

THE CROSSED CIRCUIT

Love as the Mutual Completion of the Receptive Self, and Why It Transcends

Gender

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Abstract

A companion paper to the account of solitude and the receptive self developed for the case of Cast Away established that the Me — the passive, receptive pole of the right-hemispheric self — is a faculty that can starve, that the active I cannot feed it from within (internal feeding being the sealed loop that constitutes shame and self-loathing), and that an external relay is therefore structurally required if the receptor is to be supplied. The volleyball Wilson was identified as such a relay, but a hollow one: a dead surface off which the I's address bounced back to its own Me, never genuinely received, and for that reason a stopgap whose loss returned the receptor to the empty room. That paper named the real remedy — a genuine exterior, the presence of actual others — without specifying the mechanism by which an actual other does what Wilson only imitates. This paper supplies that mechanism, and argues that its fullest and most distinctive form is romantic love. The account is the crossed circuit: each partner's active pole (the I) addresses the other's receptive pole (the Me), and is itself addressed by the other's I into its own Me — two interlocking loops running in opposite directions, so that each self's active pole completes the other's receptive pole, and each self's receptive pole is completed by the other's active pole, in both directions at once. Unlike Wilson, the relay is alive at the far end: my address is genuinely received by a real interior, and what fills my own receptor is a genuinely independent address reaching me from a place I am not. The paper distinguishes this crossed circuit, which it shares with all genuine reception between selves, from romantic love specifically, which it argues is the crossed circuit that (i) completes the Me as a whole rather than regionally, and is therefore singular and tends structurally toward exclusivity; (ii) is held open continuously rather than struck and broken, and therefore survives the partner's absence; and (iii) characteristically, though not definitionally, runs also through the somatic register. It engages and moves past the three literatures that bear on the case — Aron's self-expansion and inclusion-of-other-in-the-self model, the union theory of love from Aristophanes through Nozick and Solomon, and the attachment theory of Bowlby, Hazan, and Shaver — specifying what each captures and where each stops. It closes with the consequence the architecture forces: that this completion is pole-to-pole and that both poles are present, fully, in every self, so that the structure does not merely permit but positively entails that love crosses gender — the gendered metaphysics of an active-male and a receptive-female being not a deeper truth the account simplifies but a degraded version of it, one pole short on each side.

I. What Wilson Left Open

The companion paper on Cast Away ended at a threshold it could not itself cross. It had established a structure: the Me, the passive receptive pole of the right-hemispheric self, is built to receive what is given from outside; in solitude it starves, a receptive faculty with nothing to receive; and the active I cannot satisfy it from within, because an active pole supplying a receptive pole internally feeds it the self's own output rather than the external given, which is precisely the sealed loop the corpus identifies as shame and self-loathing. From this it followed that an external relay is structurally required — something genuinely outside, off which the I's address can travel so that the Me receives it as coming from beyond the self. Wilson, the painted volleyball, was that relay.

But Wilson was a hollow relay, and the paper was careful about the hollowness. A ball has no interior. When Chuck addressed Wilson, the address did not land in anything; it bounced. The relay returned Chuck's own output to Chuck's own Me at one remove — enough to keep the receptor from total collapse, not enough to feed it anything but the echo of the self. This is why Wilson was a stopgap and not a cure, and why his loss, though devastating, was survivable in a way the loss of a person is not: what floated away was a mirror, not a partner. The paper named the genuine remedy plainly — a real exterior, the presence and address of actual others, by which the Me is fed as it was built to be fed — but it stopped there. It did not say what an actual other does that a dead surface cannot. It did not give the mechanism.

This paper gives it. The claim is that an actual other completes the circuit Wilson could only counterfeit, because the far end of the relay is alive: there is a second self there, with its own active and receptive poles, and the address that leaves my I does not bounce off a surface but is received by a real interior — and reciprocally, what arrives at my own starved receptor is not my own echo but the genuinely independent address of another self, reaching me from a place I am not and could not occupy. And the paper argues further that the fullest, most complete, and most distinctive form this completion takes is romantic love — not as one instance among the many ways selves receive one another, but as a structurally specific kind, which the closing sections will define precisely against its nearest neighbor, friendship.

II. The Crossed Circuit

Begin with what the partnered circuit shares with every genuine meeting of selves, before isolating what love adds. The structure rests on the three persons of the self developed across the Neurological Qabalah: the active, agentic I of the left hemisphere, which addresses, acts, intends, and divides; the passive, receptive Me of the right hemisphere, which receives, stands open, and is impinged upon, and which has no voice of its own; and the integrating Myself of the Tiphareth salience network, which harmonises the two into a single functioning self.

The naive picture of why people pair says that each person needs someone to receive their address — someone to talk to, someone who listens. But this is the dyadic flattening the Cast Away paper

already rejected, and it fails here for the same reason, made sharper by the architecture. My Me is not satisfied by my partner receiving my address. My Me is the receptive pole; what it needs is to receive, not to be received. A picture in which my partner's reception satisfies me has the geometry backwards — it feeds the wrong pole. The correct structure must be crossed, and once it is drawn correctly it is unmistakable: my I addresses my partner, and it is my partner's Me that receives the address; and reciprocally, my partner's I addresses me, and it is my Me that receives that. Two loops, running in opposite directions, interlocking. Each person's active pole completes the other person's receptive pole. Each person's receptive pole is completed by the other person's active pole.

This is the precise structural difference between a partner and Wilson, and it is exactly the difference the Cast Away paper left unspecified. Wilson gave the I a surface to bounce off so that the same self's Me could receive its own output at one remove: a single self, routed through a dead exterior, fed its own echo. A partner gives the I a live receptor to address — a real Me that takes the address in and is changed by receiving it — and supplies the self's own starved Me with a live address to receive, the genuinely independent output of another I. The relay is no longer hollow. When I speak to my partner, my address does not return to me; it lands in an interior that is not mine. And what fills my own receptor is not the echo of my I but my partner's I, reaching me from a position I do not and cannot occupy. Wilson closed the circuit on a single self; a partner closes each self's circuit through the other's opposite pole.

Notice that the completion is asymmetric at the level of the pole, and this asymmetry is what distinguishes the account from a vague mutuality. It is not that two whole selves affiliate, each somehow good for the other in general. It is that my active pole specifically completes my partner's receptive pole, and my partner's active pole specifically completes my receptive pole — active-to-receptive, crossed, in both directions. What each partner most fundamentally gives is address, the output of the active pole; what each most fundamentally receives is the other's address into the receptive pole. This is a different and more determinate claim than 'people need each other,' and it makes predictions that the generic claim cannot, to which the paper will return when it distinguishes love from friendship and when it examines how intimacy fails.

III. The Literatures and Where They Stop

Three established bodies of work bear on what binds a romantic pair, and the crossed-circuit account must be located precisely against each — crediting what each captures, and marking the specific point at which each stops. The three are Arthur Aron's self-expansion model, the philosophical union theory of love, and the attachment theory of Bowlby, Hazan, and Shaver. They are, respectively, the nearest scientific neighbor, the nearest philosophical neighbor, and the most empirically powerful rival — and the crossed-circuit account differs from each in a way that the architecture alone makes visible.

III.1 — Aron: Self-Expansion and the Inclusion of the Other in the Self

The closest scientific neighbor is the self-expansion model developed by Arthur and Elaine Aron, whose central principle is the inclusion of the other in the self. On this model, people are motivated to expand the self — to increase their perspectives, identities, resources, and efficacy — and a primary means of doing so is the close relationship, in which the partner's perspectives, identities, and resources come to be, to some extent, included in one's own self. Closeness is operationalised as the degree of cognitive overlap between self and other, measured by the well-known Inclusion of Other in the Self scale, on which respondents select the pair of circles that best represents how much their self and the other's self overlap. The model is supported by a large body of research and is, of the scientific accounts, the one that comes nearest to the language of this paper, since it speaks explicitly of the other being included in the self.

What the model captures is real: relationships do change the boundaries of the self, partners do come to share perspectives and resources, and the felt sense of overlap is a genuine feature of closeness. But the geometry of self-expansion is precisely the opposite of the crossed circuit, and the difference is not verbal. Self-expansion is a model of overlap — the self enlarges by absorbing the other's resources and perspectives into its own content, so that the two selves' contents increasingly coincide. The crossed circuit is a model of distinct poles in reciprocal completion: nothing is absorbed, nothing overlaps, and the two selves remain entirely distinct. What completes my receptive pole is not the other's content folded into mine but the other's active pole reaching me from outside me, precisely as other and precisely because it is not included in me. On the self-expansion model, the ideal limit is maximal overlap — the circles nearly coincident. On the crossed-circuit account, complete overlap would be catastrophe: it would mean the other's address is no longer arriving from a position I do not occupy, which is to say the relay has gone hollow again and the circuit has collapsed back toward the sealed internal loop. The two models agree that the self is altered in love and disagree about how: Aron by inclusion and overlap, the present account by reciprocal completion across a distance that must be preserved. Self-expansion measures how much of the other I have taken in; the crossed circuit requires that the other remain outside me in order to feed me at all.

III.2 — The Union Theory of Love

The nearest philosophical neighbor is the union theory of love, the oldest account in the Western tradition. Its origin is the speech Plato gives to Aristophanes in the Symposium: human beings were once whole, double creatures, and were split by the gods, so that erotic love is the longing of each severed half to find and rejoin its other half and become one again. The theme recurs in contemporary philosophy of love, most influentially in Robert Nozick's account, on which lovers form a 'we' — a new entity constituted by the desire to form it and to have that desire reciprocated, in which the partners pool their well-being, so that the well-being of each is bound up with the other's, and pool a measure of their autonomy, so that some decisions can no longer be made alone. Robert Solomon, Roger Scruton, and Mark Fisher develop kindred versions in which love is the formation of a shared identity.

The union theory captures something the dyadic-need picture misses and that the crossed circuit also affirms: that love genuinely alters what the self is, that it is not merely two intact individuals exchanging benefits but a real change in the structure of selfhood. Its enduring vulnerability, however, is the one its critics have pressed since the beginning — the autonomy objection, stated most forcefully by Alan Soble: if love is the merging of two selves into one, then it threatens or dissolves the very individuality of the lovers, and, as has been argued against Nozick's pooled well-being in particular, it makes genuine non-egoistic self-sacrifice impossible, since on a single shared well-being a loss to the beloved is automatically a loss to oneself, and there is no longer a distinct other for whose sake one could sacrifice. Solomon could only call the strain between union and autonomy 'the paradox of love,' which his critics rightly noted is to name the problem rather than to solve it.

The crossed-circuit account dissolves this objection rather than inheriting it, and this is its decisive advantage over the union theory. On the crossed circuit there is no merging and no 'we' that is a third entity; there are two selves whose poles remain wholly distinct, completing each other precisely across the distance between them. Autonomy is not pooled, surrendered, or paradoxically held in tension with union — it is preserved by the very structure that achieves the completion, because the completion depends on the two selves remaining distinct. My receptive pole is completed only because my partner's active pole reaches it from a genuinely separate self; were the selves to merge, the completion would cease, for there would be no separate position from which the address could arrive. The union theory was right that love changes the self and wrong about the mechanism: it located the change in fusion, and fusion is exactly what would destroy the completion. The crossed circuit secures everything the union theory wanted — a real alteration of selfhood, a genuine bond, the sense that one is completed by the beloved — while keeping the two selves entire, and so it answers the autonomy objection not by biting the bullet but by showing the bullet was never required. Aristophanes' image of two halves rejoining into one is, on this account, the picturesque error: lovers are not two halves making one whole but two wholes, each entire with both poles, crossing their circuits so that each completes the other without either ceasing to be whole.

III.3 — Attachment Theory

The most empirically powerful rival is attachment theory. John Bowlby's account of the infant-caregiver bond was extended to adult romantic relationships by Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver, who argued that the bond between adult partners is governed by the same behavioral system that binds infant to caregiver, and that the partner serves the two functions Bowlby identified: a safe haven to which one turns for comfort under threat, and a secure base from which one explores in times of safety. The framework is robust and well-measured, describing adult attachment along the dimensions of anxiety and avoidance and predicting a wide range of relational behavior; its account of separation distress in particular — the nervous system treating the partner's availability as a matter of urgency — is among the best-supported in the field.

Attachment theory captures what the present account must also explain: the depth of distress at a partner's absence or unresponsiveness, and the sense that the partner is, somehow, a condition of one's own stability. But attachment theory is a model of regulation, not of the structure of the self, and this is where it stops. It describes the partner as a figure whose proximity and responsiveness regulate one's felt security — when the partner is available, the system settles; when not, it alarms — without giving an account of what, structurally, the partner completes. It tells us that the partner functions as a safe haven and secure base; it does not tell us which part of the self is served, or by what mechanism, or why the partner's absence should feel like the floor dropping out rather than simply like a withdrawn comfort. The crossed-circuit account supplies exactly this missing structural layer, and the two are complementary rather than rival on the point: what attachment theory observes as the regulating function of the available partner is, in the present account, the partner's active pole continuously completing one's receptive pole. The settling of the system when the partner is responsive is the receptor being supplied from outside; the alarm at unresponsiveness is the receptor finding the relay gone hollow. Attachment theory describes the thermostat; the crossed circuit describes the circuit the thermostat is reading. Where attachment theory says the partner is a secure base, the present account says why a secure base is possible at all: because a live exterior is completing the receptive pole that the self cannot complete from within.

IV. What Distinguishes Love: The Crossed Circuit Is Not Enough

The crossed circuit, as described so far, is not yet love, and it is essential to admit this plainly rather than smuggle the conclusion. Everything said in Section II — the two interlocking loops, the I addressing the other's Me, both poles completed — is equally true of a good friendship, of a parent and child, even of a single deep conversation. Every genuine meeting of two selves is a crossed circuit. If the crossed circuit were the whole account, this would be a theory of reception as such, of sociality in general, and not a theory of romantic love at all. The burden, therefore, is to isolate what the romantic pair adds on top of the crossed circuit — some structural property of the circuit, not merely its presence — and the architecture must name this property on its own terms rather than importing it from romance as we happen to find it. Two such properties are load-bearing, and a third is a characteristic channel rather than a defining feature.

IV.1 — Completion of the Whole, Not the Region

The first differentiator is that the romantic pair-circuit completes the Me as a whole, where friendship completes it regionally. A friendship-circuit is genuine but partial and non-exclusive: this friend's active pole reaches the region of me that is humor, that friend's the region that is ambition, another's the region that is grief. The receptive pole is completed distributively, across many partial circuits, no one of which closes the whole. Many friends together can complete many regions, and this is no defect of friendship but its proper form. The romantic claim is that the pair-circuit completes the Me not region by region but entire — the global Me at the foundation of the self, the whole self regarded as object, rather than any one of its facets.

From this single structural fact the tendency of the pair-bond toward exclusivity follows directly, and follows without appeal to jealousy, possessiveness, or social convention. Whole-completion is singular by its nature in exactly the way regional completion is plural by its nature. One may have many friends each completing a part, because parts are many; one cannot have many partners each completing a part of the whole, because 'the whole, in parts' is a contradiction. The Me has many facets, and many friends may each receive one; the Me has one wholeness, and only one circuit can close that. The exclusivity of romantic love is therefore not a moral rule laid over a structure indifferent to it but a direct consequence of what the pair-circuit completes. This also draws on a distinction the corpus has already made in the analysis of guilt and shame and of self-loathing: the difference between the global self-referential pole and the local, regional hubs. Friendship engages the regional; love engages the global. That is the first thing love adds.

IV.2 — The Circuit Held Open

The second differentiator is that the romantic pair-circuit is held open continuously, where friendship's circuit is struck and broken. A single conversation is a transient crossed circuit: it opens, completes for its duration, and closes when the speakers part. Friendship is a series of such openings with closures between them — the circuit is intermittent, and in the intervals between

meetings each self returns to its own incompleteness, awaiting the next opening. The romantic pair-circuit is the case in which the circuit does not close between contacts: the partner remains a live receptor and a live address even in absence, so that the receptive pole is held in completion across silence and distance, and the active pole has a standing destination even when no word is being spoken. This is structurally distinct from meeting often. It is that the partner has become a permanent feature of the circuit rather than a recurring one — the receptor stays supplied, and the address stays received, across the gaps.

This property gives the loss of a partner its specific structural character, and sharpens what the Cast Away paper could only state for the hollow case. Wilson had to be present and faced to function at all; the instant he floated beyond reach, the circuit broke totally and at once, and Chuck was returned to the empty room. The pair-bond is precisely the circuit that survives the partner's absence — which is why the loss of a partner is structurally unlike the loss of a friend one will see next month. The friend's circuit was already intermittent; its lapse is the extension of an interval. The partner's circuit was continuously held; its loss is the breaking of a standing completion, the receptor returned not to the familiar between-visits incompleteness but to the empty room itself, the global Me deprived at once of the single circuit that closed its wholeness and held it closed. That is the second thing love adds, and the two together — whole-completion and standing-ness — are what the architecture names as the structural core of eros.

IV.3 — The Somatic Channel

A third feature is characteristic of the romantic pair-circuit but, unlike the first two, is a channel rather than a definition, and the distinction matters for what the paper can and cannot claim. The pair-circuit characteristically runs not only through address and reception in the cognitive register but through the body — touch, physical presence, the somatic floor of the self, the Me at its most concrete, received and receiving as a body. This is a real feature and a distinctive one; the conversational circuit of friendship conventionally does not use it, and it adds both bandwidth and a register of reception — being received as a body, not only as a mind — that the purely verbal circuit leaves open.

But it must be held as a channel of the crossed circuit, not as the definition of eros, and the reason is exact. To make the somatic the essential differentiator — the thing that distinguishes love from friendship — would be to make the body load-bearing, and that would reintroduce precisely the gendered, bodily-configuration metaphysics that the next section shows the architecture excludes. The disciplined position, and the one this paper takes, is that the somatic is the fullest channel through which the pair-circuit can run, adding a concrete register of reception, while the defining features remain the structural ones: whole-completion and standing-ness. This choice has a consequence the paper accepts openly rather than evades: an intense friendship that is genuinely whole and genuinely standing — that completes the whole Me and is held open across absence — is, on this account, structurally near-eros, differing from it only in the somatic channel. The tradition has long had a name for exactly this case: romantic friendship. The architecture does not treat it as an anomaly but predicts it as the genuine intermediate it has always been. One cannot have both a purely structural differentia and a hard wall between deep friendship and eros; this

paper keeps the structural differentia, and so the wall is soft, and the intermediate case is real.

V. Why It Transcends Gender

That this completion transcends gender is not a liberal gloss added to the structure but a direct entailment of it, and the architecture in fact forces a stronger claim than mere permission. The I and the Me are not the male and the female. They are the active and receptive poles of every self whatsoever, and both are present, fully and entire, in every person. The I is no one's sex and the Me is no one's sex; they are the agentic and receptive modes of the single divided self, seated in the asymmetry of the hemispheres, present in everyone who has both hemispheres — which is to say, in everyone.

The crossed circuit requires only that each partner possess an active pole that can address and a receptive pole that can receive. It requires, that is, only two complete selves. Nothing in the mechanism indexes to sex, to gender, to bodily configuration, or to social role; the pairing is pole-to-pole — active to receptive, crossed, in both directions — and both poles are present in every self. The structure is therefore not merely compatible with love that crosses gender lines; it positively predicts that the completing circuit can form between any two complete selves whatsoever, because the sole requirement is the presence of the two poles, and that presence is universal. Two men, two women, a man and a woman, and partners outside those categories altogether are, on this account, structurally identical cases: in each, two whole selves, each entire with both poles, cross their circuits so that each one's active pole completes the other's receptive pole in both directions at once.

The older metaphysics — the active, formative male and the receptive, material female, the man as the I and the woman as the Me — is, on the crossed-circuit account, not a deeper truth that this paper simplifies or politely sets aside. It is a degraded version of the structure, and demonstrably so: it amputates each partner to a single pole, assigning the active pole to one person and the receptive pole to the other, and thereby destroys the very crossing on which the completion depends. A self reduced to its active pole alone has no receptor to be completed; a self reduced to its receptive pole alone has no address to give. The gendered pairing, taken as metaphysics, describes two half-selves, each lacking the pole the other supposedly monopolises — which is not love's completion but its impossibility, since neither half has the pair of poles the circuit requires. The truth the architecture yields is the reverse: love is two whole selves, each entire with both the active and the receptive pole, crossing their circuits in both directions. The gendered version is one pole short on each side. What presents itself as the deep traditional truth of love's complementarity is, structurally, an account in which the circuit cannot close.

VI. Both Poles Answered in a Single Motion

There remains the part of the account that reaches past even the crossed circuit as so far described, and it is the heart of the matter. The Cast Away paper established that the I cannot

satisfy its own Me from within, because internal feeding is the sealed loop of pathology. What that paper could not show, because a dead relay cannot show it, is that the I has an unmet condition of its own, distinct from the Me's. The Me's need is to receive — to take in a genuine exterior. The I's need is to be received — for its address to land in a real interior and matter there, rather than vanishing into silence or bouncing off a surface. Wilson could meet neither fully: a dead surface receives nothing, so Chuck's address was reflected but never taken in, and Chuck's I was never, in the relevant sense, received.

A partner meets both unmet conditions at once, and — this is the decisive point — meets them by the same single act. When I address my partner, that one act is simultaneously two completions: it is my partner's Me receiving (their receptor supplied from outside, by me) and it is my I being received (my address landing in a real interior and mattering there). And when my partner addresses me, the same doubling runs the other way: my Me receives, and my partner's I is received, in one motion. The crossed circuit is therefore not merely two selves each using the other as a living Wilson, two reflectors upgraded to receptors. It is the one configuration in which the I's need to be received and the Me's need to receive are satisfied in the same motion, by the same other, who is themselves being satisfied in both poles by that very same motion. A single act of address is at once the giving that the other's receptor needs and the being-received that one's own active pole needs — and it is reciprocally so, both directions, both poles, in one event.

This is why the complete picture of love is not adequately stated as mutual need-meeting, exchange, or even the crossed circuit named flatly. It is the mutual completion in which each self's two poles — the receptive pole that must receive and the active pole that must be received — are answered together, in a single motion, by one other who is themselves being answered in both poles by the same motion. Romantic love, on this account, is the standing, whole, somatically-channelled form of that single reciprocal motion: the configuration in which two whole selves complete each other at both poles at once, continuously, and as wholes — each the live exterior the other was built to receive, each the real interior in which the other's address at last arrives and matters.

VII. The Completed Picture

The account closes where the Cast Away paper could not. That paper ended with a starved receptor and a hollow relay, naming the genuine remedy — a real exterior, the address of actual others — without giving its mechanism. The mechanism is the crossed circuit: each self's active pole completing the other's receptive pole, in both directions, across a distance that must be preserved rather than closed. What distinguishes the romantic form of that circuit from every other genuine meeting of selves is that it completes the Me as a whole and is held open continuously, and that it characteristically runs also through the body — so that the loss of a partner is the breaking of a standing, whole completion, and not the lapse of an intermittent or regional one.

Set against the established accounts, the crossed circuit keeps what each saw and repairs where

each failed. It agrees with Aron that love alters the self, but by reciprocal completion across a preserved distance rather than by overlap and inclusion — the other must remain outside me to feed me at all. It agrees with the union theory that love genuinely changes what the self is, but secures that change without fusion, and so dissolves the autonomy objection that the union theory could only call a paradox: the two selves remain whole, and the completion depends on their remaining so. It agrees with attachment theory that the partner's availability regulates the self at a depth that feels like survival, and supplies the structural layer attachment theory leaves out — the partner as the live exterior continuously completing a receptive pole the self cannot complete from within. And it entails, rather than merely tolerates, that love crosses gender, because the completion is pole-to-pole and both poles are entire in every self; the gendered metaphysics of complementarity is revealed as the degraded case in which each partner is cut down to a single pole and the circuit cannot close.

The picture is, in the end, the one the opening insight reached for and the architecture confirms. We pair because the self has a receptive pole it cannot fill alone and an active pole that needs its address received, and because there exists a configuration in which both are answered at once by another whose own two poles are answered in the same motion. Wilson was the lonely counterfeit of that configuration — a single self bouncing its address off a dead surface to keep its receptor from collapse. Love is the configuration made real and mutual and whole: two complete selves, each entire with both poles, crossing their circuits so that each becomes for the other the live exterior it was built to receive and the real interior in which its address at last arrives. The complete picture of love is the closing of each self's circuit through the other, in both directions, at both poles, held open — and it is, for exactly the reasons the structure requires, a human thing and not a gendered one.

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