Pattern and Connectivity in New Ireland: Objects as Vehicles of Thought

Pattern in anthropological study has tended to resist interpretation often divorced from the object on which it is inscribed. Yet ethnographic data and museum collections indicate that patterns explicate the workings of knowledge technology and are significant in the constitution of personhood and cultural identity. Like the New Guinea string netbag, this paper argues that pattern in Island Melanesia is a vehicle for engineering social relations through attachment to surface. As object of thought, pattern is a dynamic visual medium for the externalisation and conceptualisation of knowledge in the region.

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