

Magical Laments and Anthropological Reflections

The Production and Circulation of Anthropological Text as Ritual Activity

by James M. Wilce

Anthropological writing becomes ritual when its unfolding argument structure parallels and thus its voice resonates with lament or even prayer. Structural features of lament are apparent in some ethnographies of lament, and anthropologists with no interest in traditional lament have nonetheless joined ineffectual modern elegies over modernity's destructiveness. Magical laments achieve their effects by thematically progressing from death to the afterlife by means of heteroglossia or a shift in verb mood from indicative to optative. Some anthropological accounts of lament dwell on their "death" and use metaphors also found in ritual lament. The conclusions of several relevant anthropological writings are marked by shifts in verb forms, though subtler than in laments, evincing perduring contradictions of modernity. Anthropology cannot avoid playing a role in cultural production—but what role? We can and should explore appropriate ways to mourn modernity's destructiveness—bringing the argument about the anthropology of lament full circle and enabling a shift of focus in modernist discourse from past to future.

A structural tension exists in anthropological writing, one with deep roots in early modern history. On the one hand, anthropology inherits the drive to distinguish realms of magic, science, and religion and to write scientifically rather than magically or religiously ("purifying" the boundaries separating the three). On the other hand, at least since just after the English Reformation, the human sciences have flirted with ritual—hybridizing science and religion. We see this in Rev. Henry Bourne's finding some antiquities (read "folk Catholic practices") worth saving and complaining about living in times of "too great Reformation [when] . . . we think it is religion to have no ceremonies [holdovers from Catholicism] at all" (1977 [1725], xi, as cited by Bauman and Briggs 2003, 84). This constitutes a discourse on loss that was so consistent and so concerned with ritual that it seems appropriate to call it a modernist ritualized discourse of (neo)lament. Such a pull toward feelingful, even mournful, writing continues to compete with the pull of the academic register toward emotional distancing and objectivity. The tension can be summarized thus: the requirement of the academic register—emotional distancing—coexists with other, *sub rosa* requirements that put anthropologists in the very sort of anxious situation

that, according to Malinowski, motivates magic and ritual in the first place. The result, as I will show, is double voicing in some exemplary essays in our field.

Despite the much touted move toward reflexivity in anthropology, we rarely concern ourselves on a theoretical level with our own role in cultural histories, that is, with anthropology as culture or with anthropologists as cultural actors no more—and no less—privileged than others (for a brilliant exception, see Herzfeld 1992).¹ We rarely ask, for example, what our own role has been in shaping mournful discourses that circulate in the popular media, the sort that make at least vague allusions to "anthropology" or "cultures," nor do we study the effects of our products (articles, books, films, CDs).

1. An anonymous reviewer pointed me to the volume in which Herzfeld's chapter appeared after I had already formulated the present argument. Herzfeld devotes half of his attention to a text that is key to the present article, arguing that "*Tristes Tropiques* does not so much describe as *become* a rite of passage" (1992, 53); it is a passage "ritual, textual, and personal" (p. 62). Lévi-Strauss "shows an eager appreciation of the relationship between the journey, the ritual, and the text" (p. 68). My article goes a bit farther, linking the argument to the analysis of lament (though Herzfeld could be said to do so, too; see his section entitled "Tropes of Passage, Rites of Sadness") and then broadening it to anthropological writing in general. Another exception to the rule that we ignore the role our texts play in cultural histories is the recognition of Margaret Mead's relationship to the sexual revolution of the 1960s. In addition, an anonymous reviewer points to the long history of visual anthropologists' reflecting on anthropology's role in shaping popular media discourse.

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Anthropologists like Fernandez (1986a) study the play of tropes in culture or “the uses of tropes to move social entities into new positions” but not the historical playing out of their own tropes.² Lévi-Strauss was quite the conversation topic at cocktail parties of a certain generation, but where is the research into the circulation and impact of his “lament” over the “corruption” of the “pristine freshness of human beings” (1974 [1955])? Too often, we still divide ourselves anxiously from those whom we study, as though they were social actors but we, at the moment of writing articles such as this, were somehow impotent. We are particularly blind to the potency of those actions of ours that mimic actions that in other realms we rightly call “ritual.”

While attending meetings, if not while writing, we are aware of participating in our own rituals. I argue that anthropological rituals extend beyond, say, large professional meetings in which we are relatively conscious of engaging in ritual behavior to the processes whereby we produce and circulate the products of our scholarship. We recognize the crucial role of semiotics, of “representational economies” (Keane 2002), in Others’ rituals, but there is an equal element of ritual process when we are engaged in our most serious semiotic acts—writing and producing other materials that will circulate and be consumed by interested publics. In producing books, films, and CDs, at least some anthropologists serve as high priests in popular rituals of cultural consumption. I offer here a theory of the ritual outcomes that we and those publics might seek.

Ritual and Language

Ritual is a perennial theme in anthropology that has been fruitfully addressed in this journal (Robbins 2001; Silverstein 2004; Wagner 1984). Whereas some of us might think of our writing as a purely rational intellectual activity and therefore—despite warnings that the boundary between the rational-technical and the nonrational-ritual is murky (Leach 1968)—believe that writing for our colleagues and broader publics is anything but a ritual activity, I argue that in form (viz., shifting voice or mood as they move toward their conclusions) and in function (engaging broad cultural needs or “appealing to an inclination” in a ritual audience [Wittgenstein 1979, 66]) our semiotic work is ritual activity.

Anthropologists make the concept of ritual, as a near-synonym of culture, perform important work (Silverstein 2001, 607). Ritual is a form of symbolic action in which signs commonly address moral issues (Crocker 1983, 160)³ to effect transformations (Durkheim 1965 [1915]; Bourdieu 1991,

119)⁴ captured in the phrase “rites of passage” (Gennep 1960 [1909]). Rituals restore (the conviction of) wholeness and vitality through the play of tropes, particularly “the interplay of similarity and contiguity” (Fernandez 1986b, 203) or iconicity and indexicality. One feature that defines a ritual for many—Rappaport (1999), for instance—is the invariance of the acts that constitute it. While ritual may lean toward “speaking the past” rather than “speaking the present” (Becker 1979), even rituals tend to be emergent, “not fully predictable” (Duranti 1992, 667). Lament performances epitomize this tendency. Recognizing ritualization as a process realizable by degrees (Silverstein 2004) and, of course, relying on empirical accounts of rituals, interruptions and all (Wilce 2001)—delivers us from objectifying them as (fixed) texts.

Still, it is useful to ask what distinguishes ritual from occurrences of rhetoric that we might not wish to designate as such. I stress two distinguishing features: ritual’s tendency to deal with moral issues and its unique reliance on a “hypertrophic” set of parallel orders of iconicity and indexicality that seem to cause the ritual to create its own sacred space through what appears, often, to be the magic of synchronized textual and nontextual metricalizations (Silverstein 2004, 626). This is relevant to an argument about *anthropological* text production and its circulation as ritual in at least two ways: First, it will form the groundwork of an analysis of anthropological accounts of lament, particularly Feld’s. Second, lament is iconically related to some anthropological writing and its particular poetic structure.

Turning the concept of ritual on ourselves should not be difficult. What might we expect anthropological ritual acts to do? Starting at the narrowest of concentric circles, anthropological rituals play a role in reproducing and transforming our institutional lives as professionals. Of far greater importance, together with other academics as parts of a much larger sociocultural system, anthropologists have played crucial ritual roles in (re)baptizing modernist categories (e.g., “primitive” and “modern”)⁵ on which the hegemony of current politics depends. The social sciences in general and anthropology in particular emerged out of European modernity, connected with imperialist projects, and in that cultural history anthropology has served a particular function. Obviously this oversimplifies matters, though, since challenging these categories is now a thriving enterprise. Thus anthropologists have played various roles on a broad social stage in which moral currents—including the modernist categories just mentioned and even “modernity” itself—are acted upon ritually, stages on which certain kinds of ritual statements (statements laden with moral value or with predictions that somehow

2. The quote is from one of the anonymous reviewers, summarizing Fernandez’s oeuvre.

3. Ritual does not always address moral issues. Some Navajo rituals, for example, restore a delicate, dangerous cosmic balance without invoking a moral order (Paul Kroskrity, personal communication, February 2006). But Navajo ritual healing in three different religious traditions consistently invokes a moral order (Lewton and Bydone 2000).

4. For Durkheim, rituals of initiation transformed “the whole being” of the initiate (1965 [1915], 54). More than other rituals, rites of passage are likely to concern moral issues.

5. This binary and others like it (“modern”-“backward”) arose out of Europe’s self-invention as “modern”-in-contrast-to-Others. Using the binaries, as anthropologists did so pervasively in the twentieth century, reaffirmed their legitimacy, “rebaptizing” them for a new generation.

address audiences' needs) ought to be made. This article raises anew a set of questions about the ways in which our representations of the world may affect that world and thus evoke the "symbolic efficacy of rites of institution, that is, the power they possess *to act on reality* by acting on its representation" (Bourdieu 1991, 120, emphasis added).

In the innermost concentric circle I have referred to, peer-reviewed articles and books published by scholarly presses enable disciplinary reproduction. Circulating journal articles amongst ourselves is a moment of ritual life in which anthropologists' communal bonds are reproduced, and certain peer-reviewed journals and elite presses no doubt qualify as "value-conferring" "ritual centers of semiosis" (Silverstein 2004)⁶ that are particularly likely to be originary sites of baptismal (Putnam 1975) uses of new terms and ideas in the field. In such writing the sort of distanced description of Others' rituals that Frazer's *Golden Bough* made popular—an example Wittgenstein considered carefully, as I do below—may be useful. In English at least, such distancing is characteristic of academic prose in contrast with conversation. In a comparison of "stance," the expression of feelings and assessments, as opposed to propositions stripped of overt assessments, in several linguistic registers—"conversation, fiction, newspaper language, and academic prose"—the corpus linguist Doug Biber notes (unsurprisingly) that the overt expression of stance is "much more common in conversation than in news or academic prose" (Biber 2004, 110, 114–15). Yet, by the very fact of conforming to register conventions, the production and circulation of anthropological texts such as this one may be *more* ritualized despite (or because of) being emotionally distanced.

Unconscious of their ritual nature, some anthropological text productions still fall into the pattern that defines ritual language, according to Michael Silverstein (2001, 606): "Among linguistic anthropologists it is, I believe, a matter of 'settled science' that rituals are actional texts-in-context to be read as (conventional) indexical icons. Within a particular cultural universe, rituals 'dynamically figurate' what they effectuate in the space-time context of their performance." In what follows I will first demonstrate how laments and then anthropological arguments about them fit this model and what such productions may accomplish, given the tensions under which such rituals are performatively textualized.

Modernity as Failed Mourning (Melancholia)

A substantial body of literature describes modern cultural production in terms of melancholia or failed, ineffectual, or perpetual mourning. Modernity has from the outset involved both utter destructiveness and—in reaction—an extremely

problematic "attempt at cultural mourning" (Wheeler 1999, 4; Ivy 1995; Bauman and Briggs 2003, 84, 107, 182–83, 205–6). Wendy Wheeler's *A New Modernity?* is a sustained argument to that effect. Wheeler argues that Freud's understanding of melancholia (Freud 1957 [1917])—"inner splitting and self-persecution" accompanied by a repetition compulsion (1999, 106) following the loss of an object with which the self identifies—is the key to modernity. Just as melancholics fail to mourn because, instead, they psychically introject the lost object and then, because the object is inside, punish the self that is identified with it, so "modernity is characterized by an essentially melancholic response to the loss of traditional beliefs" (pp. 4, 8, 20). Foucault (1984, 40) speaks of "the essential, permanent, obsessive relation that our age entertains with death"—obsessive, evidently, because no possibility obtains for closure, as in effective mourning. Santner (1990, 9) argues, similarly, that postwar Germany suffers an inability to mourn (something he attributes more broadly to "modern discursive practices)." Pippin (1999, 495), in "Nietzsche and the Melancholy of Modernity," finds that late-nineteenth-century European culture reacted to modernization by multiplying "figures and images . . . of death and loss," a loss that is (from Nietzsche's perspective and that of many of his contemporaries among the cultural elite) unmournable because it pertains to the death of God that "we" have caused. The critical theorist Tammy Clewell (2004, 219) considers Virginia Woolf a pioneer of "modernist mourning." Woolf "teaches us, finally, that only by refusing consolation and sustaining grief can we accept responsibility for the difficult task of performing private and public memory." This modernist "mourning" is evidently not what Freud called mourning, for it has no end.

Grinker (1998, 74), conscious of potential criticism for adopting psychoanalytic language for describing social and cultural phenomena, defends it on the grounds that Koreans, "prior to analysis" (presumably the anthropologist's), use psychological idioms to describe their national losses. Grinker not only reinforces the general picture that European cultural elites have been grieving their cultural losses since the nineteenth century (without resolution) but demonstrates how contemporary Germans and Koreans *avoid* mourning.

According to Wheeler, signs that the current phase of post-modernity may have ushered in a new, effective, "wholesome" form of cultural mourning over the losses modernity has caused include a focus on the future and an ability to transcend splitting by tolerating "good and bad, hate and love" together (1999, 8). Before this can be realized, however, "cultural grieving . . . at a new level of intensity," including "the communal *acceptance* of 'orders, rites, and procedures'" (p. 42), will be necessary. This will potentiate a "mourningful politics" focused on "establishing a coherent social world of community which is the mourner's aim" (p. 106).⁷

6. Compare Kuipers's (1998) work on ritual language and ritual centers (versus margins) on the Indonesian island of Sumba and Errington's (1988) work on "exemplary centers" and ritual speech on Java.

7. This will require us to "question the fiction of managerial effectiveness and . . . replace it with ethical requirements . . . , recognize an

The Anthropology of Lament and the Postmodern Consumption of Anthropology

The anthropological literature on ritual is vast. Although I offer brief examples from anthropologists unconcerned with lament in order to demonstrate that my arguments have relevance beyond that domain, both in order to narrow the terrain and because of the mournful foundation of modern discourse already alluded to in this article first analyzes *ethnographies of lament* and related ritual speech (Feld 1990; Kuipers 1998; Wilce 1998a). Before analyzing ethnographic writing, there are good reasons to dwell for a while on a ritual act that we more easily recognize as such.

The ritual acts on which I focus first are laments—texted performances of grief, conventionally required in many societies at funerals (Ajuwon 1982 [Yoruba, Nigeria]), (Wickett 1993 [Egypt]) but also in quite a few societies at weddings (Blake 1978 [Hakka Chinese]), Mazo 1994 [Russia]). It is clear in at least a few cases that the power expected from lament performance was magico-religious; that is, laments were expected not merely to help the living feel better but to move heaven and earth or at least to move some souls to their proper resting place. It is appropriate, therefore, to focus on textual “movement” in lament, the dynamics of textual figuration.

The analysis of lament as ritual benefits from Silverstein’s (2004) dictum that ritual iconically-indexically figurates on the textual plane what it must achieve on the cosmic plane. Rituals work, that is, by both pointing to or reminding participants of preexisting sacred features of the surround and effectively bringing others into being, often through signs that individually or collectively (as a “diagram”) imitate the cosmic end being ritually enacted. A crucial diagrammatic iconism⁸ stressed below is the stepwise relation of parts of the text mirroring steps in the transformation to be achieved.

The label “ritual lament” is conventional in the literature (see the titles of, e.g., Alexiou 1974; Danforth and Tsiras 1982, Kuipers 1998; McLaren 2000; Pinault 1999a). Yet no account of the ritual nature of lament such as I have just presented has been offered; many of those who write about “ritual lament” fail to clarify what they mean by “ritual.” It is even clearer that there is virtually no precedent (but see n. 2) for an account such as I offer of the role that anthropologists play vis-à-vis lament and in their most important form of ritual engagement, their writing—which is related to lament in ways that I will clarify. Although for comparative purposes I discuss several text excerpts, I focus on a matched

pair of examples—of lament and of anthropological writing about lament—from Steven Feld’s oeuvre, the first from his Staley-Prize-winning book *Sound and Sentiment* (1990 [1982]) and the second from an interview-article reviewing his career in the anthropology of sound (Feld and Brenneis 2004).

Publishing in scholarly journals is a ritual already described, but the work of Feld has had a much more public life and a wider circulation, reminding us of the generic possibility that anthropologists might participate in more public forms of ritual activity. Anthropology is culture—that is, conscious or not, anthropologists are full participants in cultural histories, not least when they write texts such as *The Nuer* or *Tristes Tropiques*. Michael Herzfeld (1992, 69) argues that those texts are tropic responses to, transformations of, the theme of segmentation: “Events respond in a specific way to segmentation (Dresch 1986). A text about segmentation is also an event, and we should expect it to respond accordingly.”⁹ This extract shows how closely Herzfeld’s work anticipates my argument—the text of *Tristes Tropiques* (if not the writing itself) partakes of the ritual in relation to real-world journeys (and not only that of Lévi-Strauss [see n. 2]).

When anthropologists produce for a relatively popular audience works like *Tristes Tropiques*, they sometimes produce lament-like discourse, discourse that is about far more than emotional catharsis: “Journeys, those magic caskets full of dreamlike promises, will never again yield up their treasures untarnished. A proliferating and overexcited civilization has broken the silence of the seas once and for all” (Lévi-Strauss 1974 [1955], 37). Offering discourse like this to a hungry public, anthropology serves as a productive source of signs in a postmodern representational economy in which some consumers may seek to linger in a mediated postmodern “church” whose message centers on “the destructiveness of Western civilization” and assigns value to the exotic objects of anthropology’s gaze. Anthropologists’ products reflect and contribute to larger processes of cultural production. Producing and circulating signs in this representational economy is ritual activity to the extent that it transforms the world—whether effectively or not is an empirical question—not only by stirring noble sentiments but by slipping into a register beyond persuasive rhetoric, hinting of prayer or at least of hopeful prediction.

Anthropology entails “a clumsy form of ritual” (Redding 1987, 267). At times anthropological writing appears to be a “piacular” or expiatory sort of rite (Leach 1968, 521). This link between the discourse of modernity and mourning or lament rituals makes the move I am about to make—an argument that starts with lament and progresses to an interpretation of anthropological analyses of lament that seem tinged by it—quite logical in ways that I trust will become increasingly apparent.

ecological ethos of interdependency . . . and recognize the human importance of mutuality . . . as well as creative individuality and rights” (Wheeler 1999, 29).

8. In diagrammatic iconism the resemblance is that of patterns of parts to the whole “diagram” (Jakobson 1987a [1965]); Silverstein (2004, 626). In a football coach’s sketch of a play, for example, no sign signifying a player is intended to resemble him; it is the pattern that is iconic.

9. Events, Dresch argued, show some tendency to follow “lines of tribal classification.”

Unfinished Encounters with Ritual Lament

Lament—tuneful, texted weeping in all its structurally complex richness—is the ritual form with which I am most familiar, having described it many times on the basis of fieldwork in Bangladesh and Finland (Wilce 1998*a*, 1998*b*, 2002*a*, 2002*b*, 2005, n.d.). My first book, large sections of which are devoted to lament, includes the following confessional statement: “Like those who occupy later pages, I had to deal with loss; unlike them, I was not privy to a tradition of poetic public weeping. This book probably displays some envy of the tradition it describes” (Wilce 1998*b*, vi). Unfortunately, this confession did not push me all the way toward either full participation in lament or a recognition of the ways in which our engagement with it (and with the circulation of signs more broadly) might itself entail forms of ritual activity. But then almost no anthropologist or ethnomusicologist who has written about lament has admitted being a *participant* observer in the act,¹⁰ nor has this fact ever struck any ethnographer as an exception worth reflecting on. Indeed, had persons in Finland, where I began fieldwork in 2003, not *required me to participate*—to sing and cry—in their lament workshop in rural Karelia as a condition of observing and videotaping some parts of it, I would probably not have crossed that line myself (Wilce 2005, n.d.). But my argument is not about participant observation in Others’ rituals per se, since I think the more interesting forms of our ritual activity are endogenous to writing culture.

As texted ritual performances of grief most common at funerals but also at weddings, laments are regarded not only as “emotional outlets” but, at least in some cultural contexts, as magically efficacious. Admittedly, during my five years of work in Bangladesh no one ever hinted to me of lament’s magic. That notion was thrust upon me as I began working in Finland and read the literature on that region. In eastern Finland, Karelian¹¹ “cry-women” told Tolbert that the very skilled among them, when called upon to lament at a wedding, would by their very singing ensure that the couple never divorced and that the funeral laments of skilled cry-women would safely deliver souls to Tuonela, the world of the dead (1994, 191, citing Konkka 1985, 107). Such women were thus psychopomps. Karelian cry-women made it clear to Tolbert that their status was quite analogous to that of shamans; in singing, they entered a trance state and communicated directly with the dead. Tolbert cites as further evidence of this shamanic connection the etymology of some of the Finno-Ugrian terms for lamenting—“*loihitia*, which literally means ‘to cast a spell’; likewise, *laulaa*, ‘to sing,’ . . . originally meant ‘to exert a mysterious, magic influence’” (Tolbert 1994, 191, cit-

ing Konkka 1985, 10, and Haavio 1952, 73).¹² Likewise, the dirge in ancient Greece was designed “to bring the dead man back to life. . . . Its magical function was never quite forgotten” (Alexiou 1974, 134). And in Pharaonic Egypt lamentation received pride of place in the popular myth of Isis and Osiris as a means of restoring the dead to life (Budge 1972; Sweeney 2003; Wickett 1993).

This much is accepted knowledge in Egyptology, classics, and the areal literatures relating to recent lament traditions in places such as Karelia. There is little clarity, however, as to *how* the ritual force of these such laments is deployed—as though the secret of their power were well guarded, even in scholarly accounts.

The Performative Poetics of Ritual

Perhaps analytic progress in this domain can be made by testing, in relation to certain lament texts, the logical fit of Silverstein’s summation of the linguistic anthropological/semiotic finding that ritual works by dynamically figuring, stepwise, in the text what the action must effectuate along the “cosmic axis” (2004, 626).

Strong evidence indicates that the performative magic of funeral laments lies in a poetic-structural progression from a here-now link with death to the sort of benefit promised/achieved in the performance. My first example is the particular *saya:lab* ritual lament on which Feld hangs much of the argument of chapter 3 of *Sound and Sentiment* (1990 [1982], 116–20). When he recorded this lament, Feld had been working in Bosavi but a few months. His first exposure to and recording of wept song had come within two hours of his arrival. Months later, on November 12, 1976, Feld writes, he was “awakened by the sounds of *gana-yelab*” (loud, breathy weeping [p. 107]) for a man, Bibiali, who had just died. *Gana-yelab* is not ritual lament. That had to await the arrival of the 125 persons who eventually gathered. They would soon hear three *saya:lab* laments by a female elder, Hane. Bibiali and Hane had remained loyal to Bosavi “tradition” against the fundamentalist Christianity that had made great inroads in Bosavi since the arrival of the first Australian missionary in 1971 (Schieffelin 1996, 11). But Bibiali had been unlucky enough to die at *Asondō*—the site of a new kind of longhouse, a Christianized longhouse on which Hane’s lament, in effect, blamed his death (Feld 1990 [1982], 121).

Feld’s *explication de texte* opens with these words: “Hane *sulō*’s [elder’s] *sa-yelab* for Bibiali is a map” (1990 [1982], 121). But the map was not inert or a mere set of references. Whatever arguments might be made about the emotional function of this lament, its properly *ritual* function—what it actually *did*—was to *guide* Bibiali’s soul (and perhaps the

10. One exception is Briggs (2004, 179–80).

11. The region of Karelia spans the borderlands of Finland and Russia. The plight of Karelian refugees crossing that border after World War II spawned the most recent generation of laments (Tolbert 1990).

12. The sacred space that constituted the ritual “center” of privileged semiosis for the “old ways” for the cry-women and the male shamans was quite often the sauna (Tuomas Laurinen, personal communication, September 2004).

remnant of unmissionized Bosavi people) away from the mission-crazy longhouse at Aꝟndꝟ toward safer and more permanent resting places. Bound up with this seemingly individuated task is a more (meta)cultural task (Urban 2001; Wilce 2005)—metacultural because in it Hane went to work “on” the tradition. In sending Bibiali’s bird-spirit to a safer place, she was also performing a ritual “on” Bosavi culture, trying to “repair” it, to “save” it from the missionaries. Her tools were those of any ritual—semiotic forms deployed in the real time of highly stylized social interaction. In this case, the “interaction” appears to be largely monologic¹³ (fig. 1).

The ethnosemiotic model of how such laments work—how they dynamically figure what they must ritually bring about—involves the metaphor of “hardening” (*halaido domeki*) by “forming a path” (*tok*), as Feld explains (1990 [1982], 127). Hane’s lament achieves that hardening by laying down a succession of place-names (indicated by underlining) that form a path for Bibiali’s spirit-now-become-bird to follow away from the longhouse at Aꝟndꝟ. The path—the succession of place-names—corresponds with no straight line on the map Feld provides, but in general it moves away from Aꝟndꝟ and leads toward a final resting place that will be secret though associated with one of Bibiali and Hane’s favorite places, Bibiali’s garden house near the waterfall of Salo Creek (line 34).

At this point, the emphasis of my analysis must diverge from Feld’s. Feld notes that the place-name list crescendos toward places that once held sentimental meaning for Bibiali and Hane but whose personal significance the Bosavi Christians had fundamentally altered through their disruption of local social organization (1990 [1982], 127). Feld mentions only secondarily that the song comes to “closure” by commanding Bibiali to “remain ‘secretly disappeared’ as a bird in the treetops.” This emotional crescendo or “hardening” (*halaido domeki*) of the weeping plays on the Bosavi song structure notion of *tok*, a map that runs throughout the imagery and builds to a climax.” As important as emotion is to ritual, I propose that the same *structural* movement that Feld and Bosavi people describe as *tok* enables the lament to achieve its more properly ritual effect, magically carrying Bibiali to a safe place. The fact that Hane’s lament moves the deceased and the believing-traditional community from Aꝟndꝟ to a place of hiding is precisely the kind of formal structural achievement by which ritual projects its effect onto the cosmic axis. This difference in emphasis is therefore quite significant.

The dynamic figuration of the transition in projected space that Hane’s lament has to effectuate involves what all ritual language involves—a combination of the iconic and the indexical. Hane’s lament iconically reflects the path that Bibiali-spirit-bird should follow while dynamically pointing to hiding places known and unknown. But, on a larger scale, beyond

the individual place-names and the particular diagrammatic iconism of the path, the overall structure of Hane’s lament for Bibiali—and the structure of laments in almost every other tradition in which laments may have a magical power—entails a progression from a here-now link with death to the sort of benefit promised/achieved in the performance. It is in this movement from death to safety—that is, through this precise dynamic figuration—that magical laments achieve their ritual ends. Demonstrating that Hane’s lament is not an outlier—that magical laments from other ethnographic traditions appear to function as it does—will lay the groundwork for a later claim about the double voicing of anthropological writing.

Freud’s theory of melancholia envisions the sufferer’s pathologically identifying with the lost object. The identification is pathological because it involves aggression against the self and affords no resolution. As does Grinker (1998, 94), I use the term “melancholia” somewhat analogically. Rather than uncovering psychic evidence of laments’ identifying with the dead, I offer discursive evidence—specifically, evidence of the sort of heteroglossia that involves an interplay of the voices of the mourning singer and the mourned object (and the metaphorical argument that many modern collective selves have mourned the loss of traditions, etc.). In fact, the discursive tools propelling the structural movement described in the preceding section from the here-and-now of death to the hereafter often involve a heteroglossia that is vulnerable to a misreading on a reductively psychological level as the lamenter’s identification with the dead.

A close examination of particular laments reveals the complex play of voices, not, perhaps, a psychological identification of the singer with the dead. In two laments that I will briefly describe, voices shift so quickly that the hearer or reader is left quite confused. Wickett (1993, 422–23) presents a contemporary Egyptian woman’s lament, entitled “For a Young Woman,” in which the voices of the woman lamenting and the woman who has died become confused. Alexiou (1974, 80–82) reports a *kommós* (lament) in the village of Zagori over the death (momentarily) of spring, personified as Zafeiris. The lines of the lament alternate between expressions of sorrow—*áchou*, my soul—and direct address of the sleeping Zafeiris in the form of a village boy; the alternation appears to be heteroglossic. In the final line, the village girls command Zafeiris, “Unseal your eyes!” “Arise!”

Many interpreters of lament emphasize such drama, describing lament’s function in emotional terms—as “catharsis” (Auerbach 1989) and “emotional release” (Whittaker 1994), responsible for “releasing” or “channeling” strong emotions (McLaren 2000; Tolbert 1994). Feld’s emphasis on the emotional force of lament is plain in the title of *Sound and Sentiment*. Such an emphasis potentially obscures the pragmatics of ritual—what it performatively effectuates (e.g., carrying Bibiali to safety and buttressing Bosavi tradition), even through double voicing.

Yet Feld does provide interpretive keys to the heteroglossic (Bakhtin 1981) pragmatics of Bosavi lament, not least by

13. I demonstrate elsewhere the interactive, sometimes interrupted, emergence of one long lament in Bangladesh (Wilce 2002b; cf. Wilce 2001). In the real world monologism tends to be relative and exceptional.

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- (1) Cross-cousin [Bibiali],
 Cross-cousin, you and I were together at S_Cdim, cross-cousin,
 Cross-cousin, you and I left S_Cdim and came here [at As_Cnd_C] to stay, cross-cousin.
- (2) Cross-cousin, cross-cousin
 Cross-cousin, cross-cousin, you and I were together at Hansowej, cross-cousin
 Cross-cousin, “Always look up to the top branches of an odag [fig] tree,” you say it like that to me,
 cross-cousin.
- ...
- (9) Cross-cousin,
 cross-cousin, I’m wondering if you’ve gone to Olabia, cross-cousin...
- (12) Cross-cousin, the bush pandanus leaves at Abolib,
 Cross-cousin, go sleep beneath the bush pandanus leaves at Ukani, cross-cousin
- (13) Cross-cousin,
 Cross-cousin, you and I were together at the bank of Sao creek,
 Cross-cousin, “Always look up to the top branches of a wab tree; I’m going that way”—you say it to me
 like that,
 Cross-cousin, “While you look through an opening into the women’s section”—you say it to me like
 that—“tears will secretly flow there” you say it to me like that.
- ...
- (16) Cross-cousin,
 Cross-cousin, having left, I’m wondering if you’ve gone to Gulambo’s place,
 Cross-cousin, go cross the Kalasc_k creek, cross-cousin
 Cross-cousin, having left, go along Misini, cross-cousin
 Cross-cousin, having left, I’m wondering if you’ve gone to your son’s place, cross-cousin, cross-cousin.
- ...
- (18) Cross-cousin, “Always look over there toward Yclisono,” you say like that to me, cross-cousin, cross-
 cousin.
- ...
- (20) Cross-cousin, cross-cousin
 Cross-cousin, I’m wondering if you’re going down to the roots of a *bol* tree, cross cousin,
 Cross-cousin, I’m wondering if we’ll go to Abolib together, cross-cousin, cross-cousin,
 Cross-cousin, I’m wondering if we’ll go to Ukani together, cross-cousin, cross-cousin.
- (21) Cross-cousin, cross-cousin,
 Cross-cousin, “You will always weep at Hansowej,” you say like that to me,
 Cross-cousin, “You will always weep while looking up to Mulusi,” you say like that to me,
 Cross-cousin, you hadn’t been coming to As_Cnd_C, cross-cousin, cross-cousin.
- (22) Cross-cousin, “Always look over there towards Walilo,” you say like that to me, cross-cousin...
- ...
- (25) Cross-cousin, cross-cousin, cross-cousin,
 Cross-cousin, “You will always weep while looking up to Hansowej,” you say like that to me,”
 Cross-cousin, “You will always weep while looking up to S_Cdim,” you say like that to me.”
- ...
- (28) Cross-cousin, I’m wondering if you’ve secretly gone to sleep at Salo waterfall, cross-cousin,
 Cross-cousin, go secretly sleep at KiSalaba, cross-cousin.
- ...
- (32) Cross-cousin, having left and obviously gone to Olabia you will cross BowE1 creek
 Cross-cousin, I’m wondering if you’ve gone to Gania’s husband’s place, cross-cousin, cross-cousin.
- (34) Cross-cousin,
 Cross-cousin, from now on you will stay secretly disappeared,
 Cross-cousin, from now on you will stay secretly disappeared, cross-cousin,
 Cross-cousin, you will clearly go off to sleep at your garden house, cross-cousin,
 Cross-cousin, from now on you will stay secretly disappeared, cross-cousin, cross-cousin.
-

unpacking for his readers the ethnometasemiotic concept of “hardening.” As we have seen, this involves forming the path for Bibiali to follow. But, Feld explains, another way in which Hane’s lament exemplifies the *saya:lab* or ritual-lament code is in its use of “quote directives” (indicated by italics) in which “the weeper literally commands words into the deceased’s mouth” (1990 [1982], 123). Hane uses the *elema* or *elema* form that Bosavi mothers use in language socialization routines (Schieffelin 1990)—appropriately so, since she is socializing the newly disembodied spirit or, more accurately, the spirit-become-bird.

Language socialization in Bosavi often involves triangulation—mothers feed lines to their youngest children, telling them what they should say to an older sibling (Schieffelin 1990). These mini-routines end with *elema*, “say like that [to him/her].” Here Hane engages Bibiali-bird-spirit in a similar triangulation. She is teaching the newly deceased what he should say to her. But she is also using him to speak the appropriate ritual lines to anyone among those present who is still clinging to Bosavi tradition vis-à-vis fundamentalist Christianity—a ritual community (creatively indexed—brought into being, in part—by Hane’s lament) playing the role, as it were, of the older sibling. A common thread in the various lines Hane gives Bibiali to say (lines 2, 13, 18, etc.) is where she is to look for him as a spirit-bird—in the treetops or “over there,” far away from the Christian compound. The voice play in these lines is complex. In this culturally conventional Bosavi form of linguistic indirection via heteroglossia, the bystanders may be the most significant addressees. Bibiali’s words to them (line 13) might be paraphrased, “I have gone into hiding; you must hide your ritual practice as well.”

Ethnographers’ Roles in Ritual

Up to this point I have offered a model of the ritual nature of traditional lament that is new because many accounts of lament lack an explanation of its ritual nature and because it draws on Silverstein’s recent formulation of a linguistic-anthropological/semiotic approach to ritual. As in any ritual that “speaks the new,” a section that “speaks the old” is helpful. Two anthropologists have seriously considered the way their writing impacts people’s lives on a ritual level. I propose that we radically extend what they have done.

It is probably no accident that both of those pioneers in the field of anthropological ritual and ethics—Robert Desjarlais and Vincanne Adams—work with Tibetans in Nepal, Yolmo and Sherpas. These Buddhist groups have well-developed theories of how representations affect the afterlife. Encountering Sherpas led Adams to theorize “mimesis as ritual practice” and thus to reflect on ethnography as mimesis and ritual practice. Ethnography produces “ethnographic effigies” and is thus analogous to the ritual production of *torma*, “effigies” (1997, 86), whose effects Sherpas take very seriously.

“Sherpas are connected ‘subjectively’ [as subjects] to our representations of them” (p. 94), as are certain of “us” to them.

Desjarlais’s engagement with Yolmo people in the Helambu Valley of Nepal and with Meme Lama (“Grandfather Priest”) in particular led him to a similar revision of his ethnographic stance. After earlier ethnographic work that included apprenticeship as a Yolmo shaman, Desjarlais returned in the late 1990s to record conventional life histories, including Meme Lama’s. But Grandfather Priest asserted himself in the process, telling Desjarlais in effect, “Write this, not that.” His motivation in guiding Desjarlais’s hand was related to his Buddhist-inspired understandings of signs, sounds, and the afterlife. By chanting the *Bardo Thodol*, the Tibetan *Book of Liberation through Understanding the Between* (commonly mistranslated as *The Book of the Dead*),¹⁴ over the deceased’s body near the time of his or her death, “the lamas who perform the funeral rites need to guide the soul toward a good ‘way,’” according to Desjarlais (2000, 281).¹⁵ Meme Lama regarded the life history Desjarlais was writing as a *bhaja* (echo) that would have similar ritual effects on the lama’s soul’s future path. His concerns were not egocentric but reflected his ritual career (p. 281):

Much was riding, in short, on what people might say about the life and actions of this hardworking man. His afterlife will correspond in many ways to his afterimage. That afterimage will emerge, in part, from how others speak of him. For my part, any words I might write about his life and circulate among others could very well feed into such back talk in as-yet-undetermined ways. At the least, I find I need to write well of Meme’s life, to say that he was a good man, which, I should say for the record, is an easy, straightforward thing to do because, like his children and grandchildren, he is, in fact, a good and virtuous man, without significant sins or moral failings to speak of.

So it was that an engagement with Tibetan Buddhist ethno-semiotic issues—how ethnographers’ words are viewed by analogy with the reading of the *Bardo Thadol* or by analogy with *torma* as ritual effigies—started a kind of revolution within anthropology. In the late 1990s, two ethnographers began to consider the ritually effectuated echoes of their writings. Yet these considerations were limited, focused only on the particular ethnographic field in which they had worked, self-consciously theorized in dialogue with local models not in any obvious way accounting for global processes.¹⁶ A more general theory of the production and circulation of anthropological text as ritual that engages and impacts cultural production and history would, naturally, be even more revolu-

14. I am indebted to Asif Agha for his insights into the title of this well-known book (personal communication, July 2005).

15. Thus the lamas’ ritual role is comparable to Hane’s laying down a path for Bibiali’s spirit.

16. This is not meant to characterize all of the work of these two scholars, which in various ways does account for global processes.

tionary. And it so happens that, in notes he started in the 1930s, Wittgenstein pushed anthropologists to consider just this—the ritual significance of our writing in relation to *our* culture.

Toward a General Model of Anthropological Text Production as Ritual

Although there has been very little reflection on anthropological writing as ritual activity, Wittgenstein's notes on Frazer's *Golden Bough* offer a precedent. Many of those notes anticipated by six decades Crapanzano's (1992) literary re-reading of anthropological texts. Inverting the conceits of Frazer and his generation, Wittgenstein spoke of their scientizing drive to explain Others—and particularly the fashionable notion that those Others had no "explanations" of their own—as "the foolish superstition of our time" (1979, 67). Redding, whose essay on Wittgenstein's notes ("Anthropology as Ritual") inspired the title of this essay, sums up Wittgenstein's trick this way: Whereas Frazer "examines ritual belief and practice as a primitive form of science, Wittgenstein examines . . . science as a clumsy form of ritual" (1987, 267).

In Redding's interpretation of Wittgenstein, Frazer's writing expresses the needs and "moral character" of the group to which he belonged, the "Geist" of his community (1987, 265). But why restrict the claim to Frazer? *The Golden Bough* was only a path-breaker for many later anthropological works, including recent products such as Feld's Smithsonian/Folkways three-CD boxed set of Bosavi music (2001). As Redding put it (p. 266),

Frazer's work has become, in virtue of its publication and wide circulation, an element in a type of public performance in which others participate as readers. Raising the question of the ritual character of Frazer's work allows us to ask about the role that his "explanations" of the practices of other societies play in our lives.

Redding's vision of ritual stresses the public circulation of a special text—in this case Frazer's—involving symbolic representations that accomplish some ritual purpose. Perhaps from this perspective anthropological "rituals" are exceptional only in that they tend to offer up representations of Others. In the representational economy of empire (Hardt and Negri 2000), publics see and hear Others as they consume anthropological writing, consume cultures, consume Others (Root 1996). Thus the consumption of such products as Feld's is one of many postmodern social rituals participating in which links us, as Benedict Anderson (1991) argues, to other such consumers and thus to a certain set of people with whom we discuss such rituals. In other words, in certain public rituals anthropologists like Feld serve a priestly role.

From Lament to Ethnographies of Lament: Structural Parallels

I have been arguing that a lament and a piece of anthropological writing or some other product we make may have in common a cultural function we are accustomed to calling "ritual" when we are not speaking of our own productions. Vague references to "shared function" are insufficient. Structural parallels between ritual laments and certain anthropologists' and ethnomusicologists' writings about them must be demonstrated. The accounts I focus on share with traditional laments (a) a focus on the passing or implied murder of lament, which corresponds here with the mourned "death," (b) location of responsibility for the death, and (c) metaphors such as "stripping." I deal with a fourth structural similarity, a diagrammatic iconism—a progression from indicative to optative or subjunctive mood—in a later section.

First, the focus on the passing of the beloved, in this case lament. Countless recent observers of lament offer up elegies such as "This has died out as far as anyone knows." (I do not imply that all accounts of lament mourn its passing or that any do so naively.) Here is a geographical sampling of examples: "Most younger women do not know laments" (Danforth and Tsiras 1982, 72 [Greece]); "Starting in the second half of the 19th century, laments gradually fell from use as customs and conditions changed" (Nenola 2003, 83 [Ingria, eastern Finland]); "As an institution [lament] has been completely surpassed" (Alvar 1969, 19, translation mine [Moroccan Sephardic Jews]); "In increasingly Westernized urban Hong Kong, lamentation is fast disappearing" (Johnson 1988, 138); weeping on the departure of relative is "fast disappearing," a sign of "social change" (Tiway 1978, 25 [Bihar, India]). Schieffelin focuses dramatically on a sort of death as she sums up what missionization achieved at Bosavi: "Innovation co-occurred with the *erasure* of entire expressive genres—song, lament, and traditional narrative—that were the memorializing practices of a people" (2002, S15, emphasis added).

Second, Feld and Schieffelin witnessed Australian missionaries "trashing" (Feld 2001) ritual lament. In other situations the blame lay with medieval church edicts against lament (Honko 1974, 13) or with contemporary Islamists (Wickett 1993, 335). Neo-laments such as this one by Seremetakis—"the modernization of death [on Mani, in which] . . . urbanized kin attempt to silence discursive polyphony and singing [laments]" (1991, 221)—accomplish just what Charles Briggs (personal communication, October 2004) says Warao women's laments achieve—they make public an account of the cause of suffering and death.

Third, the liner notes to Feld's boxed set of Bosavi music include this metaphor: "This is a generation largely *stripped of the ritual and ceremonial* knowledge and practice of previous generations" (emphasis added). "Stripping" evokes the tearing of clothing and hair associated with violent wailing

(G. Anderson 1991, 69–77). Such displays—or a more general association of dishevelment with mourning—were once extremely widespread from the ancient Near East to Vedic India, Ptolemaic Egypt, legendary Ireland, and twentieth-century Africa. I certainly do not claim that Feld sees the analogy or that he loads the word “stripping” with the same sense it has in traditional laments. I merely point to the parallel between his use of the term and its use in traditional laments like the one below, sung by a contemporary Egyptian woman and recorded by Liz Wickett: “Why not say the name of God over these young ones you have stripped naked?”¹⁷ What Feld (n.d. and personal communication, October 2004) sees happening among the Bosavi cannot be reduced to loss or stripping. For example, Bosavi responses to overwhelming missionary pressure to abandon lament include tremendous creativity, including generating new genres of music such as what Feld calls the “rainforest country” music of guitar bands. This genre includes one song that quotes the old *saya:lab* lament sound (Feld n.d.). A sense of loss and resignation *do not* define the contemporary scene, nor does an elegiac tone define Feld’s writing. Still, Feld’s and Schieffelin’s attribution of responsibility for the death of the lament tradition at Bosavi to missionary activity resonates with the angry attribution of blame for a death that Briggs hears in Warao laments.

The Poetics of Anthropological Writing as (Meta)Ritual Activity

Feld’s rich description of Hane’s lament resonates with his more recent reflections on his own meta-ritual role in Bosavi. Hane’s powerful performance served three ritual purposes—mourning Bibiali’s death, transporting Bibiali to safety, and prefiguring the end of ritual lament in such a way as to offer some guidance to the endangered community of Bosavi traditionalists. In form and function, this resonates with Feld’s more recent reflections on his own meta-ceremonial role in Bosavi.

In presenting Hane’s lament, Feld foregrounds its role in moving other women to tears. It also provides a map for Bibiali-spirit-bird to follow to his secret permanent resting place. But Feld’s analysis allows for at least one other level of ritual function, if our understanding of a ritual can admit one that is rejected by some bystanders—one that had its effect only gradually and only on those in sympathy with Hane. In her powerful use of heteroglossia, starting in line 2, Hane makes Bibiali speak to Hane’s audience as a bird-spirit from beyond, telling her and them to look up, look elsewhere. In line 13, as Feld’s exegesis makes clear, Hane uses *bale to* (bird-sound-words)—metaphoric indirection—to say something about the future of lament itself: [paraphrasing] “Through the opening in the partition in this very longhouse,

17. The singer is Zeinab of Luxor, as recorded by Wickett (1993, 623), who interprets the line thus: “The sight of the deceased naked made lamenters tear their gowns” (p. 216).

as you peer into the women’s section, you will be glimpsing the secrecy in which future women will have to lament.” Hane was dead right, so to speak. Mission pressure would, within a decade, put an end to lament. The meta-ritual function of her lament was thus a meta-lament and prophetic function, preparing those who cared about lament for a time when traditionalists would need to take lament underground—or, if they could, to the treetops.

In writing this analysis, Feld does not indicate that he played any active role in Hane’s lament, let alone a key ritual role. Yet his activity, from recording these “last” laments at Bosavi to analyzing and playing them back for this and later generations of people there and for us, must be seen in the light of ritual. I say “must” for two reasons. First, his writing, like mine and that of others who have written about lament, partakes of something of the form of lament itself. But second, in an interview with Don Brenneis (Feld and Brenneis 2004, 46) Feld actually describes his role at Bosavi in meta-ritual terms that I would like to relate to his recording of Hane’s multifunctional ritual lament. The excerpt from the interview in figure 2 was originally one question line from Brenneis followed by one discontinuous paragraph, spread across two columns of text, in which Feld responds. I have laid it out so as to show some of the poetic structure of Feld’s response.

Beyond the introductory lines in which he summarizes the achievement of his *Bosavi*, Feld goes on to describe the three CDs, one at a time, in what I have marked as the first three “stanzas” of the text. In the fourth stanza he reveals his dual meta-ritual role as midwife and undertaker. Because he calls himself the undertaker in relation to Bosavi *ritual* music and because I understand undertakers to be ritual specialists, I call Feld’s overall role meta-ritual.¹⁸ As the final stanza shows, Feld has mediated Bosavi musical history to interested publics including and far beyond his fellow academics. Balanced between his “representation” and “presentation,” his offering to the public is no more and no less ritual than other examples of anthropological writing. It is only more self-consciously so. The self-conscious *presentation* of the offering to the public is no more ritual in its function than the “historical representation,” for it is the “expressive value” of this representation of Bosavi history—like the “expressive value” of the representation of Europe’s Others for Frazer—that rivets the attention of the ritual-hungry audience.¹⁹

A closer analysis is warranted. Could the possible parallel between Feld’s monologue and Hane’s lament in what I have labeled stanzas 1–3 be “hardening a path” as Feld moves his readers along a path from the relatively recent past back to

18. Anyone who doubts that undertakers play ritual roles should watch at least the first episode of HBO’s prize-winning series *Six Feet Under* with an eye to the conflict between the two brothers over the significance of their mortuary practice.

19. I allude here to Suzanne Langer’s (1951 [1942], 52) meditation on ritual and to Wittgenstein’s (1979) argument that ritual should be understood as gesturally expressive rather than subject to the sorts of reductionist explanations Frazer offered.

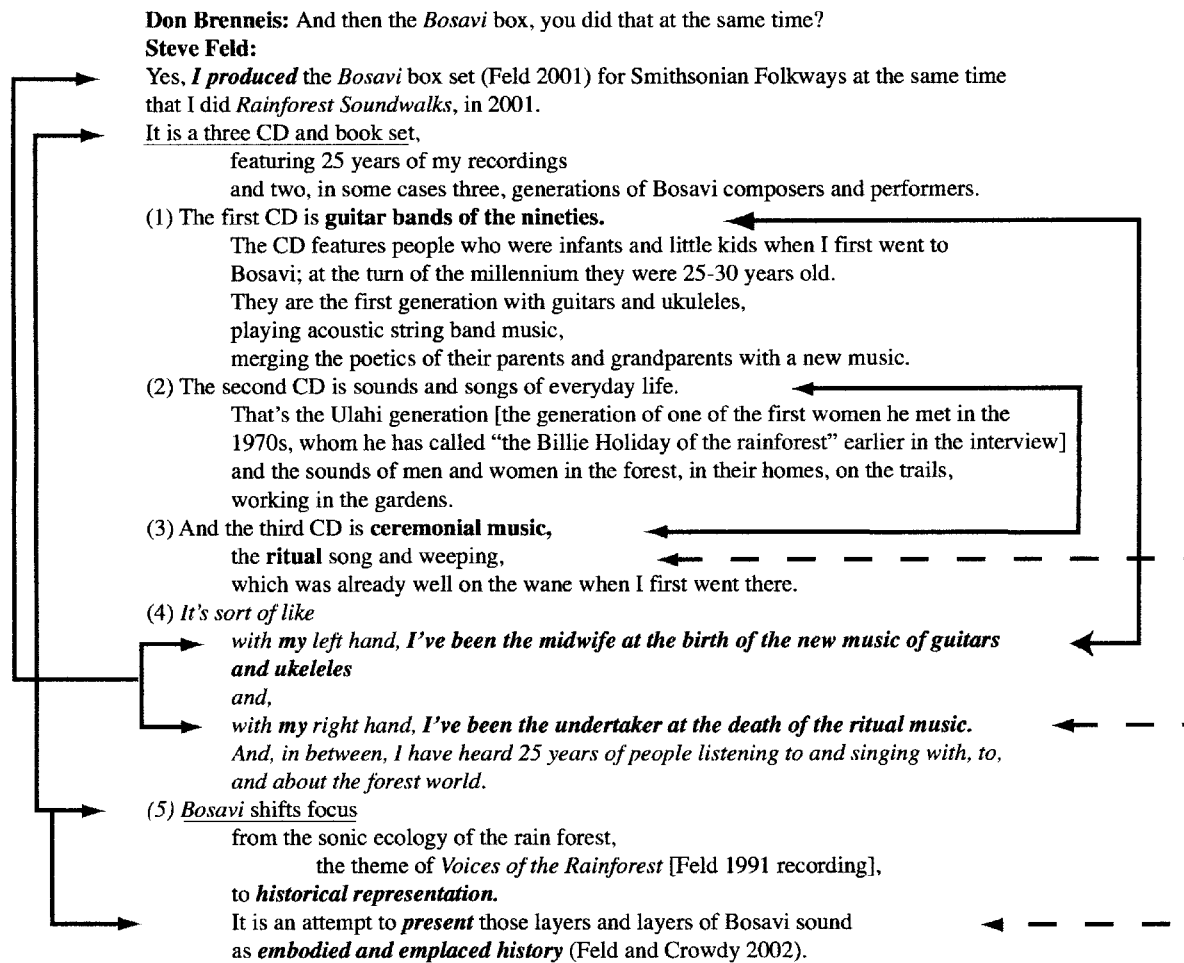


Figure 2. Excerpt from an interview conducted by Don Brenneis with Steve Feld (Feld and Brenneis 2004).

the “ceremonial music” that has not been heard since the 1970s (perhaps imaginably salvaging it)? Has the form of his monologue replicated the form of the *saya:lab*? Or is it merely superficial resemblance? Is Feld doing what any wordsmith does, making an effective list that helps readers follow him? Or does the similarity point us to a simple, straightforward way in which any verbal art, including this monologue, works a bit of magic on its audience?

The arrow linking the first-person indexes (“I produced the *Bosavi* box set” with “my left hand, I’ve been the midwife . . . my right hand . . . I have been the undertaker”) and its relation to the adjacent arrows connecting the “It” (“It is a three CD and book set”) with “*Bosavi* . . . shifts focus . . .” in the fifth stanza draw our attention to the poetic movement between Feld’s agency and a displacement of that agency onto its product, which of course evinces a complex relationship to the agency of Bosavi people whose history and embodiment Feld alludes to in the last lines. Is it possible that the move-

ment from “I” to “it”—this migration or displacement of agency, important in any ritual—parallels Bibiali’s hiding and the allusion to the need to hide lamentation in Bosavi’s fundamentalist future?

On another level, the last lines form the climax of a semantic triplet, again marked by three dashed lines. The first points to “the ritual song and weeping” in stanza 3, the second to “I’ve been the undertaker at the death of the ritual music” in stanza 4, and the third to “It is an attempt to present . . .” in stanza 5. “To present” could resonate with ritual significance, or it might be a verb anyone might use. It points, again, to the meaningful homology between all communicative activity—and perhaps particularly the sort Wittgenstein and I are describing, anthropologists’ communicative activity vis-à-vis hungry publics—and ritual. Whereas I have characterized ritual in terms of an intensification of parallel orders of iconicity and indexicality in which a ritual seems to create its own sacred context, everyday words-in-interaction, through

subtler performative features (less obvious than in rituals, for example, of presentation), nonetheless constantly manage to *do things* (Austin 1962).

In the text and context at hand, Feld shows himself a leader-priest; he is among the few anthropologists to have successfully engaged a rather large popular audience, the sort that is interested in the rain forest and in music. Though Feld calls her an “elder,” Hane’s lament never explicitly asserts any sort of leadership in an underground community of dissenters from the growing majority of Bosavi fundamentalists. We can certainly imagine her in the role of elder; at any rate, what is important is the power of her text, especially line 13, and its enduring local fame, for which Feld cites evidence. If we let Hane’s text stand as evidence of paramount importance, we can do the same for Feld’s, knowing also that his recordings have circulated more than most of our work does. In an environment in which people seek out books and CDs such as Feld produces, his interview statement about his meta-ritual roles in Bosavi can be extended to the ritual role his work plays vis-à-vis his Western audience. Among those listening to Hane’s lament were a few who hoped that such laments would continue despite missionary pressure; I have argued that to speak of her lament as a ritual act, *doing things*, includes “delivering” those believers into a future of safe hiding. Feld’s ritual role vis-à-vis Western publics may involve delivering hope from modernity’s clutches and admitting a ritual role in the history—of folks, rain forests, and musics—that becomes a story not of lamentable loss but of creativity.

The Double-Voiced Indicative of Anthropological Conclusions

There is probably nothing more important to the ritual effect of at least some magical laments than their structural progression as their texts unfold in the real time of performance. Among the potentially significant emergent dimensions is a shift in “mood,” in the sense both of feeling and of verb modality, the means many languages use to encode stance or illocutionary force. Such a progression is by no means universal to laments.²⁰ At the same time, some argue that such a progression defines certain lament genres; G. Anderson (1991) makes that claim for “the penitence-to-joy sequence” in the ancient Near East laments.²¹ In the Greek lament de-

20. Some biblical scholars do not see the sequence of moods as such, that is, as a pattern reducible to “penitence-to-joy,” indicative-to-optative, or even the inverse. LeAnn Flesher, a professor of Old Testament at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, argues that there is considerable fluctuation between moods in both senses in the biblical laments (personal communication, July 2005).

21. The *Jerusalem Bible* (Jones 1966) says that the psalms of entreaty/lament (said by scholars of the ancient Near East to bear significant family resemblance to those laments) typically include a core of description of the composer’s sorrows (in the indicative mood), designed to win the deity’s sympathy. But, defining the genre in relation to “prayer,” the editors note the dominance in many lament psalms of the tone of “appeal,” often confident appeal (p. 780), which could be encoded in

scribed earlier, verb mood changes, culminating in imperatives—“Unseal your eyes!” and “Arise!” In other laments, indicative verbs give way to optative, jussive, or subjunctive—moods appropriate to prayer.

The Finnish folklorist Aili Nenola (2002, 117–18) supplies the following example, collected in Ingria in 1859 as a woman lamented over her mother’s corpse being readied for burial. The lament begins with a question. Its middle lines are in the indicative mood, as the lamenter settles into the emotional mood of sorrow. But the last Ingrian lines shift into imperative, conditional, and subjunctive moods:

line 1 Why are you dressing my dear parent? [addressed to a third party]

...

line 13 Have you already turned hard as a stone that you cannot answer me?
You were never before so hard towards me.

...

line 25 I will bathe in plentiful tears.

...

line 30 Come to see me, even for one hour visit me, even in all secrecy

line 35 Come, be it in the morning dew.

take messages to that world

to my shiny-hatted warmer!

if you see with your own eyes

if he is there to receive you

if he is opening the gates of Death

take a message to him!

if he would appeal in that world to sweet God

with his mouth that has had no supper

and to the white elders of Death

maybe they would let you come in some hour

appear, be it as a bird in the air.

Such progressions are, as in Hane’s lament, performative. They have real-world effects. Text artifacts of ancient Near East laments, for example, had a regulating effect on ritual behavior at sites some spatiotemporal remove from the ritual center where the model was composed (Cohen 1975; Kutscher 1975; G. Anderson 1991).

But can we really find in anthropological writing—in ethnographies of lament in particular—anything like the sort of iconic indexicality I have uncovered in magical laments? In such serious work, be it what we write for our peers or what we prepare for broader publics, is there anything like the sort of double voicing that plays a significant role in traditional laments or an analogous progression of verb moods? To the extent that all ethnography speaks to Western audiences largely by reanimating the voices of Others, it is pervasively double-voiced. But there is, I believe, a particular form of double voicing whose position in the conclusions of some

the indicative, the imperative, or the optative. This edition of the Bible-with-commentary has been popular with Roman Catholic laity.

anthropological writings (whether about lament or not) might index a ritual function. That function, it turns out once again, is not far from the rhetorical. Anthropologists seem to be quite good at following Chekhov's (1892) advice to Lydia Avilova:

When you describe the miserable and unfortunate, and want to make the reader feel pity, try to be somewhat colder—that seems to give a kind of background to another's grief, against which it stands out more clearly. Whereas in your story the characters cry and you sigh. Yes, be more cold. . . . The more objective you are, the stronger will be the impression you make.

It is as though, in coming to their conclusions—at the point, perhaps, where their arguments have the most emotional force—many like myself, writing about discursive traditions undergoing transformation, opt for a cool mood.

For example, several features of the final paragraph of Kuipers's ethnography of Weyewa ritual speech (including ritual lament, *lawiti*) and its contemporary fate on the island of Sumba, Indonesia, distance him from the potential emotional force of his words (1998, 155, emphasis added):

Most Weyewa, teachers and pupils alike, believe it *would be a shame* to lose this precious resource [ritual speech]. As . . . one of the defining features of their culture, its loss means no less than the loss of a key trait of their identity as a people. So far, ritual speech *remains* an ideologically charged way of displaying both exemplary features of selfhood and the boundaries of social, moral, and political obligations. In this sense, it *continues*, albeit in vastly different form from that which anyone anticipated, to enact and exemplify a Weyewa inner state.

First, though he might agree that it would be a shame if Weyewa people lost their ritual language, this is voiced as a Weyewa stance. Second, many of the verbs in this paragraph—"believe" and "means" and especially "remains" and "continues"—are indicative but resonate with a "voice" that is, so to speak, in a different verbal mood. I stress these last two verbs for good reason. Much of what Kuipers writes about the contemporary situation is in some tension with statements such as that ritual language "*remains* an ideologically charged way of displaying . . ." anything. Yet he seems required to end on a note of hope. The tension is embedded in the register and in modernity itself. Ethnographies do not end with prayers; we reserve verbs in the optative mood for our transcripts of Others' words embedded somewhere deep within our ethnographies, not for the last paragraphs, which are inevitably in our own voices. Yet Kuipers's indicative-mood verbs resonate with an optative-verb voice, the voice of an Other who is unburdened by the conventions of our register.

Finally, in the closing paragraph of *Tristes Tropiques*, it would have been odd but very natural for the following sentence to have appeared as a prayer: "Just as the individual is not alone in the group, nor any one society alone among the

others, so man is not alone in the universe" (Lévi-Strauss 1974 [1953], 414). Lévi-Strauss continues:

When the spectrum or rainbow of human cultures has finally sunk into the void created by our frenzy; as long as we continue to exist and there is a world, that tenuous arch linking us to the inaccessible will still remain, to show us the opposite course to that leading to enslavement; man may be unable to follow it, but its contemplation affords him the only privilege of which he can make himself worthy; that of arresting the process, of controlling the impulse which forces him to block up the cracks in the wall of necessity one by one and to complete his work at the same time as he shuts himself up within his prison.

The scientist is too clear-eyed to be optimistic, too world-weary to pray or to believe. Still, beneath this series of verbs that remain indicative (except for *sache mériter* [make himself worthy]) despite ranging over a wide array of tense-aspectual forms, the Other voice, the voice of prayer, is audible.

Conclusion: Making Expiations in an Academic-Priestly Register

Contemporary anthropologists' rituals tend toward the secular, but to pay honor to various phenomena—which we do, by degrees, when we pay them analytic attention as Kuipers does vis-à-vis Weyewa oratory—is a ritual familiar enough in the most demystified of lives.

Apart from a few noted exceptions, such as Herzfeld's brilliant analysis of *Tristes Tropiques* as ritual, we are unaccustomed to analyzing anthropological rituals, perhaps because many of us think of our work as plain rhetoric, and, while acknowledging that ritual relies on more than plain rationality to change the world, would deny that our work does this. But even those of us concerned with the history of modern voices and their flirtation with the elegiac and scholars engaged in a critique of modernist "laments" seldom make contemporary anthropological writing the object of our analytic attention. When Redding writes, "We are no more, and no less, essentially rational than we are ceremonial" (1987, 267), his "we" resonates with the subject of Wittgenstein's concern—Frazer's tribe, *anthropologia*. Yet we rarely turn our analytic attention to the progression of mood in *our* texts—for example, the movement from the mournful tone at the outset of *Tristes Tropiques* (lamenting "our" impact on "them") to that at the end, deep spiritual musing in which the register of reason almost gives way to prayer. A few pages before the end, *Tristes Tropiques* affirms the propriety of the author's joining a Buddhist ritual in a temple in what is now southeastern Bangladesh (1974 [1955], 411). In the final pages Lévi-Strauss waxes more poetic still: "Yet I exist" (p. 414). The last paragraphs embrace such things as "the contemplation of a mineral more beautiful than all our creations."

Who knows to what extent the competing ritual-thematic needs of our generation for hopeful (and spiritual) instead

of tragic endings, needs that enable a particular textual production to play a useful role in a moral-representational economy, determine the emphasis which the producer of a particular film, CD, book, or article places on creativity and on hope versus loss? If anthropology is culture, such tension will be played out in what anthropologists produce. Therefore, just as it is relevant to list the corporate sponsors of an ethnographic film, we also need ethnographic investigations of the ritual effects of our productions.

A growing group of anthropologists finds the old triad of magic, science, and religion a troubled inheritance, arguing that, even while early moderns apparently policed their boundaries effectively, they actually produced a zoo-full of hybrids by regularly transgressing those boundaries.²² Building on what I have argued here, science studies should include anthropologists as their objects and not only while at work in the field but also as we write. Naturally, I expect that such studies will uncover more evidence of what I have found—the ritual function infiltrating our discursive practices.

Finally, to the extent that some of our writing exemplifies problematic or ineffectual ritual—for example, melancholic neo-laments, as in the early chapters of *Tristes Tropiques*, or other cases of modern “mourning” that are completely devoid of affect or that suffer from repetition compulsion in that we recycle melancholic texts that accomplish little (emotionally, magically, or politically)—this article might prompt a return to the issue of representation and writing. This time, with new energy from its link with such a mainstay of anthropological interest as ritual, the results might be different. This new wave of examining anthropological productions might transform them, if readers were to share my sense that there is much to be truly mourned in our recent history, that anthropologists are at their best not as distant observers but as participant-observers in such a “wholesome” mourning, that this can include a newly reflexive contribution through writing recognized as a contribution to cultural histories that we do not merely study, and that such mourning can play a role in establishing more egalitarian futures.

Acknowledgments

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22. Hybridities of magic, science, and religion were explored in the papers read at the 104th Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association in the Executive Panel entitled “Purified Pasts, Hybrid Futures? (Meta)Languages of Science, Magic, and Religion.”

Comments

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Wilce is here to tell us that “anthropology is culture” and that “writing is ritual.” This is no problem even if, at this stage, it is somewhat old news. In the service of this argument comes “lament,” which Wilce forgets to mention is neither an ethnographically coherent or singular set of textual and vocal practices nor a unified downhill trope in diverse modernist discourses. The confluences that follow lead in the direction of several confusions. Then, while doing me the honor of detailed review, Wilce introduces a curious form of linguistic policing. His complaint partakes of a form of dissing quite familiar to those of us who work in media anthropology: the sugar and spice of condescending sound bites in the midst of an otherwise elite “high” academic register of discourse (e.g., referring to me as a “priest,” arguing that my words are “working magic,” etc.).

As for Bosavi-related ethnographic and interpretive issues:

Bosavi “laments” (wrong) “guide” (wrong) the “soul” (wrong) of the deceased. Bosavi sung-texted-weeping (*sa-yeḷ*) is simultaneously direct speech to a deceased and indirect speech to an assembly of overhearers. The pragmatic memorial business involved is to remember and recite shared experiences pegged to place-names. The “path” (*tok*) of these place-names constructs a poetic cartography of social relationships. Put in Wilce’s preferred metalanguage, in Bosavi *sa-yeḷ* the temporality of wept vocal performance creates an indexical icon marking the space-time of cumulative biographies.

When tagged to common names, the Bosavi modifiers “elder” (*sub*), “middle” (*tulu*), and “younger/junior” (*leḣu*) simply indicate relative generational positions of people with the same name. Thus the designation “elder Hane” (Hane *sub*) has nothing to do either with Wilce’s criticism that I don’t acknowledge her “leadership” (wrong) or with his resistance-and-redemption interpretation (itself more New Age-sounding than anthropological) and Hane *sub*’s performance was meant to “repair” or “save” Bosavi “culture.”

From his line about “ineffectual modern elegies over modernity’s destructiveness” we see that Wilce is ill at ease with some of the words my colleagues and I have used over the years to describe the negative cultural and linguistic impact of evangelical fundamentalist missionization in Bosavi. No amount of metasemiotic back-pedaling can explain away what three anthropologists have witnessed and documented for 35 years concerning mission-introduced regimes of fear, terror, and hostility. Words like “erasure” and “trashing” work because missionaries have made statements to the effect that

Bosavi ceremonies were a kind of rubbish that should be rubbed out. As for the “stripping” of Bosavi culture, the phrase was in fact introduced by missionaries themselves, who told Bosavi people that the first step to accepting evangelical Christianity was to get rid of their bodily adornments, to literally get naked from the vanity of their “culture”—indeed, to abandon expression and adopt the affect of the dead in order to prepare either for the cleansing baptism or the apocalyptic fire. The only thing that is ineffectual here is Wilce’s refusal to take seriously the anthropological necessity to engage the destructiveness of mission activity.

Finally, on “delivering believers into safe hiding,” Wilce’s bottom-line gloss on lament pragmatics, I would only say that for Bosavi such a characterization is far too Western, far too religious, far too New Age. It has none of the subtlety, complexity, or nuance that really addresses what Bosavi “wept thoughts” accomplish. In Bosavi the practices in question have equally soothed and agitated tempers, equally calmed and provoked enmity and empathy, equally mobilized opposition and alliance—patterns that I daresay are also rather well documented elsewhere in New Guinea. But in many well-known New Guinea cases the loss and absence of persons is materially replaced by the new life that is marked through the exchange and presence of objects. The Bosavi variation gives far more emphasis to a different materiality, namely, of vocal performance, for with *sa-yeʔɔ* it is the echoic quality of weeping voices and the intervocality of poetic paths that fuse replacing with remembering.

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A social scientific account of a ritual ought to include an explanation of the origin—in a culture that comes into being as a result of certain properties of human nervous systems interacting with a certain environment—of the behavioral patterns that constitute it (see, e.g., Whitehouse 1996). A performative contradiction can arise, however, when one asks what kinds of rituals allow students of ritual to agree or disagree on their models of ritual behavior. Observation validates explanation only if reliable persons witness the same patterns together or repeatedly. But if the witnesses themselves are moved by certain cultural factors, such as the requirement to conform to certain ritual patterns (e.g., to serve as ritual specialists), then it may be that no reliable witnessing occurs. Even worse, whether the witnessing is reliable becomes undecidable.

Applying Wittgenstein’s notion of a “form of life” to scientific inquiry as Shapin and Shaffer (1985) or Putnam (1994) have done offers a way out of performative contradiction. One recognizes that the rules by which the scientific inquiry

is conducted cannot be specified and that scientific inquiry cannot yield knowledge about its own validity. Such inquiry therefore imposes silence on its practitioners on the status of such practice vis-à-vis other practices such as ritual.

One might wish to put this differently—to say that social scientific method, when regarded as a set of rituals, a religion, is no different from any other set of rituals or religion. But this is true only on the condition that one uses the words “ritual” and “religion” to refer to things that are beyond the reach of social scientific method. It is not a set of rituals, not a religion, if by “ritual” or “religion” one means a set of practices that can be defined and studied by social scientists using some kind of method that enables reliable witnessing. If we are all in the same boat (all engaged in ritual), then we have no reason to engage in those “rituals” that make possible the reliable witnessing of ritual (that is, the development and sharing of models of ritual and their validation through observation). This is an infinite regress: Who could establish, in the first instance, that reliable witnessing is possible through the deployment of certain ritual activities (Kripke 1982)?

If we are all in the same boat, there is also no way to privilege one set of rituals over another. The Thirty Years’ War (1618–48), with its more than 30 million dead, was a constant preoccupation for the generation of Europeans that first worked out the forms of the “experimental life” (Shapin and Shaffer 1985). From its beginning, the disenchanted world of science was offered as a way out of seemingly endless sectarian slaughter. Dependence on reliable witnesses was offered, implicitly, as a morally superior method to attain truth, not just a more accurate one. Disenchantment was a matter of survival, a ground for the deployment of mutual goodwill.

Wilce begins with the observation that anthropologists studying rituals of lament wrongly assume that these practices aim principally at emotional effects. Quite commonly, he insists, they are meant to have magical effects. This is an observation that corrects for ethnocentric bias and that is open to confirmation by other reliable witnesses. But Wilce also wishes to draw a parallel between ritual lament and some anthropological texts. Not only do some anthropological texts lament the passing of customs and ritual practices in ways that resemble ritual lament but they aim at magical effects by cloaking iconic indexicality via, among other things, statements containing “indicative-mood verbs [that] resonate with an optative verb voice.”

Wilce insists that anthropologists such as Lévi-Strauss, in writing *Tristes Tropiques*, or Feld, in working as both midwife and undertaker of Bosavi ritual music, are acting as ritual specialists. Even their stance of objectivity enhances the ritual effect. In archiving Bosavi music, Feld seems to be looking forward to a possible reenchantment of the world through rediscovery and reuse. Wilce argues that anthropological lament about the destructiveness of modernity can and should play a role in “cultural production” along the lines of Feld’s example. While I cannot help but be sympathetic to his con-

clusions, I am forced to ask whether the status of anthropology's "role in cultural production" is properly an object of anthropological inquiry. It can only be one if the method employed is purely humanist in character. Once we set aside the social scientific grounds for agreeing that there is such a thing as "the cultural," we have no way to verify claims. The domain of culture seems, then, to shift from being an object of inquiry to being a (relatively) disenchanting ground for deploying mutual goodwill (by, e.g., archiving lost ritual music).

Wilce's is a highly fruitful move in an ongoing discussion of ways to rescue anthropological practice in a world that is increasingly disenchanting with disenchantment. We must allow, somehow, that we are only one group of ritual specialists among many others and that, among these groups, our humane, mildly ironic mode of apprehending ritual multiplicity is the best method of conciliating divergences and conflicts. If reenchantment is now a matter of survival, it must somehow be done without unleashing sectarian conflict. But how can one validate a mediating role such as the one Wilce attributes to Feld without some claim to the authority of the reliable witness? Where can such authority come from if it is grounded in ritual—if ritual is conceived of as an object made available through the careful observation of reliable witnesses?

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Wilce's ruminative paper about ritual and scholarly lamentation operates on three planes—the descriptive, the reflexive, and the ethical, the last two building on the prior levels of analysis. Citing numerous ethnographic treatments, he notes that to the extent that writers on lament use a register iconic of it in a rhetorical idiom of modernist loss or transformation, the anthropological discourse is, perforce, continuous with the phenomenon itself, a kind of modernist scholarly lamentation—sadness over lost tropes, indeed, and an index of the more general disappearance of local cultural forms in (post)modern times. Finally, Wilce suggests that we recognize our status as participant observers in others' cultures, not just observers of them at some remove, seeming ultimately to commend the engaged ethical voice lamenting the sad state of local cultures around the world.

Wilce appears to suggest that such lamentation functions, in fact, as a reflective but unrecognized ritual site of and for the construction of the anthropologist's identity. Situated as anthropologists have been in what Michel-Rolph Trouillot has termed our "savage slot," as philologists of worlds on the wane we have documented and explicated their texts in the very museological mode of responsibility for arcana ("their" customs) displayed (in discursive dioramas of ethnography) at a distance (with increasingly troubled "scientific" objectiv-

ity). But contemporary anthropologists may find it hard to situate their own work in this ritually centered framing. We no longer merely collect. We no longer make ironic arguments about our being, culturally, simply or essentially "savage minds" despite a technological patina. We now think in terms of cultural processes intersecting in people's lives rather than in terms of people's being in the symbolic grip of distinct collectible "cultures"; it is what the human condition everywhere offers and has actually always offered for interpretative investigation. (Producing "a culture" is the cultural work of social groups—always centered, of course, in ritual forms.)

Thus, in moving across the planes of argument, we must be careful of the analytic concepts involved in the mapping, lest we lose purchase on the specificities of the cases at hand. Contemporary linguistic anthropology (see Silverstein 2004 and references therein) has established that *functionally* all effective semiotic events are by degrees products of the same elementary phenomena as explicit or official ritual events: they "do" something in socioculturally understood realms of human interest as a function of the way in which a cohesive textual *form* comes into being distinct from and indexically anchored to its context of occurrence. Explicit ritual goes farther, however, in that its textual form is a dense superposition of metasemiotic: hyperorganized movement of signs in space-time, with elaborate rhythm and meter organizing repetition (with or without variation), etc.; where language is part of or central to ritual form, we also observe hypertrophied denotational tropes such as metaphors and other referentially and indexically transposed modes of language use.

Wilce's excellent insights into the Kaluli *ɔsa-ye:lab* ritual lament documented by Feld (1990 [1982], 107–29) emphasize the ritual semiosis involved, particularly the tropic motherly directive giving stipulative voice to the fledgling aviform spirit of the deceased, instructed in what to say as much as where to take flight to ultimately peaceful rest. Wilce is able to read the ritual role relationship between lament-singer and deceased as a transposed and tropic one, ritually superseding that of cross-cousins (note the vocative term of address) and interdiscursively based on a discourse routine of early childhood documented by Schieffelin (1990, 75–111). The trope of social reproduction—mother: threshold linguistic infant : lament-singer : fledgling aviform spirit—is implicit in this ritual event. In Kaluli lament's state of threatened survival when recorded in 1976, Wilce construes the performance as evincing a higher-order trope, a "meta-tropic" lament about the survival of the pre-Christian Kaluli according to the lamenter's various depictions.

In a published interview of Feld's about a 3-CD set of recordings, Wilce sees Feld instantiating precisely such a duplex trope of social reproduction in his own cultural world of culture-artifact consumers, calling himself "undertaker" of ritual song and ritual lament in respect of CD number 3 and "midwife" of new guitar and ukulele music in respect of CD number 1 (and aural witness to 25 years of the quotidian soundscape in between in respect of CD number 2). Feld's

documentation thus brings immortal—permanent—order to the history-thus-far of the transformation of Kaluli cultural forms.

But perhaps Wilce is overlooking the centrality of cultural process—including reproduction with transformation—which has replaced cultures-as-collectibles in Feld's (and contemporary anthropology's) professional voice. As the Bosavi woman Hane is, tropically, both "mother" (like a midwife present in earliest life) and "undertaker" to the deceased Bialli, so also Feld claims not a static position as a modern collector who both laments the passing of the "traditional" (of which he offers for sale some of the last samples or specimens) but a dynamic position vis-à-vis a community whose cultural forms are ever being renewed and transformed. One would be hard-pressed to see this as a lament; rather, it is a celebration of renewal. If it is interdiscursive with the tropes of Hane's lament, perhaps the lesson ought to be that the concept of "lament" might be rethought functionally, as much as scholars like Wilce have looked at its structural or formal semiotic modalities. Might we not take lament, then, as the culturally normative, even effective ritual poesis for overcoming and transforming what would otherwise threaten to be, indeed, Freudian melancholia, for the lamenter as for others on whose behalf (s)he sings?

And perhaps anthropological discourse, too, is more than mere lamentation in that older conceptualization and has some performative value in suggesting, even fostering paths of possible transformed vitality for the diversity of local forms of cultural process.

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Wilce draws our attention to the formulaic nature of anthropologists' ethnographies, both considered as a distinctive genre and as inflected by larger modernist discourses of destruction and loss (which he terms "neolament"). His intriguing discussion of the laments that end many anthropological texts helped me to recognize similar laments that I heard when I conducted interviews in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. The latter examples raise issues about the politics of lamenting modernity and questions about what makes a lament effective.

The (neo)laments I heard were for changes in family and community life. The following comments, for example, were repeated, with only slightly changed wording, by several of my interviewees: "People are apathetic now. Kids come home to empty houses. Parents come home, everything's in an uproar. Kids go to bed, they watch TV, they've got televisions in their rooms, they got games like Nintendo. There is no sense of unity anymore" ("Catlyn Dwyer," a disabled office manager). For one interviewee who grew up in the mountains of North Carolina ("Jack Allen," an unskilled laborer), these

changes in family life were related to materialism and a faster pace of life:

Every time you turn on TV, your top stories, you hear something about a child being molested or somebody abusing a child or somebody just—drive-by shootings. And it's just, to me it's just, we've got away from our basic values, more or less—our home and our families and what's most important. It seems to me like nowadays it's just, it's out there, you know, you've got to make a living, you've got to make that money, and this is the easiest way to do it, computer games and this, that, and the other. Kids come home and they eat cold cereal or they grab a quick snack or something like that and the parents come in and "Oh, don't bother me, I'm busy, I've got—." They bring their work home with them and it's just—to me, that's not a good society. [. . .] If we could go BACK, I think if we could go back, even though the times and the money and all that—but if we could go back and live like that, I think society would be a lot better off—if they didn't have all these . . . computers and fast cars. [. . .] My parents tried to give me a better life, I tried to give my kids a better life, they try to give their kids a better life. And by the time their kids get grown, life probably won't even be WORTH anything, as far as that goes.

"Marvin Frederick," a factory middle manager, provided very detailed images of the loss of small-town *Gemeinschaft*:

Looking back from today's standards, back to where we were when I was younger, we were poor. And the things that I think about are the old men sitting around chewing tobacco on the porch and talking about whose garden, who's got the best garden, who's got the biggest tomatoes, and things of that nature. And I look at it nowadays, and we don't even know our neighbors. We don't know who lives next door. We can't even decide what we're going to have for supper without getting into a conflict of "What do you want?" "Well, I don't know, you decide." "I don't want to decide." My question is how did we get from where we were, when we were poor and enjoying it? I mean, it was fun to sit around and do that. Now, having some money or having a better life, so to speak, how did we get here, and was it worth the trip?

Wilce comments about the "needs of our generation for hopeful . . . instead of tragic endings," but these modern Americans always ended on a pessimistic note.

On the surface, such formulaic, frequently repeated comments seem a prime example of what Wilce and the commentators he cites call "failed, ineffectual, or perpetual mourning" because it has no closure. But as observers of cultural politics in the contemporary United States, we can see that some rhetorical criticisms of modern family life, in particular, have fueled very effective social movements that are blocking access to contraception, abortion, and gay mar-

riage. And what should our stance be as commentators upon such discourse, when implicit in all of the above comments, for example, is a critique of families in which both parents have demanding jobs? I would like to see Wilce address the politics of nostalgia and how anthropologists should write about it. I appreciated his final note of hope (in the required optative mood) that “‘wholesome’ mourning . . . can play a role in establishing more egalitarian futures,” but how do we sort the “wholesome” from the reactionary? Our joining as participant observers in such mourning will not necessarily lead to more egalitarian futures.

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Wilce proposes extrapolating a theory developed for analyzing the “traditional lament” to address the laments that texts and other anthropological productions express on the subject of modernity’s destructiveness. The theory for analyzing the “traditional lament” as a ritual act is very suggestive and offers novel clues on how to address a phenomenon which, despite its significance and recurrence, has not generated many analytical essays. The application of this theory to the anthropological literature is, however, much less convincing. Wilce moves parsimoniously from the establishment of ritual as language to the establishment of a model of the anthropological text as ritual activity through the role of the anthropologist in the rituals observed, but he does so at the expense of generalizing concepts, with even the very notion of ritual losing all content in the end. Projecting the ritual of the traditional lament onto all lamentation and the lamentations in anthropological texts onto anthropological production and cultural production in general results in the conclusion that everything is ritual. This is “lamentable” loss for a concept that has been useful for circumscribing very specific phenomena and could continue to be of use if it is not extracted from the intellectual context from which it emanates (e.g., Houseman and Severi 1998; Surrallés 2003)—unless Wilce has a world of pure reflexes, trivialized by constructivism, in mind and is inspired by Nietzsche’s assertion that “we believe that we know something about the things themselves when we talk of trees, colours, snow and flowers; and yet we possess nothing but metaphors for things—metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities” (1975, 283). Perhaps also in a metaphorical sense, Wilce compares the “traditional lament” with the lament over “modernity’s destructiveness” in texts written by anthropologists, two forms of expression whose specificity dissolves—as in the case of the notion of ritual—when they are placed on the same level. His call for anthropological production to be treated as a subject of study is paradoxical and not very original. If there is one thing to be learned from anthropology, it is that alterity is the best

reflection of oneself. Anthropology’s best mirror is a corollary of the work for which it was instituted. One of the most recent “laments” expressed by Claude Lévi-Strauss decades after the publication of *Tristes Tropiques* (see Viveiros de Castro 1998) is his recognition that the anthropology that he helped to develop, like all the anthropology that was practiced at the time, was inherited from a history hinged on the expansion of the West. Anthropology emerged as a discipline in the nineteenth century, the effort of a civilization that was technically superior to all others and sought to understand the societies that it was believed to dominate. Lévi-Strauss believes that this is no longer the case. To illustrate this idea he compares the evolution of anthropology with the evolution of musical composition. Anthropology as he knew it was tonal and has now become serial. Because our society or, rather, the values on which our society is based have become weak and because other societies have followed our path, societies do not possess absolute foundations: they exist in relation to one another like the notes of a dodecaphonic system. The outcome is a different anthropology, just as tonal music is different from serial music (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 120–21). It is a polyphonic and atonal anthropology that Wilce’s mirror, as if still composed in C major, a product of a closed circle of academics observing the peoples of the world, seems to obviate. When he says that turning the concept of ritual toward “ourselves” is not difficult, when he proposes that “we” practice the mourning of destruction, when he talks about anthropological rituals that transform “our” institutional life as professionals, when he refers to Frazer’s tribe, he should specify who “we” refers to. This reflection of Lévi-Strauss reminds us that anthropology has become an instrument of analysis employed by communities whose institutional, geographical, and intellectual origins, thematic interests, and political agendas make it unlikely to be suspected of responsibility for its past and for the constitution of modernity. The “egalitarian futures” to which Wilce aspires are found not in narcissistic reflection about the vestiges of an outgrown anthropology but in the recognition of alterity within the discipline itself as the best way of expiating the destructiveness of modernity, at least as far as intellectual imperialism is concerned.

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Ritual, as Wilce observes, is commonly associated with the nonmodern and the nonrational. Therefore, the suggestion that anthropologists who perceive themselves as modern or postmodern and rational are unknowingly engaging in ritual acts may easily be interpreted as an insult. I am sure that Wilce does not intend to insult those anthropologists, in-

cluding himself, whom he sees as performing ritual without knowing it in their professional publications.

Many, perhaps most, symbolic acts are performative. Ritual is by definition performative, but not all performative acts are ritual. Ritual effects profound transformation of the world and/or the persons involved in the ritual, but not all rituals effect the same ones. Some rituals render mortal human beings immortal. Some bring a transcendent god into material present existence. Some summon rainfall to a parched land.

Laments, in the strict sense of wept texted singing performed in response to a person's death, have been shown by Urban, Feld, and others to have many striking formal features in common worldwide. But what such laments actually do—the changes they effect or are meant to effect—differ widely from one society to another. Some guide the soul of the dead to a preferred place. Some decry the sorrowful life of the singer herself. Some close the broken circle and allow the living to go on unhaunted and free of the pull that the dead exert to bring their loved ones over to the other side. Many are surely cathartic, and many are multivalent and meant to be so.

What anthropologists write about people certainly affects how those people view themselves, how other people view them, what actions they may take, and what actions will be taken with respect to them by outsiders. Good ethnographic writing is necessarily always mimetic, always an attempt at accurate reflection, and through the act of mimesis, the act of reflection, the mime as mirror is changed. And the reflection is always necessarily imperfect, a changed reflection as in a distorted mirror, and the changed reflection may in time move reality to reflect upon and perhaps even mime the mimesis.

Do journalists not engage in public rituals even more than anthropologists? And how is anthropological public ritual linked to public anthropology, where the specific aim is to effect change?

A range of mostly still undocumented communication forms have formal, emotional, and sociological traits in common with lament. For example, there is a New Zealand radio talk show on which young-adult callers phone in to talk about their problems, with weeping features prominent in their speech. Anthropological books and papers lamenting the loss of an idealized past, a loss caused by the destructions of modernity, arguably have no more in common with lament strictly defined than this talk show.

Deborah Tannen has shown that ordinary dinner-table conversation is laced with poetic features. Much ordinary conversation is poetic in this sense; one may analyze any conversation and find poetic features in it. Feld's talk in the interview quoted is no exception. It may even be argued that conversation is near-impossible and certainly difficult in the absence of poetic features.

Therefore, the fact that Feld's talk in the interview evinces poetic features cannot in itself be taken as a sign that Feld has absorbed the poetry of laments. It is not that he has not

been affected by what he has heard in Bosavi; of course he has. He is talking about the content of a tape which he has just heard and has listened to and analyzed again and again. If he were not affected by it, if he did not echo some of it in his conversation about it, there would be something wrong.

Wilce's paper gives us all much to think about. It is not gospel, however, and I don't think he would want it to be taken that way.

Reply

I thank my colleagues for their thoughtful and productive engagements with my argument. I attempted to transgress "anxious borders"—theme of the 2005 AAA meetings—by locating anthropologists with the others we normally think of as ritual actors. Trawick is right—in doing so I intended no insult, certainly none to Feld. Why should uncovering double-voicing in our writing embarrass us when it pervades works we admire and respectfully engage? I argued that the magnet of ritual exerts its pull on anthropological productions, that this is particularly clear in ethnographic writing on lament, and that it becomes apparent in shifts in grammatical (verb) voice and in double-voiced conclusions. Of course, anthropologists do not openly embrace a ritual role for themselves, nor does a ritual voice dominate our writing. And my claims about anthropological writing and ritual in general are not (contra Strauss) about its being "formulaic."

Silverstein is right—generally, a lack of "dense superposition of metasemiosis" in anthropological writing sets it apart from lament texts and other text artifacts of explicit ritual. In anthropological text, we are no more likely to encounter such elaborated self-indexing of ritualization than we are to encounter an unmitigated optative verb. After all, few of us see our writing as ritual activity or performative contribution to any dramatic histories. Some anthropological filmmakers appear to differ in this respect. When David Maybury-Lewis opens each film in the *Millennium* series with the words, "My journey is to seek tribal wisdom for the modern world," he introduces a trope that is richly ("hypertrophically") elaborated throughout the series. "The journey" resonates with explicit ritual (pilgrimage). I had to delete from the final version of my article an analysis of *Millennium* and other films. Cinematic magic plays a significant role in modern cultural production (for critical analysis, see Moore 1992, 2000). For Goodman (1992), *Millennium* is "a sermon" and listening to it entails "a form of penance"; for Goodman and myself, it operates in the zone of ritual. If we place all anthropological productions on a continuum with *Millennium* at one extreme, the sort of writings Silverstein describes as escaping the savage slot by focusing on cultural processes rather than isolated collectible cultures and perhaps this article's poetic analysis of metalaments fall at the other.

The “hypertrophied tropes” that characterize explicit ritual may be rare in anthropological writing, but *Tristes Tropiques* is an exception (as is Kuipers 1998). As the translator notes, its title could be rendered *Alas for the Tropics*—appropriate for a lament. Not only can we say, with Herzfeld, that the book is a rite of passage; it also elaborately “plays upon the fundamental structures of passage . . . ; and all the part and chapter headings continue the punning image of a structural homology between the initiand’s voyage out and the initiate’s return home” (Herzfeld 1992, 58). In focusing only on Lévi-Strauss’s *conclusion* as I did in mine I neglected to show that the whole book is thoroughly, redundantly, hypertrophically structured as a passage, ritualistically initiating the reader into the mysteries revealed only at journey’s (and text’s) end. And what else are we to call it besides an initiation into mysteries when, by its end, Lévi-Strauss has long since shifted from narrating a geographic journey to inciting readers to “contemplation” of such mysteries as “man’s” not being “alone in the universe”—a truth to be apperceived in “the brief glance, heavy with patience, serenity and mutual forgiveness, that, through some involuntary understanding, one can sometimes exchange with a cat” (1974 [1955], 414–15)? *Tristes Tropiques* is not outmoded as Surrallés implies. It shows us how to merge “poetics and science,” to allow textual form to be *part of our argument* (Herzfeld 1992, 69), and it reveals how our texts may at times work at another level, too.

This brings us to the far-reaching issues Reddy raises. If indeed anthropological writing *can* be ritual activity, he says, this complicates anthropology’s status as a social science grounded on reliable witness. Though I appreciate the epochal significance this assigns such work as mine (by no means mine alone), I am uncomfortable with the sharp distinction it makes between sciences and humanities (or poetics). Anthropology’s role in ritual should be its natural object of study—if we merge science and poetics. Whether we see ourselves as humanists or human scientists, we confront mimesis, as Trawick does, and trace questions of comparison and contrast, as Trawick, Strauss, and Surrallés do. My argument and Desjarlais’s is that mimesis deeply affects the mirrored (e.g., Meme Lama) not only insofar as s/he is an altered reflection and not just through reflection on the mimesis (Trawick).

Yes, not all laments are magical (Trawick); my focus on the magical sort enabled me to clarify my argument about ritual in general and anthropological writing in particular. It would be worthwhile to formulate a typology of lament genres, to explain why some were or are relatively cathartic while others serve a more cosmic function. South Asia, where both Trawick and I have worked, may be inhospitable to magical lament because of millennia-old scriptural critiques of lament and its performers. The need to end stories on a positive rather than a pessimistic note as those collected by Strauss do is only one need; my argument acknowledges lamenting as another.

In response to Feld, I never denied the disastrous effects denoted by words like “erasure,” “trashing,” or “stripping.” I

simply sought to add another layer of analysis, and I am grateful to Feld for mentioning that “stripping” was the *missionaries’* term for the way missionized Bosavi should appear before God (without the “vanity of their ‘culture’”). I did not criticize Feld for failing to acknowledge Hane’s leadership. I *did* depart from Bosavi ethnographic particularity, calling spirit birds “departed souls.” The phrase “Kaluli lament” Feld himself used (Feld and Fox 1994, 38).

Some of Feld’s comments apparently presuppose that I attribute intentionality—for example, that he made himself a “priest”—where in fact I do not. I presume that a *post-modern public* “makes” him and others priests when they consume media in a vaguely conscious search for reassurance that rain forests might be places of hope. If using such language tars me with a New Age brush, that is another example of contagion like that which the article describes (from lament to ethnographic), in this case from the proclivities of New Age consumers to me.

It is ironic that the same argument appears to Strauss and Trawick so broad as to evoke many parallels and to Silverstein so narrow (or dated) that truly contemporary anthropologists may not identify with it. I am aware that anthropology as a whole is embarrassed by open grieving because its focus has shifted from the museological to the global-processual. Surrallés, Silverstein, and the invoked Trouillot seem to deny the coevalness (Fabian 1983, 31) of “mournful anthropologies” and “atonal” or “process anthropologies.” But the elegiac is a theme in the best of process anthropologies—Ivy’s marvelous *Discourse of the Vanishing* (1995), for example. Yes, the elegiac is ostensibly out there, in Japan, not in Ivy, but is there no feeling in her words (near the final page) “There is a loss of nostalgia itself, a double removal: not only has the imagined object of loss vanished, but even the sense of loss itself” (1995, 246)? Trouillot argues that anthropologists—especially post-modern ones—fall into a “savage slot” so generically Otherizing that it cannot deal with the “empirical destruction of the savage-object” (1991, 36). But such destruction, which for Trouillot is a trope (the loss of one member of the triad—order-utopia-savagery—that formed the symbolic field into which anthropology was born and helped constitute the West), is for Feld and myself a reality involving agents who are, in some lament traditions, named and condemned.

By making public the cause of suffering and death, laments can confront injustice. As did Strauss, Stewart (1988) collected stories in Appalachia. I recommended her approach to “the politics of nostalgia” (Strauss)—distinguishing resistant, local nostalgia (“of and for local, nameable places”) from “hegemonic” forms. Mourning in the spirit of lament is to melancholia as local, grounded nostalgia is to hegemonic, middle-class nostalgias. What is to be lamented is not a bygone world populated by distinct though perishing “cultures” (Silverstein) but violence, injustice, and erasure.

I emphasized the textual over the emergent interactive nature of ritual while acknowledging both. Surrallés aligns himself with Houseman and Severi (1998), who describe ritual

as a stylized form of (inter)action distinct from everyday forms in that it entails “ritual condensation” of otherwise opposing modes of relationship. My reference to ritual as entailing “semiotic forms deployed in the realtime of highly stylized social interaction” is not so different from this. According to Surrallés, I write as though everything were ritual. But surely there must be room for those of us—not only myself but Adams and Desjarlais—who trace dynamic connections between anthropological praxis and the lives and actions of those we study without accusing us of collapsing all distinctions. Moreover, reflection on anthropological writing as ritual, insofar as it problematizes in yet another way the subject-object distinction, is a means of uncovering “alterity within the discipline” and furthering its “tonal decentering.” That is exactly what Reddy considers my essay to have done.

I close by stressing the particular grammatico-semiotic tools that commonly render effective the textual grounds or means of transformation in explicit ritual and, in double-voiced form, some anthropological writing. Note how similar to my argument is the analysis by Roman Jakobson (Silverstein’s teacher) of the grammatical shifts in Pushkin’s poem “Cto v imeni tebe moëm” (“What means my name to thee?”)—from “the indicative mood of the mournful perfective verbs” (and a nocturnal theme) in the first three quatrains to imperative verbs (and a diurnal theme) in the fourth. These shifts enabled Pushkin to “to achieve a coherent, convincing, effective transition from the initial spiritual through the belligerent argumentation of the second strophe to the military orders and battle cries of the finale, or—in other words—how the poetic delight in verbal structures duly proportioned grows into a perceptive power leading to direct action” (1987*b*, 135).

Pushkin only wrote a poem, and anthropological writing can be dismissed as mere rhetoric. Yet both *move*—shift grammatical form and feeling over textual time. Pushkin’s poem and *Tristes Tropiques* move readers along another dimension, too. But where the poem only stirs up action, *Tristes Tropiques* and perhaps a number of other anthropological productions act on their own in a ritualized realm. They just cannot do so as openly and with quite the degree of elaboration as explicit ritual.

Admittedly, putting the spotlight on anthropological writing as ritual, often ritual mourning, might drive it farther underground if our overall discussion implicitly placed it in the savage slot. I hope that instead it has set it loose.

—James Wilce

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