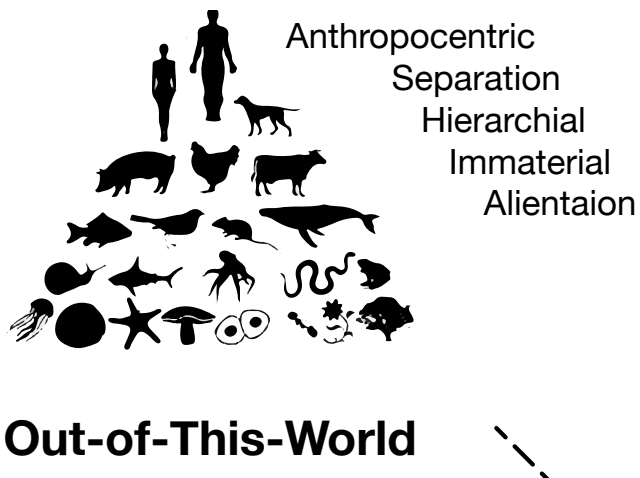


ARCANE DESIGNING

GETTING DOWN TO EARTH WITH MAGIC

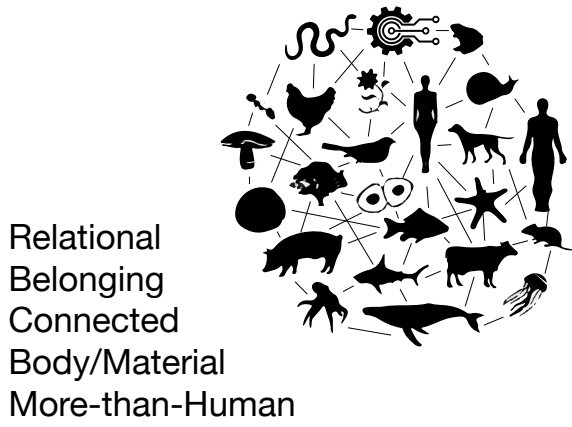
To counter the ontological disconnection of Western Modernity, this thesis develops Arcane Designing, a practice of designing with magic that opens onto-epistemic pathways Down-to-Earth. Responding to calls from Escobar (2018) for a pluriversal and relational reorientation of design, and from Dunne and Raby (2025) for moving beyond the restrictions that modern ontology places on the design imagination, the thesis explores how worlds of magic—including fantasy, witchcraft, European folklore, and mythology—can serve as resources for more-than-human design. Drawing on decolonial, feminist, and posthumanist scholarship, it frames the ontological disconnection of Western modernity as an active condition reproduced through practices, stories, and material arrangements, and develops Latour’s (2019) concept of Down-to-Earth as a critical onto-epistemic reorientation for designing toward the Terrestrial.



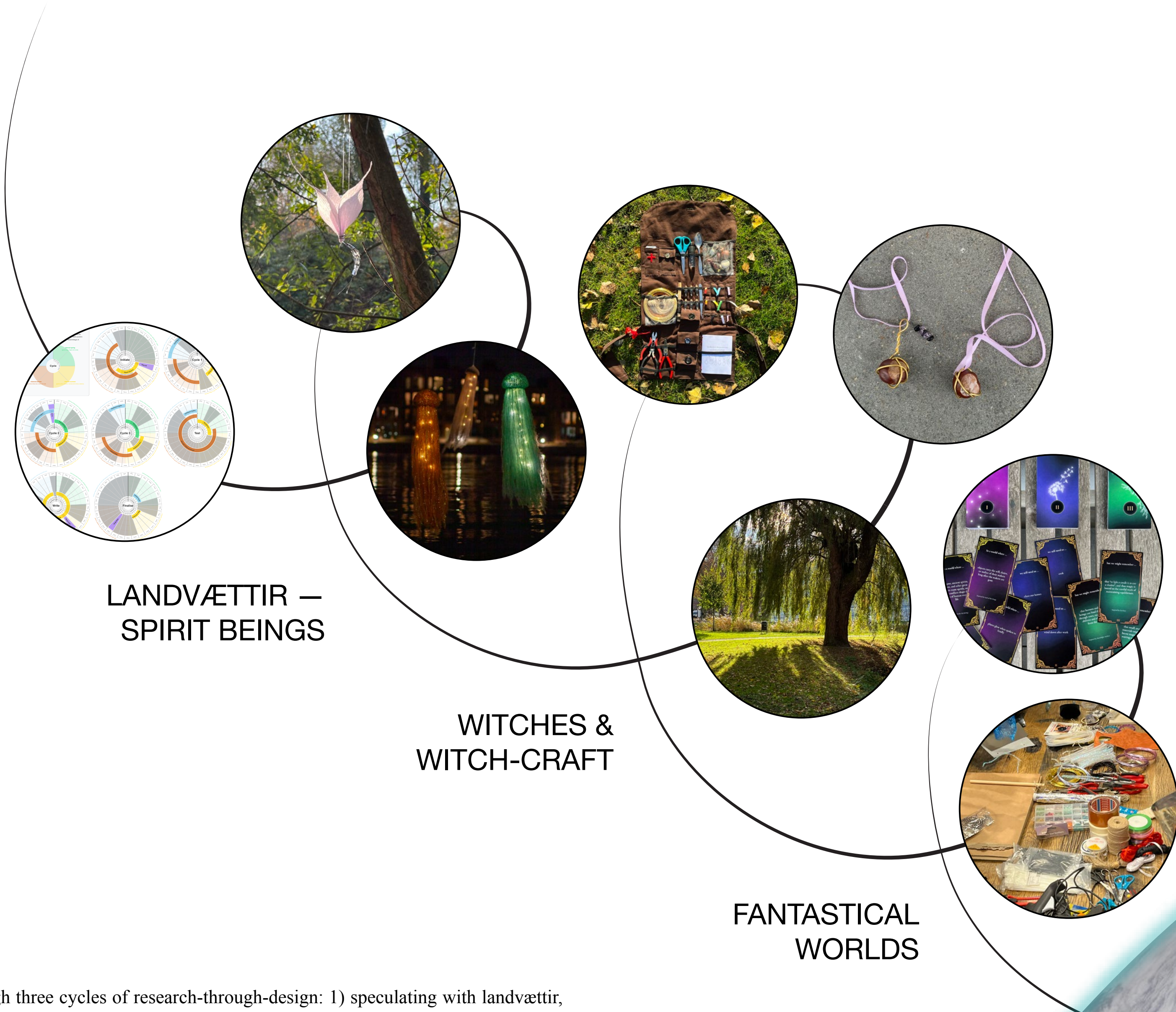
Down-to-Earth*

*A movement towards embodied, situated, and relational ways of being.

Terrestrial



How might Arcane Designing (designing with magic) open onto-epistemic pathways Down-to-Earth?



Pluriverse of Down-to-Earth Ontologies
Situated & embodied views

Through three cycles of research-through-design: 1) speculating with landvættir, 2) cultivating a practice of witch-crafting, and 3) remixing fantastical worlds of magic through a card-based design game, the thesis finds that Arcane Designing can redirect attention toward the more-than-human world, create conditions for perceptual reopenings, and provide designers with imaginative spaces beyond Western-modern onto-epistemic constraints. A key finding is that magic functions as a mode of attention: the entry point is perceptual and playful, which makes the practice accessible across diverse ontological starting points. The thesis further identifies the deliberate blurring of fiction and reality as an active onto-epistemic space where ontological openings can occur. It contributes with Arcane Designing as a promising practice within more-than-human design, along with a set of guiding considerations for designers who wish to engage with magic as a way of worlding Down-to-Earth.

Maja Riemann
Arcane Designing
February 24th 2026
Design for Interaction

Committee
Dr. Jeff Love (Chair)
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