Green Paper 04 — Attention as Ethics

Green Papers: Notes Toward Planetary Guardianship

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Author's note — AI co-creation. These papers are working notes authored by Lars A. Engberg. They were drafted and edited in conversation with an AI language model (*GPT-5 Thinking mini*). The AI assisted with phrasing, organization, and initial drafting; the author curated, edited, and is fully responsible for substantive claims, omissions, and interpretations. Where passages were substantially shaped by the AI, this is indicated in the editorial log. The work is offered as field notes and an experiment in collaborative composition rather than a finished, peer-reviewed product.

Abstract

This paper proposes attention as a form of ethical infrastructure. What we attend to shapes what becomes real, what becomes actionable, and what becomes morally relevant. Ethics is often framed as principles or duties, but in practice it begins earlier: with perception, selection, and presence.

1. Attention comes before judgment

Before we decide what is right, we decide what is real.

2. The attention economy is an ethical environment

Contemporary life reorganizes attention through speed, novelty, interruption, and competition.

3. Collapse patterns: what happens under overload

Under overload, attention becomes narrow. This narrowing is not a personal weakness; it is a biological and systemic response to stress.

4. Attention as care

Care can be understood as the practice of sustained attention.

5. Civic and institutional attention

Attention is not only individual. Institutions train attention through what they measure, reward, and ignore.

6. Planetary attention

Planetary crises are attention crises, not because people are indifferent, but because the scale and complexity exceed default capacities.

Methods / Editorial note

These Green Papers are written as field notes and working reflections. The drafting process combined (1) authorial writing and revision, (2) iterative prompts to an AI language model for drafting and editing, and (3) conventional editorial revision. Key practices:

- **AI assistance:** The AI produced early drafts and suggested language; the author reviewed and revised every paragraph.
- **Sourcing:** The papers use a "working bibliography" as orientation rather than a formal literature review. Citations are selective; empirical claims should be verified before formal use.
- **Verification:** The author is responsible for verification of cited sources and accepts responsibility for errors. Prior to academic submission, each reference and empirical claim should be independently checked and expanded.
- **Versioning:** Each paper carries a version line (v0.1). Substantial revisions will be tracked in a change log at Planetary Guardians / Spiralweb.

Closing questions

- What do our institutions train us to notice—and to ignore?
- Where does moral attention collapse first: body, relation, or institution?
- What protects attention from chronic interruption and reactivity?
- How do we build long-horizon attention without ideology or burnout?
- What would it mean to design governance as "attention infrastructure"?

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