

# Choreographing Collapsing Bodies

YUN-CHEN CHANG



*Relaxing on a Shaky Ground.* Photo by Antti Ahonen

**ABSTRACT**

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<p>Choreographing Collapsing Bodies examines the choreographic in the arrangement of different material bodies, agencies and affects. This artistic research investigates the affective power of everyday objects and their role in performance, focusing on chairs and tables as co-performers. The main question of this written thesis revolves around the methods of choreographing a performance that encompasses different material agencies and modes of expression. This research interest is informed by my experience of living in an environment marked by frequent seismic activity. This intimate awareness of unpredictable earth movements influences a choreographic approach that reflects on precarity in performance practice. I explore the subtle perception of things as a way of building my relationship with objects and allowing their vibrancy to guide my action through stillness, precarious formations, collapse, irregular rhythms, images of hybrid bodies, multiple affects and material expressions. I research choreographic methods including score-based improvisation and instant composition to create a performance situation which allows for the affective exchange between different material bodies and provides the space for chance happenings.</p> <p>The thesis is structured into three main chapters. Each chapter delves into my artistic journey and the theoretical framework that underpins the exploration.</p> <p>In the first chapter, I revisit three selected experiences from my embodied archive, exploring how my bodily knowledge nourishes the question of how to create choreography with everyday objects.</p> <p>In the second chapter, I elaborate on the choreographic thinking behind “collapsing bodies,” beginning with the presentation of pluralistic and indeterminate definitions of choreography. I then reflect on “collapsing bodies” through my situated knowledge, influenced by my precarious living conditions, and my artistic practices with everyday objects in two of my performance projects <i>Still Changning</i> and <i>Relaxing on a Shaky Ground</i>.</p> <p>The third chapter examines the performativity of the objects in choreography. I explore the notion of <i>intermateriality</i>, introduced by Daniela Hahn in <i>Things that Dance</i> (2019), reflecting on chance encounters and intermaterial dialogues in the creative process. This chapter also investigates my choreographic practice through the lens of <i>assemblage</i> and <i>thing-power</i> from Jane Bennett’s theory in <i>Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things</i> (2010).</p> <p>In summary, <i>Choreographing Collapsing Bodies</i> is an artistic and theoretical exploration that examines choreography through the performativity of everyday objects, a subtle perception of things, an entangled dynamic between stillness and movement, score and chance, and the exploration of memory and dreaming. This thesis attempts to contribute to the fields of choreography, performance art and movement practice with my embodied knowledge and theoretical insights.</p>	
<b>KEYWORDS</b> expanded choreography, performance, embodiment, precarity, materiality, immateriality, performativity, object, affect, agency, assemblage, collapsing bodies, stillness, movement, score, chance, intersection, practice	

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## INTRODUCTION: SHAKY GROUND

Choreographing collapsing bodies is a process of contemplating precarity by moving and performing with everyday objects on a large scale. I gradually build my embodied knowledge of everyday objects as my co-performers by researching their agency and vibrancy. From a pragmatic and safe position to precarious formations, my bodily relationship with everyday objects, chairs and tables, is subverted and expanded with playfulness. Performing with a large scale of tables evokes my embodied memory of my relationship to an even larger scale of planetary objects, tectonic plates.

The earth is shaking and rumbling. My body is being moved by the unpredictable tectonic forces of the earth. As a mild and subtle tremor becomes more violent and multidirectional, potentially restricting my movement, my heartbeat accelerates. Living with frequent seismic activity, I learn to stay relaxed to perceive the earth's movement while remaining alert to possible collapse.

Living on a shaky ground contributes to my artistic thinking and choreographic strategy of performing with everyday objects to the extent that I value precarity in the performance practice. I like to think of the shaky ground in my practice as my methods of score-based improvisation and instant composition in exploring the subtle perception of things, irregular rhythms, impersonal affects, stillness and movement, score and chance. Precarity lies in the time-based and vulnerable sculptures of chairs or tables. I also work with precarity in live situations with a temporary audience or in the context of transdisciplinary collaboration.

What strategies can I employ to choreograph a performance that embraces different material agencies and modes of expression? My artistic research focuses on exploring the choreographic in the arrangement of different material bodies and affects. In this thesis, the notion of material bodies is focused on human bodies and objects in a shared space. I draw on Jane Bennett's theory of affect in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), to describe the capacity of any body to act and respond.

I have been fascinated by the question of how to make choreography and how to materialize a concept into a performance. My choreographic thinking has evolved and expanded from the body and movement of dance to the arrangement of things in the time and space. One crucial turning point in my career was my collaboration with performance artist River Lin in his performance project *Dancing with Gutai Art Manifesto 1956* (2020). It was through the artistic research in this project that I was introduced to live art and learned about the practice of expanded choreography. I remember being confused and yet inspired by the concept of expanded choreography. As I carry this research question of expanded choreography with me since 2020, I understand that choreography is closely related to dance as a historical discipline within the theatrical framework and its apparatus of spectatorship. When choreography is emancipated from this tradition, it expands into different disciplines, spatial contexts and spectatorship.

According to the MoMA's website, the term *expanded choreography* refers to the interdisciplinary collaboration between dance and the visual arts, the crossing of dance from stage into the context of the visual arts. This intersection broadened the concept of the body as a time-based medium and a powerful artistic vehicle. Dance-making entered art galleries, museums and the streets, intersecting with performance art, installation, painting and sculpture. Visual artists developed works that used the body, time and space as their materials and mediums. When it comes to this intersection of dance and the visual arts, or performance art, the dominant historical narrative that I have learned often follows the line of Black Mountain College, Fluxus, Judson Theatre in the Anglo-American context. In this thesis, I present the essential role of the body in transdisciplinary intersections in the Asian-Pacific context with a specific focus on the Gutai art movement of the 1950s - 1960s.

Approaching the body at the intersection of dance and the visual arts raises the question of embodiment. I understand embodiment as how the body forms the identity and situated knowledge through sensory experience, perception, emotions and affects during the interactive process with the environment. In this thesis, I focus on my bodily and situated knowledge in relation to chairs and tables.

*Still Changing* is a performance project with chairs. It was created during the 3-week residency program *Unboxing: Live Art Arena* and performed at Umay Theatre, Taipei from 2 to 4 April 2021. Later it was developed into *Still Changing: Landscape* and performed during the exhibition *Tracing Work* at Kuva/Tila Gallery, at the Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki, from 11 March to 3 April 2022.

*Relaxing on a Shaky Ground* is a performance project with tables, my artistic thesis for my master's degree. It was conceptualized and realized as a nine-day exhibition which hosted video installations and five live performances at the White Studio of the Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki, from 28 March to 5 April 2023. I collaborated with improvising drummer Teemu Mustonen and sound designer Jouni Ilari Tapio for the live performances with the tables. Costume designer Kasia Zofia Gorniak integrated her inspiration from our performance-making into the outfit design for the live performance. For the exhibition, I invited filmmaker Ville Koskinen to exhibit a video work in dialogue with my moving image and the spatial installation of the tables. The exhibition also includes four mp3 players connected to headphones with my dream narration and an audio recording of the live performance with the tables. In the written component of my master's thesis, I focus on the live performance in collaboration with Teemu and Jouni.

This thesis consists of three main chapters:

In Chapter 1, I revisit three selected experiences from my embodied archive to see how my bodily knowledge leads me to the research question of how to make choreography with everyday objects. I approach the question with my embodied knowledge from a meditative dance with stones, an action painting and a viewing experience of a live body as a time-based artwork.

In Chapter 2, I elaborate my choreographic thinking of collapsing bodies, first by presenting the pluralistic and indeterminate definitions of choreography, and then by sharing my situated knowledge of collapsing bodies through my marginal living conditions and my artistic practice with everyday objects. With the two performance projects *Still Changing* and *Relaxing on a Shaky Ground*, I continue to analyze the

choreography of collapsing bodies through the lenses of stillness and movement, score and chance, duration, intersection of practices, and evocation of dreams and memories.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the performativity of the objects in choreographing collapsing bodies, primarily through my reflections on the project *Relaxing on a Shaky Ground*. I begin by exploring the notion of *intermateriality*, a term proposed by Daniela Hahn in *Things that Dance* (2019), to reflect on chance encounters and intermaterial dialogues in the process of materializing a concept in a physical space. Second, by thinking with Jane Bennett's argument and analysis of *thing-power* and *assemblage* in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), I examine my choreographic practice through the notion of an assemblage as a heterogeneous field of different affects, expressions, chance and surprise.



# 1. REVISITING MY EMBODIED ARCHIVE

I see my body as an archive, a repository of experiential memories, immaterial documents and corporeal knowledge. Archives usually refer to institutional places where public records and historical documents are selected, categorized and preserved in various material forms as a means of transmitting knowledge. In contrast to the material documents stored in archives, the body as an archive preserves immaterial experiences, including sensory knowledge, cognitive memories and physical habits shaped by culture, society and living environment. Dreams, emotions and desires are also written and woven into the body archive.

According to the research project *Bodily Knowledge as Professional Competence* (2013-2016) carried out by Jaana Parviainen, Johanna Aromaa and Ilmari Kortelainen:

The notion of bodily knowledge refers to a knowledge forming process in which subjects pay special attention to sensuous information, perceptions, affects and feelings that occur during physical activity, meditation and training processes. Bodily knowledge encourages individuals to trust their own body awareness and learn to understand the ambiguous feelings, intuitions and sensations emerging from the body in doing physical activities. (Parviainen, Aromaa and Kortelainen 2013-2016)

Embodiment is an active and reflective process of perceiving, producing and storing empirical knowledge. The embodied archive is in a constant process of rearranging and becoming. It incorporates multiple temporalities of past, present and future and retains a subversive potential through reenactment.

When dance as a time-based and movement-based art enters the museum apparatus, it challenges its institutional system of archiving and exhibiting permanent objects. Seeing the body as an archive also questions the conventional notion of dance as an ephemeral act on the stage, demonstrating the body's capacity to reenact and disseminate a dance technique and a choreographic work. The Dancing Museum, directed by the choreographer Boris Charmatz, explores the intersection of exhibition, performative

gestures and various forms of dissemination. Presenting the body as a living archive, Charmatz invites dancers to reenact the repertoires of emblematic dance companies in his piece entitled *20 Dancers for the XX Century* (2012). In *Twenty Minutes for the 20th Century* (1999), performance artist Tino Sehgal performed naked in the museum, chronologically sequencing signature movements by twenty influential choreographers, including Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, Pina Bausch, Merce Cunningham, and Trisha Brown. Performance artist River Lin proposes *20 Minutes for the 20th Century, but Asian* (2016) by inviting a Taiwanese choreographer Wen-Chung Lin to present a chronology of all the dance training he has received. Through Wen-Chung Lin's body, the work examines the colonial history of Western modern dance in the Asia-Pacific region. The choreographic dialogue between these works critically accesses dance heritage through the body and materializes multiple temporalities in the artistic practice of reenacting and animating archives.

For me at this moment, revisiting my embodied archive is not for the purpose of reenacting certain movement sequences but rather serves as a method of observing how I gradually embody knowledge in performing with everyday objects. In this chapter, I will focus on three selected experiences from my embodied archive. First, through the lens of a dance theatre, I will reflect on my physical training as a dancer with Legend Lin Dance Theatre and my meditative dance with 12 stones in one of their repertoires. In this experience, I will draw attention to my movement in relation to the performativity of the materials. Second, from a visual arts perspective, I will talk about my action painting as a way of thinking and moving with Japanese Gutai artists. With their Gutai Art Manifesto in the 1950s, these visual artists experimented with time, space, action and community in their art-making process. Third, from my embodied experience as an audience member, I will share my inspiration from Maria Hassabi's choreography and spatial arrangement in the museum context. At the end of this chapter, I will analyze how the embodied memories have influenced my artistic thinking and practice in terms of how to make choreography and how to conceptualize and materialize performances.

## 1.1. The walker with the stones

Measuring the distance with my feet, I walk on a long white piece of fabric in the center of the stage. Every step is precisely calculated. While imagining a thread lifting my spine towards the sky, I release muscle tension downwards and feel the gravity. My feet gently stepping into imaginary moist soil full of micro living beings, I soften my gaze and focus on the sensory experience of each slow step. Firmly rooted into the ground, I gently lift up my abdomen and slowly rotate my tailbone and pelvis backwards with imaginary threads pulling them slightly towards the sky. I gradually release the muscle tension of my thighs and bend my knees to approach the ground. I concentrate on regulating my breath in coordination to my spine and limbs in order to continuously shift my weight without sudden accentuation in the movement. With 12 stones positioned in a straight line on the white fabric, I walk slowly in a low position to pick up one stone at a time and put one after another into a wooden bowl in a specific order to avoid making any noise. I feel the shape of each stone in my hand without looking at it and place it in a precise position inside the wooden bowl only with my sense of touch. These 42 steps on the stage demand strong physical endurance and mental focus. My legs tremble slightly. My mouth drools because of my relaxed facial muscles. In the slow rhythm of walking with the full awareness of breath circulation, I experience a few seconds of emptiness and infinity. My body feels smaller and smaller while the imagined universe expands.<sup>1</sup>

My embodied practice with materials has been greatly influenced by my training as a dancer with Legend Lin Dance Theatre from 2014 to 2016 in Taiwan. Legend Lin Dance Theatre, known for their distinctive aesthetic and philosophy, draws inspiration from indigenous rituals, myths and the changing seasons. The dancers embody the spirit of materials, such as stones, bells, fabrics, rice, trees, fire, etc. The meditative approach trained my body to have a strong focus on performing with one material. The meticulous analysis of the spine movement was the basic training to shed the outer layers of muscle tension and look for the spiral force from the inner core. Embodying the spirit of the materials and the changing nature of the seasons, I practiced meditative

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<sup>1</sup> I recall my embodied memory of performing the Walker in Legend Lin Dance Theatre's repertoire *Song of Pensive Beholding* in the SPAC Shizuoka Performing Arts Center in Japan in 2015.

walking with each slow and steady step close to the ground. My breath coordinated with the movement of my spine and my relationship with the material.

I embodied the stone and experienced the momentary disappearance of my body into the environment. Wandering between imagination and physicality, I experienced the pure sense of touch in relation to materiality and space. The strength generated by concentration was transferred to the smooth and fluid movement of the arm and subsequently to the stone in my hand. In calm and slow movement, my body had time and space to receive the shape, weight and temperature of each stone. Later I often asked myself: Does my relationship with materials have to be in such endurance? I realize that tranquility, flexibility, and endurance subtly become my aesthetics in moving with a material. Staying calm and meditating on the breath releases tension in the brain and sharpens the senses in contact with a material.

## 1.2. Gutai Art Manifesto and action painting

I am quietly rebellious. I seem to be walking on the edge of the unknown and the risk, not in complete control of what I am doing. I undress and calm myself before taking my first step on the canvas on the floor. I thought I would choose red as the first color, but my body intuitively leads me to the sky blue right next to the red. I pour the paint along the wooden frame in the center of the canvas. I step on it and feel the texture of the water-based paint and the canvas with my skin. The lime paint comes into view. I pour it onto the canvas, step into it and let both colors flow down to the low point of the canvas that I create with my weight. I pour the purple, which is less dense, and wrap my limbs around the paint, quietly waiting for the color to spread to my palms and feet. The dark green is poured onto the back of my left foot and spreads to the bottom of my right foot. I walk with the back of my left foot pressed against the canvas and then use my right foot as a brush. I hold a container above my body and slowly circle the thick red paint inside it. Some of the red paint drips onto my chest. Suddenly I drop the opening of the container onto the canvas three times. Three thick circles of red paint are formed. I splash the orange color into the center and cover it with light green and then light gray. I sit on the colors.

Each time I change to a different sitting position, I imagine that I am posing for a life-drawing session. From a life-drawing model posing for the artists to an action painting using posture and movement, I experience a different degree of agency in the art-making process. Lifting my limbs in the air while moving only my bottom, I pick up another container of paint and swing it onto the canvas. The dark blue is spread. I use my feet to spread it in different directions while keeping my body straight and parallel to the canvas. After several layers of painting, I gradually pick up as many buckets and containers as I can onto my painted body. Another performer, Hsiao-Tzu Tien, comes to join me in the action painting. I take a plastic bag full of white paint and squeeze the white paint out of a small hole in the bag. The white paint squeezed out of the plastic bag looks like a thin rope that I use to whip the canvas and Hsiao-Tzu. Traces of movement go beyond the canvas. The paint drips, splashes, flows and spreads. The chaos of color is explosive and liberating.<sup>2</sup>

I experimented with a playful and intuitive approach to performing with materials within the framework of an action painting in River Lin's performance project *Dancing with Gutai Art Manifesto 1956* (2020). River Lin invited nine artists from different artistic backgrounds to research the Gutai Art Manifesto and reenact this historical art movement through our performative knowledge and embodied research in theater, dance, drag, performance art, and transdisciplinary practice. While researching the Gutai art movement, I was very inspired by its manifesto.

The Gutai Bijutsu Kyokai (Gutai Art Association), founded in 1954 by Jiro Yoshihara, was a Japanese avant-garde group with radical approaches to art making and performance. After World War II, there was an artistic trend in Japan where political content, existential themes and figurative approaches dominated contemporary art culture. In contrast to this trend, Gutai artists experimented with action-based painting, the performativity of matter, chance and playfulness in process-based practice.

*Gutai* by definition means “embodiment” and “concreteness.” *Gu* signifies tool or technique, and *tai* refers to body or substance. The definition reveals their vision of the

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<sup>2</sup> My notes from the action painting in River Lin's performance project *Dancing with Gutai Art Manifesto 1956* (2020). Premiere: 18 November 2020 at C-Lab Taiwan, as part of the exhibition *Re: Play*.

relationship between the body and matter, where the body was used as a medium to interact with matter. The process of collaboration between physical action and materials is articulated in the manifesto written by Jiro Yoshihara in 1956:

Gutai Art does not alter matter. Gutai Art imparts life to matter. Gutai Art does not distort matter. In Gutai Art, the human spirit and matter shake hands with each other while keeping their distance. Matter never compromises itself with the spirit; the spirit never dominates matter. When matter remains intact and exposes its characteristics, it starts telling a story and even cries out. To make the fullest use of matter is to make use of the spirit. By enhancing the spirit, matter is brought to the height of the spirit. (Yoshihara 1956)

Gutai intentionally avoided imposing symbolic meanings and political content on the materials they chose to work with in their art. By presenting materials as materials themselves, Gutai advocated for “the freedom in gestural abstraction and the materiality of the paint itself (Munroe 1994).” Giving voice to materials and emphasizing physical action encouraged the raw interaction between human bodies and matter. Kazuo Shiraga struggled against the mud with his feet. Atsuko Tanaka walked in a dress made of light bulbs. Shizo Shimamoto smashed glass bottles filled with pigment onto a large canvas. Saburo Murakami burst through several kraft paper screens stretched over wooden frames. Nevertheless, the playful and childlike attitude that Gutai art valued was not well received in the Japanese art scene. Because of its lack of political allegory and symbolic meaning, Tokyo’s influential Reportage painters criticized Gutai art as “mere bourgeois spectacle, no more serious or responsible than child’s play (Munroe 1994).” In my experience, however, the playful mindset liberates the individual art-making from figure and theme.

I explored the performativity of the materials and action painting through the lens of dance, improvisation and somatic practice based on mindful awareness of bodily sensations. Instead of performing a repertoire, I experienced the focused process of sensing and moving without planning all the steps. Instead of focusing on the final art product, I took the time to feel how my body wanted to move and experienced the

process of leaving movement traces. Letting the body speak and letting the colors guide me, I experimented with different movement qualities of my body or the acrylic paint.

The playful and intuitive approach to the performativity of the materials in this project enriched my artistic thinking and practice. The focus on the process of making art welcomed indeterminacy and experimentation. Constantly in the process of receiving information and making decisions, my body experienced a very different physical presence from the solemn and focused body training I had received as a dancer in Legend Lin Dance Theatre. My performance with the materials in Legend Lin Dance Theatre was precisely choreographed and required strong concentration and physical endurance. In contrast, the instant composition in the action painting encouraged me to empty myself for the moment and play intuitively with the materials.

### 1.3. Embodied experience as an audience member

While learning how choreography is expanded from the stage into the spatial context and exhibition apparatus of a gallery and museum, I am particularly fascinated by Maria Hassabi's choreographic practice, which involves the kinetic energy and intensity of a live body moving through a series of still postures in a slow and precise transition. Maria Hassabi choreographs the smallest gestures, the slightest change and the breath. She wants the smallest thing to have weight in a busy environment. Stillness is movement. Stillness gives the audience time to observe the space (Hassabi 2021).

In June 2018, I saw Maria Hassabi's *STAGING: solo #2* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. As a live installation, a dancer performed a sequence of still poses in slow and meticulous transitions on a huge pink carpet on the basement floor, visible from the lobby on the ground floor. As the dancer performed in the center of the carpet and the audience walked and sat on it, the carpet seemed to document the dancer's and the audience's traces of movement. The surrounding was filled with a lot of information and noise. The live body's subtle movements invited me to slow down my thinking and to perceive the space. The live body breathed and trembled. The choreographed postures included dropping the head backward, twisting the torso and holding the body parallel to the floor while resting an elbow and toes. With years of experience as a live

model for figure drawing, I knew those were intense poses to maintain for a certain duration. I felt intensity but also calmness, mesmerized by the striking visuals, elegance and virtuosity.

Intentionally avoiding rhythms, accents and dramatic narratives, Maria Hassabi employs dancers' bodies as vital materials for a life sculpture in contrast to flowing crowds and noises in a space of transition, such as a lobby, a passage and staircases. In the museum context, dance can experience a different way of dealing with time and attention from the theatre stage. Claire Bishop explains how dance entering an exhibition from a theatrical convention adapts itself to a different institutional apparatus, temporality and spectatorship. Shifting from *event time* to *exhibition time*, dance performance is perceived by a self-directed viewing: one can enter and leave the exhibition at any time. Bishop uses the *black box* to refer to theatrical conventions: a collective viewing experience of a ticketed performance from a clear beginning to end in a designated venue. In comparison, the apparatus of the *white cube* encompasses an individual viewing mobility during the working hours of the exhibition space. (Bishop 2018, 29) She also points out a particular attention mode at the intersection of the *black box* and the *white cube*: the *gray zone* of audience attention. Unlike the theatre, where photography is not allowed, the fact that the exhibition visitors can take photos and use social media demonstrates different levels of attention in the gray zone of spectatorship.

Distraction is just another form of attention. Today, spectatorship takes place on several levels: it is perfectly possible for full, embodied attention and absorbed thinking to exist alongside the process of continuous archiving and communication with others. (Bishop 2018, 39)

Maria Hassabi's choreographic approach emphasizes the value of micro movements in stillness. A quiet and intense body at the passing of crowds is an invitation to experience the space. Her choreography encourages me to think of a live body as a vital material, to ponder upon the use of duration and space as material and to experience different modes of spectatorship in relation to the spatial and institutional politics. I appreciate her aesthetics and draw inspiration from her compositional thinking to my practice in performing with materials.



## 1.4. What do I carry further?

A meditative dance with stones, an action painting and a viewing experience of a live body as a time-based artwork encourage me to further explore expanded choreographic approaches and questions. I bring the subtle and playful quality from my embodied experiences in performing with materials into my artistic practice. Through touch, I explore an everyday object's uniqueness and create movements that correspond to their physical characteristics and how they engage the audience. Seeing concrete objects as collaborators, I explore the entangled dynamics between human and nonhuman material bodies in stillness and movement with diverse affects and expressions. The process of constructing and deconstructing a living sculpture involving the artist's body, material bodies and the audience's body elicits risk, chance, unpredictability, playfulness and variations.

## 2. CHOREOGRAPHING COLLAPSING BODIES

In this chapter, I will first present the pluralistic definitions of choreography and reflect on how choreographic thinking informs my artistic practice. I will then elaborate my choreographic thinking of collapsing bodies, followed by two examples from my practice: *Still Changing* and *Relaxing on a Shaky Ground*. Through these two performance projects, I will explore the notions of stillness and movement, score and chance, duration, intersection of practices, and evocation of dreams and memories in order to further analyze the choreography of collapsing bodies.

I have been intrigued by the practical question: How to make choreography? In order to learn about choreography, I decided to go to France to pursue my contemporary dance study in 2017. At that time, I thought of choreography as a communicative and creative process of working with dancers based on movement research, improvisational prompts and compositional methodologies. To work with dancers, I assumed that I would have to learn their common language: contemporary dance techniques. I believed that this movement vocabulary would be the communicative medium for me to make choreography with dancers. Acquiring a wide range of contemporary dance techniques and compositional methods, I made several choreographic attempts to create my own movement vocabulary within the framework of staged dance. From my learning experience, choreography is strongly linked to the history of dance and the apparatus of theatre dance, for instance, from ballet, modern dance, postmodern dance to contemporary dance in the dominant narrative of the Western European and Anglo-American context.

### 2.1. Choreography

Choreography originates from the notation of dance, the writing of dance, and further refers to the making of dance. The history of dance has a dominant lineage roughly from ballet, modern dance, post-modern dance to contemporary dance in the Western European and Anglo-American context. Following this historical narrative, dance techniques have evolved with the intention of seeking a natural body, and choreographers have distinguished themselves from the previous generation by

establishing a new ideology of dance movement. The predominant structure for dance making and dance watching complies with the theatre apparatus. In the 1960s, as the visual arts approached the body in motion as a time-based medium, the field of dance also embraced transdisciplinary experimentation and took dance outside the theatrical framework into exhibition, public and alternative spaces. Choreography also goes beyond the process of making and producing that results in an event and becomes a method of reading the space or a continuous process of opening up dialogues by expanding the investigation of the concept of body and movement in different contextual registers and durations.

In *Choreographing Problems* (2015), Bojana Cvejić argues that choreography is pluralistic and indeterminate: “the bodies and/or movement can be composed with expressions from any other art or non-art (Cvejić 2015, 11).” My understanding of this argument is that the bodies and/or movement are not only present in the historical discourse of dance techniques, but that the notion of body and movement can also be applied to objects, their bodies and movement. Cvejić presents several choreographic works that distinguish themselves from the traditional notion of movement craftsmanship in composing an image of a dancing body “intentionally regulated by rhythmic, gestural, or other kinds of patterns (Cvejić 2015, 9).” Rather than the technical composition of continuous bodily movement, these works intend to expand to include specific expressions that arise during their making in response to the problem they pose and also entail elements from different art disciplines. Xavier Le Roy’s *Self Unfinished* is presented as an example that challenges the kinetic spectacle through the presentation of “stillnesses, repetitions, reiterations, humorous images, and unnamable forms (Cvejić 2015, 20).” Cvejić presents performance theorist André Lepecki’s argument:

Lepecki (2006) has convincingly argued that “recent choreographic strategies” in European dance betray the modernist conception of dance as “an uninterrupted flow of movement” by inserting long lapses of stillness or slowing movement down, thus undermining the “kinetic spectacle of the body.” (Cvejić 2015, 20)

Based on choreography's generic definition: "the organization of movement in time and space," many choreographers and dance scholars advocate the emancipation of choreography from the dancer's body in mobility. William Forsythe expands the notion of body and movement to objects, materials and things and defines choreography as "the organization of things in space and time." Xavier Le Roy claims it is "artificially staged action(s) and/or situation(s)." Johnathan Burrows maintains that "choreography is about making a choice, including the choice to make no choice." (Cvejić 2015, 8) Despite the current discourses on choreography's heterogeneous definitions, Cvejić points out the difficulty to broaden the meaning and context of choreography due to the historical entanglement between choreography and staged dance.

The struggle to expand the meaning of choreography is still linked to the critical analysis of the institutional mechanisms of theater, exemplified in the critique of theatrical representation with respect to spectatorship.  
(Cvejić 2015, 9)

The MoMA's website uses the term *expanded choreography* to define the intersections between dance and the visual arts. From the context of staged dance, the terms *new choreography* and *choreographic performance* are used to define the choreographic works that are imported into the context of visual arts as performances in exhibitions (Ploebst according to Cvejić 2015, 7). All these terms indicate choreography's heterogeneous characteristics to entail diverse artistic questions on body, movement, time, space and spectatorship. In *The Choreographic* (2014), Jenn Joy defines the choreographic as a rethinking of relationship to movement, stillness, perception, space, expression and composition:

Trespassing into the discourses and disciplines of visual-sculptural-audial-philosophic practice, the choreographic works against linguistic signification and virtuosic representation; it is about contact that touches even across distances. The choreographic is a metonymic condition that moves between corporeal and cerebral conjecture to tell the stories of these many encounters between dance, sculpture, light, space, and

perception through a series of stutters, steps, trembles, and spasms. (Joy 2014, 1)

My artistic practice is nourished by an inquiry into the choreographic. My choreographic thinking has expanded from my bodily movement composition as a way to translate my embodied experience to an arrangement of different material bodies and affects in the space. Thinking of my body as a material body, a sculptural material, I explore how it can be composed in the space with other material bodies to create sculptural expressions. Stretching the duration to approach an object's sense of time, I adjust my body in different still poses, perceiving subtle movement in precarious stillness that could possibly collapse in my next breath. The subtle perception of stillness poses a contrast to an unpredictable momentum of collapse. Recognizing the vulnerability in a precarious situation with objects inspires me to develop a playful mindset and movement strategies as my survival tactics to work with the indeterminate.

The choreographic strategies I gradually develop with different material bodies are score-based and open to live situations. The relationship with an audience is examined and designed to challenge the theatrical apparatus regarding the spectatorship. To expand the concept of a stage and decentralize the stage focus, I intentionally turn different corners of a theatre space into a stage by bringing my actions or mobilizing an audience there. I am also interested in exploring different spatial politics and examining how a chosen space or a given context could affect my actions, decision-making, instant compositions and my relationship with the temporary community of an audience.

Seeing choreography as a practice of listening to materials, space, collaborators and audience, I am interested in conflicts, confusion and risk of not knowing, working with the question of how different aesthetics or artistic choices co-exist and negotiate with one another in a shared space. Transdisciplinary and transcultural dialogues inspire me to expand my choreographic practice in embracing diverse expressions. Instead of defining a certain movement style in my practice, I am more interested in how to create a space to negotiate with different aesthetics and to stay attentive to the group dynamics.

## 2.2. Collapsing bodies

Performance art is vulnerable to charges of valuelessness and emptiness.

Performance indicates the possibility of revaluing that emptiness; this potential revaluation gives performance art its distinctive oppositional edge. (Phelan 1993, 148)

Peggy Phelan suggests that performance art has the capacity to revalue this emptiness that might arise from performance itself as an immaterial and untraceable experience for a limited number of people in a particular time and place, in the chapter “The Ontology of Performance” of *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993). It resonates with my reflections on my life, on my values and on the art in which I invest my time and energy in relation to the immaterial experience.

I lead a precarious life as a performance artist, living in marginal conditions. I often suffer from economic instability and a feeling of insecurity. Art sustains my life. It allows me to search for individual ways of expression and communication. Art as a career, on the other hand, consumes my life. The characteristics of art as a career—project-based, network-based and funding-dependent—create an immense sense of insecurity. As an artist, I am constantly applying for open calls and grants with a minimal chance of acceptance. I am often confronted with the unknown. With my unstable and meager income, I can only afford to live in small temporary places while pursuing my art studies and career, moving from Taipei to Paris to Helsinki. I gradually develop a strong endurance to live in marginal conditions in order to work in a precarious art environment and to be constantly mobile.

I reflect on how to live and work with precarity in life and performance art, and how to revalue intangible experience and share alternative embodied knowledge. I have been a traveler to many different places and a resident of many temporary homes. With the habit of traveling light, what I usually take with me from my travels and stays are the experiences and the memories. I seldom keep material things as a souvenir. Choosing to work with performance, I value temporary subjective experiences over permanent objects.

The choreographic thinking of collapsing bodies is derived from the anxiety of living in vulnerable conditions and the practice of living in an anti-consumerist and minimalist way. It is a process of reorienting the gaze towards marginal, vulnerable, yet playful bodies. It is an invitation to a rethinking of the relationship to space, bodies, voices, identities and values.

Thinking through collapsing bodies suggests decentralizing the focus from the human body to objects and other material bodies. Different objects produce irregular rhythms and impersonal affects in contrast to the continuous flow of dance movement. I find both humor and intensity in the collapse because it seems to be a faulty glitch, an embarrassing fall or a valueless mess, but it creates a multidirectional momentum for hybrid bodies to emerge. It is a process of listening to each other and allowing different agencies and aesthetics to negotiate and coexist.

Collapsing bodies set the existing structure in motion. They provoke reactions and create liminal spaces for new growth. When bodies collapse together, they become distorted, strange and absurd. This strange distortion limits my mobility and gives my body pleasure. The pleasure also comes from relaxing on a delicate balance between a subtle perception of risk and a playful trust in collapse. When bodies collapse together and experience a temporary emptiness, a friendship seems to be built through play and with care in order to revalue this seemingly worthless mess.

### 2.3. Collapsing with chairs: *Still Changing*

In my experience of living in Taipei, a fast-paced modern society that demands efficiency, my body is usually made to live and work in cubicles and screens. Renting an apartment in Taipei costs a fortune. Earning little money as an art worker, I shared a small room with three people for two years after moving out of the university dormitory. I had a desk, a chair and a closet, and I slept on the top of a bunk bed. There was only a narrow space for one person to move between the bunk bed and the desk. Moving from one place to another, I usually shared a room to minimize rental costs. In the spring of 2021, for the first time of my life, I had my own bedroom in a shared apartment. It was a 13-square-meter bedroom. My body adapted to the limited living

space in order to survive as an artist in Taipei. In my embodied practice, I hope to move my body and transform concrete frames into a slowly and subtly changing landscape. A human body as the smallest unit of architecture becomes part of the spatial landscape, continuously sculpting space and being sculpted by space.

I created my performance project *Still Changing* during the 3-week residency program *Unboxing: Live Art Arena*. The performance took place at Umay Theatre, Taipei from 2-4 April 2021. I performed four times in one week, and each performance lasted 90 minutes. With this project, I intended to blur the division between stage and auditorium in a theatre by subverting the functionality of the chairs and the role of the audience. Approximately 80 of the theatre's chairs were repositioned, redistributed to the audience, and transformed into precarious structures that could collapse at any time. By staging a continual process of constructing and deconstructing a sculpture made by mass-produced chairs in which I am also physically embedded, this performance responded to my lived experience in Taipei.

### 2.3.1. Stillness and movement

My body stays inside a chaotic pile of chairs. I rest on uneven and cold metal frames, receiving weight from the chairs on top of me. My movement is restricted. I navigate in the pile carefully, pulling and pushing the chairs around me. I imagine myself under the rubble of a crash site or floating in space inside a wrecked rocket. I build a shelter with the chairs around me to protect my head from an unpredictable avalanche of chairs from above. As I move, a chain of movement occurs. I hear the resounding clatter of a few chairs rolling down from the pile. To me, the chaotic pile of chairs seems to be breathing and moving. The lower part of the structure suddenly collapses. I relax my body to go along with the collapse. My body lands in a distorted position. My flesh is squeezed and my skin is rubbed red. My hair becomes disheveled. My knee pads are slightly out of place. Some bruises appear. My clothes are stretched by some chair legs. My body remains still as part of the concrete structure.

Embedding myself in a large pile of chairs reorients my perception of stillness in movement and movement in stillness. My body creates long pauses in stillness and



slows down movement. The chairs create irregular rhythms of movement and stillness through imbalance, fall and collapse. An entangled dynamic between different material bodies disrupts a flow of fluid movement. Stillness is movement; movement lies in stillness. The slightest movement of breathing and collapsing can be perceived when it is almost silent and still.

I perceive time and rhythms with objects and practice movement in relation to environments and nonhuman agency. My choreographic strategy corresponds significantly to the nonhuman capacity to act, react, express and affect. How does the physical structure of the chair suggest movements, poses and relationships? What movement and affect can a big scale of chairs produce? Composing with the inherent dynamics of chairs challenges the traditional notion of the choreographed. The well-choreographed seems to imply having complete control over the outcome of movement and expression. Composing with chairs expands my choreographic thinking in a way that their expressions influence my behavior. It further transforms the understanding of my body and challenges my sense of self. I am not in complete control of the whole image of this precarious sculpture. The expressions that emerge from this choreographic practice contest the centralized notion of what a moving body is and what makes a choreography.



*Still Changing*, 4 April 2021, Umay Theatre, Taipei. Photo by Lin Yu-Quan

### 2.3.2. Score and chance

The score for *Still Changing* was developed in close collaboration with the theatre's auditorium chairs and was designed to incorporate the audience's actions and reactions. The auditorium chairs were of the mass-produced type, stackable and light enough to be portable. They were transformed into a dynamic process in which living bodies were made to perform in a shared space.

#### **Score 1: Exchanging chairs and gazes**

I push five stacking chair carts to the designated stage; the stage area is surrounded by the 3-sided auditorium. People enter the theatre from the backstage and circulate inside. I take a chair from one of the carts and sit in the middle of the stage. I shift my gaze from one stack of chairs to another, calming my breath. Then I gaze at one audience member with the intention of observing them, thinking about how we sit differently, where we sit, how far we are from each other. I stand up and walk toward the person, maintaining the eye contact. I reach my hand out with the palm facing upwards. That person puts the hand on mine and accepts to be led to the chair where I was sitting. I take another chair and position it at the spot where they were sitting. We sit and look at each other for a while. I shift my gaze to another audience member and continue the same invitation.

#### **Score 2: Building a playground**

I start connecting chairs by inserting one chair leg into the side bar of another chair and build strange and unbalanced structures with chairs. I imagine building different structures in a playground, for instance, by interlocking four chairs facing in opposite directions and connecting six chairs in a circle. I invite some audience to sit on an unbalanced structure while I move over or under them. I also pass some chairs to the audience, either to sit on or to stack.

#### **Score 3: Becoming a chair**

I crawl over or under scattered and interlocked chairs and stay still with them, as if becoming a chair or a chair sitting on me. Occasionally I sit up in some oddly-positioned chair and look at the audience. I drag, push or roll a chain of interlocked

chairs into a precarious and kinetic sculpture. With my body embedded in it, I distribute my weight and relax into it. Gradually returning to a normal sitting position, I move to another chain of chairs and repeat the same process of transformation into a chair.

#### **Score 4: Piling up together**

I invite the audience to pile the chairs. While some audience members are in action, I push out more carts of the stacking chairs. Together we pile up a huge and precarious mountain of chairs. I climb and sink into this mountain, crawling, falling, resting and shaking the structure from within. As the mountain continues to collapse, does the audience keep piling up the chairs?

The performance is still very much based on live situations with the audience's actions and reactions, even with the scores in mind. Using the chair as a concrete and abstract medium, I propose a malleable space of interaction with the audience. It could be clear, direct, and yet open to interpretation. The performance space becomes a playground for sitting, sculpting and negotiating without words. The process could be chaotic and exploratory in nature. New elements emerge for the score throughout the performance.

Vulnerability within an unpredictable and unstable process is what the artist's body encounters in the performance situation. I navigate in a precarious pile of chairs, remaining highly attentive to the chaotic structures around me that could collapse at any moment. I feel the risk of injury in this precarious structure, but I also feel the safety and trust that the chairs are stable enough for me to climb and embed myself. I feel pleasure as my body becomes strangely shaped by the chairs. I remain highly aware of the structure, shaking it loose as I move through it. In close contact with the chairs, I trust them by giving them my weight and receiving their weight on me. "Give me your weight so I can feel you." I remember saying this to my partner once during a body training that involved physical contact.

Varied audiences and unpredictable encounters influence the live sculpture significantly. The dynamics change due to different audiences. In one performance, the audience actively participated, resulting in the vibrant construction of a huge pile of chairs with strong collective energy. In another, the audience stayed away from the

action and refused the invitation. It was interesting to see how the audience influenced each other's behavior. Some people initially accepted the invitation to sit on the chairs with me. However, as soon as one member of the audience rejected the invitation, other people began to follow that person and withdraw from the action. I ended up piling the chairs alone. The audience witnessed the process without taking action. Experiencing this collective reaction, I inevitably felt vulnerable, frustrated, and embarrassed. While I cried after the performance and thought it was unsuccessful, people came up to me and told me that it was a powerful performance for them to witness the physical negotiation and experience different dynamics. I was encouraged to turn rejection to my advantage and momentum for the next action. I had already prepared myself for different reactions from people, but when I was confronted with the rejection, I still felt a little frustrated and nervous. Nevertheless, the experience and the memory were then stored in my embodied archive, which equipped me with more confidence when encountering live situations. I am gradually building a strong mentality to live and improvise with the unpredictable and the precarious. Performance is also a process of decision making; once a decision is made, insisting on the choice could lead to an unexpected outcome.



*Still Changing*, 4 April 2021, Umay Theatre, Taipei. Photo by Lin Yu-Quan

### 2.3.3. Duration

I continued the performance project in collaboration with Jarkko Partanen, choreographer and curator, in the exhibition *Tracing Work* at Kuva/Tila Gallery, at the Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki, from 11 March to 3 April 2022. *Still Changing: Landscape* continued to explore the sculptural approach to the artist's body in a gallery setting with 138 chairs, consisting of three types of chairs retired from the institution. The duration of the performance was extended from 1.5 hours to 3 hours. I performed four times during the month of the exhibition. Between performances, the chairs were exhibited as an installation in dialogue with the space and other artworks.

Thinking about my body in relation to the chairs and other artworks in the exhibition, I decided to slow down the sculpting process, create longer pauses, and allow myself to focus more on my physical relationship with the chairs. Given the large number of chairs in the space, I began each performance with the existing constellation of chairs in the space. How the chairs were positioned in the space after each performance would most likely become the beginning of the next performance. Between performances, visitors to the exhibition were invited to move and sculpt the chairs.

As suggested by the title of the exhibition, the traces of my work could be experienced both during the time of a three-hour event and during the time of a month-long exhibition. I developed an extensive score over the course of a month. Four performances could be seen as a continuation of four different episodes. This choreographic strategy also corresponded to the practical perspective of the physical work of moving and sculpting this large number of chairs in the space. The traces of one performance would create the conditions for the next. I collected and accumulated the strategies for moving and sculpting the chairs from each performance situation, which involved instant composition and interaction with the audience. The strategies I developed and the situations I encountered in each performance became the components of the extensive score. They were written down on post-it notes. Before each performance, I mapped out a selection of post-it notes from the previous situations to create the preliminary score for the day. Compared to the repetition of the same score from a beginning to an end in the theatrical context of an event, the exhibition time and

its spectatorship encouraged me to stretch the duration of stillness even more to approach the imagined sense of time of an object.



*Still Changing: Landscape*, 27 March 2022, Kuva/Tila Gallery, Helsinki. Photo by Ida Enegren



*Still Changing: Landscape*, 27 March 2022, Kuva/Tila Gallery, Helsinki. Photo by Ida Enegren

## 2.4. Collapsing with tables: *Relaxing on a Shaky Ground*

The performance project *Relaxing on a Shaky Ground* is derived from my reflections on home, particularly my embodied memory of living in the house where I grew up and the constant transformation of the house that I often visit in my dreams.

As a diptych with *Still Changing: Landscape*, a performance installation with 138 unused or retired chairs from the University of the Arts Helsinki as part of the exhibition *Tracing Work* at Kuva/Tila Gallery, *Relaxing on a Shaky Ground* is a performance installation with 15 folding tables used in the everyday life at the University of the Arts Helsinki. As the artistic component of my master's thesis, it was conceived and realized as a nine-day exhibition which hosted video installations and five live performances at the White Studio of the Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki, from 28 March to 5 April 2023.

*Relaxing on a Shaky Ground* focuses on transdisciplinary collaboration and performance, whereas *Still Changing* is a solo performance in collaboration with the audience. How could one single material become the intersection of kinesthetic, sonic and spatial practices? I collaborated with improvising drummer Teemu Mustonen and sound artist Jouni Ilari Tapio to experiment with the tables' architectural, sonic and movement possibilities. I proposed to explore the spatial relationship with the tables by moving with them and building temporary sculptures with them. Teemu and Jouni were invited to investigate their audio-oriented approaches to the tables.

We designed the environment to interact with the existing spatial context. I was responsible for positioning and hanging six tables from the trusses to create an airborne constellation in dialogue with the nine tables on the floor. Jouni designed a contact microphone system attached to four tables and two hanging microphones. The contact microphone system was developed based on Jouni's research on DIY electronic instruments. Four loudspeakers were positioned near four pillars in the studio. While the spatial constellation of the tables was being built, the sonic environment was also being designed and tested.



Working with the spatial context, I found it intriguing to transform its functionality by investigating its spatial performativity. The White Studio located in the Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki, is a multifunctional space that serves as a white cube and a conference room. It consists of a wooden floor, four walls of rectangular acoustic panels and four pillars. The folding tables that we chose to work with were primarily for conference purposes. Performing with the conference tables in a conference room, I was interested in how to transform their instrumentality and direct the gaze and experience towards their vibrancy and performativity.

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Home is a strange place for me. Here when I say home, I mean my family and my childhood house. It is physically far away from me. It lies in my memory with a mixed taste of sweetness and bitterness. In my teenage years, my sister and I used office desks to study at home. My father's company was throwing away some office furniture, and my father took some of it and put it in our house. We had two office desks with metal drawers underneath and a partition between them, as if we were working in an office cubicle. I remember the humid and dense air when I studied at the desk in a room with no window open to the street. I always had to turn on a lamp to study. There was no sunlight in the room.

It is a house where I lived with my family for almost 18 years before I moved away, and it has been almost another 18 years since I lived away from that house, moving from one temporary place to another. I am constantly making new homes, but I also frequently return to my childhood home in my dreams. In my dreams, the house breathes and shows emotions. The walls of the kitchen expand when people are surprised by the visit of a special guest. The dusty storage room behind the kitchen turns into a soccer field and keeps expanding itself when I change my perspective. A giant tree grows to cover the road in front of the house. A clear river from the woods appears by the house.

When I talk to some Finnish artists about home, the image of home is often associated with coziness and warmth. When it comes to a table at home, it is often a wooden one in the cottage. A conference table has nothing to do with home. When I use conference tables as primary objects in a white cube, people hardly feel that they are welcome home. It is probably the strangeness which comes from the dissociation between home and conference tables that keeps me interested in hosting people in a “strange” home.

### 2.4.1. Intersection of practices

I usually like to approach materials and space through touch, feeling the texture, shape and weight. The folding table consists of a rectangular wooden board and two folding metal legs. It is a heavy object. The width of the wooden tabletop is almost my height. My body can easily disappear from view behind it. Its gray and glossy surface has the texture of paper, which might give an illusion of lightness. During the creative process, I invited Teemu and Jouni to experience the tables with me. I appreciated their curiosity about the details of things through touch. I also enjoyed watching them explore what kind of sound the table made, how the sound traveled through the table, how the table reflected the sound, how soft the sound of the table could be, how the table created sound through friction with physical touch, the wooden floor and the pillar.

I invited them to build structures with the tables by thinking of them as building blocks. The arrangement of the folding tables resembled an exercise in origami, the art of paper folding, because of their paper-like texture. I also liked to think that we were constantly making paper sculptures by repositioning them and rearranging them. We started one rehearsal by setting all nine tables on the same level in their normal positions. We intuitively crawled underneath them. Not knowing what to do next, we giggled. After we stayed with the emptiness and boredom for a while, Jouni started lifting one table with all his limbs. We joked about using the tables as a gym equipment. We somehow started to create some wavy structures by lifting some tables at different times. Then we folded some table legs and stacked a table on top of another to create a high slide. By proposing new ideas and helping each other, we went through a collective process of building and deconstructing sculptures.

In addition to making relatively stable sculptures, I suggested making some precarious structures by interlocking the tables or piling them at irregular angles. With the intention of simulating seismic activity, we gently shook the precarious structure. We were fascinated by the how all the tables were connected to each other in a delicate balance. We also observed how the vibration traveled through the connection, creating a chain of movement and possibly causing a partial collapse. As we continued to explore different ways of building a temporary and unstable structure, we wanted to make it move and travel in space. Our bodies then played an important role in binding this fragile and changing sculpture together. We supported each other to react to any collapse that might occur during the rotation.

The choreographic strategy I developed with the tables emphasized the support and care when moving with heavy objects that could cause injury. The precarious structure of the tables definitely requires a collaborative practice and support. We decided not to build a precise sculpture with specific steps but to leave the outcome open to the unexpected, to meander along the line between the known and the unknown. How we could support each other in the process of different dynamics and circumstances became essential.

The question of technical virtuosity also arose during the creative process. We did not seek to master the technique of manipulating multiple tables and performing extraordinary movements with them; instead, we listened to what the tables suggested and observed how they guided our movements both spatially and sonically. The sculptures we created were never the finished art objects to be exhibited in the space; they existed temporarily and morphed into different forms.

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Giving the tables a voice and amplifying their sounds was an entrance to a nonhuman dimension. When a table squeaks in a theatre piece, it usually has to be fixed to reduce the noise. In this performance, however, the different voices of the tables composed the soundscape. Some audience members described the experience as a trance into an obscure dimension or an apocalyptic world. In *The Artificial Nature Series* (2016),

Mette Ingvarsten's investigation in a sensory problem posed by material agency resonates with my process:

How can theater propose a space for listening to things that don't speak in a human language? What is the relationship between the animate and the inanimate world? What does it mean to make a choreography for materials, where human movement is no longer the center of attention?  
(Ingvarsten 2016, 4)

Thinking of listening to materials as a method of co-presence, our human bodies channeled the information from the table into action and stillness. Sculpting and moving the tables in the space, we listened to the different sounds the tables produced. They creaked, clattered, clanked and clicked. They rattled. They made gentle friction noises resembling waves. They made long, loud, low-frequency sounds like whales. We composed a soundscape by deciding when to make room for other elements, when to stay in silence, when to pay attention to tiny sounds, and when to turn up the volume. We composed unintentional movements and random sounds into a collective soundscape. In addition to the controlled rhythmic playing, so many unintended sounds were created. These random and uncontrolled sounds became the key elements in our instant collective composition. The dynamics of the soundscape could vary from silence, scattered sounds to rhythmic playing, traveling in the spectrum between soft and impactful qualities.

We contributed to the soundscape with our individual knowledge and practice of sound and movement. Jouni shared with me his thinking behind his research on DIY electronic instruments. He always wanted to open up the operating system to the body and extend the interface to the environment. Human and nonhuman bodies played as surprising elements to the instrument. He built the sonic environment of the performance, being aware of how sound traveled and circulated in space. Teemu created melodies with the table primarily through percussive sounds rather than using specific pitches. He alternated his playing between sustained notes and staccato rhythms by interpreting my movements into a percussive score. I focused mainly on building sculptures and exploring my physical relationship with the table. I was aware of how I coordinated my

torso and limbs in order to distribute my weight onto the irregularly positioned tables, to immerse my body in them, or to move a table with different parts of my body to explore movement variations. My movement with the table was the primary method for me to explore what sound I could make with the table. I changed the quality and speed of my movements by paying attention to the sounds Teemu and Jouni made. The sound they made influenced my decision of when to build a sculpture, when to trigger a collapse, when to make a big movement like sliding down a tilted table, when to drag the table across the floor to make its leg rattle.

The choreography of collapsing bodies incorporated the dramaturgy of the improvised soundscape. The performance began with a delicate and functional gesture of placing all the tables side by side, almost in silence. Almost no sound was produced from the tables in the beginning so as to introduce and accentuate the first amplified table sounds simulating tectonic movement. We focused on the deep and impactful sound produced by the wooden boards when they were made to collide with each other. The sound of metal legs was introduced when the initial even platform was gradually disassembled. We entered a situation where we explored our individual sound and movement relationship to the tables and space. In this situation with three independent scores, we composed together with scattered sounds, subtle rhythmic playing and silence. We also played with the timing of adding the sounds that we discovered during the creative process. I dragged the table across the wooden floor, making its leg vibrate and rattle. Jouni created a long, loud and deep sound like a whale by rubbing the wooden board against the pillar. From the individual actions to the collective manipulation, we connected all the tables together and started spinning this huge and unstable sculpture. The loud and distorted soundscape came mainly from partial collapses and friction with the floor. After the rotation came to a silent end, we loosened the tables' leg caps to produce tiny and humorous noises contrasting the powerful sound that we had just created. Teemu entered this improvised sculpture, which we called a cubist piano, and began to play it with his improvising drumming techniques. Slowly, we dismantled the cubist piano and folded all the tables. As if we were putting these tables to sleep, we made some gentle sounds of waves by slowly sliding them across the floor. Some whales might come swimming in this imaginary ocean if we found the specific tables that made the whale sound with their metal legs.

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While working with the unstable structures of the tables, it was important for me to stay aware of the changing dynamic between the three of us as human performers. Shifting the focus from the human-object relationship to the interpersonal relationship, I attended to the specificity of our individual bodies, experiences, and needs in parallel to our engagement with the tables.

We all come from different improvisational contexts. I am familiar with my body as the instrument of my performance work, and my basic understanding of the physical presence in movement improvisation is full body awareness. As a sound designer, Jouni sees the body as an electromagnetic author and mediator. He works with both the body and the electronic components, considering both to be fragile and sensitive to change. He instantly composes electrical signals that often emerge as surprising elements to him. As an improvising musician, Teemu improvises primarily with his drumming instruments in music jams. He is highly skilled at improvising with other musical instruments, and he also uses found objects to improvise within an experimental music context.

Inviting them to perform with their bodies in relation to the object and the space, I should be attentive to their needs as they stepped out of their comfort zone of performing. Especially in the context of movement improvisation, we needed to build trust in ourselves and support each other in order to enjoy moments of not knowing, discovering and reacting. I did not intend to train them to have similar movement capacity in moving with the object, but we discussed our co-presence and our need to remain aware of how we moved and positioned our bodies in the space. I learned to guide them more by pointing out what movements they discovered during the practice and asking them how much of the performance should be structured in order to make them feel safe while embracing the risk of not knowing in the improvisation. We agreed to remain mindful and aware of our own body movement even during a pause or a moment of silence. Besides learning to be sure of our individual choices, we kept the

intention of supporting and accompanying each other by attentively listening and responding to each other's suggestions or needs.



Yun-Chen dragging a table, making it rattle. *Relaxing on a Shaky Ground*, 28 March 2023, White Studio, Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki. Photo by Antti Ahonen



Jouni operating his mixer on a tilted table. *Relaxing on a Shaky Ground*, 28 March 2023, White Studio, Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki. Photo by Antti Ahonen



Teemu playing the cubist piano. *Relaxing on a Shaky Ground*, 28 March 2023, White Studio, Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki. Photo by Antti Ahonen

#### 2.4.2. Evocation of dreams and memories

Through the lens of physical materials, I went on a journey from my childhood memories, my home, my homeland and my dreams. Without directly telling a story, entering the world of the materials creates a distant path from my own thinking and verbal expression. Finding artistic voices through materials brings to mind some surprising associations that could be intimate to me. When a particular table's metal leg could simulate a whale's deep voice, it reminded me of my first dream as a baby. I wrote it down in my dream journal:

The earliest dream I can remember is the one I had as a baby. In the dream, I was floating in the ocean at night. A huge sperm whale was swimming by my side. I did not have a clear vision of it, but I could feel its gigantic presence. Could it be my physical memory of being in my mother's womb before birth? (Dream entry, date unknown)



I drew inspiration from my dreams to conceptualize this project and to facilitate the collective action. I was also curious about how to materialize my dreams as my personal material in the performance installation, in addition to the tables as physical materials in the space. I narrated my dream journals in an audio recording and transferred it to four mp3 players with headphones. These four mp3 players were circulated among the audience during the performance. The audience could have an option of watching a live performance while listening to my dream journal recordings. The narration of my dreams was looped, not strictly connected to the timing of happenings in the space. It presented the possibility of giving the audience an intimate layer of reading of our live actions.

My dream narrations were dissociated from our collective actions. Our live actions focused on the performativity of the tables and did not incorporate any text or vocal narration of the dreams. The most essential connection I made between our actions with tables and my dreams was based on my observation of space or architecture as often unstable and transformative in my dreams. As I turn my head and change my perspective in my dream, the architecture often changes its structure and I end up in a different space. Certain power dynamics exist in my consciousness. When I am deep in my dream and if I am aware of myself being in a dream, I might be able to control and stabilize the dream space for a few seconds. But very soon the dream takes back control and keeps changing the structure. I cannot make anything stay. My dreams were present in our intention to constantly transform a concrete but precarious structure in the space. This abstraction, without verbal or textual elements woven into the dramaturgical structure, may not convey the content of my dream to the audience, but it may allow multiple associations to emerge.

The tables produced their contents and expressions, which were juxtaposed with my intentions and imaginations. I was often surprised by the various associations that the tables' different formations and sounds could evoke in us, such as a fridge, a cubist piano, a whale, a playground slide, a factory, waves, earthquakes, an iceberg, a cottage, etc. The actions with tables also affected my dreaming. I had this dream while developing the movement research:

I am standing in front of a window. I say to the person next to me, “Hey, I know I am in my dream. I want to touch this window to see whether it feels concrete or soft.” I touch the window. It feels as concrete as it does in real life. Then I push the window open and realize that I am actually on a very high floor of a skyscraper. “I want to jump. It is only a dream. It won’t hurt.” But I am still afraid of heights. I take a deep breath and look down again. The perspective deceives me and the tall building turns out to be just a playground slide, like a folding conference table tilted with one leg folded up. (Dream entry 08.03.2023)

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When we simulated tectonic movement with the tables, we made connections to the geopolitics of my homeland, Taiwan, which sits at the convergence zone of the Eurasian Plate, Philippine Sea Plate and Indo-Australian Plate.

Earthquake occurrence is very frequent in Taiwan due to the convergence of the Eurasian Plate and the Philippine Sea Plate. According to the Central Weather Bureau of Taiwan, approximately 100 earthquakes occur per day and averagely 2.8 earthquakes over magnitude 6 every year. Living with frequent seismic activities, I learn to stay quite relaxed about the ground’s unpredictable shaking. The primary seismic waves travel through the ground in the horizontal direction. They are usually subtle. I become attentive to the earth’s movements. When the secondary seismic waves come, the ground moves up and down and from side to side. Sudden strong movement can hit the building harshly. I become more alert to how the earth moves. The seismic intensity might gradually decline but immediately surge. Moved by unpredictable tectonic forces from the earth, my body learns to stay relaxed to perceive the earth movement while remaining alert to any possibly destructive power. A large scale of unpredictable power moves my body. Physical relaxation gives me more flexibility to react fast.

As a young child, I was taught to hide under the table when an earthquake hit. The school held earthquake drills to teach us to find a solid cover as protection. When Teemu and I hid under the tables, it reminded me of this experience. However, instead

of holding onto them for protection, we shifted the tables above us to simulate tectonic plates, compressing and expanding them from organized and flat surfaces to disarranged positions.

Early in the morning of September 21, 1999, I was in a deep sleep. Suddenly I felt someone hugging my body tight. I slowly woke up and saw my mother's body around me. She ran into my room to protect me from a possible collapse. The room was shaking violently. Books were falling off the shelves. Furniture was creaking. Windows were rattling. Car alarms went off in the streets. The ground was rumbling. It was the night when a devastating earthquake of magnitude 7.3 struck Taiwan and caused severe casualties and damage. International rescue teams came to Taiwan to help search for survivors in the rubble. Two people were miraculously found alive after six days under a collapsed building. They survived by eating and drinking from a fridge to which they happened to stay close when the building fell down. In one of our rehearsals, Teemu built four tables into a fridge-like structure. Surprised by what he had built, I had an instinct that I wanted to work with this structure. I surrounded myself with four tables standing on their tabletops. Inside this fridge-like structure, I pushed the four tables slightly outward and then released the tension. I climbed on them and relaxed on a fragile balance.

The tables being ordinary objects surprisingly stimulated so many different associations and memories from me. As I attempted to befriend with them, I felt they also approached me with their affects. Interacting with tables was not a literary path to translate my embodied experience but an entangled field to interweave fragmented memories.



*Relaxing on a Shaky Ground*, 28 March 2023, White Studio, Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki.  
Photo by Antti Ahonen



*Relaxing on a Shaky Ground*, 28 March 2023, White Studio, Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki.  
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*Relaxing on a Shaky Ground*, 28 March 2023, White Studio, Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki.  
Photo by Antti Ahonen

### 3. PERFORMATIVITY OF THE OBJECTS

In this chapter, I will focus on the performativity of the objects in choreographing collapsing bodies, primarily through my reflections on the project *Relaxing on a Shaky Ground*. I will first explore the notion of *intermateriality*, a term proposed by Daniela Hahn in *Things that Dance* (2019), to reflect on chance encounters and intermaterial dialogues in the process of materializing a concept in a physical space. Recognizing that the human intention is not the definitive factor in the outcome, I will analyze the interactive interference of different material bodies and affects through the lens of *assemblage*. Presenting Jane Bennett's argument and analysis of *thing-power* in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), I will reflect on my practice of working with nonhuman expression, chance and surprise.

#### 3.1. Intermateriality and translation

The intermaterial dialogue is an approach to embodying the relationship between the materials, things and objects of the immediate environment and the material of the artist, such as experiences, memories, methods and practices. I also understand an intermaterial dialogue as an approach to telling a story with material agencies, rather than looking primarily for semantic meanings, comprehensive signs and symbols. Daniela Hahn, in *Things that Dance* (2019), suggests the term *intermateriality* from Paula Kramer's site-specific practice based on expanding one's sensory perception and engagement with a distinctive context or location.

Our bodies are enmeshed with the environment, they are and become entangled with its materials - rocks, water, walls, trees, soil, noise, grass, rain, wind and so on - but at the same time they remain separate from it, for example through being of a different material, a different temperature and a different speed. Thus, creating 'intermaterial' relationships does not imply the dissolution of all difference; rather, it means establishing interactive correspondences with differentiation. (Hahn 2019, 40)

The performance has the capacity to embrace the plurality of human and nonhuman presence, expressions and forces in the shared space. In my experience, the materialization of a concept into a performance is a process of correspondences between tangible materials, space, bodies and movement as material. Attending to specific properties and movement qualities of materials creates the conditions for my movement research. Allowing them to influence my movement and choices corresponds to my embodied experience of the living environment.

During the creative process of *Still Changing*, I was interested in exploring how my body was trained to adapt to a limited living space. How would movement material for the performance emerge from the theatre space where my body was positioned? Adopting a somatic approach, I touched, felt and climbed the concrete structure of the theatre. I rested on the concrete pipes on the wall, observed my surroundings, measured the distance and felt the temperature of the concrete materials. Later, it was suggested to me that I imagine the audience in relation to my movement research. Stackable auditorium chairs in the theatre came into play. I climbed the chairs in their normal positions and then in a chaotic pile.

The performance became a situation of multiple forces and affects, manifesting the intermaterial relationship between the tangible objects, the physical space and the immaterial concept elicited through memories and experience. When the audience's body, movement and decisions also contributed to the precarious situation as an unpredictable living material, there was a strong necessity to stay highly aware of my surroundings and to react to transient elements while maintaining my material and scores. Kramer's approach suggests "relaxing one's concepts and tuning into one's capacities of sensory awareness and receptivity as well as one's sense of having and being a material form (Kramer according to Hahn 2019, 40)." Allowing a dialogue between materials from the body and from space to occur provides me with alternative associations with my concept.

The concept for *Relaxing on a Shaky Ground* arose from my desire to transform my childhood home and my dreams, which often altered the rigid architecture of the house and the physical structures of real life into a series of ephemeral, sensual and

transformative scenes. With the idea of hosting an audience in a strange but transformative home, I planned to hang six to eight walls on the trusses. The hanging walls could be rotated slightly and would serve as a projection surface capturing fragmented images as they moved. In order not to exceed the weight limit of the trusses, plastic films or foam boards were initially considered to be the materials for constructing the walls. When Jouni was invited to join the project, he expressed his own research interest in creating a floor with wireless microphones attached to the underside. Movements on the floor would be transmitted as electrical signals to his machine for him to manipulate. Since we did not have the resources and time to construct a floor, I suggested using a folding table as a surface for the movement and sound experiment. It was an object that was easily available to us at the academy. I shared this experimental process with my artistic thesis supervisor, Vincent Roumagnac, and he advised me to explore the performativity of the conference table in relation to the institutional space as a continuation of my performance with chairs in *Still Changing*.

I later decided to work with the folding conference table from the Theater Academy not only for its contextual functions, but also for its visual and textural qualities. The folding feature with wood and metal components could suggest a variety of elements for play. I then asked myself whether the tables would serve my purpose of building the floating walls, or whether the tables would become the content of the work. Rather than just serving as materials for the imaginary walls, the tables were presented as they were, but not just as wood and metal materials. I decided to hang six individual tables with their metal legs unfolded. The image of floating walls that I had originally planned was expanded so that the rectangular tables floated as an extension of the pre-existing walls made of rectangular acoustic panels.

How to perform with the conference tables in the White Studio seemed to become the focus of the research. Would a strange and transformative home emerge from the construction and assemblage of the tables and my material, such as embodied experiences, dreams and memories? How can performance encompass multiple layers of thought, affect, and expression? How can nonhuman things also become the content and expression when human expressions are not the primary focus of the work?



The translation of the concept into the physical space is not a linear and literal trajectory, but a porous and entangled juxtaposition. I brought my concept and intention to the working group, but we also relaxed the concept and observed what was there to work with. I contemplated my embodied experiences, memories and dreams with the tables and the space. Instead of delivering my story, my thoughts and my dreams in a more explicit way, I chose a more abstract way of constructing a situation where the performativity of the objects would interfere with my intention and expression.

### 3.2. Assemblages

When the conference tables of the academy's daily use were transported into the performative context of a white cube, their everyday use was playfully subverted and expanded. The context and purpose of the white cube is to exhibit works of art. When an everyday object is placed in an exhibition context, it is viewed and experienced through the lens of art. These heavy and stable tables became transformative and vulnerable *actants*. Jane Bennett, in *Vibrant Matter* (2010) uses Bruno Latour's term *actant*, defined as a source of action that could be human, nonhuman or a combination of both. An actant can also be understood as an *intervener*; both serve as alternative terms to steer away from the subject-object relationship. (Bennett 2010, 52) In other words, the focus is shifted to the heterogeneous field of diverse bodies and forces that can be intimately interrelated and intensely conflictual.

An actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces. A lot happens to the concept of agency once nonhuman things are figured less as social constructions and more as actors, and once humans themselves are assessed not as autonyms but as vital materialities. (Bennett 2010, 72)

Recognizing things as actors and humans as vital materialities dissolves the binary separation between life and matter, movement and stillness, subject and object, and further encourages entangled juxtapositions of human and nonhuman actors. When a thing does not merely fulfill the functions, symbols and meanings that humans typically

assign to it, it disturbs and expands the human knowledge system of this particular thing, material or object. In her 2021 lecture at Vera List Center, Bennett referred to the early-20th-century philosopher Henri Bergson to discuss our common perception of things. How humans normally perceive things is a subtractive process of reducing things to their pragmatic use. Referring to Bergson's theory, Bennett said:

We typically disregard those aspects of things that have no interest for needs. What we do detect is the measure of our possible actions upon them. In other words, normal perception is biased towards instrumentality rather than vibrancy, simplification rather than a subtle reception. (Bennett 2011)

It is through a subtle reception that things can be emancipated from utility and subvert our normal system of perception and knowledge. In my artistic practice, my body begins to form an intimate relationship with objects by perceiving their shapes, colors, sizes and textures in great detail through touch. With curiosity about the details of things, I begin to perceive their vibrancy. Feeling their vibrancy leads me to play with them and respond to them.

When an artificially manufactured object is liberated from its functional purpose, our perception of what the object can do is broadened. A table normally provides a stable structure and surface for the human body to work, write and eat in an effortless and safe position with a chair. A table in an unusual or unstable position creates alternative relationships with the human body. From a pragmatic and stable position to precarious formations, the arrangement of human bodies and tables produces alternative embodied knowledge to expand our understanding and experience of the table's agency and vibrancy. In contrast to their designed purpose of sustaining the human body in an effortless position, the tables demand human activity to be in motion or to be suspended in a fragile balance.

The materiality of a human body can contribute to a time-based sculpture and an ephemeral composition of images. In other words, seeing a human body as a sculptural material places human and nonhuman bodies in the same position when building a

living sculpture. Human actions can also serve as a temporary glue in precarious, changing formations. When human intentions and expressions are not superior to the performativity of things, the performance creates a situation where the entangled dynamics between human and nonhuman agencies become audible and visible.

Bennett compares the thing-power to “the childhood sense of the world as filled with all sorts of animate beings, some human, some not, some organic, some not (Bennett 2010, 71).” I remember that I played with stuffed toys, toy cars, blankets and a variety of objects as a child and often enjoyed seeing them as animate beings. Seeing chairs and tables in my work as my partners, collaborators and co-performers changed my relationship with them. I became curious about their individual characteristics, voices, marks and defects. Some tables rattled because of their relatively loose legs; others made a deep, long sound like whales because their joints created particular frictions. Different densities of the wooden tabletops also produced different qualities of sound. Sometimes recognizing their voices and marks did not necessarily affect the actions, but it strengthened the bond between me and them. I caressed and hugged them. I climbed on them. I broke and fixed them, and I got injured by them.

The table’s capacity to hurt my body manifests its agency and thing-power to stimulate human action and reaction. However, the thing-power exists in its own nature, independent of human perception of the thing’s force and intensity. The thing-power lies in the fact that every thing, material or object has its own capacity to act and react, to affect and to be affected. Bennett points out that “Spinoza’s notion of affect refers broadly to the capacity of any body for activity and responsiveness (Bennett 2010, 19).” This ability to generate and feel force does not necessarily engender subjective emotions (Cole according to Bennett 2010, 20). Once again, this notion of affect attempts to deconstruct the subject-object hierarchy and focus on the affective exchange between different material bodies. A collapsing, vulnerable yet generative body emerges from the power dynamics and negotiations between human and nonhuman affects. In addition to what the human performers can do to initiate the table’s movement, what the table can do and how the table responds to actions is also information for the human performers to perceive and transmit. This affective exchange

contributes to the arrangement of bodies, the score of the performances and also the space for chance happenings.

Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within. (Bennett 2010, 77)

Bennett's description of assemblages as *ad hoc gatherings* relates to my practice in two ways. One is to deal with one single matter in a limited scope, and the other is to be in the present moment to recognize multiple forces and improvise within the specific field. The primary materials in *Relaxing on a Shaky Ground* are the folding conference tables. This single material opens up a realm of movement and expression, raising questions such as: How does it move? How does it speak to us? What structure can it create for us to move in? As we observe the table's properties and components, it gives us a set of elements to perform with. At the first glance, it would seem that it is human manipulation that initiates the movement of the tables, but the tables provide a source of action. By their very shape, size, position and weight, they suggest movements of the human body. The way they collapse and make noise also manipulates human actions.

As different material bodies with thing-power, human and nonhuman matter contribute distinctive speeds, textures, densities and tendencies to the entangled field of affects. The table collapses straight to the floor with all its weight. In contrast, as a human performer, I control my muscle tensions and redistribute my weight in order to reduce the impact of the fall or to follow the momentum of the fall into a new direction of movement. Our different material bodies are engaged in the assemblage with distinctive ways of falling and collapsing. In the collective process of construction and collapse, tables and humans have the power to affect and to be affected. In other words, this affective power is not strictly related to subjective emotions or human intentions. Opposing the consciousness-centered thinking and doing, the understanding of thing-power emancipates human and nonhuman actors from the binary relationship between an active subject and a passive object. With the recognition of diverse actants and

tensions in the assemblage, human intention is only one of the actants but not the definitive factor in the outcome.

Assemblages are not governed by any central head: no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group (Bennett 2010, 77).

Assemblages of bodies and affects correspond to the practice of not knowing and allowing oneself to be surprised. I look for materials; meanwhile is it the material that finds me? In the process of finding and being found, I allow myself to get lost in order to be open to different opportunities, but it is also essential to catch the right moment of encounter and decide what I take and work with in the moment. In the practice of instant composition with Jouni and Teemu in *Relaxing on a Shaky Ground*, we decided to work with the aesthetics of unintended sounds. Instead of a well-composed melody of the table's sounds, we instantly composed sounds from our research and also stayed attentive to unintended sounds from our movement with the tables in a situation of construction or collapse.

Collectively holding onto a precarious structure, collapsing and making noise, we experienced an entangled dynamic between different bodies and affects. Staying curious and paying attention to details, we enjoyed some surprising moments when we just found an interesting structure or a particular sound that the tables could make. We nodded to each other as a way of acknowledging each other's doing and finding, smiling and laughing together. Working with surprises, we did not intend to show how expert we were at manipulating the tables, but the performance situation was an invitation for the audience to experience what we were continuing to build, explore and deconstruct together as a group of friends on a playground. Curiosity and mutual support were essential to our collective playing.

We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, . . . to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, . . . to exchange actions and passions with it

or to join with in composing a more powerful body. (Deleuze and Guattari according to Bennett 2010, 19-20)

Choreographing materials is a process of negotiation between a planned score and the chaotic feedback of the materials that respond to the performers. The performance situation embraces chance and surprises that arise from an assemblage as a living and pulsating alliance of diverse affects. The boundaries between human and nonhuman matter become porous and turn into a field where affective bodies form visual, auditory and sensual assemblages. The visual juxtaposition of a precarious hybrid body emerges from the time-based arrangement of different material bodies. This hybrid body, filled with multidirectional forces, vibrates and responds to its surroundings.

## CONCLUSION: STILL CHANGING

This research on the choreography of collapsing bodies contributes to the making of choreography and performance with the embodied knowledge of the material agency and the human-object relationship. The affective power of things and the arrangement of different material bodies are examined through the aesthetics of a hybrid body composed of multiple affects, irregular rhythms, stillness and collapse.

This writing process has given me the space to unravel my thinking about immateriality and materiality when it comes to embodiment. I access my experiential knowledge from my embodied archive when working with choreography and performance. My body is the physical, tangible and porous space for immaterial archives. My body experiences, feels, perceives, dreams, remembers, forgets and changes. My body as an archive preserves experiential knowledge, sensory information, cognitive memories, dreams, emotions, desires and physical habits shaped by culture, society and living environment. It is in a continuous process of rearranging and becoming. When bodily knowledge is revisited and reenacted, it responds to the present moment in dialogue with the immediate environment.

By revisiting my embodied archive, I understand that my relationship with materials in artistic practices has been nourished by the subtle perception and playful mindset. The making of choreography with materials evolves with an inquiry into spatial contexts and different modes of spectatorship. In terms of my relationship with materials in my life, I find that I live with minimal material possessions that stay with me for a long time. As I stay mobile and live in temporary homes, I often choose to retain immaterial experiences rather than own material objects. However, I perform with a large number of chairs and tables. What is my relationship with the chairs and tables in the performance? My LAPS colleague Maija Linturi once shared her observation with me in a discussion about my written thesis. According to her observation, I feel responsible for the materials, and this shows in my relationship with chairs and tables in my artistic practice. The sense of responsibility for the materials motivates me to research their characteristics, structures and expressions in detail. I do not own the objects of my performance; instead, what I actually accumulate is my embodied knowledge from my

encounter with the chairs and tables of each institution where I develop each performance. This bodily knowledge contributes to my choreographic strategy to perform with objects, time, space and situations.

As my practice is situated in the discourse of choreography and performance, the theoretical dialogue with performance theorist Bojana Cvejić, scholar Jenn Joy and choreographer Mette Ingvarstsen encourages me to investigate the material agency in the making of choreography. Perceiving an object's shapes, colors, weights, textures through touch is often how I build my physical relationship with it and feel its vibrancy to guide my action. Rather than focusing on virtuosic representation and highly skilled manipulation of objects, I explore stillness, precarious formations, collapse, irregular rhythms, images of hybrid bodies, diverse affects and material expressions. I research choreographic methods including score-based improvisation and instant composition to create a performance situation which allows for the affective exchange between different material bodies and provides the space for chance happenings.

Thinking with Daniela Hahn's notion of *intermateriality* and Jane Bennett's argumentation on *assemblage* helps me to delve into the performativity of the objects in the choreography of collapsing bodies. An intermaterial dialogue is an approach to telling a story through the material agency rather than semantic and symbolic meanings. The process of materializing my concept into the physical space is not a linear trajectory, a literal translation, but a porous and entangled juxtaposition of different material bodies, affects and expressions. Affective power is not strictly related to the subjective emotions and human consciousness. The understanding of thing-power that exists in its own nature emancipates human and nonhuman agency from the binary division between an active subject and a passive object. Different material bodies are considered to be actants that contribute distinctive speeds, qualities, tendencies, temporalities and forces to the heterogeneous field of an assemblage.

In my artistic thesis project *Relaxing on a Shaky Ground*, what I took from my embodied archive to approach the tables with my collaborators included my dreams and my experience of living with frequent seismic activity in Taiwan. In my dreams, concrete structures often become unstable and transformative, turning into precarious



and ephemeral scenes that shift as my perspective changes. I proposed to transform the space and perspective by moving and sculpting with the tables. Living with the unpredictable forces of the earth led me to simulate tectonic movement with the tables and also experiment with precarious formations. It was also fascinating to observe how this process of arranging the tables evoked my dream memory and my fragmented memories of home and earthquakes, how it affected my dreaming, and how it stimulated associations of the geographic scale of planetary objects, icebergs and tectonic plates.

As the leader of this collaborative project, I used my concept and material to initiate the dialogue, but I also learned to give space and negotiate with my collaborators, attending to different needs and interests in the collaboration. In this written thesis, I think about the relationship to everyday objects from my own bodily knowledge and situated perspective. I might risk generalizing the agency and materiality of a human body while focusing on analyzing the agency of everyday objects. I have not addressed the complexity and hierarchy of human bodies with different degrees of agency regarding race, gender, class, etc. Nevertheless, my attempt is to focus on the reflection of the negotiation between different artistic agencies in this collaboration.

Recognizing the power of things and the affective forces of the environment, I return to my porous and vulnerable body and store this embodied document of moving and collapsing with a large scale of chairs and tables. After embedding my body in everyday objects for some projects, I feel vulnerable when stripped of them. How does this knowledge affect my body moving and thinking without physical contact with an object? My body never moves alone in space, always influenced by the environment full of information and always connected to the ground.

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