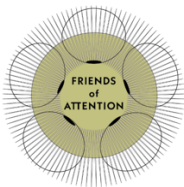


Chat Thread –  
Friends of Attention  
“First Friday” of 7 January 2022  
Planning for the Spring “Attention Labs”  
(led by Marcus Ryan)



14:14:00 From Sal Randolph to Everyone:  
THE Jac Mullen  
14:14:07 From Leonard Nalencz to Everyone:  
Yay! Jac 🥰  
14:17:05 From Leonard Nalencz to Everyone:  
And from Dolven

**FIRST BREAKOUT NOTES: General Curriculum Brainstorm**

14:47:09 From Brad Fox to Everyone:  
Diego, Kristin, Sonali, Emmet, Brad:

Meditation  
Using phones as attentional devices  
taking audio recordings as an attentional act  
using sleep as an attentional practice  
readings should be short but with a big idea  
reading and attention?  
using short literary pieces — poems? — that dramatize attention in granular detail.  
sensual attunement exercises: sit in 3 places and list sensual information — images, sounds, smells...  
thinking about rhythms of attention

14:47:12 From Leonard Nalencz to Everyone:  
Sal, Larry, Eirene, Anthony A., LN  
Entry and exit survey for March week.  
Two themes: attention (as idea and practice) and devices

I think these are both great

“Where were you when IG went down for a day?”

Have you ever participated in an activity where your phone is taken away from you? What was that experience like?

What are connotations of the word “attention”?

ADHD - there is one kind of right attention, you probably don't have it.al,  
Celebrate neurodivergence - different kinds of attention.

What can you pay attention to? What do you like to pay attention to?

Regime of the body in paying attention. What is the role of the classroom?  
Versus playground?

Focus on language of attention in our presentation.

Alternative things kids may say instead of attention: geek out, obsess over.

Blind contour drawing is a great way to assay attention.

14:47:25 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:

From somewhere in Pascal: “All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone”

For the quote—this is why it is difficult to pay attention. It occurs to me—the dialogue of self w/ self that comprises thought is probably not totally possible in a case where we refuse to sit with ourselves in silence. Somehow, the process of learning to attend is also the process of learning to think.

14:48:03 From Julian Chehirian to Everyone:

Justin:

With this age group, potentials of technology as both positive/negative. How devices can play role of distraction but can also play role of attention.

I would say that thinking of ways that ideas technologies can be incorporated or resisted, would be a topic to discuss.

Jesse:

Agree. I am troubled by how we are old. I feel like the zoomers live in a very different world than the one I grew up in / inhabit now. It's a Tik Tok world. In which

content/delivery is different. There is a ludditeism in this group that is positioning itself against algorithmic attention / mediation of new tech. That in envisioning sanctuaries, we could be imposing our wish for a lost world on a generation that is irretrievably digital.

I think we should have young people, have a Tok Tok.

14:48:08 From Julian Chehirian to Everyone:

Julian:

Yes, tech as sensitization instruments, not just de-sensitization instruments.

Could there be a moral politics to our project for purification - and what are the implications of extending that in a pedagogic format, rather than in this voluntary community discourse?

Peter:

The thought of doing an attentional practice while doing a Tok Tok is very interesting. Could be a different way of experiencing how we interact with algorithms. If I'm scrolling thru YouTube, I'm not conscious of how I'm doing it. If we approach this in terms of sensitization and INTENTION - we are doing something that very few people are doing when an algorithm is showing them what to look at.

14:48:13 From Julian Chehirian to Everyone:

Justin:

The 404 project was intentionally thinking about the phone as attention.. everyone looking at their phone together at a particular image or object. Using phones reflective screen to look at something in the black reflection of the screen. Thoughtful ways to reconsider relationship to the device. To look at device as something completely different. To accept that the device will be there.

Lane:

Do we never ask ourselves to put the devices down? Do you think that we just consider them to be an appendage? I'm being extreme on purpose. It feels a little bit, though, that in hearing about: "your attention was taken from you".... Those kinds of questions... are we in some ways not giving up that question or that fight? Do we just give up trying to hold people to standards of attention that we believe in?

14:48:17 From Carlos Montemayor to Everyone:

For themes: the importance of the body and embodiment. On how to read: Try to avoid making it a purely intellectual exercise, and not merely a self-oriented practice, but rather an engaged collective experience.

14:48:19 [Interpolated – by S. Blum]

Notes for group 6

1. Starting with attentional practices that involve the body. Importance of the body was highlighted by Rafaele Jeune, who noted that only considering attention cognitively/true reading and academic practices is not sufficient and there is something critical about engaging in a body practice. This also resonated with me as I have had an opportunity to search for/ learn about and utilize a number of centering/attentional practices in the anti-fear workshops we ran last year, which include simple things like alternate nostril breathing related to yoga practices, as well as tactile practices sleep and Native American practices, various body exercises that come from the dance world. This led to a discussion in our group that it would be interesting to do a survey of lineages may be related to various cultures as there is clearly a history that goes back thousands of years in various regions of the world slightly different in overlapping traditions of centering attentional exercises.

2. Jared brought up the notion of defense mechanisms to be employed against attentional exploitation. He noted that this is something that came up in conversation earlier in friends of attention work, and also seems like a crucial thing to include in the curriculum. We wondered in the group whether some of the body practices and centering exercises that we are interested in may serve as a key form of such defense mechanism training/self defense training which can be deployed at any time by individuals trained with the attentional curriculum.

3. I brought up the relationship of attention to downstream cognitive functions. In particular my own interests and implications of attentional exploitation on memory function. It would be interesting to have a portion of the curriculum also consider downstream cognitive effects of challenges to attention and how this plays out and other cognitive systems. I am very interested in this area and have a lot of thoughts on this :-)

4. Francisco Varela – Chilean/ French neurophenomenology/ first person science / one of authors of 1991 (rev 2017) (with Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch). *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. MIT Press. ISBN 978-0-262-72021-2 (suggested by Raphaele)

5. Jared suggested we explicitly consider surveillance as feeding conglomerate attentional exploitation mechanisms and strategies // this is related to the self defense strategy point he made / self defense was also meant in relation to surveillance more broadly speaking

6. Importance of collective experience highlighted by Carlos and all// for me this is linked to how one thinks about trauma treatment – trauma cannot be fully healed in

individual therapy but there must be part of the work in relation to others. I wonder if there are links also in how we think about "treatment" / self-defense against surveillance and extractory mechanisms, unlearning our susceptibility to may require relational / collective practices

14:48:18 From Julian Chehirian to Everyone:

Justin:

We need to address how phone could be a tool to attend to things, and also a means of distraction. To come to an understanding of its potential role or its dismissal.

Jesse:

There are things like video essays, google searches, podcasts, blogs - things that I didn't have when I was younger. There are ways to be respectful of the ways that these technologies afford exciting playgrounds for attention that have positive potential.

Exercise of defamiliarization, where we can think differently about what devices do to us.

14:48:30 From anna riley to Everyone:

Ana, Edgar, Jeff, Anna: Edgar:

What do we mean by attention?

Multiple valences to the term attention

What we mean is focus and duration

Durational engagement

Rhythm and sequences - collectively listen to how we track

Watch a whole movie in one piece

Read a book in its entirety

There is a scale of forms of attentional focus

Jeff:

The attentional envelope within which the lesson happens

The ritual structure of that

A space opens up for durational curiosity

Are there rituals to surround those lessons

Loosely understanding ourselves as a culture - mindfulness and work/productivity and action in different

Cultivate mindfulness means to empty your mind - but here we have attention with an object - not a familiar concept

Ana Marques:

What happens without protocol

14:48:53 From anna riley to Everyone:

Jeff:

Divisions of curriculum - cutting it up based on what one was attention to

Taxonomy of different kinds of attention

Seeing two similar texts in the same field - a difference that would have been hard to see becomes immediately obvious - "attention and comparison"

Political attention - what does it mean to look at a space - what are the faces in this place? Who maintains the space? Who is excluded from it?

Generically other kinds of attention that we would exercise in a day

14:49:04 From anna riley to Everyone:

Edgar:

Image sequence -

Paying attention to

What are the attendant economies

Is there such a thing as non-instrumental attention

One aspect of curriculum

Open up the question of modes of attention

Alert a group to pay attention to how they pay attention

The raising awareness aspect

What are they different economies of attention as an action

Multiple speeds of engagement that we perform day to day

Doesn't presuppose we know what these kids do or don't do on a day to day basis

Somebody's mode of being - not to patronize them inherently

14:49:07 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:

Importance of giving a taste of water before explaining what H2O means

14:49:25 From Carlos Montemayor to Everyone:

Break the addiction to commercialized practices of attention that dominate our cognition and prevent genuine politically engaged attention. Prevent the surveillance of our attention.

14:50:07 From Raphaële Jeune to Everyone:

Bring the body and the direct reality in the curriculum - first person awareness practices - collective attentional practices (conducted attention) - texts by Francisco Varela

14:50:20 From Sal Randolph to Everyone:

THEMES

Devices - relation to them

other words for attention (obsession, love, geeking out, devotion, care)

normative and nonnormative attention (aka ADHD pathologizing certain attentional styles)

#### TEXTS/MATERIALS

obviously the William James, also the stream of consciousness section - but really his descriptions are better than most

maybe the film Societe du Spectacle

looking at artists, at situations of strong attentional gradient (aka spectacle, stage) vs situations of private absorption (attention within, intimate attention)

#### METHODS:

Survey at the beginning and end of the course

Practices (like 404, like Birding, make up lots of new short exercises)

Teaching meditation (some form of basic mindfulness)

attentional exercises while moving the body

quests

blind contour drawing

14:50:38 From Jeff Dolven to Everyone:

ANA: when I teach I often begin a session by asking students to think about how they engage w the internet; what is it like for them to pay attention day to day? (Edgar came back to this, asking about developing the capacity to attend to our attention.) EDGAR named focus and duration as basic aspects. Could we ask students to listen to a whole track? JEFF: perhaps we want a ritual structure for the whole session, simple, reliable, portable practices for gathering ourselves. ANNA: the challenge of such rituals without a convener/teacher etc. ...

14:52:32 From Sal Randolph to Everyone:

One method I used in my recent Slow Studio was to offer some of the readings out loud (reading aloud, or perhaps listening to an audiobook) where people could

approach the text with a free-floating attentional field. While doing this they were free to lie down, move around, take notes, draw, knit etc.

14:53:07 From Emmet Von Stackelberg to Everyone:

Kristin: immersive experience. young people can't be feeling like they're getting scolded. practices of attention that UNLEASH the JOY of it. phone as open eye and open ear. idea of phones being used in a different way. curriculum using phone as attentional device

Sonali: five senses as nodes. how to avoid being marched through an assignment. how to avoid just it being another protocol in the day

kristin: model of a baby learning to use its eyes

Brad: find literature that dramatizes attention... poetry is a whole tradition dedicated to this basically. sitting places and listing sensual information without trying to tell a story. just as a way to attune the senses

emmet: learning a rhythm rather than a protocol

sonali: each person brings piece of their world into the space for all to attend to  
14:54:01 From Jeff Dolven to Everyone:

... ANA: the importance of listening, not interrupting, attention of the group to itself. JEFF: Might the curriculum be divided among kinds of attention? To anomalies in visual fields or texts; to structures of justice or injustice in a space; etc. The general challenge of combining the cultural investment in the quiet of mindfulness with attention to object or problem. EDGAR: the importance of teaching alertness to (attention to) the attention economy.

14:54:36 From Sal Randolph to Everyone:

Spend some time up front creating a community agreement with the group, be very open ended about what emerges

14:56:18 From Jeff Dolven to Everyone:

What can you put in an iPhone CASE? (Instead of an iPhone?)

14:56:30 From Grace Caiazza to Everyone:

Like the idea of focusing Using phone to create moments of attentional freedom or clarity? Sporadic alarms, push notifications reminders to attend or to remember?

14:56:59 From Grace Caiazza to Everyone:

\*focusing on phone as object

14:57:04 From Carlos Montemayor to Everyone:

The smartphone as paradox: connecting by creating moral and social distance?

**SECOND BREAKOUT NOTES: Smartphone as an "attentional object" brainstorm**



15:07:25 From Julian Chehirian to Everyone:

Justin:

I like the idea of the multi-sensory thing.

The ethnography of your own community - to be attending to where you are.

IN terms of incorporating senses, capturing the ambience of a space in a moment of time, and attending to the sounds visually, and out of context, so that the phone becomes just a means of transferring that from one place to another. Idea of device as a positive tool.

Lane:

Idea of showing that you can be a producer of content rather than just a consumer.

Goal of a non profit I have done a lot of work with.

Idea of centering how there's a camera, a recording device in your hand.

People are already doing this - but what are they pointing the camera at?

15:07:28 From Julian Chehirian to Everyone:

Jesse:

Narcissism/conventions of content. Scripts that they disseminate (for experience). The spontaneity of relationality is all jeopardized. Using these devices to expand palette of ways of relating/connecting.

Recording others, friends, community spaces, problems. Transgressive.

e.g. the lot in your neighborhood that could be converted to a park.

Sharing a problem with a public

Lane:

The idea of slow violence - that its one thing to capture something being curb stomped, and another to capture an unused lot, or chemicals pouring out of an unused factory. What if we could capture and also give the tools to analyze/share what you are actually seeing, with violence that is so slow that it is not actually labeled as violence.

15:07:34 From Julian Chehirian to Everyone:

Justin:

Love for practices. Basic prompts that I'm thinking about in daily life for kids:

Recognizing how we attend. Idea of the macro vs. micro ideas. Kids lying down in grass and focusing on something hiding in blades of grass. That could be a non-technology thing. I'm into the tacit doing.

Jesse:

One prompt could be making the invisible, visible. (Ralph Ellison, social dimensions of invisibility). Attending to things that are not getting recorded. Being able to find value in the noticing even without creating a record of it.

Can you describe what something is, and everyone has to read it rather than just looking at an image?

15:07:37 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:

At first: "I strongly suggest not introducing the smart phone into this until day 3 or 4. Due to the smart phone, distraction is now endemic. To focus on the smart phone in an attention seminar is a bit like having a detox clinic where the only thing in the recovery room is—empty needles? Or, if the phone is on—filled needles? Or: maybe the iPhone is like methadone?"

I don't know that kids can have a "strong" experience of attention at the outset if they start with the phone itself. The main issue, aside from its close link with distraction (it is above all a COPING MECHANISM) is that, as an object, the phone itself has some ability to pay attention back to you. It almost seems—perhaps this is appropriate for day 3, but maybe it makes sense not to start with an object that has its own attentional powers?"

15:07:42 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:

Another thing: Per past conversations with Marcus, the goal of the course should be to enhance both the 'strength' of the attentional faculty and student's (sense of their own) agency. To just teach people about the nuances and intricacies of the vast machine (the production machine, the complexity of the making of the thing) that stomps on their face—this just hurts and leads to hopelessness, if it doesn't leave people feeling empowered as well. But the focus on using it can fix this in Day 4 and 5? Think for example: Imagine you teach a student who lives in a food desert all about how terrible Cheetos are. Now imagine there is nothing in their local store for them to buy but Cheetos. What does this do for someone but give them more reason to flee into distraction?

15:07:46 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:

But Jared mentions hacking

15:07:52 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:

Maybe that's like—teaching someone to cook from cheetos?

15:08:11 From Larry Berger to Everyone:

Slowing something down as a way to approximate certain kinds of attention.

15:08:34 From Jeff Dolven to Everyone:

There was some doubt about putting the iPhone center stage (though also some interest). Should the through line be an OBJECT? Or should it be a PRACTICE or PRACTICES?

15:08:38 From Leonard Nalencz to Everyone:

Sociological treasure hunt or scavenger hunt as a way to pay attention to a neighborhood that might be familiar.

15:08:38 From Larry Berger to Everyone:

let's build an app that kids can launch that doesn't do anything at all.

15:08:49 From Sal Randolph to Everyone:

We talked about multi-sensory alternatives to only device-related exercises - getting outside, doing quests and treasure hunts, olfactory attention to scents, sharing food, maybe something like show-and-tell where they share things they really love

15:08:50 From Julian Chehirian to Everyone:

That last sentence I sent was from Justin, who expanded on that thought in a way that I felt was very resonant. Having people share something in a medium that sharpens and wakes up other senses/sensibilities... re-routing it from telephonic automaticity

15:09:00 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:

An app that explodes their phone, and then hands them a note that says "sorry about your exploded phone!"

15:09:23 From Julian Chehirian to Everyone:

Using senses, but disaggregating that kind of automatic ingestion that occurs when we all look at something on a device.

15:09:33 From Jeff Dolven to Everyone:

(I confess if there WERE an object at the center, I thought about a book. Just had to get that out of my system.)

15:09:43 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:

Mullen! You cannot explode their phones!

15:09:47 From Raphaële Jeune to Everyone:

Hack the relationship with the smartphone

Mysterious object = leave place to imagination = think the smartphone as something else = think as oneself as something else in relationship with the smartphone.

Connecting the body with the smartphone in different ways.

Disconnecting the self and the smartphone / exchanging the smartphone

How the hacking can affect the surveillance and the asymmetry

15:09:51 From Carlos Montemayor to Everyone:

Jared said we need to focus more on the commercially targeted software and surveillance aspect of the phone than the physical object. Grace said transforming our relationship to the phone as a magnet of our attention is also important. Both are important to make it politically relevant?

15:10:01 From Lane Stroud to Everyone:

(You are seen, Jeff)

15:10:04 From Leonard Nalencz to Everyone:

An app that reverses the flow of data from individual customers to HQ, and sends all the data from HQ (salaries, investments, emails from CEO) to individual users.

15:10:04 From Brad Fox to Everyone:

Diego, Kristin, Sonali, Emmet, Brad:

What is the phone paying attention to?

Altitude, location...

The detective as an attentional model

Games of voluntary surveillance: taking turns following each other through the neighborhood — one person goes X number of steps ahead, and the other tries to document their movements.

Games of charming attention: like the paraidolia exercise: sending people out to gather evidence — images of red things, smooth things, where that practice changes attention

using audio — taking short audio recordings from one's home or a specific place, bringing them in, then listening to these in a group.

15:10:13 From Sal Randolph to Everyone:

Trying to get away from people sitting in chairs the whole time - attention and movement exercises (Feldenkrais lessons? learning a complicated tik tok dance?)

15:10:26 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:

More Pascal: "The only thing that consoles us from our miseries is diversion. And yet it is the greatest of our miseries. For it is that above all which prevents us from thinking about ourselves and leads us imperceptibly to our destruction. But for that we should be bored, and boredom would drive us to seek some more solid means of escape, but diversion passes our time and brings us imperceptibly to our death."

15:10:35 From Kristin Lawler to Everyone:

Model of noir urban detective

15:11:37 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:

Can I say something quick before we wrap?

15:12:52 From Leonard Nalencz to Everyone:

YES!

15:13:12 From Julian Chehirian to Everyone:

Yes!

**JAC THANKS MARCUS, AND EXPRESSES APPRECIATION FOR THE WAY HE HAS COME INTO THE COMMUNITY**

**[GENERAL ASSENT AND ENTHUSIASM!]**

15:13:40 From Sal Randolph to Everyone:

Flusser exercise!

15:14:05 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:

We have one more question from Raphaele

15:15:02 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:

I think this is one of the goals eventually, right?

RAPHAELE POINTS TO THE NEED TO MAKE VERSIONS OF THE CURRICULUM FOR USE IN A VARIETY OF LANGUAGES AND NATIONAL SETTINGS – BECAUSE OUR NETWORK HAS BEEN FROM THE OUTSET, AND MUST CONTINUE TO BE, **GLOBAL**.

[MORE GENERAL ASSENT AND ENTHUSIASM – Mentions of work by Adam Jasper in Zurich, Chiara Cappelletto in Milan, Quentin Julian in France, Ana Marques in Brazil, etc.]

15:15:06 From edgar schmitz to Everyone:

really sorry have to go, thank you everyone for energy and ideas and ambition

15:15:06 From Carlos Montemayor to Everyone:

The issue of the “transportability” of practices came up before. Good question.

15:16:21 From Ana Marques to Everyone:

hopefully what we create will be somehow Creative Commons so we can adapt and implement in our own contexts 😊

15:16:35 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:

HEY that’d be really nice

15:16:35 From Jeff Dolven to Everyone:

One general thought: I have long been thinking about an observational study of young kids doing math problems: the ones who are looking straight ahead, sitting still, heads down, are much less likely to solve the problem than the kids who are looking around, shifting, scratching their heads. That is, panic pretends to be focus. So one basic lesson — with William James in mind — is what attention looks like, that it revolves, reconsiders, shifts, dodges etc. to keep its object alive in the mind. A false picture of attention as still focus may block the attentional capacities of lots of kids. We could unteach that.

15:16:37 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:

If you’d do that