

YLVA HABEL

THE DOMESTICATED UNCANNY

VOODOLLS, SWEDISH-BRAND PSEUDO-MAGIC

This article is part of the project

[Sacred things](#)

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“Sacred Things in the Postsecular Society” ran at the Museum of Ethnography during 2010 and 2011, with funding from the Swedish Arts Council. The project was led by Associate Professor Lotten Gustafsson Reinius, curator at the Museum of Ethnography, and comprised studies by Ylva Habel, Ph.D., lecturer in media and communication studies at Södertörn University College, and by Erik Ottoson Trovalla, Ph.D., an ethnologist from Uppsala University. See also the articles [Sacred Things in the Postsecular Society: An Introduction](https://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/forskning-samlingar/forskning/publicerat/heliga-ting/) (https://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/forskning-samlingar/forskning/publicerat/heliga-ting/) by Gustafsson Reinius and [Iconoclasm and Boundary Maintenance: Nigeria in the Wake of the Muhammad Cartoons](https://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/forskning-samlingar/forskning/publicerat/heliga-ting/) (https://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/forskning-samlingar/forskning/publicerat/heliga-ting/) by Ottoson Trovalla.

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of Sigmund Freud, scholars in the humanities have claimed that the uncanny in culture always “comes home” – it returns as something already familiar, but in demonized, alienated form (Freud 1919; Clover 1992; Viddler 1994; Hanson 1999; Royle 2003). Many themes from the horror genre in literature, film, and other media have been analysed along these lines, and the focus has been on how social problems concerning sexuality, race, and gender have come up to the surface in allegorized or metonymic guise. Homi Bhabha has asserted that the dark “migrants” in postcolonial Europe can be understood in terms of this logic of representation: their presence disturbs the picture of a united European identity, and according to him they are a spooky reminder of colonial history and its lingering repercussions in the present day.¹

1 Homi Bhabha writes: “At this point I must give way to the vox populi: to a relatively unspoken tradition of the people of the pagus – colonials, postcolonials, migrants, minorities – wandering peoples who will not be contained within the *Heim* of the national culture and its unisonant discourse, but are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation. They are Marx’s reserve army of migrant labour who by speaking the foreignness of language split the patriotic voice of unisonance and become Nietzsche’s mobile army of metaphors, metonyms and anthropomorphisms. They articulate the death-in-life of the idea of the ‘imagined community’ of the nation; the worn-out metaphors of the resplendent national life now circulate in another narrative of entry-permits and passports and work-permits that at once preserve and proliferate, bind and breach the human rights of the nation. Across the accumulation of the history of the West there are those people who speak the encrypted discourse of the melancholic and the migrant. Theirs is a voice that opens up a void in some ways similar to what Abraham and Torok describe as a radical *anti-metaphoric*: ‘the destruction in fantasy, of the very act that makes metaphor possible – the act of putting the original oral void into words, the act of introjection’. The lost object – the national *Heim* – is repeated in the void that at once prefigures and pre-empts the ‘unisonant’

Against what cultural background can we understand the renewed interest in vodou-related representations of zombies and demons of the kind that we have seen in contemporary horror films and other popular media? What cultural functions does this serve? These are some of the questions I posed as part of a research and exhibition project at the Museum of Ethnography, “Sacred Things in the Post-secular Society”. In accordance with the overall aim of the project, to question how museum institutions present, handle, and contextualize collections of different sacred objects from world religions in our postcolonial times, the aim in my part of the project, “Popular Vodou”, was to illuminate how Western (or Euro-American?) understandings of vodou are culturally and historically situated. My research interest was at the intersection between the expressions of established vodou and those of the “voodoo” of popular culture, and it was specifically focused on points of contact between historically rooted, spiritually charged phenomena from the African diaspora, and their globally circulating counterparts in contemporary popular culture.

What cultural negotiations take place when vodou is transformed into voodoo? Who are the audiences? In late modernity there are a number of examples of media presentations which involve young audiences and the category of “young adults” in a cultural cycle with expressions, spheres of association, and imagery to do with vodou, which used to belong to relatively limited genres in horror and gore but in recent years have been spread and filtered through mainstream culture. My article proceeds from this genre spread, focusing on a case study of the small dolls, VooDolls, that have been produced in Sweden in the last couple of years, and on everyday magic.

which makes it *unheimlich*.” Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, p. 236.

MUSEALIZATION, RACE, AND SPECTACLE

Although the project “Popular Vodou” was clearly oriented to the present, it was informed by a historical perspective on the cultural context in which museums and academia produce knowledge about world religions and objects charged with power. I shall therefore begin by saying something briefly about what is worth remembering in this context. Postcolonial research has shown how the colonial production of knowledge about the world’s “primitive” peoples was based on intensive discourse production of difference in textual, pictorial, and material presentations. Particularly significant was the collecting of artefacts, which were used both for research purposes and to mobilize a spectacle culture for a curious European audience (Mudimbe 1999; Tobing Rony 1996). In this way scholarship, popular culture and imperialistic aspirations combined forces in the growing institutionalization of collecting and charting activities. As anthropology was taking on a more permanent shape, a musealization project also started, with the aim of providing a new way to systematize knowledge about other peoples as an evolutionary project and to display them in historical sequences (Lidchi 2007).

During the period before 1900, museums emerged as educational institutions pursuing scholarly research and popularizing the results (Bennett 1995/2002; McDonald 2007/2011). The project of registering, depicting, and in various ways representing the world’s peoples and their everyday and religious customs was thus twofold; it was academic but simultaneously intended to attract visitors, and these two aims merged and overlapped in both discreet and spectacular ways. People and objects from colonized territories were claimed; they were circulated and combined in museums, at international exhibitions, in everyday spectacle culture, and in art contexts.

An important aspect of the way of representing the Others was that the actual act of display and the media situation acquired the function of proving what was claimed by researchers, explorers, and missionaries (Gustafsson Reinius 2005). Scientifically substantiated

racism relied on visual representations, whose function was to show nature's own truth instantaneously. This type of "logic" can be understood in several ways: Fatima Tobing Rony talks of "misrecognition", or false recognition, where the objects on display are ascribed properties that the Western observer is assumed to find (1996). Several researchers have shown that Europeans and North Americans around 1900 lived in a gazing culture – indiscreet and sexualizing (see e.g. Gunning 1994). Thanks to the impact of the new media, everything also seemed to be brought closer, within reach (Tobing Rony 1996; Archer-Straw 2000).

In a similar way, Haiti with its vodou culture (Deren 1953/1975) has long been used for the projection of an intense, often highly charged cultural circulation of ideas about dark magic in European and North American contexts (see e.g. Davis 1985/1987; 1988; Cussans 2000). Several scholars have pointed out that the country's early liberation from colonial rule (1804), and its establishment as the first Afro-Diasporan republic in the world, was followed by a global cultural process in which the black population and their spirituality were mystified and demonized (Thylefors & Westerlund 2006).

FROM VOODOO FILM TO ZOMBIE WALK

Against this background of colonial signification, I wish to zoom out from the world of voodoo genre film and in on materialized practices. The aim is to look more closely at the gradual shifts of meaning that have taken place around the meaning-making and thematizing narrative structures that vodou has introduced to popular Western culture. My working premise, which has grown organically from surveying the field, is that different media presentations of vodou also open the door to different, albeit adjacent, attitudes to it. In concrete terms, this means that the different mediation strategies, genres, and degrees of materiality in popular culture contribute to representing vodou so that it comes more or less close to an intended Western

audience. But what types of intimacy are represented, and how is it culturally conditioned? In what way are young audiences enticed to move from being spectators to become participants?

To deepen the discussion of the changed shape of the vodou motif in the transition from textual to cinematic representation, something needs to be said first about its context in the history of media, where the imperialist adventure was a central motif. As mentioned above, knowledge production in colonial times about the world's "primitive" peoples used media and material culture for purposes of scholarship and also to attract an audience. This ambivalence also affected films, as Fatima Tobing Rony has shown (1996). At the same time as colonialism was starting to lose its legitimacy in the first decades of the twentieth century, the broad media exposure of the empire was gradually shifted from ethnographic observation and collecting to nostalgic, idealized cinematic narratives about the world order that was coming to an end. Hollywood-produced imperial film – widely popular in the 1930s – presented epic heroic dramas which contradicted the more everyday picture of crumbling, vehemently criticized power relations between white and black peoples in colonial territories. The same genre simultaneously became an important cultural negotiation place where prevailing norms about boundary drawing between the imperial masters and the subjects were sometime inscribed, sometimes challenged (Bernstein 1996; Jaikumar 2006; Habel 2009).

But staging boundary-crossing tensions such as desire and antagonism between black and white film characters also means that prevailing power balances out in the world were jeopardized, as the censorship institutions of the time noticed. As the film researcher Ruth Vasey has shown, outright worry was expressed that white people would lose face as the world's leaders if they were portrayed in bad light in film. The dangers envisaged were not confined to the level of cultural representations. White populations in the world's colonial territories were also aware that they were a very small minority ruling million-strong populations; they feared that films could provoke rebellion (Vasey, 1996; Burns 2002).

During the decolonization period there was thus a long series of necessary shifts concerning *where* the titillating fascination/anxiety about racial and cultural difference could be portrayed. The Hollywood film industry had also been under scrutiny for a long time, criticized for its stereotyped representations of minorities; the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, founded in 1909) was highly active in its fight over this issue (Bogle 1973/2001). The demands for more nuanced portrayals of black characters gradually brought some, albeit limited, results. After the 1940s, roughly speaking, it became less common for blacks to be depicted as stereotypes, or Afro-Diasporan cultural expressions as primitive (Guerrero 1993). This did not, however, mean that stereotypes ceased to be reproduced, only that the resistance to this was now so tough that it became more difficult.

As Rhona Berenstein and Carol Clover show, the cultural projections and stereotypes that were no longer culturally sanctioned for use in mainstream culture were shifted to the less closely monitored category of B-movies. In this arena it was possible for the horror and sci-fi genres, with their fantasies about gender, sexual, ethnic, racial, and cultural difference, had free rein and could be processed in a symbolic sense (Berenstein 1996; Clover 1992; Williams 1991). To put it simply, in the critical discussions conducted by postcolonial and feminist film researchers, representations of this type have been regarded as cultural projections, that is, repressed desires, fears, and impulses that have been separated from the majority culture and located in the Other (Doane 1991; Shohat & Stam 1994; Cherniavsky 2005).

To get back to vodou as a narrative theme, it occupies a special position among Hollywood-produced representations of cultural/racial difference. What distinguishes normalized representations of blackness of the kind that can be seen in Hollywood's mainstream from their counterparts in vodou-related film is that they are conditioned by radically different outlooks on Afro-Diasporan culture. When vodou is represented, the story is often taken back in history via an elliptical sweep to a colonial attitude, returning to the depiction of an

essentialized relationship between black “African-coded” bodies and supposedly malicious vodou practices.

The Hollywood industry has undoubtedly had a great influence on globally circulating images, where vodou and related Afro-Diasporan belief systems are transformed into metonymies for a kind of chaotic, pre-civilization evil (a couple of film examples are *The Comedians* from 1967 and *The Serpent and the Rainbow* from 1988). In modern and late modern times, demonized pictures of vodou culture have become the bearing theme of globally circulating films and television productions – everything from *White Zombie* (1932), *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), *Night of the Living Dead* (1968/1990), *James Bond: Live and Let Die* (1973), *The Believers* (1987), and *Angel Heart* (1987) to the increasingly boundary-crossing narrative structures of the films *Candyman* (1992), *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), *Zombieland* (2009), *Van Helsing* (2004), *Dark Shadows* (2012), *The Zombie Diaries 2* (2011), and the television series *True Blood* (2008–) and *The Vampire Diaries* (2009–).

What I encountered fairly soon after starting to study the films, television series, and other examples of popular culture created in recent years was a boundless cultural cycle; the vodou-related expressions, associations, and images that used to be restricted to relatively limited parts of the horror and gore genre were now spread and filtered through mainstream culture. This development has not yet been the subject of specific research, but there is a general discussion in David Flint’s popularizing survey with the significant title *Zombie Holocaust: How the Living Dead Devoured Pop Culture* (2009). In recent years the zombie has virtually become the factotum of the horror and sci-fi genres, and is boldly and disrespectfully crossed with almost anything in popular culture. The most spectacular example is perhaps the book *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, which will appear as a film in 2013. The zombie has recently even become a theme of television series, such as *The Walking Dead* (2010–) and the reality-show-inspired *Dead Set* (2008). In the form of a documentary essay, *Colin* (2008) offers a glimpse into the everyday existence of

a person who has just been turned into a zombie. The zombie has even stumbled into comedies and other television formats. In Sweden we saw samples of this in late 2010 and early 2011 in the series *Hipp Hipp!* (2010) and *Grotesco* (2010).

This genre expansion – or rather genre explosion – which has also become intensively intermedial and intertextual through the web, has opened up a large participant culture, where younger parts of the audience especially can devote themselves to the “everyday use” of popularized vodou, chiefly in the form of zombies. Adolescents and young adults take to the streets of the city on “Zombie Walks” – and then upload films of these events on YouTube.² The latest walks took place in Stockholm in the late summer in 2011 and 2012.

Fantasies about culture, ethnicity, and skin colour are increasingly circulating in contemporary popular culture, above all in the borderland between children’s and adult culture. This is a phenomenon that creates genres and transcends them, contributing in different ways to blow life into the binary-coded narrative logic of existing tales. The filming of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003) is an obvious example, with light, cool figures representing the forces of good, while swarthy, fanged beasts represent evil. Other later examples that overturn the dichotomies and the colour-based scale of values are *Avatar* (2009), where the long-tailed, nature-worshipping androids have the hero roles, and *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011), where the ethnically coded apes represent nature, freedom, and future prospects (2010). Naturally, this is not a new phenomenon in Western culture; the fears and desires in the fantasies about race, and the boundaries to humanity that they can be envisaged as setting, have a long history.

² A recording from the 2010 Swedish zombie walk in Stockholm city centre can be viewed on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwUKetNcgps>, accessed 1 February 2011. The 2011 variant can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRQBe5louUc>, and the 2012 walk at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eEfcbrEzuM>. According to David Flint, the phenomenon began in Sacramento, USA, with a zombie parade in 2001. Since then it has spread (2009).

VOODOLLS: HANDLING AND RENEGOTIATING THE UNCANNY

The zombie-fixated culture of late modernity also includes a flora of small vodou-related, pseudo-magical toys and mascots that fit in the palm of the hand and can be taken along for luck in a handbag, in a car, or on the handle of a pram. One of the most visible phenomena in popular cultural right now is the mascots and key-ring figures VooDolls – small, pseudo-magical objects that are marketed to adolescents and young adults as carriers and conveyors of “everyday magic”. I would claim that these small figures, together with films and zombie walks, indicate a return to colonially coloured fantasies in which racial difference is an important theme. In the cultural cycle that I have just sketched, this use of zombies and exoticism could be regarded as a displaced form of what bell hooks formerly called “eating the Other” (hooks 1992).

As a media historian, I often adopt a rather close-up focus on how different media forms mediate. My working premise has therefore been that different media presentations of vodou should also be able to open possibilities for small shifts in attitudes towards it. Different genre mixes and degrees of participation and materiality also contribute to presenting vodou so that it comes more or less close to the observer or user, who is positioned as curious and white. It may be emphasized here that the closeness established through zombie walks and easy-to-handle voodoo figures is a different relation from what is created, for example, in the cinema. Vodou as adopted in popular culture seems to have become a material practice which is reinterpreted, appropriated, and brought home – and this at the same time as media representations of the zombie in an almost literal sense are worn and acted out in the city as a collective manifestation.

What interests me is how the popularized vodou that we can see in the popular culture on offer here in Sweden comes home, or even leaves home in domesticated and materialized form. In Western cultural production, as we have observed, the representation of vodou

has often been equated with primitive evil and black magic, a notion that has a fairly direct link back to colonial fantasies of a metonymic relationship between blackness and dark forces. In this context the uncanny has been renegotiated and has been literally shrunk. The everyday range of half-secularized popular vodou is big today, ranging from Internet shops selling voodoo objects,³ through opportunistic genre adaptation of established toys (zombie Lego), to a slew of small dolls (forests ghosts, StringDolls, and pin dolls).

One of the phenomena that has been highly visible in the last year is VooDolls, small vodou-inspired yarn figures, produced by the Swedish company Skytales since 2009. They have produced a series of dolls which can be playfully used to resolve various everyday problems concerning friendship, working life, love partners, and family. Advertisements claim that by using the dolls you can help to “spread everyday magic”. The package bears a red warning triangle, accompanied by the jocular text “Warning! Contains Swedish Voodoo power”.

To launch their dolls the company used the musician Dregen from the rock band Backyard Babies; he has been given his own doll, which is more expensive than the others, produced in a limited edition. VooDolls are about 7–8 centimetres long, just the right size to hang on a mobile phone, a rear-view mirror, or the handle of a pram or a golf trolley. There are over forty different doll personalities in the series, which can be ordered in different power-boosting combinations and sent as presents to someone via the net.

Before I start to provide examples of the design and purposes of these small figures, something should be said about their cultural context. Several of them seem to reflect the mixing of genres that commonly happens today. Several of the dolls bear clear traces of manga cuteness (*karawai*), an aesthetic that seeps into the Goth-Lolita with her ambivalent emanation of childlike innocence and demonic femininity. On the Skytales website one can read that the dolls are

³ See e.g. Erzulies: <http://www.erzulies.com>. Accessed 30 September 2012.

not intended for children (they consist of small loose parts and can easily be taken apart). The names of the dolls, and the miniature rendering of style markers on some of them – piercing, mohawk hairdos, earrings, and key chains – indicate that the envisaged users are young people, perhaps chiefly the group of young adults.

The different dolls can be described as a clear semiotic system, where external characteristics reveal inner drives and properties. They are colour-coded: the dark, red, and black dolls, which arouse the strongest associations with Afro-Diasporan culture, are designed either like the magical pin dolls of fictionalized voodoo, or like the more globally circulating stereotypes of evil that we remember. Brown dolls are either personifications of nature, gurus, or warrior figures, while most of the white variants are designed to appeal to more Euro-American gender norms, reflecting hobbies and lifestyles such as golf, riding, cooking, and New Age. Most of them thus have fixed relationships between skin colour, character, properties, and various stylistic characteristics, but the latest figure in the series for 2011, no. 4, was a doll that “feels outside”. Its gender is indeterminate, it is green, and it has six eyes and three hearts.

Compared with the vodou objects that could be seen between February and August 2011 in the travelling exhibition about vodou at the Museum of Ethnography, the VooDolls figures do not have such concrete points in common with the Afro-Diasporan culture. On the other hand, in the design of all the types of dolls they have imitated the ritual framework of vodou and its aesthetic, where “found objects” and recycled material are painstakingly glued together. Each doll consists of hand-wound cotton yarn in different basic colours, with details of cloth and bent wire. Like an art object, these small, tightly wound thread dolls imitate the “condensation of time and work” that, in a more ritual sense, is embedded in the objects of authentic vodou.⁴ The matt cotton yarn also means that the dolls quickly acquire a soiled patina, which from a distance

⁴ Oral communication from the artist Rickard Sollman.

resembles the layers of dust covering some of the vodou objects in the exhibitions.

VooDolls, as we have seen, can be regarded as examples of how a representation of something alien and supposedly spooky in the fictionalized practice of vodou can be domesticated, shrunk, and made easy to handle in a literal material sense. Taking home something macabre in popularized and miniaturized form nevertheless entails certain risks, which Skytales guide their presumptive customers through in order to train them as users of everyday magic for household purposes. It is assumed that the new user can be frightened by vodou, and therefore needs careful guidance into the culture that Skytales calls VooDoo. This is done by following the description on the website. The claim of the dolls to authenticity is articulated in a playful way, yet with some seriousness:

Voodoo is based on ancient wisdom and magic from darkest Africa. Known as the forbidden religion, Voodoo was brought with the slave ships to Haiti and the rest of the Caribbean. Today Voodoo has millions of practitioners all over the world.

Voodoo has acquired negative connotations and is usually associated with black magic and various types of malicious rituals. This is a totally misleading picture that has been created by Hollywood films and other sensation-seeking parts of the entertainment industry. The power of Voodoo in itself can never be evil.

In actual fact, Voodoo is about liberating the internal power we all have to achieve success and happiness. Of course, Voodoo can then be used to give some really pompous types a flip on the nose as well. But that's nothing more than they deserve.

Mami Wata is the ancient mother of Voodoo and the caring protector of VooDolls. She possesses boundless wisdom and can take on any number of forms. Mami Wata is known for her ability to conjure up almost superhuman beauty. Or to quote another great African: "She is stable!"⁵

⁵ See: www.voodolls.se/se/shopwindow.php?id=1443&shopwindow=30140, accessed 31 January 2011. When the page was checked on 1 October 2012 the owner of the website had been changed to Koalaplän, and the content had partly changed.

Each doll is accompanied by a small bag of jute-like fabric. If you put the doll in the bag it can exert no magical force. But if you want it to “act”, you stick a pin in it, during a short specified ritual, and say a charm. Two types of instructions are given: one to achieve special goals and one “to give the doll extra power”.

RITUAL to give the doll extra power:

Place the doll in your left hand and hold a pin in your right hand.
Close your mouth and breathe only through your nose. Take slow, deep breaths.

Pierce the doll with the pin. Repeat the following phrase four times:

JAAGRATA UGRA OJASAA

Remove the pin from the doll.

Now your VooDoll is charged with extra VooDoo power!

RITUAL for achieving a purpose:

Write down your wish with a black pen on white paper.

Fold the paper across the middle four times.

Stick a pin into your VooDoll and place it on the paper.

SEVATE MAAM IDANIIM

Remove the pin from the doll.

Now your VooDoll will work to achieve your purpose. Be careful what you wish for!⁶

On the Skytales website it used to be possible to find these two rituals, as well as a film sequence with a teenage boy trying to perform one of them – but he can’t keep from laughing the whole time.⁷

VooDolls, as we have seen, are organized according to categories

⁶ See: www.voodolls.se/se/shopwindow.php?id=1443&shopwindow=27672, accessed 31 January 2011.

⁷ Sabi testing VooDolls, see <http://www.videofy.me/sabi/56689> accessed 1 February 2011. That page was later removed and was no longer available at the time of writing.

with different accents that play on lifestyles, holiness, exoticism, and nature mysticism. The group *Strike Back* includes the figures Black Mamba, Dark Drakken, Devil Baby, and Zombie Magician, which all possess powerful, dark forces. They do not like narrow-minded everyday conventionality, but give the user particular protection against black magic. Zombie Magician, who has a pin stuck in one temple, is perhaps the most culturally recognizable among the fictionalized representations of voodoo dolls. He has “the darkest powers of VooDoo to enable hitting back at irritating people”.⁸

The group *Love and Passion* contains a number of “irresistible” figures such as Roxie Heart Stealer, Sedusa, and the exotic, veiled Princess Lalita. Love Guru gives the user enhanced well-being through meditation, and also helps in love life through tantra philosophy. The dolls Bridella and Mr Right embody the perfect partners in a good hetero marriage, and the pair can be given away as a present. The dolls in the group *Protection and Care* consist of figures with protective, healing, and beneficent voodoo powers. The dolls in the group *Girl Power* are all decided individualists with specific goals in mind. The queer-coded Edge is a vegetarian and animal rights activist, and possesses powers that help the bearer “to struggle for what you believe in”. The successful Linda Shadowe is highly creative and efficient, especially suitable for helping you to success in the media business. Stella Posh, finally, is a glamorous party girl who ensures that the bearer stays fresh even after a night of celebration.

The last group, *Success and Self-confidence*, has twenty different figures, not all of which can be described here. Among them is the fearless nature figure Nathoo, a jungle boy whose presentation is reminiscent of something from a book of fairytales:

Nathoo was born and grew up in the jungle – a very dangerous place. To survive he has to be thick-skinned and smart. He is so skilful in combat that even the lions are afraid of him. Nathoo fears nothing and

⁸ <http://www.voodolls.se/se/art/zombie-magician.php>. Accessed 31 January 2011.

will gladly accept any challenge. Nathoo can teach you how to become strong and courageous. He helps you with difficult challenges in hard circumstances.⁹

Otherwise the majority of the dolls in this group have a rather obvious neo-liberal orientation, with the focus on personal and monetary success. The green caped figure Gordon Moneymaker is the same colour as a dollar bill, with Wall Street glasses and a magic wand; “he is a born winner.” More striking as a documentation of the present day is the characterization of Nic Sinclair, who is successful in business; he is described in a way that embodies the yuppie-about-town, but his appearance arouses more associations with the Orisha figure Changó in Afro-Cuban Santería:

Nic is not ashamed that he has plenty of money. He does his own thing and loves to dominate in the bar. If he wants to order 50 bottles of Cristal then he just does it. And he doesn't care what anyone else thinks.

And Nic is definitely not ashamed of his Aston Martin Vantage. Or any of his fiendishly expensive Patek Philippes. He hates shabby people and finds it very hard to see the point of anyone from Gothenburg.

Nic Sinclair gives you the power to be the playboy you actually are.¹⁰

Of the other decidedly successful figures, there are those with limited interests, such as Nick Ballstriker and Tinna Horsepower, who give success in golf and equestrian sport respectively. In this group you can also find the master chef Pascal le Chef and the doll figure of the musician Dregen, who “brings you luck in love, fishing, and gambling”.

⁹ <http://www.voodolls.se/se/art/nathoo.php>. Accessed 31 January 2011.

¹⁰ <http://www.voodolls.se/se/art/nic-sinclair.php>. Accessed 31 January 2011.

CONCLUSION: A DOLL WORKSHOP ON RACE, CLASS, AND LIFESTYLE

A characteristic of the way race, ethnicity, and culture are represented in late modern popular culture is that it is reinscribed on bodies in an almost literal manner. By channelling this tendency through animals and fictitious beings, one can create cultural manoeuvring space to colour bodies. The iconography of the VooDolls could also be said to appeal to this contemporary trend. Its gallery of types displays several examples of different *natures*: ethnified or racial representations of characteristics and skills. Mixed in with this are a set of figures indicating critical attitudes to heteronormativity and normality.

More and more thinkers in the last decade have claimed that we are living in a post-political age (Brown Mouffe 2005; Dahlstedt & Tesfahuney 2008) in which negotiations about fundamental inequalities in power and conflicts of interest have increasingly shifted from the political to the cultural arena. This seems to mean that several – at first sight seemingly irreconcilable – ideological currents nevertheless coexist materially in ways that pass without comment. The culture of play and fairytale that has been visible in recent years urges us to live together in a tolerant society that affirms multicultural diversity. At the same time, this culture – especially in Northern Europe – increasingly often sees social microaggressions being ventilated, with the aim of marking and separating “the dark Other” (de los Reyes 2007).¹¹ These colliding impulses also seem to be channelled through the small VooDoll figures, charging them with New Age, post-political, and everyday therapeutic functions (Biressi & Nunn 2005; Skeggs 2004).

¹¹ For a more precise definition of the term microaggression, see the article by Derald Wing Sue, Christina M. Capodilupo, Gina C. Torino, Jennifer M. Bucceri, Aisha M. B. Holder, Kevin L. Nadal, and Marta Esquilin, Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice, *American Psychologist*, May–June 2007, Vol. 62, No. 4, pp. 271–286. Available online at: http://aanavi.com/articles_files/racial-microaggressions-in-everyday-life---derald-wing-sue002c-et-al.pdf. Accessed 7 February 2011.

What I think is the crucial difference between older and more recent media fantasies is that desire, fascination, and fear are more closely interwoven, with a mixture of inclusion and distinction. The domestication of vodou, as we have observed, involves a process of shrinking and materialization, by which menacing images of “race” can be euphemized into manageable stereotypes of the uncanny – and fitted into a pocket.

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