DEAR DR. FREUD

CHARLES L. BRIGGS
University of California, Berkeley

Dear Dr. Freud,

I hope you don't mind my writing you. People might think it strange that I address myself to a dead person, casting the living as overhearers. Yet my letter is precisely about that subject, so this mode of address seems uncannily appropriate. And I think that this type of intimacy, which I hope does not seem inappropriate to you, will allow me more freedom to explore connections between two quite different sites that have opened up issues of grief and mourning for me. One is your essay "Mourning and Melancholia" and the psychoanalytic literature it inspired.[1] Another lies in laments I heard in the midst of a mysterious and frightening epidemic in the Delta Amacuro rain forest of Venezuela in 2008 and how they shaped indigenous leaders' efforts to diagnose the disease and demand action. Your essay helped me think through poetic and acoustic features of the laments, the demands they made on listeners, and what they can tell us about the work of mourning and anthropology. I think that you and other psychoanalysts might discover new lines of thinking in how these parents, some of whom lost nearly all their children to an undiagnosed illness, displayed collective and critical ways of producing knowledge and placing it in circulation.

My goal is to reflect on my engagement with "Mourning and Melancholia" and the particular forms of mourning I encountered, not to position myself as critiquing psychoanalysis or anthropology. A letter will, I think, provide a more

open space to explore insights that got lost in translation, literally. This format might help me respond more directly to what I perceive as the remarkably and productively tentative, even hesitant, tone you adopted in the essay, starting with your "warning against any over-estimation of the value of our conclusion," sustained in recurrent expressions like "I think" and "is not at all easy to explain." You opened up a space of indeterminacy by suggesting that mourning is both analytically perplexing and "is taken as a matter of course by us"; accordingly, you never seem to resolve the question of how we move between clinging to and reimagining "the object" and reality-testing. I want to further open up this space of indeterminacy and draw attention to its productivity.

Like many readers, I was captured by your expression "the work of mourning" and your sense that mourning is not pathological, so that "we look upon any interference with it as useless or even harmful." Your emphasis on the contradictory character of mourning engaged me deeply. On the one hand, the work of mourning involves hyper-cathexis, recovering and reinternalizing the image of the dead person and imbuing it with such intense psychic energy "through the medium of a hallucinatory wish-psychosis" that "the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged," creating a fantasy world in which we allow ourselves to believe that the person never really died or will return. Nevertheless, "reality-testing" requires that "each single one of the memories and situations of expectancy which demonstrate the libido's attachment to the lost object is met by the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists," leading to a struggle "so intense that a turning away from reality takes place." Crucially, you pointed out that this juxtaposition engenders both the "extraordinarily painful" character of mourning and the emergence of a "compromise" between the two processes. I think that listening to laments will deepen our understanding here by drawing attention to some acoustic, bodily, and material dimensions of this contradiction.

Other readers have distanced themselves from how they see you as projecting the temporality of mourning. My colleague at Berkeley, Judith Butler, suggested that your essay "implied a certain interchangeability of objects as a sign of hopefulness, as if the prospect of entering life anew made use of a kind of promiscuity of libidinal aim." She thought that a linearity informs your distinction between mourning and melancholia, which would equate mourning with forgetting. Butler argued that you later changed your mind, admitting in "The Ego and the Id" that reincorporation of the lost attachment "was essential to the task of mourning." And the French psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche contended that "the Freudian theory of mourning" involves a unilinear process of stripping away mem-

ories. Julia Kristeva extended your thinking about the pervasiveness and persistence of melancholia, depicting it less as pathology than as a painful but productive force. Anne Cheng, Angela Garcia, and other writers have reflected on the complex ways that melancholia gets woven into the fabric of racial inequalities and vice-versa, a point I want to discuss with you shortly.

I agree that casting mourning in linear and functionalist terms as a process that reestablishes a psychic status quo would be problematic. By suggesting that "when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again," you do invite such readings, but recently I have come to doubt that your text points us squarely in this direction. During six delightful months in Germany, I spent a great deal of time with "Trauer und Melancholie" in German. That exercise, admittedly long overdue, convinced me that this projection of a unlinear temporality in your essay partially emerges through problems of translation. The translation of the crucial paragraph in which you characterize the contradictory nature of mourning suggests that the "orders" of the "respect for reality" "cannot be at once obeyed." The next sentence of the translation suggests that these "orders" "are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy."

Nevertheless, my reading of the German text suggests to me that these projections of a single, universal, unilinear temporality are absent. You continue: "Er wird nun im einzelnen unter großem Aufwand von Zeit und Besetzungsenergie durchgeführt und unterdes die Existenz des verlorenen Objekts psychisch fortgesetzt," which is translated, problematically I think, in the *Standard Edition* as "They are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged." You point to the need to link a "great expense of time and cathectic energy" to the specificities of individuals and situations. The next sentence, "Jede einzelne der Erinnerungen und Erwartungen" ("Each single one of the memories and expectations"), lodges the call for considering specificities (*einzelne* reappears) precisely in multiple temporalities, both pasts ("memories") and anticipated futures; mourning seems to multiply the complexity of interactions between pasts, presents, and futures. The English translation of the next sentence suggests that this work "is carried out piecemeal," again seemingly suggesting a gradualist temporality, if less explicitly. Your German text rather repeats the word *einzel* (*Einzeldurchführung*), pointing once again to specificities in particular acts of carrying out the "orders" of reality-testing. This sense of open-endedness and indeterminacy prompts you to a stunning admission: "Why this compromise . . . should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of economics." The

temporalities that unfold in the German text enabled me to find new ways of thinking about mourning, temporality, psychoanalysis, and anthropology.

I have always been perplexed, however, by the absence of an element that is prominent in *Jokes and Their Relationship to the Unconscious* and *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano suggested that you regard language as a referential apparatus. This statement certainly rings true for "Mourning and Melancholia," but in these other two works you pointed to how people engage the formal properties of language reflexively. Oddly, you left poetics out of "Mourning and Melancholia," and I missed your reflections on the role of poetics in shaping the struggle between reattachment to the "existence of the lost object" and "the testing of reality." So I invite you to take a journey with me to Delta Amacuro, to meet people who not only lodge the work of mourning in poetics but also reflect deeply on this process. There I think that you will find an eerie resonance with your call to attend to the specificities of struggles and compromises, of hyper-cathexis and reality-testing.

ON THE THRESHOLD IN MUAINA

The morning of July 28, 2008, in Muaina afforded one of those scenes that is both unimaginable and whose horror you know intimately, one where your feet seem to propel you inexorably into the middle of a disquieting space—and yet are susceptible to the urge to turn and run. The doorway, flooded with sunshine, led to a darkened interior that would confront us with our first direct encounter with death. Not just any death, but a body claimed by an epidemic of a "mysterious disease" in this small settlement where the rain forest meets the Caribbean in eastern Venezuela, just one of numerous strange fatalities. Having recruited us for the investigation they were organizing, Conrado and Enrique Moraleda had invited Clara Mantini-Briggs, Norbelys Gómez, Tirso Gómez, and me to a *meeting*, a sober gathering in which measured voices would provide clues that might add up to a diagnosis. But this is what we saw:

First our eyes were directed to the right side of the house, where a *wisidatu* (a particular type of healer) with graying hair and a kind face was treating a young man in a hammock. His song, which called on *hebu* (pathogens treated by the *wisidatu*) to leave the body, was drowned out by the voices of five women and one adolescent who became visible as we took another step forward along the dock. Standing directly opposite the doorway, we also saw a young man lying in a coffin, bringing visual and auditory senses into disconcerting alignment. One of the faces, transformed into a mask of grief and fatigue by more than a day of

mourning, belonged to Florencia Macotera, the mother of Mamerto Pizarro, the third Muaina resident to die from the unknown disease; beside her Mamerto's grandmother, two of his aunts, a sister, and a brother rocked back and forth as they collectively composed and performed laments. The exhaustion that would have ordinarily weakened their voices by this time had been overpowered by the realization that they would soon take Mamerto to the cemetery.

In retrospect, witnessing that scene seems both accidental and overdetermined. Our relationship to the Delta and its residents has been long and intense. I began working there in 1986, learned the language (Warao), and studied healing, narratives, indigenous legal practices, gender relations, and the racialization of citizenship. Given the precariousness of health conditions, I witnessed numerous wakes and documented several; after a couple of years had passed and people wanted to hear my recordings, I sat with women for extended periods, transcribing their words and discussing performances. Clara, a Venezuelan public health physician, began working for Delta Amacuro's Regional Health Service (RHS) in April 1992, just months before a cholera epidemic killed some five hundred indigenous residents. She served as the assistant epidemiologist and the state director of health education. After collaborating with indigenous communities to establish nursing stations and prevention programs, we researched the underpinnings, bureaucratic as much as epidemiological, of such extensive death from a preventable and treatable bacterial infection.

After years of working elsewhere in Venezuela, it was the book that documented this epidemic, *Stories in the Time of Cholera*, that brought us back in 2008. Collaborating with Norbelys and Tirso Gómez and residents of several communities, we were using income derived from royalties and prizes to explore new models for health programs. We had documented how President Hugo Chávez's socialist revolution had brought doctors, mainly Cubans, to live in most low-income urban neighborhoods in Venezuela. Nevertheless, other than the creation of two larger facilities, the revolution had brought few changes to Delta health conditions. More than a quarter of children still died, mostly as infants from treatable diarrheal and respiratory infections. Then an epidemic started in Mukoboina, a community of about seventy-five residents, in July 2007; by January, eight children had died. Then children started dying in neighboring communities. When strange symptoms appeared, parents took their children to healers and the local doctor, but neither could save them. Patients were referred to metropolitan hospitals, but all died.

As the president of the Health Committee, Conrado Moraleda observed the patients in the local clinic; parents and leaders pressed him to demand that public health officials take firmer steps to diagnose the disease and stop the epidemic. Cuban and Venezuelan epidemiologists visited, but they could not sort it out. Conrado appealed to the regional legislature, but the public meeting that resulted infuriated health officials. When a third wave of deaths began in June 2008 and the regional government seemed to have given up, Conrado and Enrique decided to form their own team to investigate the epidemic and take the results directly to officials and journalists in Caracas, the national capital. Having stumbled onto the epidemic, we were looking for the resident physician to ask what he knew about the strange cases when Conrado buttonholed us as we ascended the clinic's stairs. "You have to help us! You, Dr. Clara, must work as a physician, and you, Dokomuru," my Warao name, "you have to work with us in finding out what is killing the children." I was positioned as an anthropologist, but my training as a healer, my ability to translate between diagnostic languages, and my photographic training were also interpellated. The investigation began in Muaina.

I think you would be fascinated to see how the features of the work of mourning you analyzed—its contradictory dimensions, the tremendous investment of psychic energy, and the depth of the pain—were highlighted by lamenters' words and voices. Each explored the specificity of the process of resurrecting *Erinnerungen*, memories, investing them with tremendous poetic, musical, and psychic energy. Mamerto's brother Melvi reflected on how they played together as children, traveled with their parents to their mother's natal community to garden, and, shortly before Mamerto died, worked together in constructing houses. His grandmother remembered that he sometimes slept in her house and brought her fish. Mamerto's mother reflected with pride on his studies at the Indigenous University of Venezuela.

Infusing our consideration of mourning with attention to poetic detail can provide insight into complex issues of temporality. In "Mourning and Melancholia," you used the power of German's noun morphology to build evocative phrases around complex nouns, as when you joined *Kompromißleistung* (accomplishment of a compromise), *Einzeldurchführung* (particular acts of implementation), and *Realitätsgebotes* (dictates of reality). Although Warao grammar can rival German in the complexity of nominal constructions, the poetic action in laments lies in the verbs: in the laments for Mamerto, mourners wove complex temporalities deeply into poetic images. Lamenters attached the present-tense marker –*ya* and the durative aspect form –*ha* to verb stems, sometimes both in the same

word, to make images of the deceased seem as if they were unfolding at that moment and would continue indefinitely into the future. Performers created tiny imagist poems that placed listeners in the middle of actions, as if we were currently sharing these experiences with the performers. At the same time, a struggle ensued within each voice through verb endings marked as past and punctual, particularly *–(n)ae*; here reality-testing took each image and burst it apart.

This short passage from Melvi's lament suggests how finely the two temporalities were woven together.

1. *Mano, oko daobasa serebu**ya** makina eku*,
   My brother, we were making boards together in the sawmill,
2. *ama ihi mamo**ae** diana.*
   now you have left me.
3. *Ihi yakerakore aniaokawitu karamu**yaha** hatanae*,
   When you were well you used to get up right at dawn,
4. *planta aida esoho**yaha** gasoi hatane tatukamo*,
   you were filling the large generator with diesel,
5. *oko yaota**ya** yoriwere dao sepe**yaha**,*
   we were working alongside one another planing the wood,
6. *ihi mate yakerakore, wabanahakore*,
   while you were still well, before you died.
7. *Ama ihi momi wab**ae**.*
   Now you died apart from me.

In lines 1 and 3 to 6 we stand alongside Melvi as he is watching Mamerto get up at dawn and fill the generator and as the two brothers are milling lumber. Melvi uses grammatical features that suspend time, placing Melvi, Mamerto, and listeners in the middle of these scenes. Lines 2 and 7 contrastively place these memories and expectations in a past that has been sealed off from presents and futures. These features thus created the sort of struggle between multiple temporalities— lingering pasts, anticipated futures, and a harsh reality of temporal rupture—that you depicted. There is nothing either gradual or linear here. The presents that each performer constructed were not bounded points in a linear trajectory but sites in which shifting, violent, and unavoidable juxtapositions of multiple temporalities emerged. Struggles and compromises also became apparent in how these words were sung. In previous work I have referred to lines 1 and 3 to 6 as "textual phrases"; the focus is more textual than musical, consisting of bursts of words that invite listeners—including other lamenters—to concentrate on their seman-

tic content and poetic contours. Refrains, on the other hand, are associated with reality-testing; here narrative elaboration gives way to bald statements about the finality of death. These moments of reality-testing provided resting spaces in which lamenters listened to other performers.

The performance thus made this struggle explicit from moment to moment through both poetics and the musical materiality of voices. Putting poetics and acoustics into the equation could enable us contribute to how psychoanalysts have extended your discussion of mourning. I think Melanie Klein added a great deal to our language for talking about mourning. She suggested that young children build internal images of external objects (particularly of mother and father), thereby possessing them inside their bodies as internal objects. This world of internalized objects is not static but changes continually through the incorporation of new people and experiences, real and fantasized. Klein echoed your insightful comments on the terrible pain of mourning, arguing that it is produced by losing the person in the real world, which induces distrust of the external world in general and a shattering of this carefully constructed internal world. Klein suggested that the work of mourning requires mourners "to rebuild with anguish the inner world, which is felt to be in danger of deteriorating and collapsing." Although Klein referred to "the slow process of testing reality in the work of mourning," seemingly subscribing to a gradualist view, she emphasized the conflicting emotions that emerge in juxtaposing "passing states of elation . . . due to the feeling of possessing the perfect love object (idealized) inside" with intense sorrow, distress, and hatred. Klein thus productively left room for iterability, arguing that grief moves in waves, much as we saw in the laments. Klein's formulation captures how each mourner began to rebuild her or his internal world, which initially fell apart after the death of Mamerto's younger brother, Dalvi. The poetics of lament are crucial here in suggesting how mourners repeatedly took images from a shattered external world and imbued them with wholeness, immediacy, and a sense of the real, as Jacques Lacan might put it. If the crucial process, following Klein, is reconstituting the mechanism by which internal and external objects are co-constructed, then the poetics and acoustic/bodily materialities of laments provide an impressive cultural form that simultaneously models how this process can be accomplished and demonstrates its precarity.

I think you might appreciate the work of Juan-David Nasio, an Argentine-born student of Lacan. Nasio followed you in tracing how love progressively dominates our internal world by taking in the image of someone we love in such

a way as to "cover him or her over as ivy covers a stone wall." I would add that in grief we seem to painfully retrace how our love for a person has attached itself "in very particular places of the wall, in its cracks and crevices," revealing how deeply and minutely our lives became intertwined. The lament verses were like vines that extended simultaneously into the performer and into Mamerto, tracing how these experiences linked them psychically, thereby resulting in intense pain and disorientation when they suddenly seemed to have been severed. Psychoanalytic accounts of mourning and these laments similarly point to how we lose parts of ourselves as we lose an other. In analyzing the element of the imaginary, Nasio complements the ivy metaphor by describing how internalizing the loved person in the unconscious enables us to see reflections of other internalized objects, including images of ourselves, not like "the smooth surface of a lens, but as a mirror broken up into small, mobile fragments of glass on which confused images of the other and of myself are reflected." Poetic and musical features of laments suggest how memories are fragmented, as in the ivy and mirror metaphors, but also linked by virtue of their inclusion within a poetic and musical structure.

Laplanche productively charted the complexity of temporality in his evocation of Penelope in Homer's *Odyssey*. She famously embodied her mourning for Odysseus by weaving a shroud for his father, frustrating her suitors for three years:

> "Young men, my suitors, now my lord is dead,
> let me finish my weaving before I marry . . . ."
> So every day she wove on the great loom—
> but every night by torchlight she unwove it.

Laplanche used this metaphor to disagree with your account: "Penelope does not cut the threads, as in the Freudian theory of mourning; she patiently unpicks them, to be able to compose them again in a different way." Laplanche suggests that this work requires time, is repetitive, and, thinking about Lacan's account of how prohibiting the use of the names of the dead constitutes a linguistic reserve, he argued that "it sets aside a reserve." My rereading of temporality in your essay suggests that Laplanche provides us with a rich metaphor less for challenging your account than for extending it.

ACOUSTICS AND AFFECTS IN THE COLLECTIVE WORK OF MOURNING

Reworking these issues through the lens of poetics, Kristeva suggested that mourning and melancholia can result in a dramatic disruption of meaning. She argued that when the "symbolic" (semantically based) process falls short, the "semiotic" process, which does not center on referential meaning, gains ground: "Melody, rhythm, semantic polyvalency, the so-called poetic form, which decomposes and recomposes signs," are crucial. Kristeva further opened up space for poetics and acoustics in taking up the relationship between beauty and mourning you discussed in "On Transience." "When we have been able to go through our melancholia to the point of becoming interested in the life of signs, beauty may also grab hold of us to bear witness for someone who grandly discovered the royal way through which humanity transcends the grief of being apart: the way of speech given to suffering, including screams, music, silence, and laughter." The anthropologist Renato Rosado similarly explored connections between poetics and grief through poems he composed after the tragic death of his wife, Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo.

An essay by the sociologist Erving Goffman, "Response Cries," seems particularly revealing here. He suggested that such utterances as "ouch" or "whoops," exclaimed suddenly after some kind of mishap, signal a temporary loss of control. Providing what appear to be natural, involuntary indexes of the emotional and/ or physical state of the person who uttered them, they seem to provide listeners, even strangers, access to our internal states. Nevertheless, "response cries" are conventional signals whose expression is shaped by our perception of those around us: children learn to emit different response cries when they drop something in the presence of peers, grandparents, or teachers. Goffman's formulation captures how such expressions seem to convey transparently what is happening within individual bodies and simultaneously to engage social relations, asking overhearers to interpret signs of internal distress as constructing both utterers and overhearers as particular types of social beings.

Despite his genius, Goffman was given to anecdotal examples. Attending to acoustic features of the laments for Mamerto can open up Goffman's concept and help us see how acoustics forms part of the work of mourning. In laments, pain adopts the acoustic features of crying, of moans and wails, yet at the same time it is stylized. Warao lamenters use "creaky voice," low pitch, high volume, and a special, affectively charged timbre, the suppression of the "singer's formant" between 1.8 and 3.8 kHz. These features are not read as consciously stylized, as

in storytelling, but as involuntary, transparent embodiments of internal, affective states. This construction of acoustics/affect relations is said to generate their compelling effects on listeners: "What they're crying is entirely true; they couldn't cry lies." Goffman located response cries in words; thinking about lamentation would point to the centrality of acoustics. I found previously that if women use the same poetic structure but do not invest their words with these acoustic features, particularly the special timbre, they elicit a different response in listeners—they can be accused of faking it.

Goffman's work might lead us to imagine this projection of internal states as emerging accidentally. Kristeva, given the depth of her explorations of psychoanalysis, language, and poetics, unsurprisingly has much to teach us about how we are constantly providing iconic, in Charles S. Peirce's terms, constructions of internal processes. Her distinction between semiotic and symbolic processes opens up a space for rethinking Goffman's response cries. The subject does not enter into the semiotic process with a clearly defined identity shaped prior to and independent of the discourse; it is rather emergent through semiotic features. Poetics enters into both semiotic and symbolic processes; through the semiotic, poetic dimensions intersect with acoustic ones in providing extensive modes of constituting and voicing selves. I think, Dr. Freud, that given how referential content, poetics, grammar, bodies, music, and other acoustic dimensions come together in laments, they provide one of the contexts in which semiotic and symbolic processes come closest to merging. This, I think, constitutes part of the tremendous affective and social power of laments, and it suggests why they have interested anthropologists concerned with the relationship between acoustics and embodiment.

Reflecting on the work of mourning vis-à-vis these laments provides us with a new way of thinking through what has been framed as the problem of the limits of language in relationship to mourning. Eric Santner takes Paul de Man to task for "turning death into a purely linguistic operation," which leads de Man to preclude "the possibility of distinguishing one victim from any other." Bringing in specificities of historical circumstances, deaths, and acts of mourning, of bodies and materialities, of affects, of the social and psychic productivity of mourning seems to position it beyond the limits of language. But thinking about these laments suggests that the problem might rather lie in the adoption of a limited, referentialist view of language, in its reduction to Kristeva's symbolic process. Taking lamentation for a model of language in mourning would leave such binaries

behind by linking symbolic to semiotic dimensions, to the specificities and materialities of bodies, acoustics, and poetics.

I think that we can bring Goffman's and Kristeva's analyses together productively, albeit keeping their differing approaches in mind. Although Goffman seemed to view response cries as pointing to broader dimensions of speech and social interaction, he framed them as accidental, unusual features. Reflecting on spirit possession, Vincent Crapanzano suggested that such outbursts can be therapeutic when their expression is structured. Elaborately and multiply patterned, laments are prolonged performances of response cries that provide seemingly unmediated reflections of internal states and yet simultaneously model how listeners should hear them and what they should feel. Kristeva characterized semiotic process as a ubiquitous dimension of everyday speech, and her concept pointed in the direction of broader acoustic, poetic, and musical patterns. Goffman suggested that the projection of internal states is social and interactional, always more than an internal splitting of the self. In talking about laments, listeners feel that these acoustic features create similar bodily and psychic responses *within them*, saying that they "cry along behind" lamenters; we could say, in Nasio's terms, that they, like fellow performers, are reflecting on the particular vines that extended between them and the deceased.

Here I hope you will find a powerful similarity between lamentation and psychoanalysis. Lacan defined psychoanalysis as practices of listening. He was struck by "the subject's relation to his own speech, in which the important factor is rather masked by the purely acoustic fact that he cannot speak without hearing himself" and by "the fact that he cannot listen to himself without being divided as far as the behaviour of the consciousness is concerned." In analysis, patients learn to listen to their own speech, including its silences and the multiple voices that constitute it, just as the analyst's role revolves around practices of listening. The locus of performativity and the possibilities for transforming the subject lie in listening as much as in speaking, in an interactive setting in which psychoanalysts are listening too. The lamentation process similarly requires performers to listen closely to their own voices—as echoed in the words and acoustic features of the voices of their fellow performers.

What I am suggesting, Dr. Freud, is that the effects of lamentation in splitting subjects and doubling processes of listening impact overhearers powerfully as well, pointing to crucial collective as well as individual and intrapsychic dimensions of the work of mourning. Mamerto's relatives performed laments *collectively*. One person took the lead at any given moment, contributing themes

that were then taken up by others. The remaining lamenters did not voice the same words or sing at precisely the same time or with identical pitch or voice quality; rather, other singers transposed these lines, reflecting their own relationship with Mamerto and the most affectively charged aspects of their experiences. In musical terms, this relationship is called *polyphony*. Voices were coordinated in terms of pitch, volume, affective intensity, and timbre, as well as content, but these features never precisely coincided: voices never gave up their individuality. Composing, transposing, performing, and listening thus emerged together, with the emphasis shifting from one process to another from moment to moment.

In these laments, the orientation toward overhearers in the construction of internal states, which Goffman elucidated, extended beyond fellow performers. In Muaina, houses largely lack walls; accordingly, other residents were thrust into the acoustic space of mourning. Even if Mamerto was not their relative, the pain was inescapably *inside* everyone as their eardrums vibrated with the frequency of the affects generated by Florencia Macotera and other lamenters. As Nadia Seremetakis argued for Greek laments, listening engages a broader sensorium and interpellates the body. As my colleague Charles Hirschkind suggested for Islamic sermons on cassettes, listening requires listeners to locate themselves in affective and ethical soundscapes. Those in earshot could not avoid being interpellated by the sensory, ethical, affective, and bodily demands of the laments for Mamerto.

Accepting Enrique's invitation to the meeting thus entailed becoming an overhearer of the lamentation. By the time Macotera crossed the dock from her house to take her turn in the white plastic narrator's chair, we had been listening all morning to how she moved between reinternalizing powerful images of her two sons to announcing the finality of their deaths. Macotera walked slowly, as if in a trance. All eyes shifted from the previous witness, who wrapped up swiftly; everyone stepped aside. Macotera was wearing a white blouse and a light green skirt. Her hair, hanging haphazardly in front and back, and her look of exhaustion inscribed mourning on her body. The force and passion of the ritual wailing did not diminish but seemed to move toward a crescendo as she began. Her three-year-old daughter hovered around her, listening intently while alternately wrapping around herself the dress that she was carrying, and twirling it.

Macotera focused her lament on Mamerto, but she wove in verses that evoked the prior death of her younger son. The effect was to heighten the iterative qualities and the affective surplus of fear, frustration, and determination she experienced as Dalvi's symptoms seemed to leap from his dead body into that of

her oldest child. In the narrative she told at the meeting, Macotera recounted how Dalvi first grew feverish at the wake of a cousin, Muaina's first fatality in the epidemic. She weaves the story of the progression of Dalvi's symptoms into that of efforts by the local nurse and healers to diagnose and treat him. Given your training as a physician and your interest in poetics, Dr. Freud, you might not be surprised to learn that the narrative climax seemed to mirror the increasing severity of symptoms, particularly strange neurological manifestations. Arriving in a larger community where both doctors and more experienced healers were available, Dalvi seemed to be fighting cartoon villains regularly beamed into Muaina via DirecTV satellite dishes; as death drew near he declared, "Mama, the monsters have killed me, they have taken my heart." His voice began to fade: "Mama, I am leaving without you now, I'm going now. My dead cousin Eduardito has come to get me, he's with me, I'm going now, we're going now." Note how Dalvi's reported words seem to provide Macotera with lines for the lament that she would soon be singing. Attempting to hang onto Dalvi, Macotera pleaded, "don't die yet son, wait a little longer for me." Moved, he comforted her, "OK, I'll stay, I won't die. I'm not going to die, Mama." But she could see that his eyes were closed, his body growing cold, his voice fading away. "Mama, Mama, I won't die, I won't die, I won't die Mama, for you I won't die. My body will grow cold, but I won't die. I'm going to come for you, Mama, wait for me, Mama. When I die, don't cry for me, don't cry for me." "And then," concluded Macotera, "he grew silent. My son Dalvi died." At that moment Macotera shifted quickly to recounting how Mamerto's symptoms began even as the family was returning from Dalvi's burial. Before she could finish telling of Mamerto's death, the grief became too intense, and she suddenly rose up, retraced her steps across the dock, and transformed her words back into lamentation.

The rich detail in Macotera's testimony helped us in the diagnostic process. The dying words of a nine-year-old boy, moving between fantastic battles with cartoon villains and a remarkably sensitive and articulate attempt to shield his mother from mourning, signaled to us that the disease might have a crucial neurological dimension. Macotera's emphasis on the emergence of identical symptoms—fever, headache, a feeling of itching in the feet that turned to numbness, then paralysis, and then ascended upward, along with hydrophobia, a fear of water— provided us with a major clue. Given your training as a neurologist, Dr. Freud, I bet you have already figured out that *rabies* was behind the epidemic. As she was leaving, Clara asked Macotera if either son had been bitten by an animal. When Macotera replied that both had received bat bites about a month before

they developed symptoms, meaning that they had been bitten nocturnally by vampire bats, a hypothesis regarding the means of transmission emerged.

Listening sideways to Macotera's lamentation shaped how we subsequently heard her narrative, producing an involuntary doubling. The affective intensity of her narration, simultaneously etched onto her body, was doubled by the super-imposition of the remembered acoustic features of her lament. Her narrative was overlaid yet again by the acoustics of the laments still emerging next door. Even the less charged words of other witnesses, such as those of reflections by Muaina's nurse and other residents, were shot through with the acoustic features of the laments in ways that we would never be able to disentangle, even as we transposed them into written documents for transport to distal sites.

TOWARD A POLITICS OF SPECIFICITY

Given your stress on specificities in the work of mourning, I would have liked to see you analyze particular cases, as you do elsewhere. You rely on two general figures, "the mourner" and "the loved person" (*geliebte Person*) or "love object" (*Liebesobjekt*). I miss here the personal introspection that provided such poignant moments in some of your other work. Matthew von Unwerth suggests that beyond psychoanalytic disputes that resulted in the loss of friendships, "re-flection of the current affairs of a world gone mad" during World War I sparked a return "to a problem that had long been the subject of his interest—the fate of pain and loss in human memory." Because I am an anthropologist rather than a psychoanalyst, please allow me to return to the encounter with Mamerto's mourners in reflecting on the importance of whose pasts are remembered, whose futures lost, and which realities tested. Subsequent conversations with Mamerto's parents and brother Melvi taught me much about the nature of the reality-testing that had taken place.

Mamerto was wheeled into the Intensive Care Unit on the fifth floor of the Uyapar Hospital in Puerto Ordaz, a city in neighboring Bolivar State. There a guard escorted Mamerto's father and wife through a strangely vacant waiting room. They noticed a large clock with red digital numbers of the same sort that seemed to proliferate in every corridor. The date and hour portions were strangely blank; to the right of flashing dots it read ":82," as if time had been erased or was out of whack. The guard's gesture forced them onto the landing, a space of about 2x4 meters in which around fifteen people were standing, sitting on the floor, or leaning against a mound of coolers, thermoses, pillows, and satchels. Two dozen more people were distributed in the stairwell leading to the

fourth floor. Rather than welcoming Elbia Torres and her father-in-law as two more worried relatives of poor patients in a public hospital, people stared at them as if they were foreign objects. A boy of about eight pointed to them, looked up at his mother, and said "look, Mama, Indians!" This detail brought me back to the psychiatrist Franz Fanon's reflection on a boy's remark, "'Look, a Negro!'" Fanon wrote: "My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning." After a sleepless night in a rural clinic, each step of the journey—a boat trip at dawn, anxious hours in the Tucupita Hospital, and two long ambulance rides—seemed to dislodge Mamerto's wife and father progressively from all that was safe and familiar. Being unwelcomed into this disorderly space in a modern, orderly hospital was just too much.

Retreating to the next landing, which had fewer occupants, Elbia sat in a corner and slept while Pizarro remained vigilant. At 5:00AM, a nurse appeared, leading people to jump up and push toward the entrance. She called out "Indalesio Pizarro." Following her, a physician standing in the middle of the corridor told Pizarro matter-of-factly, "Your son is dead." Pizarro recrossed the waiting area slowly, its digital clock still reading ":82." Awakening Elbia on the landing below, he seemed to mirror the doctor's curt, unfeeling words: "My son is dead." "What are we going to do?" she asked. "We have to wait."

Did Macotera's and Pizarro's reality-testing begin then, and were the multiple forms of symbolic violence that organized space in the stairwell part of that reality? Seeing Mamerto hooked up in the ICU, Pizarro sensed that death was near: "Everything fell on top of him. The machines failed him there—everything failed him." Did reality-testing begin then? Did the succession of medical technologies—and the clock's capacity to disjoint time—constitute the reality that was shaping this testing? Did it begin when Macotera first declared that Mamerto's symptoms were "just the same as his younger brother's"? Dalvi felt sick during the wake conducted for his cousin, Eduardito, whose symptoms had appeared as he returned from the funeral of a cousin in another community. And the deaths in Muaina were not the first: thirty-four children and young adults had already died. Did reality-testing begin when "Warao Radio," as regional word-of-mouth transmission is called, brought stories of the first death to Muaina? Or did reality-testing begin when two of the couple's children died as infants? In the eyes of health officials, losing just under 30 percent of one's children (prior to Dalvi's and Mamerto's deaths) was considered "normal."

But Mamerto did not die as a child, his death was not a "normal" death, and his life had been infused with important specificities. Enrique had particular rea-

sons for launching the investigation next to Mamerto's body. Muaina, you see, was established by one of the most charismatic and creative indigenous leaders in Venezuela, Enrique's and Conrado's brother Librado, who was one of my closest friends. A socialist long before Chávez became president, Librado founded Muaina as a model socialist community. Paulo Freire would have loved it: Librado, an educator, created a critical pedagogy that juxtaposed indigenous knowledge production with access to Spanish, literacy, and "Western" forms of knowledge. Librado also helped create the Indigenous University of Venezuela, hoping to train a new set of national leaders who could challenge anti-indigenous racism. Facing terminal cancer, Librado sensed a potential leader in Mamerto and enrolled him in the university. Mamerto quickly distinguished himself by his intelligence, dedication, and vision; within three years he had written two short book manuscripts and translated portions of the Bolivarian Constitution into Warao. With Mamerto's death, reality-testing thus jumped scale: as Pizarro and Macotera were mourning their firstborn son, Muaina was lamenting the death of its socialist dream yet again. Enrique and Conrado were mourning the demise of their brother's dream anew.

CIRCULATION: On the Politics of Indexicality and Erasure

Our recruitment was doubled that day in Muaina, Dr. Freud; having been asked to join Conrado's and Enrique's investigation, we were called to participate in the work of mourning for Mamerto. Both tasks involved practices of listening, but they were not focused solely on these genres or on the contexts of their performance. I have pointed to the importance of circulation, to how words, acoustics, and affects moved between performers, overhearers, and narrators. Processes of circulation were modeled multiply through poetic and acoustic features of lamentation narratives and frequent references to how news of the epidemic had been moving for more than a year and was circulating at that moment. Crucially, this modeling of past and present circulations was transformed into projected futures and distal contexts from the moment we arrived: lamenters charged the team to "take our words to Chávez!" Carrying out this charge required that the team, consisting of Clara, Conrado, Enrique, Norbelys, Tirso, and me, document the epidemic and take our findings to national officials and journalists in Caracas. In the remarks with which he opened the meeting, Enrique anticipated the verbal and visual materialities that would be required to make this jump in scale by asking Muaina residents for permission to record and photograph the proceedings, providing "a base, a support, a force to enable us to convey this

painful situation that is taking place." He similarly told us after the fact what agreeing to join the investigation had entailed: collectively taking a report to Caracas.

The boldness and the potential political effects of this circulatory project struck us immediately. The projection of an indigenous/nonindigenous chasm that sorts human beings into two vastly unequal categories lies at the heart of everyday practices in Delta Amacuro's State government, including its Ministry of Popular Power in Health branch. The stereotype of "the Warao," despite five hundred years of evidence to the contrary, suggests that "they" lack political agency and cannot rise above immediate material interests. One way that the racial status quo—and the viability of this feeble but enduring racial construction—is maintained is through the unstated rule that people classified as indigenous can only report problems and demand actions in private meetings with state officials in Tucupita, but they can never take their petitions to Caracas. Worse yet, reporting an epidemic of an infectious disease would challenge the RHS's monopoly over the circulation of epidemiological discourse—backed, the RHS often asserted, by law. Starting in September 2007, the RHS had struggled to keep news of the strange disease from circulating; epidemiological reports were carefully guarded internal, rather than public, documents. No wonder officials became enraged when Conrado, after closed-door meetings failed to prompt effective action, went public about the epidemic in February 2008. Unless sympathetic national officials overrode the angry reactions of regional subordinates, we were in for trouble.

Making the work of mourning mobile raises complex issues. The sociologist John Urry has suggested that casting such phenomena as walking, bicycles, cars, and airplanes as immanent embodiments of mobility required broad transformations of bodies, landscapes, the built environment, and social relations; he reminds us that the same processes produce *im*mobilities. Mobilizing scientific and medical objects entails specific requirements. The science studies scholar Bruno Latour has argued that scientific facts and concepts are often projected as "immutable mobiles"—as capable of traveling anywhere without changing their significance. Given that these should rely on a single body of "gold standard" evidence and common diagnostic categories, a doctor's pronouncement "this is rabies" should mean the same thing in Delta Amacuro as in the United States (where people die periodically of bat-transmitted rabies too). Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star have suggested that rendering diagnostic categories and statistics mobile requires two things. Particular assemblages of practices, epistemologies, and technologies

emerge at each site they are (re)produced. For example, reducing some five hundred cholera deaths in Delta Amacuro in 1992–1993 to the official count of thirteen involved inadequate health infrastructures, a "case definition" that rejected clinical in favor of laboratory evidence, limited laboratory testing facilities, racial profiling, and political pressure. Nevertheless, epidemiological discourse would be unlikely to travel if these complex assemblages remained attached to statistics and diagnostic categories. Accordingly, Bowker and Star suggest, indexical histories must be erased for categories and statistics to become mobile.

Herein lies a fundamental contradiction the six of us faced in carrying out the parents' charge to carry their words to Chávez. Neither the laments sung over Mamerto's body nor the narratives unfolding in the adjacent house were likely to travel beyond the rain forest or to interpellate epidemiologists, health officials, or journalists—none of whom could speak Warao or would accept these genres as conveying scientifically valid knowledge. We were asked to construct a classic epidemiological formulation, "N people died from X disease over Y period in Z area," one that would have the mobility to reach national officials. Suddenly, we were not medical anthropologists who exposed *other* people's indexical histories or critically engaged *their* erasures. We documented thirty-seven deaths in fourteen localities in meetings that created a complex knowledge-production process, one that drew on political oratory, indigenous medicine, dispute mediation, personal narratives, epidemiology, and clinical medicine. The long days of our investigation were punctuated by daily visits to Elbia Torres, Mamerto's wife, whose symptoms began while returning to Muaina from the urban hospital. Recognizing that her symptoms were identical, knowing that all patients had died, and remembering acutely the symbolic violence that she and Mamerto's father had experienced in the Uyapar Hospital, she decided to die in her parents' home. The indexical history we built thus included Clara's detailed examinations, Norbelys's provision of palliative care, and the photographs that the family asked me to take of her illness, wake, and funeral.

In preparing a report, we made painful decisions about what to erase. We had spent time listening to discussions of bad medicine (which anthropologists often refer to as "sorcery"). Nevertheless, Enrique stated: "After deep reflection, I reluctantly propose that all references to 'witchcraft' be erased from the final report—they shall remain with us." No one spoke; we understood all too well. Any allusion to bad medicine would render our efforts, to use the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's phrase, incarcerated by culture: our report would be dismissed

Figure 1. Elbia Torres Rivas, an hour before death, with her mother, Anita Rivas. (Photo by Charles L. Briggs)

as reflecting superstition, not science. Nevertheless, the cost of creating mobility would be too high if we severed indexical links to bodies, laments, and narratives.

Despite the risks, we made the journey. All of us supporters of the revolution, we framed our work as bolstering government efforts to confront health inequities and overcome discrimination against indigenous Venezuelans. Nevertheless, Caracas officials initially refused to accept our report, denying its mobility. "You should have stayed in Delta Amacuro and delivered it to officials there," they insisted, thereby reinscribing the racialization of space and speech. "We told them over and over again," Conrado countered, "and they didn't listen." A three-hour standoff ensued in the ministry's lobby. The team held its ground. The situation attracted the attention of national health reporters and of Simon Romero of the *New York Times*. When the photographer for *El Nacional* appeared, Enrique handed out several of my photographs. As they were being pictured, Enrique held up a photograph of Anita Rivas watching her daughter die (figure 1), Tirso a portrait of Elbia's grandfather (figure 2), and Norbelys one of Arsenio Torres performing a lament over his daughter's corpse (figure 3). In recirculating their account of the epidemic, they wanted to keep the images and laments attached to the account that the team had transported to Caracas, thereby preventing them

Figure 2. Elbia's grandfather, Tito Rivas, at the time of her death.
(Photo by Charles L. Briggs)

from becoming abstract words and numbers or further "proof" of indigenous stereotypes (figure 4).

CONCLUSION: Psychoanalysis, Anthropology, and the Work of Mourning

When asked why they had come to Caracas, Conrado, Enrique, Norbelys, and Tirso repeatedly pointed to the regional government's failure to respond adequately to the deaths. When the photojournalist's camera seemed to pose the same question, they took out photographs of a dying Elbia Torres, her family's grief, her father's lament. The *El Nacional* photograph would take viewers back to the contested act of witnessing these deaths in the ministry's lobby. The psychoanalyst Jed Sekoff's reflections on a family photograph that includes a dead child seem particularly illuminating: "Looking at a photograph places us at the edge of a certain time. . . . The dead are somehow conjured into life. And yet again, this very magic makes their death all the more certain; our loss stares us in the face." In addition to multiple edges, the *El Nacional* photograph pictures several *un*certain times: one of the encounter in the ministry, another of a life slipping into death, and a third moment in which Arsenio, Elbia's father, attempted to acoustically conjure a death into a life. If photographs are indexical
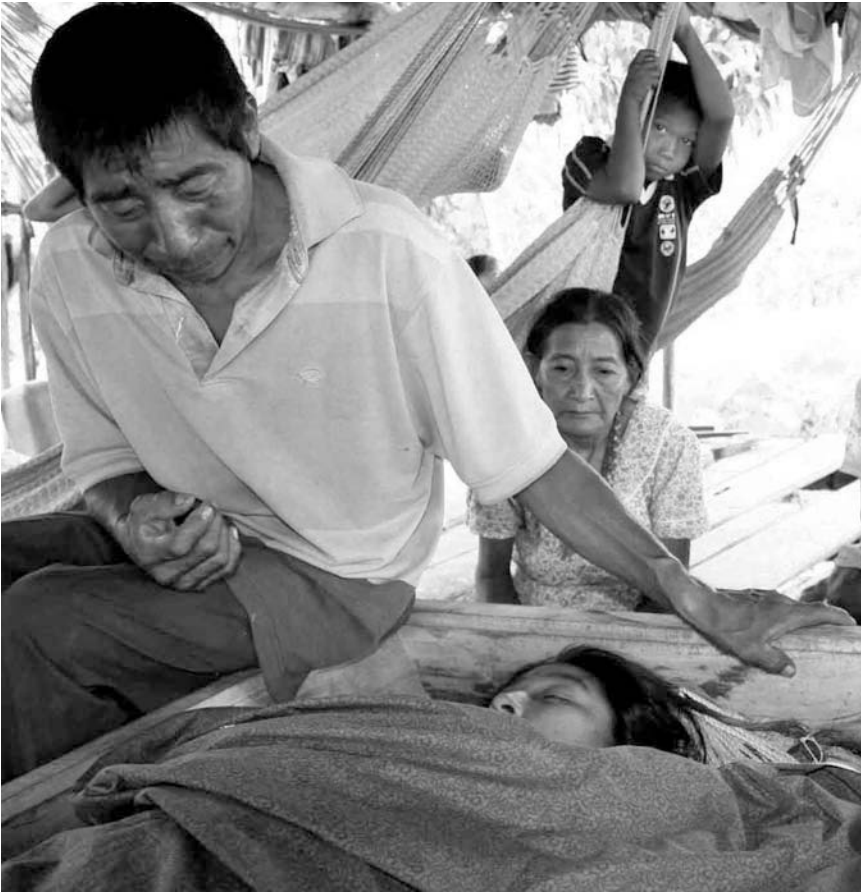
Figure 3. Arsenio Torres performs a lament over his daughter's corpse.
(Photo by Charles L. Briggs)

icons, as Peirce argued, tying images not just to what they reflect but to the moment of their creation, both reflections and points of origin get multiplied here in complex, unstable, and productive ways, especially when, to return to Nasio's metaphor, the mirror has been "broken up into small, mobile fragments of glass."

Butler suggested that in the face of pronounced inequalities, "certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanized," adding that "if a life is not grievable, it is not quite a life." In opening the Muaina meeting, Enrique projected how racialization differentially values lives and deaths: "If this community was a *criollo* [nonindigenous] community, or of the upper class, I have no doubt that health authorities would have already taken charge of the situation. It

Figure 4. *El Nacional* **photograph taken during confrontation in ministry's lobby.
(Courtesy of** *El Nacional***, photo by Omar Vegas)**

seems as if the lives of us Warao . . . aren't worth anything to the criollo world."
The photograph multiplied claims to the grievability of Elbia's life, refracted
through images of mourning and the trip to Caracas. In the *El Nacional* article,
Enrique interpellates the body politic through the figure of Chávez: "We invite
the President to come to our funerals," thereby ambiguously including deaths past
and future.

This photograph and its interpellation of readers into the work of mourning
might signal the end of our story, telling us wherein lies the work of mourning.
But the issues you raised, Dr. Freud, suggest that the photograph might rather
deepen our engagement with questions of grievability than effect their closure.
You wrote that what distinguishes melancholia from mourning is "a lowering of
the self-regarding feelings," suggesting that "it is all the more reasonable to sup-
pose that the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost." Can mourning
and melancholia be neatly separated in the wake of Mamerto's death? The literary
scholar Anne Cheng has suggested that melancholia structures racialized inequal-
ities in such a way that it "conditions life for the disenfranchised and, indeed,
constitutes their identity and shapes their subjectivity." A decade before your
essay appeared, W. E. B. Du Bois traced how racism complicated grieving for
his infant son: "All that day and all that night there sat an awful gladness in my
heart,—nay, blame me not if I see the world thus darkly through the Veil, —
and my soul whispers ever to me, saying, 'not dead, not dead, but escaped; not
bound, but free.'" Fanon famously stressed the individual and collective deper-
sonalization that structures the violence and social death produced by colonialism.

Enrique frequently disrupted epidemiologists' ahistorical interpretations of the deaths by citing five hundred years of colonial violence in the Delta following Columbus's arrival in 1498. In such a situation, is it possible to speak of "normal grief" or to distinguish it neatly from melancholia?

I am also left with questions about the anthropologist lurking in the background of the photograph. How am I participating in the work of mourning? If the laments and their circulation can inform psychoanalytic understandings of mourning, what might they contribute to anthropology?

Ethnography, as classically framed, involved imagining a research object, usually an ethnos ("the X"), a journey to what was defined as the space of a culture, and a trip home, data in hand. Although this formulation has been widely critiqued, one of its central elements—interviewing—remains central. Interviews help anthropologists create and control the discursive events they use in producing knowledge and asserting rights to circulate their interlocutors' words and images. Despite limits imposed by institutional review boards, once consent is granted, anthropologists largely shape what becomes mobile and how it travels.

Which is why the epidemic provides such an interesting and troubling site to reflect on anthropology. I had not gone to the Delta to do research, and I did not conduct interviews. Nevertheless, I was asked to participate in the investigation that Conrado and Enrique organized because I am an anthropologist, and I was constantly told what it means to do the work of anthropology. As I have suggested, the meeting juxtaposed modes of knowledge production associated with political discourse, dispute mediation, alternative healing, testimonies, epidemiology, and media documentation, which all got overlaid with the poetics and acoustics of lamentation. I was not granted control over the circulation of words and images; I was rather interpellated by lamenters and leaders into a circulatory process, placed both behind the camera and in front of it. The way I contributed anthropologically to the investigation of the epidemic and the trip to Caracas was shaped from the start by how my participation was constructed as part of the work of mourning.

Juxtaposing your essay and the laments has led me to think of *anthropology as the work of mourning*. I am not trying to universalize a single model of the work of mourning—your call to attend to specificities is crucial. Nor would I want to privilege these lamentations as a sort of *ur*-mourning or archetypal mourning; I think that there is much to be learned from the narratives, home altars, Facebook pages, grief groups, and other forms of the work of mourning that are woven into everyday life and death in the United States, not to mention the home funeral

movement that nostalgically resituates corpses, wakes, and funerals in family homes. Nor am I suggesting that anthropologists should be fixated on physical death; Du Bois, Fanon, Das, Pandolfo, and others have clearly suggested that we should think just as seriously about social death. Indeed, my interest here focuses more on work than on mourning per se.

Framing anthropology as the work of mourning evokes the work that anthropologists do in making images collaboratively and placing them in circulation, and it unsettles the usually unstated techniques we use to infuse images with particular sorts of affects. It can also help us think more complexly about how our work responds to and participates in other people's efforts to make and understand worlds, including viral and noctilionine ones. Anthropologists might read this statement as suggesting that all anthropology must be engaged, activist, or community-based, but I think that framing anthropology as the work of mourning would challenge this interpretation in two ways. First, I have not presented the particular contours of how I was interpellated in the epidemic as providing some sort of general model for anthropology; I have rather focused on how attending to the poetics and acoustics of laments can extend the ways that anthropological research and writing are imbricated in the specificities of worldings, an issue that Kathleen Stewart has recently addressed. Second, "Mourning and Melancholia" demonstrated how attending to the specificities of memories and expectations, hyper-cathexis and reality-testing require reflecting on persistent and productive conceptual puzzles. The work I was called to perform has required a collective process of rethinking knowledge production, poetics, cross-species relations, epidemiology, and circulation, and this work is by no means finished. Reframing anthropology as the work of mourning would thus require surrendering the engaged *versus* conceptual binary as a means of classifying anthropologists and projects.

Perhaps paraphrasing Karl Marx's famous statement in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* might help me clarify what I mean by anthropology as the work of mourning: anthropologists make their own stories, but they do not make them just as they please; they do not make them under circumstances entirely chosen by themselves. Crossing the threshold in Muaina called me to make knowledge anthropologically under circumstances that I had not chosen but that I did have a role in shaping. I was asked to make images, to build on Klein, as a part of collective efforts to (re)create mechanisms for building and connecting internal and external worlds that had been shattered through the colonial violence quintessentially embodied in thirty-eight gruesome deaths. I was asked to participate

in creating pasts that would challenge the social death that preceded Mamerto's physical demise and in projecting futures that imagined the end of colonialism's violent grip on the Delta. The precarity of these futures was painfully evident in the chilly reception we received in the ministry lobby's marbled interior and the government's steadfast refusal to confirm the rabies diagnosis or to provide an alternative. The lability of futures and the affects attached to them was underlined subsequently when the roles that Enrique projected were reversed: it was Chávez who died and the six of us who witnessed his funeral. As I finish this letter in February of 2014, the Bolivarian Revolution seems to be seized in a precarious work of mourning as President Nicolás Maduro's efforts to sustain Chávez's image are tested by realities shaped by his corporeal and political absence.

Nevertheless, the power and the precarity of making pasts and futures, images and realities was signaled from the start in each verse of the laments sung for Mamerto. The rhythms and acoustics, polyphonies and affects of the laments, the way they turned listeners into overhearers but made demands on them nonetheless are what I want to capture in recasting anthropology as the work of mourning. Rethinking this notion through a dialogue between psychoanalysts and lamenters has suggested to me how anthropology as the work of mourning captures connections between the precarity of anthropologists' constant movements between image making and reality-testing and the precarity of the worlds they engage, of anthropology's specificities, struggles, and compromises.

You might conclude that I am trying to get psychoanalysis on the cheap by writing a letter to a deceased analyst, one whom I cannot pay. Here, I think, you would be wrong. I have done my work of mourning, and some psychoanalysis as well. But that's another story, equally unfinished and uncertain.

Your friend,
Charles

ABSTRACT

Framed as a letter to Sigmund Freud, this text weaves precariously between psychoanalytic interpretations of mourning and laments sung during an epidemic of an unknown disease in the Delta Amacuro rain forest of Venezuela in 2008. This encounter extends reflection on the ways that Freud, Klein, Laplanche, Nasio, and other psychoanalysts have characterized "the work of mourning," urging attention to the poetics, acoustics, and bodily materiality of lamentation. Focusing on a meeting that took place just before the burial of a young man, it explores claims made by lamenters on audiences, interpellating them into particular modes of listening and

demanding attention to the politics of the circulation of images of lives and deaths. This intersection between psychoanalysis and lamentation provides a challenge to rethink the nature of anthropological research and writing. [psychoanalysis; mourning; laments; circulation; indigeneity; epidemiology; epidemics; rabies; Sigmund Freud; Venezuela; Latin America]

NOTE

1.   Given that I am writing a letter, I do not include citations in the text. A list of sources follows. My text revolves around retranslations of a number of key terms and phrases. When the translations are my own, I have included the German. Quotations not accompanied by the German are taken from the translation in the *Standard Edition*; an Editor's Note suggests that is was based on Joan Riviere's translation of 1925 but "has been very largely rewritten" by James Strachey and his collaborators (Freud [1917] 1957, 239). The translations from Warao and Spanish are my own.

SOURCES

"warning against any over-estimation of the value of our conclusion" (Freud [1917] 1957, 245)

"is not at all easy to explain"; "is taken as a matter of course by us" (Freud [1917] 1957, 245)

"we look upon any interference with it as useless or even harmful" (Freud [1917] 1957, 244)

"through the medium of a hallucinatory wish-psychosis" (Freud [1917] 1957, 244)

"the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged" (Freud [1917] 1957, 245)

"reality-testing" (Freud [1917] 1957, 244)

"Each single one of the memories and situations of expectancy . . . the object no longer exists." (Freud [1917] 1957, 255)

"so intense that a turning away from reality takes place" (Freud [1917] 1957, 244)

"extraordinarily painful"; "compromise" (Freud [1917] 1957, 245)

"implied a certain interchangeability . . . a kind of promiscuity of libidinal aim" (Butler 2004, 21)

"was essential to the task of mourning" (Butler 2004, 20–21)

"the Freudian theory of mourning" (Laplanche [1992] 1999, 251–52)

Kristeva (1987) 1989

Cheng 2000

Garcia 2010

"when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (Freud [1917] 1957, 245)

"respect for reality" (Freud [1917] 1957, 244)

"orders"; "cannot be at once obeyed"; "are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy." (Freud [1917] 1957, 245)

"Er wird nun im einzelnen unter großem Aufwand . . . des verlorenen Objekts psychisch fortgesetzt" (Freud [1915] 1946, 430)

"They are carried out bit by bit . . . the lost object is psychically prolonged" (Freud [1917] 1957, 245)

"Jede einzelne der Erinnerungen und Erwartungen" (Freud [1915] 1946, 430)

"is carried out piecemeal" (Freud [1917] 1957, 245)

"Why this compromise . . . should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of economics." (Freud [1917] 1957, 245)

Freud (1905) 1960 and (1900) 1965

Crapanzano 1981

Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2003 on the cholera epidemic

Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2009 on health programs and the Bolivarian revolution

Villalba et al. 2013 provide child mortality statistics.

"Kompromißleistung"; "Einzeldurchführung"; "Realitätsgebotes" (Freud [1915] 1946, 430)

Osborn 1967 presents a useful analysis of Warao verbal morphology. With respect to the analysis of Melvi's lament, line 6 uses a different form, -kore, which similarly places the utterances in the middle of an unfolding time before illness and death gripped Mamerto.

On the textual and musical structure of laments in Delta Amacuro, see Briggs 1992, 1993.

"to rebuild with anguish the inner world, which is felt to be in danger of deteriorating and collapsing"; "the slow process of testing reality in the work of mourning" (Klein [1940] 1948, 321)

"passing states of elation . . . due to the feeling of possessing the perfect love object (idealized) inside" (Klein [1940] 1948, 322–23)

"cover him or her over as ivy covers a stone wall" (Nasio 2004, 29)

"in very particular places of the wall, in its cracks and crevices" (Nasio 2004, 31)

"the smooth surface of a lens . . . of the other and of myself are reflected" (Nasio 2004, 34)

Robert Fitzgerald (Homer 1963, 22) provides the translation of Penelope's lines.

"Penelope does not cut the threads . . . in a different way" (Laplanche [1992] 1999, 251)

"it sets aside a reserve" (Laplanche [1992] 1999, 252)

"Melody, rhythm, semantic polyvalency, the so-called poetic form, which decomposes and recomposes signs" (Kristeva [1987] 1989, 14)

Freud (1915) 1957

"When we have been able to go through our melancholia . . . including screams, music, silence, and laughter" (Kristeva [1987] 1989, 99–100)

Rosaldo 2014

Goffman 1981

Kristeva (1974) 1984

Peirce 1932

Some sources on affect, acoustics, and embodiment in lamentation: Feld (1982) 2013, 1990; Nenola-Kallio 1982; Seremetakis 1991; Urban 1988; Wilce 1998; Briggs 1992, 1993

"turning death into a purely linguistic operation"; "the possibility of distinguishing one victim from any other" (Santner 1990, 29)

Crapanzano 1973

"the subject's relation to his own speech"; "the fact that he cannot listen . . . the consciousness is concerned" (Lacan [1966] 1977, 181)

Seremetakis 1991

Hirschkind 2006

"reflection of the current affairs of a world gone mad" (Unwerth 2005, 5)

"to a problem that had long been the subject of his interest—the fate of pain and loss in human memory" (Unwerth 2005, 10)

"My body was given back . . . in mourning." (Fanon 1967, 113); see also Pandolfo forthcoming

Urry 2007

Latour 1987

Bowker and Star 1999

Briggs and Mantini-Briggs (2003) document the cholera epidemic.

Appadurai 1988

"Looking at a photograph places us . . . our loss stares us in the face" (Sekoff 1999, 110)

Peirce (1932, 142)

"broken up into small, mobile fragments of glass" (Nasio 2004, 34)

"certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanized"; "if a life is not grievable, it is not quite a life" (Butler 2004, 34)

"'We invite the President to come to our funerals'" (Weffer Cifuentes 2008)

"a lowering of the self-regarding feelings" (Freud [1917] 1957, 244)

"it is all the more reasonable to suppose that the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost" (Freud [1917] 1957, 245)

"conditions life for the disenfranchised and, indeed, constitutes their identity and shapes their subjectivity" (Cheng 2000, 24)

"All that day and all that night . . . 'not bound, but free'" (Du Bois [1903] 1990, 154)

Fanon 1963 on the violence of colonialism

Briggs 1986 on interviews

Hagerty 2011 on the home funeral movement

Stewart 2012 on precarity, specificity, and worldings

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