

The Emerging Attention Economy by Michael H. Goldhaber
Chapter 3 (part 3)

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THE DESIRABILITY of ATTENTION

Speaking of desire, crucial questions that we now have enough tools to examine revolve around the desire for the attention itself. What is the inner benefit of attention from other people? Does everyone have the wish for it? Can it be fully satisfied? Might the extent to which we can acknowledge and seek to satisfy this desire be greater in our contemporary culture than in others?

As good a place to start as any is again with Sonya, our tennis player. Suppose she is in a tournament and we are part of a large audience, many of whom, like ourselves, have already become her fans. We see her play, we feel her wanting to win, and we too want her to win. It is commonly believed that a player does better when the audience is mostly on her side. Even if they do not cheer aloud, they will make subtle sounds and intakes of breath in sync with her. Even though she is mostly focused on playing, Sonya can pick up the crowd's wish that she win, a wish that emanates from mirroring her. To some degree, she can mirror that mirroring, amplifying her own will, possibly. At the very least, it certainly feels good to have some of the audience on her side. That is the same reason parents go to their children's Little League games, their school-play performances, or whatever. It is why parents of younger children are eager and supportive as they take their first steps or pass other milestones of development.

It can feel good to have even a small crowd in your corner, offering applause and the like. Whatever you may be doing, the sense that it is echoed and repeated in other minds, which control other bodies, enlarges you. You gain a sense of added power and strength. Now you are not just one person among many. You are, for that moment anyway, the whole crowd.

As I have already pointed out, an infant or young child absolutely needs the ability to generate audience attention. Without being able to recruit other people to satisfy her needs, she would be helpless and doomed. It seems very probable that a young child derives a vital sense of well-being from her

awareness that she attracts supportive attention. Conversely, a sense of not having sufficient attention is a cause of unhappiness. Some needs — say for some vitamins — may never turn into active desire, but the need for attention in young children is so strong it would be rather remarkable if most of them did not deliberately seek it.

Perhaps some people might “grow out” of this feeling. An adult could come to depend only on herself — if she wishes to live as a self-sufficient hermit. But why should anyone want that? Unless their culture actively discourages attention-seeking behavior on most people’s part (which is not uncommon) many — if not almost all — older children and adults can be expected to retain an active desire for the attention of others. (In the next chapter, I will explain some of the ways the culture associated with the MMI economy at its height directly discouraged attention seeking and why.)

Of course, it is a little absurd even to suggest that in any human society the desire on each person’s part for the attention of others is ever completely absent. We are highly social animals. We are, for instance, possibly the only animals who to reach adulthood must master the complexities of a language and thereafter use it with some regularity. Not much in the way of a culture, a society, or an economy can even be envisioned that does not include some wish for the attention of others, even if in certain situations it is a limited and even a very repressed wish.

CAN THE DESIRE FOR ATTENTION BE SATIATED?

How much attention is enough? Many of us have had the experience of speaking to a table-full of people or a roomful. In many of these instances, if shyness or sense of propriety does not limit us, the whole group’s attention seems most desirable. Anyone’s not paying attention can seem either rude or disappointing. Many small children seek the applause or attention of anyone who catches their eye. Some authors, such as Martin Amis, have been quite explicit that they really want everyone to read their books. Others might stick to “everyone who is anyone.” We want to live, it would seem, in a world that aligns fully to us.

Attention is different from material things. Our need for it is about as basic as for food, drink, air, shelter, and so forth, but with those physical needs, our finite bodies set limits on the satisfaction of desire. You might want to eat all the food in a well-stocked refrigerator at one sitting, but you would probably burst. For the same basic reason — your having only one body, and

that of limited size — you can only sleep in so many beds in a night or a lifetime, wear so many clothes, or visit so many spots. But if you were able to get all the world’s attention, it would not cause you any direct bodily harm. In fact, from what we can gather, it could feel terrific.

No one has ever gotten all that attention, though many have tried. These days the largest known audiences are over a billion people — a thousand million, or a thousand thousand thousand — which seems immense. But why stop there? If there were a trillion people — a thousand billion — we could somehow reach, why not get that amount of attention? Never mind the fact that for most of the existence of human beings, it would have been impossible to get more attention than from a tribe or village — probably no more than a couple of thousand people at the very outside. Modern technologies permit going after much more, and nothing seems to inhibit many of us from doing so. How many of the rest of us secretly — or perhaps unconsciously — would chance it? Are most of us held back by anything other than fears of rejection or contempt?

WHOSE OR WHAT’S ATTENTION IS WANTED?

Normally, the kind of attention that is desirable is that which involves aligning of the audient’s mind. To have a mind capable of aligning to the prospective receiver of attention means also being able to be aligned to in turn. You cannot shape your mind to that of another if you are incapable of registering at all the sort of feelings the other may have, and these include the desire for attention itself. There is no value in an audience of stones.

Or is there? What about possibly inanimate “sources” of attention such as diaries we keep strictly for and to ourselves yet write in, as if we were writing or speaking directly to them? When we confine our utterances to something like a diary, we are probably doing at least one of four things. First, through the act of writing — or speaking, say, to a tape recorder — we are each paying attention directly to our own selves, engaging in a kind of self-aligning, a sort of integration of different aspects of the same self. One could do this also by meditating, without any outward action.

Second, we may intend our own future self as an audience; in that case, we expect that what we read in that future will in effect re-align our then selves to our present sensibilities. Third, however private and secret we may take the diary to be, we may be wishing that in fact it will eventually be read by someone else, who will thus align to us. Finally, though this is closely

related to the first possibility, we can ascribe a mind to the diary, much as many people ascribe minds to all manner of natural objects. Of course, modern objectivity denies that the diary really has a mind, but not everyone automatically takes this modern view at all times.

Incidentally, if you do ascribe a mind to an inanimate object, to a spirit or god, or to a seemingly new form of life such as a computer, can you not get around the scarcity of attention? There is no shortage of stones. If we all believe stones can listen to us well, wouldn't that alleviate the shortage of attention as well? I think not, for it is difficult to ascribe mind to something – meaning it can align with a human — without believing it also wants or requires attention paid to it. I am not religious, but as near as I can tell, genuinely religious people spend much time paying attention to their god or gods. Little children who converse with their dolls or other toys usually act as if the dolls demand attention as well. I think Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick probably got it right in their movie 2001 that the computer HAL would demand attention if truly capable of paying it, but even contemporary computers and other devices, such as cars, are sometimes treated by their owners as demanding their attention. If instead, you take the view that ascribing attentiveness to what science considers not capable of thought is a kind of projection of your own attention-paying abilities onto that object, then clearly no net attention can so be gained.

NOT THE BEST WAY TO STOP TRAFFIC

In getting attention, we want to be aligned to by the attention payer or payers. That means we want the others to recognize us as other than an object ourselves. It does not really satisfy to be simply viewed as say some sort of useful thing, or alternatively as some sort of annoyance. However, the first step in getting real attention might plausibly be to be seen as simply beautiful, useful, weird, or annoying. If you are having a difficult time seeking attention from another person, the most obvious solution may be to make yourself into the object you assume they may want, casting aside the desire that the other be aware of your own subjectivity in return for at least receiving the kind of attention that may go to a desirable object, making you little different, perhaps, from a nice dish of ice cream or a handy chair to sit on, or perhaps a piece of clothing that will attract attention for the wearer. If you start with that goal though, how do you then go beyond it to getting more genuine attention for yourself? Further, without a clear understanding of just what good attention is and how it works, it is very easy to mistake any kind of attention whatsoever as the enjoyable and valuable kind.

Someone lying down in the road to block traffic probably does so with the intent of getting the kind of attention that involves alignment, but it is perfectly possible that drivers forced to stop or the police called in will ignore that and see the person lying there merely as an obstacle to be thrown off the road into a ditch or put in jail. Conceivably, someone who greatly wanted attention would view even being thrown into a ditch as of some value, if that should later result in outrage at the brutality of the treatment leading in turn to some degree of being actually heard. Other than that possibility, though, few indeed, would want to be so treated.

Still, there are many cases when the desire for attention is strong enough to encourage taking great risks in order to get it. The class clown who disrupts a high school lesson in order to get attention might be willing to take being sent to the principal's office or risking expulsion as a side danger. In more extreme cases risking even life may seem worthwhile, as in the case of NASCAR driving, risky explorations, scary mountain climbing or the extreme derring-do of Philippe Petit, the tightrope walker who strung a wire between the tops of the two towers of the World Trade Center (prior to 9-11, when they still were intact) and walked between them.

For many participants in "gangsta rap," seriously risking getting shot or being thrown in jail seems like part of the price of getting attention. So does being a German skinhead, though the dangers are usually less. Even suicide bombers fit into this pattern at its extreme. Even if they don't believe the dogma about ending up in heaven surrounded by virgins, it is true that they have a significant chance of living on in certain sense in the minds of those who learn of their exploits or see the videos they often have prepared in advance of their deaths. Certainly, many people have at least threatened suicide, or, even worse, murder, as part of some last ditch plea to get attention. If the calculation seems off, it may not be for the truly desperate, though fortunately there are few even among gangsta rappers or would-be terrorists who are fully willing to go such a length. Fortunately, for most people, even under the most extreme conditions, deliberately dying or killing doesn't really compute as a means of getting attention. However, if that extreme is adopted by some, every more modest but still outlandish means of attention getting will also surely be tried. Acting outside the norm is clearly a means to obtain at least some attention.

PURE MATHEMATICIANS

Here is one more limitation on satisfying attention getting. We do want to be aligned to, and our experience or arrogance might lead us to conclude that our thoughts. A mathematician, say, might disdain the attention of anyone other than those few who really fully understand and can imitate her mental processes. An opera singer might want only the attention of those who can fully detect the subtleties of her performances. But many do not take so limited a view, perhaps for the reasons I now turn to.

PAYING ATTENTION MEANS DOING WHAT IS ASKED OR WANTED

So far, I have been discussing paying attention as primarily a mental act, which is mostly how it has been studied scientifically. But in our common use of the term, paying attention to someone quite often has a physical component in terms of satisfying a person's wants. That is "paying attention" and "being attentive" seem linked, at least via the common root of the words. Is this link real? If so it is certainly going to be important in an economic analysis of attention. I think it is real, and I am now going to propose some "thought experiments" that you can perform in imagination to test the link. Further along, I offer additional arguments to support this connection, as well as to show some of its consequences.

To start, imagine that in talking to someone you make a request like one of the following: "Listen to this;" "Look over there;" "Consider this;" "Let me introduce you to Mr. Smith over there;" "Have a taste;" "Hold this for a moment;" "Hand me that thing over there, please;" "Wait a minute until I'm through;" "Wait here for me for a few minutes;" or maybe, "Please stand." Surely you have had endless occasions to make requests of this kind, if not in these exact words. If you know the person well, that is if she has paid you attention in the past, and *vice versa*, you could even ask her to share something that she is eating, get you a drink, give you a ride, or possibly fill other very personal wants. In addition, you sometimes make negative requests, such as "please don't do that; it's annoying me." If, without explaining why, she does not comply to requests such as these, you might well conclude she is not paying attention.

As a rule, the more attention we feel we are being paid by someone, the more substantial the wants of ours we can expect them to try to fill. That is,

normally, attentiveness does come with attention being paid. We can easily understand this in terms of the aligning of the attention payer's mind with our own. That connection leads to the following way of formulating things: *To the extent someone is paying attention to you, she wants to do for you what you want; and, conversely, she does not want to do (to or for you) what you do not want.* In the examples just offered, the requests were explicit, but they certainly don't have to be. The more attention someone has paid you, the better they are likely to be able to guess at your wants without having to be told.

The form of attentiveness to be expected, however, can vary considerably depending on the situation. It is one thing to be right next to someone, but quite another to be talking by phone, say. In that case, no use asking for a glass of water, or for most other things that would require immediate bodily motions. Another variant situation is when the one doing the asking or demonstrating some wants is in front of a large audience. (Yet another is when the attention getter is still more indirectly addressing such an audience, say in a movie, a recording, over the Internet, or in a text in some form, such as this one. As I am writing this, I have an appetite for a turkey sandwich on toast, but no matter how closely you read, by the time the text reaches you my wants will not likely be the same.)

A FEW MORE STROKES FOR SONYA

To see what happens in the case of someone before a live audience, it helps to change perspective. Imagine now that you are witnessing a performance of some sort by a star you already have paid some attention to. If you happen to like tennis, it could be someone like our favorite tennis player, "Sonya," in a tournament setting. You have watched for a while and are quite hooked on wanting her to achieve her goal of winning, probably not just this particular match, but maybe the whole tournament, or even beyond that. As you watch, you may somehow sense that Sonya is suffering from the heat of the day, is in pain, tiring, thirsty or in despair over what appear to be bad calls by the umpire. You want her to have a chance to cool down, alleviate her pain, quench her thirst, be better treated by the umpire, or whatever it might be that you sense she wants. You want her to leave the tennis match happy, for then so can you.

Sharing Sonya's desires in this way doesn't imply that you will actually try to fill them. You probably will not rush onto the court or even the sidelines to offer cooling towels, soothing balms, or refreshing drinks, nor will you go

punch out the umpire. You most likely will just sit with seeming calm in your seat wishing that her needs be taken care of. You might focus on her trainer, wanting a timeout to be called. You might hurl dark thoughts at the umpire. Possibly you would visibly frown at the bad decisions, and maybe even yell something out.

Outwardly, to go from wanting Sonya's wants to be fulfilled to trying to fill them yourself would be a big step. Still, the more you pay attention to her, the more you are likely to make the effort when you believe you might succeed. If you happen to see her walking through a doorway or gate you are near, you quite probably would hold it open longer and more graciously for her than for someone unknown to you. Beyond extending the normal courtesies further than you would to someone not known to you, there are many possible further steps. You might start following the tennis news to learn the progress of Sonya's career. If she has a website, a blog or a vlog, you might frequently tune in to see how she is doing. The more you would pay attention to her in these slight ways, the larger she would loom in your life, and the farther you would go to pay still more attention in ways that you believe will accord with her desires.

Should Sonya appear in a tournament you could travel to, you well might go, dropping other plans and priorities in the process. At the event, you would wait patiently in line, maybe even for hours, to watch her or greet her. You could try to get your friends to be fans too. You might send her encouraging fan mail or sincere hints on how she might improve her game. Should she make public requests — say to give to a certain cause or a certain charity, or even directly to herself — you would be prone to accede to them — provided doing so does not violate other values you hold. If you are enough of tennis enthusiast to have an in at local clubs, you might try to get Sonya invited to tourneys. If you succeed, you might then very naturally see to her comforts of all sorts during her visit. And so on.

Even a moderate tennis star might well have thousands of fans. If each does some little bit to see that her wants are met, the total can add up to something quite substantial. Whatever the nature of a star you pay attention to, it should not be too hard to imagine similar ways you would find yourself trying to fulfill some of her wants.

WHAT IT MEANS ECONOMICALLY

Two major points follow from this connection between paying attention and being attentive to wants. We can better see why people can desire a great deal of attention, that is, can want to be stars. While we often hear that having a great deal of attention can be annoying, it is not actual attention that is. As long as people really pay attention to the star, they will not intentionally do anything she would dislike. When we wish to be noticed and have attention paid us, we quite reasonably assume our needs and wants will be met, not the reverse.

Further, if indeed paying attention entails a desire to do what the recipient wants, then receiving enough attention almost automatically offers one a chance to live well. (This second point starts us on the path to understanding how an economy based on attention can subsume most of the benefits of the old economy based on industrially produced things, though on a very different footing.)

THE LITTLE-LEAGUE MODEL

To repeat yet again, an infant and young child's ability to command attention — and, I may now add, the resulting attentiveness — is crucial for its very survival. Let us speculate on this for a moment. Might it be that the basic attitudes that we bring towards attention to or from anyone stem from this primal encounter? After all, it is only very recently in human history that we have had many opportunities to pay attention in large audiences or across distances. Evolution had no reason to equip us to handle such cases very differently than the ways in which we handle basic parent-child interactions.

As I have already mentioned, there is one instance quite common in today's America when a tennis or other sports player or performer need not be any sort of star yet can count on considerable attention and attentiveness from certain members of the audience. It is when parents watch their own children. Many parents at their children's sporting events will duplicate your imaginary acts of fandom towards Sonya, wanting the child to be happy and wanting to satisfy her wishes when possible.

In fact, for any very young child, whatever the circumstances, there is virtually no difference between getting attention from a parent or caretaker and having one's wants satisfied. And the parent generally interprets getting attention from the child in the same light of having wants satisfied. The way

we act towards a star such as Sonya may only be a slightly modified form of how we would act if she were indeed our child (or parent).

BEING ENTHRALLED

What are the limits to this sort of attentiveness? Clearly, no sane person would lay down her life so that Sonya, the tennis player, could get new shoes, or for some trifling whim of hers. On the other hand, most people would risk their lives to save anyone they really pay a lot of attention to — their closest friends, parents or children and so forth — if the horrible circumstances arose that put their lives in danger. Sometimes devotion, even to stars, as well as intimates, goes still further.

This thought plunges us into what amounts to the “deep end” of absolute attentiveness. We commonly speak of a state of paying rapt attention as being “enthralled.” Literally, a thrall is a slave. Being enthralled then means being enslaved, though not in the usual way, which is by force. Paying absolute attention to someone would imply totally aligning your mind with hers. Quite unthinkingly, you would take up — as if your own — her desires, feelings and wants of all kinds. With perfect and complete attention, the boundaries between you drop, and you are in symbiosis with that other. Your body and your actions are as much at their disposal as their own body is. You will do virtually anything for them. It is complete harmony, total love.

This is the feeling a parent has for a baby, at least in the most intimate moments. It is the feeling an enthralled lover has for the one she loves. It is also to be seen in very compatible, long-married couples, in the ways doting grandparents act towards their grandchildren, among extremely good friends, between outstanding teachers and their pupils, and in many other situations. With that absolute degree of attention, people have made every kind of thing, fixed anything, cooked thousands of meals, waited constantly and attentively on the other, made themselves always available, at times almost literally enslaved themselves. Sometimes people in the thrall of attention to another go to still further extremes, violating laws, devoting years to someone who in reality gives very little attention back, prostituting themselves, murdering others or gladly giving their own lives — all to satisfy the wants of the person who had their attention.

The recipients of this degree of attention can be stars as well as intimates. To take a period distant enough that both broad history and details of personal

biographies are known, consider the 1960's. In America, hundreds of thousands rallied to John F. Kennedy's inaugural call to "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." They gave up career paths and risked life or health to join the Peace Corps or the military (and in this latter case were willing to kill as well). Others harked to the sermons of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and dedicated years, or their whole lives, to the civil rights movement. Still others listened to the psychologist-turned-LSD evangelist Timothy Leary's call to "tune in, turn on, and drop out," entirely changing their plans and purposes. In China, brandishing their "little Red Books, devotees of Mao turned the country and countless lives — often including their own— upside down to carry out his "Cultural Revolution."

Other figures, in many different fields, had strong pulls too, from John Lennon and Paul McCartney of the Beatles, Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and many other rock stars; the novelists Jack Kerouac, J. R. R. Tolkien, Harper Lee or Philip Roth; the stars and creator of the TV show *Star Trek*; movie stars such as Jane Fonda, Elizabeth Taylor, Marilyn Monroe, Sean Connery or Peter Sellers; movie directors such as François Truffaut, Luis Bunuel, Sam Peckinpah, Alfred Hitchcock or John Huston; "serious" composers such as Luciano Berio, John Cage or Karlheinz Stockhausen; thinkers and philosophers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Karl Popper, or W. V. Quine; economists such as Paul Samuelson, John Kenneth Galbraith or Milton Friedman; literary critics such as Lionel or Diana Trilling, Edmund Wilson, Mary McCarthy or J. R. Leavis; artists such as Pablo Picasso or Andy Warhol; and religious leaders besides King, like Pope John XXIII, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, or Billy Graham. This is only a random and highly arbitrary sampling of fields and a few of the stars in each who were most widely attended to.

Changing one's life in a general or even in a more narrow way is not all that paying attention to such a figure amounts to, however. A good many people who were attentive to these same stars were not only eager to, but actually did supply their more personal wants. For instance, it is now notorious that some filled the large sexual desires of Kennedy or King, not to mention Leary, Mao and a good many of the others. Though the sexual conquests appear to be the most outrageous and thus usually the most discussed in retrospect, such wants and their satisfaction were by no means confined to sex. These and countless other stars have been given meals — often sumptuous — and shelter and transport — often luxurious. Any other

craving they might have expressed, including their smallest whims, were often of interest to their audience and filled by one or another of them. Quite generally whole entourages grew up around stars to help serve their immediate needs.

I have selected the sixties era in this regard partly because by now so much is known about many its major attention-receivers, and also because it was the first age in which TV played a huge role in allowing the public a seemingly close-up look at many stars. Other attention getting figures, from the dawn of history until this first decade of the twenty-first century, might be cited just as tellingly. Today's rap stars; sports stars; action movie stars; columnists and leading reporters; some corporate leaders — particularly in finance high tech, and entertainment; political bloggers, terrorist leaders such as Osama bin Laden; Presidents and their entourages, along with some other politicians, and many other figures have learned how to capture probably even more attention, so as to have their wants filled and their acolytes go to extremes in even more complete ways.

Of course, some of those on my list above at times could have commanded strictly by force, by threats to livelihood, or by invoking fears of hellfire, but that is by no means the sole secret of their power. Even a Hitler or a Mao initially obtained power only by being very successful at getting attention. Then they continued to rule and stayed in power as long as they did largely through their continued ability to command attention, even if they were much aided in this by the perquisites of the positions they had managed to reach.

MONEY TRACKS ATTENTION

As long as we perceive ourselves to live in a money economy, one way we fill wants is with money, which of course is often the form in which wants are expressed. If paying attention includes the desire to fill wants, then offering money in some way will often appear the best way to be attentive.

Sometimes the nature of this as an attention transaction is somewhat concealed or unconscious, and we tend to view it as simply an old-fashioned exchange — value for money. When you buy a book, or a ticket to a sports contest or a concert, you of course know that some of the proceeds will go to the stars you want to attend to, but you can still perceive this as no different

than buying a carton of milk or a new tire. At other times, though, you are asked to make a donation of a certain size to attend either a political fundraiser for a candidate you admire or some sort of charity event sponsored by a star you cherish. In those cases it is clearer you are not so much buying something as giving money. Increasingly we do perceive such payments as what they are — a generalized way to satisfy the wants of someone to whom we give our attention, as in fact, part of that attention, and not a “fair exchange” in the marketplace at all. Nowadays, we in fact take it for granted that those who get a lot of attention — who have many fans and thus a large audience — are deserving of a lot of money as well. Occasionally a star ends up broke, and when this becomes known, fans quite frequently chip in to set the unfortunate or mistreated star back on her feet.

Here is one way to understand this use of money. Someone to whom we pay attention may have wants we cannot readily fill. If we hand her some money she can fill whatever wants she has through the regular functioning of the market. However, if money goes to people more and more according to the attention they get, then the market — as a space in which money is exchanged for goods — loses its centrality! I shall have more to say in subsequent chapters about how this kind of monetary transaction is likely to be further transmogrified as we move further into a pure attention economy. Most simply, if we have the attention of others, we can fill a large number of the wants of whomever we pay our own attention to by connecting her to the attentiveness of the right other person. The more easily we can make such direct connections, the less necessary money becomes.

THE CHICKEN LITTLE CASE

A further point needs clarifying. You do not have to be consciously focused on yourself to want attention, yet the attention you get is still taken from the essentially scarce supply. Think of Chicken Little from the popular children’s story. To the extent that any conscious or even unconscious reflection goes on in the mind of this human-like chicken, it would have to include something like the following line of reasoning. “Something fell on me. I think it was the sky. I am frightened that the sky is falling. My thoughts and fears matter (because I matter). I need help. Because I need help and my thoughts and feelings matter, and, ultimately, because I matter, it is quite all right for me not to keep my fears to myself but to go around screaming, ‘the sky is falling, the sky is falling.’ If I do that enough, and enough people — or animals — pay attention, maybe someone will help me by keeping the sky from falling or offering adequate shelter.”

Whether one views this as wanting and feeling one deserves attention for oneself or simply feeling that one's thoughts or feelings deserve attention "on their own," it amounts to the same thing. And when Henny Penny takes up the cry, the same things apply. Henny is thinking Chicken Little's thoughts, but they now are also her own thoughts. Thus the motive for seeking attention for certain thoughts or facts or ideas can feel perfectly philanthropic. But this works only via the implicit belief that one's own entertaining of those thoughts, etc., amount to a reason that others ought to entertain them as well. If you truly feel you are of no importance, then your thoughts will have no importance either.

Still, Chicken Little will have an easier time getting people (or animals) to pay attention to her thoughts about the sky if she has already entered their attention before, the more easily, the wider their prior experiencing of reshaping their minds to hers, or their knowing her appearance, name, etc. Thus to get attention for your thoughts on some future occasion it helps to have gotten attention for various aspects of yourself earlier.

“LOOK AT ME! LOOKAT ME!”

A related question is this: Can you get attention for absolutely anything? Will jumping up and down screaming, “Look at me, look at me!” do the trick? Not likely. Everyone who has ever wanted attention will have an easy enough time aligning her mind to yours momentarily, long enough to recognize what you want. But unless there is more to your call for attention than that, there will be no reason to keep aligning to you just on that basis. Some onlooker may pay enough attention to call the authorities and notify them there is a crazy person around. Then a crowd may gather, paying more attention to the efforts of those trying to shush you than to your own unvarying screams. In a short time, even that drama will pale.

A quieter approach is equally useless. Sending out e-mails reading “I want attention” over and over, and nothing more, will fail miserably. Publishing a book that just repeats your name over and over won't work very well either. (Even if such a project would draw some notice to the first person who carries it out, as a sort of deadpan Dadaist exercise, by the second or fifth or tenth copycat, interest will likely disappear completely.)

To keep minds aligned, you must keep them somehow engaged. You have to offer some kind of mental or bodily motion to align with or mirror, or else

an audience will drift – off to sleep or into some reverie, if nothing else outside captures their attention. You must do something to differentiate your own call for attention from everyone else’s, and even, to some degree, from yours in the past. For full attention, some degree of motion that does not find a complete echo in memory is helpful to maintain actual alignment in the here and now. Generally, that means some combination of the familiar with the new or the unanticipated.

I’ve already mentioned a partial exception to the requirement for expressing novelty. Especially in a personal conversation with someone who has already paid a lot of attention to you, you sometimes need do no more than repeat conventional remarks. Even then, though, if the other person doesn’t suffer from Alzheimer’s, you can’t leave it at that. Each conversation must include unique features, or even good friends’ minds will stray.

In a later chapter, I will explain in more detail just what kinds of moves can sometimes work in getting attention from an audience. No formula will continue to work, however, past the time when its patterns become clear. Audiences vary too, and different strategies are needed for different ones. The collective attention of the whole world, or even of a tenth of it, even very briefly, is a prize only very few can hope to attain, and that by only by considerable luck as well as skill.