

The End

Artist Statement

MOLLY JOYCE



Figure 1.
Screen capture from *The End* (2019).

The End is a music and video work created in collaboration between musician Molly Joyce and visual artist Maya Smira. The music is inspired by German singer-songwriter Nico's cover of the classic song from The Doors,¹ and expands to a multi-layered voice and vintage toy organ recording, reckoning with loss of physical sensation and movement and intersecting with multiple camera angles focusing on two physically different hands. The work was created with support from the Swatch Art Peace Hotel in Shanghai, China, and filmed and premiered there in May 2019.

The musical material involves my voice, vintage toy organ, and electronic processing of both acoustic sources. These elements are common features in my artistic practice cultivating disability as a creative source. I have an impaired left hand from a previous car accident, and therefore have difficulty performing with most musical instruments due to the loss of dexterity and flexibility. However, the organ's set-up of chord buttons on the left-hand side and a keyboard part on the right-hand side is very natural and idiomatic for me to perform on, and therefore a continual presence in my musical work. Since starting to perform on the organ I have added my voice along with electronic processing of both sources including delays, filters, reverbs, and more to create an enveloping electroacoustic musical soundscape, all in pursuit of exploring disability as a creative source.

Artistically speaking, the work seeks to illuminate loss of physicality through the combination of video, music, and lyrical language. It culls from my direct

experience with acquiring a physical disability, and the inevitable questioning that results as part of such experience and asking where the lost physical movement and sensation went and landed. In the car accident I broke my left hand as well as lost two out of the three nerves in my left arm. Ever since the accident I have continually questioned, artistically and personally, the process of losing these nerves. For example, I often have twitches and involuntary movement in my fingers, which I believe are the result of phantom nerves and the last endings of the two nerves lost. Furthermore, the wrist of my left hand cannot extend backward, and therefore I continually question where the lost nerves progressed, ones that would typically facilitate such movement.



Figure 2.
Screen capture from *The End* (2019).

Therefore, in my artistic work, I continually query and search for where the lost nerves went and landed. Inquires such as: “Why did they leave my body?”; “Where are they now?”; and “Will I ever be reunited with them?” continually fuel my artistic inquiry and longing. I often ask these directly in the lyrical language I sing, specifically in *The End* with lines such as “of everything that moves, the end,” “in an enervated land,” and “desperately in need of some stranger’s hand.” These reflect the ever-problematic dichotomy of reaching the end of physicality, and how it forces a reckoning and longing for even more physicality and ultimately someone else’s body in an almost posthuman sense. I believe this questioning is evident in the work’s lyrics:

this is the end, beautiful friend, the end
my only friend, the end, the end
of our elaborate plans, the end, the end
of everything that moves, the end, the end
no safety, no surprise, the end, the end

I'll never feel you again

in an enervated land

this is my hand, of the end

this is my scar, of the end

this is my scar, scar, of my veins, my arteries

my scar, scar, scar

can you picture what we'll be

so immobile and free

desperately in need of some stranger's hand

this is my hand

this is the end

my hand

The work also questions and posits the afterlife of the “human” to a wider ecology, in conversation with disability, music, video, lyrical language, and the overriding sun seen in the video. To me the sun represents the overriding presence of the inevitable. An inevitable that eventually we will all have to reckon with: the loss and disappearance of physicality, mobility, and sensation within our bodies, and ultimately the inevitable confrontation with disability. Even as disability is continually around us, in the bodies of ourselves and others and as a condition that can be temporary to permanent, congenital to acquired, and visible to invisible, I believe it is often sidelined and pushed to the background rather than foreground.

Additionally, these queries reflect the amorphous idea of the posthuman offering the chance to re-examine what is and can be considered “human.” I wish to inquire if humans always have the allotted nerves and movements they are supposed to, or if the concept of human is also inclusive of lost nerves. I also wish to ask if the human body is inclusive of nerves once held that chose to leave, that chose to escape the physical body yet remain in mental memory and energy, such as that of the disabled body and in my case acquiring a disability and thereby physical loss and immobility. I hope these queries bring posthumanism into conversation with the disabled body and specifically a body that acquired a disability, in exploring an intersectional focus on the binaries of mobility and immobility, physicality and fragility, and ability and disability.

Therefore, I believe that *The End* highlights a notion that the disabled body is critical to advancing posthumanism at the margins. It is accentuating historically marginalized perspectives of disability culture as central to this intersection, with

the added intersection of musical and video content. The work also re-evaluates the notion of “moving beyond” the “human,” in exploring the intersection between technology and culture with music, video, accessibility, and lyrical language. I ultimately wish to question who is permitted to be seen as posthuman, and if this involves disabled bodies and disability embodiment.

The End (2019)

Duration 6 min.

<https://youtu.be/Trz-u-nxIGQ>

Created in collaboration with Maya Smira at Swatch Art Peace Hotel in Shanghai, China.

Notes

1. Nico, “The End,” John Densmore, Robby Krieger, Ray Manzarek, Jim Morrison, recording Summer 1974, Island, track 7 on *The End...*, 1974, compact disc.