



“Chasing Attention” (with special guest Chris Hayes) 7 March 2025

14:14:02 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:
<https://www.schoolofattention.org/>

14:14:42 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:
End of literacy?

14:14:45 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:
Eeek.

14:17:19 From Connor Griffin to Everyone:
Amber

14:17:20 From eve to Everyone:
Amber!

14:21:23 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/13ITzzhOGmbshCHVBKrabq6tvPMKSj3E0/view?pli=1>

14:26:18 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:
Replying to "Eeek."
^^Graham's two comments, together, are actually a beautiful (irregular) haiku about post-literacy

14:29:38 From Ana Cristina (Tininha) to Everyone:
Thank YOU!

“BEING DELIVERED” WARMUP EXERCISE

14:31:23 From ana pura to Everyone:

I visualized structures like of water ducts, which conduct water rather than let it flow freely. But then there's the whole machine learning hypercomplex tech that redirects itself as it's happening, and so even if it's all for hegemony and profit, how would these ducts actually look like?

14:31:58 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:

Found myself thinking so hard about the dynamics of ENCRYPTION – and the way the workings of these systems are behind walls of formal “hiddenness...”

14:31:58 From Molly Zapp to Everyone:

Probably today looking at NY Times, even though I reject all the cookies I can, and don't use social media. Structures: vast. Programmers and journalists, advertising researchers and people who wanna sell things. Handshakes and deals made at restaurants that couldn't afford. Coal burning and windmills pumping electricity, screens, rare earth metals, underpaid janitors, overpaid executives.

14:32:00 From Etienne Turpin to Everyone:

How I was delivered to The Guardian's ad auction to receive an ad for a boot knife, that I could conveniently hide in my boot, just before this session ... the extent of the data that led to me being delivered to the boot knife people is so vast as to be at the very edge of fathomability

14:32:02 From Larry Berger to Everyone:

I am delivered because my attention is absorbed in the commercial, my energy is literally sucked into the mechanism and I am formed in that manner. But I can resist by holding my attention in my body, and not letting it be taken.

14:32:05 From Connor Griffin to Everyone:

Wait a sec... why am I getting ads on Spotify premium???

14:32:16 From Ben Berger (Swarthmore) to Everyone:

The last time I was delivered as a product was the last time I opened the internet on my computer or phone.

14:32:40 From Kyle Winston to Everyone:

Last week at Tufts I was as a "guest critic" of architecture. Invited by a friend to come review projects of her students.

My reactions and feedback, but more so my whole presence in the room, felt like I was the product students were putting their tuition toward.

When I think of delivery I think of walking through the door of the studio. A

Made possible by the architecture and design community that expects projects to be reviewed by others. They cannot just live with the one prof alone, they must be shared, with others, and enter into a kind of community of aesthetics, design and critique.

14:32:56 From Chris Hayes to Everyone:

I saw a fellow player at my pick up game today using a spray on his shoes so they wouldn't slip. I had seen that same ad on Instagram and was just wondering what the parameters were that went into that ad buy from that company: did they have a webform there they ticked a bunch of boxes? Why was I included?

14:33:02 From Jason Snider to Everyone:

Last time I was delivered as the product was the search for advocacy groups whom I might better find community and collaboration with.

Also delivered tons of ads to my socials, email and phone. A bit challenging to “visualize” that, other than rooms of servers, satellites and undersea cables.

14:33:03 From Raphaële Jeune to Everyone:

From the individualistic use to the law shared by all the citizens of a nation and reverse, getting through all the steps and contradictory tensions and logics. Nodes of interests connected in a rhizomatic web, which normally stays invisible. Nice to make it visible !

14:33:07 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:

I was struck by the contrast between the experience of being the product — how PERSONAL it feels to, say, be served a targeted ad VS. how impersonal the structures I visualized were.

14:33:23 From Ana Cristina (Tininha) to Everyone:

I visualized the structure of databases and apps that package and deliver me as a product...Then, I thought about my own "features" that allow myself to be "the product"... My eyes, my hands, my dopamine system.... And my desire to connect and to know, which "fishes" me and I end up being delivered to the customer

14:33:25 From Quinn Marchman to Everyone:

I somehow butt dialed my way to an AMEX card sign-up page. It had already auto-filled a good portion of my information.

14:33:30 From Johannes Wankhammer to Everyone:

I was meditating on the old McLuhanian "medium is the message" idea -- the short video did an excellent job both drawing attention to how the medium functions (background music, etc) and delivered a corresponding message. Last time I was "delivered" was a few minutes ago scrolling on Instagram -- and it's now showing me all anti-musk content. The message is "anti-tech-oligarch-- but me being captured by the form and medium itself contradicts that message; it feeds into the very apparatus those message claimed to attack. When thinking about how all this works I was reflecting on how precisely monetization of attention works in apps like Instagram.

14:34:07 From Jessica Gallucci to Everyone:

Delivered by means of my device/phone and the NYT app to the advertiser (Tide), who'd placed a digital ad in the top story above the fold, likely targeted to my demographic using subscriber intelligence
Expensive hardware (that I paid for); an app/subscription (that I paid for); attention (that I paid)

14:34:51 From Brit Naylor to Everyone:

Feels impossible to visualize networks, software, browser cookies. Me on a device on one end, some marketing professional on the other end, an abstract mess in between.

Started by using Pinterest for design projects, I see shoes and add them to a board out of aesthetic appreciation, then the system decides I want new shoes, then I'm shown new shoes, or rather I'm digitally paraded before all the various companies that sell shoes on multiple social media platforms.

14:34:57 From Jillian Impastato to Everyone:

Replying to "Last week at Tufts I was as a "guest critic" of ar...":
I went to Tufts and now I work in higher ed! My example was very similar about my expertise being delivered to students which make me a product in some ways

14:35:41 From Larry Berger to Everyone:

Elite charitable fundraising has a trick: create an event with "honorees". The premise is that one is being honored for one's work in this field. But in fact one is being delivered for the purpose of expanding the fundraising network of the nonprofit.

The professionalization, industrialization of kindness, concern, and the doubts cultivated about government as a mechanism for addressing concern. The widening of apertures of concern so that one needs professional charities to reach people too far away or too numerous to reach directly. One needs to professionalize fundraising with tricks like this - but it turns out it is still people and relationships that work to elicit charity.

14:36:05 From Roberto Tejada to Everyone:

Most recently "delivered" to the administration of my university employer, by means of the requirement to itemize the vocation of writing, teaching, and commitment to serve the institution and the community writ large; the delivery is through an online quantifying platform that refutes narrative.

CHRIS HAYES OFFERS HIS REMARKS

14:38:03 From Ben Berger (Swarthmore) to Everyone:

This is what Neil Postman crystalized further in Amusing Ourselves To Death

14:43:43 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:

I think of James Williams — his concern that mass media turns out to be a “race to the bottom of the brain stem” —

14:44:17 From Ben Berger (Swarthmore) to Everyone:

I think that Aristotle’s Rhetoric is written with some of the same ends in mind.

14:44:38 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:

^ ^ ^ ^

14:44:52 From eve to Everyone:

In family therapy we say that water flows to the lowest level

14:45:18 From Justin Smith-Ruiu to Everyone:

There’s also a treatise “On the Winds”, but that turned out to be Pseudo-Aristotle.

14:54:26 From Stefan Pryce to Everyone:

Have to run, peace all and thank you Chris! 🍷🍷

14:54:33 From Etienne Turpin to Everyone:

Siren call will be the most intense scene in the Christopher Nolan adaptation

REPORTING FROM BREAKOUTS – ON “RATINGS” AND “TYING OURSELVES TO THE MAST”

15:07:03 From Larry Berger to Everyone:

Gloria mark – rating change as retired, buying books, watch the message. How not to alienate for students, but different for book sales. LB: curriculum development at national level is disturbing, leads to blunt check list in search of words that are ideological. Tension v truth and ratings.

Public schools in CA can’t use race or gender for admission, but we got around it.

LB2’s work is to resist the siren call by keeping attention grounded in the body, which is the essence of mindfulness.

Cords to the post are an awareness that ads are harmful, we need that. I study the techniques.

15:07:21 From ana pura to Everyone:

Thank you for my break out room group, it was such an enriching conversation <3

15:07:42 From Carlos Montemayor to Everyone:

Elisa: Pressure to adapt curricula to pressures, at risk of dropping out key courses. Attention driven (e.g., sci fi, market driven, etc.). Doubling down was a strategy. Give students whether they are interested in medieval literature. Ratings are affecting education.

Alyssa: The role of education is to reshape the curiosity of students independently or even against the ratings.

Jessica: Are other areas of the public sphere where that apply or is it limited to academia?

Elisa: Media has consolidated in so many ways what is of interest to us.

Carlos: The key question of agency. Extending education as a shaping of society and agency for the public sphere and public dialogue. This is key to reshape the ratings and produce real agency. There is no mast to hold on to if we don’t reshape our agency.

15:07:58 From Carlos Montemayor to Everyone:

Jessica: The metaphor is not really lashing yourself to the lash when you prevent your attention to be totally dominated. It is not complete isolation.

Alyssa: I go back and forth on this.

15:09:56 From Brian Janosch to Everyone:

We spent most our time discussing the ratings question.

Roberto compares the attention of his classroom as a form for ratings. And in non-profits, there are fundraising dollars and donors who serve as a form of ratings—informing the ways folks who work at the nonprofit behave.

Raphaele also teaches and feels less of the ratings from her classroom, but acknowledges the metrics of feedback or performance ratings

Sasha makes magazines and needs to sell them. That is a form of rating. Capturing attention is even a means of receiving more grants.

I shared about digital media and how obscure that “rating” can be. It’s just a number, but that number could reflect the medium or the moment more than the content itself.

15:09:58 From Carlos Montemayor to Everyone:

Carlos: There is no mast, a lot of powerful siren calls.

15:10:02 From Johannes Wankhammer to Everyone:

We talked almost exclusively about the second prompt – and especially, as Joana introduced the problem, how that would work – exposing yourself to the “Siren’s call” while insulating yourself from its effects.

Tom mentioned the cycle of deleting apps and reinstalling them again as a possible example of such self-restraint; or things like turning phone colors off.

Joana mentioned the issue of distance – vs. Ulysses and the sirens, these apps are always “too close”.

Tom suggested having time limits might be a way to navigate Scylla and Charybdis (to stay within Homeric imagery).

Melissa raised suggest the “incoluation” – exposing yourself in small doses to be more resistant in the long run – may be one way to think about this.

We also wondered about the limits of the analogy – isn’t the beautiful allure of the Sirens different from the “anaesthetizing barrage of meaningless shit” we’re bombarded with constantly?

15:10:02 From Brian Janosch to Everyone:

We asked/wondered how we navigate the tension between where ratings may suggest we go (the direction we “should” steer into) vs consciously rejecting that. Roberto feels privileged enough to largely ignore his evaluations. Raphaele finds ways to learn from those evaluations—she finds they can help serve as a tool within self evaluation.

It’s interesting to think about the difference between ratings informing evaluation vs ratings outright dictating our messaging or our priorities as teachers and storytellers. They seem informative, even helpful, as a tool of evaluation and maybe suspect or confrontational as a force that fully steers us.

15:10:04 From Johannes Wankhammer to Everyone:

Melissa suggested a may be problematic because you’re ceding the space to those engaging terribly with the medium; an example of this is the deterioration of X by all the interesting voices moving to Bluesky.

15:11:07 From Christopher Mole to Everyone:

In architecture: Hard to get feedback from an audience who doesn't share one's ideology/orientation.

Two kinds of ratings: Internal and external — external feedback very different from friends and broader public/audience. Internal ratings need to be tuned into: bodily arousal and attentive engagement felt as an immediate feedback — getting tuned out of these signals is maddening. Tying oneself to the mast in short-term very different from doing so over longer term (or we allow our past-selves to become dictators of our future). The siren's call was the call of beauty, but the mass media don't offer beauty — those wanting news of the missing plane weren't finding it beautiful.

15:11:17 From eve to Everyone:

Jacob: reflecting on the first prompt, two different ways: 1) attention ecosystem as a merchant of attention, in my work life, the attention that I capture as an educator in higher education — there is a way of thinking about how ratings drive the sails of that work, but also 2) attention ecosystem as a consumer and through my own attention as it is consumed. 1: students signing up in classes, deciding to major in my program, rate my professor, course evaluations — those have less momentum in the sails than those signing up, how many are signing up or registering to major, which is what the university pays attention to. But then there is 2: a very different way to think about how my own attention is driven by ratings

Lane: the divide between work lives and live-lives is interesting. As a writer I think about losing someone's attention — if a reader closes what they're reading and I don't get to make rent money.

15:11:31 From eve to Everyone:

Lane: But also when one is talking, looking at the people in conversation, the dimming of the light when what you are saying is no longer compelling — reflecting on a conversation where a man at a party was holding all interlocutors hostages with something so uninteresting, not realizing how everyone was no longer interested and HOW could he not notice? The instant ratings — do you have people's attention when you are talking, and if not, how are you course correcting? Shutting up? Are you paying attention to the up-to-the-minute rating. We were all held hostage but NOT captive and he didn't notice it, only taking warm bodies in a room as encouragement; this may be more about social skills, but we all have had these moments where a kind of rating system is happening in front of our faces.

Eve: therapist rant

15:11:39 From Jacob Sheetz-Willard to Everyone:

Jillin talked about both working at a campus museum and also a social media project that both measure success by how many people engage with a project, but it's harder to quantify or measure how such experiences actually impact people's attention.

Kim pointed out that Odysseus counts on the other people to tie him fast, that it's something impossible or very difficult to do on your own; community is absolutely essential in this effort.

Quinn explored a little how impossible it feels to contest algorithmic power via our own free will, that the spiral of shame is an easy place to be when we—as folks invested in the politics of attention—feel our own habits falling short.

15:11:43 From Ben Berger (Swarthmore) to Everyone:

Ben: do we pay more attention to complaining students (who might have negative attitudes toward the material) than to students who show genuine interest—because the ratings are negative? Seems perverse...

Tying to the mast:

Phillip: Example of an excessive drinker who, after abstinence, leaves liquor/wine in the open as a part of the normal ecosystem.

Adam: One can disable recommendation algorithms on YouTube, and when Adam does that he gets a black screen when he opens YouTube. He still opens the app, sometimes out of habit, but now the black screen give the opportunity for agency.

Kristin and Donica: favor the idea of being inside an attentional system but subverting it, not simply taking actions that are re-absorbed by it.
(Glee from getting a targeted ad that's "wrong" or inaccurate)

15:11:45 From eve to Everyone:

Maura: Thinking of narcissists we have in society demanding attention; like an advertiser is demanding our attention for the product, the narcissist is a personal product. If we are resisting having our attention fracked around advertising and products, what skills can be brought from those ways to resist that type of attentional fracking to bring over to the social sphere where some of us want to resist the narcissistic demands for attention. An interesting crossover and it is what it feels like what is happening every day when we read the NYT — this person is demanding out attention, needs it, how do we not give it as a form of resistance?

Jacob: so much attention is passive without real time engagement; we are being trained to be receivers of content to have their attention captured by someone else.

15:12:01 From eve to Everyone:

Jacob: Lack of interpersonal awareness, lack of attentional capacity to recognize someone else's subjectivity in real time; so much of the people who are dominating attention are doing so in a narcissistic way, pushing things down our throat.

Lane: loves the idea of resistance. When he got elected a second time, we have had to have him on the cover of every newspaper every day for so many years. For the party story, how do I show my resistance? But Eve like what you were saying, everything we want is connection — we just want human connection, so the glossing over of not paying attention to the real time ratings is because I want to be seen and heard. How to think of the radical resistance AND the empathetic skillset to recognize that the behavior is about connection

15:12:23 From Connor Griffin to Everyone:

How do ratings manifest in your attention ecosystem? Connor: in person-to-person interactions! It's very easy to tell when I'm boring someone and especially when I was younger there was little I feared more. Ana Cristina: doesn't post on social media much but is attentive to likes/comments when she does. It's really important for artists who make their living on social media. Molly: I was a snob in my 20s and ignored the mainstream, but now I feel it's important for our politics for me to understand the mainstream! I listened to Rogan for the first time last month and discovered I know almost no one on the top 100 podcasters! That seems bad! I try to listen to more right wing voices and more religious voices now

15:12:50 From Brit Naylor to Everyone:

First ratings given are unconscious, bodily responses

15:13:00 From Kyle Winston to Everyone:

DLandes: we have a rating system among us!

ETurpin had software company funding cut from new government / hundreds of people out of work / meanwhile called "worms" by Musk.

Ratings are donor evaluation, delivering good product, having the thing blown up.

CHayes: Ratings matter a lot until they don't!

DLandes - ratings everywhere! In school settings, one of the ratings is confusion among students. Certain rating system is lost and transfixed, make students have loss of language.. and this is the goal!

Informal Unusual ratings system, who refers whom, from students, Reputation in university.

KWinston working with students as well. Cold open in architecture studio setting.

CHayes: In both of these, reading the reaction moment to moment! When you transition to camera you don't have any of that!

Part of the weirdness of ratings is it loses tactility; the of temperature of the room.

ETurpin: Mask tying plea: do not refer to the thing as a phone! It's a portable rechargeable supercomputer!

15:13:15 From ana pura to Everyone:
What if metrics were directed to HEALTH

15:13:26 From Christopher Mole to Everyone:
Felt rewards of being part of a collectively attending group: can attention activism be part of collective cultural moment?

15:14:15 From Maura (she/her) to Everyone:
Replying to "Felt rewards of being part of a collectively atten...":
exactly - that is my question as well!

15:17:43 From Johannes Wankhammer to Everyone:
Critically important observations by Graham. One question I had was whether this "numerical abstraction" of your attention ultimately feeds money -- like abstract labor in capitalism -- or power -- in this new caricature of a public sphere we discussed earlier