INTRODUCTION

Almost everyone has had the annoying experience of hearing other people applauded for ideas which they first suggested. It happens in casual conversation, in formal seminars and in print, where it is called plagiarism. Women, particularly, note how often men receive credit for women’s ideas or will respond to an idea only after it has been voiced by a man. Teachers reformulate students’ comments in the belief that they are making the ideas more comprehensible for the rest of the class and colleagues check each others’ books to see if they are cited. Although we may generously acknowledge and thank colleagues, family, editors, students and sometimes even the subjects of our research in book prefaces, we usually end by taking final responsibility and credit: to admit anything else is a form of intellectual suicide. The belief that ideas belong to people is deeply entrenched; careers remain built on singular publications and high scores in citation indexes and most examining systems do not allow group work or joint submissions. Yet, however much academia may insist on treating ideas like commodities, they are not individual intellectual property but the product of relationships which exist between people.

This paper1, which is based on the experience of doing research2 in the Mass-Observation Archive (M-OA)3, reflects on a contradiction between respect for intellectual property as a condition of academic work and the importance of shared experience in everyday life. In particular it explores some of the aims and methods of Mass-Observation (M-O) in the light of Donald Winnicott’s (1951) concept of ‘transitional objects’ and Alan Dawe’s (1973) concept of the ‘representative experience’. This last is of particular relevance to M-O as it offers an alternative view of what it means for research to be ‘representative’ to the conventional, sampling-based one which has long provided the main grounds for criticising M-O4. Coined during one of the periodic crises about the future of sociology, the

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1 I am deeply indebted to the extremely helpful staff of the Archive and to comments on earlier drafts of this paper from Dorothy Sheridan, Brian Street and Shirley Brice-Heath.
2 The project which enabled me to use and to get to know more about Mass-Observation was ‘Age, Pace of Life and Social Change’ and was funded by the ESRC Grant No. LC 14-25-0027.
3 Mass-Observation is a project dedicated to collecting material on contemporary, everyday life. It is based in the Library at the University of Sussex and is essentially a panel of volunteer writers who respond to requests (known as directives) from the Archive to write about themselves around themes nominated by the Archive (M-OA). Though founded in 1937 with an emphasis on observing others as well as the self (hence the name), since it was revived in 1981, by an anthropologist interested in the scope of popular ethnography, it has concentrated exclusively on collecting autobiographical accounts. It was founded on the belief that social science should not be elitist and in many ways predates the contemporary concern with how the human capacity for self reflection can be approached and incorporated into the research process.
4 M-O has had a somewhat marginal relationship to British sociology. Raymond Firth (1939) viewed it as inferior ethnography and Mark Abrams (1951) as an inferior sort of social survey. It suffered credibility as a result of being basically requisitioned as part of the war effort (Finch 1986) and then, because it ceased basic research in
representative experience was central to Dawe's view of the discipline as a moral one capable of changing society and transforming lives. However, as Dawe does not discuss how the representative experience might be researched, the remainder of this paper suggests how M-O might be seen as doing this. In particular, it suggests that the Mass-Observation Archive (M-OA) might serve as a transitional object enabling both its contributors and the researchers who use the material to find the 'other' in and through the representative experience produced by and stored in the M-OA.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND THE ACADEMY

However, all this is far removed from my starting point which is the problem of intellectual property and giving credit to those who are anonymous. Among the more dominant features of university life is the social isolation of many academics and a particularly turgid and ritualised style of communication known as 'academic literacy' (Street 1994) in which quotation, attribution and citation frequently obstruct clear thought and expression. Termed scholarship, it is based on a belief in intellectual property which is directly at odds with the belief that ideas are a free good. Of practical interest perhaps only to patent lawyers, is the broad issue of whether ideas can or should be commodified and what this belief does to intellectual enquiry and the practice of research. The defensive and obsessive practice of larding papers with references is done partly to impress, partly to establish credibility, but partly also because failure to acknowledge the authorship of an idea, phrase, or some evidence is considered theft and because academic mores cannot accommodate the social nature of thought and creativity. The fear of unwittingly committing plagiarism terrifies some students and in order to avoid it many play safe and write essays comprising almost wholly of strings of quotations, whilst their lecturers are burdened by the obligation to name others before advancing their own view.

Such practices are part of the inflated, egotistical and assertive style of writing which now characterises academic life. The more the chance to do research depends on peer review, counting output and convincing lay assessors, the more there is a complex ritual of judicious citing and modesty is abandoned as a form of intellectual weakness. All of which is at odds with the stress on intersubjectivity, communication and social relationship as a central part of subject of sociology. Of course, the natural sciences are not entirely free from bitter wrangles over who discovered what first, but the notion of intellectual property is not so disturbing because the nature of thought itself is not the object of study and the research process in these fields is traditionally more co-operative and team

1950 it has tended to be thought of predominantly as an historical collection. Since its revival in a climate more hospitable to qualitative methods methodological doubts are still expressed because those who write are self selected and are disproportionately middle class, over fifty and female. However, it is still a very mixed panel socially, drawing contributors from all walks of life and parts of the country. The class composition of the panel is complicated because of the tendency to move out of manual jobs with age and, as a biographical project which encourages reflection about the past as much as reportage of the present, it is hard to decide which class location a writer belongs to as they may have occupied several over their lifetime. To get round some of the problems of class imbalance the panel can be quota sampled and still be large enough for simple numerical calculations to be made, but the focus on class and representativeness of much criticism needs to be set in the context of the panel’s strengths, namely commitment to the project and cumulative skills in self reflection which make it a valuable source of information about national opinion, feelings and values.
based. Whereas in the social sciences, despite a heritage of hermeneutics, the concept of *verstehen* and a recent trend of greater sensitivity towards the negotiated aspects of research and social phenomena, remarkably little effort has gone into finding methods of studying collective sentiments directly and most work is done in isolation.

The issue of intellectual property is not quite the same as the near compulsory egoism of contemporary academic life, but they were brought together for me by fear that I might be guilty of theft if I used a phrase a Mass-Observation (M-O) writer had reminded me of for the title of a book I was writing. This led me to wonder how defensible the notion of intellectual property could ever be in the context of participatory social research and how I could steal something which was anonymised and may not have belonged exclusively to somebody else in the first place, but arose from a relationship between the writer, the Archive and the researcher. The ethical issue which bothered me was not new. Oral historians, feminist scholars and others involved in life history and narrative studies (Yeo 1986, Elinor 1992, Gluck and Patai 1991, Frisch 1990, Cameron 1992), as well as with the epistemological implications of the knowledge thus produced. But as I used M-O the practical questions about citation, privacy, confidentiality and hierarchy led back to ones about intellectual property, the sharedness of cognition and the meaning of representativeness.

**PRIVACY, CITATION AND WRITING FOR MASS-OBSERVATION**

Privacy and confidentiality first. The M-OA is very well organised to guard both of these and M-O writers are known only to the researchers by their M-O number. Confidentiality agreements are signed on joining the Archive, the master list of names is never revealed and if writers mention others by name these are deleted from the writing before it is made public. The mini-biography consisting of age, sex, occupation or last occupation and town or place lived in is now routinely attached to each contribution and is enough to allow other researchers to check on the accuracy of any quotation or interpretation, but not enough to allow researchers to thank or acknowledge any of the writers individually and, whilst the M-O writers give their ideas freely, knowing and perhaps hoping that they are contributing to research, science and posterity, this also makes them hostages to fortune. Most are satisfied with the collective credit and acknowledgement that is given to M-O and, if they were not, they probably would not write in the first place. But the results of this generosity are not always clear cut: often the most tangible result is simply the advancement of certain academic careers. Articles published in obscure journals may remain unread or matter only for purposes such as the Research Assessment Exercise conducted on British universities. But more serious for a project based on recording popular opinion and expression are the risks of misrepresentation or distortion. The uses to which research may be put and the credit taken for it can betray the intentions and faith of those writing for M-O. This problem is not unique to M-O, but it is crucial as the M-O panel is based on a
trust which is easily damaged and the subjects/writers have no way of protesting or dissenting. Of course, everything is not negative or one-sided. Even without being able to safely assume consensus, it is clear that there are personal satisfactions to be gained from participating - pleasure in writing and communicating, getting things off one's chest, using a skill, feeling valued and in contributing to public life and 'putting the record straight' (Sheridan 1993, Bloome et al. 1993). This last is particularly important as belonging to respected, co-operative ventures can be experienced as empowering (Nespor and Barber 1995).

For the researcher, the privacy conditions offer some unique advantages. M-O writers rarely, if ever, meet the Archivist or the researchers and the Archive and its procedures are identical for all. Each writer receives the same directive and every contribution is answered personally, generally in a standard format, but varied to take account of major life events when these are mentioned. For those in a position to commission a directive, M-O has the same potential for depth as much unstructured and patient interviewing without the dangers of embarrassment, leading questions, over-identification or desire to please. Of course, it would be naive to imagine that M-O writing is 'truer' or less mediated than other texts used in social science, or that the experience recorded can be taken at face value, but being constructed in the absence of an interviewer is crucial. Even without face-to-face contact there is intimacy, trust and a sense of being in a relationship. Many writers have contributed for years and this reliability, plus the Archive's responsiveness, leads them to feel, and to be known by the staff. Together these conditions form the basis of a unique relationship where, almost by accident, the physical and psychological conditions of writing for and using the M-OA material parallel many aspects of the setting required by psychoanalysis and which produce material of similarly intimate and reflective kind (Shaw 1994).

THE GROUP NATURE OF MASS-OBSERVATION: IMAGINING THE REPRESENTATIVE EXPERIENCE AND THE ARCHIVE AS A TRANSITIONAL OBJECT

Writing for M-O could seem like writing for a black hole. To avoid this and keep going the writers not only have to have faith in the value of the project, but need to imagine an 'other' or 'others' to whom they address the writing making, in a sense, projection and a desire to create something wanted the core of writing for M-O. Sometimes this is highly personal and as Dorothy Jerrome (1994) shows, it can take the form of wanting to belong to (i.e. be adopted by) the imagined Archivist, but even this is a

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5 A 'directive' is the local term used for the two sides of A4 on which the topic that the M-OA is gathering observations is described. It is not a questionnaire or a survey, more a set of themes and cues to get the writers thinking around a topic. On joining the panel it is explained that the Archive is interested in personal life and autobiographical writing, not the observation of others. Writers are encouraged to ramble around a topic if it seems relevant to them and to ignore themes on which they have nothing to say or which seem irrelevant. Most, however, make a fair effort to relate to most of the issues raised in any directive. Responses vary from one to over twenty pages, but there is a fairly consistent response rate of 50-70% from a panel currently numbering about 550 people.

6 Recently commissioned directives include ones on education, personal hygiene, the pace of life, shopping and the perception and treatment in the press of environmental issues.
form of the more general social desire to be connected to others, to be part of society, to represent and shape that society. By joining M-O the writers readily cast themselves as the people's representatives, and it is this obligation or desire to communicate and reveal the detail of ordinary life as something socially and historically important which frames the writing in a disciplined way - even if the content is individual and idiosyncratic. Inevitably self indulgent elements are discernible but, taken as a whole, the writing is neither the rant and rambling of the self-centred, nor the lifeline of the lonely, but an address to and on the behalf of some notion of society. The 'other' is important for the writer, whether that other is a concretely imagined archivist, or a more abstractly imagined researcher (present or future) or, more broadly, simply 'posterity'.

The writer discovers aspects of themselves in the act of writing, the researcher and the staff find new ideas and confirmation of old ones and all the time, throughout the writing and the reading, there are concurrent and cross-cutting relationships which may be best described as a form of transference. The M-O writers transfer their feelings, expectations, desires and images onto the Archive and its staff or the hypothetical researcher, whilst the researchers and staff, in turn, develop a form of transference or counter transference onto the writers and the Archive. These processes of transference, counter transference and projection which surround the processes of writing for, working in and working on material in the Archive form a medium through which the research is conducted: they focus the researcher's mind on what is created by the research rather than just on what is found and revive the question of how much ideas are shared or created. By giving to what might seem like a void the writers create a body of material or the basis of a group feeling from which others (the researchers) draw and formulate later thoughts. This is a key process: it implies an acceptance of oneself as one among many, a willingness to merge and a raw form of collective consciousness. In a sense all archives embody this notion of a group-over-time or a non face-to-face relationship and the very concept of documentary evidence depends on a belief in the capacity of later generations to access the thoughts and feelings of earlier generations (Platt 1981). They embody an optimism about the future, that there will be people to find the stored artefacts or records useful, and that some of the questions which future generations might be interested in might be answerable by some of the evidence preserved.

When psychoanalysts refer to transference within a clinical setting, or to the processes of projective identification on which it depends, they are referring to the way that feelings, wishes, desires and fears (mostly unconscious) which belong to one person influence that person's perception and experience of another. Therapists assume, first, that there is a compulsion for early experiences, especially traumatic ones, to be repeated and second, that if they make themselves utterly reliable, anonymous and screen-like as possible, in due course the patients will produce material which can then be analysed and work on a cure can proceed. This is transference and without it psychoanalytical work, that is work on the inner world, is impossible. Countertransference is the counterpart of transference, the same sort of imputations and projections operate, only from analyst to analysand. Analysts expect transference and countertransference to occur and attend carefully to the feelings produced in themselves by their analysands, for this is their data. Thus transference and its companion, countertransference are the preconditions for the production of material on which the patient and therapist can jointly work.
But to return to the problem with which I started, the difficulty of giving credit and recognition to individuals whose names I did not know and the relationship between this anonymity and the richness of the M-O data, the meaning of representativeness and the sharedness of cognition. As I struggled to resolve the dilemma of how to acknowledge the anonymous M-O writers I began to realise that the M-O panel, the archive, the archivists and the researchers might comprise or function as a 'transitional object or zone' (Winnicott 1951) and, as such, produce or release the creative energy of both the M-O writers and the researchers who used the archive. A fuzzy, imagined, potential space between these various sets of people the Archive, serves in the same way as the transitional objects (the teddy bears or blankets which are precious and have been imbued by the infant with the ability to provide comfort). In Winnicott’s account of psychological development the experience of relationship precedes that of the self, but is not just a stage of moving from psychological dependence to independence, but the basis of creative capacity for the rest of life. Acquiring that crucial and separate sense of self demanded a mother who was willing to go along with the infants’ fantasy that they themselves had created whatever it was that they wanted (e.g. the breast). As described by Winnicott this collusion or willingness not to force reality (that the mother had in fact anticipated the infant’s need) on the child became an indeterminate space or zone between two people which had the capacity to facilitate growth because finding and creating were blurred. At a later stage this space might be symbolised by a physical object like a blanket or teddy bear which, in turn, could be used to provide comfort, courage or power. By the end of his long career Winnicott extended the argument and proposed that transitional objects were a template for cultural experience more generally (Winnicott 1971) and that to enjoy art, music or other forms of culture individuals had to be able to enter and stay for a period in those places or transitional zones where creating and finding were indistinguishable. This broader interpretation of transitional objects has recently become popular as a way of explaining phenomena as diverse as the appeal of television (Silverstone 1994), various consumer goods (Young 1989) and school subjects (Shaw 1995). Thus to view the M-OA as a transitional object or zone where researchers and M-O writers meet for their mutual and joint uses, where the indeterminacy of M-O both releases creative thought and stores the representative experience, fits in with the psychoanalytical and reflexive turn in social theory (Giddens 1990). It achieves this because, structurally and psychologically, it is composed of several sets of co-ordinated relationships: individual writer to the M-OA, M-OA to writer, archive staff to the writer and to the academic community, individual researcher to individual M-O writer or to the panel of writers as a whole: in each instance each party depends on imagining the others and the whole as both a source and a container of thoughts.

At this point a short detour to discuss a paper describing how thoughts are a form of emotional experience which arise and exist in the space between people may be helpful. Drawing heavily on Wilfrid Bion’s (1961) distinction between work groups and basic assumption groups, David Armstrong (1991) argues that while individuals may voice thoughts, they do not own them. Indeed, if thoughts
can be said to belong anywhere it is to institutions or groups as much as to individuals and, to illustrate, he tells a story about a tree in some school grounds which the gardener thought should be felled but the headmaster, whose living room view was dominated by the tree, disagreed and thought it added to the feel of the place. Although the dispute may seem just a matter of opinion, Armstrong uses it to demonstrate that the various thoughts about the tree belonged to the school rather than to any individual and that who actually realises or articulates a thought is often simply a matter of time and place. Rather like being moved to speak at a Quaker meeting, what is crucial is that individuals 'receive, formulate and give back something that is there, which is not of oneself alone, which is not bounded by one's own physical or mental skin' and do not falsely claim ownership, for if they do that all that happens is that they redraw the boundary around an essentially shared emotional experience and deny what is truly 'in-between'. A similar dispute to the one described by Armstrong was the fairly public disagreement between the Prince of Wales and his father over the latter's decision to fell a line of ancient oaks in the Great Park at Windsor Castle and plant some other trees to commemorate himself. The ideas at stake did not belong to Prince Philip, his son or the other residents of Windsor who objected, but were views voiced by all those who felt moved to speak on behalf of themselves and others, i.e. to be 'representative'. The key point is not that anyone is necessarily being arrogant when they insist on a thought being 'theirs', but that thoughts do not come ready made and need to be attended to, apprehended and interpreted, rather like dreams. As 'proto thoughts' or 'thoughts in the finding', they are often far removed from formulated thought and are more like stages in a series of transformations which lead to thought.

Accordingly, Armstrong reminds the reader that in some societies dreams are viewed as prophecies relevant for the whole society, not just the dreamer, and that the dreamer might be more a medium than an owner. Though this view of dreams differs markedly from the way in which they are treated in classical psychoanalysis (where significance is tied to the unique associations and details of an individual's biography), Armstrong explains how he was inspired to write the paper by the 'Social Dreaming Conferences' (Lawrence, 1991) which had as their aim the mobilisation of shared experiences and vision. Apparently ignorant of the continued existence of M-O, Armstrong quotes the conference organiser's speculation about the research potential of 'some mass-observation-like study of dreams in the UK at different points in time?'. In fact, not only were dreams collected in the first 1930's ⁸ phase of M-O but they were again collected in the early 1990s. Armstrong's paper nevertheless suggests a radical view of the M-O writers as a medium for the representative social experience making available and present something which is not quite visible, but which affects the

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⁸ Prior to the outbreak of war in 1939 the Home Office was worried that it might have to deal with mass hysteria and this may have prompted M-O, by then co-opted by the Home Office, to request M-O writers to record their anxiety or 'bad' dreams just before the outbreak of war and then again just afterwards. A preliminary overview of the first (July) batch of dreams was completed by a psychiatrist and a draft of this, plus some correspondence, survives. The October dreams are not discussed and the project appears to have been abandoned. Yet when the Jungian analyst Andrew Samuels and I looked at them we felt anxious about the ethics of attempting to complete it: we assumed that the psychiatrist was unlikely to still be alive, but was it stealing if we took over the project?
whole society. In this it is quite close to the case made by Mary Douglas (1987) that it is latent groups within institutions which ultimately govern what can and cannot be thought.

FROM REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE TO REPRESENTATIVE EXPERIENCE

The conventional meaning of representativeness is based on the theory of sampling and has as its goal the accurate matching of the socio-demographic characteristics in the sample to that of the general population, and it forms the basis of a model of research in which prediction and generalisation are deemed possible. Less dominant in sociology than it once was in other disciplines, like anthropology, representativeness is less of a problem and there is more stress on understanding, grasping meaning and whether a particular case is ‘telling’ (Mitchell 1984), that is, whether it allows the researcher to make more less insightful interpretations. What is important to anthropologists is not so much procedure or mechanical rules, but intelligent and plausible interpretation.

Because of the time at which Dawe's article on the representative experience was written much of the discussion may seem dated to today's readers more familiar with reflexive sociology and more mistrustful of empiricism. Such readers may also recognise a degree of disappointment with the institutions of representative democracy which may well motivate the M-O writers to contribute and to support alternative ways of ‘being heard’. As Dawe describes it, the representative experience goes beyond the particular, localised and intersubjective experience and ‘articulates the connection between the latter and major currents of social and political concern; between the personal trouble and the public issue ... To have any impact on social, political or any other form of public thought and action, the particular must stand for the personal’ (Dawe 1973:35). The argument is dense and continues themes established in an earlier paper tracing the two dominant traditions in sociological thought (Dawe 1970), but in this later paper the focus is on where landmark or representative experiences rise above personal experience as a way of exploring the link between the aesthetic and the transformative potential of both sociology and life in general.

More than just a personal epiphany or average experience, the representative experience is evocative, it is infused with value because thought and feeling are not dissociated, it moves people and makes them aware of their common humanity. Dawe claims that representative experiences do not ‘simply reproduce and reaffirm already known, understood and fixed experience (but by enabling) us to make sense of a multitude of inchoate feelings and responses, (they) extend our experience’. Dawe was aware of how easily an 'experiential' approach could degenerate into an individualistic subjectivism and of the potential for confusion around the demand to 'own' values whilst deflecting criticisms about bias, but his main point was that explanation boils down to 'making sense of experience by means of general concepts taken to be representative of that experience'. Affirming the aesthetic, imaginative tradition, he shows how personal experience becomes representative
experience when it has been generalised in terms which can articulate 'thousands of personal realities' in many times and places.

An example of the representative experience mobilised or revealed through M-O is television and the way it is commented upon in the day diaries occasionally collected by M-O. A day diary has no set format, it is not a time-budget diary, but writers are asked to record their activities, observations and feelings for one specified day. Of course, these diaries vary enormously, but in between the lists of everyday activities like washing, cooking, listening to the birds, dealing with partners and children, are other events which have stuck in the writers' mind and were important enough to write down. Sometimes this might just be the weather, though often it was a public event or something on television, but whenever an event is repeatedly and spontaneously mentioned by writers from all over the country one can be pretty sure that it is emotionally important. Dates for day diaries are chosen arbitrarily and this one (13.3.92) happened to fall in the middle of the four week campaign running up to the 1992 General Election, by which time most of the M-O panel were heartily sick of both the election and politicians. The extensive media coverage was widely resented and regarded as intrusive: for television, as Silverstone (1994) has shown, is widely felt to be 'ours', not 'theirs'. When it worked 'for' the M-O writers it was appreciated; when it did not it was resented. As one observer commented 'Racism is bad, the law says, so why isn't 'politicianism' as bad? I do not want to have to hate people of a certain political persuasion'.

Overall television was used freely by the M-O writers to tell of their own experience and illustrate or re-present the representative experience. For example, the film Educating Rita, based on the experiences of a mature woman student returning to education was somehow squeezed into the schedules. Much commented on, this film was owned and identified with as a representative experience in the way that the electoral politics were not. One woman wrote of how it had been a normal, cheerful, busy day until she watched that film with her husband:

"...he finds lots to laugh at - and I am engulfed with hurt and envy - a howling pain from years and years back. Like Rita I wanted to become educated, to get a degree, to be recognised, only there was not an Open University - and then I married, had children: when I was 40 and had something like time, then there was only degree by correspondence course from London University, and I found that I hadn't the ability to study Old English (Beowulf in the original) and Phonetics (of all things) from the printed page on my own. I was 53, I applied to Lancaster University to become a mature student, but they refused me. I felt so denied and finding myself marrying a University lecturer made me feel quite split - I maybe had something? But I was plunged among Ph.D.s, let alone B.Sc.'s and felt more inadequate than ever. Rita bouncing up through her studies made me feel both envious and even more inadequate because I hadn't her determination, bounce, grit. So I felt really hit in the stomach.

11.30. However when the film finished I had put the lid on 'me' because John forthwith began explaining about a row that had evolved at the meeting he had been at - him being hurt is my immediate hurt so I had to shelve the
past - and listen to the who and what and why, all very unexpected and discomfiting. So it was well past midnight by the time I trailed off to bed."

This is only one account but, along with coverage of the election campaign, *Educating Rita* was what many of the M-O writers chose to mention in their day diaries. Watching the film had been evocative experience and those who then wrote about it transformed it into a representative experience. Meaning is always context-dependent and if we want to understand it then we need methods which give us some of this context, as the M-O writing does, rather than those which simply gather answers to questions or give blow-by-blow accounts of behaviour.

A feature of M-O is its capacity to reveal or produce collective representations of society. It may even operate as a sort of focus group, offering a line to shared views or, perhaps, as a series of filters where the writers, the imagined archive, the researchers (another layer of writers) and the readers all play a part. When Raymond Williams (1979) wrote that cohorts of writers around the age of thirty might be especially sensitive to and able to articulate the broad sentiments or 'structure of feeling' of the period in which they lived he was possibly referring to the same process that enables the M-O contributors to access and relay the representative experience in their writing. Based in part on a process of projective identification, and intrinsically intersubjective, the representative experience only appears in a relationship based or social setting which is emotionally 'owned' by a number of people. Rather like the apocryphal story or the urban myth, representative experiences are appropriated and re-appropriated because they tell an emotional or poetic truth. They condense meaning to be taken up and used for personal ends by individual members of the community. Oral historians have long been alert to the potency and significance of stories which are told 'as if they had happened to the narrator, perhaps because they express more vividly than the narrator feels able some comparable experience, or because the experience has been internalised on a scale which makes the issue of who it really happened to relatively unimportant' (Thompson 1978).

**CONCLUSION**

Paradoxically, the problems of citation, anonymity and intellectual property with which I started are closely tied to those of representation where I end. The M-O writers are not 'subjects' or 'data' or 'patients', their writing is not 'a response' or 'clinical material', the researchers and archivists are not therapists; the writings and the research are communications grounded in everyday life, the writers, the archive staff and the researchers are peers and some of what they collectively produce may be regarded as examples of the representative experience. The anonymity which makes it difficult for researchers to cite the contributors to M-O, to express gratitude or feel confident that they have treated them with sufficient respect, is the other side of the coin which enables the M-O to deliver such rich material and is inseparable from the social and emotional bases of thought. Examining the process of researching in the M-OA offers more than an opportunity to repeat the familiar points that
knowledge is socially constructed, that 'the truth' is not simply 'out there' to be apprehended, that researchers are part of this construction process and that everyday understandings of the social world can be as sophisticated as those of any professional sociologist: it obliges researchers to go beyond intoning that research is a construction too and think about research in terms of the feeling states which underpin it as a creative, collective project.

The quasi-group or transitional zone aspect of M-O evokes intense emotional responses in both researchers and writers and from these states flow new thoughts and ideas. Feelings and intellect are not discrete, but depend upon the other, and the ideas which are the kernel of 'research' are triggered by feelings which are engendered by the process of research, including the relationships embedded and embodied in it. Not surprisingly research which is participatory and non-hierarchical produces a different range of feelings from research which is distanced and hierarchical and leads to different insights and ideas, especially those associated with representative experiences.

Many of the incidental themes touched on in this paper, such as reflexivity in sociology, the importance of attending to the researcher as a research tool, even the role of the unconscious, have earned a place in contemporary methodological discussions which, thankfully, is more tolerant of diversity and mixing quantitative and qualitative approaches than it was in the early years of M-O. It is easier now to champion the benefits of working with M-O, and especially its capacity to jump-start researchers out of methodological ruts and trigger new trains of thought. In this case the trail has led from the question of who owns ideas to where they located, from criticisms of M-O as insufficiently representative to the representative experience and from an archive as a collection of papers to a transitional object which underwrites creativity in both contributors and researchers: all of which issues are important both for M-O and the broader project of the sociology of everyday life of which it is part.


