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Practices of attention, possibilities for care: Making situations matter in food safety inspection

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Abstract

In this paper we explore how attention and care are related in practice, as encountered in our ethnographic fieldwork on food safety inspection in the UK. Noting that there is a tendency to conceptually conflate the two activities within recent literatures, we tease apart the attention and care of inspection to propose that attention offers the conditions of possibility for care, and that its quality can shape that care in significant ways. Attention in this account does not involve simply a visual culture of surveillance, but includes the diverse range of sensory, bodily engagements through which the situations of animal and food production are made to matter. We explore how three aspects of this version of attention – ecological, economic, and educational – interact at a moment of significant regulatory change to leave key methods of supporting and improving the situations of food businesses vulnerable and difficult to sustain. We conclude by reflecting on the general and specific implications of this way of thinking about attention for how care in policy practice is understood, valued, and protected.

Keywords

Care, attention, inspection, food safety, regulation

Introduction

This paper focuses on the relationship between attention and care. That such a relationship exists is well established. In etymological terms, in both English and French, the word attention is derived from the Latin *attendere*, ‘to give heed to’, ‘to stretch towards’, ‘to take care’ (Home-Cook, 2015). In philosophical terms, Bernard Stiegler is only the latest thinker to suggest that ‘a philosophy of care assumes a philosophy of attention’ (Stiegler, 2012: 1). In ethical terms, Joan Tronto (2005), one of the key proponents of the moral theory known as the ‘ethics of care’, has proposed that attentiveness is one of the four ethical elements of care. However, in what follows we consider the connection as not primarily an etymological, philosophical or ethical one, but as a practical matter.

In practice, we propose, attention offers the conditions of possibility for care, with the qualities of that attention shaping care in significant ways. In specifying the relationship between attention and care in this manner, we contribute to the literature on ‘care in practice’ that has emerged from Science and Technology Studies (STS) to influence the social sciences more broadly (e.g. Martin *et al.*, 2015; Mol, 2008; Mol *et al.*, 2010; Pols, 2012). In such work, care is figured as socio-technical tinkering that seeks to improve situations by providing local solutions to the problem of how different goods might coexist in practice (Mol *et al.*, 2010: 13-14): that is, as a ‘tending of the tensions’ between goods (Bingham and Lavau, 2012). By offering a complementary

account of attention as the practices of *attending* through which situations and their tensions are made to matter, we seek to helpfully disentangle activities which have tended to be conceptually conflated. This enables us to better specify how it is that some matters and not others come to prompt thought, hesitation, action, and care (Stengers, 2010).

This version of attention is particularly indebted to the work of Isabelle Stengers (2011: 59; 2005; 2010; 2015), as well as other recent work in philosophy, human geography, situated cognition, and other social sciences on how attention links bodies, cognitions, economies, and cultures (e.g. Ash, 2012; Barnett, 2015; Citton, 2013; Crary, 2001; Crogan and Kinsley, 2012; Hannah, 2013; Hutchins, 1995; Stiegler, 2012; Read, 2014). It is provoked and produced first and foremost though by our experiencing and thinking through of the practices of food safety inspection in the United Kingdom (UK).

Our ethnographic study followed the work of inspection from farm to fork, passing through places such as farms, livestock markets, slaughterhouses, processing factories, cold stores, air and sea ports, restaurants, retail outlets, and food testing laboratories. Over a period of two years and across twenty sites, we work shadowed inspectors with responsibility for delivering official controls of food in the UK: environmental health officers, trading standards officers, official veterinarians, meat hygiene inspectors, food examiners, and port health officers. Rather than a more conventional ethnographic approach – which maintains a methodological commitment to immersion through a continuous presence on one site – immersion in our study involved a sustained (but more mobile) engagement with the highly distributed and often intermittent practices of food safety inspection. These observations were supplemented with semi-structured interviews with a small number of food business operators, industry experts, and policy-

makers.

There is much to learn from the activities of food safety inspectors, about how to better manage the challenges of foodborne infectious disease, about how attention and care operate together in policy practice, but perhaps most urgently about the vulnerability of practices of attention and care to destruction, as Stengers (2010: 18) might say, in the name of Progress. This might seem strange given that responses by the European Union (EU) and UK government to outbreaks of foodborne disease over the last 30 years have delivered progressively more extensive and intensive requirements for official controls of food, notably in relation to the traceability of meat (Bonnaud and Coppalle, 2013; Popper, 2007). However, these same controls have been increasingly and relentlessly construed in some quarters as burdensome on both industry and the public purse (e.g. Hampton, 2005).

As a consequence, in an atmosphere of de-regulation as re-regulation (Tombs, 2015), staff, resources, and expertise are being diverted from established ways of working in favour of a more ‘proportionate’, ‘risk-based’, ‘cost-sharing’ approach that offers a ‘light touch’ to those businesses considered ‘low risk’. Whilst the precise impact of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU on such developments remains unclear, the board of the UK’s Food Standards Agency (FSA) has committed itself to further radical change to food safety regulation, including a likely reduction in the role of both physical inspection and local authorities in enforcing food controls, and the introduction of new forms of third party or self-assessment (Wall, 2016).

Amid such rapid and profound change, our concern is that something important about the practices of food safety inspection is in danger of being lost, with very real consequences for the quality of its outcomes in making complex and potentially lethal

situations matter. It is for this reason that we hope that conceptualising attention as generating the conditions of possibility for care might also be productive in allowing us to add a new kind of reality (Mol *et al.*, 2010) to the activities that we followed, to give them new possibilities to be present (Stengers, 2010) at a moment in which they are at risk. We do so through telling three stories, each staged around a visit to or presence at a food or livestock business, and each exploring a different dimension of the attention of food safety inspection.

In the first story, we focus on the *ecological* dimension of attention, relating how an inspector articulates various modes of attention to generate a patchwork version of the situation of a food business and thereby produce possibilities for care. In the second, we use the frustrations of another inspector with how a visit unfolds to foreground the *economical* dimension of attention, which gains significance as regulatory changes touch down in inspection practice. In the third story, we highlight the significance of an *educational* dimension to the attention of food safety inspection by relating the efforts of an inspector to maintain a longstanding commitment to cultivating the attentional skills of others in making situations matter. To conclude, we reflect on the implications of our version of attention – and the relations between its ecological, economical and educational dimensions – for how care in (policy) practice is understood, valued and protected.

The ecology of attention

‘They only do about 400 birds a day here. It’s not many, but they have to have a vet every day,’ explains Maria, a contracted official veterinarian (OV) conducting ante- and post-mortem inspection in a small Halal poultry butchery. Attendance is key to current

regimes of assuring food safety in the UK. Responsible for enacting EU food and feed law, the UK's Food Standards Agency (FSA), the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and their delivery partners work together through a National Control Plan (FSA *et al.*, 2015) to ensure their key public health objective that 'food produced or sold in the UK is safe to eat' (FSA 2011: 2). The monitoring and enforcement of compliance with food safety regulations relies on hundreds of thousands of inspections each year – of commercial livestock holdings, livestock markets, meat premises, food businesses, and food imports – most of which are conducted by local authorities. For those businesses where animals are slaughtered, attendance by inspectors is permanent, and every carcass is subject to inspection. For other businesses, such as those that rear livestock or prepare food, inspectors make more or less regular visits, the frequency usually being determined through an assessment of risk.

This particular business is one that Maria has worked hard to improve. 'This place was bad,' she tells us. A few years ago, the halal requirement for freshness as 'hotness' (meat that is just slaughtered, which is what many customers want), and the food safety policy requirement for freshness as refrigerated (meat chilled after slaughter) were in conflict at the butchery, threatening the viability of the business. Together, Maria and the manager implemented a new mode of witnessing fresh-ness, whereby customers in the store could watch the process of slaughter and preparation on a CCTV screen (even though the meat would still then be chilled). The manager tells us that if the chickens were still sold 'hot' (in halal terms) 'this place would be crammed with people', but he appreciates that this resolution has allowed his business to keep on operating.

Such activity on the part of the food safety inspector is, we propose, an example of care

in policy practice in the terms described above; a tending of the tensions generated by different competing goods, such that a situation was improved. But how did Maria come to be in a position to be made to hesitate and think by this situation (Stengers, 2005)? And how did she then have sufficient appreciation of the complexity of that situation to respond care-fully to it?

Understanding the conditions of possibility for this enaction of care involves understanding the specific ways in which the practices of food safety inspection offer ‘due attention’ (Stengers, 2011) to their objects: how they enable the matters of food safety, from pathogens to procedures, to matter. What we learned from shadowing inspectors supports broader moves in the social sciences to consider attention as much more than simply ‘focused mental engagement’ (Davenport and Beck, 2001: 20), and instead as something that is stretched from cognition to bodies, from individuals to cultures, from commodity to economies, from perception to politics (Ash, 2012; Barnett, 2015; Crary, 1999; Hutchins, 1995). We have come to think of the attention that we witnessed in this inspection and others as comprising an ‘ecology of practices’ (Stengers, 2005) defined by *what* aspects of the situations of food safety were attended to, *how* they were attended to, and *where* that attention was extended to, but most of all the way that these elements were *articulated* or patched together. All of which makes the ‘ecology of attention’ that we encountered far more bodily, sensory, and more-than-human than in Citton (2013) and Read’s (2014) earlier coinage of the term.

On Maria’s arrival in the cramped office provided at the butchery for the official veterinarian on duty, it is the paperwork that has travelled from the farm with the chickens that are to be slaughtered today that she examines first. As specified by EU traceability requirements, this short document records the ‘food chain information’ of

the consignment: the flock's breed, production conditions, health, and veterinary treatments. This is just one of the many forms of records and marks to which inspectors pay attention, not just those on and about meat, but also staff qualifications and business certifications.

Pinned to the office wall beside Maria is a printed list of the butchery's staff, annotated with hand-written descriptions: 'moustache', 'always smiling', 'small man with limp'. This aide-memoire is associated with her assessment of the different skill sets of the employees (in the evisceration room, she admires one worker with an uncanny ability to detect diseased flesh as 'a champion', but she trusts the skill of the others less). Inspectors' attention to people and their practices predominantly includes staff and managers, but often also the customers or consumers.

As Maria moves through the butchery on her way outside to inspect the chickens, she pushes at some loose slats in the wall and picks at chipped paintwork with her fingernail. She had included them on a list of required repairs, and is unimpressed by the quality of this work. 'This structural work makes it hard to clean,' she grumbles. In attending to the infrastructure of food businesses, inspectors address equipment and machinery, buildings and fittings, protective clothing, work surfaces, and so forth.

Over the next few hours, Maria supervises the killing line. Initially, in the lairage, she visually inspects the chickens that were delivered earlier than morning. 'Inspectors from other places have never seen anything like this,' she says. 'Nobody else has chickens running around. Usually they just arrive in crates.' Next, she witnesses the commencement of the slaughter, from the slitting of the bird's throat and the draining of

its blood, to the scalding and de-feathering of the carcass. Finally, she works in the evisceration room, checking the carcasses before and after evisceration. As they arrive from the killing room, she takes a carcass in each hand, feels their weights and observes their size and shape (Figure 1). Difference, she explains, may be suggestive of disease. For inspectors, the animals and/or meat of food businesses may require attention prior to, during, and/or after slaughter.



Figure 1. Maria inspects carcasses prior to evisceration. Source: Authors.

Maria has paid attention, then, to at least four different aspects of the business: its records and marks, its people and practices, its infrastructure, and its animals and/or meat; a common distribution that we observed in inspections throughout the food chain. Her inspection was not, however, simply multiple in its *objects* of attention, but involved different *modes* of attention. Her inspection was a dynamic, inter-sensorial, bodily engagement with her surroundings (see also Home-Cook, 2015) that far exceeded the ocularity suggested by the term's etymological origins. Much as Maria tested the weight of carcasses in her hands to better know them, elsewhere we witnessed

inspectors squeezing mouse droppings for freshness, heard about the importance of smell in detecting an unhealthy carcass on a factory line, and learnt (with some horror) about port health officers who microwave and then taste meat as part of their inspection. The attention of inspection is less a matter of spectating – either in the sense of being solely a visual experience or of being somehow outside of the action – and more like the ‘visit’, as figured by Serres (2008); an active and bodily exploration of a complex knot of activity (Bingham and Lavau, 2012).

Maria’s attention was also *extended* beyond what was straightforwardly present at the butchery, to include other elements that enter the mix from beyond the site: the supplier of the live chickens being slaughtered and sold today (‘it’s a weak link in the system’), the absent presence of the ‘public health’ that she and her colleagues are ultimately tasked with securing (see also Bukowski *et al.*, 2012; Law, 2010), and factors shaping the current state of the business (changing economic pressures, what counts as ‘fresh’ for halal meat, cultural politics around gender, new inspection priorities for the local council, refreshed regulatory requirements from the FSA). All of these are relevant to food safety at the butchery as she sees it. Her job is to be attentive to – that is, to give presence to – the butchery as an entanglement of diverse agencies, bodies, species, pressures, flows, issues, decisions, technologies.

Doing so requires *articulating* all that her investigations have brought to her attention. The extensive list of factors that Maria takes into account in her assessment of the butchery do not remain separate as she makes her judgment regarding whether the food that it produces is likely safe to eat, despite the guidance and structure of the forms that she has to complete encouraging exactly that. Rather, performing a food safety ‘health check’ on this business involves Maria patching together a composite picture from the

variety of knowledges that she has generated. She checks the food chain information records concerning the butchery's sourcing practices against the account provided by the manager. She checks whether the log of freezer temperatures provided is realistic given what she knows about the employees' practices.

All the time she bears in mind that meat is always a matter of compromise, the outcome of how the different things expected of it – the heterogenous 'goods' of meat – are ordered (Bingham and Lavau, 2012). The manager of this butchery is seeking 'to keep multiple evaluative principles in play and exploit the resulting forces of their interplay' as Stark (2009: 15) defines the practice of entrepreneurship. The manager works between the economic goods of profit, the cultural goods of providing fresh halal meat to his customers, and the legal goods of ensuring that his premises meet food safety standards. Key to Maria's work is appreciating this range of goods that are demanded of food, and the vital coordination work through which those demands can be held together, such that meat as a matter of compromise does not become compromised matter at the centre of a disease outbreak (see also Hinchliffe *et al.* 2016).

Far from attention as simply measuring against a set of prescribed criteria, what we have found here and in other visits is what Stengers (2015: 62) refers to as the art of paying attention: 'something that creates an obligation to imagine, to check, to envisage, consequences that bring into play connections between what we are in the habit of keeping separate'. The particular ecology of attention that Maria has cultivated as a food safety inspector, the specific articulation work through which she is made to think, feel, hesitate, and act, is what offers the potential for change in, or in this case care for, the situations for which she is responsible (Haraway, 1988; Stengers, 2010).

The economy of attention

If we learned from the inspectors that we shadowed that making the matters of food business available for care depends in no small part on an ecology of practices of attention, we also learned of significant losses of staff and expertise. Inspectors spoke of being expected to make more visits, spread over larger areas, in shorter periods, and pushing against the limits of their knowledge. Such pressures are in large part the consequence of the politically-motivated, business-friendly ‘Better Regulation’ agenda, accelerated by an age of ‘austerity’ in the UK. Usually described as a shift to ‘proportionate’ or ‘risk-based’ regulation (Bukowski *et al.*, 2012; Hampton, 2005; Rothstein *et al.*, 2013), or more critically as ‘regulation without enforcement’ (Tombs, 2015), these regulatory changes have meant a long term downward trend in food safety enforcement activity, from inspections to prosecutions. For inspectors, this was unsurprisingly a matter of concern, with the quality of inspection as well as jobs felt to be at risk. In this section, we explore these moves and the anxieties they raise as aspects of a shifting *economy* of attention around food safety inspection, and how such shifts interfere in both more and less obvious ways with the ecology of attention that patterns inspectors’ work.

In addressing the amounts, distributions and frequencies of attention, we find connections with work on economies of attention that have been fundamental to the recent resurgence of scholarship on attention in the social sciences (e.g Crogan and Kinsley, 2012; Hannah, 2013; Stiegler, 2012). Whilst that work has tended to focus on the ‘limited’ character of attention (either as scarce or impoverished) – unsurprisingly, given it is largely a commentary on cognitive capitalism and consumption in hyper-

connected, information-saturated and distraction-haunted digital environments – we are seeking to do something slightly different here.

Having already proposed that there is more to attention than considering it simply in terms of more or less, or presence or absence (see also Barnett (2015)), it is not a diminishment of inspectors' attention that we identify in what follows, but how the ecology and economy of their practices of attention are related and with what consequences for their ability to care for the situations of food businesses. We explore these relations through an account of a series of frustrations expressed by Jack, a trading standards officer with responsibility for monitoring animal health, as he inspects the premises of a livestock dealer.

Jack expresses the first of these frustrations – which are at once specific to this inspection and resonant with what we witnessed during many others – on our way to the farm. Reflecting on the morning's visit to a livestock auction at which he was forced to work at the limits of his formal expertise, he sighs, 'There's no vet support anymore due to cutbacks.' This is one sense in which changes in the economy of inspectors' attention may compromise the ecology of that attention. In this case, a reduction in the *resourcing* of inspection results in a loss of the expertise necessary to bring certain matters to attention. Jack underlines that this loss of resourcing is not accompanied by an equivalent reduction in the regulatory responsibilities of his team. Indeed, the regulatory requirements that inspections deliver on continue to proliferate: 'I have to carry so much paperwork. There's so much regulation, I can't remember it all'. Changes in the *amount* of regulation meant that tales of inspectors being 'stretched' were familiar during our research (see also Bingham and Lavau, 2012; Hinchliffe *et al.*, 2016).

As we arrive, Jack explains that a high level of animal movements means that this farm is in a high risk category and must as a consequence be more frequently attended. He conducts his inspection clutching a clipboard with a Livestock Premises Inspection form, which directs how and to what he gives his attention: a long checklist of farm records and a shorter checklist for the field inspection of farm animals and facilities (see Gill, this volume, for a similar observation in other surveying practices). Each item on the checklist is linked to legislative requirements. The time that Jack dedicates to inspecting the farm and inspecting the records roughly corresponds to the respective space dedicated to them on the form. The form is a material technology of attention: it translates and condenses policy requirements and revisions into specific observations, directing where and how Jack should distribute his attention during the inspection.

In the dim light of the first shed, there are about a dozen cattle, lying or standing on a fresh bed of hay. ‘The animals look contented. They’re chewing their cud. They’ve got fresh straw,’ Jack comments, his pen hovering over the checklist item ‘sufficient dry lying area for all livestock’. The last two sheds are more open and bright. Now it is obvious that the knees of the cattle are caked in mud and that the bedding has just been dumped on top of a thick layer of muck. ‘They have thrown straw on top because we’re coming,’ Jack surmises. So whilst Arthur, the owner, is technically compliant on the count of providing fresh bedding for his livestock, Jack is becoming less confident in his animal husbandry. He wants to investigate further but the owner is absent today and, due to the increasing regulatory requirements for traceability, Jack must leave plenty of time for inspecting the farm’s records.

Whether shadowing inspectors on other farms, in slaughterhouses, in restaurants or at ports, this obligation to direct a considerable proportion of their attention to records and

marks was a constant (see also Bonnaud and Coppalle, 2013; Singleton, 2012). This shift in the *distribution* of their attention is largely a result of EU regulatory requirements for traceability (Bonnaud and Coppalle, 2013; Popper, 2007; Singleton, 2012). To be safe, meat must now be an ‘informed’ material (Bingham and Lavau, 2012; Donaldson, 2007), accompanied by records that must be inspected at various points of the food chain, records of animal identity and health, animal movements, animal husbandry, the handling and movement of meat, and the organisations involved (Bonnaud and Coppalle, 2013; Singleton, 2010; 2012).

Thus directed by his training and his form, Jack reluctantly returns to the farmhouse for the records inspection. Mike, who is employed to enter cattle movement data, launches his MS Access database. By his own admission, he knows nothing of the farm outside this room and can’t answer Jack’s outstanding questions from the field inspection. But he certainly knows the database and for the next two hours he confidently responds to Jack’s queries: using ear tag numbers to trace animal records; displaying records for cattle currently on site; demonstrating data entry for births; retrieving notes on tuberculosis testing and fallen stock. Jack asks to see the farm assurance certificates, the veterinary medical records, the cattle passports, moving through his long checklist of regulatory requirements for record-keeping, making notes for his final report, clearly more satisfied than he was with the field inspection.

Jack’s frustration with leaving the field for the office was not a judgement on the value of examining such records. His concern was that as the list of record checks lengthens, the shifting *balance* of the economy of attention means there is necessarily less time for the inspector to attend to the other sources and signs of hazard that are not formalized or represented as documents, data or marks. For Jack, this meant less time for following

up on the provision of fresh bedding for livestock, and thereby assessing the farmer's competency in animal husbandry. For an environmental health officer, this might mean less time for checking for evidence of cross-contamination in a restaurant kitchen:

‘If you're focussing too much on the documentation side of things, you can perhaps focus on that at the expense of some of the food safety hazards on the premises, cross contamination areas and stuff like that. It pushes us to really focus on that and I'd prefer it to be more of a practical inspection.’ (Interview BF004)

It is not the attention to records and marks itself that is the issue, but the marginalisation (whether intentional or not) of other techniques, styles and objects of inspection in a world in which potential objects of attention have proliferated (Crogan and Kinsley, 2012).

More worryingly, this shift in the economy of attention might not just be a matter of *balance*, but a *hierarchisation* in which the quality of the record-keeping of a food business is conflated with or taken as a surrogate for the quality of animal or food handling practices (see also Singleton, 2012). Certainly for Jack, there was concern that the strong performance in the long list of regulatory requirements for record-keeping somewhat masked the intimations from the field inspection that Arthur was neither a competent nor trustworthy stockman. Similarly, a poultry vet, who used to work as an auditor, expressed his dismay at the direction that compliance monitoring has taken:

‘So as long as the farmer's written down the temperatures in the houses, as long as he's written down the water consumption, it means that somehow or other

he's a better farmer... And the auditors will fail somebody if they haven't got the right paperwork.' (Interview BF003)

For these inspectors, there are clear concerns that too much emphasis on records could disrupt a fragile ecology of food safety inspection practices to which they are committed, and redefine 'good' practice for businesses in ways they find worrying.

Jack drafts his final report, highlighting the excellent performance in most aspects of record keeping, identifying several contraventions from the field inspection, and noting unanswered questions about livestock and infrastructure. He ticks most of the boxes on the inspection form's checklist as compliant. Jack's report on these livestock premises is thus mostly good, whilst highlighting some areas for improvement.

But the final source of frustration for Jack in conducting his inspection is the absence of the owner. In a farm setting, inspection is not a continual process; it is a snapshot, a momentary encounter. For Jack, the owner's absence means that he has an unsatisfactorily partial picture of the situation of the business, but perhaps more importantly that he does not have an opportunity to work with the owner to improve his farming practices. Similar to Maria, Jack understands his role as education as well as enforcement, as assisting businesses to take care of their situations: 'We inspectors support business as well as ensuring compliance.' As we discuss in the next section, for many inspectors the distinction between compliance and competence has become increasingly important, both in their assessment of risk and as they search for ways to leave a legacy of care after the inspection.

The education of attention

In accounts of attention that operate through key tropes of loss, distraction, scarcity, and impoverishment, the education of attention figures as a key act of resistance to and intervention in an attention deficit culture (Crogan and Kinsley, 2012; Hayles, 2007; Stiegler, 2012). For Bernard Stiegler (2012: 3), attention is social as well as individual, something that must be ‘formed’ through the sharing of experience, with the resulting collectively experienced ‘attentional forms’ acting as ‘types of concern, systems of care, of techniques for care of the self and of others’. The last of our three stories on the practices of food safety inspection likewise places the education of attention centre stage. In our case, however, education is not driven by fears of losing the skills of attention, but rather by inspectors seeking to share the arts of attention with food business operators. That is, in addition to directly attending to situations themselves, inspectors demonstrate a commitment to educating food business operators how to do so. The education of attention that we witnessed was an attempt to shape future possibilities for care.

We explore what this means and why it is important through a story of Leonard, an environmental health officer for a local authority, as he inspects a café. ‘We have got a clear mandate to try and assist businesses,’ explains Leonard, ‘whereas I think before, we were seen as enforcers that go out and find bad practice and prosecute for bad practice.’ The possibility and benefits of combining these two modes of regulatory engagement with businesses – assisting and enforcing – are evident as we shadow Leonard’s inspection. Leonard is officially attending this business as part of a broader microbiological sampling survey, but he uses the opportunity to follow up a previous inspection that identified an issue with the temperature control of foods.

In the kitchen, the chef is recording temperatures, one of the requirements of a documented food safety system. The sheet is populated with numbers, so Leonard sees that the business is seemingly compliant with this requirement. Mindful that such numbers are often fabricated, Leonard runs his finger along the sheet, attentive to the variability of the numbers which suggests that they are indeed genuine. However, the successful act of recording temperatures does not convince Leonard that the chef understands the significance and risks of those numbers. So Leonard gently asks questions. ‘Oh yes, I see you monitor the fridges every day. What temperature are you looking for them to be at? What would be a temperature that would alarm you and make you take some further action?’ It is, he explains later, about ‘prompting them to show whether they have got that competency.’

Leonard, like Jack, Maria, and other inspectors that we shadowed, articulated the work of inspection not as closing down non-compliant businesses, but as ‘helping them to improve really’. The expression ‘helping to improve’ signals that these inspectors do not simply seek to make those situations better by changing things themselves, or even by mandating that such changes are immediately made. Their version of care as improvement (Bingham and Lavau, 2012; Mol, 2008; Mol *et al.*, 2010; Pols, 2012) can sometimes take the form of improving the competence of others to improve those situations for themselves, in particular by helping them pay attention.

Achieving this in practice requires the ability to work with the ‘discretion’ that Bridget Hutter (2011:71) argues is critical to the regulatory work of environmental health officers:

‘Their overall approach does not take enforcement of the law to refer simply to legal action; rather it refers to a wide array of informal enforcement techniques

such as education, advice, persuasion and negotiation.’ (see also Wilson *et al.*, 2010).

Thus, in assessing people as compliant on the one hand (and perhaps needing further help in improving their business, like the farmer in our second story), and reliable and competent on the other (and thus less in need of such an intervention), Leonard skilfully shifts between different styles of attention: enforcer and advisor. Sometimes he is firm and demanding, and at other times he coaches and offers advice. Sometimes he is attentive to numbers, and sometimes to comprehension, all the time shaping future possibilities for care.

Such efforts at education are appreciated by some businesses. One meat supplier commented on Leonard’s team, ‘I think they’re very knowledgeable, we definitely benefit from their knowledge and experience. I think our business is better, the integrity of our product is better, because we have the benefit of their input’ (Interview BF002). Leonard himself, meanwhile, identifies this advisory or educative role as of increasing importance in recent times (see also Bukowski *et al.*, 2012). He aligns enforcement with one master (the Food Standards Agency, which is becoming ‘more demanding and prescriptive’) and advising with the other (the local authority that employs him and encourages him to ‘work with businesses’ to improve their performance). A similar distinction was remarked by the meat supplier above: ‘One of them strikes me as an enforcement body and one as a body which is designed to improve the quality, the health status of the food which is being delivered on a local level. One I’ve got immense respect and time for, the other one as it’s being recorded, I won’t describe.’ (Interview BF002)

Leonard and other local authority inspectors invest their time and expertise in educating as well as enforcing attention as their attendance is often irregular on the farms and at the food businesses that they are responsible for regulating. In contrast to other kinds of practitioners of ‘care as improvement’ identified in medical, domestic, agricultural and other settings (e.g. Mol *et al.*, 2010; Singleton, 2010), local authority inspectors are distinguished by their more intermittent and infrequent presence on farms and at food businesses. Unlike Maria and her colleagues, who (for the moment at least) are a constant presence on the killing line of slaughterhouses, unlike nursing staff in a hospital who are presumably just down the hall, unlike a farmer who tends their stock daily, Jack and Leonard only visit or otherwise ‘touch’ most businesses once or twice a year. In the current regulatory environment, this may become even less frequent. How then to maintain their commitment to improvement, when their attention is so fleetingly with that business? How then to continue to care for the situation?

Back in the kitchen, Leonard completes his survey of food preparation and storage, and now takes some samples for a microbiological survey. He selects a yellow board the chef was using earlier for chopping chicken, wipes it with a sterile ‘spongicle’ and seals the sponge in a sterile bag. This sample will be sent to the laboratory for testing, and will contribute to Leonard’s report on this business and its performance of food safety regulations.

Leonard now takes another sample from the yellow chopping board, this time with a cotton stick, which he inserts into a hand-held ATP meter to measure its bacterial content. This first sample gets a reading of 124, which Leonard says is consistent with having just been used. He now demonstrates for the chef the correct use of D10 disinfectant spray, spraying and wiping the board, and then leaving a second layer of

spray to rest for several minutes. Leonard then takes a second sample from the disinfected board, and as we await the reading, he tells the chef that we'll see 'the value of leaving the spray' (Figure 2). The new reading is 11, and Leonard expresses his satisfaction with the result and the demonstration. Later, he explains, 'I don't need to do this, but it's interesting. [The ATP meter] is a good teaching tool. I can show them before and after, and we can discuss it.'



Figure 2. Leonard uses readings of bacterial content on a chopping board to advise a chef on correct disinfectant technique. Source: Authors.

The value of Leonard's demonstration is that it cares for and in absence by *sharing the skills of attention*. Mindful of this rare moment with kitchen staff, he takes the opportunity to teach them how and why to be attentive to their kitchen practices. Advising the chef on how and why a chopping board should be disinfected in a certain way is one of Leonard's many small ways of enabling his actions to leave a legacy of care beyond this visit.

His hope is that by learning to become better versed in the attentive practices in which he is expert, the food business will then generate their own improvements, progressing along the ‘pathway to compliance’ (Bukowski *et al.*, 2012: 2) and becoming more competent in matters of food safety. Rather than simply taking charge of a given situation, he presents staff with the attentional expertise and thus the options to improve by care their own situations, an observation that resonates with Heidegger’s distinction between care as ‘leaping in’ (einspringen) and care as ‘leaping ahead’ (vorausspringen) (Tomkins and Simpson, 2015).

Like Jack and others, Leonard is concerned that current shifts in the economies of attention are compromising inspectors’ ability not only to practice their own ecology of attention, but to share the skills of attention in this advisory and educative style: ‘In my experience that audit approach doesn’t work at every food businesses. You need to have that flexibility to be able to use different inspection techniques.’ Leonard is particularly worried that, whilst the audit-based model of inspecting and enforcing compliance may work for larger businesses, it may be counter-productive in smaller businesses.

These concerns are supported by research commissioned by the FSA on securing compliance (Bukowski *et al.*, 2012; Wilson *et al.*, 2015). As Hutter (2012: 19) observes: ‘[The] technical demands contemporary food laws place on business are increasing and the traditional knowledge providers for large numbers of small and micro businesses in the UK are [environmental health officers] whose numbers are being reduced’. Not only is inspectors’ ability to attend to and care for food safety situations directly being made vulnerable by ongoing changes in the regulatory regime, so too is their capacity to educate businesses in the art of attention and thus leave a legacy of care beyond their visit.

Conclusion

Food safety inspection, as we witnessed it during our research, is about making certain situations, or certain aspects of highly complex situations, matter. One of our intentions in this paper has been to do the same for the inspectors, to make *their* situations and *their* practices matter. Conducting this research at a time when a key government report cast considerable doubt on the ability of a risk-based, records-oriented audit approach to assure food safety – stating that ‘Understanding the complexities of supply chains is much more than maintaining a paper trail’ (Elliot 2014: 20) – it seemed unfortunate to say the least that other practices and modes of inspection that are capable of dealing with such complexities were instead being marginalised. At a moment in which both practitioners and their practices are exposed to dramatic shifts in the regulatory landscape, we have sought to offer them a new kind of reality.

We have done so by considering the work of food safety inspection in terms of attention and care. In shadowing food safety inspectors, it is clear that the philosophical, ethical, and etymological link between attention and care is indeed a practical one as well. Thinking through the productive work being generated by the recently renewed academic focus on both concepts, we have sought to present inspection practices in such a way that they might travel easier and further within that literature. In doing so, we have both contributed a new case of attention and care in policy practice that may be compared to others, and opened up opportunities to link across diverse cases around issues of common concern, such as the role of improvement in care work or the risks of formalisation to practices of attention.

We have storied the methods by which food safety inspectors made situations matter as practices of attention, attention that was the condition of possibility for improving those situations, thought of as care. In the first of our three stories, we described a particular *ecology* of attention, the ways in which a diverse set of active, multi-sensorial, bodily engagements with a business were articulated or patched together to generate a situation that mattered. In the second, we explored how a series of regulatory changes were shifting the *economy* of attention in ways that interfered with the ecology of attention that had hitherto patterned inspectors' work. In our final story, we pursued the implications of such interference for the *education* of attention in others, which had become such a key – if under-acknowledged – aspect of inspectors' commitment to improve the situations they attended. This, we argued, compromises the ability of inspectors to care in and for absence, to create a legacy of care beyond the moment of inspection. We offered these stories not as a way of defending or justifying the ecology of attention that we witnessed during our research, but at the very least to provoke thought and perhaps hesitation about what might be lost if current trends in food safety regulation intensify.

Specifying the attention and care of food safety inspection in this way has allowed us to make two conceptual contributions to current work on attention and care. Firstly, by gently teasing apart attention and care as we encountered them in practice, we have offered a corrective to a tendency whereby attention gets rolled up into or conflated with care (in the literature on care), and care gets rolled up into or conflated with attention (in the literature on attention). In this case at least, we found teasing them apart absolutely necessary to be able to offer a sense of how situations were empowered (Stengers 2010) through practices of attention that prompted thought and generated care-full action. Secondly, our examples of how inspectors make aspects of situations matter that are not

obviously present, and how they share skills of attention such that businesses can care for situations in their absence, indicate there is further rich work to be done exploring the diverse spatio-temporalities of attention and care, and what they suggest for improving situations. Attention, we propose then, deserves further attention.

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