

Critical Correspondence
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Jack Ferver
In conversation with Marissa Perel

New York based performer, choreographer, writer and teacher, [Jack Ferver](#) spoke with CC Co-Editor, [Marissa Perel](#) via Google Hangout about the process of making his new solo, "Mon, Ma, Mes," which will be performed October 6 at Le Skyroom for FIAF's Crossing The Line 2012. Ferver discusses returning to Interlochen as a guest artist, sculpting performance out of chaos, the art of the Q & A and the performance of persona.

Interview Date: September 21, 2012

via Google Hangout

Jack: I am back at Interlocken, the school that I went to, where the seed for what I'm doing now really was planted. When I studied at Interlocken, you had to choose between being a theater or a dance major, so I decided to become a theater major, but take a lot of dance classes, and use the dance building at night to make my own work.

Marissa: How long has it been since you've been back there?

Jack: I came here a year ago to do a panel, which is why I got invited to make this work here. But before then, it had been ten years since I had been here. I've been here since August 31, and I haven't been back here for so long since I went to school here. It's like this constant mirror, where the birth of my superego happened. Plus, I'm working with teenagers, and they're art teenagers, which is twice as intense.

When I was studying here, I was in the Bacchae, and the director knew that I had been studying Graham technique, so he said, 'well, why don't you choreograph your part?' So, I'd learn the text by Euripides during the day, and then choreograph in the studio at night. It's ultimately what I've ended up doing here with the students. I've taken three plays by Euripides; *Medea*, *Elektra*, and *The Trojan Women*, and I have done my own adaptation of *Medea* and Clytemenestra's monologue.

Since it's Interlocken's 50th Anniversary, I wanted to use classics, and in the way that I do things, contemporize them. So, in the last scene of *Medea*, these three teenage lovers appear and have fights about heartbreak. In *Elektra*, there's a youtube video of a girl who hates her mom, and misses her brother and her dad, while the death scene of Clytemenestra happens on the other side of it, and there's a dance to Nikki Minaj's Young Forever, while Clytemenestra is getting killed. The last piece, *Trojan Women*, has nothing classical in it. It has a girl hanging out with her friends, and they're dancing around, and she gets a skype call from her brother in Afghanistan. She then sees him get killed, which is an incident that actually happened to a student.

It's been interesting working with these teenagers because I've been teaching them how to use their own lives, and improv, and Authentic Movement to build choreography, and creative writing to build text. So, I rehearse with them and then come home and write, then I rehearse for my show at FIAF, and then I rehearse with them again.

Marissa: How is rehearsing for your show at FIAF?

Jack: I wanted to explore persona, and the “Jack Ferver persona,” the concept of celebrity, and people build that. So there’s a Q & A session, which I am creating for the performance.

Marissa: Is it with the audience?

Jack: Yes. Then, I am doing a dance.

Marissa: What is the dance?

Jack: Well, it’s a lot. I am processing just having re-performed my trio, “I am trying to hear myself” at the V-Out show at Andrew Edlin Gallery this summer. I made it 5 years ago when I was in a very different place in my life, and after having re-performed it, it just felt like self-abuse. I turned to Marc Swanson, whom I collaborated with for “Two Alike” this past year at the Kitchen. “Two Alike” was a difficult piece to perform but I felt a sense of efficacy and accomplishment with it. “I am trying to hear myself” is different, made on a younger body. So, I have been taking elements from it for my solo. I guess that’s where it begins. [Screams] In the tower of art I sit with Martha Graham over a ouija board!

Marissa: [Laughs hysterically]

Jack: This piece for FIAF is about loneliness and control, it’s an issue that is very present for me as an artist. The more you grow as an artist, the harder it gets. You get to see what doesn’t work much clearer and the line becomes thinner. When I made work earlier, it was ok to do things just because, intuitively, but now I am asking myself the questions of why? What am I trying to say? Why am I saying it? This has come from teaching, and doing dramaturgy with students every day.

Marissa: Tell me more about this hardness. What are you getting out of this process versus the youthful feeling of being free and doing whatever you want?

Jack: Well, for starters, I’m alone. I am continuing to work on the Interlocken show for October 10th, but I am also working on a duet with Joshua Robin Levy for Prelude 2012 at CUNY the night before my show for FIAF.

Marissa: You are busy!

Jack: Yes, that’s how I like it! I think being at Interlocken right now while I am working on the solo is important because I have to look at how I started as a performer. It compelled me to do a lecture-performance at Crossing the Line, where I am going to talk about myself as an artist. I feel like it’s micro to macro dialogue.

[Google Hangout crashes and then restarts, and then Jack sings, “Witchcraft will make the Google Hangout happen!”]

Marissa: You were talking about the Q & A as a micro to macro dialogue.

Jack: I feel like the Q & A explodes what the audience wants from us, what the audience expects, what we want when the audience comes, what we expect. It’s like any relationship, which is part love and part abuse. There’s a duet going on between us and the audience that is part love and part abuse, there’s a duet among audience members and how they relate, and between the artist and himself, who he is and how he relates to himself when performing. In “A Movie Star Needs A Movie,” I made a Q & A at the end to push this sense of grandiosity.

Marissa: Is it grandiosity or self-reflexivity?

Jack: It's drawn from a sense of narcissism, like how artists talk about their collaborators by referencing themselves.

Marissa: What do you mean?

Jack: It would be like if someone brought your name up to me in conversation and I said, "Oh, I know her, she is so brilliant. She had marvelous things to say about *my* work, and how I am breaking the zeitgeist." So, it's really not about you at all. I am dealing with the thrust of choreographic control, and how we wrestle with control, this obtuse narcissism and neurotic behavior.

It's like the beginning of the *Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, "...a girl gets a scholarship here and a scholarship there, and ends up driving New York like her own private car, but I wasn't driving anything, not even myself." That is totally me. I got to Interlocken and to New York by scholarships and by a movie. But I wasn't driving, I wasn't in control. I rehearse every day, I meticulously script my material, but I still don't know what it is. Chaos reigns.

I'm sculpting the performance, my dramaturge is looking at it, Marc is looking at it, but where is it coming from in me? What is it? The thrust of my work is psychology. Making work is a lot of analysis; why are you using that music? Why do I use cold lighting?

I think I've said to you before that artists are the stomach of society and they are digesting the indigestible. It's a lot of energy to channel and sculpt. I make art so that people won't feel as lonely as I have felt. That is what I get out of seeing great work, too.

Marissa: How do you allow the chaos to occur to create material that you then sculpt? Where is the place of chaos in your process?

Jack: Chaos happens in the creating of the dance, the script and the performance. The Apollonian tactics for the Chthonic matter, thank you, Camille Paglia, are how you rehearse, cut and edit the original material. So the making of choreography is a meditation on what you are trying to say.

Marissa: Do you know what you're saying yet?

Jack: When I walk into the rehearsal room I know what I want to say. This is new dance is a meditation on loneliness and control. I film it, I look at it; just like Gia [Kourlas] said "just because it feels good it doesn't mean that it looks good." I try to write every day and figure out how to line the bullets up, so when you shoot the gun, you hit them between the eyes. So that's how I metamorphose the chaos.

And then I talk to my collaborators, so I'm putting the chaos out there. In the duet with Josh, I am looking at the dramaturge- performer relationship like the therapist-client relationship, and how the dramaturge tries to get the performer to another place which doesn't always work.

Marissa: Do you need to get into an intense feeling of isolation to meditate on the loneliness and control, or is that feeling always there and it's a matter of focusing on it?

Jack: I like what you said in the second part of that question. I feel all the feelings, Marissa! All the time! So it's a matter of tapping in. It leads into deeper questions like, "Why am an artist?" As Martha [Graham] said, "Ambition is not enough, necessity is everything."

I need to do this. There are certain things that I have to explore as an artist. These compulsions lead me to both difficult and rich places, and they are not easy to separate. For instance, in going to back to my dance-making process, I was very oriented toward repetition in "Two Alike" because it was about finding a

sense of safety in an unsafe childhood. My compulsions, personally and artistically, brought me to where I am today, but they also made me develop traits that made me into a monster.

Marissa: How?

Jack: Traits that I developed in my childhood to be safe, I don't need as an adult. But I can't get rid of them. It makes it very difficult to negotiate the world. So, I watched *Opening Night*. I watched it here, where I grew up, where I took dance every day. It seemed appropriate to think about what it means to be haunted by an inner child, or a super ego. Everyday I'd be rehearsing, going to dance class, theater class, then I'd read *Blood Memory* by Martha Graham, night after night. This thing about the solitary artist and that it's self-imposed had a great effect on me, and it illuminates what it is to be back here.

In my childhood I was becoming so isolated, but I was also validated in my isolation by being an artist. This made it ok to cut off, in fact encouraged, to cut off friends and family. It took years to break apart, and it remains a cunning reality.

I've been doing this since childhood, and the discipline at Interlocken. I'm happiest making art; it's where I know what to do. I can struggle here.

Marissa: When I saw "Two Alike," I interpreted it as a meditation on death.

Jack: How did you come to that?

Marissa: It was something about the eradication of self. When you put the blanket over your head, I saw it as you looking to eliminate the pain by eliminating yourself. But it sounds like for this new solo, you are being present with it, living in it.

Jack: Yeah, that is probably true. I feel it is at once trying to present with it, and to step in and out of that performance skin.