A Role for Attention  
in analysing data

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# Conjecture(s)

#### Conjecture

A useful way to begin analysis of interview transcripts or observational videos, audios and transcripts is to ask yourself

What would I have to be attending to in order to behave the way I am interpreting these subjects to be behaving? How would I be attending?

What is available to some one who is attending in this way?

#### Comment

I cannot know what someone else is attending to as they may be attending to several things at once and in different ways. However I do know that if we are attending to different things, or attending differently to the same ‘thing’, our communication is going to be impoverished at best.

Ways of attending include

Gazing (holding wholes)

Discerning Details

Recognising Relationships (in the particular situation)

Perceiving Properties as being instantiated

Reasoning on the basis of agreed properties

Notice that Mathematical Modelling calls upon these different ways of attending.

Notice that a shift from *recognising relationships* in the particular to *perceiving properties* as being instantiated is a move to “seeing the general through the particular”; and then “seeing the particular in the general”.

Notice that mathematical abstraction involves *perceiving properties* that may be instantiated as axioms or assumptions on which to base reasoning (hence abstract t group theory, algebra, topology etc.) as well as modelling.

#### Conjecture

Many different theoretical frames are little more than an alternative specialised vocabulary for discerning what people are attending to and in what way.

#### Conjecture

The more precisely someone specifies what they notice, what they discern in something that has been declared to be *data*, the more we know about what that person is sensitised to notice.

#### Wild Conjecture

The ratio of the precision of what is discerned to what the person is sensitised to notice is constant.

# Some Distinctions

Stressing & Ignoring: “to express is to over stress” (some aspects and consequently to ignore others)

This is the basis for generalisation (Gattegno)

I am sensitised to notice some ‘things’, some aspects or features.

This is why it is useful to try to adumbrate, to bring to articulation your own assumptions and interests before embarking on data collection.

What I am sensitised to notice is what strikes me, what I attend to.

#### Traps

Listening to & Listening for; Watching what & Watching for

Of course I am always listening for and watching for in some sense, because what I notice, what comes to my attention, what I discern, is based on what I am sensitised to, what I have previously discerned.

Accounting for & Giving Accounts of

*Accounting for* what is discerned means providing explanations, making judgements etc.

If the *account of* the data is intermingled with *accounting for*, it is impossible for a reader to gauge whether alternative readings or interpretations might be possible.

I use *account of* to refer to a description which is stripped as much as possible of interpretations, of emotive, judgemental and technical terms, so that someone else who was present or who has been present in similar circumstances, can readily recognise the incident being described, whereas when *accounting for* is intermingled, this may not be so easy, as there may be alternative readings or interpretations..

### The Value of multiple even contradictory interpretations or readings

For example, “Sleep is to the hunter a excitement is to students” (Shah)

Sleep is a necessary preparation for a long period of intense concentration, and excitement prepares the student to embark on new experience; but also

Sleep is what makes the hunter miss the prey, and excitement can divert student attention away from what is available to be learned.

For example, “Wounds are to a patient as assessment is to students” (Mason)

Wounds are inflicted upon a patient and have to be endured; assessment is an imposition, a probe into their inner life and has to be endured.

How well a patient responds to a wound is a measure of the health of the patient; how well a student responds to inflicted assessment probes is a measure of their appreciation and comprehension (their ‘understanding’).

By having contradictory interpretations some of the complexity of human existence and human experience is maintained. Proposing a single interpretation implies a simplistic view of human experience.

Consequently it helps to seek multiple interpretations of other peoples’ actions or behaviour.