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Embracing the Void: The Creation, Rehearsal, and Production of Farside

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Embracing the Void: The Creation, Rehearsal, and Production of *Farside*

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Playwriting)

by

Vivian Jeanell Ophelia Barnes

Committee in charge:

Professor Naomi Iizuka, Chair  
Professor Marisa Abrajano  
Professor Stephen Buescher  
Professor Deborah Stein

2021

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University of California San Diego

2021

## DEDICATION

This iteration of *Farside* is dedicated to my family, biological and chosen, without whom I could not have finished this thesis. It is also dedicated to the resilient town of Pass Christian, Mississippi: home to some of my favorite people.

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Finally, I would like to thank my family. You kept me sane, you kept me grounded, you kept me whole. You’re in everything I write and you are all of the best parts. I love you.

## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Embracing the Void: The Creation, Rehearsal, and Production of *Farside*

by

Vivian Jeanell Ophelia Barnes

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Playwriting)

University of California San Diego, 2021

Professor Naomi Iizuka, Chair

I hate uncertainty. I am a planner and I take great comfort in knowing that I've done everything I can do to make things go as smoothly as possible. My time at UCSD has been marked by the slow chipping away at this reliance and working on *Farside* throughout this pandemic was the culmination of this process at this stage of my career.

*Farside* follows the story of Pam, an astronaut who orbits the Earth and collects orbital debris a.k.a. space trash. The play kicks off when she finally gets the chance to travel to the



moon but nothing about this mission goes the way it's supposed to. She faces all types of uncertainty: the precarity of the mission itself (which has been rescheduled multiple times for safety reasons); traversing the farside of the moon where she will be cut off from all communications back on Earth; and then, dealing with a clone that shows up in her space pod after she emerges from the farside of the moon. A clone that forces her to finally deal with the biggest force of uncertainty in her life: her broken relationship with her estranged mother whose health is quickly declining.

As I was working on this play about a woman dealing with the unthinkable, I was dealing with my own versions of the unthinkable: separation from all my loved ones because of a global pandemic, the complete and total reimagining of the entire theatre industry, an existential dread that stopped me from writing anything at all for four months, plunging into a new medium (the audio play), and learning to trust new collaborators at the same time we were all learning how to collaborate remotely.

Everything about the circumstances of creating and producing this play was the worst nightmare for my planning/perfection-obsessed brain: having to write it quickly because of the new audio play format, being at the mercy of constantly changing campus pandemic access, faulty Wi-Fi in rehearsal and during important recording sessions, actors and designers and crew members who were facing unprecedented emotional and physical challenges. I had to learn a new kind of patience and grace, both for myself and everyone else on the team. This required me to embrace the void and sit in the extreme discomfort of all these unknowns. Rather than languishing in the discomfort, I learned to work through it. Inspired by the tenacity and flexibility of the team, I stopped fearing the judgement of failing and took swings, trusting in the plasticity of the process. I learned to start trusting my gut rather than endlessly vacillating about

script changes and design choices. I let go of the idea of trying to get the play “right” or “perfect.” And letting go of that gave me a new kind of freedom in my work.

I still love to plan. I would still rather know exactly how something is going to go than deal with curveballs. Working on *Farside* didn’t magically “cure” me of any of that. But it did help me realize that disruptions are not the end of the world. That fracture and interruption, while uncomfortable, can lead to new viewpoints that crack open my creative process. And that embracing a new relationship to the void—one of curiosity instead of just fear—is a necessary step towards the next phase of my artistry.