

Breathless

von Hannah Ellul

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If I were to tell you how I arrived here, I would have to explain the voicemails. The voicemails have been in the back of my mind for some time. They had accumulated over several years, in fits and starts. A waxing and waning of words spoken into the void. For months, I watched them arrive but I did not listen to them. When I eventually did hear the messages, certain things were immediately clear. The condition of his lungs was deteriorating. His breathing was laboured. The messages had never been easy to follow. They were often slurred, because of the drink. But now when he spoke his words were interrupted by coughing fits, more and more so as time went on. By groans and gasps. Belly-speech. Gurgles of outflow.

In *The Absent Body*, Drew Leder writes that the healthy body is 'transparent'. In illness, the body loses its transparency by 'dys-appearing'. In a state of dysfunction, it appears. When I read this, something about the idea of the loss of transparency seems familiar to me. The pregnant body is not transparent, but it's not dysfunctional either. In fact, the cis female body is perpetually troubling this idea of transparency in health. I am not the first person to point out that the question of the body's transparency is not as simple as it seems.

I try to listen to the groans and gasps between the words as sounds in all their electronically-mediated materiality, perhaps I am being evasive. I am finding it hard to breathe as I listen: the body impinges, despite myself. And they call this 'reduced' listening. The absent body, on the other side of the voicemails, of the radio. For something so absent, it weighs heavily. Dissipated, dys-appearing.