

What Acceptance Is

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Abstract

This is a personal and philosophical reflection on the theme of acceptance as it relates to my grief journey following the deaths of my son and father (among others) in recent years. Its main premise is that acceptance is a state of being given, and, as such, we would do well to stop not accepting. To learn how to do this, I draw on a wide range of sources, from Christian and Persian mystics (Marguerite Porete, Simone Weil, Rumi, Hāfez), to rock singers (Jeremy Enigk, Eddie Vedder, Chris Cornell, Kurt Cobain, Maynard James Keenan), to architects (Rem Koolhaas). I also dive into the Ancient Greek etymology of the word “acceptance.” The overall result is a philosophical guide into acceptance.

This article includes a Public Holistic Response by reviewer Nic Cottone.

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- ¶11 My father died. My son died. Truthfully, every day of the last seven years has been extremely difficult. My wife, Joanne, and I welcomed two sons into the world after our first son Finlay's departure, and yet even parenting has transpired as an emotional ἀγών (*agon*), which is to say a general struggle with myself against myself as I attempt to say yes to a reality that is not what I want. In no uncertain terms, I can say that I struggle to find the thread through the maze. Even when—through music, art, intellect, soul—I have found it, the point of following the path eludes me. Why continue? What is the point of all of this?
- ¶12 The most excruciating, confounding, and exasperating aspect of grief has been, by far, the notion of Acceptance. That word appears frequently in the discourse on grief, and yet what it means is never quite clear. It's a "stage" of grief, sure. Actually, until recently, it was the "final" stage, which suggested that when I reach it I will almost be done with this grief thing. But in descriptions of that "stage," it is not uncommon to find definitions that simply recenter the word I need to figure out: "This stage is about accepting the fact that there is a new reality that cannot be changed, and figuring out how the new reality will impact your life, relationships, and trajectory."¹ Accepting is about accepting. Another therapeutic modality, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), provides a different angle. ACT fuses mindfulness and cognitive-behavioral techniques to help griever suspend judgment and act according to truths that become apparent in the wake of loss. But where precisely is acceptance in this scheme? In the not-judging? If so, then we only glimpse acceptance negatively. In the acting-in-accordance-with-truth? That doesn't seem quite right; more properly, this action seems to be a commitment to not knowing, to testing our beliefs. Helpful, yes. A definition of acceptance? No.
- ¶13 Even if I don't scrutinize the word and simply sense its meaning intuitively: How can I accept a world in which my son is dead? How do I embrace the vivacity of my second son, Phalen, when doing so only highlights Finlay's pure silence? From where can I summon energy to tend to my third son, Ren, whose congenital heart problem portends a lifetime of medical intervention? Why would I want to participate in this traumatic and uncivil sociopolitical landscape with the added sadness of my dear dead son? To accept would mean to let go and let it be. And yet holding on—to my beliefs, to my ethical positions, to my desires—feels like the surest way to affirm my weak agency in this world where I am but one living creature among so many natural and social powers. If I let go, then I will be washed away, swept into the abyss of quotidian existence where I pay my taxes, work, eat, sleep, laugh, cry, and admit that the world will never stop to mourn the death of my loved ones in the way in which I feel is right and necessary and good.
- ¶14 Still, I know that Acceptance is not excruciating merely because it seems impossible. It confounds because it is necessary. To *not* accept means nothing other than to refuse to live fully. From this realization springs a bounty of eye-opening truths. For if I protest and say that, no, I can live just fine with this anger in my heart, then I simply look inside and see that this anger eats my soul. If I look around and say, aha! I publish books and pursue a deep understanding of complex philosophical concepts and so therefore I am perfectly alive, then I fall silent for a mere moment and cede to the truth that intellectual work is not the same as inner peace and tranquili-

ty. All my activity, all my deeds, all my words, these things do not erase the pain and sorrow I feel without my son, my father, my friends who have gone. The only cure is to accept that this is how it is, that the pain is part of life, that the sorrow is the index of my ongoing relationship with the dead. I know this is true and I don't want this to be true. What is this "Acceptance"? What is this φάρμακον (*pharmakon*) that is both poison and remedy all at once?



- ¶15 One day, something happened. A light went on.
- ¶16 In May 2018, I went on a silent retreat with this question in the front of my mind. Early on, deep in one of the days' many meditations, I realized that to embrace silence I had to let go of the question and, to whatever extent this seemed possible at the time, simply be. I saw the question written in large neon letters behind the blacks of my eyelids, and then I saw it recede into the distance and disappear, leaving only the sound of my breath. I figured that I would not encounter any deep insight about Acceptance after all, that I would simply restore my physical and mental health through the practice of quieting the mind. But then, on the final day, before the final meditation, I decided to walk the retreat center's outdoor labyrinth with nothing in my mind other than the notion of Acceptance. I moved one foot in front of the other. When I reached the center, *it* came to me. Understanding. I saw clearly what Acceptance is, the obstacles to reaching it, and the way to dissolve those obstacles.
- ¶17 Acceptance is a "horizon problem." From the position of despair and depression, the position I have occupied for the better part of the last eight years, Acceptance has appeared to be the purest insult. From the shores of darkness, Acceptance is an illusory light, a story that people tell to make themselves go on living. This narrative dominated my thoughts from June 2017 to May 2018, and the proof of my unhappiness shows up in the three grief notes I drafted throughout the year²:

July 24, 2017

It occurs to me grief is forever. We acclimate to its presence. What then is acceptance? Does it come, or is it a manner of comportment?

December 5, 2017

I feel like I've splintered into multiple selves. Most of these selves are now adrift in alternate worlds that don't align with this "real" world and my "actual" self. I am thus trapped here, incomplete, unfulfilled.

February 10, 2018

I can't escape the frame of mind that says, Nothing Matters.

- ¶18 It is not the case that this despairing perspective is wrong *per se*; rather, it is a partial perspective that perceives not the essence of Acceptance—what it most fundamentally *is*—but its popular aura, its presentation as something we are just supposed to understand or believe or achieve.
- ¶19 Between Despair and Acceptance stretches a horizon, and it is this horizon that I apprehend when I stare through my bloodshot eyes at the hopeless hope of grief's resolution. Horizons are

a strange kind of substance, both there and not. If I stand, for example, on the Atlantic shore of Edisto Island in South Carolina and send my gaze east, I could truthfully say that I am looking at the horizon. That concrete thing at which I stare, however, is not there. The horizon is nothing other than the limit of my vision, both an end and not. My sight trails off a few miles into the sea, but beyond there is more ocean and then, directly east, Marrakesh, Jerusalem, then Lahore, then Shanghai, then San Diego, and eventually the back of my own head. I see none of those places, only the curve of the water.

¶10 When I say that I now recognize this horizon between Despair and Acceptance as a “problem,” I don’t mean that it is unwanted or negative. This problem is nothing other than a task, a proposition, a “thing put forward” that, once recognized, leads beyond despair. The path of recognition begins with the word “horizon” itself, a word that carries a key to the problem of Acceptance:

late 14c., *orisoun*, from Old French *orizon* (14c., Modern French *horizon*), earlier *orizonte* (13c.), from Latin *horizontem* (nominative horizon), from Greek *horizon* (*kyklos*) “bounding (circle),” from *horizein* “bound, limit, divide, separate,” from *horos* “boundary, landmark, marking stones.” The h-was restored in English 17c. in imitation of Latin. Old English used *eagge-mearc* (“eye-mark”) for “limit of view, horizon.” The apparent horizon is distinguished from the celestial or astronomical horizon.³

¶11 The key here is *kyklos*, circle. If we first admit that the face of Acceptance we see from the realm of depression is only an illusion, and then name that illusion the “horizon” or limit of our understanding, then the task of Acceptance becomes to unbind, to unite, to open the arc of the circle that we have drawn around ourselves and expose our hearts to the Everything(s). What is Acceptance when it is no longer bound by our individual perspective? What is the essence of Acceptance, not what it appears to be but what we would know it to be if we lived within it? Can we put ourselves on the other shore and look back at the land of Despair from the shore of Acceptance, thereby imaginatively dwelling within precisely that realm that seems so excruciatingly foreign?

¶12 To answer these questions, we need to prepare for a counterintuitive shift. When we think of Acceptance, we usually imagine it as something that we have to do. It is up to us to accept. Unfortunately, if we succumb to this typical understanding then we are already off on the wrong path. Acceptance is not something that we do, not an action that we must somehow learn and then perfect. Acceptance is, instead, something done to us. This is the first part of the shift: to accept we must acquiesce to our status as patient. Instead of thinking of ourselves as agents, active individuals asserting our will through our deeds, we must tune in to our status as beings enduring a certain event. This event does us, and much of our “power” comes from allowing ourselves to be done to.

¶13 The tacit belief in autonomy and individual agency, ubiquitous in US educational institutions and media representations of the “self,” urges us to do grief. How to grieve is unclear, but doing it promptly is necessary because eventually we have to get back to normal. What this “normal” is is also unclear, but we’ll find indicators suggesting we haven’t yet arrived there. We will sense that our time to grieve has been used up. Paid or unpaid leave is over. Family members expect their holiday gatherings. Friends stop making meals for us.

¶14 Accepting that grief is something done to us, however, changes the paradigm completely. Our actions are not capable of reaching Acceptance. Performing grief and striving for acceptance

will bring us only as far as the viewpoint from which we perceive Acceptance as the horizon, as something “out there,” a limit that compels more striving. But what we perceive as the horizon is a false limit. There is more there. To sense that “more,” we do nothing. Not-doing, becoming-patient, practicing non-performance: these are the dispositions that allow the event of Acceptance to be done to us.

¶15 What precisely is this event being done to us? It is a ceaseless giving. We are being given. The essence of Acceptance is the act of giving.

¶16 Here we encounter the second part of the counterintuitive shift. In order to understand how Acceptance—a word that is synonymous with receiving and reception—is actually the manifestation of pure giving, we can turn to the experience of mystics who come to know God through their direct communication with the Divine. Historically, in terms of Christianity, this direct communication angered the institution of the Church because it allowed individuals to circumvent its hierarchy. Mystics practiced ascetic exercises that opened them to divine messages, and these messages all spoke of the need to let go, to dissolve the self, and in so doing to find the meeting point between loving and being loved.

¶17 The poet and Classicist Anne Carson writes beautifully of this theme in her essay “How Women [...] Tell God,” in which she lingers on the writing of Sappho, Marguerite Porete, and Simone Weil. Of the three mystics that Carson writes about, Porete is perhaps the most helpful starting point. Burned at the stake in 1310 for her writings about love, Porete gifts to us a complicated work called *The Mirror of Simple Souls* ([Carson 2022](#)). For Carson, the soul of this book is the practice of love that will unite Porete with God. The practice begins with assenting to the call of God and then requires Porete to find a way to God despite the binds of her fleshly existence. “Marguerite first discovers in reality a certain absolute demand and then she consents to it. Like Sappho she sees herself split in two by this consent and experiences it as a kind of ‘annihilation’” (163). Here, with the word “annihilation,” Porete rhymes with mystics from many cultures who see the goal of their lives, not to become more devout or more pious or more of anything at all, but, rather, to become nothing.

¶18 Carson underscores the pain that Porete felt when she realized that all her human action, including her desire to love God, was actually obstructing her path to God for, in the end, God’s immensity could only be welcomed by not merely clearing the house of her being of all unnecessary accoutrements but by razing the house to the ground. Carson, taking the word from Weil, describes this act of razing as “decreation”: “The process of decreation is for her a dislodging of herself from a centre where she cannot stay because staying there blocks God” (167). For Weil and Porete, the problem is the “I.” “I cannot go towards God in love without bringing myself along. And so in the deepest possible sense I can never be alone with God. I can only be alone ‘with’ God” (169).

¶19 And this “with” holds the mystic key that unlocks the problem of Acceptance. To be with God (not “with” God) is to be “of” God, to dwell so intimately within God that we become love itself. But to do this, we must let go of love, or what we know of it. Strangely, within the love of God, there is no longer love. It disappears because it is no longer needed. When you are love, you no longer need to perform the task of loving. The fusion of opposites discovered by the mystics—Love/No-Love—relates directly to the seemingly paradoxical union of Acceptance and Giving. How is

the essence of Acceptance a pure Giving? It is so because the nature of Acceptance is to give. There can be no human act of Acceptance if nothing has been offered. If we were to transport ourselves from the beach of finitude where we stand, travel through the horizon, and land on the shore of Acceptance itself, we would look back at our former position and see a kind of overwhelming deservingness. If we could see with a telescope's precision and look from the land of Acceptance directly into our own human face, we would see a being deserving of the greatest gift. Acceptance gives this gift, insofar as it is giving.

¶20 Let's call this gift "life." In terms of the big picture, what is this greatest gift if not life itself? The problem is, under the weight of grief, we don't want it. If life includes the absence of my son, then I don't want this gift. But in this refusal lies another realization. To accept means not to perform an action but to stop refusing. Acceptance, in other words, is to allow the gift to be given. Life, in this guise, becomes a transmission of endless "belligerent symphonies," as singer Scott Hutchison of the band Frightened Rabbit bemoans in his song "[Dead Now](#):"

I'm dead now, check my chest and you'll see
 The light has been mined from me, burned for the heat
 Oh I'm dead now can you hear the relief
 As life's belligerent symphonies finally cease

¶21 For some of us—certainly for Hutchison who killed himself in May 2018, a couple weeks before I went on retreat—it's all just too much. Life is an unbearable gift. The horizon of death—i.e., what death looks like from the land of the tortured—seems to portend a relief from the surge of feelings and thoughts, "ticks and inconsistencies," stirred up by the flowing moment-to-momentness of life. Acceptance, which requires letting the flood in, leads to the opposite of death; it leads to more vibrant life. It should not be surprising that the thought of more life scares so many and leads to the final turn toward the horizon of death. But all active attempts at Acceptance will only confuse the matter. To let the flood in requires the peculiar form of non-doing that Eastern philosophers talk about. This non-doing is not a task to undertake, but, rather, a releasing of the props with which we hold ourselves up. Non-doing Acceptance is the particular form of dynamic passivity that allows us to participate in the effortless, and sometimes belligerent, giving of life.

¶22 The Persian poet Hāfez (Khwāja Šamsu d-Dīn Muḥammad Hāfez-e Šīrāzī, 1325–1390) somehow finds words for this gift that is life in his poem "It Felt Love" ([Hāfez 1999](#)):

How
Did the rose
Ever open its heart

And give to this world
All its
Beauty?

It felt the encouragement of light
Against its
Being,

Otherwise,
We all remain

Too
Frightened.

^{¶23} The phrase “encouragement of light / Against its / Being” touches the pulse of the matter. On the surface, Hāfez paints a picture of a rose bathing in the sun, soaking up the invigorating emollient of pure light, which, for Hāfez and other Islamic thinkers, equates to the Divine. But the enjambment adds a second layer to this story. “light / Against” is the flower’s act of resistance. Though encouraged by the light, the rose prefers to hide its heart. It goes against its wishes to bloom. And yet, the flower’s life, its “Being,” which Hāfez’s translator emphasizes by dedicating a separate line to that single word, is nothing without the act of blooming. So the flower lets go and blooms. It doesn’t choose to bloom. It stops choosing not to bloom. Fear is the name Hāfez gives to this choice against blooming, but he makes it clear that “Too Frightened” is a bogus paralysis. After all, the rose’s reason for Being is to give of its beauty. Fear is a matter of ego, but the flower is for others and thus basks in resplendent egolessness once it lets go and does its thing.

^{¶24} One of the teachings of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, the founder of the Art of Living Retreat Center where I undertook my silent retreat, further illuminates *non-doing Acceptance* and the love of letting go. We watched a video of Sri Sri responding to a complaint about the difficulties of existing alongside other people: “When I am on this retreat,” the questioner lamented, “I can see the divine in all people. I look around and I feel nothing but love for everyone around me. When I leave and go home, however, this all changes. I go to work and all I see are people who annoy me. I just can’t accept them. What can I do to extend the teaching of the retreat into my daily life?” Sri Sri finishes reading the question aloud and then emits a polite laugh: “Go ahead, don’t accept them. What is your alternative?” Everyone in the room laughs a similar laugh because they understand

his point. The alternative to accepting people is anger and frustration. These are feelings that we want to shed, but they are feelings that we ourselves create.

¶125 Non-doing Acceptance reorients the choice. The choice we actually have is not whether to accept our fellow humans. The choice is to create these feelings of resentment. If we cease to create those feelings, *then acceptance reveals itself as what is already occurring*. Anger, frustration, resentment: these are constructs that we fabricate because we believe on some level that they are more pleasing than the work of seeing beyond the façade of our fellow humans into their true selves, selves that look a lot like our own selves. Bereft of those constructs, our ears begin to perceive within the belligerent symphonies the individual warming tones that motivates the heart to bloom. The warmth of these tones leads to the wild feeling of being alive, which sadly, many of us try to anaesthetize through narratives of disappointment or carefully cultured chemical protocols. But make no mistake. Living, loving, and unfurling is the path of least resistance.

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¶126 Acceptance is not what it appears to be. It is not something I must do but, instead, something that is happening concurrent with each breath I take. This “happening” is life itself, a gift, the intensity of which numbs the gums and buckles the knees as it animates our hearts and souls for our few trips around the sun. Against the acquired habit of bracing myself against the g-force of the journey, I must stop resisting and act like Hāfez’s loving rose. To reappraise my situation from the perspective of Acceptance—an imaginative act which is perhaps the dress rehearsal many of us need before we can affirm ourselves through the patience of letting go—is to review my circumstance with the kind of unconditional love that is so pure that it itself knows not what love is since it is love itself.

¶127 By the time I stood in the middle of that labyrinth, chest humming with breath and the teachings of Sri Sri, I felt—could practically *taste*—the arrival of the final verse to the song of Acceptance. This verse spoke of the significance of the relation between the constructs of anger, frustration, and resentment, on the one hand, and the architecture of the voice, on the other hand. Looking back, this is not a surprising connection. Nowhere is the power and texture of the voice more palpable than a silent retreat! Our most metaphysical organ, the voice unites our physical bodies, our intuition, and our intellectual circuitry. In its grain, we can sense even the most minute resistance against what is. To focus on the *architecture* of the voice, in turn, is to gain insight into the sustainability of the worlds we build through language. When we build our beliefs through song and speech, are we constructing these beliefs in such a way that they communicate openly with the dynamism of the great weave of the world? Where Acceptance is concerned, do we, when we lament, construct our lamentations to mesh with the being-given presented through love and life?

¶128 Singers who use their voice to grapple with life’s overwhelming abundance offer a master class in the art of Acceptance. Hutchison, whose band guided Joanne and me through many a dark day, muscled his way through his depression with his strong Scottish voice. Until he didn’t. A similar story, sung in a different key, goes for Chris Cornell of Soundgarden and Audioslave, Kurt Cobain of Nirvana, and others, who explored every pleat of the vocal folds in search of the cure to what ailed them.

¶129 For each of these singers who ultimately refused the gift, there exists another whose open throat testifies to their slow but gradual unfolding toward the light. Across from Cobain, there is Eddie Vedder. Across from Cornell, Jeremy Enigk.

Cobain

I am buried up to my neck in
Contradictionary lies
I take pride as the king of illiterature
I'm very ape and very nice

OUT OF THE GROUND
INTO THE SKY
OUT OF THE SKY
INTO THE dirt

Cornell

And in the after birth
On the quiet earth
Let the stains remind you
You thought you made a man
You better think again
Before my role defines you

Nail in my head
From my creator
You gave me life
NOW SHOW ME HOW TO LIVE

Vedder

Three days, and maybe longer, shed my skin at
last...shed...shed...

Let the sun shine, burn away my mask
Three days, and maybe longer, won't ever find
me here

Let the ocean dissolve away my past
Four days, and not much longer...
Let my spirit PASSSSSSS...

Enigk

Rhythm of mind
Don't want to spend my time
Being afraid of dying
I really want to be good

Drowned in a world of pity and sorrow
Then a burst within the light
What was I looking to find?
Run along to the sea

I want love
If love wants meeee

I want God
If God wants MEEEEEEEEEE

¶130 Cobain sings of human ineptitude and finitude, culminating in a terse poetic summary of our journey from ashes to ashes. Cornell channels the rage of Frankenstein's monster and demands guidance from his maker. Vedder opens his band's third album with a gnostic report of the burning up experienced through a life of fame. Enigk all but obliterates himself through the screamed invocation of "me," a full-throated offering to the God he can never seem to embrace with both

arms. Each man wails, and yet, framed within their battles of Acceptance, the table presents a distinct dichotomy between the left and right columns. How should we name the difference?

¶31 I understand the issue as one of sustainability. This word, which for decades now has been allied to the art of architecture and the challenge of harmonizing built and natural environments, serves to distinguish between two types of vocal architecture. While Cobain and Vedder both grind the voice into a channel capable of expressing deep inner conflict, only Vedder's vocal architecture has been self-sustaining. Enigk, likewise, builds a crumbling bridge between his fleshly body and God's transcendent otherness, but the bridge doesn't crush him as it falls apart. Instead, the plaint—a word that connotes both a lamentation and a charge against an unfair act—dissolves along with the song, leaving Enigk's throat to heal before the next session. But Cornell, despite the effortless with which he weaves his textured signature rock vocals, can't sustain the anger. His demand—show me how to live—eventually coils back around himself and takes his breath away.

¶32 The Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas provides the perfect summation of this architectural issue in one of his manifestos:

Where there is nothing, everything is possible.

Where there is architecture, nothing else is possible. (1997, 198)

¶33 We can think of the “nothing” in that first line as an open field. With nothing built upon it, the openness is pure potential. When architects bring their design to bear on the field, the open is sacrificed for the architectural vision, which, ideally, serves a number of purposes. As an architect, Koolhaas is not suggesting that we don't build. He sees the problem of the open field's potential as the crux of truly sustainable architecture. The issue is one of building sustainably, in such a way as to allow for the power of the open to at all times communicate. Even more, to allow the ghost of what has been foreclosed to continue to communicate through the built environment.

¶34 In his design for the McCormick Tribune Campus Center of the Illinois Institute of Technology, Koolhaas began with such an open field. Students crossed that field on their way to their classes. Koolhaas saw how the students' habitual movement across the field began to carve out a series of crisscrossing paths, urban migration patterns that mimicked the paths of other flocking animals. To preserve this organic network of passages, Koolhaas designed the hallways of the building he eventually placed on that field to overlay the grassy walkways. The result is an atypical floor plan of diagonal halls that, at first glance, seem nonsensical within the campus building. Allowing the history of the open field that preceded the building to shape our vision of Koolhaas's plan, however, we see that the crisscross pattern tells the story of the students' paths of least resistance they once took across an urban field to reach their classes on time. Stretching even further back in history, before the urban metropolis colonized the Illinois environment, we can imagine similar paths carved out by nonhuman animals through the plains and prairies as they sought out salt and water. Koolhaas seems to recognize that his architecture can still speak of these histories even if the built environment forecloses the organic movement of people and fauna.

¶35 Singers' voices are similar acts of building. The vocal equivalent to Koolhaas's open field is silence. Before singing a single note, every method of expression is possible. The architecture

placed within that silence is the composite of the notes, lyrics, phrasing, and arrangement selected by the singer and the band. Within silence, as I understood so well on my retreat, thought and sensation are free to exist in an amorphous state. Without the need to communicate anything to anybody, including myself, the tuning fork of my consciousness can more easily touch upon the vibration of the all.

¶36 As soon as the singer chooses a vocal direction in which to travel, however, a commitment is made. Cornell commits to the anger of “Show Me How To Live.” Cobain commits to the crown he wears as the King of Illiterature. Vedder undertakes the passage. Enigk encounters his identity (his me-ness) as it dissolves within God’s wanting. Each of these commitments is a form of architecture that can never be unbuilt. Each singer will necessarily discover whether he is worthy of the commitment he makes, and whether that commitment opens to life or leads to death.

¶37 For another poetic example of this foray into the commitment of vocal architecture, we can turn to Rumi. The great Persian mystic frequently ended his poems with the command, “Silence!” as though he was chastising himself for having had the hubris to put the tremendous mystery of Love into words at all. “Silence!” or *Khâmush* takes on the guise of a living entity who inhabits Rumi’s poems and functions something like the mirror image of the poet himself. Rumi conjures the appearance of this character in order to look himself in the eyes and attempt a kind of leap in place that results in transcending worldly existence. Of course, Rumi never quite manages to jump entirely off this plane of existence, which is why he recited so much poetry.

¶38 Rumi scholar Franklin D. Lewis says something similar and helps deepen our understanding:

In the poems in which it appears, *Khâmush* usually calls for an end to the complaint of existential or ontological pain experienced in the absence of the object of love. This word effectively remonstrates with the poetic persona, pointing out the paradox of being unable to express in words the *mysterium tremendum* experienced in the presence of this numinous beloved. The poem then ends in an address to a personified silence, an embodiment of the *via negativa*; the signature also acts as a command to the reader or the mystic desirous of revealing the mysteries of mystical love: Silence! It is not through words but experience that the truth is known. (2007, 329)

¶39 The *via negativa* is Rumi’s poetic commitment to silence. It would seem as if poetry, which for Rumi was first recited aloud before it was captured by the pens of scribes, is the worst way to achieve silence. By merit of its existence as impassioned utterance, poetry fails to tune into the silence of the Beloved. But poetry for Rumi was not a product of cognitive thought. It was, rather, a process of experiencing the world. Rumi understood that during the recitation of poetry, which occurred during the ritual dance of the *samâ’* (the whirling that we now associate with the Dervishes), he could perfectly sense the presence of God through the unfolding absence of himself.

¶40 Koolhaas’s building is the index of all that was possible before the building was built. Likewise, Rumi’s poem is the realization that when he stares out at God through the architecture of his words, God is there precisely *in the stare and in the speaking* and thus couldn’t be closer. God is, in fact, so close that Rumi is not there, not really. The illusion of Rumi—understood as an “individual” “apart” from God—cedes to the Oneness of the only true Existent. His poems thereby function as spiritual guides to all who come after Rumi, though, as the last line of Lewis’s quota-

tion makes clear, it is through the moment-to-moment act of existence and not through spoken language that the presence of the Divine will reveal itself.

¶141 I include Rumi in the ilk of rock singers I've assembled here to summarize the necessity of sustainable vocal lament within the non-doing of Acceptance. Non-doing does not negate activity. In grief, this activity sometimes transpires as lamentation. The ritual vocalizing of our passage through the perceived horizon of Acceptance, which is to say through the frustration evoked by the seemingly ever-out-of-reach land of Acceptance, has been a hallmark of grief for many cultures. But when we sing or scream, we do so at our own risk. The power of the voice brings the same substantiality as the presence of a building in an open field. If the voice does not persist sustainably along with the environment, then the weight of the edifice (of belief, of resentment, of anger, of passion) will collapse down upon us as we sing. After we sing, when we fall silent, we remember that all around us is music already. We are human. We forget this, and so we sing again. As Rumi instructs, however, we must return to the open field of silence in order to constantly attune ourselves to the environment. Each attunement ensures the sustainability of our next song.



¶142 If you're neither a rock singer nor a Persian mystic, the song remains the same. We all build vocal structures, either through daily complaints to others or through our internal monologues. Here are some common structures that we build with our language:

I can't...

It will always be like this.

I should be doing...

We're fucked.

What's the point?

Why are we here?

I don't know what to do.

¶143 Each of these phrases is the first brick in a monumentally unsustainable building situated directly atop the most magical of open fields. The phrases crafted from these words lead to various commitments that sap our energy and discourage us from collaborating with our fellow grievors (i.e., everyone on this planet).

¶144 Fortunately, each of these constructs is ripe for renovation. It is possible to create a sustainable project from even the unsightliest beginning. Take the big question, "Why are we here?" To renovate it, we simply turn from speculation to artful pragmatism: *That* we are here, what will we do together? Given our reality, in which we exist on this rock in the middle of space, what should we make together?

¶145 A similar tweaking can take place with the frequent lament, "I don't know what to do." Well, unless you stop existing the moment after you say that, you will discover that regardless of your not-knowing you will continue to do something. Maybe this something is breathing deeply or crying or screaming or breaking plates. Whatever happens in the moment after you decry not

knowing what to do, you will discover that it is through doing that we come to know anything at all. Is it ever the case that we fully understand what we need to do *and then* commence to achieving the goal? Or is it rather that we stumble about and, through trial and error, we find our way from one waystation to the next? Act and reflect and act again and fall silent. Or, as Beckett says, try again, fail again, fail better.

¶146 This is perhaps a good time to come back to the word Acceptance itself. For so long, I worked hard to figure out what Acceptance meant. After months of therapy and frustration, I finally decided to look the word up in different languages.

Arabic: لوبق (qabūl or qubūl, acceptance, admission, approval, consent, admittance, agreement)

Japanese: 受け入れ (Ukeire, the act of receiving)

Chinese: 驗收 (Yànshōu, made up of “test” and “receive”)

German: (die) Annahme (adoption, acceptance, assumption, approval, supposition)

Ancient Greek (two words draw my attention): λῆψις (lepsis, carries additional usage of “taking of medicine,” “the choice of pitch (in music),” and “the choice of matter (in poem)”) and ἡσυχία (hēsukhiē, acquiesce)

¶147 Only after I renovated the architecture of my understanding of the word “Acceptance,” and then shifted the way I deployed the newly renovated word, could I start out on the path that would lead me to the silent retreat and my realization there. Each of the words in these other languages gives us a new perspective. With the Arabic word, for example, I am struck by the affinity between acceptance and entrance, which shows itself in the synonyms “admission” and “admittance.” Acceptance is akin to letting something in, as one might admit an honored guest into one’s home. Prior to the act of admittance, there is a kind of agreement, as though the honored guest and I consent to sharing time and space together. This purposeful agreement and subsequent invitation to the interior commences an entire process, and thus Acceptance shifts from a one-time event to an ongoing conversation.

¶148 Of all these translations, I am most fond of the Ancient Greek, where two words for Acceptance open onto unexpected meanings. With λῆψις (*lepsis*), to accept is to take one’s medicine. Acceptance is the cure for what ails us. In musical terms, it is the setting of the key. In what register am I being asked to sing? Can I reach this pitch without straining, or do I need to train my voice? What kind of vocal regimen will allow me to reach the extraordinarily high pitch of Acceptance without hurting my voice over time? How can I sustain the pitch of Acceptance? Each of these questions opens into an ongoing musical practice that has as its end not an aesthetic beauty but a sustained cosmological consonance. And then there is the poetic valence. In addition to the taking of medicine and the choice of pitch, Acceptance is the choice of poetic matter. What is the best way to tell the story of Acceptance? What story will adequately portray the humongous magnanimity of Acceptance’s act of giving?

¶149 In addition to λῆψις, we also find ἡσυχία (*hēsuchia*). The word has a mysterious quality, which comes from the shadow cast upon it by Christianity. That is, looking back from the present to-

ward the classical emergence of this word requires us to pass through its employment in Biblical verse, specifically its usage in Orthodox Eastern Christianity, where it refers to an inner quiet that leads to a oneness with God.

¶50 It seems likely that Christians first encountered ἡσυχία through pluralistic scholars like the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria. In Philo's *On Flight and Finding* (1934), for example, we see the following:

¶51 To these inquiries the other gives the only right answer, "God will see for Himself" [...] For it is by His taking thought for them that the mind apprehends, and sight sees, and every sense perceives. As for the words [i.e., idiomatic expression] "A ram is found held fast," this is reason keeping quiet and in suspense. For the best offering is quietness and suspense of judgement, in matters that absolutely lack proofs. The only word we may say is this, "God will see."

¶52 If we seek to understand how so many Ancient Greek philosophical ideas wound up in early Christian thinking, we could investigate points of contact between figures like Philo and, say, Paul the Apostle.

¶53 Peering back through Philo into spaces where ἡσυχία wore pre-Christian, Ancient Greek clothing, so to speak, our eyes alight on Plato and Pindar. In Book IX of Plato's *Republic* (2013) we find Socrates asking questions about pain and pleasure. He wonders whether, for people in pain, the relief (ἡσυχία) of pain is more desirable than the feeling of wellness. In usual fashion, Socrates' interlocutor is quick to agree with the great philosopher when he says,

"And you notice, I think, when people get into many other similar situations in which, when they're in pain, they praise not the feeling of joy but not being in pain and the relief from that sort of thing as the most pleasant sensation."

"Yes, this is perhaps what then becomes pleasant and desirable: the relief."

¶54 This notion of relief is central to acceptance since, after all, the accepting of one's grief ought to bring not the erasure of the conditions that brought the pain to be but relief of that pain's sting.

¶55 Another resonant morsel sings out through Pindar who, in his Eighth Pythian Ode, reminds us that the noun ἡσυχία is derived from Ἥσυχία (same pronunciation), the daughter of Dike, goddess of Justice. Her name is synonymous with Peace, specifically peace within the polis (city). Justice presides over the political practice and philosophy of a place, and Peace presides over the place itself as a kind of adjunct to Justice. When Justice is present, so too will be Peace.

¶56 In the guise of ἡσυχία, the movement of Acceptance carries us through a series of stations. First, acceptance is most certainly a state of mind, a kind of mental reception that allows us to understand the events that have befallen us. But this cognitive understanding is only the first blush of acceptance. (Think, for instance, of times when we say that we *know* something to be true, but we don't yet *feel* it. Here, the mind grasps some truth but the body has not yet fully metabolized it.) Mental acceptance must be accompanied by a full-bodied acceptance of the gift of one's fate. Perhaps sung lamentation is an embodied manifestation of this cognitive knowing.

¶57 It seems to be the case, however, at least in my experience, that acceptance of this gift is a perpetually repeating action. Each moment asks of acceptance insofar as each moment of life is a

gift given. The consequence of this is something like an acceptance *reverberance* that resonates through the body and can only be calmed by a kind of inner peace. Attainment of this peace begins with an inner quieting (acquiescence), and the quiet allows the self to sense the great expanse of the self (something usually muted or occluded by the ego and/or traumatic memories). Here we reach the stations of Pindar and Plato, since inner quiet is truly a relief and Peace. This Peace is the offspring of Justice insofar as the sense of self that results from ἡσυχία is tantamount to finding balance.

¶158 And then we arrive at a new way of thinking about the “stage” of acceptance. The so-called stages of grief, if we want to mind them at all, are not thresholds through which we pass but are, rather, environments in which we fully immerse ourselves. The environment of acceptance is everywhere a space of peace and calm. Plato’s *Timaeus* contains a discussion of the “inner fire” going away when sleep befalls us. A quiet ensues within the mind and body right before deep sleep. Thus, in the moment of falling asleep we sense the environment of Peace that marks the domain of acceptance. In his “Twentieth Discourse: Retirement” (1939), Dio Chysostom, the Greek philosopher and historian of the Roman Empire in the first century CE, speaks of the silence and quiet needed by the sick to fully recover from illness, and this peaceful environment is also the space of acceptance where those who ail become receptive to their state.

¶159 All of this is to say, *the acceptance yoked to grief is an environment*. We’re always already in this environment. Delusion and temporary blindness distract us from the fact that we are always already dwelling within this Peace. If we seek acceptance, then we already walk in the wrong direction, since no seeking is required. To seek is to assume, not to dwell.

¶160 No seeking. Only being. A being-with oneself and one’s grief. This revelation stops any attempt at moving through grief’s stages and convinces us to fall quiet.

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¶161 I speak of horizons, Persian and Christian mystics, and Ancient Greek philosophy carried as ameliorative cargo in contemporary words. I hear the soundtrack of ‘90s grunge scoring the manifesto of a Dutch architect. The total constellation illuminates the issue of Acceptance and reveals a landscape both familiar and foreign.

¶162 One more citation from the world of rock music comes to mind. Not a grunge song this time but something harder, a track by the group Tool from their album *Lateralus*. In “[The Patient](#),” Tool singer Maynard James Keenan sings what appears to be a reflection on his mother’s medical condition. Having suffered a stroke and lost most of her mental and bodily control when Keenan was eleven years old, his mother, Judith Marie, was all but lost to him. Years into the grieving of this situation, in which his mother is both here and gone, alive and all-but-dead, Keenan creates “the patient” as a multivalent term that applies equally to his mother (the medical patient undergoing treatment for her stroke and paralysis), himself (the one who must abide the terms of his mother’s condition and wait patiently for resolution), and the plural subject of all who experience a similarly liminal situation between life and death (the patient of the world who suffer such hardships).

¶163 With this multivalent subject in place, the lyrics of the song speak to a concrete circumstance, a gradual spiritual realization about the futility of anger and resentment, and the universal condition of patience required by all who grieve, where “patience” is best understood in the sense I described earlier—the patience of being given the at-times belligerent symphonic gift of life.

A groan of tedium escapes me,
Startling the fearful.
Is this a test? It has to be,
Otherwise I can't go on.
Draining patience, drain vitality.
This paranoid, paralyzed vampire act's a little old.

But I'm still right here
Giving blood, keeping faith,
And I'm still right here.

¶164 We have here a truly poetic dramatization of Acceptance, understood as the non-doing of unfolding into life. At the same time, we have an exquisite example of rock vocal architecture that helps Keenan channel the full breadth (and full breath) of his experience into musical form, thereby processing his realization while also making it available to anyone who chooses to listen. While the lyrics begin in quiet tones that sound like a lonely soul talking himself through a dire situation, the crescendo builds to a resounding, exorcistic bridge that doubles as a mantra:

I must keep reminding myself of this.
I must keep reminding myself of this.
I must keep reminding myself of this.
I must keep reminding myself of this.

¶165 Of what is he reminding himself and us? He is screaming his choice: to walk away or to remain. From the perspective of his mother, the “walking away” is perhaps a graceful exit through euthanasia. But this choice is not taken because, so the story goes, Judith Marie, a religious woman, saw her affliction as a test from God and thus embraced it. This choice led her to live for roughly ten thousand days after her stroke, a fact that Keenan would underline with the title of the later album: *10,000 Days*. From Keenan's perspective as the patient bystander who witnesses his mother's test-taking, the choice to walk away would be to leave and never return, to give himself over entirely to his career as a rock musician and close himself off to the emotional trauma he experienced at age eleven. But he refuses this choice and stays sutured to his mother's experience:

If there were no desire to heal
The damaged and broken met along
This tedious path I've chosen here
I certainly would've walked away by now.

¶166 He stays because healing is present, not his mother's healing but, rather, his own. As the lyrics, sound, and volume of Tool's albums attest, Keenan has walked through the fire of rage and disgust since the time of his adolescence. Sutured to his mother, this fire became a kind of cleansing heat that revealed the dead end of hate. He decides not to walk away because he chooses to heal through the act of grieving, an act he engages through his voice's great capacity.

¶167 He decides not to walk away, but he may yet make that choice: "I certainly would've walked away by now. / And I still may, I still may be patient, be patient, be patient." The choice of which he must remind himself, in other words, is the choice to make himself continually open to the trial of choosing to heal. The choice to reject anger's fury is not a one-time offering. It replays each and every moment. As such, he must keep reminding himself to *be patient*, to be *done to* by the gift of life, a gift he may not want but that he accepts. Through the poetic framing of this ongoing Acceptance, Keenan uses his voice to produce another sustainable architectural model for us to study, one that draws deeply from the realm of anger and bitterness and Enough Already and resolves into a beat that drives us onward.



¶168 We don't achieve Acceptance by first traveling through denial, anger, bargaining, and depression. There is no linearity to grief. Instead, Acceptance is the multivalence of patience, the release into the flood, the choice not to erect unsustainable abodes that close us off from the power of the Open. When we choose to build, we must build sustainably. And we must build, for what else are we doing here if not to make something, to engage in various forms of *poiesis*. Guides for our acts of creation are all around. In addition to the vocal architecture I cite here, we also have the complex structures of birds who bend reeds into multilevel houses and adorn their doorsteps with colorful pieces of rubbish they pick up in the wilderness. We have beavers' dens and the nests of gorillas crafted anew each night from materials on hand. The origami of Australian weaver ants. Models abound. All we have to do is to look out.

¶169 Looking out is in fact how this realization of Acceptance began. From the darkest pit I looked ahead and kept moving through. I walked until I could see the horizon and then, once locked onto that sight, I set about understanding what that horizon is. At first, it is nothing but a window into an unattainable state. But, as with all thinking, the certain opinion I first formed of the horizon begins to appear stranger and stranger until, one day, the horizon problem opens up and I leap into silence.

¶170 From silence to screaming, the non-doing of Acceptance teaches that both raising the voice and hushing up only matter if you have breath to inflate your lungs. And if we ponder the network of living things into which we enter every time we inhale and exhale, then we begin to sense the global symphony in which we are playing, whether we speak or not. If you shout out to your fellow players, fine. Do so with an ear turned toward the larger work. If you embrace the silent path, very good. Your heartbeat's rhythm will soon be louder than any timpani or snare. The true aim of such expressions is to think beyond the self and then look back from the position where your body appears as pure deservingness. Then straddle both shores and feel the magnetic field of Acceptance-Giving. This is what Acceptance is.

OOO
(epilogue)

- ¶71 I know what Acceptance is, and yet each moment requires living. And while it feels like my thoughts on this matter should conclude here, they do not. They do not because life keeps giving. I was recently gifted another opportunity to put these theories into practice.
- ¶72 Two years after the writing of these words, my wife and I learned that our third son, Ren, has a congenital heart defect that will require a lifetime of medical intervention. During Joanne's pregnancy, doctors prepared us for the first several weeks of his life to unfold in the hospital, during which time he would undergo open-heart surgery. On day three of his life, we were alerted to the possibility that the geometry of his heart may open the door to a new option. Instead of the surgery, Ren could undergo a stenting procedure that was much less invasive and, as a result, would put him on a solid trajectory to heal before the next big surgical intervention around four months of age.
- ¶73 We were relieved at this new option, yet not at peace. Fortunately, we had very little time to prepare for the CT scan that would assess Ren's internal geometry and point the way forward. In what seemed like the blink of an eye, I was sitting in a makeshift waiting room in the basement of the hospital, outside the CT lab. There, with the cacophonous soundtrack of multiple televisions blaring HGTV and the plosive moans of a patient lying in traction roughly ten feet away, I felt Acceptance, which is to say that I both Accepted and was Accepted.
- ¶74 Just before this momentous occasion, however, I was trying to make something magical happen. I sat with my eyes closed, began to breathe deeply, and called to mind all the elevating images I could summon. Angels trumpeting from the rafters. The dissolution of the floor and the commencement of levitation. Light piercing dusty dark corridors. Wings sprouting from my back. My energetic body dancing with Ren's heart geometry. I got quite inventive and even began to see a kaleidoscope of colors before a voice said to me, "Stop." I knew at once the meaning of the voice, that trying to will a positive outcome for my son meant that I was maximally far from Acceptance. To come closer, I had to do nothing. That is, I had to stop doing. So I stopped.
- ¶75 I understood in that moment of peace that we all participate in something much greater than ourselves. We are always already participating in it. Attuning to both the act of participation and the "something greater" requires increasing our aptitude, and here "aptitude" means the way we fit into the grand scheme of life, the universe, and everything. Each of us has our own shape. Our shape in turn vibrates at its own frequency. To adjust our shape, to whittle away at our loose ends and insecurities, we learn about ourselves and the worlds of the humans and nonhumans who cohabitate with us on this planet. While sitting outside the CT lab, I allowed for the possibility that, in that moment, I was enough. I had loved enough. I had learned enough. I had made adjustments and reflected on the grain of my voice. I had apologized when necessary and allowed myself to collapse in a puddle when that's what was needed. In total, I could do nothing more than sit there and wait. I couldn't intervene in the procedure, change the shape of my son's heart, or conjure a magical intervention by whispering a mantra under my breath. There was nothing to do. And this nothing was the cornerstone of the non-doing that supported the greater, sustainable, curvilinear edifice of Acceptance.

Notes

1. This quote is attributed to Sarah Gundle in Gupta (2022).
2. Grief notes are a method of processing grief that Joanne and I borrow from Roland Barthes. After his mother died, Barthes wrote short notes and put them in a jar on his desk. We do the same thing throughout the year, and then around June 5, Finlay's birth/death day, we type up all the notes from the previous year and reflect on the picture of grief that they reveal.
3. Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. "horizon," updated August 19, 2015, https://www.etymonline.com/word/horizon#etymonline_v_14453.

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The *PPJ* supports [Collaborative Community Review](#) (CCR), an open peer review process rooted in transparency, community engagement, and ongoing developmental conversations. It is designed to shape scholarship so that it might effectively enrich public life and cultivate habits of responsiveness and collegiality among participants. CCR focuses on four style criteria: accessibility, relevance, intellectual coherence, and scholarly dialogue.

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Guy Cools is professor in dance studies in the dance department of Université du Québec à Montréal. His most recent publication, *Performing Mourning, Laments in Contemporary Art* (Valiz, 2021) discusses artistic creations in different disciplines that process individual or collective grief.

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Grief and the Patience Required for Acceptance: Willfulness vs. Willingness

Nic Cottone

About the Public Holistic Response

- ¶11 Will Daddario’s article, “What Acceptance Is,” brilliantly moves through aspects of grief, despair, and Acceptance; it allows griever to meaningfully hold together aspects of loss that are otherwise fragmented and dispersed in our subjective experience of it. Daddario traces contradictions that permeate our experiences not only of grief and loss, but also of how we live in light of them. This includes the paradoxical relationships between accepting and giving, cure and poison, being open and closed off, centered and decentered, and, as I will later add, of willingness and willfulness. His confrontation with acceptance resists the typical rectilinear picture (e.g., the “stages of grief”), ultimately providing us with a picture of the process out of despair that manages to retain its life and dynamic movement despite the fixity of language.
- ¶12 By including—rather than disavowing—the various vantage points through which we confront, and are confronted by, grief, Daddario reconfigures the way we understand acceptance. One of those perspectives involves the recognition of the “horizon” that lies between despair and Acceptance. We are confronted with this horizon in our search for the resolution of grief—a search he describes as a “hopeless hope.” From the vantage point of depression, Acceptance appears as something reached or achieved. Daddario notes that this is a partial view, however, because a horizon is merely the limit to our sight. It is both “there” and “not there”: an abstraction that is real. Drawing on the etymology of “horizon” as a bounding circle, Daddario explains how the horizon encircles us or constitutes a delimiting circle.
- ¶13 Describing the horizon as a circle lets Daddario begin moving beyond despair because Acceptance can be seen something other than a telos achieved through intentional action: Acceptance is a “non-doing.” Apprehending this shift involves two parts. First, he describes how we must “acquiesce to our status as patient,” which Daddario understands by looking at the role of agency with respect to enduring. Treating acceptance as a “doing” involves seeing it as something accomplished through agency—a picture Daddario rightfully contends with. The second shift consists of recognizing giving as the essence of Acceptance. Daddario represents each of these moments as part of the counterintuitive shifts required for seeing how Acceptance is not “a doing,” but is something that is done to us.
- ¶14 As a binding circle, despair has a potentially totalizing nature. It can engulf us to the point that it blocks our ability to recognize how despair is a partiality that represents itself as whole. A perspective is totalizing when there is nothing outside of it because it is wholly self-contained or closed off. Its engulfing nature is perhaps what prompts us to search for respite in a location other than where we are, like reaching for a horizon that is never present to us. It is worth noting that the perceived totalizing nature of despair is not mere delusion. Grief does not merely “appear” totalizing to the person who experiences it as such. Its potentially totalizing nature materializes in the way it consumes us—sometimes to death. It can be destructive—a destruction our depression may welcome—so that we may be reunited with, or remain in proximity to, what is lost. Just as the horizon is both “there” and “not there,” despair is both “totalizing” and “not totalizing.”

The arc to the horizon is capable of opening. For many reasons, however, some of us may never experience our circle wedged open.

- ¶15 The risks involved with despair prompt me to think about the subjective experience of, using Daddario's words, acquiescing to our status as patient. Because this acquiescence is part of what it means to recognize the true essence of Acceptance, the nature of our status as patient becomes especially crucial to dislodge despair. For me, this has meant tuning in to the aforementioned dualism whose theme features in this essay: my experience with the difference between willfulness and willingness.
- ¶16 I propose that one moment of our acquiescence towards our status as "patient" concerns the difference between willfulness and willingness. Within despair, *willfulness* is a stubborn protector that, while trying to obtain results, nevertheless encloses us. Daddario discusses this aspect in terms of agency, drawing a revealing connection between "doing" grief as agents and normalcy. He writes, "tacit belief in autonomy and individual agency, ubiquitous in US educational institutions and media representations of the "self," urges us to do grief. How to grieve is unclear, but doing it promptly is necessary because eventually we have to get back to normal."
- ¶17 Queer disability theorists point out the inextricable connection between normalcy and the compulsion to be normal, where the compulsory nature of normalcy creates the guise of choice within a system where it is lacking (McRuer [2006](#), [2012](#)). The impetus to grieve (as agents) for the restoration of normalcy might lead us to attempts at willfully rearranging and controlling the pieces of our lives in an orderly manner. Ordering our world seems to promise a return to normalcy or a reprieve from grief. While willfulness is protective, it ultimately distorts our vision of Acceptance. Willfulness chases the receding horizon; in doing so, it abdicates our capacity for pure giving because it is oriented not by patience, but teleology: it strives to reach the abstraction of Acceptance that we see from despair's partiality. Drawing on Anne Carson's discussion of Porete, Daddario insightfully highlights how action may ultimately obstruct our path.
- ¶18 In contrast, *willingness* opens the arc of despair and sees its partiality. While despair is always partial, our willfulness against loss precludes the recognition of it. Much like how Acceptance is a non-doing, "willingness" is a "non-willing." Willingness entails a pause that relinquishes willfulness, a relinquishment that is required for our status as patient. Willingness, then, is not a reassertion of the will to bring within reach the destination of Acceptance. It is the absence of the reassertion of it. Willingness provides the interval for patience—for enduring—by opening us up to what is already there, even when we fear what may be.
- ¶19 Sometimes circumstances permit, or inhibit, a confrontation with (or refusal of) our fears. Given that willingness is a non-willing, we cannot merely "will" ourselves out of fear. Fear nevertheless plays a significant role in differentiating willfulness from willingness. In Daddario's discussion of Hāfez's rose, he describes how "[the rose] doesn't choose to bloom. It stops choosing not to bloom," and choosing not to bloom is what Hāfez describes as fear. This passage can be used to draw out another aspect of willingness: the difference between "willfully choosing" on one hand, and the willingness required for the cessation of fear on the other (where fear consists in choosing to remain closed off). Considered in this light, willingness may be the antidote for fear—an antidote required for the non-doing of Acceptance—because fear underpins willfulness. Willingness is a necessary condition for being patient: it's the wedge that drives open the despair encircling

us. And the pure giving that is constitutive of Acceptance requires that we be patient: “all active attempts at Acceptance will only confuse the matter.”

110 Daddario provides us with an answer to the question of what Acceptance can be “when it is no longer bound by our individual perspective,” because opening our circle involves letting in. Sometimes in grief we say that we’re beside ourselves. Perhaps being beside ourselves is not just a facet of grief, but also of Acceptance. Maybe we’re beside ourselves when we decenter or suspend our willfulness. Maybe the process of opening the arc up to giving lets us honor the ways in which we were always beside ourselves—or, to use Judith Butler’s words, already given over—to something bigger than ourselves (Butler [2004](#), [2006](#)). As Daddario says, “We were always already participating in it.”

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