

Disarming design

Between semantic,
intentional, and
subjective meaning

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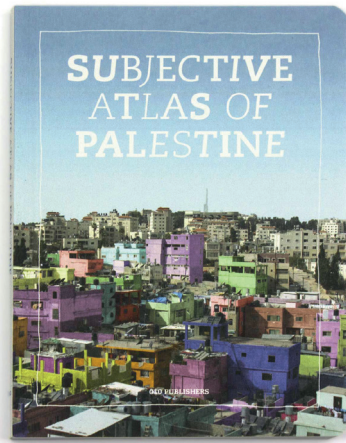
The term *disarming design* has been moving through my practice as a description of a book, in the title of a design label, and a master's programme. The words seemed poetic and nonconformist, but caused tensions, particularly in the context of Palestine, where the projects are undertaken. In this text, its interpretations and values are discussed as a critical reflection to carefully regard the political and ideological stance a title can imply.

Left: *Subjective Atlas of Palestine*, ed. Annelys de Vet, 010 Publishers (2007).

Right: *New Flags for Palestine*, *Subjective Atlas of Palestine* (2007).

Below left: Documents that I needed to travel outside Palestine, by Majdi Hadid, *Subjective Atlas of Palestine* (2007).

Below right: Twelve ways to eat chickpeas, by Suleiman Mansour, *Subjective Atlas of Palestine* (2007).



For years, the term disarming has been moving through my practice, first as a word on the flap copy of a self-initiated publication, then in the title of a design label that I co-founded, and later as the name for a temporary master's programme in design which I headed. Over the years, the notion of disarming design in relation to these projects has taken on a layered significance through its use, context, and the responses this term triggers; both intentionally through the meanings that are projected into it, and more semantically through the connotations read in it. Inevitably, an ambiguous disconnect surfaces between intention, semantics, and perception. The choice of words seemed poetic and nonconformist, but time has revealed the tensions of its pragmatics, particularly in the context of Palestine, where many of my design projects take place. The word disarming is closely related to the notion of violence, but how do the projects reflect on this? As it turned out to be untranslatable to Arabic, does it frame its thinking immediately in a Western perspective? In this text I attempt to unpack disarming design: its interpretations and values in various politically charged contexts, as well as the strategy of the students involved for reappropriation are discussed. This text is a critical reflection, and an appeal to carefully regard the political and ideological stance a title can imply.

Introduction of *Disarming* in the *Subjective Atlas of Palestine*

The adjective disarming appeared first in my practice on the flap copy of the *Subjective Atlas of Palestine*.¹ The description mentions how, in this atlas, 'it is the Palestinians themselves who show the disarming reverse side of the black-and-white image generally resorted to by the media.'

The personal images and narratives of lived experiences that were captured in the *Subjective Atlas* opened an intimate space for encountering the Palestinian question. They didn't

present opinions or specific histories, rather they allowed the reader to meet deeply felt plural realities. In the publication it was the Palestinians themselves who narrated and mapped their everydayness. It challenged 'long-held assumptions about cartography, and about the normalcy of everyday life'.² It showed views that often were somehow unexpected. Curator Chrisoula Lionis reviews the *Subjective Atlas* in her book, *Laughter in Occupied Palestine*:³

The personal, unconventional and diverse responses they [the artists] submitted almost all carry an element of humour that is formed by the incongruity between our expectations and projections and the lived experience of Palestinian artists and designers ... It is precisely this subjectivity and humour of the contributions included in the publication that allow it to shed light on the diversity of identification with Palestine.

While working on the *Subjective Atlas* with artist Khaled Hourani and curator Reem Fadda (who were directing the International Academy of Art Palestine at that time) there was much joy involved, as well as hospitality. The openness that was present in our exchanges allowed us to encounter each other without reservation. To a certain extent, the art practice of Khaled Hourani has a 'disarming' strength, due to his visual humour and wit. Hourani states that 'humour can sometimes be more eloquent than books, research or in-depth analysis, and, more importantly, humour offers introspection, knowledge and hope for a better future'.⁴ Without realizing it, this collaboration greatly shaped my ideas about design. It became evident that design should work beyond a proposition-focused practice – in which finding solutions is the main goal – and operate more as a means with which to build relationships that engage in processes of other worlding.⁵

The word *Disarming* stuck; touching upon a notion that seemed so relevant in the context of misrepresentation,

framing, and violent oppression. According to the *New Oxford Dictionary*, the adjective disarming means 'a manner or behaviour having the effect of allaying suspicion or hostility, especially through charm: he gave her a disarming smile'. Somewhere, it borders on temptation, and positions an approach to free the mind of preconceptions. It represents a curious gaze, a sudden openness that roots you in the present and makes you encounter something without judgement. And it is this sense of nonconformity that made me value *disarming* as a prefix to *design*. As such, in a way, it insinuates that a design in itself could have the ability to 'erode suspicion or hostility', create receptivity and foster relations, or that it could mobilize this state of being.

Naming Disarming Design from Palestine

Several years after the *Atlas* project, in 2012, a new collaborative project emerged. With the International Academy of Art Palestine (with whom the *Subjective Atlas* was also developed) we initiated a contemporary design project on local crafts. The aim for this new project was to reach a similar tone of voice as the *Subjective Atlas*; again 'personal, unconventional, and diverse'. This time, the materialisation would not take place through alternative cartographies but through useful objects that tell stories. The intention was that we would develop a collection of objects that would invite the user to start conversations about the realities embodied within the products. I suggested titling this imagined design label Disarming Design from Palestine.

Disarming Design from Palestine had a sticky sound as a rhythmic alliteration, it rhymed and was thought-provoking in its plural connotations of the word disarming. It did not go unnoticed that the differing meanings could also give rise to controversial interpretations and challenging discussions. Particularly in the context of Palestine, it keeps raising questions. I couldn't decide if using this title was a valid choice, as it had to be carried by all involved. When proposing it to Khaled Hourani, director of the Academy, he smiled; he appreciated the duality of the title and its humour. We tested the name with many people in Ramallah, and asked their opinions. Majd Abdel Hamid, coordinator of the project at that time:

There is a cultural aspect of language. I like the name. I know what it means. But the problem is that 'disarming' always takes you to an idea that something is armed and this proved to be a little controversial when I was talking to and inviting artists. We are still thinking about the title, how to manoeuvre around it, play with the name without creating some kind of controversy of talking about Palestinian design as armed design.⁶

Some really appreciated the name, others were a little dazed on hearing the title at first. The fact that it opened conversations and included a sense of poetry convinced most. Hence we decided to call our collaborative project Disarming Design from Palestine.

Several European languages have a similar translation of the word disarming, such as Dutch, German, Spanish or French, but it turned out to be untranslatable to Arabic. The literal translation would be نزع سلاح, which means singularly taking away the weapons. There was no other word that would make sense in Arabic and which would have a similar complex of meanings as the adjective disarming. So the first year we translated our project to تصاميم من فلسطين, which just means 'Designs from Palestine'. But this title was not to the point; our project was not about *any* design from Palestine, it focused on ethically produced conceptual designs that carried a political message. After many alternatives were rejected, we decided to use the translation as فلسطين تصاميم مجردة من, which means something like 'Abstracted Designs from Palestine'. مجردة (*mujarrada*)

comes from the root 'جرد' (*jarada*) which means 'to strip down', it becomes abstracted in the sense that all layers are taken off. Perhaps this translation comes most close to disarming as an adjective, but in daily use it doesn't produce the same message as 'disarming' does in European languages. The issue of the difficult translation made clear that the title had a problematic aspect; it derived from the language of the former British colonizer, and that of the *lingua franca* of the international community flocking into Palestine. It was not a locally rooted term.

It is clear that in the context of Palestine, the notion of *disarming* is heavily charged. Are we talking about taking away the arms of Palestine or Israel? Should design disarm Palestine or Israel? Should the image of Palestine be disarming, or do the designs spread a disarming message? And disarming who, and what for? In mainstream media, Palestinians are often portrayed as armed even though they are prohibited from being so by the Israeli military occupying powers, who themselves are massively armed. In her 2022 essay "The Arming Act: Reflections on Cultures of Popular Education" (written for her graduation at the master's programme Disarming Design), architect Saja Amro mentions how to her, the word 'disarming' is very negative and frustrating in the context of Palestine:

It triggers me personally. We are a disarmed nation weapon-wise (with both an old and recent shameful history)! There have been constant attempts to disarm the Palestinian popular resistance, while arming the members of the institutionalised Palestinian Authority, which ended up protecting the security of the occupation and preventing any act of resistance against it.⁷

The word disarming in the context of Palestine is closely related to the notion of violence, disarming as such is what the colonial project of Israel is engaging in, in her struggle to have the monopoly of violence in a colonial settler state. The term connotes a kind of de-politicisation of Palestinian resistance or culture, especially in the association with armed struggle. In a conversation with curator Lara Khaldi she mentions how this makes it problematic:

When it comes to armed resistance in Palestine, in contrast to the situation in the Ukraine, for example, the conversation is blocked. This is why in order for our arguments and voices to reach outside, we first 'have to be disarmed' in a sense. It needs to be announced that it is peaceful, that it is tamed.

Becoming aware of the different positions regarding the choice of words that composed the project's title, soon an urge was felt to change it. However, during workshops, exhibitions, or events, and sometimes out of the blue, people approached us to mention how 'brilliant' they felt the name was – this came both from people within Palestinian and international communities. Many assured us we had to keep the name, and not propose an alternative. Amidst these conflicting positions, I kept asking the opinions of artisans, designers, artists, scholars in Palestine, and also international curators, translators, visitors, and many others who were in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle. For instance, designer Nuno Coelho⁸ shared how he feels that the title of the project sheds light on Palestine as a place of creativity. He feels that both the *Subjective Atlas of Palestine* and the products in this project disarm the one who holds prejudices. It is very disarming in the sense that you just can't criticize it, it works disarmingly: 'When something is disarming, you engage.' Lara Khaldi pointed out how it is about positionality. Depending from which position one speaks, it becomes a position of power; the design object can disarm the other. 'When you disarm someone it means you leave them without, not only literally arms or weapons, you disarm them of any arguments.' The fact that it does instigate a discussion or thinking about all of this is quite interesting on its own, Khaldi adds.



Above left: *Awakening Goggles* (Sleeping mask embroidered with the eyes of the artisans), by Tessel Brühl and Open Studio Khan Younis. Model: Manar Nakhleh. Photo: Celine Callens.

Above right: *Proudly Made in Palestine* (An inside-out t-shirt with 21 'Made in Palestine' labels across the front), by Ibrahim Alhindi, Farrah factory, Bluzti Falistiniyeh. Model: Manar Nakhleh. Photo: Celine Callens.

Left: *Unveiled Souls* (Origami-folded cotton bag, revealing hidden beauty), by Qusai Al Saify, Widad Sarhan, Aziza Abu Khatleh, Saber Abu Masoud, Amer Amin-Qubtan. Photo: Elettra Bisogno.

Over time, the meaning of Disarming Design became shaped by the interaction between the title and the designs that were developed under the term. The collection framed the notion of disarming design, which dimmed the question of suitability: the name stuck, resonated; and through its repetitive use it worked like a brand. The products it represented, their wittiness and tone of voice, articulated the more contextual meaning. All have a certain thought-provoking aspect, which operates both at the conceptual level (for instance how the title of an item directs its meaning), but also in the kind of clarity and simplicity that each item seems to embody. Each is recognisable as an everyday object (a ceramic plate, a T-shirt, an earring), but through the design – through a certain twist or print or addition – the meaning of the object extends beyond the generalized *everyday* and touches on another, particular everydayness; the everydayness of living in Palestine. The products are accessible in their commonality but deconstruct reservation and distance because there is something surprising; something that tries to tell a story, that offers a lived perspective that questions the dominant narratives. As objects, they challenge and confront many social and political preconceptions.

The project is a form of cultural resistance and a way to disseminate Palestinian art and design. It foregrounds well-made designs with a presence and narrative; designs that can challenge biases, stimulate critical thinking, and trigger reflective moments. As such, the collection uncovers meaningful connections and patterns that can help to both better understand the local heritage and imagine restorative futures. The designs do that through persuading and seducing those engaging with them, sometimes by using humour. As renowned Palestinian revolutionary writer and intellectual Ghassan Kanafani sees it (through the voice of his pseudonym Faris Faris): 'Humour is not for entertainment and it is not a waste of time, but is an attitude and a commitment at the highest level.'¹⁹

For example, the sleeping mask, named *Awakening Goggles*, has embroidery that depicts the eyes of the artisans in Gaza who made it. When we wear this mask, it looks like their eyes are looking through us or upon us, but we ourselves are blinded. The object sneers at the world turning a blind eye to the ongoing situation in Gaza. It is a well-crafted product and is both useful and elegant as a sleeping mask, it connects directly – visually even – with the people who produced the item. Another product is the *Proudly Made in Palestine* T-shirt, a shirt that looks as though it's turned inside out, but instead of revealing one label it shows fifteen labels that honour that this T-shirt is 'Made in Palestine'. Designer Ibrahim Alhindi responds to the local situation where he feels the need to define and clearly show the (re-)development of Palestinian industry. This T-shirt tag is, in many ways, more meaningful than any expressions or phrases printed on the front, and thus what is hidden inside the shirt is more important than its outside appearance.

Another item is the *Unveiled Souls* bag by Qusai Al Saify. It's an origami-folded cotton bag that only reveals its hidden beauty when engaged with; underneath the corners of the folded cotton, you find colourful embroidery. The shapes are based on villagers' patterns and symbolize displaced memories that are stitched together with dedication.

The objects can be seen as cultural tools that defy authority. In that way, items in the collection could be considered as 'objects of agency', as designer Danah Abdullah coins this notion in her essay on designing resistance "Against Performative Positivity":¹⁰

To engage with the world around us and to become design dissenters, we (...) should move away from creating instruments of control and into producing objects of agency that pose questions; that are designing alternative forms of political and economic organising.

‘When you disarm someone it means you leave them without, not only literally arms or weapons, you disarm them of any arguments.’

The collection as a whole forms a voice that speaks beyond each individual object. None of the objects or narratives suggest that we want to disarm or de-weaponize the Palestinian resistance. The designs are rooted in anti-colonial resistance and we see them as manifestations of cultural agency. But it took time to clarify this position and to express and build trust with a wider audience. We had to, and still must, speak clearly, politically, about our intentions and our position as a design initiative. This requires careful articulation and framing, but most of all a radical transparency about both intention and methodology.

Institutionalizing the term in education

Each year, a number of students from the Design Department of the Sandberg Instituut in Amsterdam, NL, which I was heading, joined a workshop in Palestine and collaborated with peers and artisans there. It was during these encounters that the wish for a more politically driven design course took hold. My position at the Sandberg Instituut afforded me the opportunity to initiate a context-specific temporary master's programme.¹¹ The most obvious title for this new programme would be Disarming Design. The staff at the institute liked it, as it fit well with the other haunting names of temporary departments such as Shadow Channel, Radical Cut Up, F for Fact, Fashion Matters, or Material Utopias. However, it took months of negotiation and doubt before Disarming Design was finally decided upon positively.

The new programme aimed to foster disarming ways of knowing, starting from place-based understandings and acknowledging critical pedagogy. It positioned design as a cultural tool for opposing authority, and to share and build knowledge with generosity, care, and dedication. In that sense it resonates with the ideas of feminist author and scholar bell hooks who understands ‘radical openness’ as ‘the will to keep an open mind [...] is the safeguard against any form of doctrinaire thinking, whether coming from the Right or the Left.’¹²

While developing the curriculum with the founding team, we discussed the title. Artist and researcher Shayma Nader was assisting with funding and curriculum development, and she questioned whether Disarming Design was the most appropriate name. The coordinator of the new programme, designer Francisca Khamis, also expressed hesitation, as she was worried about the connection it had with the design collection; that it might mix two separate projects. Both thought we perhaps needed a more precise name, as disarming, through its literal and geopolitical connotations, could imply that we would take the position of opposing violence in social justice struggles, rather than seeing it as a viable means of resistance fighting for a just future. It could imply that we would seek to avoid pain and difficult situations, rather than fighting against what caused them. So, we looked for a gripping title that would capture the spirit we were aiming for, would contain or refer to the word ‘design’, and could touch upon our intended political approach. The suggestions included: *Designing Other Futures*; *Design to Resist*; *Collective Design Strategies*; *Design for Political Action and Solidarity*; *Design as Emancipatory Tool*; *Resilient Design*; *Educational Platforms for Design*; *Library of Situated Learning*; or *Decentralized Design Dedication*.

None of those titles felt right, nor imaginative or poetic, and it was tough to settle on a name that would not become too explicatory or that wasn't already taken for another initiative. Even though ‘Disarming Design’ wouldn't cover the full intention of the programme, and might include problematic interpretations, it triggers conversations, speaks a poetic tone, allows for ambiguity and does not refer explicitly to another discourse or institution. Somehow it pre-empts discussions on political power struggles that might be glossed over in an otherwise only-design-focused name. I was willing to walk the line between this charged discussion and a conversation that confronts these ideas, with ‘radical openness’. The framing of



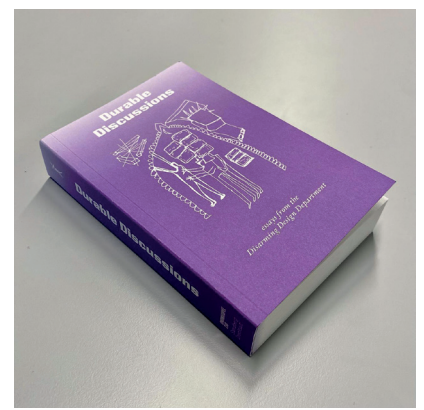
Disclosing Discomforts. Poster for group exhibition at Mediamatic Amsterdam, October 2021. Design: D_D.



Drifting Dialogues. Poster (A2) announcing the graduation show of the Disarming Design Department, Amsterdam 2022. Design: PING (Miquel Hervás Gómez).



Drifting Dialogues, Durable Discussions, Diasbura Delights, Daily Decisions. Digital poster announcing graduation events, Disarming Design Department Amsterdam 2022. Design: PING (Miquel Hervás Gómez).



Durable Discussions. Essays by the Disarming Design Department. Onomatopoe, 2022. Graphic design: Rasha Dakkak, Miquel Hervás Gómez, Siwar Kraitem, Ott Metusala, Mohammed Tatour.

the programme needed to show the willingness from the start to confront these questions together.

The staff of the institute favoured the title, and together we decided to announce the programme as Disarming Design; a two-year master's programme committed to design practices that deal with conditions of conflict, oppressive forces, and entangled histories. 'Operating at the intersection of design, crafts, community and politics, it questions to what extent artistic practices can counteract oppression and injustice through the act of design.' One of the students of the master, designer Siwar Kraitem, recalls:¹³

I distinctly remember how I exhaled when I first read the name of the programme. I had been looking for a master's programme for a few years. Something about the programme named Disarming Design, dedicated to 'design under oppressive systems', answered the urgencies I had been busy with just a few months following the protests in Beirut in late 2019. My blood was still boiling for a cause, and the word 'arm', even with that prefix, made total sense.

We formed a team of tutors and selected seventeen engaged designers and artists to join the department. Over the two years of the course, the programme's title became a recurrent topic of discussion amongst them. The students questioned whether the term was indeed independent, existing in its own right as their master's course, or if it was actually still connected to the pre-existing design label that they themselves were not related to. Did choosing the same name for both undertakings imply a connection that this group of students wanted to be unaffiliated with? Were the students there to inscribe themselves in a narrative that was not theirs, one that would promote my personal practice? Did it frame them in a particular way? Did it hinder their free mindsets?

One of the students, designer Rasha Dakkak,¹⁴ remembers the moment 'when they were all, momentarily, aligned':

We, the seventeen of us, wanted a new name. When something is disarming, it calms hostility. Whose hostility is evoked in naming this department, Disarming Design? The term 'disarming' was questioned in our ongoing discussions due to its misleading connotations with the Arabic-speaking world, from which eleven of us hail; it seemed to exoticise, conjuring up images of hostility,

rage, and suspicion. It was hard to overlook the setting in which we operate and how the act of arming or disarming might frame us. It was also obscure whether we were learning to unarm design. Are we disarming design broadly speaking, or just a specific design discourse and practice? Are we here to be unarmed by design? Is it the idea to be disarmed by a particular school of thought? Or should design be disarming?

As department staff we offered the possibility to propose another name, but there was no consensus. The group seemed to resist being named under any title. They refused framing; it could suggest tokenization or risk 'reproducing the same obsolete practices, structures and economies and thus reinforcing existing power relations'.¹⁵ Still, *Disarming Design* troubled expectations and brought resistance. It seemed to trigger the opposite of what it was intended to stand for. 'Although this name brought us together, its uniqueness also inscribed a pressure of being labelled as "a collective" as opposed to colleagues within a class'.¹⁶ The need for a fixed name to ensure and validate the particularity of the department stirred emotions in an almost visceral way. It provided grounds for a time-consuming struggle for all those involved. When the public communication for the final works and graduation show had to be materialized, the struggle was finally conceptualized with urgency.

After two years of deliberation, negotiation, and sometimes acceptance, the students of the department opted for the initials 'DD'. With this new moniker, they acknowledged a lineage of lengthier conversations that emerged when naming events that had occurred during their time at the department, such as *Diasbura Radio* and *Disclosing Discomfort*, the title of a radio project and an exhibition they held at Mediamatic in Amsterdam in November 2021. Rasha Dakkak notes, 'We felt a sense in what began as a pun, where we can interpret DD according to media and outlets.' The final graduation show was titled *Drifting Dialogues*, and the publication containing all their essays was named *Durable Discussions*. It was launched during a two-hour live radio show called *Diasbura Delights*, and all shared moments were captured on a website named *Daily Decisions*. *D_D* became the new slang term when talking about the department and was used for the profile of the shared Instagram account. After graduation they changed it to 'd_d.collective', representing an 'inter-disciplinary collective of artists, designers and architects

currently residing at Nieuwland', the new shared space in the city where a majority of the participants found their studio. Their first public event there, still in the same year, was called *Dream Dialect*.

Even though DD as an abbreviation seems to be an empty signifier, it works as the result of a process of reappropriation. The students had exercised their agency and taken charge of the quest for both naming and framing. Perhaps one can perceive their act of renaming-through-abbreviation as disarming, or better re-arming; it allows for humour and creativity, while offering the possibility for a name that remains open to interpretation. They were building upon the situation, generously thinking along with what was already there. The students attached their narrative to it because they formulated it themselves. The act of naming became their 'object of agency'; both an engagement and a disengagement with their own contexts. It would have been completely different if the department would have been called D_D from the start. After graduation, one of the participants, Siwar Kraitem, reflects:¹⁷

Framing is just another thinking process. It allowed us to take more agency. Perhaps it's our way of revolting against the very structures that frame us, the one that names us. In the end, the act of questioning itself is probably more worthwhile than the outcome, whether it does or doesn't lead to a name.

Naming an institutionalized education 'disarming', although temporarily, brought about a (sometimes painful) institutional tension. How can it escape a framework that risks reproducing the same obsolete practices, structures, and economies that reinforce existing power relations? It remains grounded in the worldview of the institutional context, the situated use of the term colours the meaning; those politics define its semiotics and connotations – more than I had realized. 'The growing demand for fundamental change has been taken up enthusiastically by (...) institutions spreading confusion by taking up words, rhetoric and discourses, but too often disembodied, disconnected from the very aesthetic experiences these artists want to facilitate.'¹⁸

Unintentionally, the department's name might have fed an energy of collective opposition (being together against) and a drive to change, to take agency of one's own framing. The group was able to turn the mechanism of dissensus into something productive and poetic. The act of naming worked to mobilize, and the outcome is an imaginative one, but one that came at a price (in time, discomfort, and emotional burden), which must be acknowledged.

Staying with the trouble

It seems that Disarming Design as a title unsettles (or resettles) when labelled from the top down; when institutionalized. It can be especially charged in the context of Palestine. The connotations of dis-arming and de-politicisation of resistance will always be there, which will also make it, in certain contexts, a problematic term, despite the intentions. The use in the three different projects shows that the meaning changes through the context, the positionality, the conversations and the embodiment of its designs. Or as Donna Haraway puts it, 'It matters which stories tell stories, which concepts think concepts. Mathematically, visually, and narratively it matters which figures figure figures, which systems systematize systems.'¹⁹

In summer 2022, the Workspace Performing Arts (wpZimmer) in Antwerp announced an 'evening school of gentle disarming',²⁰ in which it invited artists and participants to 'mould conversations, and to explore collective behaviour, mobilisation and demobilisation, collective imagination and alternative futures'. Its use of the term disarming, in this context, focused on 'non-productive' time, or 'free time', which, according to them, is:

Time when we can fully exercise our freedom and choice, when we do out of desire and pleasure and not out of obligation, when we are hobbyists, amateurs, volunteers, or we just simply do 'nothing'.

Their use and framing of 'disarming' illustrate how broad its semantics can be. Apparently, the term also stuck with this group, although it is used quite openly and given direction in its description.

Disarming design – that is, design that disarms – can be associated with many different ideas, processes, and characteristics. In that sense the term itself seems to have agency to play; it has vitality and exists as a living, changing, growing, and reactive notion. Mostly it refers to a state of being; somewhere between being moved, overwhelmed, unsettled, and charmed. Sometimes, the intended meaning may be perceived otherwise. It keeps moving in that semantic field and remains double-sided.

How I prefer the term to be used is in the orientation of 'love'. I mean love not just as a feeling in the emotional sense, but as a power that can transform both ourselves and those with whom we interact. Educator and philosopher Paulo Freire talks about 'radical love' in the context of education, as it facilitates the pedagogue in considering learners as human personalities who create knowledge with affection, desire, imagination, and creativity. I would even like to believe that a disarming way of being can open the potential for love in the way that writer and civil rights activist James Baldwin²¹ talks about love in his 'declaration of love's power':

Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. I use the word 'love' here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace – not in the infantile American sense of being made happy, but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth.

With all the debates that were triggered by the choice of the word 'disarming', an unambiguous interpretation remains unsettled. The different experiences within the projects related to 'disarming' opened discussions about underlying social and political implications. This might have rendered space for debate and change, in the way that curator Magnus Ericson and designer Ramia Mazé place socially and politically engaged design:²²

It may not be up to design to resolve the large-scale problematics of the prevailing social, political or economic order – but, by finding and articulating underlying ideas and implications, critical practices render these more accessible to understanding debate – and change.

So far, I failed in finding a better alternative that expresses this open state of being as mobilizing or persuading as 'disarming' is. 'Disarming Design' triggers, it's paradoxical, and in that sense it causes motion. Even though I have foregrounded it as a state of nonconformity that gives rise to energy as an invitation to engage, in the context of violent occupation there is a thin line between intention, representation, and perception – depending from which position one is speaking.

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- 3 Lionis, Chrisoula. *Laughter in Occupied Palestine: Comedy and Identity in Art and Film*. I.B. Tauris, 2016.
- 4 Hourani, Khaled. "Preface." *Laughter in Occupied Palestine: Comedy and Identity in Art and Film*. I.B. Tauris, 2016, pp. XIII–XVI.
- 5 I use worlding here as Helen Palmer and Vicky Hunter summarised it in the almanac of *New Materialism: Networking European Scholarship on 'How Matter Comes to Matter'* (2018): 'Worlding therefore is an active, ontological process; it is not simply a result of our existence in or passive encounter with particular environments, circumstances events or places. Worlding is informed by our turning of attention to a certain experience, place or encounter and our active engagement with the materiality and context in which events and interactions occur. It is above all an embodied and enacted process – a way of being in the world
- consisting of an individual's whole-person act of attending to the world.' newmaterialism.eu/almanac/w/worlding.html.
- 6 Nieuwhof, Adri, in conversation with Majd Abdel Hamid and Annelys de Vet, "'Disarming Design" project inspired by art-work in captivity', *The Electronic Intifada*, 12 October 2012, electronicintifada.net/content/palestinian-dutch-disarming-design-project-inspired-art-work-captivity/11760.
- 7 Amro, Saja. "The Arming Act: Reflections on Cultures of Popular Education." *Durable Discussions, Essays from the Disarming Design Department*, Onomatopoe, 2022, pp. 170–189.
- 8 Nuno Coelho is a Portugal-based designer and lecturer (PhD) who self-published *A Land Without People for a People Without Land, a Colouring Book about Palestine* (2009, Nuno Coelho, Adam Kershaw, eds.).
- 9 Cited by Hourani, Khaled. "Preface." *Laughter in Occupied Palestine: Comedy and Identity in Art and Film*. I.B. Tauris, 2016, pp. XIII–XVI.
- 10 Abdullah, Dana. "Against Performative Positivity." *Futures*, 21 May 2021, futures.org/stories/against-performative-positivity.
- 11 Jurgen Bey, the Sandberg Instituut's director since 2010, has sought to find ways to align the institute with the dynamics of contemporary society. Bey introduced two-year Temporary Programmes that are developed according to urgent global issues. He personally endorsed the initiative for a new master's programme related to Palestine and design; *Disarming Design* was the seventeenth temporary master's programme.
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