



A RIGHT TO ATTENTION? (with guest John Newman) 3 October 2025

2025-10-03 14:02:39 From peter@sustainedattention.net to Everyone:
Vitória reporting from the beach 🏖️

2025-10-03 14:07:14 From peter@sustainedattention.net to Everyone:
Hi Akua!!

2025-10-03 14:07:22 From Akua to Everyone:
Hi Peter!!

2025-10-03 14:12:16 From Jonathan Gershberg to Everyone:
Hey @Holmes, Brooke!

2025-10-03 14:12:47 From Holmes, Brooke to Everyone:
:)) Hi friends!

2025-10-03 14:13:09 From asú to Everyone:
Kristen, I wanna hear the rest of what you were saying!! <3

2025-10-03 14:16:30 From Jahony Germosen to Everyone:
Go Jonathan !!!
Jonathan Gershberg, Peter (he/him): ❤️
Gwen Olton (they / she): ✨
Holmes, Brooke: 🙌
David Landes: 🙏

2025-10-03 14:16:52 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:
The TOOLKIT is looking SO GOOD!
Henry Kramer: 🙌

2025-10-03 14:17:28 From Jahony Germosen to Everyone:
Thanks Peter !!!!

2025-10-03 14:19:18 From peter@sustainedattention.net to Everyone:

This copy is Brazil-bound for asú!
asú:❤️

2025-10-03 14:19:29 From Holmes, Brooke to Everyone:
YAY Gwen!
Gwen Olton (they / she):❤️

2025-10-03 14:22:08 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:
GWEN thank you for your amazing work!! 🙌
Gwen Olton (they / she), David Landes:❤️

2025-10-03 14:22:17 From Jahony Germosen to Everyone:
Thanks Gwen !!!
Gwen Olton (they / she):❤️

2025-10-03 14:25:22 From Yves Citton to Everyone:
Amazing book!
Christopher Mole:👍

2025-10-03 14:25:58 From kristinlawler to Everyone:
I use Scenes of Attention for my class too, it's so fantastic and the students love it
Donica Bettanin (she/her):⚡

2025-10-03 14:26:57 From Henry Kramer to Everyone:
<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/782387/attensity-by-the-friends-of-attention/>
Peter (he/him):❤️

2025-10-03 14:27:05 From Elisabeth Q to Everyone:
It's a great holiday gift, buy a few!
Donica Bettanin (she/her):❤️

2025-10-03 14:27:13 From Henry Kramer to Everyone:
Replying to "<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/782387/at...>":
(Link to the book!)

2025-10-03 14:28:49 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:
HEY that is AMAZING thank you Yves!!
Donica Bettanin (she/her):👏

2025-10-03 14:29:27 From Jahony Germosen to Everyone:
LEN NALENCZ !!!

2025-10-03 14:34:20 From Yves Citton to Everyone:
Th

2025-10-03 14:35:58 From peter@sustainedattention.net to Everyone:
Jahony:❤️

2025-10-03 14:36:40 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:
I found my object more interesting after I interfered with it — made me think about how a threat made the “right” seem more vivid, more insistent

2025-10-03 14:36:44 From peter@sustainedattention.net to Everyone:
My object: the stapler.

I put it under my desk, out of sight, and then gave my attention to it through the desk. Or was I just thinking about the stapler? Not sure... but I was really trying to stay with the spatial direction of my attention. Not just thinking about the stapler, but thinking about it being right there!

2025-10-03 14:36:47 From Jonathan Gershberg to Everyone:

Object: Park gazebo

I meditated on the meaning of attending to a structure, and saw all the holes and broken pieces that could be fixed with attention and care.

2025-10-03 14:36:48 From Henry Kramer to Everyone:

My object was a wooden mask.

It's been hanging on my wall for years and became invisible.

First, I put it behind my computer so it was refused.

Then I put it over my face, ran my fingers along the wood, and smelled it. I looked through its eyes to see how it might see the world. I looked at its face to imagine what sort of person it would be if it were a person with its own face - the cheekbones, nose, etc. Then I attempted to see it as something deserving of my gaze, that needed it/fed on it, and I began to appreciate it more.

2025-10-03 14:36:55 From Evan Porter to Everyone:

Quality of attention is not dependent on an object, its aspect is

2025-10-03 14:36:59 From Elettra Bietti to Everyone:

I moved a half eaten apple to a spot where I often leave things before tossing them and then took a bite of the apple, which now looked undesirable

2025-10-03 14:37:04 From Christopher Mole to Everyone:

I paid attention to a rather ostentatiously coloured handkerchief. Its right to attention was negated by blowing my nose on it (thereby making it slightly disgusting). It turns out that paying attention to slightly disgusting things is kind of interesting.

2025-10-03 14:37:12 From Akua to Everyone:

I turned a framed poster on its side. As I attended to it, I was drawn to the painting in the background. It was full of astonished looks I didn't notice until I interfered with it 😊

2025-10-03 14:37:20 From Sebastian Watzl to Everyone:

I chose a drawing my wife made for our three year old last night. I think it deserves some of our attention. Then I hid it (didn't dare to destroy it). As I couldn't see it, it was a lot harder to keep a focus on it. Tried to imagine the content of the image, but the mind wandered easily. Keeping mind fixed much easier with external scaffolds!

2025-10-03 14:37:33 From Larry Berger to Everyone:

My Object was a cup of the major philosophers. I put it in a drawer, and then I could feel it in the drawer after imagining it for a while

2025-10-03 14:37:37 From John Newman to Everyone:

Object = pumpkin. Denied right by putting a blanket over it. Experience: I immediately felt guilty, suggesting I had personified the pumpkin by attending to it.

2025-10-03 14:37:38 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:

I attended to a granola yogurt parfait that I bought this am, and have not had time to eat. I put it out of view. And then gave it a kind of meditative attention.... Striking in this, for me, was the way my attention went to the "GENEALOGY" of its elements (where they came from, how they were prepared).

This kind of "historical" thinking is key to me. But is it a way of STAYING WITH an object? Or DEPARTING FROM IT?

2025-10-03 14:37:49 From Elisabeth Q to Everyone:
The interference was key.

2025-10-03 14:37:54 From Zev to Everyone:
A ceramic pig. Reminds me of my mother. I placed a stand in front of it. Then I leaned around the stand so I could see it. Felt calm and curious. Playful.

2025-10-03 14:38:09 From Yves Citton to Everyone:
The right of a plastic cup to be noticed, to be taken into account, instead of being used and thrown away. This taking into account affects our planet's conditions of habitability. I did put smthg in front of the cup to hide it. Then I thought I had the right to remove the obstacle and look at it again...

2025-10-03 14:38:13 From kristinlawler to Everyone:
A framed photo and series of letters from Brandeis to my grandfather's law partner, I inherited it after my dad died and I haven't found a good spot for it in my newish apt yet so it's leaned against a bookshelf. I turned it around and noticed pencil writing on the back, lines so that it could be hung evenly and some numbers, saw the wire by which it hangs, which is still shaped by the way it hung in my father's office. Rips and tears in the framing paper, each one with a story, holding my father and my grandfather here with me.

2025-10-03 14:38:14 From Roberto Tejada to Everyone:
Transparent tape dispenser: unremarkable on my desk, sequestered from the clutter, then hidden behind a standing cell phone, but once recuperated, placed on the laptop serving as the portal to this meeting and now receiving all the light from the room, reflections in the absent space and around the curves and contours

2025-10-03 14:38:32 From Brit Naylor to Everyone:
Placed a stainless steel thermos on the floor and behind a floor lamp in the corner of the room, out of sight. Attending to the object involved simply repositioning myself to see it in the corner. I could see the lamp and the wall and the rug all reflected in the brushed stainless steel and I was sort of reminded of an oil painting class in which i learned to mix colors of adjacent colors into each other to make it look more realistic, because colors bleed like that in reality. Though the thermos was hidden in reflected everything it was hidden BY, so i could see it without seeing it

2025-10-03 14:38:49 From Roberto Elías Luna to Everyone:
During second round I saw details I haven't seen, like never!

2025-10-03 14:39:27 From Michael Boyden to Everyone:
I selected an E-identifier. Not sure why? It is purely functional and serves to give me access to my bank account. I never considered its value beyond that...

2025-10-03 14:45:35 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:
For later: John, can you drop the name of that case (about the profane shirt) in the chat

2025-10-03 14:46:19 From Mihir Kshirsagar to Everyone:
Cohen v. California: <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1970/299>
Jac Mullen, Jonathan Gershberg: ❤️

2025-10-03 14:46:34 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:
^^^ for Mullen... (and all...)

2025-10-03 14:48:26 From David Landes to Everyone:
what are some alternatives to rights?

2025-10-03 14:49:08 From kristinlawler to Everyone:
Replying to "what are some alternatives to rights?":
Power
Sebastian Watzl: ❤️
Peter (he/him): 🙋

2025-10-03 14:49:27 From Sebastian Watzl to Everyone:
Replying to "what are some alternatives to rights?":
Exactly!!

2025-10-03 14:59:46 From Henry Kramer to Everyone:
Comparison to the "right to clean air." Is this issue more hygiene-like than strictly individual. More of a common right than a right that belongs to and is protected by and for you alone. What kind of "attentional ecosystem" or "attentional environment" could be put forward or articulated, so that the right to attention can be framed intersubjectively rather than atomically - to be more of a parallel to environmental law? Shared psychological space? The experiential landscape? We are wondering what alternative models to "rights" could be? Perhaps the alternative is power. "I have the power to not turn on my phone. I have the power to not do certain things, and do other things." What is in our power? By not paying attention, we have power. This is not contradictory with rights.

2025-10-03 14:59:47 From Henry Kramer to Everyone:
"Public right to hear" - such as a right to hear an alarm if there is a fire. How could this be applied?
River personhood in New Zealand - where does the river end? Is it the river's individual rights or is it collective? Where does the river end?
Conclusion: all of this depends on what we agree something is. Once we reach that agreement, we can then begin applying legal concepts.

2025-10-03 14:59:50 From peter@sustainedattention.net to Everyone:
Room 4 (1/1):

Elettra: I disagree with John's sketch in one way - I believe that US law does provide a right to attention! And it does so in the wrong way. US law is based on individual freedoms, and the individual liberty to direct your attention wherever you want. That is a *form* of attentional freedom, and one that is weaponized by the current economy.

Michael: Isn't that in line with John's argument, that a rights-based approach doesn't quite work here? As in, the kinds of protections that the US system provides are insufficient.

2025-10-03 14:59:55 From Etienne Turpin to Everyone:
WHAT WOULD RIGHT TO ATTENTION REALLY LOOK LIKE?
HOW WOULD IT LOOK DIFFERENT FROM YOURS?
HOW TO DISTINGUISH CONFLICTING RIGHTS TO ATTENTION?

Could it be like an ATTENTION Sanctuary - ZONES away from distraction algos

The right to the city, the right to my body, is a cultural north star with some ambiguity; but, how that codifies in the law, is less clear.

Culture sphere is more important, and using legal language as rhetorical mobilization!
Use the ambiguity!

Thinking small, small steps - the right to turn off algos. I have the right to turn it off. That is a small step that can help control the information feed.

Yes, small, but also important to consider how it is destructive of land, water, etc., how to unplug the machine at a larger scale.

Also, negative articulation: the Right Against Attentional Theft!

2025-10-03 14:59:54 From Yves Citton to Everyone:
Mike Ananny's "public right to hear"

2025-10-03 14:59:59 From Jahony Germosen to Everyone:
- Non-human entities having legal rights (how is this understood)
- Why are rights-based policies generally received better— what is the opposite of rights-based ?
- Paying attention forward- as a gift
- Rights & Protection: What about protection policies? Certain moments might not be caught in time which will create a slippery slope in actually protecting attention.
- The Attention Economy has a lot of money to protect themselves even from breaking laws that are imposed on technology.

2025-10-03 15:00:08 From peter@sustainedattention.net to Everyone:
Room 4 (2/2):

Elettra: We differ on how we view the landscape. The problem to me is that there's too much emphasis on individual opportunity to opt in and out. I would not propose a right *going forward*, but I do think we have some rights, and they aren't working the way we want them to.

Rebecca: I read an interesting article in the NYT yesterday that advances a different approach. A mayor in a Japanese town who saw a lot of truancy in schools. He decided to take on the digital addiction that he thought was driving this problem, and wrote an ordinance limiting digital device use to two hours a day outside of school work. There's no enforcement, but the thought was that in Japanese society, there is sufficient social pressure to conform to the regulations. What he's really trying to drive is getting families to get off their screens.

2025-10-03 15:00:22 From Holmes, Brooke to Everyone:
Intuitively, rights is not the way
Although some rights must be inalienable / not able to be bargained... it would also be difficult to define infringement against the right to attention (how do we pigeon-hole attention to clearly identify harm?)

We think of rights as a legal mechanism
But can we think of rights more morally?
Moral rights have a different valence
Can we come up with a more philosophical understanding of what a right is rather than a legal question?
How do you ground rights? In property or privacy? In cognitive integrity?

2025-10-03 15:00:28 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:
Jac: I don't know much about the framing of rights as 'bargain-able,' but I am curious to think with that framing. It strikes me as—jeopardizing, intrinsically, to cling to anything which is susceptible to become an object in bargaining, or liable to bargaining, when you are in an environment shaped by/operating adversarially against massively persuasive systems and technologies

Zev: Attention is a choice—but in the face of extraordinary technology: what does it mean to make a choice? It's a choice, but it needs training now, and it needs to become a discipline.

Larry: The question becomes how do I hold onto my attention in the face of its capture and misformation. <— Larry is doing a fascinating embodiment exercise with his students right now which, in my

sense of it, helps them to resist dissociation during scrolling by having them literally eg pinch their hand while on their TikTok feed.

2025-10-03 15:00:31 From David Landes to Everyone:

"Rights" are important as cultural slogans (e.g., the right "to the city", "to be forgotten") whose ambiguity plays out guiding, further than any singular legal codification that would be difficult to accessibly enforce

Jac Mullen: ❤️

2025-10-03 15:00:42 From Eva Schmidt Mickunas to Everyone:

Notes and brainstorming : Protecting attention through rights. Legally what are the best ways to protect attention? Attention is being fracked by other entities - companies, corporations etc. Consciously and non-consciously - attention is being taken away. I have the right to pay attention - yet corporations are syphoning attention without our awareness. Is Attention a practice? Like a listening practice - but with the fracking, it makes it more challenging.

2025-10-03 15:00:43 From Gwen Olton (they / she) to Everyone:

Alyssa, Sebastian, Evan, Gwen (part 1)

Competing rights - thrown into these marketplaces of competing rights. But ends up being about who has political and judicial might to enforce "rights". I might see something as bigotry that is perceived as "rights" of someone else.

From philosophical perspective. What are the alternatives? In philosophy it's to talk about power, unfair advantages, protecting certain kinds of relationships, less individualistic. It's about making sure certain valuable ways we can relate to each other are protected and can't be interfered with. Can be done in lots of different ways - but that feels like could be an alternative. Not sure how it would operate in a legal sort of framework.

2025-10-03 15:01:12 From Gwen Olton (they / she) to Everyone:

Alyssa, Sebastian, Evan, Gwen (part 2)

Intuition that it is really hard to establish a new "right" thinking about historical analogues - ex. Tobacco, fast food. Don't think those cases hinged on the creation of new rights but leaned on pre-existing rights. The idea of doing this through anti-trust instead is interesting. Could bring back / change our "consent" mechanism. Restoring competition at a basic sense might be what our legal system is set up to do. Better historical analogue might be the rise of health and fitness - not a right to fitness but folks started going to the gym. Might be more at the level of culture than the level of law.

Gandhi's distinction / disappointment of the creation of human rights and looking for "human responsibilities", the relational aspects of how we are to be together

2025-10-03 15:01:14 From Akua to Everyone:

Our conversation became a reflection on the substance of a right. Provocative, but not conclusive. We discussed how to non-legal thinkers discourse on rights are discourses of morality. We discussed whether protecting attention legally means conceding attention as a commodity.

2025-10-03 15:02:00 From Etienne Turpin to Everyone:

I think the "collective" right can take us back to urban noise legislation in the 19th and early 20th century. That residents all had the right NOT to be driven mad by urban noises day and night ...

2025-10-03 15:02:44 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:

Replying to "I think the "collective" right can take us back to...":
Interesting!

2025-10-03 15:03:47 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:

Replying to "'Rights" are important as cultural slogans (e.g., ...":
It's a little crazy to interact with a comment of this depth and perspicacity with a heart emoji

2025-10-03 15:04:05 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:
Replying to "'Rights' are important as cultural slogans (e.g., ...)":
❤️❤️
Jac Mullen: ❤️

2025-10-03 15:04:15 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:
Replying to "'Rights' are important as cultural slogans (e.g., ...)":
Two heart emojis?
Jac Mullen: ❤️

2025-10-03 15:04:33 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:
Replying to "'Rights' are important as cultural slogans (e.g., ...)":
[Emoji of unbearable political anguish]

2025-10-03 15:04:50 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:
Replying to "'Rights' are important as cultural slogans (e.g., ...)":
[emoji of the unspeakable eldritch horror]

2025-10-03 15:05:05 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:
Replying to "'Rights' are important as cultural slogans (e.g., ...)":
❤️

2025-10-03 15:13:46 From Etienne Turpin to Everyone:
The Right to Attention has a nice ring to it. It is catchy. It works.

It is a precursor to other rights as well. It is necessary for many other rights and is foundational.
It cuts across a lot of other rights.

Flood the cultural space with attentional rights and new slogans, new ideas, new attention rights
as a proto-first ammendment. Like Net-neutrality.

Also Rights against attentional theft, attentional abuse. That could play out of shift of
consciousness.

Need to define the measurable harm: as with cigarettes, we need to name the harm.

CAPTology must be THE STATED ENEMY.

PS -

If any of the Friends, or Friends of the Friends, are in Berlin later in 3 weeks, please join us for the
launch of the great attention philosopher Bernard Stiegler's The Immense Regression, enthusiastically
endorsed by none other than D. Graham Burnett!

<https://kverlag.com/blogs/news/dan-ross-stiegler>

2025-10-03 15:13:49 From Henry Kramer to Everyone:
Intrigued by "tax on advertisement/tax on attention"
There are certain cities that have strict rules about billboards, signs, etc.
New York banning phones in schools - maybe local action can be applied here more generally?
Municipality-specific fracking restrictions?
"In New York City you can't infinite-scroll on Instagram. Meta must provide a non-infinite
Instagram to NYC residents."
Goes along with the environmental parallel (rights to clean water etc).
Costs: "if emails cost a penny, how many fewer we would get!"
"Attentional Sanctuary Cities"
Collective rights.

2025-10-03 15:13:56 From Henry Kramer to Everyone:
Replying to "Intrigued by "tax on advertisement/tax on attentio...":
Breakout Room 5

2025-10-03 15:14:02 From Jahony Germosen to Everyone:
NOTES:

- Jonathan G: One of the divisions I see in activist spaces is the difference in language during mobilization efforts. Rights based language might make it easier to connect with other activists but Anti-trust might be more strategic for actual policies.
- JN: The civil rights movement used the language of RIGHTS on the street—
- RT: The rights based language is still very powerful— it prompts action.
- Jahony G. Why do we use "Rights-based" language so often? We have to acknowledge the value of something BEFORE we protect it, which is why I think RIGHTS may come before ANTI-TRUST or PROTECTION

2025-10-03 15:14:08 From peter@sustainedattention.net to Everyone:
Michael, Elettra, Peter, Rebecca (1/2):

Michael: The Canadian philosopher [] distinguishes between individual rights and group-based rights. Perhaps this is a generative way of talking about the issue as well. We move beyond individual rights!

Elettra: Thinking about collective rights is more useful. One way to think about rights is to think about them as the CORRELATE of DUTY. It's more helpful for me to think about duties in this space. I'm writing a paper to propose a tax on companies based on how long people spend on their platforms. If you create an addictive interface, you're supposed to pay it back to the community.

Peter: I don't think we should have a group line on the *legal* intricacies of rights, but we should use the language of rights for rhetorical purposes.

2025-10-03 15:14:12 From kristinlawler to Everyone:
Increasingly we feed the attention extractive algorithm with platforms we are forced to use at work, can we think of this as a workplace right too

2025-10-03 15:14:16 From Akua to Everyone:
Breakout Room 3: Mobilizing people around a discourse of rights is, to us, a question of culture. Politics are downstream to culture. The issue is that the attention economy is impacting culture and politics, creating a new (and strange feedback loop). Attention activism as public policy might be a more durable mode of cultural change.

2025-10-03 15:14:25 From David Landes to Everyone:
We are the right people to appealingly/virally name concepts and ideals for attention, including RIGHTS TO (attn privacy, protection) + RIGHTS AGAINST (attn theft, abuse) + anything that works create social force

2025-10-03 15:14:28 From peter@sustainedattention.net to Everyone:
Michael, Elettra, Peter, Rebecca (2/2):

Michael: This could be similar to the law against gambling.

Peter: I notice that many of the charismatic social movements I can think of tend to use the language of "rights": civil rights, voting rights. I guess the outlier is the environmental movement, which did not use a "rights" discourse. Could the environmental analogy provide an alternative way of thinking?

2025-10-03 15:14:29 From Gwen Olton (they / she) to Everyone:

Alyssa, Sebastian, Evan, Gwen

Looping back to health and big tobacco - cigarettes as drug delivery devices.

A bit skeptical of the health angle as well because of the continued focus individualism. It's about how we relate to each other. Through attention we form community at all - it misses the civic friendship / commons aspect

Think it's unlikely that we will or should take a "stance" on the rights question. Being able to stay kind of nimble and agile because we don't pin something down completely except the attention at the key / center.

2025-10-03 15:14:43 From peter@sustainedattention.net to Everyone:

Replying to "Michael, Elettra, Peter, Rebecca (1/2): Michael: ...":
@Michael Boyden , could you name the Canadian philosopher?

2025-10-03 15:14:53 From Michael Boyden to Everyone:

Replying to "Michael, Elettra, Peter, Rebecca (1/2): Michael: ...":
Will Kymlicka
Peter (he/him): 👍

2025-10-03 15:16:35 From Elettra Bietti to Everyone:

Is anyone here in touch with Jake Auchincloss?

2025-10-03 15:16:40 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:

Wow! Thanks John and thanks everyone for memorable contributions

2025-10-03 15:16:59 From Jahony Germosen to Everyone:

Thank you John !

2025-10-03 15:17:06 From peter@sustainedattention.net to Everyone:

peter@sustainedattention.net

2025-10-03 15:17:16 From Jonathan Gershberg to Everyone:

Much appreciated @John Newman

2025-10-03 15:17:24 From Elettra Bietti to Everyone:

Thanks John!

2025-10-03 15:17:35 From John Newman to Everyone:

Thank you all for welcoming me! And for sharing your attention. This is a lot of power in one room...

Vitória Oliveira, Donica Bettanin (she/her), Elettra Bietti, Holmes, Brooke, Brit Naylor: ❤️
Gwen Olton (they / she), Mihir Kshirsagar: ⭐

2025-10-03 15:17:46 From peter@sustainedattention.net to Everyone:

Be our seed generation of STUDY CORPS organizers!!!
Gwen Olton (they / she): ⭐

2025-10-03 15:17:51 From peter@sustainedattention.net to Everyone:

peter@sustainedattention.net
Jahony Germosen: 🔥

2025-10-03 15:18:28 From Roberto Elías Luna to Everyone:

Thanks...this was my first meeting. Delighted
Donica Bettanin (she/her): ❤️

2025-10-03 15:34:15 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:

<https://kverlag.com/products/the-immense-regression>

2025-10-03 15:34:42 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:
Taking Care — Bernard Stiegler