

COOP
DESIGN
RESEARCH

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M.Sc.
PROGRAM

STORYTELLING BY DESIGN

MAKING THE COMPLEXITY OF THE WORLD TANGIBLE

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ABSTRACT

Our world is shaped by human activity that is currently out of our control. We live in the Anthropocene, a new ecological epoch shaped by humans. We are changing Earth more rapidly than we understand it. Under these conditions, it is necessary to take a step back and look at the already designed processes. With this research, I want to make visible the social part of design and its entanglements. With a narrative approach, I want to shift the designer's attention more to the process of designing. This thesis documents my journey as an industrial designer to develop a storytelling approach and describes my design position and methodology.

The Anthropocene is best described as the age of globe-spanning industries, and Anthropocentrism is a central danger of our time that drives the exploitations of humans and non-humans. The progress of Modernity that created Western Universalism was only possible through colonization not only of natural resources but also of subjectivity and knowledge. Through storytelling approach, I am questioning this as only one way of living and designing. Stories make sense of the world around us, and they create codes in which we believe. Can we change the world by telling alternative stories? Design is a particular form of storytelling because stories are not only written in words but also in materials, relationships, processes. To understand the current most prevailing discussions about storytelling and design, I investigate its different forms and fields of storytelling in, through, and by design. I begin with storytelling in current corporate design sectors as a marketing tool, design processes, and communication methods within teams. Storytelling is also used as a reflective practice for designers who step out from industries. Furthermore, Critical and Speculative Design (CSD) open minds to the imagination of what the world could be, which allows stepping back from the dystopia we currently live in. CSD operates in a plausible future and leaves a blind spot on the material reality we live in, towards which I focus my research. Additionally, there is a tendency to regard the social as something that exists separately from materiality. We do not just live in a material world, but we are intensely ingrained in it.

For my storytelling approach, I build a framework between design, Design Anthropology, and New Materialism. I am looking at the social theory of Donna Haraway, Ursula Le Guin, Anna Tsing, and Bruno Latour to find alternative ways to tell stories. Through this framework, I gain my perspectives in telling design stories, including narratives in multivocal way. In addition, I conduct interviews with several designers as existing examples of storytelling in Design Anthropology and material-based design. Parallel to forming the framework and including observations beyond theoretical discourse, I traveled to Sardinia for field research to observe olive trees and their entanglements to take a step back and think differently about nature. Modernist's view on progress and industrialization sees nature, thus materials for the material world, as passive and mechanical. As a designer I understand the olive tree as a symbol and a metaphor to start getting into the thinking process of materials and how to treat and care for them. In my field research, through **sensitive observation**, I found a **contact zone** where different knowledges are interwoven with each other. The fence surrounding the olive trees made out of wild plants mixed with by-products from cultivation also became a **contact zone** between nature and culture, wild and cultivated, primitive and futuristic, messy and clean, public and private.