Melancholy Hope and Other Psychic Remainders
Afterthoughts on Love the Sin

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In this essay the coauthors of Love the Sin consider connections between moral and psychic ambivalence around sex and sexual pleasures; what tolerance “feels” like; and melancholia as both block to and resource for democratic social relations. In the final section of their essay, they suggest rethinking tolerance as a kind of melancholic reaction, or defense, that protects the agents of tolerance from knowing just how far short that they have fallen from their own professed commitments to being fair and doing good.
Questions concerning the psychic life of state power (to rework the title of Judith Butler’s (1997) influential book) haunt our argument in Love the Sin in a number of places: in, for example, our discussion of the profound moral ambivalence that characterizes American attitudes toward sex as well as our analysis of the structure of tolerance (which is the explicit focus of chapter two). Our four commentators push us to think more squarely at the intersection of the social and the psychic and to consider (1) connections between moral and psychic ambivalence where sex and sexual pleasures are concerned; (2) the psychic and affective work performed by tolerance; and (3) melancholia as both block to and resource for democratic social relations. We will take up each of these important challenges in turn. First, however, we want to clarify the connections we draw in the book between religion and sex and between religious freedom and sexual freedom.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, SEXUAL FREEDOM

In writing Love the Sin we sought to grapple with and understand one of the enduring paradoxes of American life. Freedom is a, if not the, preeminent American value. And yet, when it comes to sex, the high value set on freedom in the United States comes crashing to the floor. But why? If freedom is such an important value that men and women are sent to fight, die, and even kill others in its name, why isn’t sexual freedom a mainstream value too? In other words, what makes sex a special case? The short answer to these questions is: religion. In Love the Sin, we demonstrate how religion and sex are already connected in American life and argue that the ways in which they are connected impede not just sexual freedom but religious freedom as well.

In the third chapter of the book, we develop an extended analogy between religious and sexual identity. Ideally, a religion-sex analogy might help to redirect public conversations away from unproductive debates over what “causes” homosexuality (where “inborn” and “chosen” are presented as the only two options, and mutually exclusive ones at that). By thinking of
sexual identity as akin to religious identity we might develop a more expansive consideration of the conditions necessary to the free practice of a range of social differences, not just differences in sexuality. On this account, where both religion and sexuality are concerned, performance is constitutive of identity.

It is a peculiarly Christian and Reformed Protestant tendency to narrow religion to questions of conscience, belief, or inner life. For many other religions, though, and even for some Protestant denominations, practice is the definitive element. Similarly, we want to work against the narrowing of sexuality to a matter of interiority—what an individual is. On both sides of the analogy, then, religion and sex, we move outside-in to stress enactment over interiority. Deemphasizing interiority may have some important implications for depth psychology, too, and we would like to invite further conversation on this score.

In her contribution to this special forum, K. Roberts Skerrett beautifully returns our religion-sex analogy to us:

Sexual practices, like religious practices, form our stories and sensibilities in ways that motivate human beings on visceral as well as intellectual registers. Sexual practices, like religious practices, involve us in effective incentives to engage in micro- and macropolitical activities with a daring and steadfastness that sheer intellectual practices may not. Freedom of sexual practice, like freedom of religious practice, can be understood thus as a resource for the formation of citizens capable of the complex responsiveness and maturity that a pluralistic democracy requires.

Importantly, the connection we draw between religious and sexual freedom is far more than an analogy. Religious freedom is not just “like” sexual freedom. In our view, religious freedom is a structural condition for sexual freedom in the United States; the latter freedom cannot be achieved unless the religious freedom promised in the Constitution is realized in practice. The First Amendment to the Constitution begins, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Concerns about religion
thus precede even the well-recognized freedoms of speech and of the press. When it comes to sex, and when it comes to many other matters as well, there is no real disestablishment of religion in the United States. To the extent that at their base all state laws, all federal legislation, all court rulings that pronounce sanctions on homosexual practices and forms of life are Christian in origin, then it is religion that prevents sexual freedom.

Sodomy statutes are an Ur-example of this dynamic, and we devote the first chapter of *Love the Sin* to a close analysis of the Supreme Court’s infamous decision, in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, #478 U.S. (1986) upholding the constitutionality of laws prohibiting “homosexual sodomy.” One of the most striking features of the majority decision and concurrence in *Bowers* was the way the justices justified laws criminalizing homosexual sodomy by appealing to millennia of moral opposition to homosexuality. On closer examination, however, this supposedly timeless and universal moral opposition turned out to be religious in origin, deriving from what Chief Justice Warren Burger, in his concurring opinion, explicitly identified as “Judaeo-Christian moral and ethical standards” (p. 196). So saying, the Supreme Court, the very body charged with defending the constitutional principle of church–state separation, handed down religion in the place of justice for all.

Disestablishment is only one component of the First Amendment’s religion clause. The second, completely unrealized component is the free exercise of religion. Here we will let conservatives do the talking for us. As Mormon legal scholar Frederick Mark Gedicks (1995) reports, “No Jewish, Muslim, or Native American plaintiff has ever prevailed on a free exercise claim before the Supreme Court. Fundamentalist Christians and sects outside so-called mainline Protestantism have had only mixed success in seeking exemptions” (p. 116). So much for freedom of practice. In practice in the United States you have the freedom to act Protestant, whether or not you are.

Although we are heartened by the Supreme Court’s decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* 539 U.S. 558 (2003) to reverse *Bowers*, it remains to be seen how *Lawrence* will be interpreted and taken up by future courts. The record thus far is mixed, with one
court (the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court) citing Lawrence along the way to affirming the right of gay and lesbians couples to marry. However, in two other important, if less noticed, post-Lawrence lower court rulings, courts in Florida and Kansas cited Lawrence only so as to dismiss its applicability to cases involving, respectively, the right of states to bar openly homosexual men and women from adopting and the permissibility of harsher prison sentences in cases involving same-sex statutory rape. In both cases, gays and lesbians came out the losers.

Part of the problem is that Lawrence left ambiguous the relationship between due process and equal protection for homosexuals as such. But a larger and more systemic issue is that the cultural logic that underwrote Bowers remains in force. We can certainly see the ongoing hold of specifically religious ideas about the “proper” form of human intimacies at play in current legal and extrajudicial debates over the definition of

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1. The cornerstone of the Massachusetts SJC’s ruling in Goodridge et al. v. Department of Pubic Health 440 Mass. 309 (2003) is its interpretation of the state constitution, in particular the due process and equal protection provisions, which are more extensive than those promised under the federal constitution. Thus, it is conceivable that even in the absence of Lawrence or even had Lawrence gone the other way, the Massachusetts SJC could still have held that the Massachusetts constitution required the state to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

2. The relevant cases are Lofton et al. v. Kan. App. 2d 364 (2004), in which the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a Florida statute banning adoption by gay men and lesbians; and Limon v. Kansas (2004), in which the Kansas Court of Appeals upheld the 206-month prison sentence of Matthew Limon. Limon was convicted at age 18 for an act of oral sex he performed on a 14-year-old boy; by all accounts, the sex was consensual, and Limon stopped when the younger boy asked him to. Yet, in a perverse legal twist, if Limon had had oral sex with a 14-year-old girl, all other circumstances being the same, he would have been charged with a lesser crime and been sentenced to only 15 months in prison: Kansas has a “Romeo and Juliet” law, a sort of modified statutory rape law, which provides for lesser sentences in cases where the two parties are both teenagers, the age difference between them is fewer than four years, and the older teenager and the younger one are of the opposite sexes. As Michael Bronski (personal communication, 2004) has observed, Romeo and Mercutio need not apply.
marriage. If religiously derived sexual regulation has not ended with the overturning of Bowers, this is in no small part because a set of interlocking assumptions—and anxieties—about sex and religion are taken for granted. Let us turn now to consider some of these assumptions as they relate to moral and psychic ambivalence around sex and sexual pleasure.

**PSYCHIC AND MORAL AMBIVALENCE**

In the United States, sex is the subject of often contradictory moral worries. On one hand, sex is sometimes dismissed (and also justified) as merely a “private” affair, concerning no one but the consenting participants. On the other hand, sex is also invested with amazing and paradoxical powers. Sexual relations are thought to be foundational to family and, by extension, to the American nation. And yet, at the same time, sex is thought to be so powerful that it threatens to dissolve family ties and thereby unravel the nation itself.

Our own view is more skeptical. We suspect that sex is not an all-powerful solvent that can, as people often say, “destroy Western civilization as we know it.” However, once one accepts the terms of this fantasy-cum-nightmare, it becomes imperative to control sex, to regulate where it can happen and between whom. Its power must be contained and “domesticated.”

This way of thinking about sex and its potentially destructive power serves to justify extensive regulations on sex and sexuality in the United States. Importantly, the rationale behind these regulations—from marriage law to the lesser legal status of sexual speech to the movie rating system to the marriage incentives built into welfare “reform”—usually just goes without saying. The notion that sex needs to be, must be, regulated is so taken for granted as to require explanation only in the breach. We are in agreement with David Schwartz, then, when he writes that “the

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3The students in Michael Bronski’s “gay class” had a slightly more nuanced version of privatizing. They did not trivialize sex’s importance; but, for them sexual freedom boiled down to negative liberty: keeping the government out of their bedrooms.
deeply embedded anxieties and mechanisms that motivate, justify, and guide self-regulation and the intolerant regulation of others, in daily life and in psychoanalysis, are unarticulated.” What’s more, they are often not even experienced as regulation.

Schwartz suggests that the acceptance of sexual regulation as “the rule, even in disciplines like psychoanalysis and anthropology, which are in principle committed to questioning regimes of regulation,” presents a “problem for our project.” Far from being a problem “for” our project, in the sense of being a hindrance or stumbling block, this unconscious enthrallment to sexual regulation, even by adherents of the supposedly secular discourses of psychoanalysis and anthropology and even by those whom Schwartz calls the “liberal middle,” is actually among the problems that animate our project. (We will come back to the important issue of Schwartz’s liberal middle later, in the section on Feeling Tolerance.)

As we argue in our book, the usual story told about secularization in Western societies is that over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, as the modern period developed, there was a progressive retreat of religion from public life, including, most prominently, from the workings of the market and government. Tasks that were once delegated to Church and Crown came to be assigned, through linked processes of secularization and democratization, to the state. Religion, previously a major force in public life, was pushed to the background, to a newly privatized zone of family, morality, and questions of conscience. So the story goes, but we want to complicate this secularization narrative.

Underreported here are all the ways in which religious ideas about the body have continued to be enforced by the newly secularized state. This is the “afterlife” of religion in modernity: secularization has meant not so much the retreat of religion from the public sphere as its reinvention. This reinvention is accomplished through a conflation of religion and morality, in which morality is assumed to be the essence of religion, and,

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"For a full explanation of this secularization narrative and our critique of it, see Jakobsen with Pellegrini (2000)."
conversely, moral proclamation can be a means of invoking religion without directly naming it. In other words, under cover of an official secularism, particular religious claims about “the good life,” the way things are or should be, can still remain operative.

In our book we refer to a kind of “stealth Protestantism” that undergirds the state regulation of sexuality in the United States. If we move from the level of the state to the level of the individual to ask how sex is lived out by the subjects of state power, perhaps we have to speak not of a stealth Protestantism but of a Protestant or, better, an unevenly Protestantized unconscious.

For many Americans, we suspect that the scandal of homosexuality is the scandal of sex itself. If “sex is guilty until proven innocent,” as anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1993) has famously quipped (p. 11), homosexuality provides the perfect scapegoat. Skerrett cuts to the psychic heart of the matter when she describes how “normative sexual identities, even if they pretend to moral glamour and natural necessity, remain encrypted with traces of anxiety.” Homosexuals become the repository, the degraded and devalued holding place, for these buried remainders, those disavowed aspects of the self that must be, at all costs, charged to the account of the other.

For all the ways in which American culture is saturated with representations of sex and sexuality, where sexiness is not simply used to sell various products but is the very commodity to be packaged and sold, nonetheless we are yet a culture in which it is difficult to talk about and affirm sexual pleasure as a good in and of itself—never mind homosexual sex. This hesitancy about sex and sexual pleasure, a moral hesitancy and even revulsion that are displaced onto nonnormative, or dissident, sex and sexual subjects, is not simply the trace of specifically religious ideas about “good” sex versus “bad,” bodily discipline versus anarchy. It is also evidence of the ways that sexual acts and sexed embodiment are overburdened psychic sites, testifying as they do to our vulnerability before the other, the ways our body-self comes to be only through the touch of another, for better and for worse. Such traces of the other are formative for bodily life but can also be deeply deforming or destructive in the very act of bringing the “I” into shape and being.
We thus take very seriously Donald Moss’s concern that we have overemphasized a happy ending in which being able to imagine something makes it so and sexuality has been purified of violence. We think we are less “elated” on both of these points than Moss fears. First, we do not see “erotic constraints as congruent with constraints on free speech or civil rights.” It is true that we want to expose the ways in which religiously derived sexual regulation limits the free practice of sex and of religion (including the practice of no religion at all), but we do not believe that this kind of regulation is all-determining such that putting an end to it would “liberate” sex from shame or from the limitations, and incitements, of loss. Creating more social space for the enactment of difference, space not just to “be” different but to “do” our identities differently, would certainly be a major improvement over the current state of affairs. However, we cannot know in advance how transformations in the way sex is ordered will, or will not, affect the kinds of subjects we are called to be.

Perhaps we did not make this clear enough in the book, but we are building on Foucault’s (1978) criticism of the “repressive hypothesis.” Nonetheless, our embrace of Foucault does not mean that we reject psychoanalysis’ fundamental insights about the potentially productive intransigence or “resistances” of psychic life, the always only impartial ways in which social demands are internalized and installed as the rule of the self. We are not saying that psychic resistance to normalization necessarily or automatically translates into social transformation. As Butler (1997) cautions, in her own attempt to move between psychoanalysis and Foucault, “The claim that the unconscious only and always resists normalization . . . does not imply that such resistance yields the power to rework or rearticulate the terms of discursive demand, the disciplinary injunctions by which normalization occurs” (p. 88).

What kind of language is adequate to the complexities involved here? We want to think about sexual freedom, sexual subjects, and sexual pleasures in terms other than those of taboo, transgression, and subversion. As David Cole (1994) has argued in a law review essay on sexual speech and the First Amendment, one danger of too much focusing on the regulation of sex—
whether that regulatory power be ascribed to the state (Cole’s particular focus), the social, or the superego—is that this “regulatory obsession” may end up constructing “a very particular type of sexuality, one in which transgressing lines and violating taboos is central to sexual excitement” (pp. 524–525). Cole says that this version of sexuality is neither necessary nor inevitable, and he calls for the framing of “alternative visions of sexuality, visions that are not delimited by the transgression of taboos” (p. 525). Our own focus on the value-making capacity of sex, the ethical horizons that sexual relations may bring into view, is offered as one such alternative optic.5

This does not require jettisoning the concept of the unconscious or cheerfully forgetting the aggression that pulses through erotic life. Indeed, to take up Moss’s concern about sexuality and violence, we realize that it is one thing to argue for and affirm the value of pleasure and quite another to live out these sentiments in or as our bodily life with others. To refer, as we do, to the value-making capacity of sex is neither to essentialize sex (this time as on the side of “the good”) nor to bracket violence and loss. Yes, sex can be a rich site for the emergence of values.

We are not saying, however, that sex is in and of itself valuable, only that sex is a social relation out of which people can, in their practice of sex, create values along with pleasures, intimacies, kinships, and also pain, sadness, and sometimes loss. Sex does not have to be good to be a site of values. It does not have to be tied to romantic love; it does not have to have spiritual meaning. The wonder and the horror, and the moral responsibility,
of sexual freedom are that sex is what we make it. This is also why we prefer the language of “making sex” to “making love.” “Making love” too quickly closes the book on what sex can mean or do, whereas “making sex” makes room for the recognition, both elated and pained, that what we make of sex and how sex makes and remakes “us” are not set in advance. Sexual relations can be a resource for sustenance; but they can also be sites of tremendous and, tremendously intimate, damage.

FEELING TOLERANCE

The issues raised by the conjunction of sexuality and values do not just roil the public square, are not just matters of political rhetoric or public legislation; they also go to the heart of our most intimate relations and the kinds of persons we (mis)take ourselves to be. We see these dynamics in the poignant exchange between parents and their lesbian daughter or gay son, for example, when the parents assure their child of their love and support, while simultaneously harboring, and maybe even expressing out loud, the wish that their beloved child were not gay. What to make of this wish? Perhaps it expresses fear for a lesbian child in a homophobic culture. How many queers have heard their parents wish their child were straight in just such liberal terms, some version of, “I am worried for you, honey.” This wishing away of difference—as in, “We still love you in spite of everything”—is also a family portrait of tolerance.

Tolerance is certainly an improvement over hate and hateful violence, and we expect that our hypothetical queer child prefers her parents’ tolerance to being thrown out of the house, or worse. Thus, we should not be surprised that Michael Bronski’s students were so attached to tolerance as an ideal. It is not simply that tolerance seems to promise safety from violence and hate. It is also that, as Bronski writes with respect to his students, “Not only was [tolerance] the paramount nonhomophobic discourse, it was, pretty much, the only discourse available to them.” Even the Southern Poverty Law Center, the group probably most responsible for bringing hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan to justice, urges us to “teach tolerance” in order to battle hatred. But what does tolerance really offer—and to whom?
We discuss the structure of tolerance in the second chapter of *Love the Sin*. Our argument there, in brief, is that although American commonsense valorizes tolerance as a response to violence and social division, in practice tolerance works to affirm existing social hierarchies by establishing an us–them relationship between a dominant center and those on the margins. (We use the language of “dominant center” and “tolerant middle,” but we think we could also, with Schwartz, speak of the “liberal middle.”) The structure we are describing, in which a dominant majority grants rights of sufferance, or not, to its various margins, is in many respects a secular version of religious toleration, in which an established church allows dissenters the right to worship without fear of persecution but withholds from them equivalent public or civic rights and privileges.

Again, there is nothing surprising in this religion-genderism dynamic. The history of tolerance in the United States is inseparable from the history of religion. Concepts of religious tolerance were developed in Europe in response to the “wars of religion” that were sparked by the Protestant Reformation. The American principles of religious freedom enshrined in the First Amendment were supposed to overcome these limits of toleration by providing for the equal treatment of different faiths: there is no established church, and all religions are free to practice as they please. In actual practice, however, these twin promises of religious freedom have run up against two conflicting notions of American national identity: that this is a nation of religious freedom (including the freedom not to be religious at all), and that this is a basically Christian nation.

Professions of tolerance mixed with stern moral judgment are a routine feature of political life in the United States. When President Bush came out in favor of a federal constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage, a move that would create a permanent constitutional underclass, he nonetheless concluded his remarks with a call for “kindness and good will and decency.” What are we to make of this political equation in which personal kindness is traded for public justice? Is this a matter of hypocrisy? Political rhetoric? It may be both, but we are interested here in the affective and psychic work that
tolerance performs for the dominant center, who are the real targets of the President’s speech. Many political “moderates” and “liberals,” too, are uncomfortable with gay marriage, but they are also uncomfortable with the idea of appearing intolerant of their gay friends and neighbors. The fact of the matter is that on the gay marriage question, as around many other divisive social and cultural issues in American public life (and especially those that have to do with sex), people of good will can take positions that are punitive towards their fellow citizens while at the same time experiencing themselves as basically good people—“morally glamorous”—who are compassionate and even tolerant of difference.

But what of those who are the objects of this finely measured tolerance? We would like to think that most gay people would prefer justice and democracy to the personal “kindness and good will and decency” of the friendly homophobe next door (or on Pennsylvania Avenue), but perhaps Bronski’s students’ investments in tolerance and their difficulty conceiving of sexual freedom as a public and fully social value argue otherwise.

MELANCHOLY HOPE

Crucially, tolerance is not just a way of structuring social life in the terms we have outlined. As a structure of feeling, it also comes to suture gaps in the psychic. The feeling or feelings that tolerance generates and the losses for which it compensates differ depending on whether one is positioned as a beneficent dispenser of tolerance or an object of the “gift.” Freud’s (1917) framework for melancholia is helpful here, and we are glad that both Moss and Skerrett have introduced this topic.

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6 The term structure of feeling comes from Williams (1977). Recently, a number of cultural theorists have taken up Williams’s language to explore the affective relations that bind minoritarian identities and communities and help them negotiate loss. Many of these scholars have also been developing approaches to melancholia that see it as a democratic resource for the future (see, e.g., Muñoz, 1999; and Cvetkovich, 2003; Eng and Kazanjian, 2003; Cvetkovich and Pellegrini, 2003. See also Berlant, 2000).
“Mourning and Melancholia” is part of Freud’s evolving theory of identification, the topography of the ego, and the formation of conscience. As Skerrett underscores in her summary of “Mourning and Melancholia,” the array of objects that may be lost in grief includes not only loved persons, but also abstractions like patriotism, liberty, and other cherished ideals.

In his first attempt to theorize melancholia and what makes it different from “normal” mourning and “normal” identification, Freud described melancholia as a kind of pathological state in which the ego turns away from the world under pressure of an unknown or unacknowledged loss. Melancholia involves an object loss that has been withdrawn from consciousness and absorbed into the ego. Lost, yet unrecognized as loss, the lost object cannot be mourned as gone. And yet, this nonrecognition of loss does not spare the subject of melancholia; the unknown loss produces internal work similar to that undergone in mourning. It is, however, a kind of psychic work that defies understanding; neither the subject of melancholia nor those who surround her know what it is that absorbs her. This defiance even of self-understanding results in part from a change in the ego; in the place of an object that cannot be mourned, there comes an identification with the lost object or, perhaps even, with loss itself. All-unknowing, Freud observes, “the shadow of the object fell upon the ego” (p. 249).

Significantly, by the time he came to write “The Ego and the Id” (1923), Freud had revised his views on melancholia. No longer does melancholia constitute a “pathological” turning away from the world. Instead, “normal” processes of identification come more and more to resemble the melancholic model of object-identification he had diagnosed as pathological in “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917). “The Ego and the Id” offers a picture of a body-self forged in the wake of loss: “the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes . . . and contains the history of those object-choices” (1923, p. 29).

The depathologization of melancholia is important for a number of reasons. It takes melancholia, and conversations about it, out of a narrowly clinical and individualizing frame and invites us to think about the larger social and political
contexts in which loss is lived and negotiated. Where the *psychic* life of tolerance is concerned, Skerrett’s suggestions have pushed us to conceptualize tolerance as a kind of melancholic reaction, or defense, that protects the agents of tolerance from knowing just how far short that they have fallen from their own professed commitments to being fair and doing good. Again, this is not about the bad faith, false consciousness, or social pathology of some individuals. Being and feeling tolerant are more than an individual’s defense against feeling “bad” about himself. These individual acts of “forgetting” connect to a larger national imaginary in which the sometimes violent exclusions at the heart of American democracy are recast and misremembered as inclusiveness (Eng and Han, 2003, p. 347).

Tolerance is a wedge against recognizing and grappling with loss. As long as “we” conduct our antidemocratic politics with “kindness and good will and decency,” we need not grieve, nor fight to restore, the lost objects of democracy, freedom, justice. The moralizing strains of tolerance are conceivable as self-reproach turned outward onto those others whose ongoing inequality (and the irksome noisiness with which “they” proclaim it) threatens to bring lost ideals back into view. Recall our earlier point about the religious history of tolerance and the fact that the American promises of religious freedom were supposed to redress the inequalities built into tolerance. In its moralism, perhaps tolerance betrays the trace of this specifically religious lineage.

For those who are on the receiving end of tolerance, tolerance is also a kind of enforced forgetting. In place of the painful feelings of abjection and ego impoverishment that loving “bad” objects or loving in the “wrong” sort of way might produce, being tolerated feels like safety. Tolerance feels better than being hated; it also feels better than the extreme self-reproaches that might lead to suicidal thoughts and actions.

As a psychic structure and as a social transaction, tolerance fits all too well with a version of liberal democracy in which

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*Our own analysis here is indebted to the work of Eng and Han (2003). See also the important essay by Crimp (1989).*
people can be admitted into the center, or close to it, on the condition that they give up what makes them different from the norm. Do we go too far to suggest that tolerance has become democracy’s psychic tomb? If so, what would it take to restore to life some of democracy’s as yet unrealized promises?

Democracy does not require that those who are different hide or erase their difference as a condition of enfranchisement. Nor does democracy require that we “truly accept” those who are different from us (whoever “we” are and however that difference is measured). Rather, democracy requires that we grant other people their rights and freedoms. One of the reasons that it is often difficult for people to respond positively to diversity and to recognize others’ freedoms is that we conflate total acceptance with basic rights. We do not have to agree with everyone; we do not even have to like everyone; but we do have to grant them freedom. People should not have to feel that they are giving up their own principles or that their “identities” are at risk when they grant others the freedom to act on diverse principles.

Even in movements for lesbian and gay rights, we often find an inability to accept diversity, to acknowledge the various ways in which people are gay, are doing something that they would call “gay.” (Debates among gay men, lesbians, and other sexual queers about the value of making same-sex marriage the end game of lesbian and gay politics are just one case in point.) We advocate freedom in part because we want to build a movement that is open to all the various ways people “do” their sexualities, all the ways they build relationships that are important to them. Those relationships that matter may well include forms of religious belonging. There are many LGBTQ8 persons for whom religion and religious practice remain a deep and sustaining point of collective belonging and meaning-making practices. Of course, there are many LGBTQ people for whom religion has never been a point of identification. There are still other LGBTQ people who have left behind the religious traditions in which they were raised because such traditions and communities either

8Lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer.
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seem no longer to have any space for them or fill whatever space there was with active and sometimes even violent aggression. This leaving behind may feel like liberation, loss, or both at once. It is vital that LGBTQ communities make room for these diverse forms of queer life and (be)longing.

Forged at the edge of loss, we are all melancholic remainders. We thus share Muñoz’s (1999) melancholy hope, when he writes that melancholia “helps us (re)construct identity and take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names—and in our names” (p. 74). Like Muñoz, we do not think we should have to choose between utopianism and melancholia. Call us *hopeful melancholics*, but we think that a depathologized and politicized melancholia offers resources for surviving into the future precisely because of melancholia’s greedy (and heart-stretching) conservation of loss. In the face of a dominant culture that tells the multiple others in its midst that our multiple lost objects—whether loved ones dead to AIDS, homelands left behind for the “greater” opportunities of America, first languages lost in translation, distinct cultural forms “transcended” through assimilation, or religious commitments torn by heterodox desires—don’t count because they were not worth having in the first place, the melancholic retention of those objects and object relations we have loved and lost is a thing to marvel at and commend. The weight of our history with others is both burden and buoy as we struggle to carve out more social space to be different and do ourselves differently.

REFERENCES


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9 Eng and Han (2003, p. 363) also cite this passage from *Disidentifications*; we have benefited greatly from their discussion and repurposing of it.
10 For a treatment of melancholia in the context of sexual trauma, see Pellegrini (in press).


