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ITERATIVE PERFORMANCE: RESISTANCE AND OPPORTUNITY IN THE RHYTHM OF RETURNS

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ABSTRACT

This paper defines iterative performance as a live, time-based project in which multiple returns to the same framework (score, prompt, location, group) at regular intervals fundamentally shapes the dramaturgy of the work. The author asserts that the rhythm of regular returns inherent to iterative performance offers an alternative temporality that resists dominant, capitalist and heteronormative modes of living and making art, and creates the conditions for distinct artistic possibilities. Chapter 1 outlines the theoretical frameworks for this argument and introduces three key ways in which iterative performance is able to achieve the aforementioned goals. Chapter 2 explores three case studies through interviews with the artists, textual research and first-hand experience. The chapter concludes with two appendices, one a composite interview with Alex Torra and Iris McCloughan about The Sincerity Project, the other a partial index of contemporary iterative performance projects.
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INTRODUCTION

Every culture is first and foremost a particular experience of time, and no new culture is possible without an alteration in this experience. The original task of a genuine revolution, therefore, is never merely to “change the world,” but also - and above all - to “change time.”

- Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*

*Iterative performances* are live, time-based projects in which multiple returns to the same framework (score, prompt, location, group) at regular intervals fundamentally shapes the dramaturgy of the work. The rhythm of regular returns inherent to iterative performance offers an alternative temporality that resists dominant, capitalist and heteronormative modes of living and making art, and creates the conditions for distinct artistic possibilities.

While many performance works and creative processes incorporate iteration in some capacity, the kind of project I am discussing here functions in the following ways:

1. The work is live, time-based, and engages an audience or public
2. Iterations occur at regular intervals (e.g. once a week, once a year, every three years)
3. Each iteration is an equal component of the larger work rather than a work-in-progress towards a premiere
4. Each iteration is responsive to the time between iterations, to the act of *returning*, rather than fixed “episodes” created ahead of time and released on a regular schedule.

Taken together these attributes create a temporal structure that circumvents more typical performance development processes, and can profoundly impact the content, ethos, and impact of a work on creators and audiences alike.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Much has been written about the role of repetition in performance, as well as the function of regular personal practices not intended for an audience or public, but few have explored iterative performance as defined above. In their book *Time Slips: Queer Temporalities, Contemporary Performance and the Hole of History*, theater artist and scholar Jaclyn I. Pryor uses the term “serial” to describe their project *floodlines*, a multi-site-specific performance that repeated every year for seven years, somewhat revised each time “to stay true to the passage of time and the accretion of history.”¹ Pryor’s scholarship provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the potential impact of this iterative approach, which I explore later in this chapter. First, it bears explaining why I have chosen the term *iterative* over *serial*.

While the word *serial* implies regular returns to a framework that are equal components of a larger work, it also carries a strong association with television and web series. In those forms, all returns (or episodes) are typically at least written, if not fully produced, before they are released to the public, with little to no room for change. Conversely, the word *iterative* implies change from one return to the next. A new iteration of a software, for example, is understood to be different from the previous one. Internationally renowned writer, facilitator and healer adrienne maree brown invokes iteration as instrumental to the process of social and political change-making. “If we release the framework of failure” she writes, “we can realize that we are in iterative cycles, and we can keep asking ourselves—how do I learn from this?”² While each return of an iterative performance doesn’t necessarily aim to improve upon the previous one towards an ultimate goal, it is informed, consciously or unconsciously, by all previous iterations and by the time that passes between them.

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¹ Pryor, Jacklyn I. (2017) Page 113
² Brown, Adrienne Maree (2017) Page 105
Within performance studies and performance philosophy several theorists have written about the opportunity performance offers as a time-based medium to resist dominant temporalities (the sense of how time passes) and the systems they uphold. These authors often start by invoking foundational early 20th-century philosopher Walter Benjamin or contemporary queer studies scholar Elizabeth Freeman to make the case that time is not a neutral force, but one created and recreated to suit culturally hegemonic motives and value systems. As the introduction to the 2015 anthology *Performance and Temporalization* puts it, “time is not a given, natural, objective phenomenon, but a condition and product of processes of human activity.” Or more pointedly in Mauyra Wickstrom’s *Fiery Temporalities in Theater and Performance*: “temporality is actively and continually constructed for ideological and material purposes.” Our perception of time not only reflects our deepest societal values, but fundamentally impacts our lives.

The current dominant Western conception of time as a linear succession from past to present to future, for example, reinforces the capitalist values of progression, productivity and cultural amnesia. Another name for this kind of linear time is “Aristotelian.” Aristotle’s *Poetics*, arguably the foundational text of modern Western drama, reflects this conception of time in its embrace of a progression narrative, the idea that a story must have a clear beginning, middle and end. Aristotelian temporality is not without its consequences. As Pryor puts it, “dominant culture abjects subaltern subjects through the construction of time as linear, teleological, and progress-oriented.”

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2. See Elizabeth Freeman’s concept of “chrononormativity” in *Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography* (2005) and Walter Benjamin’s concept of “historical time” in *On the Concept of History* (1942)
The argument continues that as a time-based medium, performance can be a rich site to resist dominant, harmful conceptions of temporality and enact new ways of relating to time that can be reparative, transformative, even revolutionary. Building on seminal theorist Jack Halberstram’s idea of “queer time” as defying the linear, progressive logic of capitalist accumulation (or “straight time”), Pryor introduces the idea of the “time-slip”: a moment in performance when time is experienced “queerly” through the use of “stopping, rewinding, replaying, and perhaps even fast-forwarding past an unresolved traumatic event.” Time-slips, Pryor claims, “can help to transform sites of violence, injury, and/or harm into something else.”10 By resisting Aristotelian time within performance, artists can create the conditions for change.

Repetition acts as a particularly potent tool of temporal resistance. In discussing the power of repetition as a time-slip, Pryor begins by citing Judith Butler’s conception of gender as the “stylized repetition of acts through time” and resistance to gender essentialism as possible through the “breaking or subversive repetition of that style.”11 They expand this notion to include a range of “performative accomplishments,” including race, religion, sexuality, class, and national belonging. If these cultural conceptions are merely actions repeated over time, Pryor argues, they can be resisted by disrupting that repetition and/or repeating something else. Pryor draws heavily on the work of 20th-century philosopher Gilles Deleuze in theorizing the impact of repetition in/of performance, returning again and again to the refrain: “Repetition: something is changed.”12 Each time something repeats, or iterates, we are in a new present, and thus the repeated phenomenon will never be exactly the same. Repetition does not simply allow for change, it necessitates change, and creates a container in which change becomes the most recognizable phenomenon.

10 Ibid, 91
11 Ibid, 92
12 Ibid, 89
By inviting (or insisting on) a series of returns over time, iterative performance acts as a kind of expanded repetition, carrying with it all the same affordances described above plus its own distinct opportunities. After conducting interviews with core artists of three major iterative projects (described in depth in *Case Studies* below) I have identified some common opportunities provided by the rhythm of returns:

- By shifting focus away from a single product towards a series of equal components, the creators can pay more attention to the process and the experience of those involved, without sacrificing (and often while deepening) the overall integrity of the artistic gesture.
- By staying responsive to the time between iterations, the work becomes porous to the evolving nature of weather, world events, participant’s personal lives, and more, creating an opportunity to notice and be intentional about change.
- By returning at regular intervals, these projects tap into the often invisible rhythms of the natural world (circadian cycles, seasons, ocean tides, etc). This allows artists and audiences alike to settle into a rhythm, accessing expanded artistic freedom and community.

If “capitalist time forecloses necessary processes of reparation,” then iterative performance can create the necessary conditions for those processes to occur.\(^\text{13}\) It asks those involved to forgo the kind of pushing-through often found in the lead-up to a premiere in favor of creating a container within which to be present and look back, reflect, reimagine, and repair.

\(^{13}\) Ibid, 91
CASE STUDIES

These common threads have emerged from my experiences with, reflections on, and analysis of the iterative performances explored in this chapter. Over the last decade of living and working between Philadelphia and New York City, I have engaged with three major iterative performance projects as both artist and audience member: Headlong’s *The Quiet Circus*, Brian Mertes and Melissa Kievman’s *Lake Lucille Project*, and Team Sunshine Performance’s *The Sincerity Project*. Sensing a fundamental connection between these otherwise disparate works, I decided to return to them as a scholar. On account of my familiarity with all of the artists interviewed for this chapter I am engaging in “colleague-criticism,” an approach coined by theorists Jill Dolan, Jaclyn I. Pryor, and Paul Bonin-Rodriguez. This method acknowledges that the author may have close professional and personal relationships with the artists they discuss and thus approaches the act of writing from a non-hierarchical place of “mutual respect and common cause.”

The Quiet Circus

My first experience of iterative performance began in 2016 when I signed on to be the assistant director and site manager of *The Quiet Circus*, a project developed by Philadelphia-based company Headlong. Initiated by Headlong’s then Co-Artistic Director David Brick along with scenic designer Maiko Matsuhima, *The Quiet Circus* encompassed a series of interwoven programs spanning 15 months that explored principles of mindfulness through “creative engagements with site, performance, participation and community.” The core program consisted of weekly performances at the Washington Ave. Pier, an historic site of

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15 Headlong was founded in 1993 by Andrew Simonet, Amy Smith, and David Brick. From 2012-2019 it was co-led by Smith and Brick. As of 2019, David Brick is the sole Artistic Director.
immigration turned waterfront park tucked between Philadelphia’s U.S. Coast Guard Base and the Sheet Metal Workers Local 19 Training Center.

For three three-month stints (Fall 2016, Spring 2017, and Fall 2017), a core group of participants gathered at the pier every Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. For some, *The Quiet Circus* was one of many concurrent projects; for others it was their only consistent creative pursuit due to the constraints of parenthood, employment, or mental illness. Among the regulars were Carolyn, David’s profoundly Deaf mother who used a walker to navigate the site; Jacinto, an undocumented immigrant and construction worker who found the project when searching Facebook for meditation groups after a health scare; and Jenna, a multidisciplinary performance artist with an expansive creative practice. On Fridays we “rehearsed” and on Saturdays we “performed” – for audiences who had come specifically to experience *The Quiet Circus* and passersby alike. Each return to the pier began with a silent walk around the perimeter of the site, followed by open exploration of three scores (all participatory in one way or another), and ended with an invitation to reflect on the experience (and warm up or cool down depending on the season) at the Dunkin’ Donuts across the street.

Amidst this steady structure flowed deep currents of change. Some days the tide was high, other days it was low, some days we moved slowly, gathered in the shade, others we braced against the wind and rain. Core participants rotated in and out, and anyone who was interested in deeper engagement was invited to join a Friday “rehearsal” and participate from a new vantage point the following morning. By consistently returning to the same structure over time and keeping the barrier to entry low, the research no longer belonged to any one artist, but was held and worked on collectively by all who encountered it. In my interview with David, they recalled a turning point in the development of one of the three scores. Originally they had thought it
would become a “proscenium-inspired” dance piece. After several months of returns, he realized that “something more important [was] going on here, around how newcomers can come to an increasingly sophisticated and elaborating structure, that is still available [for them to join].”

The structure of the returns created the conditions for a work that was both highly complex and accessible, neither compromising the other.

A few months after the final return to the pier, David published a blog post on the *Quiet Circus* website titled “Echo.” What they wrote speaks directly to the broader ethos and opportunity offered by iterative performance:

> There’s a primal simplicity to a structure that focuses on the sense of “again” without being fussy about the repetition. [...] following a simple structure of iteration can side-step problems that come with imagining art as a result of self-consciously visionary acts of will and rarified talent. Instead, a structure of iteration imagines an artistic practice as part of a lived life. It puts emphasis on the work of showing up over and over again. To show up can be hard work but it is not mysterious and it doesn’t require an unshakable belief in one’s inevitable artistic prowess. [...] *An artistic practice is showing up for a duration of time that is pre-determined and repeats.* That's it. Notice that nothing is specified about what one does during the time designated for practice… The expectation of repeating, anticipating the “echo” of doing it again, is essential though. Knowing that *you will* return and knowing *when you will return* to the “empty duration” subtly influences your experience of the time in between practice times. This creates a new layer of awareness, observation and thought as you travel through each day’s ordinary and extraordinary journey. As your practice echoes over time, things will arise and begin to accumulate. This accumulation is insight which is the purpose of practice. Insight will suggest forms and languages as your practice continues.”

David’s writing does significant work in illuminating how the rhythm of returns resists capitalist notions of individual excellence, makes creative practice more accessible, and becomes fertile ground for artistic insight and discovery.

After three seasons of steady engagement with *The Quiet Circus*, one word echoed in my mind: *return*. Much like the sensation of phantom waves after a day spent in the ocean, the rhythm of our bi-weekly returns to the pier continued to pulse through my system months after

17 Brick, David. Personal Interview. 8 February 2023.
the project came to an end. It wasn’t until this framework was gone that I realized just how much it had impacted me and my understanding of what this kind of performance structure can make possible. In returning each Friday and each Saturday to the same (evolving) site, the same (evolving) scores, and the same (evolving) group, I found a downbeat for my free-form weeks. The rhythm of those returns gave me something that a six-week rehearsal period, or even a sporadic series of longer development periods, could not: a porous container in which to land, to listen, to reflect, to connect, to grow.

Lake Lucille Project

Memory, filtered through the body in time. What was before is now and is not now. Is new now.19

Last summer I received an eleventh-hour invitation to produce the Lake Lucille Project annual retreat. In between emails and check-ins and following along with rehearsal, I took feverish notes like the one above – feverish both because of the fullness of each moment at the lake and because I felt I had been dropped into a fever dream, deeply present in each moment and rocked by the waves of a past I had not directly experienced.

Brian Mertes and Melissa Kievman began the Lake Lucille Project in 2003. Nearly every summer since, a group of 20-80 artists has gathered at their old stone house on Lake Lucille in New City, New York to work on a performance – almost always an Anton Chekhov play.20 Spurred on by a provocation from playwright Erik Ehn at a Regional Alternative Theater conference, the couple decided to experiment with integrating their art practice into their neighborhood. They invited a group of performers up from the city to workshop The Seagull for a week, focusing as much on making good food as staging the play. The pair knocked on every

19 Excerpt from a personal journal entry made in August, 2022
door in the community, returning if no one was home until they made sure to verbally invite each of their 80 or so neighbors to come by at the end of the week, share some food, and see what they were working on. The first year was such a success that Brian and Melissa decided to do it again (and again, and again). When I asked Brian if it was an assumption that the project would repeat each summer, he replied: “It’s not an assumption, it's a shock… Because it's just so improbable and completely impossible and preposterous.” And yet, almost every year for nearly 20 years, they have returned.²¹

Although Brian and Melissa did not set out to create an iterative project, iteration found them, and has proven no less powerful than if it had been by design. With each successive year, more and more neighbors got involved – first as audience members, then as hosts and chefs for the growing band of artists descending on the lake, sometimes even as performers. I am reminded of a maxim I learned from Erik Ehn in college: Create a gift-giving economy. Giving someone the opportunity to give a gift is, itself, a gift. The audience brings a dish, the actors bring a play, everybody feasts. “There’s something about this expansion and contraction annually here in this community – you can feel the year go by with this event,” Brian mused in our interview. “That annual return creates this pulse, but I can feel that pulse inside this community as well.” Although last summer was scaled down significantly due to Covid-19, the community’s engagement persisted. Early on in the week a neighbor stopped by with a towering potted basil plant, just in case we might want some for our meals. Others lingered on their way home to watch rehearsal from the road. And come Saturday, the lawn hosted dozens of local witnesses, gathered to share a meal and see the latest iteration of Chekhov at the lake.

After a week of prepping the house and grounds for their arrival and our work

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together, the performers arrived over the course of one morning in twos and threes. With each new arrival, I felt the air shift with the echo of each of their previous returns (once or twice for some, every summer since childhood for others). “There’s a ‘yes’ the project absorbs” from those who are drawn to it, Melissa explains, “and it reinvents itself around that new configuration.”

This porousness de-centers any single creative voice and allows the work to live inside an ever-shifting landscape of perspectives and impulses. The most recent iteration reflects that inclination. Rather than cast actors in specific roles, Brian invited the actors and musicians to share responsibility for the text, feeling their way through the story as a collective.

In the second year of the project Brian and Melissa gathered a group to work on *Three Sisters*, and something “undeniably transformative” emerged in the final moments of the public showing. Brian claims to have “no idea” how it happened, but he does remember the note he had given the actors about that part of the play:

> Just work that round, that lullaby. As long as it's alive. Don't worry about *Does it need to come to an end?* Don't worry about it. If it's still going, it's still going. If it has ended, it has ended. If someone isn't done with it, and we're going back around to it, join in. And when it does end, when it does, no one has to keep returning to it. Just be in stillness.23

Eighteen years on, this note serves as an apt metaphor for the project as a whole, and one possible relationship to iteration. *If it's still going, it's still going. If it has ended, it has ended.*

**Sincerity Project**

As *The Quiet Circus* came to an end in early 2018, I took a job as the Operations Manager for another Philly-based company, Team Sunshine Performance. The Co-Artistic Directors Alex Torra, Makoto Hirano, and Benjamin Camp were in the early stages of preparing for the third installment of *The Sincerity Project*. In this “theatrical anti-play ritual” the same

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ensemble gathers every two to three years for 24 years to create a “public accounting for the lives and communities [they] create.” This chapter concludes with an interview composed from two separate conversations I had with the project’s Creative Director Alex Torra and one of the core ensemble members Iris McCloughan, which goes into depth about the origins, lessons and impact of The Sincerity Project. What follows is a summary of the major developments in the project’s history, as discussed in my conversations with both artists.

The piece began as a one-off performance exploring what it means to be sincere on stage. Once the company landed on iteration (first a joke, then a dare, now a reality), the work became increasingly complex and resonant. After a particularly challenging process to create the second installment in 2016, one ensemble member decided to step away. The remaining seven realized that if they were going to keep working together for two more decades, they needed to center the care and wellbeing of all involved. The changes they made were so significant that, in Alex’s words, Sincerity “feels like the place where we're innovating our practice most. The way we make Sincerity now has taught us how to make all of our shows. And we just keep on learning new ways.” According to both Alex and Iris, this shift not only kept the project and their relationships afloat, it led to some of their best material to date.

The latest iteration in 2021 further expanded what constitutes a return to The Sincerity Project. Led by Guest Director Shavon Norris, Sincerity #4 featured an expanded ensemble of performer/creators and a significant tonal shift. By adjusting the focus of the work from a single production to a dozen over twice as many years, the artists are free to take major creative risks and asked to create deeply considered and human-centered processes, which has fundamentally

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changed how Team Sunshine works on all of their projects. As Iris put it, “the piece’s true effect is in the accumulation of time… it feels like freedom… It's not really about any one of us. And it's not really about, at least in my opinion, making good theater anymore. It's about a wild, human endeavor of being committed to this relationship in this format for 24 years.”

CONCLUSION

Iterative performance offers a powerful framework for making live, time-based work. The rhythm of regular returns resists mainstream temporalities, and in so doing creates the conditions for a wide range of relational and artistic discoveries. A select few have been explored in this chapter; with a dedicated term, hopefully others can turn their attention to this form and uncover more.

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27 Ibid.
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APPENDIX A:
IN CONVERSATION WITH ALEX TORRA\textsuperscript{28} AND IRIS MCCLOUGHAN\textsuperscript{29}

N.B. These interviews were conducted separately and edited together after the fact. They have also been edited for length and clarity.

**Jillian Jetton (JJ):** Can you introduce yourself?

**Alex Torra (AT):** My name is Alex Tora. I use he and they pronouns, and I'm a Co-Artistic Director of Team Sunshine Performance. I'm also the lead artist for *The Sincerity Project*. Sometimes I'm called the Creative Director. I used to direct all of the installments and all the development of the project, but then last year for the first time we had a guest director. So I've kind of shifted into a slightly different position called “Creative Director.”

**Iris McCloughan (IM):** Iris McCloughan, they/them pronouns. I'm in the cast of *The Sincerity Project*. I'm one of the founding founding members of that ensemble. And I'm also a writer and an artist in other capacities as well.

**JJ:** What was the impulse behind this project?

**AT:** I was trying to scrap together a life as a freelance artist. I felt really tired and in need of some respite, some peace [...] I was experiencing existential confusion, like *what am I doing? What's my purpose? What's my community?* [...] The other thing that was happening was I was a little tired of fiction. I was thinking, *What are we doing? Isn't the best part of theater the true part?*

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\textsuperscript{28} Torra, Alex. Personal Interview. 24 January 2023.
\textsuperscript{29} McCloughan, Iris. Personal Interview. 13 April 2023.
JJ: How did you arrive at an iterative structure?

IM: So [before the project was iterative, in what is now called Sincerity #0] it felt a little gossipy. It didn’t quite connect. Maybe in parts it did, but I think overall it didn’t connect quite as strongly as Sincerity #1 does to this sense of the future.

AT: I remember Iris doing this [exercise in rehearsal of] real time updating of what was going on with them at that moment. And recognizing that, whenever we did that exercise the content would change… And then, because it was changing all the time, we were like, wow, we can really just do this forever. And then someone jokingly was like, What if we just said in the first performance that we're going to do this every couple of years, for 24 years?

IM: It was a joke for a while. And then there was a slow shift where suddenly people were like, you know, that's actually kind of a good idea. And we started shifting a little bit about what is the question of this performance? And like, what are we making towards? Is it just one thing? Or can we actually think about how to make material that resonates on a larger time scale? That was the period when Aram and I made the cooler moment. The prompt was: make a scene that is meant to get better, or more interesting as time would pass […] I still honestly think that one of the best things I will ever make as an artist is the cooler scene […] I could feel as I was performing it, that sense of time becoming material… How can a human who is alive engage with times in which they are not alive? Or, how can a younger person engage with times in which they will not be young anymore?”

JJ: How have you noticed the impact of iteration on *The Sincerity Project* audience members, perhaps around the letter writing?30

30 At each installment the ensemble invites the audience to write a letter to themselves that Team Sunshine will hold onto through the end of the 24-year project. The letters are available to read at each performance, so that by year 24 an audience member could show up to find 11 letters to themself written over 24 years.
AT: My sensation is often that the experience is private, but people acknowledge that it is really powerful. And sometimes they share some details, like, *Oh, my God, when I wrote this letter back in 2014, it said that I wanted to be a parent, and now I am a parent, or I was with a partner, and now I'm not with them.* [...] We used to do it so that people could collect their [old] letters and then write the [new] letter and hand it in before the show started. And then this last time Shavon thought it was a good idea to do that afterwards. And so the lobby was just like, people going all over the place with their letters and crying and writing to themselves. It’s an extraordinary thing.

JJ: What is essential to a *Sincerity* piece? In other words, what repeats?

AT: That it happened? I think everything else is on the table. I mean, literally, anybody else could direct it. Anybody else could be in it at this point. [...] The people involved need to be somehow connected to the people who have been involved. [...] And the action of the event (it doesn’t have to be a performance) is a kind of encounter with the things that have happened in our lives and in the world, and the time that has passed. [...] There's something else that's going on that's around care and community, and evolving notions of not just collaboration, but ensemble, that feels like a constant. Because we have to keep coming back to each other to figure out how the hell we work together. [...] It’s one of the gifts of the project, we're learning how to be in relationship for so long.

JJ: Do you think that that's where that shift towards care came from? The reality that you’ll be working together for so many years?

AT: Yeah, the urgency was immediate. *Sincerity* #2 was so hard. And so harmful, I think, for all of us, that we needed to take a moment to be like, *Stop, everybody stop.* What actually matters
here? How do we do this in a way that is actually healthy? Because we don't like each other anymore. We have hurt each other. This structure is very painful.”

**JJ:** How do you think the iterative structure makes this work more or less accessible?

**IM:** What it allows is that space of trusting that people are going to come back and that the container persists over time. [...] *Sincerity #4* is a great example. There wasn't a ton of money. I didn't have a ton of free time during the development period. And because of the iterative structure that was totally fine. I could still do the show. I still felt like I was involved and a part of it. But I didn't need to give everything, or as much, in a time when I couldn't.” [...] Around *Sincerity #3* there was that shift towards, what do we need from this process in order for it to feel sustainable? And [we arrived at]: We need to let check in take as long as it takes. And sometimes that means that all rehearsal is, is checking in. [...] That's when a lot of [Mel and Aram’s] material got built. And to me, that remains some of the strongest material in the project thus far. And I think it is because the piece was saying, what do you need? And not like, give me what you think the audience might need.

**JJ:** How do you feel this project relates to dominant (capitalist, heteronormative) temporalities?

**AT:** It's weird because [the project is] using the nonprofit model, that temporality, to be like: *alright, prep, prep, prep, produce, do the show, strike, move on to the next thing.* But we keep returning to the same question, framework, group of people, while we're making a different thing. It requires a different kind of communication, and a different kind of relationship.

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31 *Sincerity #3* focused heavily on Mel Krodman and Aram Aghazarian, both of whom had lost their fathers since the previous return.
Everything is relational. So the way we relate to each other, the way the producing organization relates to the creative staff, the way we prepare, the way we rehearse, all that stuff is different in this room than it is in other places. Because there's vocabulary and history. And it's very unusual. In fact, so much so that it feels like the place where we're innovating our practice most actually. The way we make Sincerity now has taught us how to make all of our shows. And we just keep on learning new ways. I mean, it's so hard to do this show. I cannot stress how difficult it is to corral seven to 11 people, pay everybody and pay for space, and then to deeply and considerately move through everyone's experiences, and to then to figure out how to make it all into a viable theatrical experience. So stupidly hard. And yet every time we do it, we learn something brand new about how we want to work. It's an extraordinary gift. It disrupts the nonprofit temporality because you can't just like plug and play, you can't use the same model, it is responsive to the people. […] It's funny, because when you're talking about capitalism or heteronormativity, so many [ensemble members] have gotten married or had kids on “normal” timelines.

**IM:** [Early on] I remember being very upset, because it felt like, implicitly, the project was still trying to attach to this heteronormative idea about what a life should be like. [...] After we did Sincerity #2 and we began talking about Sincerity #3, I remember a kind of freedom emerging, because I realized that in a project like this, number one was saying “this is what we're going to do.” Number two was proving that we were going to do it. And then number three could kind of just be anything. The only important thing is that we did it. [...] In number four, where we release even further the idea that the project is only the original cast, that it can be theatrical in a very different register, I think we realized that the heteronormative idea of *I can dream my future and make it happen* is sort of a lie. [...] The project resists the kind of time that feels inflicted with
heterosexuality, which is this vision of *I'm gonna do a good thing, and then I'm gonna get known*, that upward arc. Now we’re moving into a different mode where we don't necessarily need that upward arc, so much as it's a circle. And that the circle is both getting bigger, it's spiraling outward. But it's also, as time goes on, it feels like it spirals inward, too, because we have two more years of history with each other [...] And even though Ben and I, for instance, don't really talk outside of the rehearsal periods, I have such deep love for Ben, because we have been doing this thing together for 10 years, and we've both been moving through our lives. And it's not like we're that close, but even if we're on opposite sides of that circle, I still feel the connection. And over time, it only feels more valuable.
APPENDIX B:
INDEX OF CONTEMPORARY ITERATIVE PERFORMANCE PROJECTS

- *Lake Lucille Project*, Brian Mertes & Melissa Kievman (2003-ongoing)
- *Room for Cream*, The Dyke Division of the Two-Headed Calf (2008-2010)
- *The Motherhood Project*, inFLUX Theater Collective (2021-2031)
- *The Canyon*, Freddy Edelhart