

# THINGS OF DYING

assemblages. goods. transmitters.

An applied design-anthropological exploration of the current death culture by Bitten Stetter

## WHAT?

This **practice-oriented dissertation** investigates with design-ethnographical methods the **material culture** of **end-of-life-spaces**. At the border of palliative, social and spiritual care, consumption, design and trend forecasting.

**Things of dying** are being reflected under aspects of the visual, material and postmodern turn and with regard to individualization, value change, digitalization, demographical change and holistic health. The **applied design-anthropological** exploration of the **new death culture** is questioning the current **lifestyle of dying**:

**How?** do the spirit of the age and death consciousness materialize in things of dying?

**Which?** roles entail things of dying in end-of-life-settings?

**Who?** are the (un-)professional designer and con- and prosumer?

**What?** support can end-of-life-design provide to improve quality of life and care of dying people, relatives and nurses?



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## WHY?

Things of dying are irreplaceable in (un-)professional dying settings. They are non-verbal actors and aktants. (Latour 2007) They have **functions** and **roles**, construct **identity** and transport **knowledge**. They are involved in (self-)care, conversations and crisis (Bosch 2014, Bourdieu 1987, Goffman 2003.). Things can be (dys-)functional or (un-)comforting. The (non-)human-centered design creates (in)dependence, (non-)quality of life, dignity or unworthiness. The **material culture** of dying (Hahn 2015, Tietmeyer 2010,) represent values and moral standards of **concepts of good dying**.

All of of them are designed, produced, distributed and get consumed. They are present in dying settings, absent in our every-day life. Their sensually perceptible qualities have received **less attention in cultural science** and **medical research**. (Sandelowski 2003, Smith 2006, Artner et al. 2017).

The **research through design** approach allows to transfer the findings and knowledge into **new products** for care givers, patients and relatives. The products should act inside and outside medical and nursing worlds with the goal to improve **awareness of dying, quality of life, communication** and **autonomy** and **self-empowerment** (finally.design).



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## HOW?

**Bitten Stetter** combines her design practice with cultural studies research. Lifeworld practices, communicative interactions, rituals, symbolic meanings and forms of sociality will be investigated using **design anthropological** and **design ethnographic** approaches.

The **multisite** and **multiscape ethnography** complemented by cultural probes and design interventions. The methodology **situational analysis**, based on grounded theory after the postmodern turn (A.-J. Clarke), understands mappings of discourses and narratives and data visualizations as an analysis as well as an **knowledge transfer tool**.

The field research takes place at the **Center for Palliative Care** in the City Hospital Waid in Zurich, at **Hospice Aargau** and **PalliaViva**, a charitable foundation for mobile palliative care. One part of the PhD-research is funded by the **Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)**. This interdisciplinary project **Sterbesettings (2020-2023)** focus on four disciplines and perspectives: language, religion, care and design. (sterbesettings.ch)



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