

Vargyas Gábor:

Soldier's Dog tag in a Shamanistic Headdress: a Semiotic Guerilla Warfare?

(Abstract)

This paper is based on a larger contribution published in Hungarian in 2004 in which I analyzed all the constituent elements of some Bru (Van Kieu) shamanic headdresses, their explicit and implicit symbolism, the myths relating to them, just as the ways of manufacturing and transmitting of these ritual objects. Developing the analysis offered there, I deal here only with some of the most unexpected attributes of them: the dogtag of an American soldier and a die-cast plastic seat of a matchbox toy car. Using the concept of “bricolage” and relying upon new material culture studies, I examine how objects migrate between widely opposed, moreover hostile social realms, what kinds of transformation of meaning and value they go through during this process, and, to paraphrase Hebdige's writing on subcultures, what is the Bru cycle that leads “from opposition to defusion, from resistance to incorporation”.