

Feint Lines: Notes on the Creation of a Skateboard Choreography

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Feint Lines: notes and footnotes on the creation of a skateboard choreography

Dani Abulhawa

This piece of writing describes a performance I made in 2018 called *Feint Lines*. It contains a number of footnotes designed to highlight the 'tip of the iceberg' nature of any performance creative process. The text mirrors the interweaving of strands of personal experience, skateboarding practice, history, and my connection to the site of the performance, that came together in the work.

Feint Lines was presented at an event called 'Lone Women in the Not Quite Light: flashes of wilderness'.¹ Artist Clare Archibald created the event as part of the Not Quite Light weekend (2018), [explain what that is]². It stemmed from her ongoing research and creative projects exploring women's experiences of [being aloneness], darkness and wilderness, and their use of public spaces. 'Lone Women' took place in the Deansgate North Q Park Car Park, on Chapel Street—the border between Salford and Manchester, officially in Salford—from 10.30pm until just after midnight on 19th May 2018.³

The event was exclusively for people who self-identify as women, with the audience forming a contingent of women occupying a public space at night, performatively assembling together in solidarity and support.⁴ The concept appealed to me as someone who does not feel comfortable alone on the streets at night. Aside from the quite normal fear of personal safety experienced by women and some men when they are alone in the street, I have increased anxiety at times due to a health condition.

Skateboarding—an activity that I deeply connected with in my adolescence—has always been a point of simultaneous safety and controlled fear. As a teenager, I would put my hood up and walk home at night with my skateboard, adopting a kind of invisibility cloak, or more accurately, a masculine one. Skateboarding kept me occupied and calm for hours at a time. It was also a challenge, a mental more than physical one that I still struggle with: the

¹ The title immediately made me think of Clarissa Pinkola Estés's *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Contacting the Power of the Wild Woman* (2008 [1992]). Coming from a Jungian psychoanalytic perspective, Pinkola Estés writes about the 'wild woman archetype' and women's connection to wolves. Her introduction to the book resonated with my feelings about the restrictions placed on the feminine. Also, the idea of having a symbolic connection with an animal or plant has always appealed to me, as has the ancient Greek concept of the 'daimon'—a guiding spirit.

² Not Quite Light is an ongoing photographic project by artist Simon Buckley, exploring the city of Manchester (and the city of Salford) at night time and twilight.

³ My practice as an artist is oriented around movement, public urban spaces, gender and skateboarding. I often make site-responsive performance work, drawn from the physical features, historical stories, users and uses, and mythologies related to particular sites. I've always been fascinated by the generic and repetitive environments of what Marc Augé might refer to as 'non-places', such as car parks (2009 [1992]) *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. London and New York: Verso). As an artist and a skateboarder, the opportunity to create a performance in this car park appealed to me.

⁴ Judith Butler has written on the performative power of assembly in her book, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015)

Commented [CB1]: Please select a pull quote that captures the main argument

Commented [CB2]: I wonder if the piece would flow better if some of the notes—the more discursive ones, except references—were integrated. Why is it important for the reader to need to go to the note?

Commented [DA3R2]: A major theme of the performance was the relationship between internal and external worlds; the presentation of a performance and the psychological processes involved when you are making site-specific performance in a place, which necessarily involves the embodiment of a landscape (perceived, conceived, and lived experiences). The process of using footnotes allows me to reflect this.

Commented [CB4]: Please check capitalisation

Commented [DA5R4]: The capitalisation is because this is the title (and subtitle) of the event.

Commented [DA6]: It's explained in the footnote, but do you want more explanation than this?

Commented [DA7]: Aloneness is a term used directly by Clare Archibald who curated the event. I've added inverted commas to show that this is an intentionally non-standard word. I can only conjecture on Claire's intentions, but my own use of 'aloneness' is to denote a state in which one finds themselves, rather than an essence or nature (connected to the word, being). Also, 'aloneness' borrows from the word 'wilderness', which is thematically linked to Claire's curation, and to the reclaimed feminine.

Commented [CB8]: ?

Commented [DA9R8]: Not sure what the question mark means here?

acceptance of risk, the leaps of faith in your abilities, the ability to quiet your fears and thoughts and to focus completely.

Insert stills FL7 and text: “Karina’s power – if you could call it that – came about quite organically, out of necessity. And Karina had no idea at first that other people lacked the same ability she had.”

For this performance, I wanted to weave together some of these themes with fundamental features of the practice of skateboarding—its connection to surfing, to waves, and to water flows; the process of finding a precise speed, entry point, material resistance, and exit point to slide or grind without ‘stopping or slipping away completely’.⁵

Insert still FL3 and text: “As a 15 year old, she had loved playing basketball, but couldn’t often pull off fast-paced misdirection. It was one afternoon in the sports hall at school, during a long and emotionally-intense game against another local school team that she noticed a slight flicker of something.”

The skateboarding movement was developed from the space itself. I went to the car park regularly to practice. I didn’t want to perform typical skateboarding tricks—and not only because I do not have many to perform, but because I wanted each movement to be drawn from the site and not from an existing repertoire, with the skateboarding aspect functioning more as an indexical marker of my experience of this space.⁶ I played with the idea of creating the smallest and slowest movements and actions I could perform. The movement took in the whole of the third floor of the carpark, and, more akin to improvisatory processes in dance took cues from the space itself—lumps in the concrete; open flat areas; painted lines, words (‘exit’) and arrows; the curvature of walls; hidden areas and curbs.⁷

⁵ I was interested in skateboarding tricks that involved ‘sliding’ as the creation of smooth space (within striated space) in the sense discussed by philosophers Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1988). For Deleuze and Guattari, smooth space is unpartitioned and open, contrasting with the closed, ordered and intervalled striated space. In their work they discuss the way one distributes oneself in smooth space, as if the body is able to occupy a state across an environment in a deeply connected way. The skateboarding slide resonates with this, as the skateboarder performs an intricate balance of weight, timing, energy and attention that allows her this alchemy. [Please briefly explain what they mean]. I

was particularly referencing their maritime model which seemed to resonate so strongly with the act of skateboarding. In this text, Deleuze and Guattari describe the pre-navigational sea as ‘a smooth space par excellence’ (1988: 479), and the city as ‘the striated space par excellence’ (ibid: 481). Skateboarding developed from its surf-ocean roots (gliding, flowing movement) toward a street-based practice in the 1980s (manifesting in linear modes of practice and more ‘technical’ tricks) and has, since then, embodied a creative tension between these different sorts of practice. Symbolically, skateboarding is understood as both simultaneously ‘of the sea’ and ‘of the city’. Deleuze and Guattari write, ‘in striated space, one closes off a surface and “allocates” it according to determinate intervals, assigned breaks; in the smooth, one “distributes” oneself in an open space, according to frequencies and in the course of one’s crossings’ (Ibid).

⁶ I wondered, how might I occupy this car park and generate a kind of ‘smooth’ space? How might this performance work function like a skateboarding ‘slide’?

⁷ Consider, for example, the practice of contact improvisation which involves movement with another person (or group of people) through a process of being present and responding to invitations that come from your proximity to other people’s bodies, their touch, or from an urge to move in a particular way drawn from the moment of practice.

Insert still FL5 and FL6

Another aspect of the performance was a voice-recorded story about a girl called Karina who discovers she can 'double' herself. As the story goes, Karina discovers this power when she is playing basketball during an intense competition between her school and a rival school team. During a tackle between Karina and a rival team member, she performs a feint move, and is able to dodge past the other player. Karina recognises that the feint she performed was actually a moment in which she 'passed the ball between herself, from right hand, to right hand, to left, making a slight movement to the right, which gave her enough space to slip past the boy and towards the net.' Over the course of the story, Karina learns how to harness this power and use it to her advantage—in simple everyday ways, and more serious ones.

Insert still FL1 and text, "Unlike Matilda, Karina never managed to harness her power in a way that she could just switch it on and off. This is a true story, after all, but she tried though. Karina would concentrate very hard and imagine every cell in her body creating an image of itself and she imagined projecting these images using her mind to another location close by.

The final line of the story read, 'Much better than invisibility or super-human strength, she liked the idea than she would always be there for herself in the most extreme of circumstances.'⁸ Karina's story is comical and fantastical. The idea for it came from daydreams I would have about being able to become invisible (something I've often wanted to do when walking alone at night) and—in contrast—the idea that a person might be able to make a friend magically appear, so that you always have a companion to walk home with.

Insert still FL2 and text, "She fanastised about being able to send her doubled-self into boring meetings at work. She thought she would watch from outside the door as her doubled-self nodded away diligently and appeared to take down notes. Meanwhile, Karina would spend this captured time in a room nearby, watching YouTube videos, listening to interesting podcasts, stretching her legs, and teaching herself about quantum mechanics."

⁸ Feint Lines includes some movements that are not related to skateboarding or directly to the story of Karina. In the piece, I perform actions that represent 'Safety Energy Lock 15' from the practice of Jin Shin Jyutsu — a Japanese healing art that balances the body and mind through a simple hands-on light-pressure technique. The practice has a series of 'energy locks', which are combinations of places on the body you can place your hands to help with a wide range of physical and mental symptoms. Energy lock 15 is referred to as 'wash our hearts with laughter', suggesting a desire to take things less seriously. This energy lock helps to harmonize the heart, to bring mental peace and security, and to bring forth new ideas and adaptation. The integration of this element was related to the idea of 'self-help' and 'self-care'.