

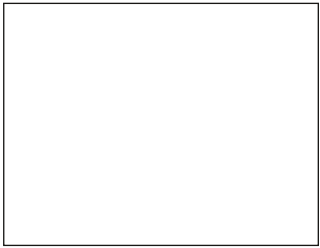
Amba Luna



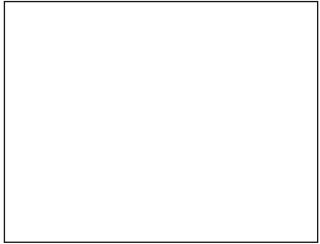
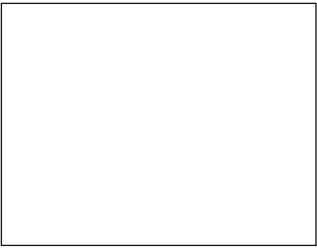
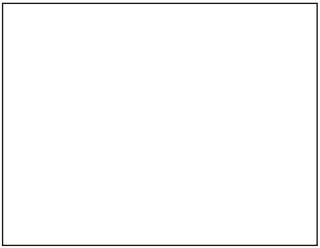
Stories, the scaffolding of our realities

Stories, the scaffolding of our realities





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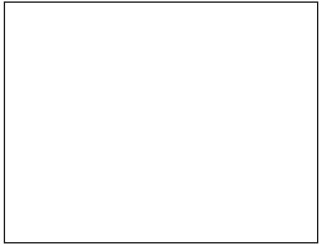
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Introduction to: Stories, the scaffolding of our realities

True to my way of expressing myself artistically, this introduction too will dip in and out of other people's minds. Their words and their stories serve as a reflection of what takes up residence in my brain.

What I mean by that is probably expressed best in Kate Murphy's words: "The stories we collect in life define us and are the scaffolding of our realities. Families, friends, and coworkers have stories that bind them together. Rivals and enemies have narratives that keep them apart. All around us are people's legends and anecdotes, myths and stark realities."

All kinds of stories have intrigued me in the process of developing my diploma. As the author Austin Kleon put it, "The idea that the artist should sit down and create something new is a paralyzing delusion. We can only create a collage of our influences, our memories – filtered through our imagination."

I have been very lucky to stumble upon so many inspiring voices across multiple fields. From psychology to poetry, science studies to biographies, podcasts to contemporary literature, professors to documentaries and especially to the people in my life I love so dearly (you know who you are).

Hereby, I want to thank all of you for writing and speaking about things you deeply care about. Thank you for the greatest gift one can receive: thank you for letting me listen to you.

Listening is always a key part of my artwork. But I don't mean listening solely as an act of gathering a string of words. I mean it in the way Katherine Hampsten described it: "It's like a game of catch with a lump of clay. Each person catches it and molds it with their perceptions before tossing it back."

That being said, I want to release you from the idea of having to understand the following works in every respect, of catching the metaphorical clay I throw at you without it being molded. Because I think it is like Miles Davis said: "If you understood everything I said, you'd be me."



Three stories about snails, 2025

c-print, 80 × 120 cm



“The fact is that every human being is born with curiosity, a desire to learn, and a determination to progress. To borrow an image from the sociologist Theodore W. Adorno, every child is like a snail, sending its feelers out into the world to discover it.

If its probing is not reciprocated, if it is left to grope in the void, or is even harmed, then the determination to develop and the desire to learn will wither away. It will withdraw its senses from the world, and eventually it will no longer venture out at all. A story of arrested development, of an educational background that has been stunted, is often a story of wounds.”

– Jakob Mueller on the Lives of the Unconscious Podcast

“I was watching my little sister play the other day. She had this snail and she was holding onto it really tightly – she was like, Snail, snail, snail, named it Ronny, made it a bed of leaves, said she was going to find him a friend, but the whole time she was holding onto him so tightly and eventually, when she let him go, I saw that she’d crushed his shell. She doesn’t say why she brings up this story, but I get her. Love made us grip so tightly that we broke it; each other too.”

– Annie Lord from her book Notes on Heartbreak

“The two of them are in a weird sense very much alike one being family by blood the other by choosing. I have always been intrigued by the way history moves. It reminds me of the spiral shape of a snail’s shell.”

– Amba Luna from her personal notes









Storytelling as Integration, 2025

inkjetprint, 5×5cm



“Language allows us to corral our experiences into story form.

Once we have the story, we’re more able to revisit an experience – even a trauma – without reliving all the turmoil attached to it.”

– Mark Wolynn from his book *It Didn’t Start with You* (how inherited family trauma shapes who we are and how to end the cycle)

“Between some of the pairs (of photographs and text) there appears to be a disconnect. Sometimes distance is a necessary tool to be able to tell a story at all. Forgive me for not unraveling myself completely. Maybe it will give you space to unfold.”x

– Amba Luna from her personal notes



1/8

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Storytelling as Integration: Five to one, 2025

inkjetprint, 5×5cm

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“It takes five positive interactions to make up for one negative one during a conflict.”
– John Gottman and associates from their study Predicting marital happiness and stability from newlywed interactions













2/8

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Storytelling as Integration: Control, Identity & Self-Worth, 2025

inkjetprint, 5×5cm

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“The psychologist Julie T. Anné, who specializes in treating eating disorders, nails it: with her clients, she says, ‘three lacks’ are typical: lack of control, identity, and self-worth, along with a need to numb pain.”

– Gabor Maté and Daniel Maté from their book *The Myth of Normal*









Storytelling as Integration: The memory of suffering, 2025

inkjetprint, 5×5cm

“I remembered the way, when each of my sons was a baby, they would deliberately drop things from their highchair in order to watch them fall to the floor, an activity as delightful to them as its consequences were appalling. They would stare down at the fallen thing – a half-eaten rusk, or a plastic ball – and become increasingly agitated by its failure to return. Eventually they would begin to cry, and usually found that the fallen object came back to them by that route. It always surprised me that their response to this chain of events was to repeat it: as soon as the object was in their hands they would drop it again, leaning over to watch it fall.

Their delight never lessened, and nor did their distress. I always! expected that at some point they would realise the distress was unnecessary and would choose to avoid it, but they never did. The memory of suffering had no effect whatever on what they elected to do; on the contrary, it compelled them to repeat it, for the suffering was the magic that caused the object to come back and allowed the delight in dropping it to become possible again. Had I refused to return it the very first time they dropped it, I suppose they would have learned something very different, though what that might have been I wasn't sure.”

– Rachel Cusk from her book Outline









Storytelling as Integration: Blame and Understanding, 2025

inkjetprint, 5×5cm



“Blame becomes a meaningless concept the moment one understands how suffering in a family system or even in a community extends back through the generations.”

– Gabor Maté and Daniel Maté from their book *The Myth of Normal*

“It helps to know what happened in our family that made our parents hurt so much. What sat behind the distance, criticism, or aggression in the first place? Knowing these trends can open the door to understanding their pain, as well as our own.”

– Mark Wolynn from his book *It Didn't Start with You* (how inherited family trauma shapes who we are and how to end the cycle)









5/8

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Storytelling as Integration: Verbal ability and impulse control, 2025

inkjetprint, 5×5cm

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“Verbal ability appears to be strongly related to impulse control; we encourage toddlers to ‘use your words’ when they get frustrated for a reason.”
– Maia Szalavitz and Bruce Perry from their book *Born for Love* (why empathy is essential and endangered)







6/8

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Storytelling as Integration: The possibility, 2025

inkjetprint, 5×5cm

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“Rats who were given brief interludes of rest atop a dry platform, kept swimming in a barrel of water for days on end simply because they had learned that the possibility of dryness existed.”

– Mary Jo Peebles from her book *When Psychotherapy Feels Stuck*









Storytelling as Integration: Protected and Boundless, 2025

inkjetprint, 5×5cm



“That Saturday night, when it was already dark and the gates of the gardens were locked, I imagined them, the deer, racing unhindered through the grounds, across the untended meadows, up and down the hills, along the tree-lined paths, their hooves clattering on the gravel and stirring the sleeping swans. What freedom to live like that, protected and boundless at once.”

– Tomasz Jedrovski from his book *Swimming in The Dark*



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Storytelling as Integration: Rippling, 2025

inkjetprint, 5×5cm

“Rippling is the phenomenon of creating concentric circles of influence that may affect others for years, generations, interminably. Without our conscious intent or knowledge, we leave behind something from our life experience, some trait, some piece of wisdom, act of virtue, guidance, or comfort that passes on to others much as the ripples caused by a pebble tossed into a pond go on and on until they are no longer visible but continue at a nano level.”

– Irvin D. Yalom from his book *The Gift of Therapy*











The four horsemen of relationships, 2025

gif (video), 36×31 cm, <https://vimeo.com/1078705323>



“The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse is a metaphor depicting the end of times in the New Testament. They describe conquest, war, hunger, and death respectively. We use this metaphor to describe communication styles that, according to our research, can predict the end of a relationship.”

– From the Gottman Institute Research







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Criticism, 2025

gif (video), 36×31 cm, <https://vimeo.com/1078705323>

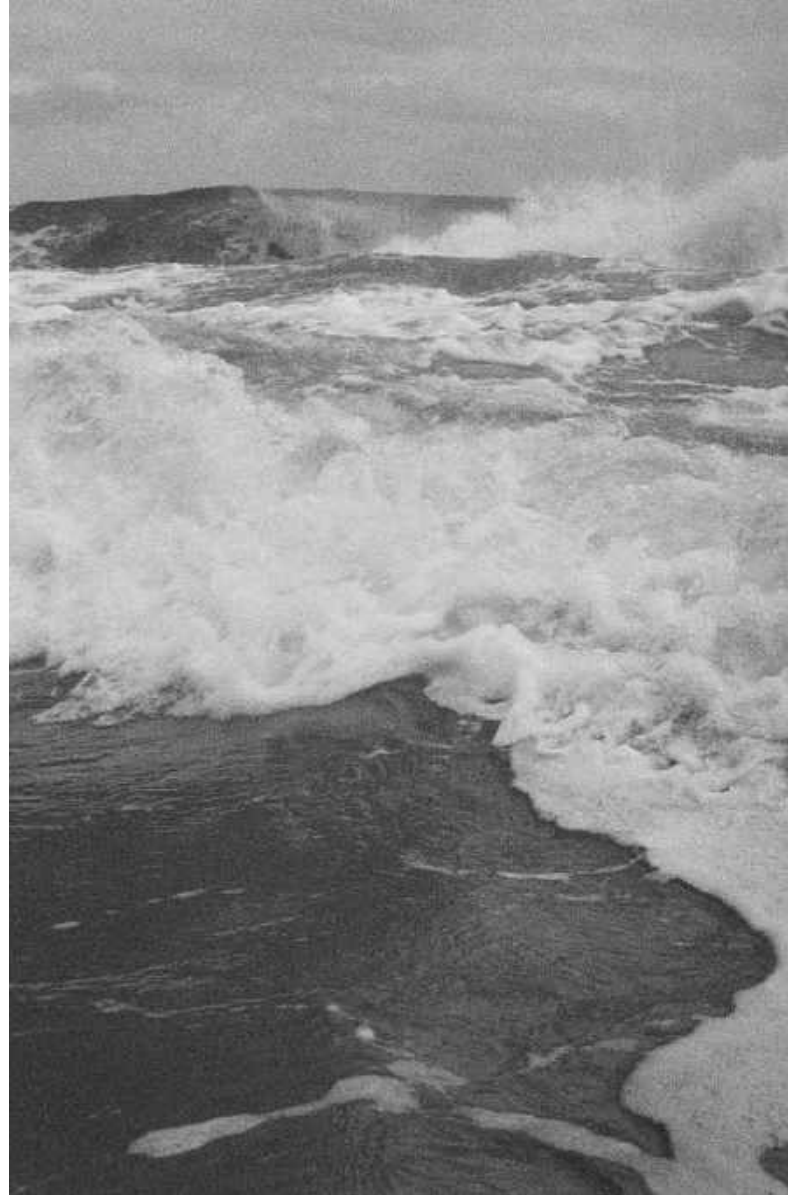
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“The first horseman is criticism.

Criticizing your partner is different than offering a critique or voicing a complaint. The latter two are about specific issues, whereas the former is an ad hominem attack. It is an attack on your partner at the core of their character. In effect, you are dismantling their whole being when you criticize.

The antidote to criticism: gentle start-up. Talk about your feelings using ‘I’ statements and express what you need in a positive way.”

– From the Gottman Institute Research







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Contempt, 2025

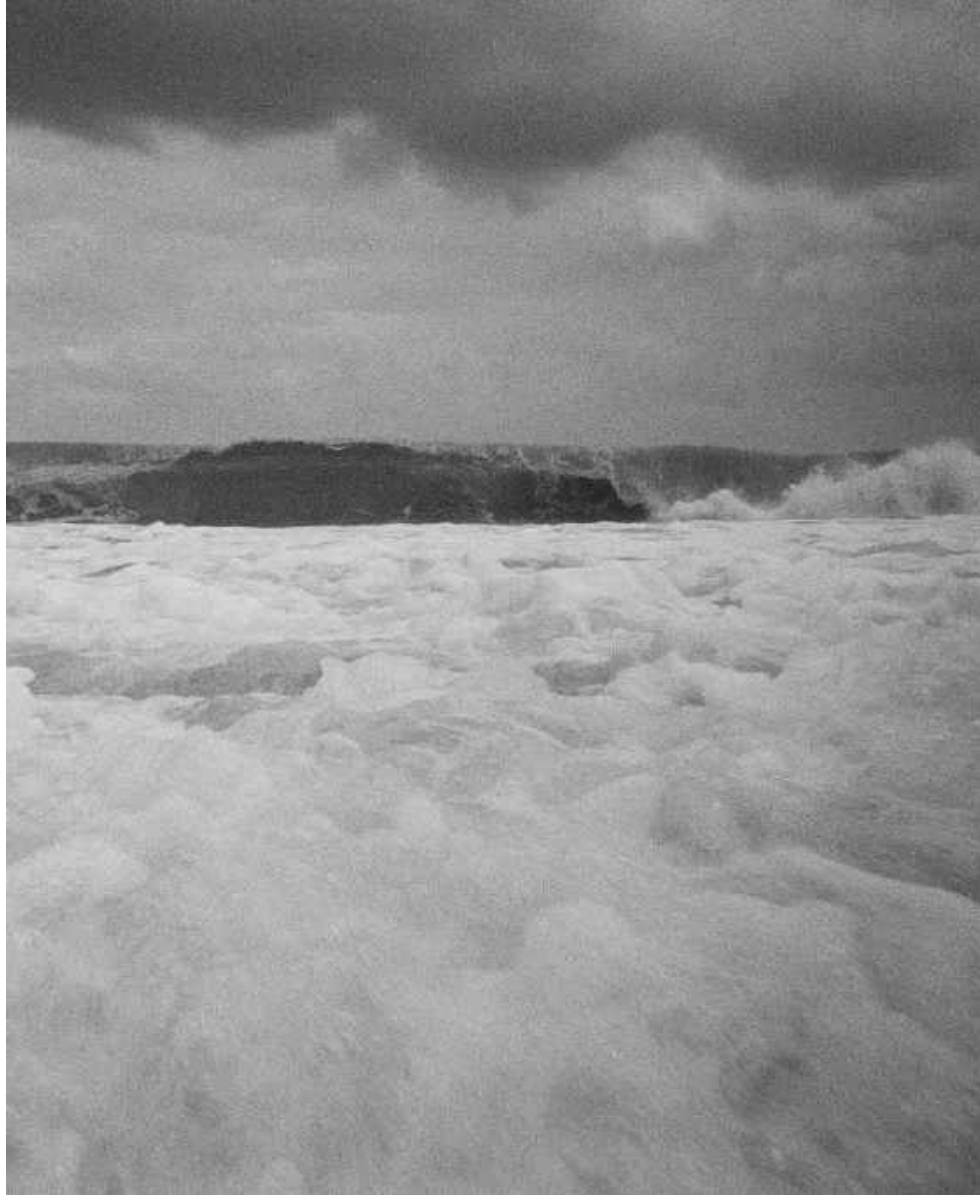
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“The second horseman is contempt.

When we communicate in this state, we are truly mean—we treat others with disrespect, mock them with sarcasm, ridicule, call them names, and mimic or use body language such as eye-rolling or scoffing. The target of contempt is made to feel despised and worthless. The antidote to contempt: build a culture of appreciation and respect. Remind yourself of your partner’s positive qualities and find gratitude for positive actions.”

– From the Gottman Institute Research







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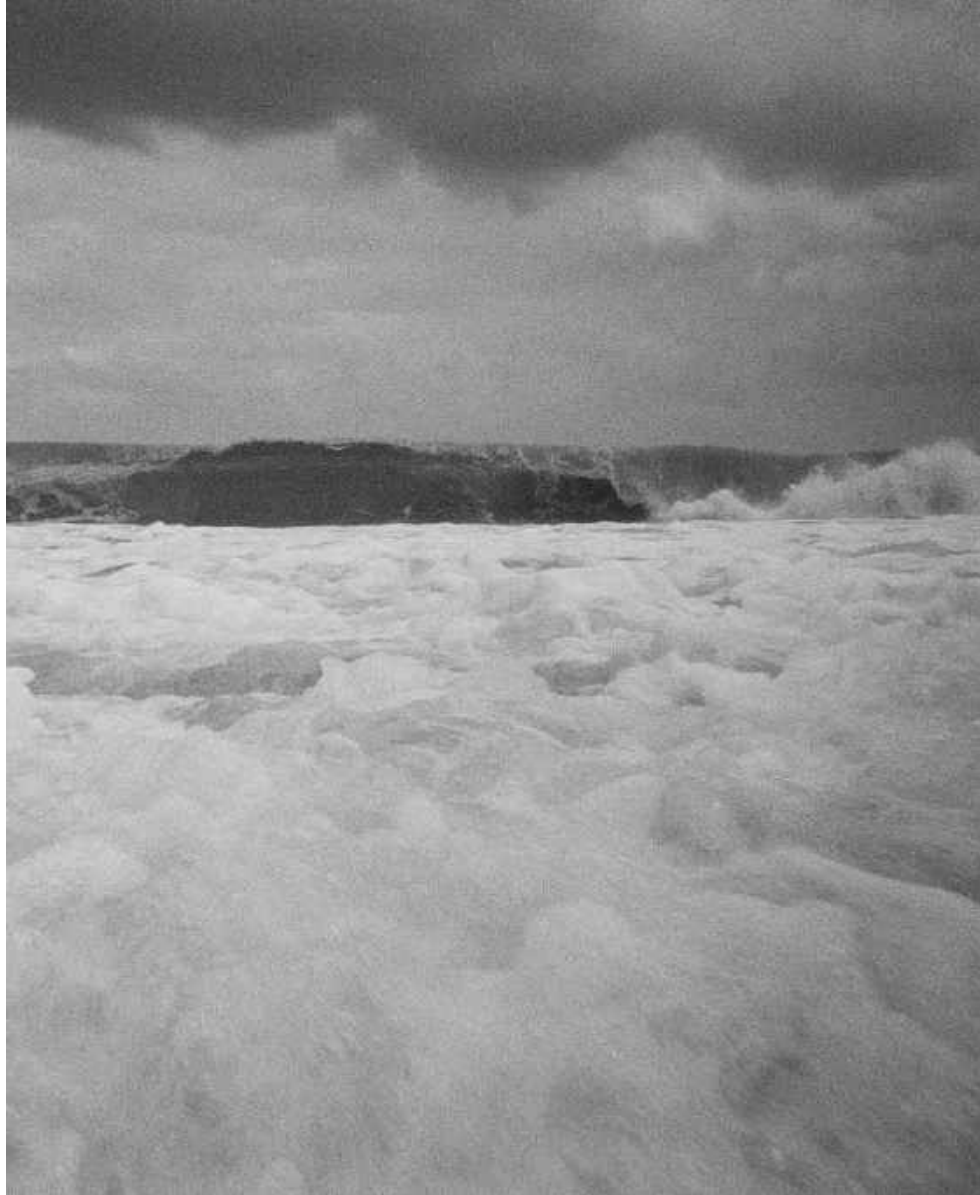
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Defensiveness, 2025

gif (video), 36×31 cm, <https://vimeo.com/1078705323>

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“The third horseman is defensiveness, and it is typically a response to criticism. We’ve all been defensive, and this horseman is nearly omnipresent when relationships are on the rocks. When we feel unjustly accused, we fish for excuses and play the innocent victim so that our partner will back off. The antidote to defensiveness: take responsibility. Accept your partner’s perspective and offer an apology for any wrongdoing.”
– From the Gottman Institute Research







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Stonewalling, 2025

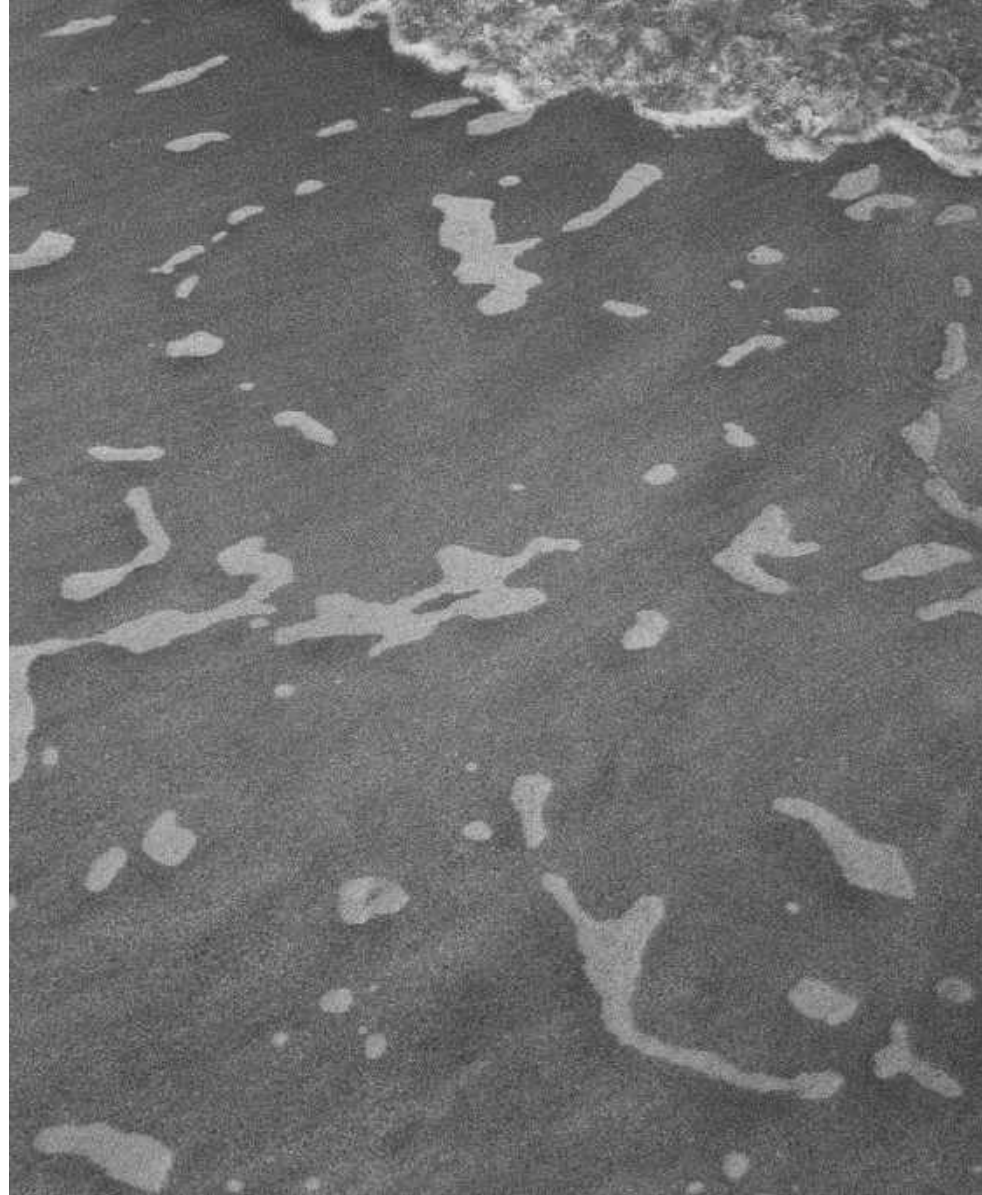
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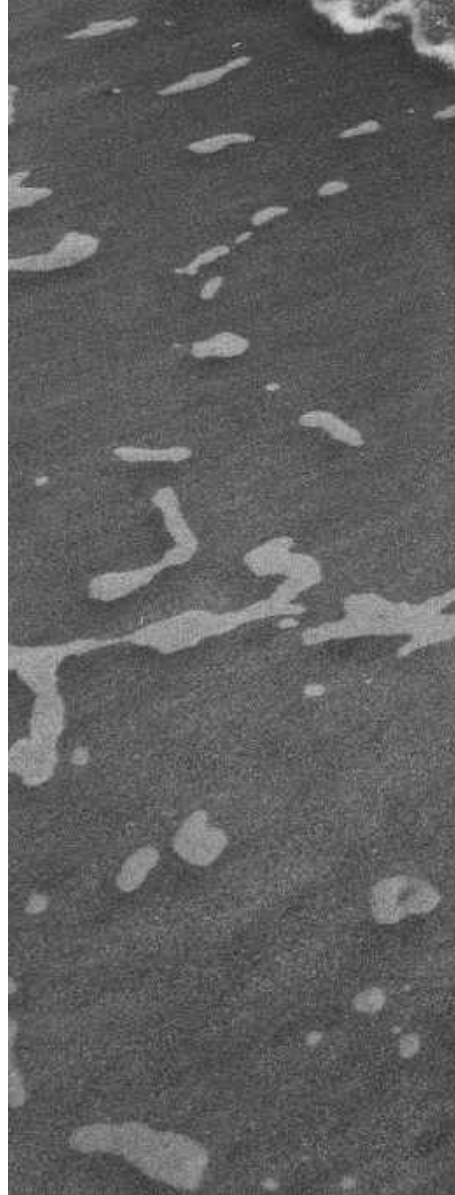
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„The fourth horseman is stonewalling, which is usually a response to contempt. Stonewalling occurs when the listener withdraws from the interaction, shuts down, and simply stops responding to their partner. Rather than confronting the issues with their partner, people who stonewall can make evasive maneuvers such as tuning out, turning away, acting busy, or engaging in obsessive or distracting behaviors.

The antidote to stonewalling: physiological self-soothing. Take a break and spend that time doing something soothing and distracting.“

– From the Gottman Institute Research





Note of Gratitude

The scaffolding of our realities is made of the fabric woven by and with the stories we share with people. Like life, this book consists of many stories and people, all of which I want to thank hereby.

Thank you, Clara van Handel and Levin Jaensch, for all the work and effort you put into designing this book.

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I am so very grateful for the wonderful five years of studying fine art, for the life I built in Stuttgart, and especially for the people I grew to love. Thank you, Carmen, for our animating conversations about the human mind, Jakob for being such a loyal friend, Laura for all the adventures we went on, Lynn for every dance we shared, Maya for the time spent under blossoming apple trees and Paula for

your candor, it never fails to impress me.

Thank you, Mama, for your strength and endurance that showed me that joy and love can be found again and again. Thank you, Papa, for setting the example of how to build a life after moving to a different continent. I am so grateful that you both support my choices unconditionally. Thank you, Mira, my Sisterly, for being such a loving big sister and for all the times you took care of me. Thank you also to the rest of my family, especially my grandparents Monika, Klaus, Herta and Fredi.

Thank you, Alaska, for your technical support and for being by my side for most of the writing that went into this.

And lastly, thank you, Felix Lavey, for being my home, my peace, my chosen family. Thank you for everything. Sea of Strangers will always be dedicated to you in my mind. I love you endlessly.

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