



South side of our house in Rumpshagen. Photo by [Karen Ande](#) and [Jeff Johnson](#).





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**A glimpse into our mental landscape in 2025**

### ***We Circle Around God (after Rilke)***

I live my life in widening rings,  
drawn out across the things of the world.  
I may not complete the final one,  
but I want to try.

We circle around God, around the ancient tower,  
circling for thousands of years;  
and still we do not know  
whether we are a falcon, a storm,  
or a vast song.

Rainer Maria Rilke, Berlin-Schmargendorf 1899  
[set to music](#) in the [Rilke-Projekt, 2001](#)

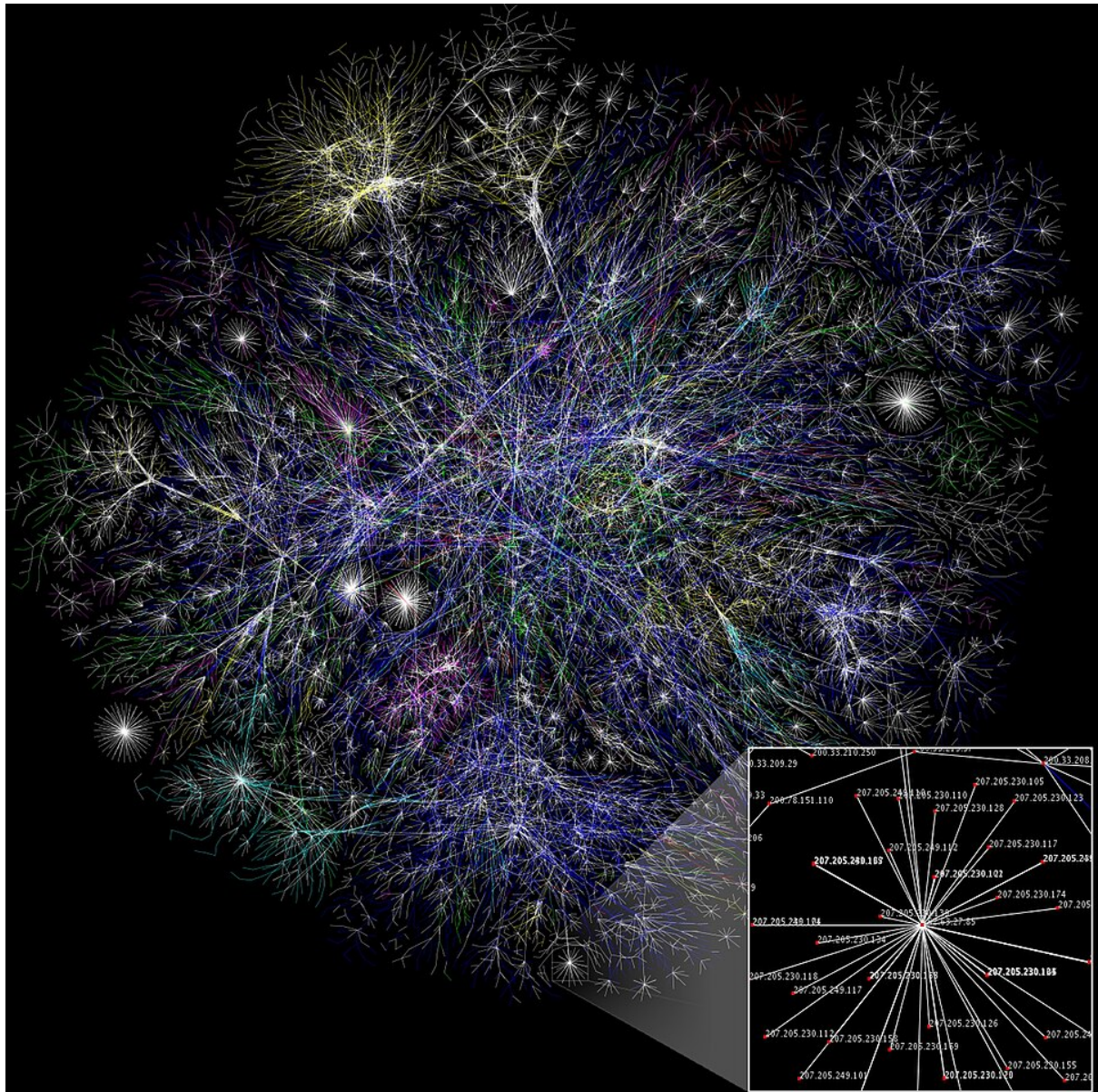
### **Specific talking points**

Jeffrey Sachs [about his Open Letter to German Chancellor Friedrich Merz](#): “Learn history, Mr. Chancellor!”

While Matthias Desmet describes the mechanism of pathological substitution ([mass formation](#)),

Gabor Maté provides a profound diagnosis in “[The Myth of Normal](#)” of the reasons why our society has abandoned the “space of love.”





Opte Project visualization of [routing paths](#) through a portion of the Internet. The connections and pathways of the internet could be seen as the pathways of [neurons](#) and [synapses](#) in a global brain.

Source: [Wikipedia](#)

## Enabling freedom: Thoughts in the global brain

An annotated analysis by ChatGPT

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De-escalation controls structurally fulfill the same type of function as mathematics in the natural sciences and belief in God (understood as love) in the Christian tradition: they are not content, but rather means of order that enable freedom by setting boundaries.

This captures *function* and *structure*, but there is an additional effect that makes these de-escalation controls indispensable in modern societies: time

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## **Which secular structures today can perform the same functions of de-escalation, freedom, and withdrawal that “love” had in the Christian sense—without claiming transcendence?**

A precise way to answer your question is to treat **Christian love (caritas/agape)** not as a belief-content but as a *functional architecture*:

it created **distance from immediacy, de-escalation of conflict, and inner freedom**, by relocating ultimate judgment outside the world.

Once transcendence is removed, *only immanent structures that can still slow, buffer, and relativize action* can perform comparable work.

Below are the **main secular candidates**, ordered by how deeply they reproduce the *structural* functions you name.

### **1. Law as Procedural Cooling (Rechtsstaatlichkeit)**

**Functionally closest analogue.**

- Law does **not decide truth or virtue**, but *interrupts immediacy*.
- It replaces revenge, honor, and passion with:
  - delay
  - procedure
  - appeal
  - proportionality
- Courts, due process, and rights operate as **institutionalized patience**.

**Why it works**

- Like Christian love, law *forbids totalization*: no one is reducible to their act.
- Guilt is delimited, not absolute.
- Time enters conflict.

**Limitation**

- Law de-escalates externally, not internally.
- Without legitimacy, it hardens into technocracy.

### **2. Science as Suspended Judgment (not as Truth)**

**Freedom through epistemic humility.**

- Science systematically refuses final answers.
- It creates freedom by:
  - separating observation from reaction
  - privileging doubt over certainty
  - slowing decision through replication and peer review

**Structural parallel**

- Love said: *judgment is not yours*.
- Science says: *judgment is provisional*.

**Limitation**

- Science de-escalates cognition, not desire.
- It cannot restrain power without external norms.

### 3. Art and Aesthetic Distance

#### Withdrawal without negation.

- Art allows intensity without action.
- It creates *symbolic space* where pain, rage, desire, and loss can be held without escalation.

#### Why it matters

- Tragedy, irony, and ambiguity preserve freedom by:
  - refusing moral closure
  - allowing contradiction to coexist
- Art is a **non-violent container for excess meaning**.

#### Limitation

- It is optional.
- It cannot coordinate large-scale action.

### 4. Democratic Deliberation (at its best)

#### Institutionalized hesitation.

- Parliaments, committees, and public discourse are designed to be *slow*.
- They transform enemies into opponents.

#### Structural role

- Like love, democracy insists that:
  - no voice is final
  - no decision is sacred
  - power must listen

#### Limitation

- When speed or outrage dominate, democracy collapses into spectacle.
- It depends on cultural restraint it cannot itself generate.

### 5. Social Systems of Care (non-religious)

#### Immanent compassion.

- Welfare systems, healthcare, disability support, restorative justice:
  - separate worth from performance
  - protect the weak without sanctifying suffering

#### Structural similarity

- Love once guaranteed unconditional concern.
- Care systems translate this into *administrative universality*.

#### Limitation

- They risk bureaucratic coldness.
- Without symbolic depth, they can feel empty or humiliating.

### 6. Psychological Practices (Therapy, Psychoanalysis)

#### Interior de-escalation.

- Therapy replaces sin with:
  - pattern
  - trauma
  - unconscious repetition
- It suspends moral condemnation in favor of understanding.

#### Why it matters



- It creates inner freedom by *making behavior interpretable* rather than damnable.

#### Limitation

- It individualizes what are often systemic pressures.
- It does not scale easily.

## 7. Time Itself (Institutionalized Delay)

### The hidden foundation.

- Deadlines, cooling-off periods, sabbaticals, moratoria, review cycles:
  - all introduce *temporal distance*.
- Christianity promised eternity; modernity must **engineer time**.

### Key insight

Where transcendence once slowed the world, modern societies must do so mechanically.

## A crucial difference (and risk)

Christian love worked because it:

- **externalized ultimacy**
- **absorbed resentment**
- **promised meaning beyond history**

Secular structures:

- work *only as long as they are trusted*
- cannot redeem failure
- cannot guarantee forgiveness

Therefore modern societies are structurally fragile:

they require **continuous maintenance of de-escalation mechanisms**.

## Condensed thesis

**Secular freedom depends on institutions that delay reaction, relativize judgment, and protect persons from totalization.**

Love once did this symbolically and metaphysically.

Today it must be done procedurally, aesthetically, temporally, and psychologically.

If you wish, I can:

- map these structures explicitly onto **Luhmann's systems theory**,
- contrast them with **digital acceleration and outrage dynamics**,
- or formulate this as a **single integrative model** (e.g. "immanent transcendence through delay").

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**Paranoid systems collapse not because of hostility, but because of irreversibility.**

**Culture survives where escalation is not final.**

## 1. Paranoia is not hatred, but closure

Paranoid systems do **not** primarily fail because they are aggressive.  
They fail because they **cannot reverse a decision once it has been made**.

Paranoia means:

- every signal is interpreted as confirmation,
- every doubt becomes betrayal,
- every delay appears as weakness,
- every alternative is treated as danger.

Hostility still allows negotiation.

**Irreversibility does not.**

Once a system reaches the point where:

- decisions cannot be suspended,
- meanings cannot be reinterpreted,
- enemies cannot be reclassified,
- collapse becomes a matter of time, not intention.

This is the structural insight behind your sentence.

## 2. Escalation becomes lethal when it is final

Escalation *as such* is not pathological.

Cultures, like organisms, require intensity, conflict, even aggression.

What destroys them is **finality**:

- the last word,
- the last judgment,
- the last weapon,
- the last interpretation.

A culture survives **only if escalation remains reversible**:

- if words can still replace blows,
- if enemies can still become rivals,
- if guilt can still be narrated rather than executed.

This is the hidden commonality in the figures you named.

## 3. Rilke: Delay as spiritual technology

Rilke's poetry repeatedly refuses closure.

- Angels terrify because they *see too much too fast*.
- Human life, by contrast, unfolds in **time**, slowness, incompleteness.

Rilke's ethic is not consolation but **postponement**:

*Live the questions now.*

That is anti-paranoid:

- meaning is not fixed,
- judgment is deferred,
- transformation remains possible.

His poems are machines that keep experience from hardening into verdict.

## 4. Else Lasker-Schüler: Metamorphosis against identity

Lasker-Schüler survives persecution not by resistance alone, but by **becoming multiple**.

- She shifts names, genders, mythic roles.
- Identity is never final, never capturable.

Paranoid systems demand:

- fixed identities,



- stable enemies,
- permanent classifications.

Her poetic strategy is therefore structurally subversive:

If I cannot be fixed, I cannot be eliminated *as what you think I am*.

Culture here survives through **excess of possibility**.

## 5. *I, Claudius*: The court as irreversible machine

The Julio-Claudian court collapses because:

- suspicion cannot be undone,
- accusations always accumulate,
- survival requires preemptive violence.

What matters is not the cruelty of individuals, but the logic of the system:

- once someone *might* be dangerous, they *must* be removed,
- hesitation becomes fatal.

Claudius survives only by:

- appearing harmless,
- delaying action,
- misunderstanding signals.

He lives by **not being taken seriously**—that is, by escaping final interpretation.

## 6. Ellsberg: Nuclear strategy as absolute irreversibility

Ellsberg's *The Doomsday Machine* reveals the most extreme paranoid system ever built.

- Launch protocols designed for speed eliminate recall.
- Automation replaces judgment.
- Deterrence works only if everyone believes escalation would be final.

This is paranoia fully realized:

- mistrust is rational,
- delay is forbidden,
- reversal is impossible.

Here culture itself is at stake:

- once launched, nothing remains to interpret, forgive, or narrate.

The system does not *intend* destruction.

It merely **cannot stop**.

## 7. The deep cultural law

What all these cases show is a negative principle of survival:

**Culture exists only where action can still be reinterpreted.**

Or more sharply:

A society dies when its decisions outpace its capacity for reflection.

Christian love once guaranteed reversibility metaphysically:

- forgiveness beyond history,
- judgment beyond time.

Modern culture must engineer reversibility *within* history:

- through art, irony, delay, procedure, ambiguity.

## 8. Why culture is fragile today

Digital systems, automated weapons, financial algorithms, outrage dynamics—all tend toward **irreversibility**:

- instant response,
- permanent records,
- viral judgments.

They are not hostile.

They are *too fast*.

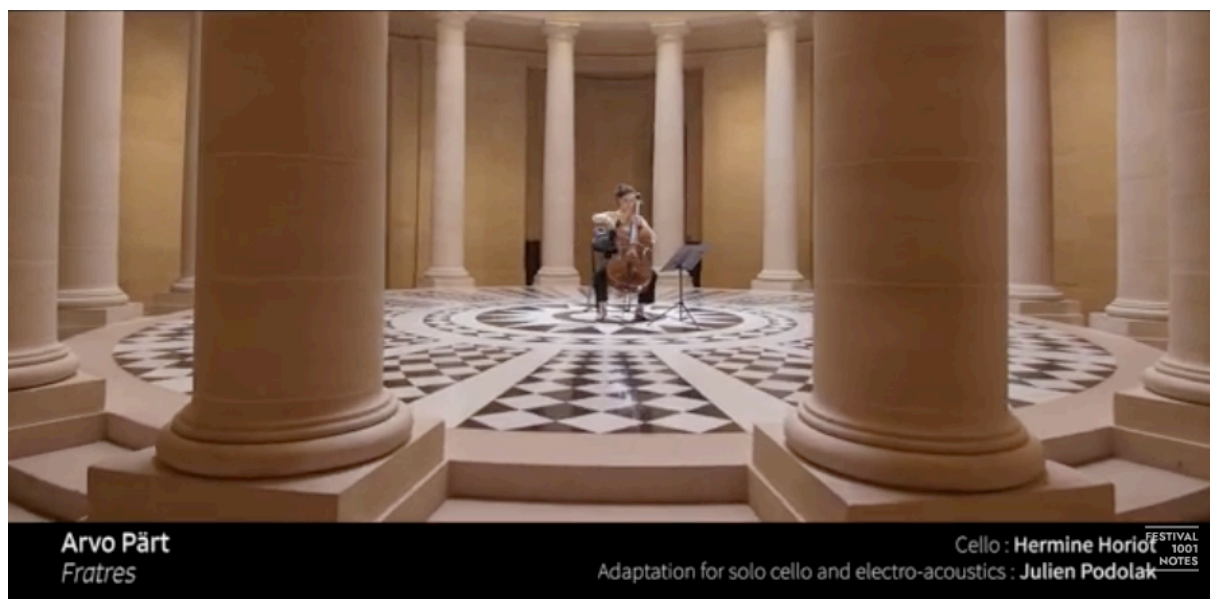
Which brings us back to your sentence:

**Paranoid systems collapse not because of hostility, but because of irreversibility.**

**Culture survives where escalation is not final.**

This is not a literary observation.

It is a systems-theoretical warning.



[Arvo Pärt - Fratres / Hermine Horiot - Adaptation for cello and electronics](#)

**Often it happens to me  
that I lift my gaze toward that vast,  
shimmering sky of my memory,  
a firmament of inner time**





Claude Monet - Spring by the Seine  
Rita Strohl - Musiques sur l'eau for piano (1903)

**"Je contemple souvent le ciel de ma mémoire"**  
**Marcel Proust**  
**Free Adaptation by ChatGPT**

Often it happens to me — most often in one of those quiet hours  
in which the present, like a weary maidservant,  
steps out of the room for a moment —  
that I lift my gaze toward that vast,  
shimmering sky of my memory,  
a firmament of inner time,  
in which countless small lights drift,  
lights so inconspicuous and yet so peculiarly persistent,  
as though they wished to whisper something to me  
that I long ago forgot how to understand.

They are fragments of an earlier life:  
a fleeting smile that, like the scent of a forgotten flower,  
drifts in through an open window;  
a voice, scarcely more than the shadow of a vibration;  
a moment that has fallen out of me  
like a small stone from an old mosaic,  
so that its former place can now be recognized only by the fact  
that a faint emptiness still glimmers there.

How many of these joys — if one may even call them that,  
for some were scarcely born  
before they sank back again into that nameless twilight —  
never revealed their cause,  
were broken before I could feel out their delicate origin,  
or simply evaporated, without ever having had the decency  
to transform themselves into a clear desire,  
like breath on a winter morning.

And yet, when night in that inner sky  
gathers together all that is scattered and faded,  
then I see these lost parts,  
radiant, as though they possessed a gentle destiny of their own;  
and I listen, almost against my will,  
to how their voices — for even what is forgotten speaks —  
layer themselves into one another and slowly fall silent,  
like an echo rolling back from a hill  
on which I once stood,  
without ever later being able to remember the path that led me there.

### **Decisive point: Proust knows about the illusion**

Important — and often misunderstood:

Proust does not naively believe in stability.

He dissects:

- snobbery,
- cruelty,
- social coldness.

But:

He is able to observe them with **slow, analytical attention**

because they do not yet escalate immediately.

His calm is:

**the calm of the observer, not trust in the world.**



## The real rupture

After 1914, the following collapse:

- time as a resource,
- politeness as a buffer,
- institutions as protection.

Literature responds with:

- acceleration,
- fragmentation,
- alarm.

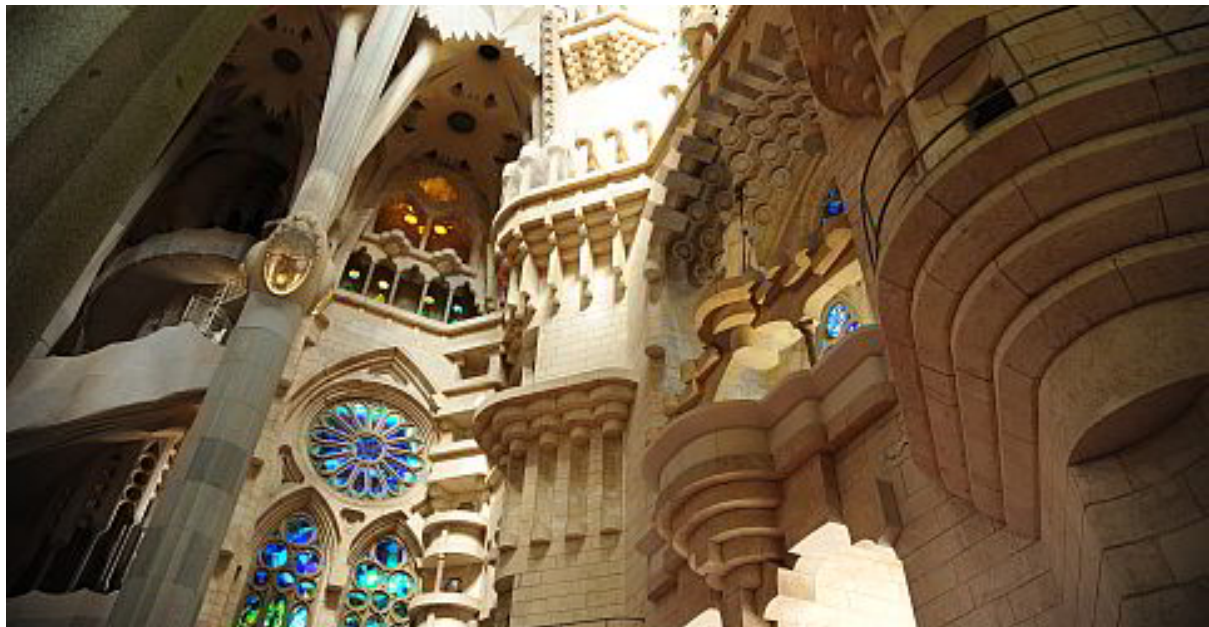
Not because writers become more hysterical,  
but because systems **no longer permit delay**.

### Hypothesis:

**Proust's literary calm is the last great work of art that was possible to emerge from a society that still believed escalation could be institutionally restrained — and therefore still possessed the time to watch itself remembering.**

If this hypothesis is correct, an uncomfortable consequence follows:

**Is Proust difficult to imitate today  
not because talent is lacking,  
but because the social form of time is?**



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### **The Requiem as an anti-escalation ritual**

It says: "Nothing needs to be decided now."

## Mozart's Requiem in the Basilica of the Sagrada Familia - ARTE Concert

Requiem aeternam dona eis, domine,  
Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord  
Et lux perpetua luceat eis.  
and let perpetual light shine upon them.

Christianity was able to promise peace because it accepted a place beyond this world.

Modern societies must organize peace in this world—or they will lose judgment, science, and democracy.

The Requiem does not promise peace.  
It **creates a space where peace can happen.**

Likewise, restructured science would not guarantee truth.  
It would guarantee something equally rare today:

**The right not to decide yet.**

In a world of permanent urgency,  
that right is indistinguishable from wisdom.

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