ben Highmore points out the hermeneutical stakes at work for the researcher of M.O.

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[11] Leslie, 2000, Preface, p. vii.

[12] For example, 'YOUR COURAGE YOUR CHEERFULNESS YOUR RESOLUTION WILL BRING US VICTORY'. See Owen Hatherley, 2016, pp. 19-20.

[13] Elsewhere in Langford's diary, for example, she writes of her suspicion that her phone is being tapped.

He posits the risk of the editorial voice submerging the polyphonic as a crucial consideration.[14] Using the medium of film, it is all-the-more likely that a certain 'representativeness' can be imputed when communicating diary-form extracts. Framing these diary extracts in their whole life context would therefore be necessary for the subjects not to appear as mere cyphers or archetypes.

As we worked against the clock to create a narrative from all the elements at our disposal, we were conscious of how adequately we could represent these three distinct voices. We were aware, too, of the audio-visual techniques available for documentary film making which lead the viewer through a recognisable narrative arc. Sometimes we took shortcuts, such as attributing long-lost middle class Southern English accents to our diarists (a presumption informed by our familiarity with the classic 'stiff upper lip' and class-based archetypes of British films of this period). The title itself, *The Day War Broke Out*, is a nod to the catch-phrase comic monologue of the music hall and radio comedian Robb Wilton (1881-1957) — calls to another archetype of region and class. As film-makers and researchers, we were necessarily needing to refine and highlight, to navigate our way through all this messiness and polyphony.

I believe we were successful in the visual representation of the diaries, highlighting their idiosyncratic nature, which lends character to the disembodied voices contained therein — whether pen-and-ink, on good paper or on less-good quality paper, single- or double-sided, typed closely or well-spaced. However, my doubts remain about how successfully we managed to avoid the sin of generalisation as we looked to amplify certain aspects for the sake of impact through audio-visual means. I am thinking about this as I plan to return to the M.O. Archive for further research and I hope to address some of these limitations in a future project.

Case Study 3: Measuring the direction of leisure – Dominique Baron-Bonarjee

Both hands are at work: mainly thumb, index and middle finger, but the ring and pinkie fingers assist the others in the task. The papers I am looking through are precariously delicate and thin with age.

[14] See Ben Highmore, 2008, p. 85.

They remind me of old-fashioned stationery, the gossamer sheets of airmail letter pads that preceded email communication. As I parse my way through the records, I'm nervous about my interactions with these materials, careful that my own bodily emanations don't leave sweaty fingerprints on these collections of other people's traces.

Each of these yellowing sheets tapped out in typewriter font on a typewriter, invite a meta-level of observation, revealing a person, a place, a process: I can see the faint letters where the ink was too dry, or the tap of the finger was too soft. It makes me think of the 'obs' — as the Mass Observation observers refer to themselves — reflecting back on that moment in the dance hall, counting the number of couples dancing to a particular band.

There they are at their desk, attempting to put order into these notes, by reducing them to a dense constricted column of initials and numbers — 30, 40, 45, 25, 30, etc. — that scrolls down the page; for me to pore over these abstract codes that recall the long-gone sweaty night of 31 March 1939, at the Paramount Dance Hall on Tottenham Court Road. I could sit here for days, traveling in time, by imagining the body of this enigmatically terse voyeur sitting over there in the shadows of the dance hall, attempting to bend the frenetic activity around him to a Euclidean logic:

> Obs tried to work out some system of counts, but it is very difficult. One interesting line is to get an idea of the numbers who hold their partners on different manners. Tried counts but they are impossible. But found that there were 9 positions for the man's right hand on his partner's back. ... Not so easy to classify the holds women have of men. [Mass Observation, 'Paramount' AH. 31 March 1939]

The number of records on the subject of leisure, including sports, dance, entertainment, is overwhelming, and temptingly immersive: I have forgotten what I was looking for, and find myself off on a research tangent (or is it really a parabolic curve and I'm still on the right track?). The deadline for completing my film, *The Measure of Leisure*, based on my visit to the Mass Observation Archive, is approaching, and I am having trouble finding a clear direction. That evening, as I retire to my room, it's time to have a break from it all with some quiet time. I don my Muse headband, a biofeedback device that helps me to track my practice of meditation: the task now is to do my best to get the 'birds' to tweet.[15]

[15] I have recorded 250 sessions since I first began to use the Muse EEG monitor and app. All this amounts to 2558 total minutes of meditation, or 6793 birds — a bird is a sonic alert and its associated data point indicating a very calm 'meditative' state.

Conclusion

For us as writers and researchers, the autobiographical 'turn' of the Archive as well as the combined synergy of our interactions with one another and the Archive: observing the observers observing as it were, sparked our professional interest. We were, it is true, limited by the technical resources and time available. The majority of the film was recorded on Smart/iPhone, with some gadgets such as extra microphones offered to us by CHASE and with the welcome addition of a high-resolution DSLR camera, which affords a control of depth-of-field which is not available on Smart/iPhone. However, the methods taught by the course tutor Karen Boswall were remarkably non-technical and person-centred. Through simple techniques our cohort of film makers became versed in film making skills quickly.

The final film is only 8 minutes and 24 seconds long, well within the 'directive' of the CHASE Summer School to produce 7-10 minutes of film. We took the limitation as an opportunity to open up our methods to a wider audience and, in the process, advance our thinking. Mired in our own practices and interests, we were also, nevertheless, open to making a virtue of the encounter between ourselves: our diverse backgrounds (a concurrence which was mostly smooth but naturally sometimes also abrasive) as well as our trans-disciplinarity via Braidotti's concept of 'nomadism'. The film we made is thus just one aspect of what Bakhtin conceived of as an infinite layering of the dialogical process: the self in relation to the self, the self in relation to others and the self in relation to the world or the context.

Could this offer a response to Walter Benjamin's challenge to the eerie silence of post-crises worlds? The 'whole life' context is then amplified through the viewers of the film (and readers of this paper) ultimately extending beyond the moment of encounter potentially without limit.[16] The dialogical starts with the autobiographical, the engagement with the self, its 'observation', and develops through the interstices of relationality. It is only through engagements such as ours, we contend, that the M.O. Archive, can ultimately realise its objectives.

[16] Holquist, 2002, p.39.

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Film references:

Links to a selection of films made during the CHASE Summer School: Making Films of Your Research with Smart/iPhones and Digital Cameras, held on 22-28 July 2019 are available here: https://www.chasevle.org.uk/archive-of-training/archive-of-training-2019/film-summer-school/

To view the authors' joint panel discussion on the film and this paper as part of the CHASE Encounters Conference 2021, please see The Observers Observed video poster:

https://vimeo.com/564127705/864822b3ad

Individual films are available as follows:

The Day War Broke Out by Elizabeth Chappell (Open University, Department of English) and Simon King (Birkbeck University, Department of English and Humanities) https://vimeo.com/364033011

The Measure of Leisure by Dominique Baron-Bonarjee (University of Goldsmiths, School of Arts) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnuEG4FNt6k

Harry Browning by Hattie Hearn (University of East Anglia, School of Art, Media and American Studies) https://vimeo.com/365073478

Brazen Souls by Jenny Flood (University of Sussex, School of Media, Arts and Humanities, History Department) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cjgq8JFt70o

The Repository and Me by Maryam Sholevar (University of London , School of Oriental and African Studies, SOAS, Gender Studies and Economics) and Harriet Hughes (University of Sussex, School of Media, Arts and Humanities) https://vimeo.com/368624011

Martyn Edwards on Thomas Tipper by Veronique Walsh (University of London , School of Oriental and African Studies, SOAS, Music Department) https://vimeo.com/365071779

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