

PORTFOLIO

Project Documentation

Module 9

Master Dance Teacher 3

Specialization: Professional Education

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1. INTRODUCTION

This portfolio is part of the Module 9 in the Master Dance Teacher program (MADT) of the Palucca University of Dance Dresden. The goal is to offer the student the opportunity to document a project in which he or she participated, whether as a choreographer, assistant, or dancer¹.

I have chosen to document the process of creation of *Fragile*, a contemporary dance piece directed by Konstantin Tsakalidis, whose central theme investigates social isolation, individual vulnerability, and processes of dissolving interpersonal barriers, which optimistically aims at regaining mutual support as well as individual and collective strength. The Fragile project comprised a 7-week rehearsal period, with three performances, which took place between February 24th and 26th, 2023 at the Sociocultural Center Werk 2 in Leipzig.

This project documentation comprises four main parts. In the first part I introduce the project's director and choreographer, and I speak about the selection process of the dancers. Then I elaborate on the process of creating the piece, emphasizing aspects of collaborative work such as sourcing movement material and narrative content from the dancers. In the third part I address the stage rehearsal and the 3 performances. Finally, in the last part I speak about the music, as well as costume, light and stage design, and I offer the reader a brief reflection about my experience within the Fragile project.

As a source material for this paper I used my own notes, photographic² and videographic records taken throughout the process of creating the piece, as well as an interview I conducted with Tsakalidis after the première.

2. ARTISTIC DIRECTOR & CHOREOGRAPHER

Konstantin Tsakalidis³ is a German director and choreographer born in Sigmaringen, Baden-Württemberg, in 1966. He has been working for many years as a freelance choreographer, director, performer and educator, both in Germany and abroad, at various institutions for theater, event, television and film.

¹ In relation to transferring (teaching) dance movements in the artistic process.

² The images attached in the appendix were taken in the studio and during the performances in the theater, among which are rehearsal and stage records.

³ See Appendix 1.

Since 2014, he has been the director of the Tanz-Zentrale Leipzig, a dance studio for Hip Hop, Jazz Dance, Modern Dance and Ballet which, among courses for beginners and amateurs, offers a training program in dance pedagogy and choreography.

Tsakalidis gives coaching and courses in choreography throughout Europe. He is the author of several books⁴, which include: *Choreography: Craft and Vision* (published in 2011), *Solo im Zeitgenössischen Tanz: Choreographie und Entwicklung - Figurenarbeit* (published in 2019); and *Tanzimprovisation* (to be published in 2023).

Konstantin choreographed many different dance pieces, which include *La Sacre du Printemps* (2011) and *Animal Instincts* (2019). His choreographic interests lie in the quality of movement in connection with space and music; furthermore, he is interested in the dancers' own experience and interaction with movement material and the artistry of dance, in aspects of expression and authenticity.

Over the years, his movement style has been influenced by countless sources, from which his own style developed. His "kinetic signature" was deepened by intensive movement research and is in constant transformation, with each new endeavor of his.

3. DANCERS⁵

Isaac Araujo was born and raised in Brazil. He received gymnastics and acting training, danced contemporary dance and ballet, and was subsequently engaged as a professional dancer in Brazilian companies for many years. He studied instrumental pedagogy at the Martin-Luther University Halle-Wittemberg and will successfully complete his master's degree in dance pedagogy at the Palucca University of Dance Dresden this year.

Lilach Schwartz attended Wizo High School for the Arts in Haifa, Israel, from the age of 13 to 18, where the curriculum was combined with dance training, focusing on ballet and Graham Technique. She participated in the "Maslool" program of professional dance by Naomi Perlov and Ofir Dagan in Tel Aviv, where she performed works by various choreographers such as Mats Ek,

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⁴ His books can be purchased through Amazon or directly on the homepage of the Tanz-Zentrale Leipzig: https://tanz-zentrale.de/shop/

⁵ See Appendix 2.

Sharon Eyal and Jiri Kylián. She was engaged in dance companies in Switzerland, and since 2022 she is freelancing and teaching in Leipzig.

Miriam Arbach has been working as a freelance dancer, acrobat and choreographer since 2017. Her work is located at the intersection of contemporary dance and contemporary circus. She completed her acrobatics and circus training in London (Aircraft Circus), as well as her training in dance pedagogy in Leipzig, at the Tanz-Zentrale.

Jasmin Potrafke is a physical education teacher and sport therapist. She worked as a yoga and Pilates teacher in Stuttgart. Since 2018 she works in Leipzig, and has meanwhile successfully completed the training program in dance pedagogy at the Tanz-Zentrale.

Verena Piwonka received her dance training at SOZO and completed a Yoga teacher program at Satya Yoga, both in Kassel. She is currently a scholarship holder at Weissmann Teacher Training. Verena's work draws inspiration from choreographers such as Johannes Wieland, Deborah Smith-Wicke, Ayman Harper and Valentina Cabro. She is co-founder of Kollektiva and part of the Tanzwerk Kassel Association.

4. CASTING PROCESS

The casting was conducted in two phases. First, there was a public call, for which 30 dancers applied through a resumé and a dance video. In this phase, Jasmin and Miriam were selected, both dancers with an acrobatic background, and with whom Konstantin had already worked, therefore with personality and movement qualities to a certain extent known to him. Verena was selected soon after. According to Konstantin's imagination, Verena's physical characteristics and artistic aptitudes would match those of Jasmin and Miriam. Soon afterwards, Lilach was selected and a male dancer was added to the casting as a possibility.

In the first week of rehearsals, Konstantin decided against the male dancer and it was then that he asked me, Isaac, if I would be interested in participating as a dancer in the production. I accepted.

In an interview with Konstantin, he told me that his initial intention was to select a group of dancers that featured a variety of physical characteristics, for example, dancers with a strong physical appearance and dancers with a slender and fragile physical aspect. Looking from another perspective, he envisioned dancers that physically fill – also take – a lot of room (scenic space) in

contrast to dancers that move primarily within their own kinesphere. In this way, Konstantin sought to create a tension of opposites, a conflict, as far as the formation of the group of dancers is concerned.

Besides their external physical characteristics, another important factor in choosing the dancers, according to Konstantin, was a strong diversity of personality, whereby he refers to the quality of movement, also intensity, through which the dancer externalizes his/her individual needs and intensions, i.e. dancers with very distinct "kinetic signatures", wherein extremes are welcome, e.g. polarizing sensitivity and emotion on one hand, and precision of form and rationality on the other; so that, ultimately, an ideal mix of characters could be found, one that matches his initially idealized image of the Fragile project. Konstantin stated that he found the ideal group of dancers for the production, exactly as he had previously envisioned.

5. CREATIVE PROCESS

5.1 FIRST STEPS

When the group was finally complete, with the final constellation of dancers, Konstantin presented his proposal for a narrative; he guided us step by step through the various moments (he called them "Stimmungen") which would initially constitute the dramaturgy to be researched during the rehearsals.

5.1.1 Dramaturgy

It can be basically outlined in 7 stages:

- 1. there is a social problem: the strong individuality of society members causes tension between them about a self-centered thinking/acting;
- 2. there is a social aspect that belongs to the interpersonal sphere about interconnectivity of individuals in their societies;
- the social contract can be understood as a marriage between individuals, and also between individual and society – about a tension generating factor;
- 4. there is a sense of weakness brought about by tension, individually and collectively there is a tendency towards giving-up;

- 5. there is a second attempt by the individual towards himself and towards society, seeking reconciliation: the illusion of unison there is a tendency to use other individuals to get what one wants;
- 6. there can be defeat, a giving-up;
- 7. there is a discovery: there can be support, from the individual towards himself and from him towards society about being supportive.

The work began with the generation of movement material in 3 parallel lines: character work, group repertoire, duet material. Through this work, the dramaturgy previously envisioned by the choreographer was shaped into movement sequences and subsequently into short scenes, which were developed and linked to one another, following a process that Konstantin called the "intuitive principle", which for him means to make decisions spontaneously, as a result of one's own interpretation of the reality present before one's eyes.

5.1.2 Character Work

Konstantin invited the dancers to create a character for the piece, a figure that had an origin, desires, pains and sufferings, ambitions, specific physical characteristics and a particular quality of movement. At the same time, there could also be opposing aspects, which could provide counterpoint and tension. Konstantin emphasized that each one of us could (should) put into the character much of ourselves, much of our own personal characteristics, thus seeking an emotional proximity between the character of the piece and the essence of each individual dancer.

I developed my character based on the following characteristics:

- ¤ duality: slightly strong vs. fragile (soft, breakable);
- x sensitive attentive; listening internally and externally;
- psychosomatic sensation of a body with long arms, long fingers and long neck;
- quality of movement arising from the sensation an illusory sensation of bones and joints melting and elongating into space; quite continuous and circular, using light weight (bones and fascia) and bound flow (Laban);
- character's personality: lost; seeker a part of me is missing, I can perceive it, but I cannot see it, or recognize it.

After the character development, each dancer presented his/her character to the group, through a solo performance of approximately 5 minutes, which was followed by a feedback round led by Konstantin.

Throughout the rehearsals the characters gained clarity of intent and quality of movement. This process was directed by the choreographer. Through comments and suggestions, he helped to shape each one of them, aiming at the following proposal: a group of essentially opposite characters, composing a blend that could be experienced collectively, that could "work" together, both at the level of interrelationships within the group itself, and at a very visual level, from the audience's perspective.

5.1.3 Group Repertoire

The creation of movement sequences to be performed in unison by the group was a line of work that we followed during the entire process of production. It took place as follows:

It was always dependent on a specific subtext. Konstantin would introduce the dancers to a concrete situation, such as "I have a shell on my body, I perceive it and connect with it". This is in fact one general atmosphere of a specific moment in the piece. So, "bearing this thought in mind, I press my hand against my body and slide it sensitively along; subsequently, I direct my attention outwardly; then a sharp and restless movement happens with my head, which in turn develops, seeking expansion in time-space; then my hand starts to search something behind myself, and for not finding anything, I let myself be seized by a wave of anger, which gains more and more space and intensity."

Following this creative process, step by step the movements of the group sequences were created, carefully delineated – narrated – by the choreographer. One feature worth mentioning about this method of choreographic creation is that movements are generated and simultaneously attached, on a nervous system level, to a specific intent (image, emotion, intensity), i.e. form and content are simultaneously generated, in a process with an essentially narrative aspect.

5.1.4 Duet Material

Similar to the process of creating group repertoire, the duets were created based on concrete situations proposed by Konstantin. For example, a couple who constantly lose one another – they develop a relationship under the constant presence of a third element, which can be understood as a shadow.

Starting from such situations (narratives), quite specific ones, the choreographer and the dancers sought movements to give them a shape (life). Many movements Konstantin brought into the process from himself; these were steps, expressions, transitions, and lifts from his own repertoire. At other moments, he didn't bring finished movements, rather only an emotion or an idea of intensity, for example an explosive wave leading to physical distancing.

Throughout the whole production, I felt an open approach by the choreographer towards welcoming the dancers' creativity; he constantly invited us to actively contribute to the movement creation – also regarding the intention and narrative aspects of the scenes.

5.2 COLLECTING MOVEMENT MATERIAL

5.2.1 Collaborative Process

The collaborative process behind the development of the movement material occurred basically in three lines: individual creation of the dancer within a framework proposed by the choreographer; movement material brought by the choreographer with the following subtext "that suits everybody" (without emphasizing the movement qualities of one dancer to the detriment of the other), which was later adapted to the characteristics of each individual figure; duets that were created using impulses and ideas coming from the choreographer and the dancers.

Throughout the entire creative process, one of the choreographer's work tools was to ask the dancers questions about their characters, with the intention of seeking out the dancer's own strengths and qualities as much as possible, as opposed to imposing on them ideas coming primarily from him.

In the construction of the duets, for example, I felt that the choreographer gave us dancers a lot of free space to develop our characters, letting us find our own paths within the relation to our dance partner. He didn't overwhelm us with his ideas and possibilities, but rather gave us impulses

at key moments of the creative process; impulses through questions like "where do you see at this moment a possibility to bring your character, to emphasize it?" In this way, Konstantin repeatedly invited the dancers to connect a little bit more with their characters during the process of developing movement material.

In general, the solos that were created used primarily impulses and ideas coming from the dancers. Here, the choreographer's interventions had characteristics such as: towards cleaning up the movement and looking for possibilities of greater physical expressiveness within the dancers' own choices. For example, in a sequence where the use of the upper body was too heavy or dense, Konstantin would look for ways to counterbalance such focus, directing the attention also to the use of the hips and legs; another example, when a movement sequence tended to unfold too much in one place, he would look for ways to encourage the dancer to use more space (travelling), while remaining within the spectrum of possibilities and intentions of each character.

Instructions (precise directives) coming from Konstantin also guided the process of creating the collaborative scenes, however with due care not to block the dancer's creativity (rather as a supporting tool). Konstantin gave instructions to the dancers during the creation process in moments where, under his perspective (he identifies such intake as an interpretation, i.e. based on an individual's own process of analysis, thus a subjective perception of reality), the dancer seemed to be lost within the process of creation, in need of more concrete and precise impulses in order to proceed with the development of his/her own character.

5.2.2 Konstantin's Movement Material

Konstantin describes his process of developing choreographic material as arising from a personal sensation of hunger. This sensation he uses as an inspiration, or a factor that drives him to choreograph, to draw out movements in space-time. According to his own words, these are moments within the process of creating scenes where he realizes that here and there something seems to be missing; he then starts to fill these gaps with his own individual expression, thus momentarily leaving the collaborative process, and telling the dancer exactly what he would like to happen at this specific moment of the production, regarding time, space, movement, and intention. This represents to the choreographer an urge for liberation, since he himself has (and recognizes) his own needs of expression concerning the subject of the work. In my words, these are the moments where he can experience liberation through the dancers.

5.3 PUTTING SCENES TOGETHER

The scenes of the piece were created based on the dancers' improvisations, in which the object of inspiration was provided by the choreographer – a specific setting involving several themes, such as anger, or a concrete situation involving some imagery, for instance, punching a cardboard pile. From these improvisations, shapes emerged. The choreographer then proceeded with isolating such shapes, identifying basic characteristics inherent to them and intensifying them, in size, speed and intent, to name a few. These shapes were assembled into phrases in several formats: solo, duet, trio, and group sequence.

In the third week of rehearsals, the initial material (movement sequences with intentional content and narrative) was put together into a first idea of progression. It was then that the first runthrough took place, with a total length of 24 minutes.

In conversation with Konstantin, I asked him about his intellectual process during the act of putting scenes together. He said it happens intuitively. He compares it to painting a canvas, where one has the possibility of using different strokes, different colors; he says, "one also has the possibility of painting a perfect canvas, especially if one has the appropriate skills to do so. However, during the painting process, there is also the possibility of letting the artist's intuition express itself."

Konstantin states that such an intuitive process happens for him somewhat apart from the narrative process of a given scene. On the one hand his creative process focuses on the subtext or narrative intended by him (the analytical and formal aspect, of which dance language, for example, as well as quality of movement and the interrelations between dancers/characters belong); on the other hand there is within his creative process a side that he describes as foggy – representing the room of intuition. Konstantin moves between these two sides during his choreographic process. He states that sometimes he finds himself totally immersed in the nebulous side; at these moments he feels the need, almost the urge, to cross over to the other side, and to use analysis to resolve things, to find solutions (to sort things out, to clarify things).

To the process of putting the scenes together belonged also the creation of transitions. One of them was created basically with material coming from the dancers, which was generated through an improvisation whose subject was in fact anger. The dancers had 20 minutes to improvise about this theme, with the task of putting a few movements together. This sequence was then

performed for the rest of the group, followed by each dancer teaching the other dancers his/her sequence.

For me this was a very rich process. I had the opportunity to kinetically experience the "taste" that each dancer feels when it comes to this strong emotion. In other words, I could experience through my body, aspects of the anger that each of the dancers personally carry with them.

Teaching my movement phrase about anger to my fellow dancers was in a way a very common experience for me. I have been teaching dance for 12 years, and such activity is part of my profession. However, from the perspective of my role as a dancer within the Fragile project, teaching a dance phrase to the whole team was a new situation, which for me represents the intersection of two activities that are primarily quite distinct from each other. On the one hand, as a dancer I am primarily concerned with producing movements that are coherent with the proposal and the framework set by the choreographer, and I naturally add my artistry to it; in the role of the person who passes on (or teaches) dance movements, another dimension of attention opens up in front of me: it concerns clarity of communication through body and spoken language, regarding the forms and intentions within a certain movement sequence; it also concerns what and how the information I transmit is perceived by the receiver – the dancer – acknowledging the fact that these are dance professionals, not amateurs.

In the fourth and fifth weeks of rehearsals, new scenes were added to the work. It grew. Scenes were added at the beginning, at the end, as well as various transitions in the middle. By the sixth week of rehearsals, the final format of the show had been achieved. In the next section I address the seventh week of rehearsals, when final adjustments were made, and we had the first runthrough with the musician and costume.

5.4 LAST WEEK OF REHEARSAL

The last week of rehearsals started with a problem: one of the dancers, Miriam, had become ill over the weekend and we were not sure that she would recover before the première. I suggested to Konstantin that we use Monday to make the necessary changes in case Miriam did not return. He then invited Passainte Ibrahim, a dancer from Egypt living in Leipzig, to learn some parts of the piece. Passainte came on Tuesday to the rehearsal and quickly learned several scenes. On Wednesday, however, Miriam returned, as she had recovered.

Wednesday's rehearsal started with the training of isolated scenes and the checking of musical cues, after which the lifts were also trained. After a break, we continued with a run-through of the piece, however without the musician, only with electronic sound.

The rehearsal was good, everything went well, except for one musical cue – the starting mark of a group sequence, which did not go well. It was a musical cue that is released manually, and wasn't released at the correct moment, so the dancers lost the musical counts. Right after the run, this problem was solved; both the moment of release of the track and the counts were clarified between dancers and direction.

On Thursday, there has been the last run-through in the rehearsal room, with costumes and the presence of the musician and his instrument (viola). This was indeed our dress rehearsal, even though it was not in the theater. Everything went well — musical cues, lifts, choreographic formations, soli, duos, trios. We were ready for the première, which took place on the following day, Friday, February 24, 2023.

6. STAGE REHEARSAL

On Friday, the light rehearsal began at 1:30 pm. The dancers marked scene by scene while Konstantin designed and recorded the light, together with the theater technician. It was a process that took 2,5 hours. Then, there was a break. At 4:30 the stage rehearsal began, just to check space, musical cues and lighting. Dancers didn't put on costumes, didn't perform lifts, and just marked the movements.

I personally missed a full dress rehearsal on stage. Not because of insecurity, but out of habit. The piece was well rehearsed, the execution of the material was very consistent, so the lack of a dress rehearsal did not negatively influence the performance.

After the stage rehearsal, dancers had an hour to prepare for the show that started at 7:00 PM.

7. PERFORMANCES

There were three presentations of the piece. The execution of the movements (group sequences, solos, duos and trios), the lifts, and the interaction with the musician were all successful. There were no major technical problems during the performances. I believe that such a success is due

to the consistency achieved by the team throughout the rehearsals (even in the face of the uncertainty regarding the participation of Miriam, the dancer who got sick one week before the première).

Through videographic documentation of one of the performances I could see that many of the spatial formations did not have clarity of execution. That is most probably due to the fact that the stage rehearsal just before the première did not focus specifically on adapting the formations to the stage, which has dimensions smaller than the rehearsal room.

The musical cues were successfully followed. In only one of the presentations, on Saturday, when the extra track, referred to in section 5.4, was released, the intensity of the viola (volume of sound), played by the musician parallel to the electronic sound, covered it up, making it impossible for the dancers to hear the musical cues. At this moment, the dancers followed my movement, since I was at an angle of vision where everyone could see me.

Based on comments I heard from the audience, I can state that many spectators found themselves emotionally connected with the piece. Within their own interpretation of the piece's narrative, there have been moments where they experienced themselves through us dancers, and through the intensions of our characters. I've received reports of emotional involvement speaking about the perception of emotions on a bodily level, for example through the embodiment of sadness, and through crying.

Finally, I would like to add that all performances were sold out. In addition to the 110 seats available for online ticket sale, 30 extra seats have been made available for sale on site.

8. MUSICIAN & MUSIC CHOICE

Cenk Erbiner⁶ is an internationally sought-after violist for New Music and World Music and has been playing with the Anhaltische Philharmonie Dessau since 2010. He was born in Istanbul in 1976 and studied viola at the Istanbul University Municipal Conservatory.

The choice of music reflects the subject of the piece, wherein two or more elements share a common space-time – an attempt towards co-existence, towards interaction. Cenk was part of

⁶ See Appendix 3.

the scene; with his viola, he interacted with the dancers, through sound interferences and through his presence.

Aspects of encounter and disagreement, union and separation, attraction, stress, tension, ultimately fragility, proposed by the choreographic material, also echoed in the interplay of the viola and the music tracks, which were conceived and produced electronically for the production.

There were moments when only the viola could be heard, other moments only various electronic sounds (melodies, texts, melancholic rhythms, chaotic rhythms); and yet at other times, both could be heard, in harmonious interaction or in friction, in disagreement – contradictory, conflictive.

Cenk used melodies from his viola repertoire, echoes of melodies taken from the electronic tracks, and he also had many moments of free improvisation where dissonance and acoustic friction could be perceived as a central element within the soundscape.

9. COSTUME DESIGN

There was no costume designer. Lilach, dancer with experience in drawing sketches for costumes, did an initial study about shapes and colors that could be used in the piece, based on the following parameters: pieces of single color, preferably matte, one color per dancer – or shades of the same color, more or less saturated; different outfits and without any prints.

The search for costumes following such directives took place during the sixth week of rehearsals. Each dancer searched and bought his/her own costume in second hand stores in the west of Leipzig or through virtual orders. A chat group was set up, where pictures of possible costumes were exchanged, in order to achieve a unity and coherence between all costumes.

10. STAGE DESIGN

The piece was performed in the Halle D of the Werk 2 – Kulturfabrik Leipzig e.V., on a stage measuring 9 by 5 meters.

There was neither a stage designer nor a set designer. No props were used. The setting comprised only the dancers, the choreographic material and the musician. However, on the right side of the

stage, detached from the black box, the musician's musical set could be seen, with a chair, a stand for his instrument and, on the floor, his technical equipment, among other things a Loop Station.

11. LIGHT DESIGN

The light design was made by Konstantin. Based on an atmosphere of clear, harmonious, somewhat pure aspects, Konstantin sought characteristics of natural light, without using e.g. LEDs, and without using colors, but rather using primarily daylight filters.

Nevertheless, in several scenes saturations of blue were introduced, aiming to bring a sense of distance and coldness between the characters (dancers), thus supporting the narrative of the piece.

Other major decisions were the inclusion of a strong backlight, in 2 different gradations, and the massive use of sidelights. Frontal lights were not used much.

In general, the stage was not always evenly illuminated, which created at times a silhouette effect, revealing more the outline of the dancers and less of their volume, which further emphasized the isolation of the characters.

12. REFLECTION

I am very happy for the opportunity I had to work with Konstantin, Miriam, Jasmin, Lilach, Verena and Cenk in this production. The team worked together towards a common goal and created a dance piece about fragility; through shared inspiration, each one contributed to the creative process. After 7 weeks of rehearsals, we delivered a consistent and heartfelt dance piece to the audience.

In relation to my role as a dancer, after years away from the stage, I felt very comfortable working with this team, under Konstantin's direction. His way of working, constantly inviting the dancers to bring their own creativity and expertise to the production, provided a space in which I could collaborate with the production, experiment, find and deal with my limits, all accompanied by a sense of trust, in the process, in the direction, and in myself.

From an academic perspective, the Fragile project contributed to my artistic formation, both in personal and professional spheres. Structurally, the project provided me with a field of research

and performance as a dancer, teacher⁷, and creative artist. The subject of the piece offered me the opportunity to get in touch with my own personal issues and experience those of my fellow dancers, an experience that gave more depth to the process, grounding it in aspects close to my personality.

⁷ Every Monday, during the 7 weeks of rehearsals, I was in charge of a 45-minute warm-up.

APPENDIX 1 Artistic Director & Choreographer

Konstantin Tsakalidis



Source: https://www.xing.com/profile/Konstantin_Tsakalidis

APPENDIX 2 Dancers

Isaac Araujo, Miriam Arbach, Lilach Schwartz, Jasmin Potrafke, Verena Piwonka



Images: Isaac Araujo & Konstantin Tsakalidis

APPENDIX 3 Musician

Cenk Erbiner



Source:

APPENDIX 4 Rehearsal Images

by Konstantin Tsakalidis

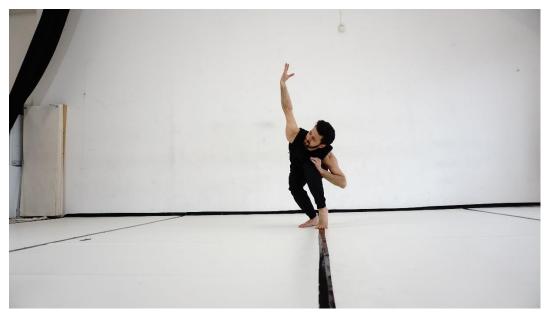












APPENDIX 5 Stage Images by Passainte Ibrahim













Fragile

Zeitgenössisches Tanzstück von Konstantin Tsakalidis

