

Attention: An Interdisciplinary Workshop

Programme

Day 1: 14th of September 2022, 2:00pm to 6:30pm (BST)

2:00pm – Welcome

2:20pm – Session 1: What Is Attention?

3:30pm – Coffee Break

4:00pm – Session 2: Studying Attention in the Lab and in the Wild

6:30pm – End of Day 1

Day 2: 15th of September 2022, 2:00pm to 6:30pm (BST)

2:00pm – Session 3: Why Attention Matters

3:30pm – Coffee Break

3:50pm – Session 4: The Attention Economy: An Impending Crisis?

6:20pm – Closing Remarks

6:30pm – End of Workshop



Session 1: What Is Attention?

14th of September 2022 – 2:20pm to 3:30pm

The workshop will begin with a series of papers exploring the nature of attention, a term that appears to have a plain and obvious meaning, but which on closer inspection evades easy definition. The presentations and subsequent discussion will investigate whether attention is a coherent analytic category, what are, if any, its essential properties, and whether there are inconsistencies in current understandings of the term. The session will also explore how models, theories and understandings of attention's nature can vary across cultures.

Presentations:

Towards a Synthetic Psychology of 'Attention'

Bernhard Hommel

Institute of Psychology – Leiden University

Attention Across Two Cultures: Divergent Models and Metaphors

Rahul Rose

Department of Anthropology – LSE

What Attention Is and Why it Matters

Sebastian Watzl

Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas – University of Oslo

Presentations followed by round table discussion.

Discussants:

Britt Anderson

Centre for Theoretical Neuroscience – University of Waterloo

Christopher Mole

Department of Philosophy – The University of British Columbia

Session 2: Studying Attention in the Lab and in the Wild

14th of September 2022 – 4:00pm to 6:30pm
(inc. short breaks at 5:00pm and 5:45pm approx.)

Building on prior discussions about the nature of attention, the presentations in this session will explore how attention can be studied. The presentations draw directly from empirical research conducted in the laboratory and in the real world, examining how elusive aspects of attention can be unlocked through particular and novel methodological approaches. The subsequent round table discussion will elaborate on these elements, foregrounding cross-disciplinary disjunctions and synergies, revealing assumptions embedded in the different approaches and sketching potential routes towards a better understanding attention.

Presentations:

Evangelical Habits of Attention: Fierce Mindfulness and Listening Meditation

Josh Brahinsky

Berkeley Social Interaction Laboratory, Psychology – UC Berkeley

'Inattentional neglect' as a Means of Investigating Lifelike Attentional Capture in Vision, Hearing and Touch

Polly Dalton

Attention Lab – Royal Holloway, University of London

Studying Attention 'in Situ': A Case for Subjective Evidence-Based Ethnography (SEBE) as a Means to Capture Attention as Individuals Experience it

Maxi Heitmayer and Atrina Oraee

Department of Psychological and Behavioural Science – LSE

Fieldwork in the Silence: A Protocol for (Auto)ethnographic Research on Meta-attentional Practices

Malene Hornstrup Jespersen and Kristoffer Albris

Copenhagen Center for Social Data Science (SODAS) – University of Copenhagen

What Does Misdirection Tell us about Attention?

Gustav Kuhn

MAGIC Lab – Goldsmiths, University of London

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Measuring Attention Ethologically: How an Interdisciplinary Team of Social Data Scientists and Anthropologists Measured Attention in the Field

August Lohse, Emilie Munch Gregersen and Sofie Læbo Astrupgaard
Copenhagen Center for Social Data Science (SODAS) – University of Copenhagen

Tracking Sound and Listening to Tracks

Hermione Spriggs
Slade School of Fine Art and Department of Anthropology – University College London

Presentations followed by round table discussion.

Discussants:

Sophie Forster
Sussex Attention Lab – University of Sussex

Morten Axel Pedersen
Copenhagen Center for Social Data Science (SODAS) – University of Copenhagen

Session 3: Why Attention Matters

15th of September 2022 – 2:00pm to 3:30pm

The second day of the workshop focuses on the vital role that attention plays in the cultural, political and economic lives of contemporary societies. To that end, this session will explore why attention matters in a broad range of contexts, from inequality and creativity to disaster relief efforts. The papers in this session take diverse methodological approaches, but each speaks to the centrality of attention for understanding society, showing how 'paying attention to attention' (Cook 2018) might provide a novel perspective on complex problems and issues. This overarching topic will be the focus of the round table discussion.

Presentations:

Attentional Shifts in Long-term Disaster Response: An Examination of the Exceptional

Devin Flaherty

Department of Anthropology – The University of Texas at San Antonio

Fair Shares and Selective Attention

Davide Domenico Pace

Center for Research in Experimental Economics and Political Decision Making (CREED) –
University of Amsterdam

Creativity and Attention, in Anthropology and in the Wa State

Hans Steinmüller

Department of Anthropology – LSE

Bridging in Attention-Allocation Systems

Luke Thorburn

UKRI Centre for Doctoral Training in Safe and Trusted AI – King's College London

Presentations followed by round table discussion.

Discussant:

Julia Cassaniti

Department of Anthropology – Washington State University

Session 4: The Attention Economy: An Impending Crisis?

15th of September 2022 – 3.50pm to 6:20pm
(inc. short breaks at 4:30pm and 5:30pm approx.)

The present moment is one of deep anxiety about attention and its potential manipulation by technologies old and new. The final session brings together scholars from a range of disciplines - from law to economics through anthropology, philosophy and literary studies - to interrogate the present 'crisis of attention'. As such, the session will incorporate divergent perspectives on the attention economy and technological distraction. This includes papers that seek to understand the perceived crisis, its causes and possible solutions, as well as papers that take a more deflationary approach, looking for value in states of inattention and employing a longer historical framework. This will provide a varied foundation for the final round table discussion, creating a fertile environment for novel interdisciplinary syntheses and understandings of the contemporary moment.

Presentations:

From Data to Attention Infrastructures: Regulating Extraction in the Attention Platform Economy

Elettra Bietti

NYU School of Law and Digital Life Initiative at Cornell Tech

Reading Attention in Contemporary Literary Studies

Alice Bennett

Department of English – Liverpool Hope University

A Brief Introduction to Rational Inattention

Mark Dean

Department of Economics – Columbia University

Personalization: Building Attention Subjects within the Digital Attention Economy

Eva Iris Otto

Copenhagen Center for Social Data Science (SODAS) – University of Copenhagen

Distraction Reconstructed

Marion Thain and Edmund Sonuga-Barke

Centre for Attention Studies at King's (ASK) – King's College London

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Frame Problems in the Age of Attention Scarcity

Christopher J. Watts

Independent Researcher

Presentations followed by round table discussion.

Discussants:

Nick Seaver

Department of Anthropology – Tufts University

James Williams

Writer and Technology Ethicist