

White Pill, No Pill: A Solo Performance of My Own Design

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Abstract

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White Pill, No Pill is a short film that looks at the question of choice. The thesis's question starts from a sincere question of my own existence, and why my mom made the choice to bear me into this world. The intention of the piece is to look at two different perspectives of choice from one woman. The thesis hopes to look at how one woman's choice of having a child, or not having a child would so alter her life. With the use of a few pills, a women could continue her career and single life, or by doing nothing, forever alter her life's trajectory.

Jessica Thorne

Graduate Thesis - *White Pill, No Pill*

Jeffrey Fracé

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When I first started my work on *White Pill, No Pill*, I began an exploration of my own fear. The idea for this project came to me last year when I worked on my first solo show with Val. However, as I looked deeper into what the story would want to become, I knew I needed more stage time and more gestation time. Val and I talked about the idea of this show at the end of my second year, and I was at a loss for what I wanted to say. I wanted to tell the story of my mom's choice to have me. I wanted to more deeply understand how an incredibly successful woman working on Wall Street, and living in Brooklyn in the late 80's, decided to upend her life and career to have a child out of wedlock in a Catholic family. I have always known my birth was a strange story of shame for my mom, but never knew how it came to be. The question I have always feared was, "Could I do what my mom did? Could I end my career to give life?" This question has haunted my entire adult life.

As I began to flesh out the structure of the story, I realized I didn't need to just tell my mom's story. I could also tell the story of her other choice. Her other choice to not have me. She would have climbed the ranks, gotten that promotion she was denied when she got pregnant, and built a house in the Poconos next to my grandparents. In another parallel universe, I never was. What did that woman, who never gave birth to me, do alone in her apartment in Brooklyn?

The script I am submitting as my thesis is both the same, and yet completely different. Before the pandemic, the show was meant to be a fully realized theatrical production, and now it has been rewritten to become a film short. In that first theatrical, I relied heavily on the Integrative Alexander Technique with Cathy Madden to help me physically embody what a third trimester would look like, and to look at ways to navigate the cellular fear I had in embodying an abortion on stage. I used my skills from Composition and Viewpoints with Jeffrey Fracé to build an exciting reversal at the end of the show, and to improve my entire script. I had planned to never put pen to paper until the show had been realized in performance. I used Voice Memos to gather all of my “improvised” scripts, and refine them. Finally, I relied on my skills from Solo Show with Valerie Curtis-Newton to dare bravely to jump into the deep end. When I recognized how the theme of this show scared me, I knew I was heading in the right direction.

When I began to rewrite this script for film, I drew from my year long study of film with John Jacobsen. How do I compose shots that tell the story? How do I use sound or no sound to build tension? How do I use wide, medium, or close up shots to tell Anne’s story? One can notice that most of the shots start wide and end tight to help point the audience towards the heightened moments of the scene. There was also a strong use of shot perspectives that start behind Anne. This is so that the audience can see what Anne sees, and hopefully, see her perspective of it all. I wasn’t interested in a voyeur look into a woman struggling with an unwanted pregnancy. I was interested in the audience being able to empathize with Anne.

I hope to fully realize this script on my own after school. The script has been adjusted so that I could, within the confines of COVID, shoot and edit this script in my

own apartment with the help of my partner. You'll notice there are no grocery store shots or outdoor shots. Everything will be able to be shot in my apartment building. With the pandemic, it is more important than ever for me to build and produce my own work. My graduate thesis is my first step towards self actualizing my own work, and I'm grateful to have the tools to do so.

White Pill No Pill
A Film Short

Open on an interior shot of an apartment, early in the morning. We sweep to see a night table with “Manias, Panics, and Crashes”, “How to Win Friends and Influence People”, “The Pelican Brief”, and “The Nature of Investing”. The night table is well kept and homey. We SEE an icon of Mary, and a 90’s Sears style photo of a mother and daughter. We widen the shot to see a woman wake up, look at the clock, and turn the alarm off before it goes off with perfectly manicured nails. One of those women who wake up pulled together. She gets up and we rotate with her as she picks up her phone to check emails and make coffee.

Quick shots of coffee, lipstick, heels, and stilettos clicking out the door.

We hear news program running and SEE heels and legs moving through a lobby. We let the woman walk away from the camera and be fully visible in the shot. We SEE Anne walk up the stairs and around the corner. Anne has long perfectly styled hair. Black skirt and blazer. Robin Wright style heels. Pulled together, confident, and strong. Another shot we watch the heels come up to a stool, sit, and cross her legs. Hands with perfectly manicured nails smoothing down the skirt. We hear

MAKEUP STYLIST: You ready Anne? You’re on in 5,4,3,2...

Quick shift to a male news anchor. Crisp suit, and combed hair. All American.

ANCHOR: Tonight we have Anne Litts joining us. Anne is a financial analyst with JP Morgan. Anne, thanks for being here.

ANNE: Thank you for having me.

ANCHOR: Anne, do you think we are headed towards another Great Recession?

ANNE: First, I will say, that predictions are very tough to make. But with oil at an all time low, I think it’s time to call a spade a spade.

ANCHOR: I think that’s what most American’s are worried about.

Anne’s stomach turns. Vomit? Her face cracks.

ANCHOR: Anne are you okay?

ANNE: Yes. *swallows* I had some feedback on my headset.

ANCHOR: Where in the market do you see this?

ANNE: If we get more negative news, you'll see these tech and gross stocks pull back like we saw at 11:30 today. I'm going to sound like a broken record but if you look at aluminum, copper, oil, they're down a lot, 20-30%. The ratio of the SNP 500 technology sector to energy is the same or higher than the peak of the tech bubble in the early 90's. So I think these sectors are taking the brunt, and this is only the beginning. The Corona Virus isn't a sprint, it's a marathon. The question is, will the markets make it through?

ANCHOR: That's a question we all have today. Thanks for talking with us Anne.

ANNE: Thanks Stephen.

Shot above a toilet. We SEE Anne run in and vomit. Shot at mirror. She steps up to the sink into shot to rinse out her mouth. She tries to put lipstick back on. She finds something in her teeth. Vomit again? Rinses out her mouth again. Fixes her lipstick again.

We HEAR Anne on the phone with her mom while we SEE a wide shot of her front door opening. During this whole monologue Anne walks into the apartment in a wide shot, while she takes off her blazer and shoes. Anne then walks towards camera into a medium shot as she pours wine, and opens up the take-out. The camera holds the shot and pans while Anne moves to the couch with her phone and wine. We end with a medium close shot of Anne on the couch as she ends this phone call.

ANNE: Hey mom. How are you? I'm good, just home for the afternoon. I had an early start to the day so I'm just gonna take a nap. Yeah.

Well with the virus, I'm pretty booked up for the next few weeks. You'll see me on CNN tonight. Yeah it's pretty cool.

How was daily Mass? Oh good Father Mike's back?

Nothing too new on my end. Well. Actually, I'm picking up a few interviews this weekend because a girl at work got pregnant. Yeah.

No, she's not married.

No, why would she keep the baby? She's single living on the UWS with an amazing career. I'm taking her interviews because she's getting an abortion.

Mom?

Mom?

Are you there?

I'm not being flippant, I'm being honest.

Well who would want to be nine months pregnant on the Upper West Side single and alone?

Yes. A human life is more important than a career but...

No I'm not saying that...

No, I'm just saying that I get it...

Mom. You don't need to quote JPII and The Culture of Death to me right now.

No I'm just saying it's a hard decision to make.

I think there's a decision to make...

Silence. Clearly Mom has a monologue to say about abortion that is coming as a surprise to Anne.

ANNE: Hey Mom, look I'm sorry I upset you. It's not a big deal.
Yes. It's a big deal for that baby.
No Mom I'm not going to talk her into keeping her baby.
I don't know.
Yes. (Anne is giving in)
Yes. (Anne shuts down)
Sure. We can pray for her.
Yes.
Our Lady of Guadalupe. Great. Email me the novena and we can pray it together.
Hey mom, I've got to go. I've got some work I need to get done, and then I need to sleep.
Okay
Okay
I love you too.

Anne hangs up the phone. Drinks wine. Sits and understands she's alone. Her email pings with the novena.

Frantic quick shots. Drugstore bag hitting counter. Pregnancy test. Ripping off package. Opening of instructions. Peeing on stick. Moving stick to counter.

Then one shot in the mirror of waiting. Waiting. We watch Anne see the test come back positive. Furious and then heartbroken. We stay for awhile.

Anne crashes to the couch with her wine, which she's now hesitant to drink. Drinks anyway. A moment of uncertainty, and then Google. She sits and finds the TeleAbortion Site. We stay with her as the voice explains a TeleAbortion.

Female Doctor:Hi, I'm Doctor Bailey. Teleabortion is a medical abortion or the abortion pill using Tele Medicine. Teleabortion is a great option for anyone who has difficulty getting to an abortion provider. A Teleabortion may be more private and convenient than an in office medical abortion. //

When you receive your teleabortion package, it will contain the mifepristone pill, the misoprostol pills, and written instructions. In preparation for your medical abortion, we suggest having these supplies at home. Maxi pads will be necessary for when you start passing the pregnancy. I recommend getting the super or overnight pads.Heating pad and Ibuprofen. Your provider may supply you with pain medication as well. Snacks and Drinks. You may eat and drink during the process, so it's nice to have some things you enjoy. Support Person. Although it's not necessary, consider having someone with you to help you with anything you might need on the day you take the Misoprostol.

At the double slash, there is a cut to a shot of Anne coming home to the package at the door. From inside the apartment, we see her enter, and move to the counter to open the package. She finds the mifepristone pill, and downs it with water. There is a moment of pause in this realization that there's no going back.

Then movement. Taking off of shoes, opening up the takeout, and crashing to the couch to watch TV. Her mom calls. She ignores it. Anne falls asleep on the couch and then wakes. She's uncomfortable and cramping.

The Teleabortion monologue has finished and it's silent.

Anne gets up and we have a tension shot with her looking into the bathroom. We pan behind her to look where she's looking and see an empty bathroom. In the silence, she walks in, and picks up the misoprostol pills as we pan in closer to her in the mirror. She puts one pill in between her cheeks and gums, and another on the other side. In the silence, she waits for them to melt and she swallows.

Then movement. She changes into comfortable clothes, puts on a maxi pad.

She walks down the hall to pick up some food to crawl in bed with her heating pad.

In bed, she tries to call her mom. Nothing. She's alone, and in pain.

Blackout

Morning.

Shot of Anne sleeping in bed. The lighting and color is completely different in these shots than they were before. There is a calm and safety that wasn't there before. Anne startles awake. Terrified. She reaches to her belly. Safe.

She moves to sit up in bed, and we see she is eight months pregnant. She takes a moment to feel their movement, and she smiles. She crosses herself to pray

ANNE: Remember O Most Gracious Virgin Mary that never was it known. That anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help, or sought your intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence I fly to you O Virgin of Virgins my Mother. To you I come, before you I stand sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate. Despise not my petitions but hear and answer me. Mary take care of my baby girl. Amen.

Anne gets out of bed, and the apartment is packed up. It's bare and full of boxes. She answers the phone by the window.

ANNE: Hi mom. Yep. I am all set to go. There are a few things up high that I need help getting down, but other than that I'm ready to go. Umm the movers should be here in a few hours, so we have time to go get some bagels.

Yeah.

Ahh it was good. Just a big going away party. Um no. It's not sad.

Isn't that strange?

Yeah.

I think it's time for a change.

Yeah

Okay.

All right. I'll see you soon. I love you.

Anne looks around her apartment and holds her belly. She looks out the window and begins to sing "Solider Solider will you marry me".

ANNE: "Solider, Solider will you marry me? With your phi and drum. Oh no dear lady I...

As she sings, we move in closer and then blackout.