Circling around the idea of ‘slow radio’, this essay offers a critical reflection on how listening is presented as a form of care in the media. The discourse of ‘sonic self-care’ has become increasingly familiar with the promotion of noise-cancelling technologies, digitised sound therapies and personalised tracklists and other forms of what Mark Hagood calls “orphic mediation”. As orphic media “foreground a deep desire for control as freedom”, it is perhaps not surprising that they seemed to become more prominent through the pandemic and its privations.1 But listening as a care for self, and as a care for others, has long been entangled in the history and infrastructure of radio and other audio media. It can be found most explicitly in relation to the business - whether mainstream or marginal - of producing sounds and music mixes with a focus on contemplation, relaxation and slowing down.

**A century of slow radio**

The BBC is just one major broadcaster that has begun playing with the idea of ‘slow radio’ in recent years, most notably with a series of broadcasts-turned-podcasts on BBC Radio 3, its station for classical music, arts and cultural programming. The BBC website promotes *Slow Radio* as ‘an antidote to today’s frenzied world’, a chance ‘to step back from the busy hurry-burly of life’.2 Suggesting that slow radio allows you to ‘take time out to recharge and

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2 This programming began with a short series in 2017, becoming a permanent feature from 2018. BBC Radio 3 Slow Radio: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05k5bq0](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05k5bq0)
understand the world and all its crazy ways in a new light’ Radio 3 Controller, Alan Davey, has said that Radio 3 is the ‘natural home for slow radio because we are the place where things have always taken the time they take.’ The BBC extended its offer of slow programming during the pandemic, with the launch of ‘Radio 1 Relax’, a streaming service of soundscapes, calming noises, and advice on mindfulness aimed to support young people deal with the stresses of lockdown.

The Slow Radio series is, slowly, building up an archive of immersive sound walks, nature recordings and audio close-ups of nostalgic, meditative or restorative sounds. Examples include the sounds of slow sheep in southern Spain, a mountain climb in the Lake District, and the sounds of a Norwegian forest that involves, among other things, the sound of tadpoles hibernating in the snow. An early contribution included a ‘late night duet between a shakuhachi player and a nightingale’. For anyone interested in the history of British radio, this last example will ring a bell, as it immediately – and self-consciously - conjures up inherited memories of the famous Nightingale broadcasts with the cellist Beatrice Harrison.

In May 1924, the BBC's very first experiment with outside broadcasting had featured Harrison playing a “duet” with a nightingale in her Surrey woodland garden. It clearly

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BBC Radio 3: A Slow Radio Soundscape: Birdsong and Vapour Trails http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08rg41l. There is also a regular weekly ‘slow radio’ item on Radio 4’s Broadcasting House show, where listeners send in their own soundscape recordings.


5 https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0689tgk#play. This isn't an isolated case of musicians duetting with nightingales. David Rothenburg has made several recordings with nightingales in Berlin. See: https://www.nightingalesinberlin.com


7 For a detailed account, including the technical aspects, see Iain Logie Baird (2015) ‘Capturing the song of the nightingale’ Science Museum Group Journal 19 October, Issue 4 T DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15180/150402
resonated with listeners, attracting some 50,000 fan letters, and turning Harrison's garden into something of a tourist destination. Its success saw the duet repeated annually for the next 12 years, relayed by international broadcasters like CBS, and recordings released by HMV. From 1936, ten minutes of nightingale song was also broadcast before midnight every night, to "bring solace" to the listeners. Commenting on the surprise success of this experiment, the famously dour Director General, John Reith, remarked that "something closely akin to emotionalism" was sweeping the country. While he might not have entirely approved, he did acknowledge the "glamour of romance" that had "flashed across the prosaic round of many a life". It brought the sound of nature to urban listeners and a brief shelter from the shadows of war and human turmoil. The cello and the nightingale programs somehow continue to resonate in the national imaginary, and people petitioned the BBC to record a new version on the 90th anniversary in 2014.

In his extensive essay on the making and meanings of this early media event, Iain Logie Baird reflected on the affective responses to these broadcasts in highlighting the "bluesy emotionality" of the Nightingale duets. He speculates about their function in relation to managing the encounter with what, in 1924, was still a strange new medium:

By expressing or experiencing intense emotions [...] creatively through a new auditory medium, perhaps it seemed easier to come to terms with the uncertain emotions that

The BBC has recently revealed that this first broadcast was a 'fake' as the sound engineers had frightened the nightingales away, and so they resorted to a 'siffleuse', a whistling artist, to stand in for the bird. See Dalya Alberge (2022) 'The cello and the nightingale: 1924 duet was faked, BBC admits' The Guardian, 8 April.

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10 Hannah Furness (2014) 'BBC relives first wildlife broadcast 90 years on' The Daily Telegraph May 11.
radio itself stirred up – to regain a feeling of control – by its ‘taming’ a natural environment that was familiar, and presenting it as content to console the listener.\textsuperscript{11}

Antidote, solace, consolation: a century of broadcasting framed by a common vocabulary of care and compensation. It is this striking parallel, expressed through broadcasts more than 90 years apart, that motivates this attempt to think through the ethics of care in broadcast communication, by examining in historical context the discourses circulating around such experiments.

The politics of slow

It may be overstating the case to speak of a slow radio ‘movement’, but recent experiments in slow radio can be seen as part of the wider slow movement that is usually traced back to the slow food manifesto of 1989.\textsuperscript{12} Connected to the eco-activism and self-reliance movements of the 1970s, the manifesto emerged out of an Italian protest against McDonald’s as the epitome of fast food and throwaway culture.\textsuperscript{13} The movement set itself up in resistance to the temporal logics of industry and the machine, which activists argued were insistently colonising and enslaving private space. It was a resistance of the local against the global, of craftsmanship against mass production, and of good taste against bad. It was also, significantly for the discussion to follow, a resistance politics based in the demand for ‘guaranteed sensual pleasure’, a demand rooted in a politics of self-care.

\textsuperscript{11} Logie Baird (2015) op cit.
Gradually, the slow movement moved into other areas of life, by now taking in slow travel, slow cities, slow schools, slow books, slow living and slow money.¹⁴ There are many books on the subject, both popular and academic, and any number of calls to slow things down, such as slow business, slow journalism, slow art, slow fashion, slow beauty and, appealingly, slow scholarship.¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, there are also calls for ‘slow media’.¹⁶ One expression of this is the ‘slow media manifesto’ declared in 2010 which, like the slow food manifesto, envisages a consumer-led resistance to the commercial logic of the mainstream.¹⁷ It focuses on the quality of communication, the sociability of the social, the mindfulness of mediation and the acknowledgement of the act of listening as equal to the act of speaking up. In this more critical iteration, it is a rejection of the acceleration and proliferation of data and information flows under capitalism, and a promise of a return to reflective and deliberate public engagement.¹⁸ A similar manifesto for the digital age has been declared under the rubric ‘Slowcial Media’, dedicated to ‘unhurried and meaningful’ human to human communications, and highlighting apps, platforms and other initiatives with similar aims.¹⁹ Slow media, in short, continue to be proffered as an antidote to a wide range of social and political ills of the digital age.

¹⁹ https://slowcialmedia.com
The mainstreaming of slow media

It is no surprise that the slow movement took to the air, alongside other media, to spread the word. In fact, Carlo Petrini, the leading figure of the slow food movement, had run one of the first stations of the Italian free radio movement in the 1970s, Radio Bra Onde Rosse, that decades later came to inspire projects like the slow food podcast network, Heritage Radio. Slow Living Radio, one of many online channels, carries the tagline, ‘Tune in. Slow down. Live well’, describing its intention to ‘create a strong sense of place, a better balance and an appreciation of the simpler experiences life has to offer.’ But as well as media evangelising the slow movement, there have also been plenty of aesthetic and commercial experiments in slow media.

‘Slow cinema’, with its aesthetics of duration, stillness and even boredom, has many antecedents, particularly in countercultural and art cinema, but began to be recognised as a distinct genre in anglophone film criticism in the last two decades. Meanwhile, ‘Slow Television’ launched in Norway in 2009. These marathon broadcasts, usually a live feed from a single static camera, included continuous footage from a seven hour rail journey along the entire length of the Bergen line, eighteen hours of live salmon fishing, and the twelve-hour long broadcast on National Wood Night in 2013, that attracted a fifth of the population to tune in to programmes about chopping, drying and stacking wood, culminating in the live transmission of eight hours of an open fireplace. Thomas Hellum, the producer of these pioneering shows, said the secret of slow media is “that there is no producer who has decided what is exciting and what is not. Everything is there, and the

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21 http://www.slowlivingradio.com
viewer himself [sic] must find out what is interesting and what is boring.”  It was a statement that not only obscures the production choices and broader institutional infrastructures of broadcasting but seeks to offer a populist defence of a quite esoteric experiment. In doing so, it encapsulates a perennial tension in thinking about the audience of slow media, revealing as it does a curious mix of crediting the audience with the ability to produce meaning for themselves, while implying that in every other media encounter the audience has surrendered this capacity more or less passively to the whim of the producer. At root, though, it is a description that wants to demonstrate slow media’s care for the audience.

When these programmes first launched, the broadcasting of such non-events was, paradoxically, ‘event television’. They were later promoted as ‘the next big thing’ by on-demand services like Netflix, and are certainly now commonplace on most streaming services, albeit listed under adjectives like ‘meditative’, ‘wellbeing’ or ‘calming, rather than specifically ‘slow’. Social media platforms like YouTube, Reddit and Vimeo provide a convenient location for more local or amateur production of longform and ambient video, including livestreaming. Livestreams from zoos and aquariums became especially popular during the enforced isolation of lockdown.

Amazon was a relatively early adopter of slow content, with its ‘Window Channel Network’ offering ‘immersive and rejuvenating’ scenic films that unfolded to soothing real-time field recordings of ambient sound. In 2018, WCN was acquired by a digital health company, Sharecare, to expand its business in the multi-billion dollar mediation and relaxation

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26 An interactive map identifying slow television broadcasts from around the world is available at https://slowtvmap.com.

27 Some sites are available as apps, too, e.g. EarthCam TV.

28 Emma Gill (2020) ‘Zoos are livestreaming animals so isolated families can watch them play’ Manchester Evening News April 17.

29 https://thewindowchannel.wordpress.com/about/
industry. Alongside providing longform relaxation videos for healthcare and spa settings, the acquisition was driven by the recognition that engagement with slow media via data-gathering apps could be personalised, quantified, gamified, and monetised.⁴⁰ Users’ engagement with Sharecare’s content produces personalised data sets where meeting certain ‘health indicators’ earns them rewards and unlocks access to premium services.⁴¹ It is just one example of the exponential marketisation of technologies of the self in an era where the desire for individual autonomy and self-knowledge meet consumer culture and digitised forms of networked individualism.⁴² Self-care (as self-tracking, self-improvement, self-disciplining) through digitised slow media, quietude and silence has, in this way, been thoroughly appropriated by the accelerated consumer culture that it promises its users an escape from.

**The sounds of slow media**

Some of this slow video material is decidedly nostalgic, particularly for analogue forms of media. A lot of it is also pitted decidedly against the insistent pull of screen culture, not least the pestering temptations of the mobile phone, albeit that many of these videos will be accessed via phones and their apps. There is much to say about this, but for the purposes of this essay the key thing is how much these efforts seem to be about making screen culture function more like the classical idea of radio: there is a constant or at least very extended stream of output; it works as a secondary medium, providing distraction and

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⁴¹ In 2020, Amazon’s Alexa voice assistant service linked up with Sharecare to provide health information to users. Separately, though interestingly in this context, Amazon has recently been promoting Wi-Fi-enabled ‘Echo Frames’ (audio glasses with microspeakers and a microphone in the arms of the frame) that allow users to take Alexa with them and engage with Amazon content hands-free and on the move. Unlike earphones, their selling point is allowing the user to ‘stay in the moment’ as they allow ears to stay ‘open’. See: https://www.amazon.com/All-new-Echo-Frames/dp/B083C58VDP

accompaniment while doing other things; and it is precisely the audio track that provides the unbroken engagement with the text. Sounds of birdsong and water tend to dominate. Many slow videos are almost motionless, bringing their soundtrack to the fore, and claiming this makes them perfect background material to accompany ‘sleep, study, work, or relaxation’. One aficionado of slow TV on Netflix is quoted as saying: ‘I’ve been putting it on when I’m doing other things, like painting, going through bills, folding laundry […] Slow TV is good for making the room feel more alive, while at the same time not competing for my attention.’ Sharecare Windows on Amazon Prime even offers ‘black screen’ videos, like ‘9 hour Rainstorm for Sleep’.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons that among all the experiments with and discussions about the varieties of slow media, there is actually rather little about slow radio. Google ‘slow radio’ and you’re more likely to come up with various easy listening stations than anything else. This is interesting because it might suggest that there is, from the perspective of the listener at least, a very long history of ‘slow radio’, and the pleasures and distractions it offers, but that it has simply gone by other names. The second is that the term ‘slow radio’ is otherwise used to denote radio that precisely eschews or at least minimizes the staples of what is clearly taken to be ‘normal speed’ radio, namely music and speech.

In his archaeology of the term in the context of American radio, Keir Keightley finds ‘easy listening’ used from the late 1930s (but dominant 1946-66) to describe a radio-friendly style of presentation, that didn’t go ‘hammer and tongs’, but was ‘restrained, less emotional’. Here is another paradox. ‘Easy listening’ is used as a shorthand not only for a particular kind of music, but for a particular kind of auditory experience that was one expression of ‘care’ for the listener – a promise not to disturb, but rather to accommodate to the domestic conditions of reception, to offer soothing companionship and a respite for

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33 Bukszpan (2016), op cit.
the ears. On the one hand, ‘easy’ became part of the promotional vocabulary of advertisers who sought to sell their products with the promise of freedom from labour (while disguising the labour embodied in the products and the labour required to earn the means to consume such projects). On the other hand, it became a dismissive, even disdainful, shorthand for a kind of attention that is precisely undemanding and easily available to all.\(^{37}\)

Meanwhile, the more critical tradition of slow radio often requires its audience to invest in the labour of listening, to work at listening more deeply. It is often explicitly interventionist in aiming to disrupt broadcasting conventions and convenient listener experiences. One such activist attempt at subversion was Radio Boredcast, 744 hours of eclectic slow content broadcast as part of the 2012 International Festival of Art, Technology, Music and Film.\(^{38}\) Despite being described as freeform radio, there was a good deal of curation the idea that there was time to be filled with an eclectic mix of ‘engaging, entertaining and unpredictable’ content. To this extent, it bears a striking resemblance to the vernacular modernism of the early public radio schedules, in the years before broadcast genres and conventions had become established, when the new medium offered up a premonition of empty time to be filled.\(^{39}\) And yet, from the perspective of those caught up in contemporary commercial media logics, the idea of ‘freeform’ radio can be posited as a participatory ethic of care, not only in relation to listeners, but also in relation to fellow creative practitioners, with the promise of liberation from the shackles of the schedule.

A radically different approach to filling time is represented by the slow radio produced by the Wetland Project. Each year on April 22, Earth Day, a single day-long soundscape of the

\(^{37}\) Keightley, op cit. p.313.  
\(^{39}\) Kate Lacey (2018) ‘Radio’s vernacular modernism: The schedule as modernist text’ Media History 24, no. 2: 166-179.
Saturna Island marsh in Canada is streamed worldwide. These recordings, by Brady Marks and Mark Timmings, are made in the spirit of acoustic ecology, and specifically Bruce Davis’ 1975 call for “wilderness radio” as a kind of radio that ‘listens in’, rather than ‘broadcasts out’. For Brady, American commercial radio’s stylistic and acoustic template was all about ‘tending towards smoothness and speed to maximise domestic listeners’ receptiveness to advertising messages.’ In contrast, the slow, jarring and unpredictable sounds of the wilderness, overlain on the urban soundscape would, he claimed, disrupt listeners’ expectations and recalibrate their relationship to mediated sound, time and the environment.

**Slow radio and hierarchies of attention**

Throughout radio’s history (and beyond), these different modes of attention - the distracted and the concentrated, the indiscriminate and the discerning – have been used as markers of distinction, mapped, as often as not, onto prevailing class distinctions. And certainly, it is possible to see this at play in the way in which ‘slow radio’ is actively distinguished from ‘easy listening radio’, in terms of content and the spaces in which it operates. Its heritage lies more squarely in the traditions of sound art, soundscapes and acoustic ecology than broadcast radio. But the rhetoric about care for the listener, and about providing an acoustic balm for the trials of modern living, is remarkably similar, and crosses otherwise persistent borderlines.

In this respect, the popularisation of slow radio in its more mainstream forms as ‘easy listening’ contrasts with those forms of slow media where the purpose of slowing down is

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40 ‘Slow Radio Broadcast’ [http://www.wetlandproject.com/ra-more.php](http://www.wetlandproject.com/ra-more.php). This page contextualises the broadcasts and reproduces the listener feedback received about the 2020 Earth Day broadcast (i.e. during the pandemic).


42 Davis (1975), ibid, p.22.

precisely to demand or facilitate greater concentration, deeper attention. Slow cinema, for example, is difficult, challenging cinema, a rejection of the fast editing rhythms of mainstream film, and an invitation to contemplate the ‘image of the duration of things’ (Bazin in Mulvey, p.103). It can be demanding on the body, too, spending hours or days on end in darkened auditoria. In some instances, this challenge is pushed to impossible limits. There have been attempts to scale up slowness; for example, a ‘very slow movie player’ has been mooted that would slow a movie down so much it would take a year to view. There are many instances of stretched audio, too, of course. A neat example that encapsulates the interplay of the corporate and the experimental is a super-slowed version of the Microsoft 95 sound, a 7 second sonic corporate logo originally composed by Brian Eno, champion of ambient music. But in terms of sheer continuous duration, even the most mainstream radio schedule in its endless flow has always already exceeded comprehension by an individual listener. Individual radio shows and dramas can run for years and decades. Slow radio is rarely as physically demanding as some forms of slow cinema, though it can also be about challenging auditory norms and about encouraging heightened awareness – of duration, certainly, but also of space and the environment. However, the broader terrain of slow radio output does seem designed less to challenge the senses than to soothe them.

There are, then, two contradictory tactics at work here – distanciation and immersion (tactics that might crudely be associated separately with the eye and ear). The first is about creating a critical distance by drawing attention to the absence of conventional forms of editing and presentation. This is perhaps particularly evident where ‘slow radio’ is embedded in the normal flow of broadcasting (like the slow radio segments on Radio 3’s ‘Late Junction’ or Radio 4’s ‘Broadcasting House’). Here it acts as an extended pause button, a putting on of brakes. Paradoxically, its more contemplative mode serves as an

44 Bryan Boyer. ‘Creating a Very Slow Movie Player’ Medium, 22 December 2018
https://medium.com/s/story/very-slow-movie-player-499f76c48b62
This is part of a longer and evolving history of how media users (as audiences and producers), can speed up or slow down media content. See, for example, Jonathan Sterne and Mara Mills, “Second Rate: Tempo Regulation, Helium Speech, and ‘Information Overload,’” Triple Canopy #26 (2020): https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/issues/26/contents/second-rate

45 Brian Eno - Windows 95 Sound x23
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNIfbdi41ho&t=2s
interruption, a formally discomforting break from the norm, however comforting the content. The second is about encouraging the listener to experience sounds ‘in the moment’, as they unfold as if in real time. Here is where we see the connection to current discourses about ‘mindfulness’ as a response to the distractions and permanent receptivity of modern mediated experience, the irony of doing so through another form of mediation, notwithstanding.

Occasionally, these two tactics overlap, as in the example of ‘Radio Lento’, a slow radio podcast that made waves during the Covid-19 lockdowns. The podcast consists of ‘unedited’ 3D field recordings of the British countryside made as a hobby during family walks. The couple who makes them, Hugh Huddy and Madeleine Sugden, contrast their work with the formalism and artistry of Radio 3’s ‘Slow Radio’ which for them is embedded in the traditions and interventions of soundscape craft. They eschew the “overly designed overly edited speeded-up view of the world”, claiming it is the very “concept of time” that they want to “preserve”. However, the key ambition is to offer up their recordings as therapeutic access to nature, and as a shield against noise, distraction and the travails of modern life.

**Slow radio and the ethics of care**

In this way, slow radio, in line with the broader slow media movement and the whole ‘mindfulness industry’, is commonly framed in terms of an ethics of care for the self, as a defensive and privatised response to the ‘malign velocities’ of contemporary life. It is a trope that was at work a century ago at the dawn of broadcasting, but that has in recent years become ubiquitous as it is so easily aligned with the interests of neoliberal economics and the politics of individualism.

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There is a lucrative market for slow media genres that either incongruously or cynically exploit the apparently widespread desire to escape media logics. To this extent, these forms of slow media (together with many apps and podcasts offering varieties of ‘healing sounds’) are connected to familiar strategies like ‘digital detox’, ‘unplugging’, or ‘monotasking’ promoted to help consumers with what is variously called the ‘barrage’, ‘bombardment, or simple ‘addictiveness’ of media. But using slow media as a salve, or as a temporary respite, seems only to shore up those dynamics, to serve the interests of what Evgeny Morozov already nearly a decade ago called ‘the mindfulness racket’.\(^50\) From this perspective, slow media can only offer the semblance of escape; rather than working for change; in fact they work to accommodate the user more effectively to the prevailing conditions from which they seek to escape. It is a paradox that pervades such programming, even when it is offered by public service broadcaster like the BBC.

Similarly, for all its promise of resistance, the slow media manifesto is caught up in these wider logics. Article 11 declares that “Slow Media are auratic [...] They generate a feeling that the particular medium belongs to just that moment of the user’s life” (David et al., 2010, n.p.). This is a discourse of control, but also of retreat to interiority. In terms of slow radio, it is arguably a denial of the open-ended collectivity inherent in the classic broadcast address. In the rise of the discourse of ‘mindfulness’ and ‘self-care’, there is a real sense in which the iniquities and stresses of life under neo-liberalism or ‘fast capitalism’ can no longer be resisted or contested, let alone overturned; we simply have to work on ourselves to feel better – and work more efficiently - within the system.

This aspect is mirrored in the mainstream in the way radio channels increasingly produce schedules, shows and mixes designed explicitly to create a certain mood, whether designed to help focus more on the secondary task at hand, to gear up for a new day’s work, or to recover and relax from the exertions and stresses of the day. There are mixes to pick you

up, but there seem to be even more to calm you and to wind you down. There are even programmes to help you sleep, once the last escape from the media world. Away from slow radio per se, there are any number of podcasts that offer slow stories, slow news, and variations on the internet sensation (literally) that is ASMR, with its slow, hypnotic whispering, tapping and other audio triggers. Listeners are addressed and interpellated as private individuals, entire unto themselves rather than as members of a public.

So, there is a certainly a risk that self-care draws people away from a more political or proactive response to the situation they find themselves in. But from another perspective, self-care is ethical, in the Foucauldian sense of ethics as the self’s relationship to the self. Foucault delineated an ethical framework for ‘living a beautiful life’ in which caring for the self becomes ‘a matter of pleasure, autonomy, and self-mastery in the present’, a self which is created and regulated through daily choices and practices. Switching off, and tuning out of the normal flow of media messages - or immersing oneself in the *longue duree*, rather than floating along amid the flotsam and jetson of the data flow - might be one example of such a practice. Indeed, there can be a radical dimension to such an ethic of self-care. The American civil rights activist, Audre Lorde, famously argued that in some contexts self-care is not about self-indulgence, but rather self-preservation. Self-care, she argued could become an act of warfare, a way ‘to exist in a world that is diminishing.’ Not all forms of self-care are about accommodation to the system, but about surviving to fight another day.

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51 Sounds of nature and gentle music are common in sleep apps; slow “sleep stories” are also becoming very popular, where soothing tones and unexciting content are designed not to be listened to the end. Siobhan Norton (2020), ‘Can’t sleep? Millions are using the Calm app to hear a soothing bedtime story for grown-ups’ inews October 10. There is also a growing market in radio sets and white noise machines designed for sound and sleep therapy. See also Jonathan Crary (2013) *24/7: Late capitalism and the ends of sleep*. Verso Books.

52 There is an extensive literature on ASMR, but for an interesting discussion that focuses on its sonic, aesthetic and material qualities see Joanna Łapińska (2020) ‘Vibrations of worldly matter. ASMR as contemporary musique concrète’ *Estetyka i Krytyka* 57, no. 2: 21-35.

53 Laurie Ouellette and Jacquelyn Arcy (2015) “‘Live through this’: Feminist care of the self 2.0.” *Frame* 28, no. 1 95-114, p.100

But, as ever, context is all. There is a pervasive sense in which the vocabulary of self-care has been appropriated by the very neo-liberal system from which it ostensibly offers some respite. Self-care all too often is literally sold to us, available only in pre-packaged and commodified forms, requiring new forms of labour and more calls on our time. There are powerful images in circulation of what a cared-for self should look like, the norms to which the cared-for body should conform. These hollowed out forms of self-care are then put on display and recirculated as what might be called ‘selfie-care’.\(^{55}\) Thus the cycle is ratcheted up, producing new forms of exclusion for those who can afford neither the time nor the money for the extravagant forms of self-care demanded by the logics of neo-liberalism. Whatever form it takes, an ethics of care that is focussed only on the self could never be sufficient. Feminist and radical care ethics highlight the need for interdependency, the need to care for both self and others and to do so as part of everyday relations and practices.

The paradoxes and contradictions around the experiments with slow radio and its various counterparts in the end suggest that the ethics of care are not predicted or constrained by what kinds of sounds are played, nor for what duration. Speed is relative, after all, and the care we need comes in different forms. But the discourses that circulate around slow radio might matter, sitting as they do along a series of familiar fault lines – between image and sound, the mainstream and the margins, invocations of good taste and bad, the individual and the collective. How these discourses are embedded in structures of care is also important, and in this context, that includes the institutional structures and infrastructures where slow radio is presented and how it interpellates its listeners. Slow radio in the end treads the shifting line between discourses of public service media and media that are merely self-serving.