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Thoughts Provoked by Bernard Wolf's Paper

Brunswik introduced the idea of representative design in connection with sampling statistics and directly linked it to sample size, thus making the idea concrete. But the idea, the concept of representative design, goes much further than sampling statistics, although almost no one makes this generalization. It was brought home to me by a student in 1950, who pointed out to me that we should sample variables as well as objects. I thought, YES ! and because in those days I was corresponding with Brunswik I passed the student's remark along to him. Brunswik responded as I did, with an enthusiastic "yes" and some other remarks I no longer remember. But I do remember that he said: "that is a very bright student; hang onto him !"……

It may be a bright idea in principle, but it needs fleshing out. I can't do that here, but one will see immediately that it will require a theory to supply the "variables" to be sampled. We can do that now by referring to Brunswik's most important concept of "distal aim". That is, we can postulate a continuum of that runs from proximal stimulation to distal information. (Notice that Brunswik did NOT say distal "stimulation"). In fact in my current book ms I do postulate such a continuum. I argue that just as we should specify the location of each judgment task on a Task Continuum, we should also specify the location of each judgment task on the Proximal-Distal continuum. Having done that, it should be customary to make a prediction as to the location of the cognitive activity of the subject on the Cognitive Continuum. Disconfirmation of the prediction should be just as interesting as confirmation, and will call for an explanation to be further tested. Location of cognitive activity need not necessarily be a dependent variable. Needless to say this approach will be idiographic. Variation of task locations will of course be planned.

I thank Bernard Wolf for his stimulating remarks