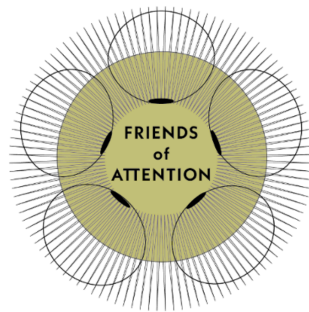


A  
HANDBOOK  
FOR THE *ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENTS*

drafted by the

*Anthesis Working Group*\*

of the



Waterford, CT  
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## PREFACE

Survival is itself difficult. To thrive and flourish, with others — this is the hope. Therefore, when and as we are able, we must work for this (and play, too, for this).

This handbook has been composed by a group of friends — true friends, who are also “Friends.” All of those who participated in its conceptualization and drafting are affiliated with the “Friends of Attention,” a coalition of activists, artists, and others who promote, cultivate, theorize, and share *forms of attention resistant to commodification*. What does this mean? It means that the Friends (who found each other over years, through creative work and writing and study and collaboration) believe that

**\*\*\* RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION UNFOLDS THE ASTONISHING REALITY OF THE WORLD! \*\*\***

And we believe, further, that this capacity is in no way some decadent privilege of the leisure class. Rather, we think it is *fundamental to the goodness of life*, and therefore, properly, belongs to all as an essential and enabling good.

This Handbook has been written by people who believe this, and who hold this belief on the basis of diverse, intimate, individual, and collective experiences of radical attention — of the ways it can transform, deepen, bind, and enchant. From such experiences has arisen their Friendship. And from such experiences has arisen their desire *to find new friends* in this shared good — a good which may be the good of goods, and which is, in the end, not even scarce. It is available to all, and near at hand. We need only to *attend*.

That said, we worry. And we have written these pages because we worry. We worry (with many others) that new and rapidly changing conditions threaten the forms of attention we care about most, and upon which we place our hopes. We will lay out our concerns below in more detail, but they are easy to state: we fear the rise of a powerful new financial, commercial, and technological system that is *commodifying human attention* as never before (turning it into a thing to be bought and sold). This new economy, operating at a scale and on channels previously unimaginable, has created — is creating — increasingly impossible conditions for the cultivation and practice of the forms of attention we believe make life good (that console us when we suffer, arm us against loneliness and despair, and set the conditions of suffusing joy).

This is a handbook. It is not a work of theory. There are theory books that touch on these questions, and we recommend many of them. This is not a guerrilla manual for armed overthrow of the established attentional regime. But we should be clear: we *do* seek to overthrow that regime. This is not a work of “self-help” exactly, though we would be happy if it helped you. It is just that we want it to help you help others too. This *is* a work that dreams of a genuine revolution: a coming together of all those who know something of what attention can truly do, and who feel called to protect, extend, and *practice* this most precious of our capacities. Join us. Or let us join you.

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## WHAT IS THIS DOCUMENT? WHAT ARE ITS AIMS?

You are reading *A HANDBOOK FOR THE ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENTS*.<sup>†</sup> This Handbook is intended:

- 1) To make life better (for you, and for those around you) by:
  - a. *Consolidating* existing attentional rebellions and insurgencies;
  - b. *Fomenting* new collectives of **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION**;
  - c. *Offering* specific attentional practices (to advance the cause); and,
  - d. *Encouraging* the sourcing and exchange of techniques for attentional resistance.

AND,

- 2) To advance shared understanding of:
  - a. The supernal value of **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION**;
  - b. The profoundly hostile conditions within which this form of attention currently operates;
  - c. The need for sustained and organized (as well as fugitive and informal) efforts on behalf of the liberation of human attention in its life-giving and life-sustaining forms.

AND,

- 3) Generally, *to advance the program of the ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENTS, as they serve the wellbeing of persons of all descriptions, and their needs, desires, and hopes, however various, on this planet and beyond, in the vastness of what obtains.*

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<sup>†</sup> Readers unfamiliar with the work of the Friends of Attention are encouraged to consult two documents closely related to the present HANDBOOK: the *TWELVE THESES ON ATTENTION*; and the *MANIFESTO FOR THE FREEDOM OF ATTENTION*, both drafted by the Friends, and available at [www.friendsofattention.net](http://www.friendsofattention.net). This HANDBOOK draws freely on both the content and spirit of those documents.

# WHAT ARE THE “ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENTS”?

The ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENTS (or **ALMS**) are groups of persons who believe two things: first, that **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION** (rightly cultivated, activated, and shared) affords unrivaled access to the goodness of life; and second, that present circumstances present new and imperiling obstacles to human attentional capacities.

Believing these things, those who associate themselves with the ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENTS work, individually and (whenever possible) in concert, to:

- 1) *Draw attention* to the centrality of human attention in the flourishing of individuals and communities;
- 2) *Identify* and, as possible, *neutralize* or *counteract* such forces and tendencies that compromise, pervert, or otherwise adversely affect the free and flourishing use of human attention;
- 3) *Study* and *share* the work of those whose research or practices reflect a common commitment to attention as the good of goods;
- 4) *Actively cultivate attentional practices* (quotidian habits as well as formal occasions; positive programs of action, as well as such strategies of prophylaxis or refusal as may be needed) that aim to make **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION** everything it can be.

This Handbook has been composed by affiliates of various branches of existing groups which identify as “Attention Liberation Movements” in this sense. The authors (and their respective communities, cohorts, zendos, cells, *volées*, etc.) are diverse, and our ideas about attention (like our attentional practices) are by no means uniform. But we have found common ground in the sense that *radical attention brings the ineffable into reach*, and thereby dignifies, deepens, and even redeems human existence. Through attention, shared attention, we participate in the astonishing reality of things, beings, and persons. By means of joint attention, we love the real into existence — our existence.

The ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENTS, the **ALMS**, work for *change*. In this Handbook, we explain why, in addition to sketching how. But we also seek, in these pages, new allies. Which is to say, we hope you will consider “joining” the **ALMS**. This means, among other things, that we hope you will have things to teach us about the ways that human attention, in the radical forms known to you, has contributed to what is good in your life, and the lives of those with whom you have shared this gift. How do you attend? When? With whom? To what? We want this Handbook to raise those questions for you. We have raised them for each other, doing so in the process of trying to sift out and cultivate forms of attention we have come to believe have *magical power*. You are, we think, in possession of this magic. And we would like to share our

spells — and invite you to share yours. Together, cobbling together what we have and can learn, we hope to equip an *insurgency of those who care*, and who are committed to resisting the onslaught of tricks and traps set by those who would buy and sell the very stuff from which our best lives are made.

\* \* \*

## WHAT DO THE ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENTS MEAN BY “ATTENTION”?

Everything in this Handbook hinges on this question. There are lots of books out there on “attention.” There are TED talks. There are YouTube primers and university courses on this topic. Business schools teach young entrepreneurs how to capitalize on “The Attention Economy.” Psychologists run experiments using eye-trackers to show what things attract the eye and prime the mind. Neuroscientists will put you in a machine, and track the oxygenation of blood in your central nervous system, and they will point to a screen that looks like a lava-lamp (it is your brain), and say “there, that is attention happening.” Philosophers, predictably, have ideas of their own. Historians too. Also, children. Some of these various ideas can be fitted together, and some cannot. The authors of this Handbook warmly encourage wide reading, study, and discussion of any and all of these materials.

HOWEVER, those who affiliate themselves to the ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENTS are concerned with **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION** (sometimes “pure” or “true” attention, and sometimes appearing under other names in various traditions and disciplines).

This form of attention, we contend, constitutes an infungible and irreducible human good. Difficult to define concisely (like “justice” or “equality” or “an experience of the infinite”), it is nonetheless of the utmost importance.

Let us begin, then, by sketching what **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION** is *not*.

### **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION:**

- 1) *is not* the human response to a stimulus, however compelling;
- 2) *will not* serve any finite goal or objective;
- 3) *can not* be bought or sold.

In this sense, we can say that **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION** *defies commodification and instrumentalization*. It cannot be “triggered,” “elicited,” or “harvested.”

You may, having read this far, doubt the existence (or even the coherence) of **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION**. That is OK. We welcome your skepticism. Stay with us for a few more paragraphs.

Can we say anything substantive about this special kind of attention? Can we do anything besides list what it is not? We can try. We believe that **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION** *unfolds the astonishing reality of the world*. We believe **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION** *loves the real into existence*.

Make no mistake. This kind of attention is magic. It is the spell that summons something out of nothing. But unlike simulation, which mimics and obverts attention, **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION** confirms and manifests reality through the formation of associative bonds. What kinds of bonds? *Human* bonds. Or, if the term makes you uneasy, you may prefer this formulation: *non-inhuman* bonds. Bonds that are not unworthy of us. Where attention is free, mutual, and consensual, it is *radical*, it goes to the *root*, because these relationships form the deepholds for association in a world where the law is dissociation.

There are two possibilities: EITHER you have had, in your life, an *actual experience* of the ways that **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION** (attention that cannot be bought, that will not be sold, that refuses to be put in harness — free attention, freely given, alone or with others) brings forth the astonishing reality of things, beings, and persons; OR you have not.

IF YOU *HAVE*, then you already understand what this Handbook is about — what it is “for,” what it hopes to promote and protect. Indeed, you may already be part of an Attention Liberation Movement of one sort or another. A sleeper-cell of *attentionistas*, a distributed confraternity of attentionauts, an underground of the radical attentional front. Good. This work is for you and yours. In it, we sound the small call to all: Know each other! We are out here! And we know something that we want to share. We hope that you will understand us as your allies, and that you will encounter, in the explicit commitment to **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION**, a vast new network of friends and allies — others who, like you, have had a taste of what radical attention can do. Let us learn from each other, and come into conjunction and alliance as we move through territories increasingly hostile to the forms of attention we cherish, and on which we pin our hopes!

But it is also possible that you have NOT had such an experience. In which case, we believe we have had glimpses of something *impossibly precious* that we need to share with you. We may be wrong. But we have felt what we have felt, and seen (in ourselves, and in others, and in the world) what we have seen. Give us a chance. For we come in love and care and concern. And we are ready to test what we think we know against what you think you know. We want to *witness*, in both senses: we want to *bear witness* to what we have learned from **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION**; and we want *be witnesses*, standing by attentively as you give voice or body to who you are and what you know. And so, if you are willing, walk with us, and let us attend together. If you, along the way, catch your own glimpse of this preciousness, this astonishing goodness, then we will rejoice in one more voice in the chorus of rejoicing!

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## WHAT DO THE ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENTS MEAN BY “LIBERATION”?

The work of the ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENTS is a work of *liberation*. It is *emancipatory* work. It is the work of freedom and understanding: the freedom that comes with understanding, and the understanding that itself frees. Let us put it this way, in a formulation that should resonate with many readers: “*Attention is born free, and is everywhere in chains.*” The liberation for which we call, and to which we aspire, is both a freedom *from* the rapacious exploitation and colonization of our best attentional capacities, and a freedom *to* make new worlds — with and in and through **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION**.

Do not be deceived: the ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENTS most often operate (like our forefighters in non-violent revolutionary resistance) in *hostile territory*. We operate in a world in which *attention is increasingly bought and sold*. Bought and sold by powerful interests, pursuing wealth — pursuing “eyeballs,” and the dollar values thereof on increasingly sophisticated and machinic markets.

At the time of our writing, the five largest companies in the world (by market capitalization) are each worth well in excess of one trillion US dollars, or ten to the power of *twelve*. Of these five companies, four are nominally technology companies (one, Saudi Aramco, is a state-run oil monopoly). Each of these companies has customers that can be counted in the billions, the majority habitual users of the goods and services they offer. The four technology companies (Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, and Alphabet) might appear, to a visitor from the mid-twentieth century, to be: a pair of producers of computing machines and the software for running such machines; a mail order service; and the publisher of a large and glamorous telephone directory. All of these companies can be described as super-monopolies, monopolies on a transnational scale. But this use of economic language does not adequately encompass the situation. By some conventional measures (such as price-to-earnings ratios), these companies (which in any case generally do not pay dividends) are *radically* overvalued. This reflects a consensus, on the part of stock market investors, that the power of these companies will only *increase*: even though these companies *are already* global monopolies that have *already* saturated their market segments *across the known universe*.

Let us put this a different way: the market — in its wisdom — has determined that these companies will *continue* to behave in ways that are historically unprecedented. Which is to say, we have reached an inflection point: the power of these corporations does not reside in profitability, their power resides in power. The aggregate opinion of humans who study these matters (and stake *huge bets* reflecting their best judgements) is that these companies will now

shape the way that history works; they are perceived not only to have “won the game,” but to have *altered the way that the game functions*.

This seems right to us. We experience the results.

In the morning, you wake. You extend your arm. Eyes still thick with sleep, you reach left or right or down or up. The familiar rectangular shape, cold-glassy and smooth, slips perfectly into your palm. Like a magnet, you are repulsed and attracted at once. The latent anxiety you feel seems to flow down your fingers to illuminate the screen’s white glow. You step into — no, you can only *gaze at* — the 2D world where you are always both the consumer and the consumed.

The companies that devised your finger trap have been presented, on occasion, as if consciously or unconsciously engaging in what Arendt called the “banality of evil,” with their small, efficient, and desirable machines concealing can’t-be-helped malignancy in their diminutiveness and ubiquity. Yes, the entrapment and canalization of our attention through algorithmic, industrial-scale advertising and surveillance/platform capitalism is *SPIRITUAL USUFRUCT*. But there is also so much to like! Yes, an Orwellian newspeak gives us “friends” that are not “friends,” “followers” who are not “followers,” “feeds” that do not feed anyone, “hearts” that do not beat, “smiley faces” frozen in a banal rictus of evacuation. But also, we can more easily find a vegetarian restaurant in Muskogee.

For the “banality of evil,” we propose to substitute the “evil of banality,” a media effect all the harder to evade because it is systemic rather than conscious. Even as more and more of the autonomy of the user is dissolved into the liquid crystals of display, what the companies themselves seek is, above all, TOD — “time on device,” and, coincidentally, the German word for *death*. “Engagement,” in this devil’s dictionary, is obviously a misnomer, but “disengagement” is in no way possible. This circular maze encircles both our private and our professional lives. There may or may not be a minotaur in it. But within such a prison, the minotaur itself is superfluous.

As corporations plunder the world’s resources, as our environments (physical and psychic) grow polluted, as we reach the limits of our planet (and our souls), our billionaires have begun to build their escape vehicles, kitting out craft in which to leave Earth behind, and gun their afterburners for outer space.

**RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION** provides a different frontier, no less vast, but shockingly near to hand, and perfectly free to all: *the infinite space that springs up between human beings*.

To activate this precious form of attention, to practice it, and to inhabit the worlds it makes possible, we must, urgently, *liberate attention from those who would slice it, dice it, and price it*. We must TAKE BACK our attention, in its full radical glory. We must learn from those who precede us in emancipatory struggle, and *seek solidarity*, lending aid to those wounded or in the hands of those who would frack human minds for the last vaporous traces of monetizable attention.



The liberation we seek is the freedom of persons in full and conscious command of their powers of attention, which is the basis of all other freedoms. When attention is free, the possibility of creating worlds other than our own appears. When attention creates its own conditions: this is **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION**. This kind of attention is a creative practice and a discipline, and its realization, however fleeting or ephemeral, is an experiment with the conditions of being. It is this experimentation, the creation of these worlds, that enables the very possibility of human wellbeing. More than a precondition of human flourishing, the creation of such worlds is an activity *constitutive of flourishing itself*. Hence, to liberate a **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION** that thinks, cares, feels, and dreams is not merely to “create the possibility of a better world”; it *actually brings a better world into being*.

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## WHAT DO THE ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENTS MEAN BY “MOVEMENT”?

By “movement” we mean that we are *moving*. We are *moving together*. We are *already moving together*. Music has “movements.” They reflect the way music steps through time. We are a *movement* in this sense, too — an episode, a phase, a “spell” in time. The **ALMS** are full of history, stand in the present, face the future.

This movement is for all. It is for the dishwasher and the bus driver and the executive. It is for the grandma and the artist and the friend. It is for our cousins, for kin, for strangers. It is for the whole human being who reaches for value beyond money-value. It is for every person who longs for genuinely shared experience, for the plural joys of being in right and real relation with others. It is for all the yearning *non-inhumans* who stretch out a hand towards that which they cannot yet name.

Which is to say, the ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENT is for those who aim to free their own attention — and work towards the liberation of others. It is for those who, in waking, wish to find that the astonishing reality of being is in everyday reach. It is for those who are poised to join the diffuse, multifarious, and emergent work of giving and receiving **ALMS**.

Writing back in 1890, at the very origins of the Attention Economy, the American philosopher William James (for us, an unheralded pioneer of the ALMS) wrote: “the connection of the movements themselves with the continued effort of attention is certainly a *genuine* and *curious* fact.”

Indeed. The movements are “genuine” because they are very much *in motion*. And they have been “in motion” for as long as human beings have stood slack-jawed, gaping at the world. What they do is real. The community they convene is real.

And they are “curious” because just how they do it is a *mystery*. The specific techniques for cultivating **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION** — for tapping into the life-force that both sustains attention and is sustained by it — are largely obscure, often indescribable, and immensely diverse. Some are ancient. Some were invented today. Many have yet to be conjured. Why this eclecticism? Why is there not “one way” that the **ALMS** know and teach? The answer is simple: the forces of attentional unfreedom are shape-shifting tricksters. The Movements must continuously morph and transfigure and *move* accordingly.

Are you part of these Movements? It is quite possible. Let’s check. Have you ever felt close to the astonishing reality of a thing or being or person? If you can answer this question in the affirmative, you may already be affiliated with a sleeper cell of the ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENTS. Where were you? Were you with others? What were you doing? It is possible that the cell awaits your activation. This Handbook is a tool for the activation of sleeper cells of the movement, scattered across the globe. Philatelists. Windsurfers. Those who needlepoint, with care, and with others. The ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENTS lie low, move incognito, wear camouflage, spread out behind enemy lines, choose their skirmishes carefully. But give the sign, make the *movement*, and they rise up! Always, everywhere, associates of the movements are listening for the distorted, muffled lament sung by attention that has been trapped, the cries of attention under the yoke and lash, the groans of attention being tried out into money over the melting fires of capital. Find it. *Set it free!*

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## OK, HOW CAN I LIBERATE MY ATTENTION?

Now we come to the crux of the matter. What can be done to liberate **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION**? How can you help protect your attentional capacities from the insidious forces of attention mining and financialization? And how can you be part of the work of others in extending and brightening the emancipation of those forms of attention that conduce to human flourishing?

Do you practice “Mindfulness”? It is good. It is well. Against such, we say not a word. For, in truth, **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION** is a lot like “mindfulness” — except that it is not all about *you*. It’s about the world. And about others. The world is real, and it’s waiting for you. Other beings and persons are real, and in order to be able to *act*, in order to be able to encounter the astonishing reality of what is around you, you need to be able to reenter the world, and encounter what resides here. This Handbook can be thought of as a therapeutic manual for those attempting to release themselves from the cage of device-driven narcissism, and take wing back into the world.

For we live in new ways, but lack the practices and preparation to thrive under our present circumstances. Our social imagination has not kept pace with technical innovation. We do not know how to live when our people are returned to us as flashing images served up between clickbait promotions; when our access to information is determined by our advertising categories, which deform our persons and delimit our horizons. We do not know how to live when we are continuously needled into emotional arousal by algorithmic puppetmasters jerking distant anguish and monoclonal erotics before us — while anesthetizing our bodies, deadening our eyes, and picking our pockets.

And yet we are *tired* of watching our friends and family and ours very selves fail to flourish under these conditions. We are *tired* of seeing friends and family receive mental health diagnoses — as though failing to flourish in inhuman conditions is some individual quirk.

We have found no respite from this situation more restorative than the keen pleasure of *presence*: of being present to ourselves, of being present to one another and the world. And it is **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION** that defies the laws of dissociation and anomie, the laws of efficiency and optimization, the laws that convert life into money, and returns it to us as pennies placed upon our sepulchral eyes. Our proposal, then, is simple: that our escape from these conditions is the work of a *community of friends*. Friends who attend. Together. And in attention, care for each other and the world. This is the work of the ATTENTION LIBERATION MOVEMENTS.

The *MANIFESTO FOR THE FREEDOM OF ATTENTION* ends on a note from which to launch a thousand Movements:

*Humans who do useless and extravagant things together in dead earnest — things that do not yet have names and to which these humans give names — are REDEEMED, which is to say that they create for themselves the conditions in which they might more fully become what they are, or what they could be*

This is the emancipatory work of **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION**. Our hope lies this way.

To assist you and yours in this work, we have gathered together an array of useful and practical EXERCISES, which afford *opportunities to limber and train the radical attentional faculties*. We ground these exercises on a principle of central importance to the **ALMS**: ANTHESIS.

A word, then, about Anthesis: the term sounds a bit like “antithesis,” but it means something deliciously different. It is a technical term in botany, where it refers to “the period of time during which a bud begins its irreversible flowering.” Hence, it can be thought of as “the period of time when a latent reality begins to unfold.” It means, in this sense, “floreescence.” One is reminded immediately of Galway Kinnell’s great poem “Saint Francis and the Sow,” which opens:

*The bud  
stands for all things,  
even for those things that don't flower,  
for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;  
though sometimes it is necessary  
to reteach a thing its loveliness,  
to put a hand on its brow  
of the flower  
and retell it in words and in touch  
it is lovely  
until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing;*

This is the ANTHESIS of radical attention, and it is the moment in which one's loneliness becomes, through the hand of a friend, solidarity. It is the moment in which an insurgent gesture becomes collective practice. It is the giving and receiving of **ALMS**.

Take up these several exercises here below, and experiment. *Practice*. Put your hand on the brow of what obtains, and effect *anthesis*. Flower forth. Make friendship, through care.<sup>‡</sup> This is the path to **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION**; its means and its form as well.

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<sup>‡</sup> For more on the centrality of this dynamic, please see the appendix to this document, "What do we mean by the Friends of Attention?"

PRACTICAL EXERCISES FOR THE CULTIVATION OF  
**RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION,**  
or,  
ACTIVITIES FOR DAILY **ALMS**

1.

*Situation:*

It's too much.

*Practice:*

Try different things, but there are no easy answers on this one.

*Anthesis:*

- A) Call your people, or else;
- B) Make your people, or else;
- C) Call a Friend of Attention, all of whom have a commitment to respond to any such call.

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2.

*Situation:*

It's too much, and it's not fair.

*Practice:*

Fail. Carefully. Lovingly.

*Anthesis:*

Fail (carefully, lovingly) with your friends.

.

### 3.

*Situation:*

Fear of missing out.

*Practice:*

Deeply appreciate something, to a nearly unbearable degree.  
Keep it entirely to yourself.

*Anthesis:*

Deeply appreciate something, to a nearly unbearable degree, with  
your friends. Don't talk about it.

.

### 4.

*Situation:*

You feel your device is your only means of connecting to the  
people who ground you in a world that constantly threatens to  
dissipate. On the other hand, you experience your device as an  
ever-open window into the very expanses that make reality feel  
like a simulation. You think, "*Do I love my phone, because it's a  
conduit to my friends, who make me feel whole? Or do I hate my  
phone, because it's a trap that encourages me to be a version of  
myself I don't like?*"

*Practice:*

Attend to your device. Determine its personality. Give it a name.  
You don't have to like it, but find a way to accept it.  
Embellish it with accessories that emphasize its traits  
(e.g., an ornate frame, a mirror, a hat, a leash)

*Anthesis:*

Get together with your friends and throw a surprise party for your  
phones. Let them enjoy each other's company. Have a separate  
party while they are together.

.

## 4.

*Situation:*

You come to see all your experiences as a means of generating “content” to be packaged and presented on the platform of your choice. You wonder what is the point of having experiences otherwise.

*Practice:*

Embark upon a 3000-day cycle of meditation and ascetic denial as practiced by the mountain monks of Yamagata in Japan, eating only pine needles, creosote, bark, toxic herbs, and the sap of the Chinese lacquer tree, until you achieve self-mummification. Your seated remains may one day be worshipped.

*Anthesis:*

First, cook an elaborate dinner for your friends, and listen to them crow about their experiences, because people like doing that.

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## 5.

*Situation:*

You are increasingly trapped in the conviction that you need your device to “connect” with others. Your device contains all the data you think you need in the event of an emergency. At the same time, you notice that the use of the device is rendering you increasingly incapable of dealing with any *actual* emergency, because the underlying emergency is that you cannot be separated from your phone.

*Practice:*

Memorize someone’s phone number.

*Anthesis:*

Show up wherever they live, ideally unexpectedly, and tell them that you have done so.

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## 6.

*Situation:*

You encounter a friend stuck in the scroll.

*Practice:*

Do not assume that this friend is less enlightened than you. Do not blame this friend for falling into the trap viciously set for every living human. Do not lecture this friend (at least not now) on the commodification of human personhood or the great tragedy of intersubjective deadening. Instead, grasp this person gently but firmly by the hand, and with slow and careful authority, direct and configure this hand so that the index finger points to the nearest animal. Bring your own index finger to your lips, *Shhh*. The animal may be an insect, a bird, a bear, or, in the absence of any other options, yourself.

*Anthesis:*

Reconfigure the hand of your friend in such a way as to make it appear in a “V” or a manual gesture of “two.” Then take those two fingers and point them slowly at the eyes of the animal and then at your friend’s own eyes. Repeat this process three times, staging a stare-down. If the animal refuses to sit still, congratulate your friend on having won. Repeat with a widening circle of beings.

.

## 7.

*Situation:*

What is clearly an act of abjection is made to seem like an unfortunate necessity.

*Praxis:*

Seek the wisdom to know the difference.

*Anthesis:*

Seek the wisdom to know the difference, with your friends.



## 8.

*Situation:*

You haven't spoken to flesh-and-blood person for hours. You are beginning to doubt the reality of material existence.

*Practice:*

Walk outside. Choose an object with which you think you are familiar (e.g., a tree, the pavement). Look closely. Take inventory of the colors. Are there colors present which are other than what you already knew? Keep looking. In what does this object consist? Does further inspection of this object reveal details or qualities beyond your mental concept of the object? If yes, this object probably exists outside of your mind. You likely did not create the world. You are probably not alone.

*Anthesis:*

Gather some friends. See?

## 9.

*Situation:*

You're scrolling through your social media feed. You notice a creeping sensation of jealousy, inadequacy, or malaise. You begin to notice wanting things. Perhaps these are things you did not — years previously — want.

*Practice:*

Pause on an image. What desire is modeled in this image? What does the person in this image *want*? Or, what does the person who posted this image *want*? Ask yourself, is this a desire *you also want to want*? If not, inhabit your inner Maria Kondo, and remove this image and/or person from your feed.

*Anthesis:*

Lay your hand over your phone, so it flowers, from within.

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## 10.

*Situation:*

You are commuting, or perhaps in a waiting room. A glossy magazine falls into your hands. You begin to flip through it. A glossy fashion spread, printed edge to edge, catches your eye.

*Practice:*

Imagine that this magazine is sent from the future. The models are literally *models*. That is, they are prototypes of future humans. They have come from the future in order to induce you to reach a more perfect world. Perhaps a glassy-eyed waif is moving shipping containers via telekinesis. Perhaps the muscled man has trained his organs to metabolize not only his grief, but the sorrow of others, and is in a state of repose. The models appear to live in hermetically sealed spaces, or outside, in environmentally damaged landscapes, but in fact their world has transcended the need for manual labor, and has purified acts of consumption to the level of sacred rituals. Demand that the fantasy world of the advertisement make literal its promise.

*Anthesis:*

Invite your friends to a masquerade in which you act out this world. Use only materials at hand.

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## 11.

*Situation:*

You encounter someone who seems to be oblivious. Your pack instincts are whetted.

*Praxis:*

Be oblivious. Let yourself be seen as oblivious.

*Anthesis:*

Find your friends and go do something else.

## 12.

### *Situation:*

You find yourself speaking with — or being spoken at by — a person who, for any combination of reasons, you are convinced is *beyond the pale*. That is, their views or their way of appearing in the world is so inimical to your attentive commitments that you find yourself at a loss. Or, worse, you assume *they* are utterly lost. (Your symptoms may include outrage, annoyance, hatred, pity).

### *Practice:*

Presumably — unless you have become so disturbed by the offending person as to engage in open mockery by making antlers of your hands and sticking out your tongue while chanting “Nah-nah-nah-nah-nah” — *presumably* your tongue is resting in your mouth. Make the roof of your mouth a button. When your tongue rises silently to the roof of your mouth to press this button, with all the suddenness of a switch, *everything transforms*. Neon lights. Dancing penguins. Raining flowers. Saturated color. Groovy music. Disco ball in the sky. It is a party, and the person speaking is the host *par excellence*. Oh, this person looks *fabulous* tonight: the particular arrangement of the features on this face, the distance from the eyes to the chin, the angle of the nose to the ears. Everything being said is so *right*, it is as if you are hearing a *DJ of truth*. You are so *onboard* with these words and ways that you *want to cry*, to dance in the ardor of their accuracy. You see, floating in the surround, the specters of those who raised this person, brought this person into being; the blood and sweat and tears that got this person to *this moment*, and that now raise this luminous body up into near-levitation. THIS is the party this person *always aimed to throw* and now, it needs YOU as the guest to pull it all off — you are *indescribably* lucky to have finally found it, here, an invitation to the *place you belong*.

Fear not: should this all become much too much to handle, or should you get swept away and begin to lose track of yourself, simply *remove your tongue from the button on the roof of your mouth*. The world will return. Your regular set of values and modes will come rushing back. Press the button again, and the party resumes. (Rapid toggling of the button has been reported by practitioners to be quite fun, though not recommended for people sensitive to stroboscopic effects, epileptics, etc.).

NB: This practice is best performed with the lips closed and the face neutral. Only the trained observer may recognize the slightest indication that the button has been pushed in a softening of the eyes.

*Anthesis:*

Participate in a ritual of *sustained attention to objects made to be attended*, and practice it regularly with your friends; give each other funny names, for instance, the names of birds.

HERE ENDS THIS HANDBOOK

(may it engender familiars)

and remember, to achieve *FULL ANTHESIS*,  
you must to take the time to ***let the flowers  
smell you,***

(and your Friends....)

## APPENDIX

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “THE FRIENDS OF ATTENTION”?

## I. FRIENDSHIP AS AN ATTENTIONAL PRACTICE

Friendship, as we have discussed, makes the world more livable. And friendship is made from **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION**, which is both its cause and its effect. While companies might prey on our desire to cohere and feel understood by others, radical friendship offers *free and unlimited access to the generous encounter with self and other in all of the mutable, chaotic, and experimental manifestations possible*. In the act of *tending* to a friendship, a SANCTUARY emerges, where our associative bonds offer footholds for expression and understanding. These footholds give us access to the spaces of possibility — spaces to dream and build another world, to contemplate the *what shall*.

Friendship, then, is a form of radical attention that resists monetization. “Radical” because it is vital to life, because it nourishes us *at the root* so we may flourish. “Attention,” because it invokes the *spell of association*. “Resistant to monetization,” because it *bestows without expecting return*.

Our desire to be seen and validated by others is frequently exploited by the forces of commodification. Surveillance and data mining pose a direct threat to free expression by funneling our search for self into the profitable thoroughfares of the market. The trails we leave on- and off-line are tracked and manipulated by the gatekeepers of social platforms, so that our behaviors become ever-more predictable and are hardened into “legible” and “computable” identities. (Although this phenomenon affects us all, it poses a special peril for the young, who have never lived in a reality free from this segmentation/atomization of identity.) We are broken down into data. *He is the type of person who buys organic eggs and cares about social justice. She is a mother of three who loves DIY projects.*

But *among friends*, the branded identity, the ersatz pseudo-self, dissolves into dynamic and mutable expressions. Radical friendship is *prismatic*. The jewel turns, and the light refracts, creating strange and beautiful patterns and colors. Through friendship we access new ways of being. We open ourselves to facets of our identities that we could not have found on our own, because we have the license to experiment, to try on new appearances and have them reflected back to us with greater nuance, generosity, and *reality* than we can give ourselves.

### PERFORMING THE SPELL OF ASSOCIATION

#### The Twinkling Jewel

*I am precariously holding others to whom I attend.*

*May we witness each other.*

*Hold one another safely and in expanse.*

*How does she need? How does she need to be witnessed? Where can I direct the light so it may refract in a [truer] way?*

\* \* \*

## II. FRIENDSHIP AS SANCTURY

Friendship is *unprofitable*. Unlike many aspects of traditional marriage, or the historical structures of family, or employer-employee relations, the form “friendship” has, to a significant degree, resisted incursion by both state and market. Friendship remains *free*. Free from the leaden entanglements imposed by convention, regulation, and financial obligation, “friendship” ever allows us to cast, transmute, weave, and recast a World Wide Web of *golden threads* — a true NET that holds us in safety as we experiment our way to ourselves.

In turn, friendship constitutes the SANCTUARY for free and experimental coexistence. It is the project of *weaving ourselves into existence*. Under these conditions, we achieve authorship over our own lives, we are *gifted* with this authorship by others — within the spaces of friendship, we can give something a name and have others recognize it. We say, “*I see it too.*”

Loneliness is alienation. It makes us prey. Friendship is the antidote. **RADICAL HUMAN ATTENTION** *acts like a spell on an unlivable reality whose law is dissociation*. The world cracks open, the glass shatters: behind and within we see the possibility of ourselves (and everything around us).

In SANCTUARY, there is *dignity*, and where dignity can be summoned, there is power.

### PERFORMING THE SPELL OF ASSOCIATION

#### The Sanctuary

*Face one another with availability, with radical attention.  
Do not evaluate, do not sit in judgment, do not loan yourself  
expecting a return with interest.  
Do not functionalize, problematize and seek solutions; instead,  
relish the mystery.*

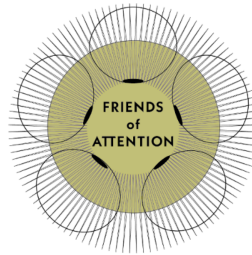
\* \* \*

## III. TENDING AND ATTENDING

Friendship integrates attending and tending. To offer a friend a place to stay, a long phone call in the middle of the day, a warm meal, or an article of clothing — these acts secure the bonds that obligate us to one another. These obligations differ from the traditional terms of financialized intersubjectivity that target the individual (market relations, predatory lending, “networking”). Instead, the terms of friendship are *emergent*. They represent values beyond and other than money value. They advance the common project of *building a world together*.

PERFORMING THE SPELL OF ASSOCIATION  
The Lifeguard

*Attend and tend. Tend to your friendships.  
Nourish them with love, generosity, and patience.  
Swim to the side of the stream, hold out your hand.  
Wait without expecting.*



[www.friendsofattention.net](http://www.friendsofattention.net)