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## Psychick Order

Corissa Duffey

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Psychick Order

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

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May 2018

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## Abstract

Preserving Psychick Order

By Wyley Duffey, MFA

*Preserving Psychick Order* is an investigation into the subliminal, of a body processing trauma and transition. I explore how my mind and body filter memory, fear, and the impact of the past into the present. Since childhood, making dolls has been a way for me to express complex feelings, especially as they relate to dynamics between biological and found family. By tenderly modeling dolls after my own transforming physical features and mental processes, I make connections between the effects of my mind on my body and vice versa. I like to describe the resulting forms as queer monsters trying to camouflage themselves poorly in my parents' home in rural Georgia. Unconscious becomes conscious, inside moves outward, and unmasking realizes the self and the trickster within.

## Body processing emotions

Throat

Chest

Abdomen

Bodies harbor memory in a way a mind may forget.

Psychick props play a role in replaying, recombining, and reintegrating pieces of old memories.

Fragmentations of such props tickle the soft, slick linings of my digestive organs as they pass through. Acidic bubbling sometimes escapes my lips as a weak burp or a burning sob as my juices try to

BREAK DOWN

the parts into something more easily digestible.

Pink bowels are splintered regardless.

The past is alive. The parts are alive.

Unconscious becomes painfully conscious.

Outside, materials forge new relationships with seemingly unrelated memories.

From here we have new forms, new familial units, new sentiments.

A B R E A C T I V E

*Absence of ritual in modern contexts removes a psychic prop to the individual's capacity to cope with major transitions of life.*

- Helena Bassil-Morozow, *The Trickster and the System*

At my most anxious and without fail, I have nightmares of my spiders escaping. I have seven of them, each in a separate tank that is customized to their environmental needs. The worst of these dreams is when they are stuffed into a single tank, eating each other alive. Thrashing bodies and bristling hair and flailing legs spill out from under a flimsy lid. I stare in horror at the scene of battered survivors fleeing one by one. It's impossible to count the number of legs that produce the faintest drumming in their race for sanctuary. Glittering eyes roll frantically in tiny heads without seeing anything. They vanish under beds, behind drapery, and places I'll never be able to reach. I am too petrified to dive after them and fear I'll cause more damage than has been done.

They are surprisingly delicate.

*We attempted to use others - our mates, friends, and even our children, as our sole source of identity, value and well-being, and as a way of trying to restore within us the emotional losses from our childhoods. Our histories may include other powerful addictions which at times we have used to cope with our -----.*

- The Welcome of Co-Dependents Anonymous,  
<http://coda.org/index.cfm/meeting-materials1/welcome/>

We put the AFFECT in affection.

Shortly after Granny died, I dreamed one night that my brother and I were carrying her pink casket through the woods to her burial site. It was made of cardboard and too narrow for her body. As we dodged and ducked through the woods, the cardboard began to twist and rip. She kept slipping out of her flimsy casket and her hair was tangling in my hands, growing longer and darker by the second like in her youth. She was wearing a blue dress in this dream.

She was buried in pink.

Her favorite color was blue.

I start with the head.  
A photo of my face behind a ten cent Halloween mask.  
Many of the materials I work with come from discount holiday decorations  
Left in bins, carelessly strewn about the clearance aisle, broken, stolen.  
The leftovers nobody wants, that are practically free in a desperation to move on the the next  
commercial holiday.  
The image undergoes a quick Xerox transfer onto sewn, striped fabric  
Much like the shirts Granny always wore.  
Slipping it over my head  
I wonder behind holes cut for eyes what she looks like now.  
A mask under a mask.  
Upon removal, I fill with polyester fiber and sew it shut.

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### SYMPATHETIC MONSTERS

*Well I'm a human fly*

*I-I said F-L-Y*

*I say "buzz buzz buzz"*

*A-and it's just becuz*

*I-I'm a human fly*

*A-and I don't know why*

*I got 96 tears and 96 eyes.*

*-The Cramps, "Human Fly"*

The injection was relatively painless last night.

I pierce mother once a week.

Feeling bratty and spiteful and very horny,

I have turned back time and will never grow up at this point.

I think about that one mannequin leg in my studio and still haven't unpacked.

There's such a familial comfort in excessive clutter.

I don't want to be bound by the same neuroses.

I want to have everything I hold dear on my person...

knotted to or in a lover, their scent locked in the whiskers of my hairy asshole,

dumb cartoons that make me laugh inked on every inch of my skin. (Yes!)

I don't flatter myself to say I'm an exquisite corpse,



more like an experimental corpse,  
a kind of becoming.  
Or not.  
I am dying in mother's eyes.  
I've been "dying" for a while.  
Bzzz.

I-I say F-T-M  
I feel the vibrations of my deepening voice.  
Mama says I don't sound like myself.  
I-I tell her I am sick.  
A sweaty meatball of hormones  
seeking desirability in the undesirable.\*  
And boy did i get it!  
Bzzzzzzz!\*\*

\*you looked dead when I found you  
\*\*We often settle for less

I have a truncated male torso.

A cracked mannequin with carved abs, groovy collarbones, a delicious curve to the spine.

Adding skin to it is easy.

I layer the front with a pint of liquid latex and shredded toilet paper.

As it dries, I can see the floral print of the toilet paper through the wrinkling, yellow latex.

Later, I'll embroider that pattern across the chest with blue floss.

Piercing associations.

After a rub down with baby powder, I peel off a perfect copy of the torso.

I try on my new, flat chest.

A near perfect fit.

I add nipples cut from the tips of pink balloons and

Stiffened with sugar grains.

Hair is threaded from an old wig around the areola.

Such focus on tender details allows me time to ruminate without leaving angry blotches on my forehead and shoulders.

Pawpaw always greeted guests with a lift of his polo shirt and an offer from his "sugar tits."

Especially during the holidays.

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### **SELF MASTERY**

It's easier to communicate difficult feelings through a felt body

From a floating head.

It was a blustery week when I found the giant stuffed bear

Crumpled and emptied under a parked car.

Its foam pellet organs confettied all down Bowe Street.

I recognized it immediately from its flimsy striped shirt as the stuffed bear that inhabited a front porch a few blocks away.

The material was weathered with neglect.

I carried it home, where it continued to spill

Up the stairs

Into my bedroom

The pellets clung to my cat's fur.

Oh bother.

The legs were so tattered that they disintegrated during travel.

I filled its feet with cement, which were big enough to fit my feet wearing shoes.

Anchoring an old aluminum crutch into each foot gave it height.

A combination of polyfill and the pillow I took from the clinic after I broke my wrist gave it the bulk it never had with loose foam beads.

Newly weighted, the addition of rope and ratchet straps gave it the stability to stand upright.

Hard and soft solutions.

I remember reading somewhere that the role of the mother is to nurture and the role of the father is to provoke.

*Thomas Jefferson's injunction to his eleven-year-old daughter, Patsy-  
"Take care that you never spell a word wrong...if you love me, then strive to be GOOD under every situachun."*

-butchered from Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia*

Self preservation Self destruction

It's a fucking tomato.

You don't realize how much it hurts

When you take a nibble here and there

Hoping I won't care

since it's just a nibble

But nibbles add up

And I'm left with nothing

And you are nourished and out the door

Leaving a trail of sauce and skeletons (and suckers) behind you.

*Humiliation demands a soiling. Even if the ordeal is merely mental, the body itself gets dragged into the mess.*

- Wayne Koestenbaum, *Humiliation*

A trickster lost.

I am still grieving.

Fuck 'em if they can't take a joke is a mantra I allow to circulate in my psyche, a childish declaration that still makes me laugh.

I guess that makes me the clown.

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