

TOOLKIT FOR ATTENTION ACTIVISM



Read the new book, *Attensity! A Manifesto of the Attention Liberation Movement* by the Friends of Attention

Dear Friend,

Welcome! This document, which was written by our team at the *Strother School of Radical Attention* in Brooklyn, is meant to help you to begin practicing **ATTENTION ACTIVISM**: the collective movement to push back against “human fracking” and to nourish the forms of beautiful and true attention at the heart of human flourishing.

The first thing to know is that **YOU HAVE EVERYTHING YOU NEED** to be an Attention Activist! So read on, and get started...

We think of this work (and play!) as including *three kinds* of activity. You can do Attention Activism:

1. through **ORGANIZING** — meaning **coalition-building** across communities who see the need to resist ongoing harms to human attention;
2. through the creation of **SANCTUARY** — meaning the formation of spaces and times that provide **shelter and nourishment** for attention;
3. through **STUDY** — meaning shared inquiry and reflection that create meaningful, shared experiences of the kinds of attention that help us flourish; this is **consciousness-raising** and **world-building** through self-creation and authentic *learning*.

This guide gives you some tools to begin practicing the three pillars of Attention Activism with your people — wherever you live! Our hope is that this resource will serve you as you build your community.

And one more thing: If you'd like to join SoRA's national coalition of organizers for Attention Activism, you can find resources in the final pages to get involved.

In solidarity,

Strother School of Radical Attention



What's Human Fracking? It's like petroleum fracking, which pumps huge quantities of high volume, high pressure **detergent** into the earth to crack the foundation layers and force deep-hidden oil and gas to the surface. Except that, instead of pumping toxic chemicals into the earth, our devices relentlessly pump non-stop **algorithmic content** through our eyes and into our *brains*. This continuous jackhammer flow breaks up our deep reserves of attention into smaller and smaller fragments — that are easier for social media companies to suck up and sell to advertisers.

Your attention → their profit.

ORGANIZING for ATTENTION ACTIVISM

Gather Your Friends (and Strangers, too!)

“Attention Activism... requires COALITION-BUILDING — collaboration and solidarity across a range of communities who see attention’s essential role in human flourishing.”

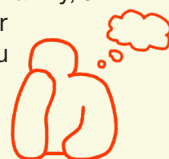
ATTENSITY! A Manifesto of the Attention Liberation Movement

One of the most important characteristics of “human fracking” and the Attention Economy is that they isolate us even as they pretend to make us more connected. To push back is an act of resistance. And to radically transform a crazy-lucrative industry that is fueled by our (human) desire for care and connection, we need to build real POWER — people power!

So you want to form a community of Attention Activists? Let’s talk about HOW TO START!

1. Decide what matters to you

What’s important to you about your time, mind, and senses? What experiences and relationships are you looking to form in your own life? What *changes* are you looking to create in the world around you? Are you a community organizer, or part of a community organization — or are you thinking about your family, or your classroom, or your team at work? Once you have a sense of your personal mission, you’re equipped to show others how, together, you and they can rally around a concrete program of Attention Activism.



2. Pick a meeting time and place

“Organizing” means thinking about how to get people in the *same space* (at SoRA, we prioritize IRL gatherings, although plenty of Attention Activists get together online!). As you go about picking a meeting time and place, consider how different kinds of spaces encourage different kinds of attention.



3. Invite people to join

Perhaps you have friends who are already into this stuff. In which case, it could be pretty easy to launch! Let folks know what you’re doing. Feel free to share this packet (or a copy of *Attensity!*).



If you **don't** already have a community where you live, or if your community doesn't seem particularly interested (they say "but I like my phone!" or "TikTok is great!"), go *one person at a time*. Make sure they understand that Attention Activism isn't "anti-phone" or even "anti-social media." We are anti-**EXPLOITATION**. We don't want to live in the blasted *fracklands* so greedy tech-plutocrats can cash in on HUMAN EYEBALLS! How to get the conversation going? Ask a friend, a colleague, or a neighbor to sit with you and talk about the way attention works in their life — be open! Listen. A real conversation about this stuff is the **START** of Attention Activism! If you want to go further, create invitations with actual contact info and leave them in public spaces. That's how every real *movement* gets going! Invite a co-worker; set up a table in a public space... And when people start asking what it's all about, refer to **number one** (above, your *thing*), and share **why this matters to you**.

Our friend Lou has a go-to gathering place for his Attention Activism: fifty yards off **ROCKAWAY BEACH**, in Queens, New York. As the organizer of a surf camp for local youth, he teaches young folks about the special kinds of attention that can *discern a beautiful breaker* on the horizon. TikTok won't get you the perfect ride...



4. Get together!

Be sure to share the details with everyone well in advance. **COMMUNICATE** if there are any changes in the plan. (People have not gotten better at IRL get-togethers as virtual/asynchronous social lives have become the norm, so it takes some extra work to make real stuff happen — this is an active part of Attention Activism!). Come prepared for the gathering — and have a plan for how you are going to invite folks to the next one! Once everybody has arrived, you can share the following tools to help **BUILD!**



Build *what*? Read on...

When the artist-underground of "attentionauts" known as the "Order of the Third Bird" started doing their attentional "flashmobs" in front of works of art in museums, public monuments, graffiti, and whatever else they chose, they carried little "business cards" that simply read "I am doing a practice of radical attention, in silence — feel free to join." A contact email on the back invited follow-up. Curious bystanders got slipped a card, and many ended up becoming part of the collective.

SANCTUARY for ATTENTION ACTIVISM

Draft Your Guidelines

"...Attention Activism means forming SANCTUARIES — spaces where people can gather, care for each other, experiment with different kinds of attention, and conceive brighter futures."

ATTENSITY! A Manifesto of the Attention Liberation Movement

What is an Attention Sanctuary?

Attention Sanctuaries are spaces and times that are protected from the "fracking" of our attention. Sanctuaries offer us protection, but they are also PORTALS to the world that we want to live in, and that we intend to create. These spaces nourish and deepen our experiences of ourselves, and others, and the world— because *they help us to practice the kinds of attention that allow us to FLOURISH, with others.*



Laura, an Attention Activist in Portland, creates mobile attention sanctuaries using a portable library hitched to a *Haley Tricycle*. Her STREET BOOKS community outreach program brings books to unhoused people around the city— and creates conversations about books (and everything else) that bloom into lasting friendships.



SOUND familiar? You probably have attention sanctuaries of your own. **Libraries** are attention sanctuaries. **Museums** are attention sanctuaries. **Places of worship, classrooms, cinemas, craft workshops, and community centers** can be attention sanctuaries. Your own **GARAGE** or **GARDEN** may be your attention sanctuary. "Sabbaths" are sanctuaries. **Bookstores?** These are *absolutely* attention sanctuaries! (Sometimes sanctuary spaces are... not "spaces" at all! Park gatherings, walking groups, and surf clubs can all be sanctuaries — because attentional sanctuaries are often *mobile*, and appear whenever like-minded people create them, simply by putting their devices away and being present with each other and the world!) These special environments — which we have to **CREATE**, together — allow us to give our minds, our time, and our senses to the people and the things we *actually* care about.



More than twenty years ago, the writer Dave Eggers and some of his friends had a vision: they wanted to create a space where young readers and writers in San Francisco could hang out, after school, and feel the infinite power of their creativity and imagination. Starting with a storefront on Valencia street, in the Mission, and a sign in the window, they gradually built a network of more than **SEVENTY** sanctuary spaces for young *Minds on Fire* — and the world's first library of unique works by junior authors.

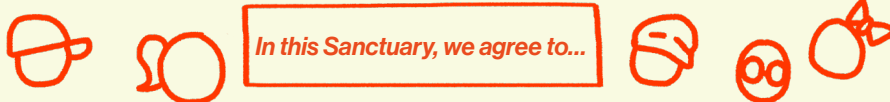
Drafting Your Guidelines

Sanctuary guidelines are one way to create attention sanctuaries.[†] The idea here is to imagine, with your community (a classroom, a worship group, circle of friends, etc.), the kinds of attention that you intend for this sanctuary to foster. What kind of EXPERIENCES, together, do you want to have? Once you settle on that, then you'll have to work to agree on the behaviors (of people) and the configuration (of the space) that support these kinds of attention. Last step? Get it all down on paper! Think of it as an "attentional constitution" — a written agreement that helps to form your community of attention activists.

As you prepare to draft your guidelines, think about the following questions:

1. Why have we decided to form a sanctuary of attention? What do we hope to do here?
2. What forms of attention do we want to create together? How do those forms of attention feel?
3. How can we collectively encourage those forms of attention?
4. How can we set up the space to foster, at certain times, the special forms of attention that we want?
5. Are there any things we'd like to keep out of the shared space?
6. How will we know that we have created our sanctuary?

Once you've considered these prompts, it's time to start drafting! Constraints are generative, and we've found that the following format helps to get everyone's thinking in line:



You can follow this up with a series of ten to twelve numbered agreements. Less is more! If you can fit the agreements, handwritten, on a single piece of paper, you're sure to have a document that everyone can know by heart. Once you've drafted your guidelines, make copies so that everyone can have one. Post them!

And then: *follow your guidelines!* Share your attention!

Congratulations — you have now formed the seed of an authentic community of **ATTENTION ACTIVISTS!**

Now it's time for the *fun* part...

[†] Burnett, D. Graham, and Eve Mitchell. "Attention Sanctuaries: Social Practice Guidelines and Emergent Strategies in Attention Activism." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1546, no. 1 (March 20, 2025): 5–10. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.15313>.

STUDY for ATTENTION ACTIVISM

Practice, Deepen, and Share Your Attention

"...Attention Activism is rooted in STUDY — a commitment to diverse forms of teaching and learning centered on attention (what it is, what it can be, what it can do)."

ATTENSITY! A Manifesto of the Attention Liberation Movement

Attention Activists give attention to attention itself. That is, we STUDY attention. But our STUDY is not simply *about* attention — as it turns out, STUDY is an important form of attention *itself*! We believe STUDY extends far beyond the boundaries of what is typically associated with "studiousness" (i.e., academic spaces, reading and writing... *school stuff*). Any context in which people use attention in a way that nourishes their life is, we believe, fertile ground for STUDY.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "STUDY"?

We use the word "study" in a way that is a little unusual. Do we mean "cramming" for a test? NO WE DO NOT! In fact, our philosophy of study is nearly the *opposite* of this! In Attention Activism, STUDY is the decision to attend to your world and yourself as if you don't completely understand it (because you don't!). It's about sitting with uncertainty, and *allowing the mystery of the world to deepen*. It is, in this sense, about giving shape to YOURSELF, as a free person in the world, with others. This is the deepest work of all. This is the goodness of **BEING HUMAN.**

The more you give your full attention to something or someone, or to attention itself, the more you will *experience*, and the more questions you will have. Questions lead to more questions. Attention leads to more attention. True "study" is the practice of *continually seeing the world anew* — seeing *more*, and thereby becoming "larger" and "wiser" and even... more truly **FREE**. When you do this with other people,

you create new worlds, and inhabit them together.

Olivia, an Attention Activist in Philadelphia, loves to sing. She also loves hanging out with friends. So she decided to form a choir that makes group singing into a form of STUDY for Attention Activism. Through lively rounds of folk and protest music, Olivia's choralists explore the ways that singing together changes the quality of attention they give to their own bodies, to music, and to the people around them.

This is our theory of change; it views questions, rather than answers, as a path forward. It

is about freedom, and world-making. All this may sound pretty abstract, but the **PRACTICE ITSELF** is as simple as can be...



SO... WHAT'S YOUR PRACTICE?

Attention Activists study attention through *practice*. That means that we learn about attention by USING it! Specifically, we use our attention, and then we *reflect* on our “experience” of attention, and then we *share that experience* with others.

The good news is, you get to CHOOSE how to explore your attention. You get to choose how you want to “study” Because you are free! Do you have, in your life, an activity or pastime that you enjoy sharing with others? One that feeds your



attention (and the attention of those around you) in nourishing ways? Then *that* is your **PRACTICE**. Your practice can be playing with your cat, or gardening, or writing poetry, or reading, or DJ'ing, or dancing, or walking, or cooking, or eating together, or building bicycles, or staring up at the sky, or debating tech policy, or *just about anything else*.

Choose your thing. Study it. Practice it. And, whenever possible, do it with others. This helps to give your practice a **STRUCTURE**. That means creating constraints in time and space, because these will let you step into your practice with the intention of attending to your own attention. Specify the amount of time that the practice will last. Specify what the rules are while practicing (are you in silence?). Specify

how people will move through space. You can write all this down — that helps everyone remember what you did, and share your practice with others.



Hali lives in rural Louisiana and has a longstanding interest in the crafting traditions of the native communities of the American South. She has run a community center for years, and worked with kids to protect and transmit cultural heritage — especially around the masks and costumes used during the annual season of Carnival. She began to think of the sewing and story-telling meet-ups she organized as a form of Attention Activism. Intergenerational gatherings to share the spirit and techniques of mummery (and memory) feed the goodness of a special world — one that needs the special protection of an authentic **SANCTUARY**.



Informal is fine, but *formal is often better*. At the Strother School of Radical Attention we love actual “protocols”: a kind of “score” for joint attention, an “exercise.” Think of goofy, game-like rules: *we X for ten minutes; then we Y for 10 minutes; then we take some notes. After, we’ll share our thoughts on what happened!* There is no better way to sync up your attentional experiences — to practice what attention is, and what it can do. Musicians do “drills,” and so do soccer players. Attention Activists have drills of their own. And they are both deeply fascinating, and... fun. Just experiment.

Here’s the important thing. YOU are the expert on your own experience of attention. No scientist or philosopher knows more than you about the sensation of giving your mind and senses to the world. This makes you and your friends absolute **AUTHORITIES** in the field of the study of truly *human* attention. Wield that authority with care. Ask questions. Share what you learn with your friends. *Study some more.* Life is not “something else.” Life is this. Because attention is the root of everything: love, knowledge, truth, care... consciousness itself.

That’s why we can’t let the frackers have it!



ORGANIZING A STUDY

Because formal structures can really help coordinate authentic moments of encounter and discovery, we'd encourage you to be bold (but also *generous*) when creating study experiences with and for others. Our study gatherings often take this shape:



1. **FRAMING.** Help participants understand WHY they are about to engage in study.

What questions do we have about our attention? What would we like to explore or play with?



2. **PRACTICE.** Outline the practice itself, then actually DO the practice as a group.

What are we attending to? For how long? How should the group arrange itself in space?

3. **REFLECTION.** Have folks think about their experience (taking notes can really help with this). Then have each person share something, going around the circle; prioritize active listening — which is a key form of attention! (It is generally good to give people the option to “pass,” if they like — most won’t, but the invitation to remain silent can help everyone feel safe and free.)

How did it feel to use attention in that way? Where did my attention go? How did it behave? What did I notice? What surprised me?

4. **QUESTIONS.** Once you’ve completed the reflection, invite questions about the experience as a whole.

How did our experiences overlap or diverge? What have we learned about attention? What questions are we left with? What should we do next? Would someone else like to lead?

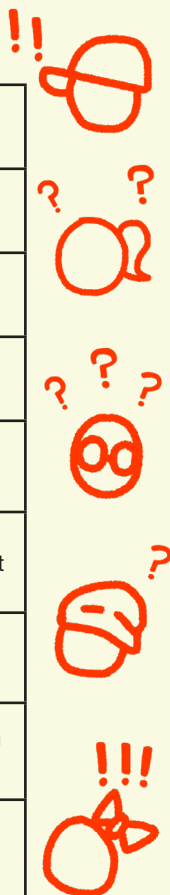
These steps can be applied to virtually any study of attention. The process invites participants into individual experiences, weaves those into a collective experience, and transmutes that into collective questions. Which present an opportunity to... get together and study some more!

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Studying attention is the practice of continually asking what attention is, how it works, and what it's good for. As we have argued in these pages, this is **CRUCIAL WORK** in a *very special way*... now! Why? Because in the last fifteen years a totally unprecedented, trillion-dollar industry has arisen, and wormed its way into every aspect of our existence. This enterprise — **HUMAN FRACKING** — is pumping our attention into the pockets of tech-plutocrats, and *harming us*. Our only hope? To *come together* and *push back* — to understand what's happening, and take control of reshaping a livable world, and good lives in it! This is **ATTENTION ACTIVISM**.

The questions listed below can get you started in your investigation. By spending time with these (or similar) questions with others, we come to answer them, and then ask them again, over and over and over... and to learn more about our attention, and others', as we go!

What is attention?	What is attention for?	How do you use attention?
How does it feel?	Are there different kinds of attention?	How do you know?
Is your attention physical?	Is your attention mental?	What part of your mind is "attending?"
What senses does it include?	Who decides how your attention behaves?	Why does your attention behave the way it does?
What forces influence your attention?	Are these pressures "natural," or engineered?	Whom do they serve?
Where do these forces come from?	Can you change these pressures? How?	If you could change these pressures, what would you do?
What kind of attention do you enjoy?	What kinds of attention do you <i>not</i> enjoy?	Is there good or bad attention?
Who decides what's good or bad attention?	Does attention <i>change</i> ?	What does attention <i>create</i> in your life?
What is the relationship between attention and freedom?	What kinds of attention do you want to experience?	Why does it matter?



What's Next?

If you've put these tools to work, and want to connect your community of Attention Activists with folks across the country, then...



The non-profit School of Radical Attention is sounding the call to Attention Activists across the country who want to join our national coalition of organizers for Attention Activism. To access further resources, learn more, and get involved, visit:

schoolofattention.org



APPENDIX: SAMPLE READING LIST

In case you'd like to learn more about the ideas that led to understanding Attention Activism, we've collected the titles of a few texts on attention, human fracking, and the power of social movements. If you have any recommendations to add to this (non-exhaustive) list, please get in touch! And check out our much more extensive bibliographies and syllabi online.

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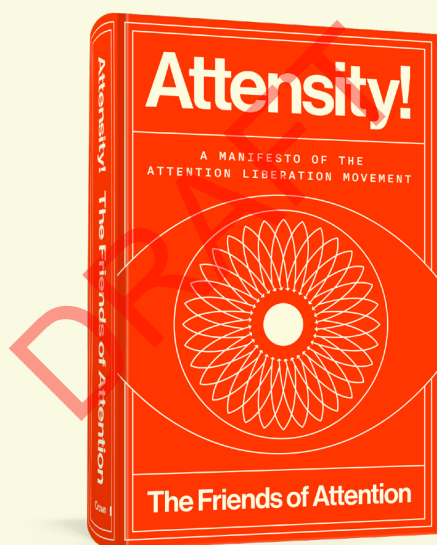
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Illustrations by Ali Lim.

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