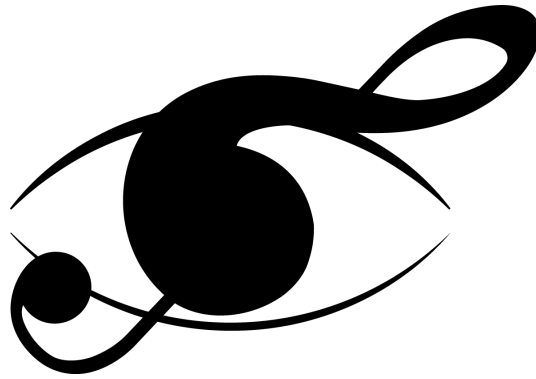




POLITICS of ATTENTION VIII
SCORES of ATTENTION
August 7th - 10th, 2026

REFLECTIONS

Participants:

Alyssa Loh
Capri LaRocca
Connor Griffin (co-organizer)
Eleanor Lambert (co-organizer *in absentia*)
D. Graham Burnett (co-organizer)
Haena Chu
Kevin Madison
Peter Schmidt (co-organizer)
Raiane Cantisano

Foreword

From the 7th to the 10th of August 2026, a group of the Friends of Attention convened at the Eugene O'Neill Center in Waterford, CT for the eighth annual Politics of Attention retreat. Our mission for the week was to turn attention to the subject of the "score" (also known as the practice, protocol, action-poem, etc.) as a central tool in Attention Activism.

Across multiple seminar-style sessions, we discussed the diverse genealogies of the score across religious, artistic, pedagogical, and political practices, identified its defining characteristics, and articulated its relationship to the historically unprecedented threats to human freedom on which our community of Attention Activists has set its sights.

We concluded with a clarified understanding of what scores are ("a question you do with other people") what functions they serve in Attention Activism (as spaces that create the conditions of possibility for understanding, as technologies of freedom in action), and what role they play in the strategic path we are charting across the coming year (in our expansion from our origins in arts and culture to the zones of education and civics). Read on to get more of this good stuff.

It was an extraordinarily generative (and fun!) retreat. Many thanks to the Friends who shared their time and their attention. Until next year, and...

ONWARD!

Peter Schmidt (co-organizer)

FRIENDS OF ATTENTION / SoRA Working Doc

WHAT'S AN "ATTENTION SCORE"? (And why do they matter....?)

The Attention SCORE

(**S**ocial **C**horeography for **O**bservation, **R**eflection, and **E**naction)

Social Choreography

THINK...

- collective patterns
- synchrony
- joint movements of thought and action
- coordination ("keeping together in time")

Observation

THINK...

- heightened awareness
- multiple sensory modalities
- formal practices of noticing
- attentional attunement

Reflection

THINK...

- turning back through the experience (study)
- rumination
- contemplation toward understanding
- communication (with self and others)

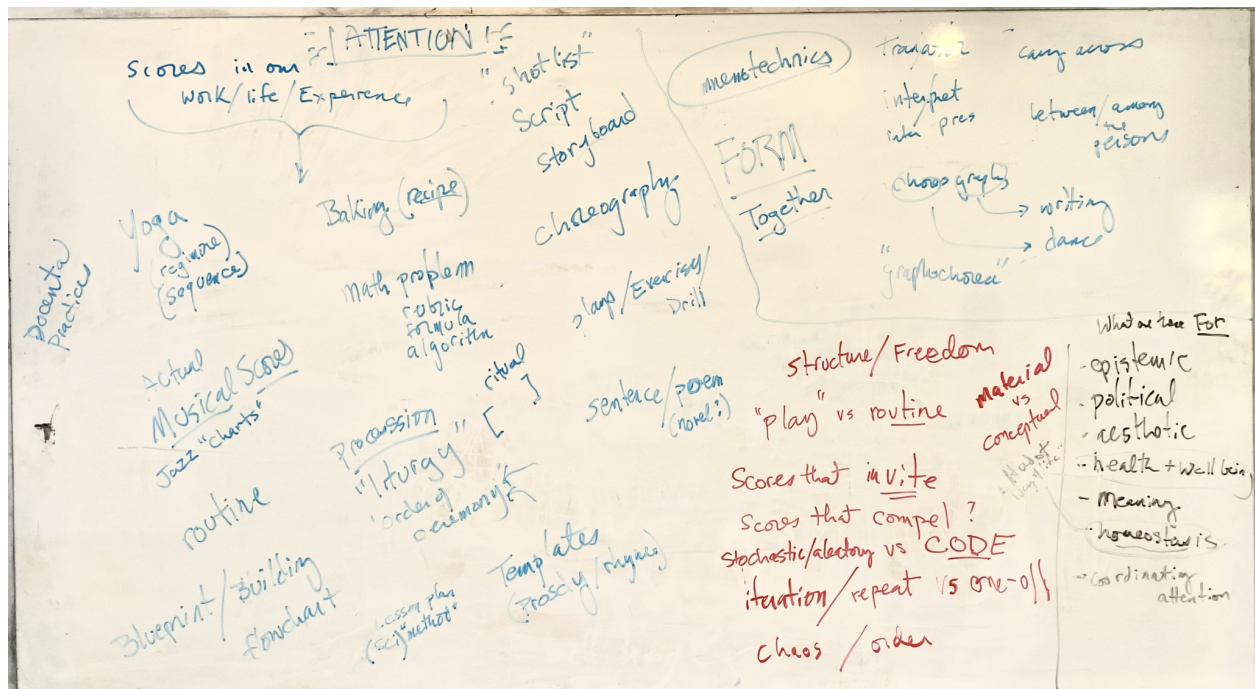
Enaction

THINK...

- performance
- practice
- action
- embodiment
- realization

Whiteboards

PoA VIII : Scores of ATTENTION				
	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON
9:30-12	TRAVEL	I. The SCORE in Attn. Activism	III. Politics + Pedagogy of the SCORE	TRAVEL!
12-13	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	
13-15:00	GOALS	II. SCORES: Art, culture, History	IV. Next Steps!	
15:00-17	FREE	FREE	FREE	
17-18	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	
18+	FREE	FREE	FREE	



SUNDAY —
Where are we?

Peta: "Conditions of possibility making possible"
 This is kinda "Form over content"

Capri: Shared Language / tools + Attention SPECIFICITY around SCORES

Comor: Synapse to our Front-facing Practices/work

Harna: Keep thinking: how to make all this Compelling; give the first push

Kevin: how do we increase the odds that our SCORES, in our hands can most reliably help people Cross over from passive consumers to Active Participants

Alyssa: We want to get people BAKING (ie... not just feed them a great piece of doughnut)
- our arc from Art/culture to education back to culture
- understanding is an event in the life of persons...
- the deliberative democracy + joint attention

Rai: - the doola {dance + birth} what is key is less what scores ARE and rather what they can do ...

Key thing all our SCORES need to have (explicitly/implicitly) the question/issue of Machine Attention vs HUMAN Attention

Scores make a hypothesis, explicitly or implicitly about a distinctive position/relation to things/conditions/beings

Key to any politics worth having

agential experimental (waged relations)

This would be IN ADDITION to our work helping educate to learn to translate their existing lectures + class time INTO Attention SCORES

Sacrality is Freedom in action (where freedom is our capacity to choose set/hold our conditions with others)

Make a deck of CARDS

"Click" vs DING! This is us! call together / durational

*** T a K e A w a y ***

RAC: We need to use Freedom-style questions about FORM to think about WHAT THE THING IS that is our ATTENTION SCORE that is going to be in people's HANDS in Education / Cards, etc.

Harna: What scores do we use as an invitation to LIVE a Question with others... SCORE is: Question you DO with: ...

Kevin: Do we need, in our Ed-facing work, to win a mini-curriculum of "Attention Fundamentals"...
a "pay your scales" kind of practice

Peter: Freedom as the "capacity to choose/set/fashion your conditions with others"

FIN: In the lab, we want to try to "make attention activities" we want to give people a sense of being human Feeling through and working with others

Alyssa: you can never go wrong SOLIDNESS SOMEBODY FREEDOM

DEB: All our SCORES need to be a question people DO make in the hopes of answering the odds of people having an experienced clarity

Capri: Getting people to love baking / see the water

Education
 Higher Ed (colleges + universities)
 K-12

Civic

Religious/spiritual
 Christian (mainstream)
 catholic
 Buddhists

Arts

"Culture"/Pop culture/etc

[AI → knowledge]
 [Scores → Understanding]

[Deliberative Space]
 [Attending (joint) conditions possible]

SCORE

Center in Relations Intelligence

D. Graham Burnett

There was a LOT to all that we did over these couple of days... really remarkable!

I think the thing I would like to underscore, out of all of it, would be:

- 1) The ARC of our work issue (specified by Alyssa, as I recall) - that we want to move into mainstream culture by moving OUT from our special art/BK ecosystem INTO education, as well as civic and religious spaces/activities. We get to mainstream, legible, recognizable messaging/change VIA education FROM our special art and creative mini-ecosystem.
- 2) I am REALLY MOVED this idea that I think we see more clearly now that Attention SCORES are, for us, at least aspirationally, *always a way of doing a question with others*. They are an INVITATION TO LIVE A QUESTION, TOGETHER. A more elaborate way of articulating this would be to say something like (and I am here paraphrasing Haena, as I recall): a good SCORE has, implicitly or explicitly, a "hypothetical" nature, which invites a distinctive position/relation to things/conditions/situations. They are, inherently, AGENTIAL, EXPERIMENTAL, RELATIONAL, and....one is WAGERED in them (this is very important; one has to DO them; one has to *put oneself on the line*, to some extent...). I think all of that is important/good in itself. But part of what makes these dynamics so important, now, is that these attributes are essential to ANY POLITICS WORTH HAVING! And they are things (agency, relationality) that many people have trouble feeling these days in relation to the political lives of their communities (at various scales...)
- 3) Cannot emphasize enough how powerful it is that our Attention SCORES be understood as forms of improvisational/participatory/exploratory DRAMATURGY that create the conditions of possibility for EXPERIENCES OF UNDERSTANDING, with others. These are powerful stagings, in which people have INCREASED ODDS of an experience of understanding! And the reason this is important is, as we said, on account of the ways that AI is sweeping away with the work of "knowledge" - organizing, analyzing, and conveying "knowledge" can now be outsourced! Really, *should* be outsourced, mostly. But that does not leave us humans with nothing to do! On the contrary! It leaves us with EVERYTHING to do! Because it leaves us with the work of UNDERSTANDING. Which is always an EVENT that occurs in the life of a PERSON (in community, in history, in a particular place/time). THIS IS OUR JAM! This is what is going to make us, and our Attention SCORES so so so important in the decade ahead - across the educational spaces!

THANK YOU ALL FOR A SUPER PRODUCTIVE (AND FUN!) COUPLE OF DAYS!

Connor Griffin

From now on, we'll be much more intentional with the purpose and setting of our scores. Our purpose: to do a question together, to create the opportunity for a moment of understanding, which is an event that happens in the life of a person. The settings where our scores have power to act is where a certain kind of institution is struggling and needs to be rebuilt, maybe in part "taken to the people" as the Jesuits did. For now, these are educational and civic institutions.

I have a lot of open questions about the civic setting. Do we write scores for deliberation on issues (ie deliberative polling)? Or are our scores for rebuilding the kind of thick civic life that our society has historically required to really function? I think a lot of problems in our society can, and can only, be solved at the level of small communities of people organizing themselves to make interventions, without government help. Remaking ourselves into a self-governing people.

We also want to be a lot clearer going forward on the kind of experience we want participants to have when writing scores, or maybe more like why that experience relates to attention activism. We might even state explicitly the question or the hypothesis behind each score when facilitating. Our question will often be "what is the difference between human and machinic joint attention?"

Some lofty goals that are useful guiding lights. From Alyssa: "Hey, what do you want to do tonight?" "I dunno, maybe a score?" From Graham: that scores can be so constitutive of a new kind of political engagement that they are like the coffeehouses that created a public sphere and gave rise to democracy.

I think there's an open question about how to make our scores compelling: such that people would want to do them for fun, such that they would transform people into more active participants in their lives and communities.

Lastly, I still don't understand Situationism at all and I would like to know more.

Haena Chu

This weekend, we have focused on the issue of carving out the zone of scores that SoRA operates in. Rather than the question of "what *are* scores," we asked: "what can characterizing attention practices as scores *do* for our activism, as we apply it to civics and education?"

We arrived at a working definition of scores as **questions for doing with others that create the conditions for events of understanding**—as opposed to AI, which answers questions by conveying information/knowledge. Scores as such are both form (sequential directions) and medium (material object which circulates), two registers that work together to compel participants towards the deliberative discussion of a hypothesis. Broadly, the hypothesis can address the status quo of the Attention Economy, problematics of the status quo (ex.

difference between machinic and human attention), or the expanded ecology of human attention.

In art programs, our new definition leaves me with the task of reframing exhibitions and artist-led programs as “questions for doing with others.” On the one hand, this involves creating consensus with the team and artists on attention-related questions for each exhibition as well as more structures that encourage “doing” during public programs (especially for programs that are inherently more passive like screenings or artist talks). In the process, art programs will also continue to signal our departure from the conventional definition of art as a historical lineage or as a set of objects, and appeal to the creation of situations through mediums other than text. Rather than as an isolated program area, I am hoping that artistic traditions and skills of artists in choreographing objects, people, and environments can help our entire team continue to get better at creating experiences that are compelling enough for attendees to bring back to their own lives outside SoRA.

Alyssa Loh

A score is a question that people do. (Together!) I am so pleased we did indeed find basic language for what a score is. And we need another (more concrete) sentence, too, along the lines of... “A multi-step protocol of attention you do with other people in relation to an object.” But... even more basic?

We also remembered how rules - **at the right moment, in the right tone - create a feeling of a *there* there.**

I think we can never go wrong **solving someone’s problem.** It’s not enough to be interesting or even right. **We have to be useful.** For instance, teachers. Or, parents. Or, funders.

Translating what we’ve done into ordinary language is a good gut check as to whether or not we’ve got an idea that can travel and have impact. **“Let’s look at this, together.”** Or: **“What do you want to do tonight? / I dunno, maybe a score?”**

It seems to me that kind of cultural penetration only happens by winning education. I can only imagine people doing scores in their free time if this is a form they received from somewhere. Something like they way we read for school (books like the sun also rises...) and read for fun (books like the perks of being a wallflower...) In other words, I was persuaded by the weekend that, tactically, we can go **niche cultural success → education / civic success → mainstream cultural success.**

Understanding is an event in the life of a person. Wow. Incredible. There is KNOWLEDGE - what the machines now do better than us - and there is UNDERSTANDING, the domain of human intellectual life.

WE WANT TO GET PEOPLE BAKING! This is related to having a great recipe for cheesecake, but also different. For instance, you probably have to let people have a taste of some really

good cheesecake to create the desire to bake (our Attention Labs? Our Sidewalk Studies?). And you also have to give people a few recipes to get started. And a feeling of empowerment that they can take it and run with it. But we never forget the goal - to get people baking!

What are the basic ingredients - the basic toolkit? Our “fat, sugar, grain.” For us, maybe... an object, more than one person, multi-step instructions, a set duration of time, and a debrief after?

Are there not RULES (like the Bird rules - no interpretation, no studium, no judgment, be generous) to protocols? I bet there are. And I bet they are not unrelated to the Bird rules, actually. Games have rules. It is part of what makes it fun... I explained to Heller in the New Yorker what I thought the purpose of those rules were, and I stand by that explanation. (To prevent one from thinking you have ‘solved’ the work, to prevent the possibility of being ‘done’ with it, to prevent one’s attention while Birding from being ‘useful’ in some task-oriented way)

I think *maybe* something has gone a little bit wrong if the protocols at the school can’t be done 10 times and still be fun.... Is it possible that they’ve been set up as, essentially, Birding the same work again and again and again? Or maybe this is... okay? I’m not sure...

Rai’s insight that our eagerness to tell people they are “attention activists” has become a gate people must pass through. We are, in certain contexts, closing people out, burdening what we’ve got to offer... if our proposal is that protocols really are the next stage of literacy, or something like this, then **we don’t need to tie every moment someone does a protocol to WHETHER OR NOT THEY CONSENT TO BE ONBOARD WITH SOME LARGER POLITICAL PROJECT**. Sometimes you just wanted to, like, read a book and talk about it with a friend. Same should go with scores.

It is wild to me that all those political philosophers never mention joint attention as a precondition to functional civic life. BUT that is because, really truly, **regular occasions of joint attention were such an obvious, commonplace, always-true, intimate and basic fact of human life, until a few years ago**. Now - they are extremely rare. We never needed language for it. Now we do. “This is water.” The conditions you are in... have a name. We are massively underestimating the impact of this change on our civic and personal lives. Attention span is almost entirely unrelated to this.

Birding produced a robust community of friends. And books. And marriages. And babies. That is... immensely real.

This idea that our scores should have a hypothesis. Is this... what we really mean? A hypothesis is a proposed answer, yes? We need to be careful to not seem like we’ve got an answer in our pocket we want to lead people to... But I think we’re all on the same page with this. (I also can’t help but wonder if the hypothesis being tested by durational attention to an object is sometimes not just... that the world and other people are real...? And that it feels good, to be

among the people and material of the world...?) But this is a cool direction, and I like the idea of running it down...

Peter asked -- What characterizes our scores? What characterizes the broader field of possible scores? And we should still answer these questions.

Kevin Madison

(Re-reading this, I'm realizing I have a differing opinion as to what constitutes "machinic" vs "human" attention; would be good to discuss IRL)

I want the practices to feel like how going to an improv class feels. Or going to a group music lesson. Or a baking class, or a ceramics class. I have not, so far, had that experience with the practices. Maybe this is not even what we want to do - but I am writing this to explain where my push for the practices to have some kind of rigor, or rules, or more strict container, comes from. All of these aforementioned activities have humanistic elements, and machinic elements. I don't think machinic attention is always bad.

Machinic attention is doomscrolling, but it is also learning your scales. You are not contemplating reality and what it means to be human when you are learning your scales. You are coordinating your fingers to move in time in a specific way to achieve a specific, reliable result, every time. This is the **lego of being a musician**. This kind of machinic learning **leads** to one's ability to someday compellingly improvise, compose, and freely express themselves at the instrument.

I believe that our lofty goals of mass culture adoption, **especially in the education space**, cannot happen without an acknowledgment that the vast majority of people don't know their scales yet. They don't even know what scales are. I would like to see **some** of our scores ask extremely specific questions and lead people to specific answers. **To solve specific problems for people**, as Alyssa noted above. I know this is not what SoRA does so far, but I'm suggesting it anyway, for the following reasons.

I understand that some of our practices naturally lead people to the magic, to the sauce. Our facilitators definitely have the sauce and we've felt it, we've seen it. I believe we need to be explicit about what that actually is.

We are not going to reach mass cultural adoption of this thing without a reliable, internally agreed-upon and externally sleek sense of transformative power and/or gamified reward and/or learning outcome in the practices.

For example, I think that sometimes it would be preferable if people were **pushed to their limit** in attention, leaving with tired brains from a tough workout. This is how you grow. Your thinking must be **challenged**, as to be altered. You cannot reliably create conditions for change by giving people ultimate freedom and saying they can do no wrong when they do not even know their scales. This is a very nice feeling in our society of burnout, and a completely necessary and healing space to maintain, but I **do not believe that does the thing we have discussed that we set out to do (create the conditions in which it is possible for people to change their relationship to attention in the education and civics spaces.)**

I say all this with all of the baggage, history, and narrative of my own life and experience as a trained musician and long time teacher in the K - 12 / undergraduate space. I am also sort of playing devil's advocate here, because, from what I can tell, **K - 12 is currently diametrically opposed to what we do in Dumbo**. Trying to get a bunch of 2026 high school students to sit and look at their hands will lead to, at worst, a loss of classroom cohesion / focus / respect, and, at best, a time for them to shut their brains off. **I am convinced that we need age-specific, content-specific practices for the education space.**

I do not know if I'm right about this, because I also haven't put my money where my mouth is, so to speak, and tried developing practices like this, but that is definitely a next step for me. I invite pushback and any reminders of context or experiences people have had in the labs that I'm missing.

Capri LaRocca

Our current context & problem // We're living through times characterized by omnipresent technology designed around a business model that extracts our attention and relies upon keeping us suspended in a **"machine attention"**. In this world, **knowledge** is abundant, but true understanding is scarce.

Our solution // Attention Activists are advocates / protectors / chefs of **"human attention"**. Their aim is to help us relearn / return to our innate ability to engage with the astonishing reality of things, beings, and persons.

SCORES help us with **understanding** our humanity. They provide an opportunity to retreat from the extractive realm of machine attention and reconnect with what it means to be human, essentially "filling our cups" before returning to "fight the frackers". **Sanctuary is freedom in action** and the spaces / mindsets created through SCORES are liberatory.

There is no single "right way" to engage with SCOREs. You already do them all the time. Like **Jazz charts**, baking recipes, and dance choreography, SCOREs provide a framework for **play**. Through SCOREs we "live the questions" of what it is/means to be human.

If you enjoy the experience of a SCORE we invite you to keep playing with them with your friends, family and loved ones. ("What do you want to do tonight? I don't know, maybe a SCORE?") If you want to become an Attention Activist, we have ways for you to get more involved!

Overall Themes:

- Human Attention vs. Machine Attention
- In Age of AI: Understanding vs. Knowledge
 - We're preparing people for post-literacy *humanity*. SCOREs can thrive in the end of literacy because they are enacted / embodied with minimal reading
- Our strategy is Culture → Education & Civics → Culture (connection to Pace Layers)
- Understanding is an event in the life of a person. SCOREs are event structures.
- SCOREs create conditions of possibility

- Baking: We want people to taste the most delicious cheesecake, and be inspired to bake. (“The realization of a better game”)
- Ephemerality as resistance to capture
- 3 (potential) Areas/Flavors of SCOREs? (via convo w/ Haena) 1) Status Quo (observation), 2) Problematics (critique), 3) Ecology (synthesis) // These hypotheses are being tested through the practices / SCORE << Let’s explore this more!
- We know how to stage the dramaturgy to increase the likelihood of someone experiencing an event of understanding

Raiane Cantisano

This weekend has brought forth so much clarity and trust in the simplicity and power of what we are offering to the world. The score is revolutionary and persists across time because it contains the capacity to create possibilities for an experience of understanding with very little need for initial investment. Like the Tarot that got popularized for being a jolly card game played by peers, and later became this incredible symbol of self exploration and connection to a spiritual life, the score has the potential to be something that people want to reach out for, understand how to reach for it, and ultimately do it! Our discussions this weekend have illuminated a path in the long unanswered question I’ve had in regard to our work which is “how do we make this stuff stick?”

To scale our project, I believe we need to continue investing in the score as an object, something people who want to free their attention can do together, in various forms and mediums (books, cards, workshops, games, a curriculum), something that can infiltrate our daily lives, our homes, our classrooms, our congress seamlessly, and as covertly and “pleasantly” as our phones have. Our job is to keep finding the many shells or packagings or horses we can use to get beyond the walls of Troy- which in this metaphor are the political divide, the skepticism and despair that all is lost to big tech, the loneliness groove which we find ourselves in. And I believe that if we do this consistently and creatively enough, we won’t even need to teach everyone the language of the work that we do, but rather we will have enough experiences of humans awakened to their humanness to see a meaningful change in our landscape. To guarantee that people keep getting together to *do questions*, we don’t need to necessarily teach them grammar. We may just need to identify a need they have (if they’re lonely, give them community, hungry, cheesecake, etc.) and find ways to keep giving it enough that their own skills and projects for a livable world can spring forth.

Peter Schmidt

Going into this weekend, we knew that the “score” was essential to our Attention Activist project. Our intention was to establish a shared understanding of WHY/HOW that is the case, to fashion clear language for making that case publicly, and to chart a strategic trajectory for the next year of our work.

Per Rai/Alyssa, we want to split our ambitions for the score in two. On one hand, we need to be prepared to talk about why these things are SO IMPORTANT and POWERFUL for the Attention Activism project: how they can serve us to push back against many of the biggest problems today (chiefly: the disintegration of our politics, the destabilization of our educational institutions). On another hand, we want these scores to be something that people do independently of any larger project/commitment – simply because they feel *good*.

I accept Alyssa's observation that we can only achieve the second goal by way of the first. If we can legitimize scores in educational and political practice, then they stand a chance of travelling back out into popular culture (People read *The Sun Also Rises* at school, and then *Perks of Being a Wallflower* at home).

So another moment on that first goal. What can we say (persuasively, succinctly) to help people understand what scores are and why they matter?

Graham has offered one way of doing this: by pointing out that the CHARACTERISTICS of scores match the characteristics of the kind of politics we want: ATTENTIONAL, AGENTIAL, EXPERIMENTAL, RELATIONAL, and WAGERED. To reestablish that kind of politics on the widest scale, we need to realize/practice it at human scales.

A complementary way of making this case is by emphasizing **FREEDOM**. Plenty of people (including, significantly, the tech overlords) characterize freedom as the ability to do what one wants, without constraint. This is an *instrumental* sort of freedom, and one that centers the individual. We are talking about a DIFFERENT KIND of freedom. Something like: **freedom is the power to create the conditions of our own existence *with others***. This account of freedom shifts the emphasis from the choices we make as individuals to the field of choices that *we make possible* as collectives.

This is a way of thinking about politics not as "CONTENT" [i.e., the issues you vote for, the ideas you have, the decisions you make] but as "FORM" [the procedures and shared agreements and deliberative spaces *within which* we have ideas and make decisions]. The problem with politics these days is not that it lacks content; to the contrary, politics has become *exclusively* content – that's the very meaning of the "politics of the spectacle." What has been so tragically compromised by human fracking is the FORM of our politics: the shape that holds it all together. **Democracy is politics at the level of FORM, and that's what we're working to preserve.**

SCORES ARE THIS KIND OF FREEDOM IN ACTION. They are simple tools for creating the (temporary) conditions of our existence with others. They allow our attention to take the form of the kind of politics that we desire. Specifically, they allow us 1) to carve out spaces from the near-inescapable conditions of **MACHINE ATTENTION** that have been imposed upon us *without our consent* and which have proven highly corrosive to our civic life; and 2) in doing so, to create spaces for the conditions of **HUMAN ATTENTION**, which is ours, and which is a necessary precondition for the kinds of education (centered on human experiences of understanding) that make us free, and for the kinds of representative, agential, collective, relational politics that we deserve.