



"Reading this refreshing and rejuvenating book will make you think hard about how life should be lived."

Tim Wu, author of *The Attention Merchants*

# STAND OUT OF OUR LIGHT

FREEDOM AND  
RESISTANCE IN  
THE ATTENTION  
ECONOMY

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# WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

- Something profound and dangerous is happening to our attention in the digital age.
- We need to be able to give attention to the things that matter most in our own lives and in our world.
- Technology has enveloped our lives - it used to be localised now it is not bounded in time or place and how technology and in particular social media is getting in the way 'standing in the light' of our attention.
- That the issues and challenges are not just about distraction or manipulation but have become the fundamental challenge of our times.
- That there are no free products - we pay with our attention - our attentional labour is used to meet these companies goals where are rarely the same as ours.
- We are being distracted from our lives and from what matters most in our lives.
- The advertising industry has colonised the internet - dominated by a few, generally white, US based men, this has consequences for us all.
- Attention is a vital component of will - without attention, we can't apply our will.

# WHAT QUESTION IS THIS BOOK ANSWERING?

1. What are we paying when we pay Attention?
2. How can we make sure technology isn't stopping us from give our attention to the things that matter most in our lives?
3. How can technology enhance our ability to behave and think in ways that are our own?
4. Is our attention for sale and if so, what is the true cost to us?

# WHO SHOULD READ IT?

Whilst it's a short book and a relatively quick read I don't think this is for everyone. It is quite academic in it's approach and I definitely found the first half more relevant to my work than the second but I think if you're interested in the impact technology is having on our ability to pay attention and the wider implications of this for society, you'll find something here of interest.

# WHAT IT'S MADE ME THINK ABOUT:

- How to be much more intentional about how I'm using technology. The impact technology is having in our lives - so people becoming more irritable, less tolerant, needing instant gratification and stimulation. Inability to be rather than do and how sellable this then is.
- The 3 different ways of thinking about attention - the spotlight, starlight and daylight - I like these as a language for the TE - our Attention enables the thinker to access all 3 of these types of their own attention.
- Average person checks phone 150 times a day - makes us distract ourselves - we interrupt ourselves - we can't sustain our own attention
- How our weaknesses can be manipulated and so what is not good for us can in the short term feel good

## SUMMARY

1. Rather than supporting our intentions technology has largely sought to grab and keep our attention...making it harder to live the lives we want to live or even worse, undermine fundamental capacities such as reflection and self regulation.
2. In order to do anything that matters, we must first be able to give attention to the things that matter. It's my firm conviction, now more than ever, that the degree to which we are able and willing to struggle for ownership of our attention is the degree to which we are free.
3. We are rich in information yet poor in wisdom.

## MY FAVOURITE QUOTES

1. "When information becomes abundant, attention becomes the scarce resource".
2. "What do we pay when we pay attention?...We pay with the lives we might have lived".
3. "The question of attention becomes the question of having the freedom to navigate your life in the way you want...it's about who you are, who you want to be, and the way you define and pursue those things".
4. "The degree to which we are able and willing to struggle for ownership of our attention is the degree to which we are free".

# ACTIONABLE TAKEAWAYS

- How radical and important having a practice of Attention
- If we want to use our attention well we have to practice giving attention to what we most want to - Thinking Sessions and in particular generative attention is one way to do this
- Leave my phone at home when I can - doesn't need to be a constant companion.
- Make sure when I'm with the children I don't have my phone on me.
- Use social media on my computer and not on my phone.
- Make sure that I am giving my attention to the things I care most deeply about.
- If I don't know what is most important to me, it is very easy to get distracted by what other people think is important.

# COMPONENTS IN FOCUS


In particular I think this book can support our understanding of these components:

- Attention - A TE is one way to defend and strengthen our attention
  - need to reclaim our own attention
  - A TE becomes a moral, social and political imperative
- Equality - especially in relation to boundaries and lack of equity in pitting individual willpower against the might of global corporations
- Information - what is stopping us from absorbing the information about the role of technology and it's impact on us (we enjoy it)

# BOOK NOTES



## THINGS I FOUND INTERESTING AS I WAS READING

- [Preface] Rather than supporting our intentions technology has largely sought to grab and keep our attention...making it harder to live the lives we want to live or even worse, undermine fundamental capacities such as reflection and self regulation.
  - [Preface] The liberation of human attention may be the defining moral and political struggle of our time.
  - [pg9] There's a deep misalignment between the goals we have for ourselves and the goals our technology has for us.
  - [p11] our most dangerous adversaries are not things we fear but but from things that give us pleasure.
  - [p11] 'people will come to love their oppression - to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think'.
  - [p13] when information becomes abundant, attention becomes the scarce resource.
  - [p13] "Herbert Simon - in an information rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else; a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of it's recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information that might consume it".
  - [p16] we are living in the "Age of Attention".
  - [p20] what has no boundaries has no shape.
  - [p23] one of the major lessons of the past several decades of psychology research has been the power of people's environments in shaping their thoughts and behaviours.
  - [p27] ethos, pathos and logos = authority, emotion and reason = thinking, feeling and saying.
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# BOOK NOTES

## CONTINUED

- [[p35] we're paying for the possibility of a surprise - with technology we are paying with our attention, often in short bursts over long periods of time which have a negative cost on our energy/well being but it feels like it's free.
- [p45] Generally speaking when we use the term Attention we typically mean what cognitive scientists call the 'spotlight' of attention - or the direction of our moment to moment awareness within the immediate task domain.
- [p45] What do we pay when we pay attention?...we pay with the lives we might have lived.
- [p46] the question of attention becomes the question of having the freedom to navigate your life in the way you want...it's about who you are, who you want to be, and the way you define and pursue those things.
  
- [p49] The spotlight - the starlight - the daylight - these lights of attention pertain to doing, being and knowing respectively.
  
- Do what we want to do - Doing - Spotlight = our immediate capacities for navigating awareness and action toward tasks. Enables us to do what we want to do - interrupted by notification, sounds, banners, persuasive technology.
- Being who we want to be - Starlight = Our broader capacities for navigating life by the stars of our higher goals and values. Enables us to be who we want to be - value alignment, identity - intermittent variable rewards interrupt this, infinite scrolling, - surprise and random rewards, addictive feeds, cost of cognitive load - impacts of our finite ability to pay attention - more impulsive, petty, frustrated, narcissism, values change accordingly, more impulsive - shapes our values, lives and societies.





# BOOK NOTES

## CONTINUED

- Knowing what you want you want - Daylight = our fundamental capacities - such as reflection, metacognition, reason and intelligence - that enables us to define our goals and values to begin with. Enables us to want what we want to want - psychological wellbeing is impacted - flight or fright response at number of emails, reduction in IQ due to stress - habituating us to a state of outrage - impulse to judge and punish, social disintegration, polarisation - bullying - mob rule (reduction in democratic values).
  - [p51] - the effects of interruptions aren't limited to the amount of time we lose engaging with them directly. When a person is in a focus state and gets interrupted, it takes on average 23 minutes for them to regain their focus. And experiencing a functional distraction in your environment can make it harder to return your attention to the same place later if something task-salient appears there.
  - [p70] - Reflection is an essential ingredient for the kind of thinking that helps us determine what we want to want.
  - [p128] In order to do anything that matters, we must first be able to give attention to the things that matter. It's my firm conviction, now more than ever, that the degree to which we are able and willing to struggle for ownership of our attention is the degree to which we are free.
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