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The Limits of Listening

From the moment of waking, to the last minute before sleep, we are surrounded by networked devices. The mobile phone, which is commonly used as alarm clock and a portal to check email and social media services as well as a telephone, plays a key role in emerging 'practices of listening': literally and metaphorically. It is used to quickly 'tune in' to email, Twitter and Facebook updates, as well as to make calls and listen to music. But with such a personal technology that is almost always with us, is there a need to delimit the capacity to listen? Beyond a simple 'information overload' perspective, what are the implications for human attention and subjectivity as participants in 'always on' environments? Complains about a high signal to noise ratio, and the 'echo chamber effect' (Pew 2009), invoke sound metaphors to address the experience of regular interruption, or 'continuous partial attention' (Stone 1998). With developing social and labour pressures to be present via mobile phone as well as in social media space, what disciplines are emerging around the ideal listening subject? This talk will consider Crary's position that 'the compulsory consumption of "information" is being made synonymous with experience' (1999), to consider how ideas of listening and silence function in mobile and social media.