Attentive technology

How to build self-control and sustainability
of attention with/through digital design?
(or don’t make it worse at least)

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The observation motivating me to write *Attentive technology* is that the overabundance of information available from our devices at any given moment turned attention into a scarcity, and a very significant proportion of this attention is consumed by different screens. As devices get smaller, they can be embedded in more spaces and situations. Though we often leave desktop computers at their own dedicated place, their pocket-sized versions come with us everywhere, and even smaller ones are starting to claim space on, and perhaps even in our bodies as wearables. As measured by numerous studies, we see and touch the screens of our smartphones probably more than any other object or person for that matter. What are the consequences of the smartphone's newly gained centrality in our lives and and how could we instead build self-control and sustainability of attention through digital design?

References:

Winnick, Michael. "Putting a Finger on Our Phone Obsession." Resources for Remote, Qualitative and in-Context Research, blog.dscout.com/mobile-touches.

Andrews, Sally, David A. Ellis, Heather Shaw, and Lukasz Piwek (2015), "Beyond Self-Report: Tools to Compare Estimated and Real-World Smartphone Use," PLoS One, 10 (10), 1–9.

The first part of this research looks at different psychological aspects of attention, the strong tendency to engage in interferences (which are often some kind of information), our relationship with information as a reward and a powerful need, and a model to explain strategies of gathering information.

The second part is about how the human mind exists in the attention economy, which requires digital products to gain as much time and mental energy of their users as possible in order to succeed. This inspired popular methods for exploiting the limits of our attention capacity, affecting our ability to 'single-task' (experience flow, be bored, write, etc) and our free choice of what we pay attention to. There are also several critics of these methods who I want to present in this research (Tristan Harris, James Williams, Amber Case, etc.)

References:

Gazzaley, Adam, and Larry D. Rosen. *The Distracted Mind: Ancient Brains in a High-Tech World*. MIT Press, 2016.
Pirolli, Peter, and Stuart Card. "Information Foraging." *Psychological Review* 106.4 (1999): 643-75. Print.
Eyal, Nir. *Hooked: How to Build Habit-forming Products*. NY, NY: Portfolio/Penguin, 2014. Print.
Annual reports of Facebook, Twitter and Tencent
"Time Well Spent." *Time Well Spent*. Web. 07 Sept. 2017.

In the third part, I will try to imagine an alternative vision where the success metrics of attention will help us have more self-control over our attention, and make our focus more sustainable. One part will consist of interviews of digital designers already aware of similar issues in order to learn from their approach, and designers who specifically create mobile applications to have a better idea how to work with qualitative goals in mind. The other part would be a visual representation of attention that shows its relational nature instead of using it as a currency. The learnings from the interviews and the development of the visual language will inspire the master project.

References:

Case, Amber. *Calm Technology: Principles and Patterns for Non-Intrusive Design*. O'Reilly, 2016.

Citton, Yves. *Pour une écologie de l'attention.* Seuil, 2014.

And many more.