



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



Photo by [Karen Ande](#) and [Jeff Johnson](#).



Photo by Karen Ande



Photo by Silky Piehler



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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.

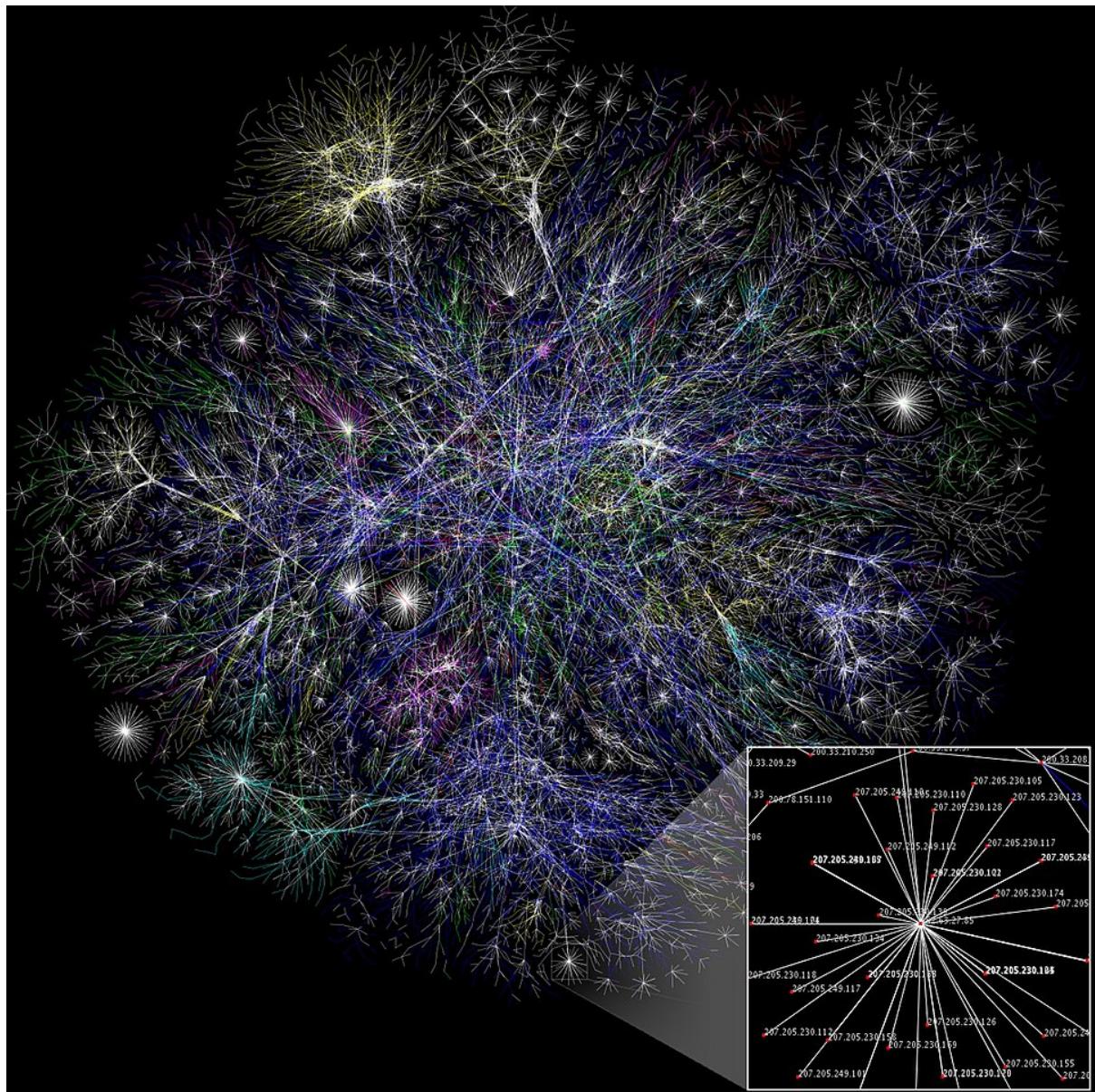
Rainer Maria Rilke, Berlin-Schmargendorf 1899
set to music in the [Rilke-Projekt, 2001](#)

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

https://chatgpt.com/s/t_69522f4e08808191b5647ff928f730c6

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*.

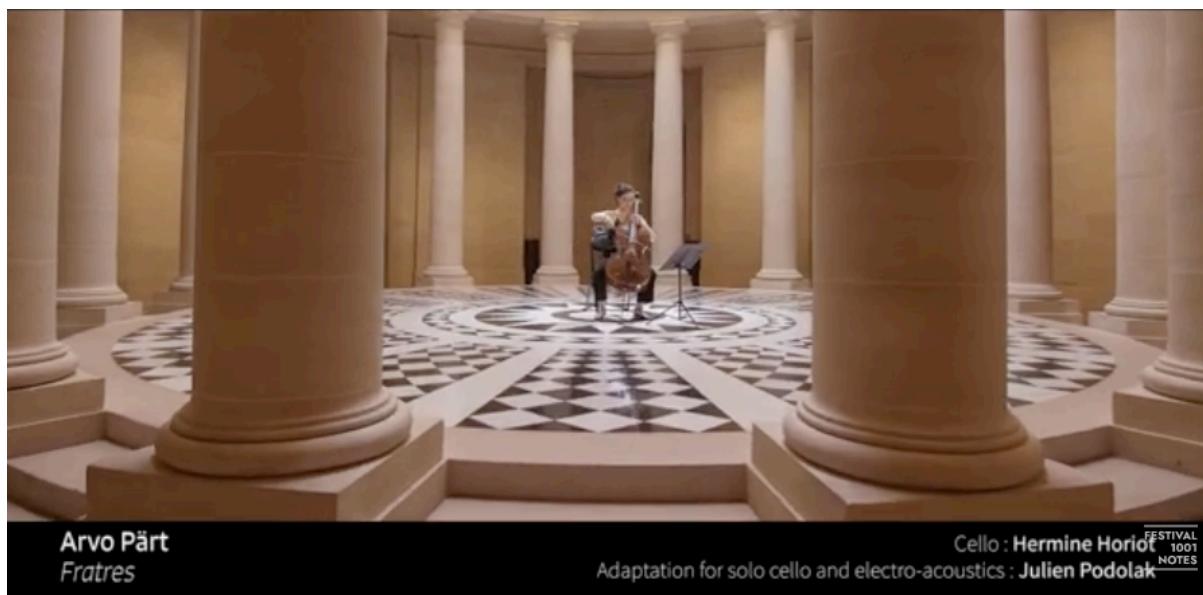
Which brings us back to your sentence:

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 maid-servant,
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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