

Skill-less Tricks: A score for moving through walls

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Skill-less Tricks: A score for moving through walls

Dani Abulhawa

In the current context of restricted movement due to Covid-19, I have found myself reflecting upon my connection to friends and collaborators in Palestine. This paper proposes my use of a performance score – ‘Skill-less Tricks’ – as a method of cultivating an ongoing connection with those friends and collaborators. As many Western nation-states have spent much of the last year policing their borders in ways anathema to the freedom of movement expected by global tourism, my time and relationships in Palestine have been brought into sharp relief. This paper begins with a discussion of my connection to Palestine and how I came to be regularly working with communities in the West Bank. It explains the personal and political impulse for crossing the wall between Israel and Palestine and the bodily experience of ‘what it takes to cross a border’ (Noeth, 2019). The main reason for my ongoing work in Palestine is due to working with the SkatePal charity in the West Bank who build skateparks and teach children to skateboard. This paper reflects on the role SkatePal take within this specific political context.

The history and current context of the Palestine/Israel conflict has been well documented in numerous sources including Elizabeth Matthews’s edited collection with David Newman and Mohammed Dajani Daoudi (2011). This source presents a range of viewpoints on central aspects of the conflict from 16 contributors and offers a balanced introduction. Instead of repeating work that has been done elsewhere, this paper reflects on aspects of the current state of the conflict from my own personal perspective captured in journal entries, which are scattered throughout the main body of the text. This selection of journal entries are – more or less – as they were written during the three weeks I spent with SkatePal in the summer of 2015. I have selected material from my journal that is most directly associated with experiences of the wall, of crossing checkpoints and borders, and about expressive movement practice. The decision I made to journal my experience was inspired by reflective practice in performance and dance broadly as a research method, and by anthropologist Michael Taussig’s own reflections and experience of Palestine in his article, *Two Weeks in Palestine* (2013).

Finally, the paper discusses the creation of my score, Skill-less Tricks – its origination as part of my PhD research, its adaptation for this new use, its translation from English into Arabic, and my intentions for using this as the basis for the continuation of an informal remote exchange.

September 21st 2015

At Ben Gurion passport control I hand over my passport and watch his eyes scan the page. He reads my name, my place of birth and my age, has a brief conversation with the guy in the booth next to him and then I'm directed to the security waiting area, as I have been before, and the waiting begins, and my stomach-ache starts up. My luggage contains a lot of skateboarding equipment and eight pool-finishing trowels, which I'm planning on taking into the West Bank to help with the building of a skate park in Asira Al-Shamalyia.

There are a few other people in this waiting area. We don't speak, but we stretch, shift our weight on the seats, look into each other's eyes and yawn together knowing – I think – that we share much because we have been selected to sit here and wait. After some time I'm directed into an office where there are three officials. The first round of questioning begins; what is your father's name? Your mother's name? What is the purpose of your visit? What do you do for a job? Where are you staying? What are the names of your family members in Jerusalem? Where do they live? Why aren't you staying with them? They ask for details of my email addresses and phone numbers. They want to see my ID card for my job. They want to see evidence of where I am staying. Who do you know in Palestine? What is their number? How did you meet them? Then I'm sent back to the holding area to wait.

When I'm called in again I speak to a different woman. Similar questions, some variations, some additions. I explain that I'm going to be travelling into the West Bank, to a city called Nablus. She says she has never heard of it. I feel all half; halfway in and halfway out of the airport, half-Palestinian. I change the text in my calendar on my phone so that the period between 21st September and 16th October reads 'Israel' instead of 'Palestine'. Just in case they check it and it gives them a reason to refuse me entry.

One of the questions was about what I do for a job. I say I am a teacher at university. She asks which field. "Theatre". "Nice," she says. I think about how theatre is soft or softening. Peter Bazalgette described culture as a form of soft power. In this context, that idea takes on a very different meaning to what he intended, and I make a mental note of it. Soft power. After four hours a woman appears with my passport. "Welcome to Israel", she says. It's not until we have driven into Jerusalem that my stomach starts to settle.

At my family's home in East Jerusalem everyone is talking about me travelling into the West Bank and worrying that it will be difficult. What is apparent from regularly visiting the West Bank is the proximity of a tense, uncertain and fearful realpolitik within which people operate. Border areas are punctuated by architectures of restriction and exclusion and the presence of the Israeli military. The separation wall, check points, administrative practices and area delineation within the West Bank (A, B and C) create complex rhythms of restriction and separation between Palestinian villages that Palestinians embody through a regulated practising of power upon individuals and the collective social body.

Once I get to Nablus and then to Asira everything feels more relaxed. It's as if your physical proximity to the wall and the checkpoints and the military increases your response to them – the bodily knowing of what is there and how close to it or how far away we are. When I am working on the building site I pay attention to the physical movement. The repeated bending, thrusting, lifting and twisting of the shovel.

We work into the night, switching from daylight to electric light. I glide a trowel across the transition of the hip again and again, thinking about smoothing and polishing. These are the verbal cues that we use to guide our movement: snowboarding, polishing, gliding, and pressure.

Asymmetries

Sometime in the July or August of 2014 I am sat working in the library at the University of Manchester¹. In the moments that I'm not writing I'm idling, leaning on the back legs of my chair, stretching my arms and scrolling through my Instagram account. As I do this I am suddenly struck by a post published by Sidewalk Magazine that shows a short video clip of Welsh skateboarder, Chris Jones, performing a backside boardslide on a rail outside a shop in Ramallah, a city located in the middle of the West Bank. During those same months, in the besieged Gaza strip, just 52 miles from Ramallah, Israel is implementing Operation Protective Edge². A military intervention during which 1372 Palestinian citizens, 785 Palestinian conflict participants, 63 Israeli soldiers and 5 Israeli citizens were killed (B'tselem, 2014), and during which more than 11,000 Palestinians and 1600 Israelis were injured (OCHA, 2015).

Chris Jones, I discovered, was in Palestine working with SkatePal. A charity started by Scottish skateboarder, Charlie Davis. Charlie travelled to the city of Jenin in the North of the West Bank back in February 2006 to teach English for a few months and he took his skateboard with him. When he wasn't teaching he would ride around in the streets, which drew a lot of interest from local children. The experience of spending time in Palestine led to Charlie undertaking a master's degree in Arabic and continuing to visit. Recognising that there are very few play spaces for children in the West Bank,³ Charlie had the idea of building a small mini-ramp⁴ and bringing some skateboards with him to entertain local children. His idea grew and in 2013 he established SkatePal as a charity. He had generated some money through donations from friends and family and assembled a team of volunteers to build SkatePal's first skatepark in the town of Zababdeh in 2014.

Sat in the library watching my Instagram feed, and having a background awareness of the disastrous events happening in Gaza, I recognised that I was witnessing another kind of intervention through the documentation of SkatePal's work – the opening of a new channel of exchange between people inside and outside the West Bank through the movement and social practice of skateboarding – a simultaneously collective and anti-authoritarian southern Californian export (Borden, 2001; Abulhawa 2017).

I don't know whether Sidewalk had given much consideration to the contrast of these events when they posted that video, but for me – a British-Palestinian skateboarder – it mostly evoked a feeling of hope. This arose from my awareness of the symbolic dimension of skateboarding movement and my own conception of what it means to 'slide'⁵, but there

¹ I have never been a student of the UoM but I live in the city and I use the library on a visiting researcher basis.

² For a detailed report on this part of the conflict, see the United Nations Independent Commission Inquiry (2014).

³ Charities such as Playgrounds for Palestine and Anera, amongst others use funds directly to provide safe play equipment and spaces for children in Palestine.

⁴ This is the colloquial term for a scaled-down 'half-pipe'.

⁵ My understanding of the 'slide' is twofold – firstly, a slide is a kind of alchemy created by skateboarders that enacts Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'smooth space' (see my text about this in Urban Pamphleteer 8 from 2019: <http://urbanpamphleteer.org/skateboardings>). I have first explored this alongside the idea of 'sliding' between states – of being British and Palestinian, and across the physical borders of Britain, Israel and Palestine, in a short film called *The Slide* made in 2018 featuring Chris Jones and available to view here: <https://www.daniabulhawa.com/the-slide>

was more to it than this. There was something hopeful to me in the idea that British skateboarders were actively visiting the West Bank, situating themselves within this political impasse and, as anyone must do when they are on the ground: trying to understand it. I appreciated, sat in the library, that the then leading British Skateboarding publication – Sidewalk – were publicising a simultaneously remarkable and normal image of a British skateboarder skateboarding in a Palestinian town to their readership, at a time when Palestinian cities and towns were typically represented in British media solely as sites of war and conflict and within a broader political climate of negative media portrayals of Muslims and Islam⁶ (Ahmed and Matthes, 2017).

25th September

We have made plans to go to Jerusalem to visit a skate park for the day. We want to get a bus from Nablus to Jerusalem, but this means that we have to pass through Qalandiya checkpoint on foot before getting another bus on the other side of the wall into Jerusalem. I want to get through as quickly as possible. Some of the group notice a line of jersey barriers and want to skate them. I'm a little anxious about how this is going to be received by locals and by the Israeli Military who police the area. A small group of local people gather around to watch. They smile and seem impressed and interested in the skating, perhaps also because it seems to operate on a subversive level in this particular context; we are spending time outside the checkpoint, playing on an object designed to block roads and traffic. For once, I think, the authorities are waiting for us to finish what we are doing. We will pass through the checkpoint when we have finished playing. I'm reminded of how much skateboarding operates at this meeting point between 'just playing' and politically-charged, subversive act.

The architecture of the checkpoint is harsh; concrete and razor wire. People have to pass through narrow metal partitions and large metal turnstiles. I keep thinking that they don't have to build them like this. I think about people passing through this place regularly and how that would make me feel - criminal, second-class. We pass through the checkpoint and board another bus that will take us into Jerusalem. We get off at Damascus Gate – the main bus station in Jerusalem's old city. From there we walk to the skatepark, which is in West Jerusalem, the Israeli area. The walk there from Damascus gate is a strange one. There's a gradual shift from the Palestinian area, which is quite run down, to the Israeli area, which is smart, clean and smooth. It's like walking into another country.

I was born in the midlands of England, to a Palestinian father and a British mother. My father came to the UK to study and tried to integrate completely with British society. The first educational establishment he attended when he arrived organised for him to live with a British family. His new landlady gave him an English name – “you look like a Jim” she said. As a light-skinned Arab, he passes easily for a Southern European. Recognising the benefits of fitting in, he cultivated a British accent and went with the name ‘Jim’. Our surname is tricky to pronounce and it generates a variety of assumptions and prejudice about the person to whom it belongs. When we were growing up he avoided the politics of Israel-Palestine and of religion, not wanting to indoctrinate us with any particular views or to expose us to the complexity of the conflict. He avoided engaging with demonstrations. He had little time to teach us Arabic beyond a few words and phrases, and besides, in the 1980s of Britain it

⁶ Sunni Muslims make up 80-85% of the population of the West Bank, according to the CIA Factbook, 2020.

didn't appear to be of the utmost importance and usefulness. He didn't want us to have the experience of being seen as different. It wasn't until I was in my late twenties that I recognised the erasure that is implicit in what it means to assimilate. To become similar. Sat in the library, in Manchester in 2014 and sat with this personal context, I was hopeful and heartened that some attention was being drawn to Palestine – not solely as a place of destruction, but as one in which a person might make connections and play.

September 30th 2015

Me, L and C visit the girl's school in the morning to talk to the head teacher about us teaching some of the girls to skateboard at the school, before the skatepark is built. We talk about how important safety is, as M has asked us to do, and then we have an opportunity to introduce ourselves and to talk a little bit about skateboarding. When it is my turn to speak I decide to highlight that skateboarding is a creative 'dance-like' activity. I feel this is important for me to mention because I think the word dance might appeal more to the girls, and because I realise it's also what's important to me about skateboarding; that idea of creative expression.

Later when Me and M are sat alone in the car together he says he liked that I used the word 'creative' when I was talking about skateboarding. He tells me about how important innovation is. He talks about his own physical practice - he is a former competitive gymnast and now he walks a lot. We discuss the connection between creative bodily practice and spirituality and the meditative quality of concentration and focus. I wonder about the power of play as something that connects you with yourself and others, and with the landscape. Without it, what happens? I wonder how much freedom of the body can initiate a feeling of freedom more broadly?

I had taken my skateboard with me on family trips when I was younger, but I'd never seen anyone else skateboarding there. This remarkable convergence of skateboarding in Palestine opened up a possible space for me to explore another connection with Palestine, one framed by the shared and collective physical culture of skateboarding, and one in which I might reconsider what it is to be a skateboarder and a Palestinian. A year later I was on my way to Tel Aviv to help SkatePal build a new skatepark in a town called Asira Al-Shamalyia in the north of the West Bank, and to begin an ongoing research project exploring the work of SkatePal, skateboarding's physical culture – the movement we perform in skateparks and in the streets, and the social-spatial practices we foster.

Lines, Nodes and Intersections

The skatepark in Asira Al-Shamalyia is much more than a skatepark. SkatePal facilitate volunteers from all over the world to come to Palestine and spend at least a month at the skatepark teaching skateboarding. The skatepark has been a space of social interaction even since before it was completed. Somewhat unlike the culture of skateparks in other parts of the world, here in Asira the skatepark is a community hub. Extended families come to sit and watch their children play, to have a picnic and to chat with each other. The volunteers who take part typically integrate with this – volunteers learn some Arabic, local people learn some of the various languages spoken by volunteers (mostly European ones). Volunteers become temporarily part of the town, they go olive picking and trekking with farmers, they play cards at people's homes until the early hours, they go for dinner with local families. In

this way, the skatepark has a social function, developing relationships that extend beyond the time volunteers spend in Palestine. The charity have shown a commitment to this community and to the wider geographical region of Palestine for many years. Former SkatePal volunteer and Programme Director at Free Movement Skateboarding (Athens), Amber Edmondson addresses the importance of commitment in an interview with Ryan Lay on the Vent City podcast discussing her work. She stated, “the skateboarding doesn’t matter. It’s not the skateboarding that makes the difference. It’s the consistency. It’s saying that you’ll be there and turning up” (Edmondson, 2019). This statement is relevant both to the commitment shown by an individual working for a charity such as SkatePal, as well as that which is shown by the charity as an organisation.

The creation of a space in which volunteers from outside the West Bank can visit and interact with local people is particularly relevant in the political context of Palestine. Palestinian people are not easily able to leave the West Bank to travel into Israel and to other parts of Palestine (B’Tselem, 2017), or to another country.⁷ The presence of volunteers creates a space of social forum (Abulhawa, 2017). A skatepark – wherever it is in the world – functions rather like a node. A point at which different experience and perspectives, and a point at which the skateboarding lines produced by different bodies, cross paths.

5th October

While we are working at the site a procession of vehicles can be seen and heard down below on the road. They drive onto the site and many of us stop what we are doing to see what’s happening. A large group of men appear from buses and cars with huge red flags emblazoned with PFLP⁸ logos. Music blares from the bus and they dance and clap together.

We have built something in Palestine: A permanent built environment for playing on skateboards, though we can’t be sure how long it will last. A node for the practice of a fluid community of skateboarders. Each person is building a physical practice of movement on skateboards that might support them to navigate and take up space in all sorts of contested landscapes. Personally, I am building a citizenship⁹ – a sense of belonging and a series of bonds here in Palestine, my father’s homeland, which I can come back to and that I have invested blood, sweat and tears in.

Crossing Borders

In 2020, the Covid-19 global pandemic and the elevation of the Black Lives Matter movement into broader public consciousness have – in their own different ways – heightened awareness of our need for nodes and intersections. Places in which we can be together, assemble, and create new pathways. Covid-19 restrictions have removed the

⁷ Out of 195 destinations, Palestinian citizens must have pre-arranged visas for 138 countries and visas on arrival or e-visas for a further 35. 10 countries do not require a visa from Palestinian citizens and 3 countries automatically refuse entry (Visalogy, 2020).

⁸ The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The PFLP are a secular socialist-revolutionary resistance movement who aligned themselves with the USSR and China during the 1970s and developed militant tactics to draw attention to the Palestinian cause (BBC, 2014). The PFLP has been designated a terrorist organisation by the US, Japan, Canada, Australia and the EU.

⁹ The term citizenship has mixed connotations depending on your positionality. In Palestine the very status of belonging to a particular place and having a national identity is part of the political struggle.

possibilities for SkatePal volunteers to travel to Palestine for the time being, but skateboarding sessions and supplies of equipment continue through local manager Aram Sabbah. Our connections with each other can also still happen, albeit mediated through Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp.

11th October

We drive to the Samaritan village at night. It's on the top of one of the mountains surrounding Nablus...

We drive up a mountain and eventually reach a large yellow gate across the road. There's a sign outside that reads that this is in zone A, a Palestinian-only area and no Israelis are permitted to enter. We park the car outside and walk in through the gates. There's a falafel shop on the left, with a big window, a bright square of light. Inside we meet a guy who speaks very good English and has white skin and blonde hair. D remembers him from the last time. He lives in the village and has served in the IDF. I'm already confused. We talk to him, in a guarded way. I don't mention my heritage.

The people who live here, he tells us, have lived here for a very long time. They are people who practice a type of Judaism, but they aren't Israeli. They call themselves Samaritans. Still they have Israeli citizenship and he (and perhaps others) have served in the IDF. I keep thinking about the sign outside this village. I ask how many people in the village are Samaritans. He tells me almost all are. There is one family who are Muslim.

Our conversation turns to the problems that have been arising throughout October. The guy says, "They keep throwing stones. We don't know why". D questions this... "why do you think?" The guy sighs, "they do it because they want their land" He pauses. "But we don't believe it's theirs". "Gaza is." He says, "But not the West Bank". My mind returns to the sign at the entrance to the village. Area A.

The guy says that no one in this village is concerned with the wider politics of Palestine/Israel. D asks about the man behind the counter, who runs this shop. He is a Muslim, a Palestinian. "He doesn't care", says the guy. Then he proceeds to ask the man in charge of the shop, in Arabic. The man responds and the guy turns to us, "see. He's saying he doesn't care".

We walk through the village towards a point on the edge of the mountain that looks out across Nablus below... On the way we pass a group of IDF soldiers, who are stationed on the edge of the mountain with guns and night-vision binoculars; they are looking down into the valley, into Nablus. I feel as if I've accidentally gone backstage, behind the scenery. One of the soldiers talks to us. He seems like a nice guy. We tell him about the skatepark. He is very positive and supportive about it. His brother likes skateboarding.

There's a heritage board, which I read before we leave. It's written in Hebrew and English. It explains the history of the area – of Nablus – without any reference to Palestinians. The biblical story it narrates seems to sweep the valley below of all context and all the Palestinian people.

My experience of working in Palestine had, until this point, been punctuated by the effects of the physical border that exists between Israel and Palestine – the separation wall. As a British citizen, my passport has allowed me entry to Israel and the freedom to pass freely if uncomfortably, through checkpoints. The journey into and out of Palestine, both actually and emotionally, is not – as is illustrated in this paper – straightforward. Faced with the possibility of a prolonged period of not being able to maintain physical proximity with my family and with other people and places in Palestine, I wondered:
how might I continue to find this border?
How might I continue to be working in exchange with the people and places of Palestine?

The collaborative work of choreographers, Sofiane and Selma Ouissi, which makes use of multiple spatial/temporal zones facilitated via skype due to personal, financial and political constraints, articulates the need to work with what is possible and available, despite separation. Talking about their performance *Here(s)* (2012), which was staged in Berlin via skype whilst Selma was in Paris and Sofiane in Tunis, they explain,

[f]or us, art must nourish itself from life and more precisely from our life, our conditions, our time, and our personal situation. It's about making art not locked up in a studio (and in any case, we don't really have the luxury of this kind of enclosure) but in the context of our everyday lives. Financial conditions, visas, traveling all come into play... This work demonstrates the search of a way to make art and to continue to work artistically within the constraints imposed by our respective lives: distance. (Sofiane in Tunisia and Selma in Paris; Sofiane not able to travel easily and Selma stuck in Paris because of her pregnancy, not to mention a complete lack of financial means). We could not, however, stop working together. It was therefore necessary to invent and produce differently, starting from the current context of our realities. (Selma and Sofiane Ouissi in Binder and Haupt, 2012)

Selma and Sofiane Ouissi had been working in this way for years before the Covid-19 pandemic forced a much broader swath of people across the globe to experience remote relationships with family and work colleagues and for this to become their default mode for exchange. Selma and Sofiane's emphasis, on working differently, not only to overcome obstacles, but to continue to work with another person, embodies resilience and commitment. It reminds me of another connection to skateboarding: In her book *The Art of Living Sideways*, Sophie Friedel discusses her experience volunteering with skateboarding charity Skateistan in Afghanistan. She writes about the sideways stance performed by skateboarders as a symbolic movement. Skateboarders adopt a bodily position through the act of skateboarding that suggests the ability to sidestep and slide past difficulty (Friedel, 2015). From a social and political perspective, circumvention – rather than the ollie – may be skateboarding's primary 'trick'.

15th October

A is planning on going back to Qalqilya and says he doesn't mind travelling with me to Ramallah, though it is totally out of his way... He describes how the West Bank is like a gigantic pen in which he and the younger generation are kept. He points out settlements as

we travel and tells me that the positioning of them continues the work of the wall. He recognises both of these things as part of the colonial strategy; if you make a place unliveable/unworkable the young will leave and the old will eventually die.

Tricks and skill-less tricks

In 2020, I found myself drawn to reconsider the practice I had developed for my practice-as-research PhD, which took place between 2009-2015. The period in which I conducted my PhD was (another) hiatus in my skateboarding practice. Over the years I had found it very difficult to continue a skateboarding practice in part because of the rising responsibilities of life and work, but also because of feeling out of place within skateboarding culture, and my feelings of discomfort at occupying public space on my own as a woman to engage in this form of play.

My research derived from this lived experience to explore the social barriers for women to move freely and play within urban space. It was focused on the geographical context of England and involved me creating a series of performance interruptions in cities and towns. I would move through the streets of a place and use the physical environment – the architectures of buildings, paving stone patterns, street furniture, railings, steps and bollards – as a series of play spaces. The movement was improvised and involved contact with objects and sometimes the impromptu interaction of other people within the space. These interactions were not something I initiated, but would sometimes happen. The research enquiry and the form of the practice was drawn from my experience and knowledge of skateboarding. It was an adaptation, which involved the removal of the skateboard as play object and refocusing the activity of urban play to the direct relationship between body and site. This practice was both a way for me to explore my research enquiry and a chance to reclaim and reassert the act of playing in the street by a woman. My research revealed insights into the ways gendered bodies are socially conditioned to act in public space through processes of authorisation and interpretation, and what is revealed about the depth of bodily connection to the built environment understood through the improvisatory process. This research project also led me back – more authoritatively and authentically into my skateboarding practice. It happened that the writing up of my thesis occurred in the summer of 2014 at the same time that I was sat in the library discovering SkatePal.

My approach to a technique of playing in the practice of my PhD, was called ‘Skill-less Tricks’ – a disingenuous title. I was adopting a deliberately everyday improvisatory style so as to avoid a display of virtuosity and codification that is typically associated with skateboarding and with dance. The idea of performing a ‘trick’ was central to the concept of this improvised movement. In skateboarding a trick is a punctuating moment – as part of a run – in which the skateboarder successfully lands a clearly defined type of jump, rotation, slide, grind, balance or stall (often done in relation to an obstacle) that requires a high level of skill to perform. The skateboarding trick also evokes the magical and transformational – an idea that has been explored by skateboarding magician Joe Ledoux (2015). The descriptive title of my score as skill-less tricks was designed as a contrast to virtuosic display. Through an assumed humility, the approach of making skill-less tricks was designed to free the mover from the restrictions imposed by a perceived lack of bodily intelligence or worth. The title skill-less tricks is disingenuous because there is much skill within the practice of improvising,

and of vernacular forms of moving. I could have named the practice skill-free tricks, but skill-less contains within it a lack of pride, which registers a diminished sense of worth. It was, at the time it was conceived, something felt within my own body. I remember one of my PhD supervisors at the time questioning my use of skill-less as a term. I decided that I wanted to keep it, but I don't think I quite understood why until sometime after the research and thesis had been completed and I had processed these ideas of bodily intelligence, pride and a sense of my own movement worthiness.

16th October

At the entrance to the airport we go through a mini checkpoint and our car is pulled over. The bonnet is lifted, the boot emptied. My bags are put through an X-Ray machine and my taxi driver is questioned. When we are released to enter the airport, my taxi driver looks into the rear-view mirror to make eye contact with me and says, "because Arab". I already know.

In the departure area there is another layer of security. A woman studies my face intensely. Moving her eyes speedily from passport photo to face like a computer scanner. Then I am asked more of the same questions from my arrival - what was the purpose of my visit? Why volunteer to do skateboarding in this country? Did you have options to volunteer elsewhere? Who did you stay with? What do you do for a job? What do you teach? How were you able to get time off to come here? Do you have a staff card for work?

Why I would choose to come to this country to teach skateboarding? "Because I have family here and because it's a beautiful and interesting place". "Is there a skateboard in here?" She says, pointing to my luggage. "No. I gave it to a child". "Why?" She asks. "As a gift," I say. She talks with a colleague and then lets me pass through. I check my large bag in at the desk and proceed to security (part three).

At the security scanner I'm pulled to one side. Every piece of my hand baggage is inspected in detail. I find this process quite fascinating and absorbing to watch; the careful separation of objects, removal of camera lens, the opening and closing of my laptop. Then I am taken to a small cubicle and a woman inspects my body in the same way. I feel like I am not myself, but rather a piece of my effects. I am also thinking that if more Arabs travelled through this airport that they couldn't sustain this level of inspection - it is time consuming. I also think many women would be upset - particularly Muslim women - about having to remove their underwear and having that X-rayed too. I can't help but laugh as my bra is placed into a tray and passed beneath the curtain to be scanned. By the end of the process I feel quite sterile, or blank.

In 2020, the height of the first English lockdown not only restricted travel, but basic physical movement in the streets around our homes. It seemed people were becoming more starkly aware of the relationship between physical movement and wellbeing, of the restrictions of their own bodies, of the openness or closedness of public spaces, of the freedom to move. At this time, it seemed appropriate that my thoughts went back to the body-place practice of skill-less tricks that had cultivated my research.

Having already tested and utilised this score within my PhD and teaching practice, I wondered how a new application of this could work within a very different context and circumstance? How might I use the practice of skill-less tricks as a way to explore those questions of borders and being with people and places? I decided I would translate and share a version of the skill-less tricks score with people I was cultivating relationships with in Palestine – skateboarders and non-skateboarders, friends, professional contacts and family – to see what might come out of that offer.

My dad did the first translation of the score. The title 'skill-less tricks' was the most difficult element to adapt and so I also asked a friend, Mohammed Ghalaieny to advise. My dad had selected the Arabic word حيل (heyal) for 'tricks', but this is used to refer to cunning, deception and ploy rather than the performance of a physical act as is used when referring to a trick in the context of skateboarding. Based on discussions with Mohammed we settled on a different phrase for the title of the score in Arabic – حركات بدون مهارة (harakat bidoun mouhara) or 'movement without skill' in English. The score is a set of instructions for generating a site-based movement 'without' skill, a moment of interaction and an exchange across physical and embodied walls.

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