Article

ON MOURNING SOCIAL INJURY

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Abstract

This article offers a fundamental revision of the Freudian model of mourning and melancholia in order to render these psychoanalytic concepts flexible enough to describe the processes by which individuals and groups manage experiences of social injury such as racism, misogyny, homophobia and economic exploitation. "On Mourning Social Injury" argues that political hope is, in essence, a social form of mourning.

Keywords
mourning; melancholia; trauma; modernism; politics

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been a remarkable proliferation of scholarship throughout the humanities and social sciences focused on the phenomena of mourning and trauma. This wide-ranging inquiry represents one of the most vital domains of collaboration today between psychoanalytic theory and progressive politics. At the end of humanity's bloodiest century, and at a time when violence and deprivation are inflicted with ever greater technological force and institutional rationalization, cultural critics, historians and sociologists are struggling to understand what it might mean to grieve for systematic social injuries and whether there can be a "working through" of traumas that take place on so monumental a scale as the Holocaust or chattel slavery. Scholars working in this area are

wrestling with a range of important questions. What kinds of grieving can enable victims of oppression to survive and flourish in the wake of all their suffering? What psychic and cultural practices make it possible for people to sustain desires and forms of subjectivity that have been systematically derided by corrosive cultural formations such as homophobia, misogyny and racism? How do we retain faith in egalitarian social possibilities in the face of long histories of political repression, foreclosure and betrayal? In what ways have the grieving strategies of subordinated social groups contributed to emancipatory social movements?[1]

Those engaged in these inquiries have tended to rely primarily – though with varying degrees of theoretical precision – on Freud's original vocabulary for analyzing object-loss. But Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia is a famously problematic one, and a number of scholars have been particularly uncomfortable with his conception of mourning. They have framed their criticisms in different ways, but most have been provoked by Freud's association of mourning with a process of decathexis in which the bereaved relinquish emotionally what they have loved and lost. In political contexts in which we are considering the response of vulnerable social groups to their oppression, a model of mourning that demands the psychic surrender of lost objects appears politically conservative as well as psychically callous.[2]

In response to this conceptual limitation, a number of critics have embraced Freud's theorization of melancholia, finding it to be more adequate than the theory of mourning to the task of understanding how derided identities and truncated social possibilities can be sustained. If mourning entails the surrender of beloved objects and aspirations that have been prohibited or destroyed by an unjust society then, these critics suggest, melancholia seems to provide a psychic means of honoring them. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud does point out that "love escapes extinction" in melancholia because the bereaved retains the lost object internally (and perhaps indefinitely) as an identification (Freud, 1917, 1957, p 257). He goes still further in *The Ego and the Id*, where he suggests that such melancholic identifications may, indeed, constitute many aspects of the ego itself. Some cultural critics and theorists have drawn on these formulations to propose that melancholia (or some hybrid form of "melancholic mourning") may provide a necessary strategy for remembering and honoring the beloved people, communities, social possibilities and political aspirations that have been denied us by the violent and oppressive social structures within which we live.[3]

I share the aim of these politically engaged scholars to the extent that I believe, as they do, that the work of progressive social change requires that we be capable of grieving social injuries in ways that allow us to sustain thwarted hopes and denigrated desires. For those who have suffered the psychic and material effects of racism, misogyny and homophobia, such grieving is essential not only to personal survival but also, as these critics suggest, to the building of

emancipatory political movements. I will argue, however, that this kind of grieving can be better conceptualized as a social form of *mourning* than as a type of melancholia. It is my view that we need a more adequate conception of mourning than the one bequeathed to us by Freud: a conception that enables us to understand how the hyper-cathected recollection of injuries and deprivations can lead to greater future satisfactions – and to the forms of social change that would make such satisfactions possible. At the same time, we need to retain a *critical* conception of melancholia in order to grasp the actual pervasiveness, and the human cost, of self-destructive forms of grieving.

Melancholia is, precisely and above all, a form of grieving that compounds the pain of loss by inflicting further injury upon the self. As Freud and generations of subsequent clinicians have recognized, melancholics respond to deprivation distinctively by displacing their rage onto themselves. Because of its extremity and unconsciousness, this self-beratement can even lead to suicide. Those who champion the grieving processes of the oppressed as "melancholic" tend to ignore the self-destructive dimension of the psychic phenomenon that melancholia has sought to name. The AIDS activist and theorist Douglas Crimp has provided a valuable corrective to this tendency, pointing eloquently to the dangers posed by melancholia not only for individuals, but also for the emancipatory movements organized by oppressed groups. Crimp has argued that only a full process of mourning can enable an effectively "militant" political response to the AIDS crisis, whereas a blocked grieving for the losses entailed by the epidemic may cause gay men to turn their anger back upon themselves as self-hatred, with devastating psychic and political effects (Crimp, 1989, pp 11–14).

There is a particularly urgent need for this kind of critical analysis of melancholia in the United States because this form of toxic grieving has been given a privileged status in modern American culture. I would go so far as to propose that a self-destructive and politically quiescent melancholia was institutionalized as the dominant high-cultural response to loss in 20th-century America. The ideological processes that enshrined melancholia in this way also worked to obscure and denigrate cultural efforts to mourn destructive social formations and to build progressive social movements through that work of mourning.

I offer these claims on the basis of work I have done in recent years on literary modernism in the United States.[4] This literary movement emerged in the opening decades of the 20th century in response to the widespread injuries inflicted on millions of Americans, at every level of the social hierarchy, by the burgeoning of monopoly capitalism. In particular, modernist writers struggled to grieve for an increasingly pervasive experience of alienation. Through their experimental formal techniques, they sought to mourn the loss of emotional and sexual intimacy at a personal level – and of social solidarity in the public domain. The dominant strand of US modernism, which was canonized during

the long era of the Cold War, is essentially melancholic. Writers such as Eliot, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Cather, Toomer and Faulkner obscured the social causes of their losses even as they fitfully acknowledged them.[5] They often managed social ambivalence in their poems and fictions by naturalizing the destructive processes of capitalist modernization as timeless and irresistible features of the human condition. That which they had lost, they represented as irrevocable and unmournable, as infinitely beautiful but inherently inaccessible. To the degree that they naturalized the causes of their injuries, moreover, they also mystified the objects of their anger. In their literary works, they displaced their rage onto fictional surrogates for themselves and onto the beloved objects and imperiled possibilities for which they grieved. They tended also to displace the anger they could not name onto various scapegoated groups, indulging in the racism, homophobia and misogyny that are endemic features of canonized US modernism.

The cultural prestige and influence of this canonized tradition can hardly be overstated. Seeking cultural support for its assertion of geo-political ascendancy after World War II, the United States laid claim to the world-class stature of these writers, especially the Nobel-prize winners, Eliot, Hemingway and Faulkner. The capacity of their works to register the psychic and social injuries of monopoly capitalism, while they obscured the actual causes of these injuries and neutralized the anger that accompanied them, made these texts ideally suited to the cultural exigencies of the Cold War. Although these writers expressed the sorrow and injury that were ever more pervasive in American life, they grieved in a manner that was unthreatening to the social order. From the 1940s onward, their strategies of melancholic grief were increasingly institutionalized as the most beautiful, most adequate responses to social loss.[6]

During this same period, the cultural priorities of the Cold War simultaneously marginalized and derided another strand of US modernism: a strand that mourned the injuries of capitalist modernization in ways that were psychologically less self-destructive and politically more radical. Developed principally but not exclusively by members of socially subordinated groups (women, African-Americans, working-class and often queer writers, political radicals), this "other" modernism mourned the alienations and oppressions of modern American life in ways that did not entail the displacement of rage onto the bereaved or other vulnerable members of society. Writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, H.D., Tillie Olsen, Langston Hughes and William Carlos Williams directed their anger instead at the destructive social formations that had produced their deprivations. As a result, they grieved in ways that enabled them to honor the libidinal and social aspirations that had been thwarted in their own time as possibilities that might yet be realized in the future. These practices of mourning contributed productively to the development of emancipatory social movements – including a wide range of anti-racist, feminist and anti-capitalist struggles in which these writers actively participated.

This modernism of mourning and resistance remains subordinated to its more fully canonized variant today, and by offering this view of modern American literature, I mean to highlight the continued pervasiveness of politically destructive forms of social melancholia in our culture. It seems clear that we need a critical vocabulary of melancholia to discuss this phenomenon – and a fuller conception of social mourning, rather than a theoretical turn against it. In the following pages, I offer some formulations to forward this theoretical project. I will, first, revise fundamentally the model of loss that undergirds the Freudian conception of mourning and melancholia, in order to render these terms flexible enough to attend to the complex phenomena of socially induced loss. In particular, I will propose a structural revision to the dyadic model (comprised of a mourner and a lost object) that characterizes the Freudian account of grieving, in order to bring fully into view a third term – the variable *social forces* that are responsible for most forms of collective loss. This structural revision enables a more dynamic conception of grieving that takes into account the temporal persistence of most scenarios of social loss. It also enables a more adequate explanation of how destructive social formations that are not punctual or surprising can nevertheless be experienced as traumas. Finally, I will propose, within this structurally revised model, an expanded and refined conception of the work of mourning. By theorizing mourning not as decathexis, but as the bringing to consciousness of what we have loved and lost, I mean to suggest an alternative theoretical path for those who wish to understand the psychology of oppression and liberation. For political hope is, in the end, the gift of social mourning.

The Freudian Model

As those familiar with "Mourning and Melancholia" will recall, Freud distinguishes between two types of grief – or, more precisely, between two psychic strategies for responding to loss. The first he calls "mourning" and his description draws principally upon the familiar experience of grief that follows the death of a person one has deeply loved. In addition to feelings of sorrow, the main symptom of mourning is the painful withdrawal from life – an incapacity to take "interest in the outside world" (except to the degree that it reminds one of the person one has lost) and an inability to "adopt any new object of love." Freud proposes that mourning involves a particular kind of remembering that is saturated with feeling, a "hyper-cathected" recollection of every aspect of the lost object that bound the mourner to it. This work of memory is performed alongside a process of "reality testing": the mourner keeps the object alive in memory, but this remembering takes place always in conjunction with the painful recognition that the object is, in reality, gone. Through detailed and loving remembrance in the full knowledge of loss, one is able slowly and painfully to bring the process of mourning to an end. This does not mean an end

to sorrow, nor does it imply a forgetting of what one has loved. What it means, on Freud's account, is that the mourner is able to regain access to the libidinal energies that have been attached to that object, as a result of which "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again." The mourner is, in other words, able to love once more, to engage with interest the world outside (Freud, 1917, 1957, pp 243–245).

Melancholia shares most of the features of mourning, but it includes two dire additional symptoms. Most dramatically, as we have seen, the grief of the melancholic is accompanied by acute feelings of self-beratement or self-hatred. (As Freud notes in passing, this aggression can, in some cases, be directed simultaneously at the self and, in a kind of promiscuous and generalized misanthropy, at "everyone else" (p 246). Hamlet provides Freud with a literary illustration of this phenomenon.) The danger and severity of melancholia lies in this – at times suicidal – self-beratement. In addition to self-hatred, the symptoms of melancholia differ from mourning mainly in duration. Although the work of mourning takes place slowly, it comes to an end after a finite "lapse of time" (p 244). Melancholia, in contrast, can last indefinitely. Sometimes, after prolonged self-punishment, the melancholic rage can burn itself out. Frequently, it terminates only with death itself (pp 252, 257). Like the mourner but without the promise of liberation, the melancholic is unable to enter into new and dynamic object-relations, unable to sustain loving interactions with the world outside.

In the course of a dense, speculative discussion, Freud proposes four possible factors that may contribute to the blockage of mourning and the development of melancholic symptoms. First, he suggests that melancholia may emerge in response to "ideal" rather than "real" forms of loss – by which he means situations in which a loved person has not actually died, but has nevertheless been lost to the sufferer, as in cases of romantic rejection (pp 252, 256). Second, melancholia may be triggered by forms of loss that are, to a substantial degree, unconscious. Freud alludes here to cases in which a patient may well "know *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost" in that person – a situation most likely to occur when the loss itself is of an ideal character (p 245). Third, the process of mourning is often blocked by the presence of strong and unacknowledged ambivalence – conflicted feelings of anger or hatred as well as love – toward the person one has lost (p 251). (Such ambivalence is likely to be particularly acute in cases of "ideal" loss, especially if one takes rejection or abandonment to be the paradigmatic cause. It should also be evident that a bereaved person is particularly likely to repress, and thus render unconscious, such negative feelings.) Fourth, Freud proposes that melancholia may be especially likely to occur in cases where the original bond of love has been formed on the basis of narcissistic identification. In such circumstances, a person may respond to the experience of loss through a regressive movement from (narcissistic) object-love to pure narcissism: because the melancholic takes

the object into the ego as an identification, the libidinal energies that had been attached to the loved person may now be withdrawn and redirected towards the ego itself. This regression from object-love to identification provides love with a psychic refuge: "by taking flight into the ego, love escapes extinction" (p 257). But this retreat into narcissistic identification enables the melancholic, above all else, to displace onto him- or herself the feelings of rage and aggression that were unconsciously felt toward the lost object. It is this displacement of aggression through identification that explains the fierce self-beratement that distinguishes melancholia, including the "tendency toward suicide" (p 252).

In the opening paragraphs of "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud explicitly proposes that more social forms of loss (including quite abstract ones) can give rise to the same psychic responses as the experience of personal loss through death or abandonment. He explains that mourning and melancholia can emerge in "reaction to the loss of a loved person, *or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on*" (p 243; emphasis added). Having raised this provocative suggestion at the outset of the essay, Freud then immediately moves on to discuss structures of grief and mourning entirely in individual terms. His comment nevertheless suggests how a psychoanalytic inquiry into mourning might be opened onto a social plane. It is this recognition – that mourning and melancholia can emerge in response to social as well as individual deprivations – that so many scholars throughout the humanities and social sciences have been developing in recent years.

Most forms of socially induced collective loss are characterized by the features that Freud identifies as conditions for melancholia. Highly abstract and collective losses, such as the destruction of a political movement or the shattering of a cherished image of one's nation, are by their very nature "ideal." Because they are ideal, they will generally involve unconscious elements: one may know that one has lost a nationality or a political movement – but it should be clear that what one has lost *in* such things will usually be a matter of unconscious, as well as conscious, investment. It is equally clear that the loss of large ideals and social formations will generally involve ambivalence. At the very least, there will be anger that these things have allowed themselves to be destroyed, through whatever vulnerability or inadequacy. (This ambivalence will be especially acute in cases where the beloved object is perceived to be actively responsible for its own destruction.)[7] And finally, large-scale social crises will generally entail the loss of things – ideals, movements, social or cultural formations – to which the bereaved are attached through deep bonds of identification. To suffer such losses is, therefore, to suffer considerable narcissistic injury. For this reason, the victims of social disaster – the survivors of war, displacement, economic crisis or environmental devastation, for example – must often struggle to understand who they are in the wake of catastrophic transformations. In many cases, the rage that such victims feel in

the face of deprivation is directed violently against themselves – and, misanthropically, at the world around them.

Thus, the conditions for melancholia are often present for those struggling to grieve social injuries. And yet, while some do indeed respond melancholically to such conditions, others are able to find the difficult paths to mourning. These different psychic responses, as we will see, have dramatically different political implications.

The Triadic Model

In order to understand the distinctive and politically significant forms of grieving produced by social injury, it is necessary to revise the fundamental model of loss that undergirds Freud's conception of mourning *and* melancholia. In particular, it is necessary to move from a dyadic to a triadic model. Freud's account assumes a scenario in which there are two parties: a subject (the mourner) and an object (that which has been lost). Although the dyadic model may be adequate for analyzing some kinds of private loss, it is insufficient for understanding collective losses produced by ongoing and historically particular social dynamics. In cases of socially induced loss, we need to consider three terms: the subject (which may be an individual or a group), the object (which will generally require a complex definition: an ideal, a social or cultural formation, etc.) and the *social forces* that have destroyed that object or made it unavailable.

The triadic model opens up important questions that remain obscure in Freud's primarily intra-psychic account. The most significant of these asks *why* this object has been lost or rendered inaccessible. Others follow immediately from this: Who or what is *responsible* for my loss? Where should I place blame, and what is the proper object of the *anger* that accompanies loss? These questions are social (and, in some cases, political), but they are also properly psychoanalytic. Freud recognized the decisive importance of anger in the processes of grief, but his dyadic model reduces our capacity to think flexibly about the causes and objects of that anger in a social setting. In Freud's account – and in many psychoanalytic accounts that have succeeded his – the anger of the bereaved is imagined as having only two possible objects: the lost object or the mourner him- or herself. The triadic model demands that we identify the social forces that have produced any particular experience of collective loss, and it holds open the possibility that the bereaved may indeed – and, in some cases, should – feel rage at those social processes or formations. The triadic model does not presume that in cases of socially induced loss, anger will be directed at destructive social forces *instead* of at the mourner or at the lost object. On the contrary, it seeks to open the question of the variable relationships that exist between and among those forces, the bereaved, and that which has been lost. In some cases – one might think, for example, of Polish

Jews who survived the Holocaust – the bereaved may properly experience the causes of their loss (Nazism, organized anti-semitism) as almost entirely separable from themselves and from what they have lost (loved ones, shtetl communities, a shared Jewish culture). Others – post-war Germans, say, who were children during the Nazi era – may be mourning something (the loss of an idealized image of the German Reich) that is responsible for its own destruction: the cause of loss (and the object of anger) is also that which is loved and grieved. In other cases – that of a loyal SS officer, for example, grieving the loss of a heroic, imperial Germany after the defeat of Nazism – the mourner is himself inescapably entangled with both the object of his loss and that which has destroyed it. The anger accompanying these different scenarios will be variously distributed, and will pose different challenges for the work of mourning.

In proposing the triadic model, I have begun with the question of responsibility and anger because the problem of aggression is so central to the mourning process and to its painfully self-destructive variant, melancholia. For melancholia is, in essence, a form of mourning that is blocked by *unconscious* and *displaced* aggression. Freud is clear, and on the whole convincing, about this matter. The melancholic internalizes the lost object, taking it into the ego as an identification. The psychic aim of this internalization is to enable the melancholic to displace onto the self feelings of aggression that are, for whatever reasons, inadmissible to consciousness. I wish to emphasize this point because, as I suggested in the opening of this essay, those cultural critics who have sought to celebrate the grieving of oppressed groups as positive forms of melancholia have needed to ignore or minimize the central, self-destructive aspect of this psychic phenomenon. Melancholia is not simply a form of grieving in which anger is present as well as sorrow; and it is certainly not a form of grieving in which anger is more fully acknowledged than it is in mourning. Rather, melancholia is precisely a mode of grieving in which a bereaved person is unable to acknowledge consciously the nature and object of the anger that has accompanied the experience of loss. This is what produces self-beratement and misanthropy. Whether or not melancholia leads actually to suicide, the self-punishment is extreme, as is the depressed cauterization of libido – the indefinite inability to love. The social variants of melancholia are no less painful and no less disastrous: they merely take place on a larger scale.

In cases of socially induced, collective loss – as in purely private instances of bereavement – sufferers must be able to name the causes of their grief and the objects of their anger. If they cannot identify the social formations that have harmed them, and cannot find the means of directing their aggression at them, similar forms of self-punishment and similar scapegoating behaviors will follow. The triadic model I have proposed enables us to trace these varied strategies of psychic displacement.

The triadic model also focuses attention on the complex and persistent relationships that characterize scenarios of social loss, which are usually

sustained and ongoing. The economic and social pressures that truncate the lives of people in an exploited and impoverished working-class community, for example, do not arrive one day and vanish the next, like a tornado. Rather, they commonly persist throughout a lifetime, even across generations. The effort to grieve these privations (the psychic depletion caused by unrewarding and repetitive jobs, the exclusion from education, the lack of time to nurture families, the denial of opportunities for self-realization, and so on) will take place under the persistent pressure of the very forces that have produced these losses. Similarly, the objects being mourned in such instances will not simply vanish, as in the case of a person who has died. When people grieve for relations and human possibilities that are denied by prevailing social structures, they often grieve for things that continue to exist in truncated form (one's own creativity, familial bonds, etc.) – or that might exist if those ongoing social pressures were diminished.[8] For this reason, analyses of socially induced loss must account for processes of grieving in which the bereaved sustain ongoing relations to the objects they are persistently losing and to the social pressures that are persistently injuring them. In such circumstances, neither the objects nor causes of loss are engaged at a purely intra-psychic level – as they may be in the most delimited cases of private mourning.

Because the triadic model enables us to account for the duration of experiences of social injury, it provides a valuable context in which to reconceptualize the nature of collective traumas. The psychoanalytic concept of trauma has proved fruitful for many scholars concerned with catastrophic social phenomena, but the standard formulations of this concept have important limitations as well as strengths. The virtue of the trauma model is its focus on the unassimilability of some forms of social injury. It reminds us that social phenomena can breach our psychic boundaries in ways that we cannot process or tolerate at the moment of their occurrence. This psychic fact can lead not only to intractable forms of suffering, but also to acts of unconscious repetition that can be psychically and socially devastating.[9] In Freud's original formulations, the distinctive unassimilability of traumatic events results most centrally from "the factor of surprise" or "fright" (Freud, 1920, 1961, *Pleasure Principle*, p. 6). But this focus on sudden punctuality or "shock" is clearly of limited use in the analysis of ongoing and sustained dynamics of social injury and deprivation. If we are trying to understand the psychic effects of the Holocaust, of capitalist modernization, or of chattel slavery, we are struggling with social phenomena that cannot be said to be experienced indefinitely (for years, decades, centuries) as sudden shocks that take the psyche by surprise.[10] In part, this difficulty may be addressed by noting that these large social processes may produce myriad particular experiences that are suddenly injurious and whose unexpectedness gives them a traumatic character. But the triadic model suggests a fuller explanation of the way in which the ongoing social processes can themselves be traumatic. Following the logic of this model, I would like to propose that people

experience structural social injuries as traumas when they do not possess adequate analyses of the processes or formations that have harmed them. In the absence of such social or historical accounts, they will experience these processes not merely as injurious, but as mysteriously and inexplicably so. It is the lack of adequately explanatory social narratives that makes these catastrophic experiences not only painful but psychically unassimilable – and may doom the victims to traumatic symptoms, including the compulsion to repeat. In the case of large-scale social injuries, then, the psyche is "unprepared" (Freud, 1920, 1961, p 26) and hence traumatized not by the sudden punctuality of its violation, but by a potentially indefinite incomprehensibility of the social process that is wounding it.

By analyzing social traumas within the larger triadic framework, we can also understand more fully what it might mean to remediate them.[11] For those who are experiencing destructive social processes as traumas, the psychic task of "working through" must involve not only the painful therapeutic project of raising their injuries to consciousness – but also the work of developing explanatory social narratives that will make the ongoing causes of suffering cognitively intelligible.[12] As victims develop such narratives, they must also confront the rage that will accompany the growing recognition of the nature and causes of their injuries. Although Freud did not focus on the place of anger in the working-through of trauma, his passing references to the symptomatic similarities of melancholia and trauma should alert us to the importance of the blockage of aggression in the perpetuation of traumatic suffering (Freud, 1920, pp 6, 27). The triadic model provides a structure for understanding how the objects of anger can be identified – and what may be at stake in displacing that aggression. As victims gain consciousness of the injuries they have endured (and of their causes), the task of "working through" will become, increasingly, the task of mourning. For traumatic social injuries entail losses: these will commonly include the loss of identifiable external objects (beloved people, communities, social movements, etc.), but they will also include the loss of cherished aspects of the self that has been violated.

But in the context of this model, with its expanded social dimension, mourning itself requires theoretical reconceptualization. Because Freud was principally concerned with melancholia, his account of mourning is relatively undeveloped. It is also problematic in several respects that have had an enduring influence on subsequent psychoanalytic discussions. Most fundamentally, Freud suggests that the psychic work of mourning centrally involves a "detachment" of libido, a decathexis, from what one has loved and lost. This notion that libido must be "withdrawn" from the lost object in the process of mourning rests upon the so-called "economic" model of the psyche, to which Freud was recurrently drawn. This model presumes that the amount of energy (including libido) in the psyche is limited, contained within a closed system, and that in order to have this energy available for one object it must be withdrawn from another. For this

reason, Freud describes new objects of attachment as "replacements" or "substitutes" for objects that have been lost (Freud, 1917, pp 244–245).

These formulations, introduced in "Mourning and Melancholia," have encouraged an unfortunately rigid understanding of the movement from loss to new love. The logic of necessary decathexis in mourning rests on an overly mechanistic understanding of the psyche and implies an unduly constrained conception of our capacity for love. Libido is not infinite, to be sure, but it is not a mechanical closed system either. Freud's implication that the mourner must, as a matter of course, sever affective ties to that which has been loved and lost has appropriately struck some commentators as insensitive to the realities of grieving – and it has, as I have noted, prompted some recent critics to dismiss the mourning process itself as inherently normative and coercive. We need to refine and expand our conception of mourning in this regard, rather than rejecting what is, in fact, an indispensable psychic process. In particular, I propose that the process of mourning involves, not a detachment of libido, but almost its opposite: it involves, above all, the vigorous effort to raise to consciousness one's ongoing libidinal investments in what one has loved and lost.[13] It is the protracted and "hypercathected" recollection of beloved things now lost that enables us to regain access – and to reinforce our ongoing relation – to those aspects of ourselves that were inspired, stimulated, gratified by something still beloved but unavailable to us. This process enables us to hold on, at the deepest affective as well as conscious levels, to the libidinal possibilities in ourselves that were engaged by the object taken from us. The hypercathected activity of mourning thus enables us *both* to sustain our attachment to what we have lost *and* to extend these libidinal energies to new objects.

I want to propose, further, that we should revise – or possibly abandon altogether – the language of "replacement" and "substitution," which rests on the problematic logic of decathexis and which has persisted within psychoanalytic discussions of loss. This vocabulary implies that the end of mourning is marked by one's capacity to seek – and find – new objects that take the place, more or less identically, of what one has lost. It is in this sense that they are "replacements" or "substitutes" and not merely new objects of love. These are misleading formulations, for the degree to which one experiences new objects rigidly as replications of the old is, in fact, the degree to which one remains mired in melancholia. It is an indication that one continues to be open to the world only to the extent that it reminds one of that which has been lost. The end of mourning should be understood, rather, as the renewed capacity for dynamic object-relation: as the capacity to experience new people and relations with spontaneity, with a receptivity to difference, to newness, to changes in oneself and others. To insist that a full process of mourning leads to such a capacity for dynamic and spontaneous relation is not to suggest that these new bonds are unrelated to lost objects that have been mourned. For the mourning process,

as I have described it, is above all an affirmation of those energies in the self that have been engaged and attached to what one has loved and lost. In new love relations, one brings these ongoing and affirmed aspects of the self into contact with different possibilities. The depth and fullness of the mourning process is, then, demonstrated by the dynamism and flexibility with which those libidinal possibilities in the self are extended into the present and the future.[14]

These revisions to the Freudian conception of mourning can be integrated readily into the triadic model, providing us with a richer sense of what it means to mourn socially induced losses. In social mourning, we invent or adapt cultural practices that enable us to name our continued yearnings for forms of social activity and personal realization that have been denied by the social orders in which we live. When this particular work of memory can be performed, the victims of systematic social injury are able not only to recall what they have been denied, but to open themselves to the possibility that those imperiled human capacities might find a way to flourish once again.[15]

To the degree that victims of social injuries seek only to retrieve what they have lost in the mode of rigid replication, the work of mourning remains unfinished and obstructed. In social as in private processes of grieving, the capacity to imagine only replication is a sign that the bereaved can gain access to libidinal energies only to the degree that they remain exclusively attached to something lost. One can see this phenomenon with particular clarity, for example, in the case of people who are grieving for the disappointment or failure of political movements. In the face of such disappointments, some cauterize their former political aspirations, cutting themselves off entirely from the yearnings they embodied. Others retain access to those desires, but only as a rigid – sometimes nostalgic, sometimes furious – attachment to the precise form of a past political movement: only the return of the slain Dr. King or Malcolm X (or of some imagined precise equivalent) would enable the Civil Rights movement to regain its momentum, for such people; only a return to the particular socialist movement crushed by the Red Scare would be meaningful; only if young women could imagine feminism in the same terms as those who launched the second wave could the women's movement truly be extended. In such examples, the process of mourning remains significantly impeded.[16] For when the process of social mourning has run its course, when its painful and creative work has been pursued most fully, the bereaved are able to regain access to the aspirations and remembered pleasures attached to lost objects (in this case, disappointed or stalled emancipatory movements) – and to extend those libidinal impulses dynamically in the present, meeting responsively and spontaneously the specificities of an evolving world, scarred by loss.

When private mourning is able to proceed fully, one opens oneself to the possibility of new attachment. In the case of social mourning, an injured portion of a society is able once again to imagine the possible flourishing of capacities in themselves that have been denied by the social structures within which they live.

Political hope is a social form of mourning: indeed, it is the principal form that social mourning takes. In contrast, political despair – and its ironic variant, political cynicism – are social forms of melancholia. While some level of social consciousness is a necessary condition for such mourning (something that enables the process, preventing the destructive displacement of anger), political hope is an embodiment and result of the process, its gift. If political hope is not shallow (a form of complacency or ignorance about social injury), it is a remarkable psychic as well as social achievement. It represents the ability to acknowledge the depth of one's loss, to name those aspirations and satisfactions that have been denied, and to imagine how, in some form, they might be dynamically explored and enjoyed in the future.

But like any form of mourning, political hope is an arduous process that poses grave psychic difficulties. It is not only a relief to recognize that what one has lost might be revived (in the complex and particular sense I have described). Such a recognition can also be a painful burden. If what one has lost – a political movement, the frustrated hopes of an impoverished community – has been crushed by vast social forces, then it is only possible to imagine the revival and extension of such thwarted yearnings if one can also imagine collective resistance and social transformation. To mourn social losses of this kind, in other words, is also to accept responsibility for a daunting task of social change. That responsibility is formidable: for many, over the course of the last century, it has been intolerable. Nevertheless, the triadic model should help us to see that the acceptance of social responsibility is not only an ethical or political imperative, but also a psychic necessity. For in mourning socially induced losses, one must find ways to name the causes of one's grief and anger and to imagine how yearnings that have been systematically denied might ultimately find means of realization. Once one recognizes that one's deep needs collide with the social structures in which one lives, one must seek either to deny those needs or to change those structures. This recognition is frightening as well as liberating. The challenge of mourning social injuries is faced by each of us, in every generation – though in different ways, in varied circumstances, and with different urgencies. The strong grip of political cynicism and despair in our own time is a powerful reminder of the persistence and the price of social melancholia. The continual rise of emancipatory social movements, even in the wake of dreadful injury and deprivation, is proof that we can also find our way to paths of collective mourning.

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Notes

1 The scholarship on social forms of mourning and trauma is voluminous and growing steadily. Some influential explorations by historians include Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich (1975), Lepenies (1992), Rousso (1991), Winter (1995) and Friedlander (1992, 1993). For sociological investigations, see Marris (1974) and Ericson (1994). For debates about trauma, see especially Caruth (1995, 1996) and La Capra (1994, 2001). For a helpful overview, see Homans (2000). For a recent collection of essays, see Eng and Kazanjian (2002). I will discuss literary treatments below.

2 For two convincing feminist critiques of Freud's insistence on decathexis in mourning, see Fradenburg (1990) and Woodward (1993). For critiques from queer and anti-racist perspectives, respectively, see Moon (1995) and Novak (1999).

3 See, for example, Novak's claim that "melancholia" is a "therapeutic" and more "ethical" response to the African-American experience of racism, while mourning in this setting would be "a surrender to the forces that produced the losses in the first place" (Novak, 1999, p 191). For one attempt to theorize a hybrid "melancholic mourning," for similar reasons, see Munoz (1997). For a critical mapping of this emergent celebration of melancholia, see Forter (2003).

4 My forthcoming book, *Mourning Modernity: Literary Modernism and the Injuries of American Capitalism*, offers an extended discussion of these literary and theoretical arguments.

5 Some readers may be surprised by my inclusion of Jean Toomer and Willa Cather in this list. Although they were canonized neither so early nor so firmly as the other writers mentioned here, I would argue that their recognition as modernists preceded that of most other women and African-American writers in large measure because of their greater conformity to a melancholic structure of feeling.

6 For a recent version of this celebration of melancholic modernism, see Ramazani (1994).

7 See, for example, the case of Germans after World War II, as discussed by Santner (1990) and Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich (1975).

8 The objection may be raised that "loss" comes in my account to describe situations in which human capacities are not so much "lost" as prevented from flourishing. Butler offers the useful formulation that social formations (in her case, homophobia) can "preempt" and "foreclos[e]" the possibility of realizing certain desires (homosexual ones, in her example) in ways that produce profound experiences of loss that may be especially difficult to grieve (Butler, 1997, p 135). I share the view that we should recognize such forms of preemption and foreclosure as entailing loss, and we should attend to the distinctiveness of such experiences.

9 For an influential application of the Freudian concept of trauma to cultural, especially literary, representations of social injury, see Caruth (1996).

10 Some scholars have sought to render the concept of trauma more flexible, in order to adapt it for use in discussing the gradual, ongoing character of injurious social processes. See, for example, Ericson's model of "collective trauma," which moves away from an emphasis on "surprise." Ericson is not concerned with the details of psychic experience, however, and we need more adequate theorizations of the psychodynamics of gradually inflicted social traumas. I would recommend as one starting point, within the psychoanalytic tradition, Khan's formulations about "cumulative trauma" – which might be productively elaborated in social terms, though they have yet to be taken up by socially-minded scholars (Khan, 1963, 1974, 1964).

11 While clinicians (and social scientists like Ericson) have been centrally concerned with the question of remediation, literary scholarship on trauma has been surprisingly inattantive to such matters. I would suggest that this inattention to remediation stems, in large part, from the tendency among literary critics and theorists to universalize trauma as the essence of history itself, and from the conflation of socially induced forms of "loss" with metaphysical forms of "absence" as noted by La Capra (2001, pp 43–85).

12 As Jameson (1988) has pointed out, works of expressive culture may have a special importance in enabling individuals to map the vast and evolving structures of destructive social formations – including, for example, modern capitalism – that shape their lives, but often exceed their conscious comprehension. I wish to add that the work of "cognitively mapping" such social processes may thus be understood as psychically (as well as politically) imperative for modern subjects to minimize (and, retrospectively, to "work through") the traumas of modernization.

13 Freud nearly recognized as much, in asserting that mourning involves the "hypercathected" recollection of everything that binds one – "expectations" as well as "memories," he notes – to the lost object. Freud himself, however, goes on to assert that the "detachment of libido" is somehow "accomplished" by this very process of "hypercathe[xis]." Freud was reaching here for an important point: that mourning does paradoxically involve both a holding onto and (in some sense) a letting go of what one can no longer have in the present. But by characterizing the acknowledgement of loss specifically as a "detachment" or "withdrawal" of libido, he confused matters a good deal, implying a kind of ultimate affective relinquishing of the object that is belied by most mourners' experience – and that actually diminishes a proper sense of the *ongoing* manner in which lost objects are held onto even in the fullest processes of mourning that lead to renewed capacity for love (Freud, 1917, 1957, pp 244–245).

14 See Fradenburg's (1990) related critique. While Fradenburg emphasizes the radical particularity of every love-object, my account of mourning stresses the persistence of libidinal impulses in the self that carry over from one attachment to another. I regard these as complementary, not alternative, formulations.

15 In thinking about an expanded conception of mourning adequate to circumstances of socially induced loss, I have been particularly inspired by the work of Butler (1997), Crimp (1989) and Santner (1990).

16 In this context, see Brown (2002).

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