

[Insert Scholarly Title Here]:
Negotiating Contested Identities Through X-
Communication

Dustin Goltz

As a child, I was always cast as the “bad seed” of the neighborhood. Parents, including my own, were wary of me. Whenever a group of us were caught ding-dong-ditching or blowing up mailboxes with acid bombs, I was assumed to be the ringleader, the troublemaker, and the bad influence. “You need to stop hanging out with ‘that Dusty boy!’ He’s always getting into trouble!” I refuse to confirm or deny these charges. When my friends and I would crank call someone, back in those blessed days before caller ID, we would all huddle around the phone, each listening in, feeding each other the next line, while holding our hands over each other’s mouths to muffle our laughter. I’ll start with this metaphor as a point of entry to this essay. This essay is a crank call into academia. While on one end of the phone, this may read like a coherent and stable person speaking to you, there are over a dozen of us (Deleuze and Guattari 3), slowly feeding the words and ideas that construct the “I” in this essay. Not all of us are laughing. One is gesturing right now to hang up the phone, not finding this funny at all. Another is afraid we’ll get in trouble. The metaphor of the crank call is by no means perfect, but it is a place to begin. It provides a way for me to start writing, in hopes that a better metaphor will develop along the way.

Vivian Gornick argues that constructing a well-crafted narrative with clear intent places two burdens upon the narrator. The narrator,

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or teller, needs to know *who* is speaking and *why* they are speaking (6). At the opening of the second paragraph of this story, I have already failed to meet her first criterion. The “I” in this story is suspect. It is a fictive construction, which at any moment, could be exposed through a burst of laughter from a dozen kids typing words onto these pages. It’s a joke, but not in the sense that it is funny. It’s a lie, but not in the sense that some form of truth is purposefully being withheld. It’s a choice, because there is a story “I” want to tell.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler argues that, “the ‘I’ has no story of its own,” as the “I” is always in relation to norms of discourse (8). All narrative marks a site of struggle, an assertion or action of claiming and defining the “I.” Kristin Langellier extends Butler’s concept of performativity as the action of the narrative, the political articulation and “struggle over personal and social identity rather than the act of a self with a fixed, unified, stable, or final essence” (“Voiceless” 208). Frederick Corey demonstrates this tension in his discussion of the personal versus the master narrative, I which he argues personal narrative “defixes” the master narrative’s truth, posing a challenge to hegemonic discourse (250). In performativity, this struggle marks the site of potential to challenge discursive structures and attempts to understand the world in new ways. Langellier’s work is steadfast in situating any discussion of personal narrative within a discussion of power and context. The personal narrative is a construction; something made, not found, and continually begs the question “who’s interested in this/whose interest is this?” (“Two or Three” 127). She asserts that all narrative is political, serves a political function, and marks an active site of discursive struggle for personal identity (“Voiceless” 208). In order for this story to be told, for the next sentence to be written (as it has been rewritten over ten times already), I ask you to place faith in this fiction of the “I,” this teller of this story, even if, in the background you hear ruptures of our muffled amusement, chatter, and conflict.

The following essay is not the story of *Banging the Bishop: Latter Day Prophecy* (Goltz, “Banging”; “Forgive”). This is my version of the controversial events surrounding *Banging the Bishop: Latter Day Prophecy*

at a southwestern university¹ in the fall of 2004, a local incident that speaks to broader issues of performance scholarship in the academy, the politics of differing approaches to research, and the influence of institutional power in determining what forms of knowledge are deemed legitimate. This is one way to frame the story, although there are many others, as the events created a performance (con)text (Strine) that generated a multitude of pedagogical opportunities for discussion and interrogation. My narrative begins with the larger controversy, but chooses one (con)textual extension of the events, the performance of *X-Communication*, as its primary focus. I create a narrative of my research and my performance of *X-Communication* in the wake of the *Banging the Bishop* postponement, offering an interrogation into the oversimplified ways that fixed or coherent identities were constructed and asserted within these events. As a gay male, a novice academic, and a former member of the LDS church, I was faced with navigating multiple and seemingly contradictory identities. I created the performance of *X-Communication* as a tool to generate dialogue within a tense and polarized community, but also as a space where I could assert my own understandings of self, challenging the simplistic identity categories that worked to lay claim on my experiences.

This essay takes the form of a quilt, an assemblage of textual fragments and identities from shifting contexts that are laced together

¹ The fact that this story takes place in the southwest United States at a university with a unique relationship to the Mormon community is vital to contextualizing these events. However, the specificity of the names involved or the various names relating to institution have been omitted or changed, as the objectives of this essay are not contingent upon these specific details. As these events were highly controversial, and this account is admittedly my own version of the story, my hope is not to incite further accusations or characterizations of individuals or institutions. One of my objectives is for this account to problematize any simplistic framing of these events, and to continue the promotion of mutual respect and productive dialogue. There is one name missing from my story whose absence is deeply regrettable—a member of the performance studies faculty, the show's director, and a dear friend—who made multiple sacrifices and contributions for *Banging the Bishop*. I would never take the liberty to speak for her, as we walked through this experience together at moments and separate at others. Still, it feels wrong to not see her name in these pages, as this experience was very much ours.

to construct a deceptive sense of coherence. The performance text from *X-Communication* is woven throughout this essay² to disrupt the ease of this narrative. The jagged chaos of identity and events are filed down with temporal distance, an effect of telling and retelling our stories into clarity. These textual ruptures work to resist this coherence and draw attention to the false stability of the crank caller. I also piece together letters, emails, and journal entries from the controversy to further destabilize the authority of a singular teller, the “me” that is seated in my bathrobe in front of my computer, three years after the event, in some ways a stranger to the performances I once wrote.

“Banging the Bishop”: More Than a Euphemism For Masturbation

It was the fall of 2004. My master’s degree was in performance art from a private art school, and so academia was a mystery I was just starting to piece together. On the last day of orientation, just before classes began, I was rushed to the hospital because my liver was failing. I was ordered by my doctors to “take it easy” for the next four months (my first semester as a doctoral student) and forbidden to drink any alcohol. It’s okay to laugh. I did. I was back on the same campus where I started as an eighteen year old newly-converted Mormon undergraduate in 1993, took classes in the LDS institute, prepared for my Mormon mission, returned as a failed missionary, accepted a gay identity, and began doing solo performance work. I was an active member of the LDS community at one point, and so I was aware of the substantial LDS presence on this particular campus. However, this LDS presence and the speculated influence of LDS ideologies had consistently grown over the last decade, as the university’s single largest benefactor was now a prominent local LDS businessman (Watson).

The story begins on 4 October 2004. I had survived a month and a half with yellowed jaundiced skin and no alcohol when I handed

² Unless specifically noted, all set apart text in the essay is from the performance script of *X-Communication*.

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out the first flyer for *Banging the Bishop: Latter Day Prophecy* (hereafter *BTB*). The performance was scheduled to open in a week. The promotional flyer and press release read:

This man will make it to heaven. All he has to do is honor his temple covenants, serve a two year mission, marry a good Mormon girl, have a ton of kids and keep smiling till it hurts... But he's Jewish... and gay... and he masturbates A LOT! *Banging the Bishop* is a multimedia performance, combining video, sound, movement, musical theater, and narrative into one absurd journey. "Goltz and [Director] expect that some audience members won't be amused by a tale that mixes synagogues, temples, bedrooms, and gay bathhouses," says [theater critic for state newspaper]. "The work is both harsh and tender in its honesty," says [director], "Any time you reveal those kind of truths there is a risk." [Theater critic for local weekly] calls *Banging the Bishop: Latter Day Prophecy* a "slapstick journey through love, religion, sex, and hockey" that's "rowdy," "relentlessly hip," with "compelling video work." He warns you, however that "You'll never hear the hymn 'Come come yea saints' the same way again!"

On October 5th, I receive a phone call from the director of *BTB*. "We need to cancel rehearsal." In response to our publicity, a letter was sent to the director of the school of communication, the director of the performance studies area, and members of the administration. Doors were closed. Emergency meetings were taking place. Several weeks later, I was finally given a copy of this letter, which was written by an associate faculty member at who was a member of the LDS church.

Banging the Bishop. Its very title revolts me, and reeks of Hate Speech aimed not to elucidate one's personal experience, but to incite hatred and fear against a religion and a people who have suffered hatred, persecution, and oppression all its days... *Banging the Bishop*, in all its connotations, is an aggressive sexual act of violence akin to rape. It not only dehumanizes and objectifies the men called to serve as Bishops of my faith, but ignites violence against them. On a campus that boldly asserts: "HATE—NOT IN THIS HOUSE," how can we turn about-face and condone, even promote, such a

hate-filled show? Were another, in a fit of vengeance, to propose a show entitled *Banging the* (insert any number of groups: Homosexuals . . . Jews . . . Muslims) I am confident the humane [department] would censure, and prohibit the request. As well they should! ... Others have urged me to speak decidedly, encouraging a direct address to [university president] yet I hesitate ... I entreat you with the energy of my soul. Cancel the show. Cancel the show. Show your compassion, and cancel that show (Watson 26).

A second letter, by a second LDS faculty member, was sent directly to the university president.

I trust that you will be sensitive to the feelings of [university's] Latter-day Saint community and seek to preserve its dignity. I trust that you will continue to maintain a campus environment where provocative ideas can be explored with respect, and where blatant provocation is not considered a legitimate substitute for critical exploration ... In that light, I request that you exercise your office to censure and cancel the October 15-17 performances of *Banging the Bishop* (Watson 26).

I arrive at campus on October 5th. No one in the department is talking to me, yet I feel like everyone is staring at me. Faculty members, whom I have yet to meet, are whispering to each other, but quickly silence themselves as I walk by. Their smiles look painful on their faces. Do I still hand out flyers? I feel ashamed to be holding them, unsure of what I have done. With only two rehearsals left before curtain, I opted to go to The Empty Space and run the show by myself, even though the official rehearsal was cancelled. I sat in the theater, reading the flyer over and over. I thought about all the things I might have done wrong. The silence of the space was exaggerated by my own paranoia. I sat in judgment before an empty audience, facing accusations I had to both supply and then defend. Although I didn't know what the specific problem was, I knew that the thing I had been running away from for over a decade had just caught up with me.

I sit on a solid black cube, and talk directly with the front row.

PERFORMER. There are questions I have avoided for a long time, because I've been afraid. October 5th, I walked into this space, The Empty Space, with a bag of Wendy's and a Diet Coke. I sat right here on a box, with my hockey stick, and I performed the show, from beginning to end, by myself, as dialogue, as prayer. (*Looking to the sky*) Help me understand what it is I'm doing wrong. I don't point fingers. I don't judge. I own all of it. Please let me know because I am tired. I'm tired of waking up in the middle of the night to read scriptures, wondering if I have failed somehow. I'm tired of reading my patriarchal blessing³ and trying to find something in there that even resembles who I am, or who I was supposed to be. I'm tired of reading Bryce's letter saying, "get back on your mission because you don't know what it's like and I do, and so you can't possibly understand what you're missing." I'm tired of wondering if I failed, if I just wasn't strong enough. Why won't these questions go away? The Mormon Church saved my life. It did. I owe my life to the Mormon Church. I'd be dead now, and I remember the calm that rushed through me every time I tried to end it, a peace, a resolution. I've been exhausted ever since.

BTB was my story, about my body, and my experiences. This highlighted my obvious personal connection to the text, but more so, an inner conflict. I wasn't standing up for the work of Larry Kramer or a distant author whose words I chose to embody, such as with the controversies surrounding *The Ghetto* and *The Normal Heart* (Roach; Strine). The text was my assertion of self, my claiming of an "I" in relation to existing discourses, and so I was responsible, if not suspect. Upon immediate attack, my first reaction was to doubt the text. I felt "I" was wrong, "I" was unfair, and "I" was now going to be punished. Ironically, the entire performance of *BTB* was about feeling guilt and shame for one's body and one's experiences, searching desperately for some form of forgiveness. Standing in the theater where I had once felt completely safe, I ran the words of the

³ A patriarchal blessing is an extended blessing in the Mormon Church. The blessing is recorded and then typed up, so one can refer to it throughout one's life. The blessing contains information about the individual's entire life on earth, and serves as a guide for keeping them on the correct spiritual path.

text through my body, interrogating myself for a confession or some evidence of my crime.

As I performed the words of the text, guilt turned to anger. I grew frustrated with myself for allowing their complaints to cast doubt in my mind, furious that the shame I had fought to exorcise from my life still had such power. I felt a deep connection to the text that had been absent through the rehearsal process, a fury and an urgent passion that I hadn't felt since I pounded those words into my computer years before. I remembered why I wrote this show.

PERFORMER. I stood right there, and faced God, and I performed the monologue in the show that means the most to me. It's about a friend whom I love, a man who is gay, a man who has spent his entire life destroying himself in shame. Watching someone you love hate themselves, hurts. Watching someone you love torture themselves, hurts. He's sick, and that's no one's fault, and yet, it's everyone's fault. I stand here on stage and I pray for him, because he thinks God doesn't love him. But I love him. I love him, and that love is good. And this show is for that boy. It's about forgiveness. It's about finding forgiveness for our selves, and our bodies, and our loves.

I left the theater resolved. I felt, with a burning certainty, that *BTB* would be performed this next week because it was the right thing to do. To apologize or cower away from this performance because of LDS pressure could not be an option. Only then should I feel ashamed, because running away in fear would mean the story "I" tell in the text is a lie.

That night, I received the call from the director of the performance. The next morning, ticket reservations on the website were shut down, announcing that *Banging the Bishop: Latter Day Prophecy* was indefinitely postponed. I was never asked to be a part of the meetings that took place. The script of the performance was not read by anyone except the show's director, nor was it requested in the decision-making process. I found out that the discussions surrounding the performance extended from the president's office, to the provost, to the dean, to the department chair, through my director and collaborator, but the final decision was relegated to the

performance studies faculty, with a vague directive to “cancel or postpone the show or face the consequences.” (Park-Fuller, “Socio”).

I didn’t understand the criteria for the decision, nor the politics and power structures that placed performance studies in such a tenuous and uncertain position. To put it simply, there was much more at stake in this controversy than a few complaint letters and the questionable promotion of a performance. Over the previous summer, the university went through major restructuring, and the communication department had just landed in a new college with a new dean, as well as a newly hired departmental director. In a climate of anxiety and adjustment about the future of communication within a new college, the department was just beginning to sort through “the way we do things now” from “the way they’ve always been done.” Needless to say, when this issue landed on the desk of the college dean, who had to answer to the provost, who was responsible for communicating with the university president, it was not an ideal situation to begin articulating the scholarly or pedagogical merits of performance research. In fact, many key stakeholders in this discussion were unfamiliar with the field of performance studies at all, as it was a brand new addition to their college. Had these events taken place in a fine arts college, which are more likely to have clear procedures or mechanisms in place for handling a controversial production, these events may have taken a much different turn. However, as our department was newly housed in a college more familiar with social scientific research and our adjustment phase was suddenly burdened with a growing controversy, a giant spotlight was shined upon performance studies expecting some explanation. This was exacerbated due to the much more strict policy within our new college for getting official permission from the dean prior to using the college or university name on any form of posting, which we had failed to do. The anxieties, adjustments, and frustrations that accompanied this institutional restructuring were already in place, further complicating the simple narrative of one flyer and two complaint letters. Transition quickly shifted to crisis. Still, as I was shut out of the discussion, my knowledge was limited to the flyer and two formal complaints. My naïve faith in a clear line that divides a “right” from a “wrong” decision reared its head. At that time, I felt

they made the wrong choice. Three years later, as I have slowly gained more knowledge of these events, I have come to believe that nothing was as simple as it might have seemed at the time.

Violating doctor's orders, I indulged in a bottle of self-pity, a performance I know all too well. An odd impatience lingered around me, watching me, expecting me to do something, to respond. After sobering up from my victim status, fellow graduate students and faculty eased me into the realization that I was not powerless in this situation. As a graduate student, I was far more protected from the institution than the faculty or the administration. However, my peers argued that my framing of the events needed to be reconsidered. If I chose to respond or protest, then I needed to perform a very specific identity. I was not an artist. This was not about being a former member of the LDS church or a gay man. If I were to be taken seriously, I needed to be an academic, a performance identity for which I had yet to rehearse or embody. My complaint was about "scholarly inquiry," not "free speech." Don't mention "art" or "censorship," as these terms are irrelevant in the social sciences. It wasn't about "a performance" it was about "research." I suddenly landed in academic boot camp, the fight for legitimizing different ways of knowing through strategic use of language. The "I" that I assert in the following letter, which was sent out over the department listserv, stands in the place of a dozen peers and friends, who were equally unsettled by the events of that past week. However, it needed to come from "me."

Dear Colleagues,

Given our collective concern in the pursuit of scholarly research, some important questions need to be addressed: What are the implications of this decision, specifically in regard to power and private discourse in the university? Who is allowed to tell their story? Who has the power to silence one's story? Who is held responsible? How is it that a complaint about a research project is given serious consideration without any knowledge or investigation of the research itself? What impact do the complaints of religious organizations have on the silencing of scholarship? How does this impact your own work and the integrity of the [university] academic and artistic community? I send these questions to you to

begin a dialogue. These are questions that I cannot answer because the discussions take place behind closed doors. However, I firmly believe that these questions impact many of us and need to be asked, regardless. I want to strongly encourage you to think about these questions, discuss these questions, and continue asking these questions until you, yourself, can feel satisfied with the answers.

Over the next two days, the listserv was flooded with discussion and debate. As soon as a group of graduate students and concerned faculty entered the discussion, local TV news stations, print media, CNN, and the ACLU all made efforts to contact me. While some attempted to explore the potential reasoning for the postponement, others were quick to name and define the events. Homophobia, right wing religious influence in the university, the tenuous position of performance studies, the changing role of the American university, academic freedom, and censorship became framing devices to discuss this situation, each highlighting broader issues that were already in existence on campus. Within each of the narratives my identity was constructed in distinct and often contradictory ways. I was the gay victim of homophobia, the citizen denied free speech, the reckless graduate student, the blasphemous pervert, a necessary example to mark the limits of college campus tolerance, the impassioned young scholar, the naïve artist, and the gay guy who had sex with his LDS bishop.

Mary Strine argues for an “expanded conception of the artistic performance text,” or (con)text using the examples of the controversial productions of *The Ghetto* at Ball State University and *The Normal Heart* at Southwest Missouri State University (391). She examines how these productions are embedded within larger social dramas, and how these dramas point to extend performance as a potential strategy for political interference. In each of these performance (con)texts, the public controversy surrounding the productions “assumed a character of its own” (392). In a similar fashion, the postponement of the performance became a vehicle, a situation to be appropriated to discuss a myriad of issues that lacked a defining event to articulate. For this reason, the performance postponement became an opportunity for multiple interventions,

broadening the (con)text far beyond the scope of a performance nobody had seen or read. As communication scholars in performance, many members of the faculty urged the graduate population to reframe this potentially damaging situation as an excellent opportunity for education and inquiry. Dialogue was happening. The attacks on performance studies' legitimacy were answered instantly through the rapid dissemination of ideas, opinions, thoughts, and perspectives on the issue (Park-Fuller, "Socio"). While theatrical performance is a vehicle for consciousness-raising and social intervention, in this case, it was the (con)text, rather than the performance, which created the intervention.

The pedagogical opportunity afforded by the performance (con)text was capitalized on in a number of settings. The closed-door discussions, which initiated the action, were broadened out to faculty-student departmental meetings, a graduate student response committee, and public forums for debate. On this level, the protection of scholarship and the visibility of departmental procedures came into question. The role of performance scholarship entered the larger discussion, providing visibility for the discipline, and created an environment that forced the importance of this work to be articulated and expanded (Park-Fuller, "Socio"). The student and local press carried this discussion to the broader community, highlighting the issues of LDS funding to state institutions and freedom of expression in the university (Watson 24). Class discussion explored, dissected, and debated the topics unearthed in the (con)text. The university hosted a public forum on academic freedom, exploring issues of power, private funding, and the role of academia in the freedom of expression (Goodall). In this situation, communication was flourishing. Articles and opinions from all sides of the discussion were featured on queer, LDS, masturbation, and art websites, and extended beyond to multiple discussion boards, and blogs.⁴

⁴ The postponement of the show was reported and discussed on a multitude of local websites, such as the university press webpage, local Jewish organizations, city newspapers, and the local Humanist chapter. Additionally, the story was discussed on sites of broader national and international interest, for example queerday.com,

While I was cast as a character in multiple narratives, some very negative and others overly positive, these disseminated stories had very little to do with my own experience and understanding of the events. I remember walking out of a meeting with the administration and a peer asked me, “So, what do you think this is all about?” I shrugged my shoulders, unsure how to answer the question in a declarative sentence. Bothered by my pause, he corrected, “It’s about homophobia. It’s that simple.” I remember thinking to myself, “I wish it were.”

PERFORMER. Why should this show not take place? It’s a good question. It’s a hard question, and more complicated than many can know, on either side. Sides, two opposing sides. This was not the intention. I stand in the middle.

Supportive friends and colleagues continually framed the story as “Dusty is being silenced by the Mormons.” But the problem was, it wasn’t “the Mormons,” which implies some collective and unified body. Some Mormons voiced complaint, but it was the institution that postponed the show, and more specifically it was my own professors, who did so under unspecified pressures. Rather than “the Mormons,” it was academia that stripped me of a voice in this situation, as it was demanded I perform a role I wasn’t capable of playing. I knew the power of performance in my body. I felt performance, but was not prepared, at that time, to sit in a stuffy seminar room behind institutional tables and articulate, in their terms, a convincing argument for the defense of performance scholarship. I felt inadequate to make the arguments that needed to be made. Three years later, I have those arguments ready at a moments notice, citing the well-crafted words of Conquergood, Schechner, Turner, Langellier, Denzin, Taylor, Madison, Pollock, and Pelias at the first sign of attack. However, at that time, I only had what I knew in my body, and that was not enough.

As the academy and the role of the academic silenced me in these events, I was equally frustrated by the ways the LDS church was

jackinworld.com, blogs on livejournal.com, lincolnplawg.blogspot.com, affirmation.com, as well as LDS-themed discussion boards.

being framed. *BTB* was all about my negotiation of Judaism, Mormonism, and homosexuality, and yet these events, from the initial complaint letter stripped me of any LDS affiliation, history, or experience. I was constructed as “the Mormon-hater” and the “anti-Mormon.” It was assumed that my gay identity somehow cancelled out my Mormon past, and blanket statements and totalizing assessments about Mormons were thought to be acceptable in my presence. Statements like “you were Mormon” place a temporal assignment on my identity that implies I am no longer Mormon. This model of “once was, but no longer” articulates identity in terms that fails to grasp its complexity. Whenever I haven’t eaten for a good part of the day and my stomach begins to growl with hunger, I am instantly taken back to Sunday fasts and the strength that I felt for enduring hunger in the name of obedience and sacrifice. I will find myself spontaneously singing “Oh Lord, My Redeemer” in my car, on the freeway, late at night. Sometimes, when I pray, I fold my arms and begin with the words, “Dear Father, who art in Heaven. I come to thee on this night.” Sometimes I don’t. I have experienced living as an LDS undergrad at this university. Daily, my beliefs were mocked in my classrooms and in the dorms. While I am not Mormon, at the same time, I’m not not Mormon. As people would make jokes or statements about Mormons, I felt a frustration when their beliefs were misrepresented. I resented having to take on the role of defender of Mormon beliefs, for several reasons, yet the ways LDS beliefs are constructed in popular discourses is often oversimplified or over-exoticized.

As the events unfolded, who I was in this whole discussion became less and less clear to me. Even worse, the discussion became a talking within “camps” rather than a discussion across. I was satisfied that the decision to postpone was made visible and not tucked away. Still, I failed to see the productivity in several of the strategies proposed by my peers, such as protesting the LDS Institute or speaking to news media. I knew the media would likely sensationalize the sexual elements of the performance and misrepresent performance studies. Additionally, I had several personal issues I was struggling with, as I didn’t know how or where “I” had a voice amidst this whole controversy.

Gay and Mormon (But Never Had Sex With My Bishop)

Performance became the one way I felt I could respond to the events, one space where I could figure out who “I” was in the middle of this controversy.

PERFORMER. I walked into the Empty Space Theater over ten years ago. I guess it would be fair to say I left the church and came here. I love the name “Empty Space” because it lacks definition. It says nothing about what happens here, nothing but possibility. This space is sacred to me: as a site of inquiry, as an exploration of identity, of truth, of sites of knowledge. So many bodies, ideas and truths have used this Empty Space to ponder, to pray, to reflect, to declare. It’s a safe space. Ghosts and remnants of past and futures float around this small room. I did my very first solo piece here. It was called “His Image” and the entire show was about allowing myself the space to be angry. [Two treasured mentors from my undergraduate program] allowed me that space. My twenty-year old body in black jeans and my naked twenty-year old chest smeared with mud still linger in this space amidst all of the other voices.

The *X-Communication* performance project sought to interrogate how the different “sides” of the controversy failed to account for my own identities and identifications. I wanted to explore and problematize the clear lines that were being drawn between “us” and “them,” as I struggled to locate myself within/across this binary frame. I started with a series of questions. Based on my understanding and experiences within the Mormon Church, why should this production *not* take place in academia? Why should this production take place within academia? How might I attempt to engage this issue in a productive dialogue with the LDS community when their worldview is radically challenged by my queerness? How might I attempt to negotiate these diverse worldviews that exist within my own body? Why is *BTB* at the center of this discussion? Why is it feared? Why is it (if it is, in fact) relevant?

PERFORMER. We attended a church fireside earlier this evening, and no one was ready to go home. We drove up here, on top of this mountain.⁵ Wow! Guys, check this out. Look out over the city lights, past the mountains. It's perfect, huh? It's beautiful. Peter, Morgan, Mike, this world is our gift tonight. The spirit is within us, swirling around us, can you feel that? It's overpowering. You guys are literally glowing. What a world. (*In prayer*) Heavenly Father, tonight, on this mountain, we promise we will be forever faithful and true. We will obey your word and honor you with our actions. Thank you, Father. We say these things in His name, amen. (*To audience*) I will remember this night for years to come. I will remember who I am, and the truth I hold as I stand here. I am God's child, and I am blessed with this knowledge, with this testimony. I would never write that show. Standing here, that show would never happen. Peter, Mike, Morgan and I, we would fight it, like warriors, because that's the right thing to do. And so, ten years later, I've returned to scripture, walked back into church, trying to get back to that mountain that amazing night, to remember why I would have fought me.

X-Communication is a personal investigation into the "I" that is asserted and constructed within the narrative of *BTB*. My relationship to the LDS Church was more complicated than many seemed to understand. During the entire explosion, following the postponement, I remained, technically, a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. While I was in the process of removing my name from church records, I had taken my endowments in the Mormon Temple and engaged in sacred rituals, which are closely guarded and discussion of them is strictly prohibited outside of the temple walls. Mormonism is not some distant and abstract evil, but a piece of me with lingering remnants in my photo albums, my bookshelf, my memories, and my daily life. My mind and my body have experiences that the LDS church claims to own. I was LDS, and there is a part of me that will always be, or, at

⁵ Some sections from the "mountain" portion of the *X-Communication* text were later added to the revised script of *Banging the Bishop* in 2005. In this research, I crafted new text that I felt offered an important voice to the script, a voice that I felt was absent when I revisited the original script months later.

least, not not be LDS. I know, through lived experience, prayer, fasting, and daily struggle and negotiation, the work it requires to live the life of a faithful Mormon on a daily basis.

PERFORMER. We stood on that mountain. Our reasons would not have made sense to anyone other than ourselves. Wrong is wrong. God's truth is more powerful than the academy, or free speech, or even logic. Spirit, that which carries and claims truth. To see that flyer, the charred text, the charred mission call, the temple... Standing on that mountain, we would understand with the utmost certainty that this was the work of the lost, the misguided. Why would you do this? In that moment, I would have approached my play and myself with disgust, but mostly pity.

At eighteen years old, I “came out” as a gay male, taking that identity upon myself. I was terrified of what that meant, ashamed of what that made me, and what my life would become. It was an identity I could not manage, and I grew depressed, disgusted with myself, and eventually wanted to die. The church was at my door when no one else was.

PERFORMER. The LDS church embraced me. For the first time I could remember I knew, with all my heart, I was a good person. I had a mission. I had something divine inside of me. The discovery of this, the nurturing of this, living with this, as I woke each day... I had a knowledge, a spirit, and a testimony of the truth of this church, and a desire to love. I wished my friends could understand. I wished my family could understand. They couldn't. They thought I was nuts. But I wasn't. I was home. For the first time in my life, I was home.

When I “came out,” for the second time, I forced myself to deny much of my Mormon self. These differing identities that existed inside of me refused to dialogue with each other, feeling as if one must lay dormant for the other to exist.

PERFORMER. I remember the night I was baptized. I believed I was starting over. I remember changing my clothes after the baptism and watching my friend change, and the desire I felt made

me so sad. I thought that desire would be lesser. I believed it would be gone. As much as you may hate the idea of this play, I felt the same way about my body. I wanted it to be quiet. I wanted it to have some respect. I loathed its perversion, its reckless freedom, and its violation of all I held sacred.

The *X-Communication* project adopts an autoethnographic/ autobiographical/ personal narrative approach to the construction of the performance text. The placement of these three concepts next to each other is not intended to dismiss their differing historical developments in the academy but seeks to challenge the problematic ways they are often set apart from one another. The construction of autobiographical personal narrative, as exemplified in the controversy surrounding *BTB*, inescapably implicates the broader cultural backdrop (Corey; Langellier, *Two or Three*), as the effort to designate domains of the personal from the cultural is “somewhat absurd” (Gingrich-Philbrook 299). Gingrich-Philbrook interrogates the legitimizing claims that autoethnography offers a cultural critique absent from autobiography, arguing that this limited representation of autobiography serves to obscure autoethnography’s mediocre claims to artistry and aesthetic commitment (301). I wish to work within these three concepts, as my project is informed by literature written under each of these terms (Corey; Ellis and Bochner; Gingrich-Philbrook; Langellier, *Two or Three*; Park-Fuller, *Absence*; Ronai). My goal was to face my fear about the questions, concerns, guilt, and shame that I felt by writing the text of *BTB*. I wanted to bring myself closer to the person I was ten years before, this Mormon convert who had absolute faith in scripture to answer any question he faced.

I placed myself in situations I had avoided for years, believing that specific sites, specific encounters, and specific situations would provide some form of connection to my past, this person I used to be. Peter⁶ was my best friend for several years, as well as the man who baptized me twelve years ago. Unbeknownst to him, and maybe myself, I was in love with him for the majority of our friendship.

⁶ The name Peter is a pseudonym.

When I left the church, our friendship faded immediately. I cut ties with him, immersed myself in gay friends, gay bars, and gay identity. The pain that drove me away from Peter was a composition of unrequited love and guilt for my broken covenants to the church, to which he was a witness. At that point in my life I was afraid to face him, fearing the way his eyes would study my overcompensating narratives that worked to justify my new life, a life I was just beginning to reconcile and negotiate. We had not spoken more than ten minutes in a decade when I called Peter, asking him to meet me for dinner on 17 November 2004.

My anticipated responses and defenses were in overdrive. I projected potential narratives onto Peter in a preemptive effort to prepare my counter-response. I cast him as the devout Mormon who would self-righteously judge my life, my choices, and my performance. I cast myself as the queer artist who has the right to tell his story. I later realized that I was complicit in the very discourses I thought I was challenging. My anticipated scripting of our meeting was not only inaccurate, but also unfair. I was just as bad as all the people I had criticized in the performance controversy; the ones who unfairly reduced me to a singular identity stereotype. I projected this simplistic identity onto Peter, but my actions were less forgivable. Peter was my friend. A person I spent every day with for over three years, and yet somehow I filed and shaped him in my mind into something less than human. His only response to the whole performance drama was, “well, those people just don’t know you. I know who you are. You’d be fair.” We spent the majority of the dinner talking about the career trajectories of U2 and R.E.M., our families, and the friends we’ve lost touch with. We weren’t the same people we once were. Some of Peter’s idealism had been tarnished, his eyes tired from working long hours to support his wife and two daughters. Still, we knew each other in ways that are more complicated than saying “we once knew each other.” I located a part of me that was unique to my interactions with Peter, a relational identity (Jackson) that reemerged very easily after a decade over a burger and fries. While not fully contingent on this relational identity I have with Peter, Mormonism was inescapably tied to this self. Long ago, I had convinced myself that the “Mormon me” was a

performance that was somehow less authentic or accurate (Tracy and Trethewey). I dismissed my entire life, from that time, as if it was all a lie. For clarity of self, I lumped friendships, basketball, Louis L'Amour books, Jimmy Stewart movies, and dozens of other identifications into an overstuffed bag that I labeled "Mormon" and tucked it away. What scared me was that I wasn't as different now as I wanted to believe. My identity was as contingent on physical space and relational interaction as it was on religious or sexual categorizations. The lines between then and now, the "me back then" and the "me now," lost some coherence.

My boyfriend dropped me off at the church sacrament meeting on morning of 21 November 2004. I wore a dress shirt and a tie, shaved, and combed my hair for the first time in years. My goal was not to fit in, but to not stand out. For years I have been receiving mail and missionary visits requesting I return to church. I chose a different ward from the one I used to attend, wanting to focus on how the physical and spiritual space felt in my body without facing the pressure of explaining myself to others. Upon entering the building, I feared two different reactions. I was afraid I would feel guilty and ashamed; paranoid that everyone there would sense my transgressions like a spiritual branding across my forehead. What if they recognize me from my picture in the paper? I was equally afraid that it would feel too comfortable, too right, demanding I go through the seemingly never ending process of questioning my choices, my broken promises, and my failures.

Throughout the ceremony, I experienced both reactions. People were friendly. There were many kind smiles and handshakes. I remembered how humbled I felt during sacrament meetings years ago, and the deep shame of not feeling worthy to partake in the blood and body of Christ. I remember that person, that emptiness and humility squeezing within my stomach. However, it was less of a memory, in the sense of temporal distance, than an embodied history that challenges the logics of linear historical mapping (Taylor). My body seemed to work in different ways, negotiate differing meanings or pathways of sensation. I felt a certain sense of power in not taking the sacrament. It wasn't out of shame, but a choice, one that sat comfortably in my body as a defining action of the "me, now." I sang

hymns I somehow managed to hold onto in the back of my mind. I was humbled by the prayers and missed having a regular space in my life that was set apart for spiritual reflection. I enjoyed the lessons and the speakers with a generous removal from the doctrine through a logic of “this works for you.” It didn’t, however, work for me. I walked out of the ward building, turned a corner, and lit a cigarette. It was a small, petty, and satisfying act of distancing myself and claiming myself. I laughed, feeling like a teenager all over again, enjoying the tiny rebellions that carve out points of departure from the identities imposed upon us. I do share something with everyone in that room, and yet, I made a choice not to live it, perform it, and place faith in it. I’ve placed my faith elsewhere, but we’re not complete strangers, not in that space. My body still feels that space, understands its energy, and recovers a piece of me within it.

On the evening of 28 November 2004, I prayed after I finished reading the “Book of Moroni,” the final section of *The Book of Mormon*. It contains a scriptural passage that is commonly used by missionaries, which asks readers to pray on the truth of the testament. It was how I came to the church many years ago, after Peter gave me a copy of *The Book of Mormon*. I realized that I’d been going about this completely wrong. This was my truth. I remember how deeply I felt this, the warmth, the conviction, and the hope that stemmed from praying on these words. How can truth be in the past tense? The next morning, I woke up and watched my boyfriend sleeping. I was listening to Sinéad O’Conner in the background and watching his face as the sun slowly inched across the room. I had been mining my guts for everything I could feel, and watching him sleep was the most peaceful resolute sensation I had experienced in months. I remember, when I returned from my mission, I received a barrel full of letters from Mormon friends at the Missionary Training Center. They were on a campaign to save me from my “choices.” One particular letter always stuck with me. It came from a close friend, who argued, “There is a difference between happiness and pleasure.” That phrase haunted me for years. Looking at my partner sleep, listening to Sinéad, some of the pain of that phrase was eased.

In asking “who am I,” the question perpetuates the illusion of a fixed and stable self to be located or found (Butler; Tracy and

Trethewey). To approach identity in terms of intersectionality (Crenshaw), creates a space to articulate the ways multiple identities cross over one another, as religious, sexual, gendered, or academic identities do not function on “mutually exclusive terrains” (357). However, intersectional models of identity run the risk of reducing the messy nature of identity “into a formulaic grid” (Puar 128), “stabilizing identity across time and space” (128). An assemblage identity model “is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency” (128). Assemblage challenges identity formations that emphasize naming and create the illusion of timelessness (128), as identity moves and shifts through special and temporal locations.

By placing myself in these contexts and interactions, I watch my identities morph and shift, emerge and dissolve, through time and space. There are no clean breaks defining the “once was” to the “now am,” as “I” continue to be negotiated, leaving open the space for an identities that are always becoming and emerging (Puar 128). For several days after I met Peter, attended church, and reread scriptures, I caught myself continually singing hymns when I was not paying attention. I found myself editing out swear words I would usually ramble off. These remnants still sit in my body, and the performances of these identities are familiar, but my personal truths have changed. These truths, much like contexts and relationships, call for different performances and forefront different identities. Watching my partner’s face, as he sleeps, testifies a truth just as the spirit does when I pray.

X-Communication: Face-to-Face and Body-to-Body

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to personally invite you to a performance discussion event at The Empty Space Theater on Thursday, December 9th at 4:30 P.M. This event will attempt to create an open and civil discussion surrounding the postponed production of *BTB*.

The events surrounding this production have created a troubling and silencing polarization within the community. I firmly believe that this was not the intended result of any of the

individuals involved in this situation. My hope is that a safe and respectful dialogue will assist all of us in growing to understand divergent worldviews and belief systems that differ from our own, as well as provide a forum for each of your voices to be heard, pondered, and experienced. The event proposed is designed as follows:

There will be a brief twenty-minute performance to help facilitate the discussion. This performance examines contradictory internal arguments for why *BTB* should and should not be performed. In light of recent events, I have chosen to return to scripture, church, and LDS friends from years ago in order to explore any of my own reservations regarding this production. I offer this piece as an honest gesture of self-exploration, attempting to investigate contradictions of faith and worldview that exist inside of me, as well as within our academic community. The performance is designed for an LDS audience, and I guarantee there will be no profanity, nudity, or content that would intentionally alienate anyone in the audience.

Following the performance, a facilitated discussion will take place, opening the dialogue to the entire audience using the “Civil Discourse” model.⁷ Everyone invited is asked to respect the diversity of the audience. First and foremost, my goal is to create a space where everyone involved can feel comfortable to speak on this complicated matter. I understand many of you may feel apprehension about this forum, and I am going to great lengths to prevent anyone from feeling silenced, attacked, or mocked in any way.

I organized this performance event with the hope of generating dialogue, sharing experiences, and problematizing the ways the controversy had constructed polarized positions. The performance

⁷ The Civil Discourse discussion model, designed by John Genette, places five seats in front of an audience. A statement is presented, from which the audience takes various positions. In our dialogue, one statement was “*Banging the Bishop* should not be performed in academia.” The five chairs range from “strongly agree”, to “agree”, to “neutral”, to “disagree”, to “strongly disagree.” Once five members of the audience agree to participate, the rest of the audience observes the discussion. During the discussion, participants are encouraged to shift their chairs if their position towards the statement shifts within the dialogue.

was a tool to bridge differing perspectives (Fouss, Kistenberg and Rosenfeld) and trigger intercultural discussion (Valentine and Valentine). Using personal narrative, my objective was to give voice to diverse experiences in the audience, create mutual vocabularies, and construct productive dialogues within various positions of audience (Goodwin). This project approaches autobiographical personal narrative as a pedagogical and political act (Park-Fuller, Absence), identifying the blurred boundaries of culture and self in autoethnographic/ autobiographical research to facilitate a discussion of binary positions.

In crafting the piece, I needed to decide which “I” was relevant or productive in this discussion. I have always been suspect of performance work that stands outside of structures and points fingers at the oppressive institutions, as if the performer and text were exempt from socialization and cultural production. Additionally, given the controversy, I knew there would be an audience expectation for me to assert “what really happened” (Park-Fuller, “Absence” 21), although there was no way to tell the whole story (24). The narrative was not a given, but a creation (27), one I hoped would not diminish the ambiguity of my experience and could promote an ethic of partiality and misunderstanding (Langellier and Peterson 239-240). The performance event’s objectives were “to open up possibilities for learning about difference and the operations of identity rather than didactically prescribe or reinscribe particular identity configurations” (236). I believed, if well executed, *X-Communication* had the possibility (Madison) “To transform us. To transform others. To create change” (Martin, xviii).

In crafting the text for *X-Communication*, I felt frustrated with the ways LDS considerations, institutional pressures, and my own fears were monitoring every word I wrote. I was afraid to speak, terrified of the repercussions of my voice, as my story was now contextualized within, and reflective of, a larger institutional hierarchy. In addition, the discourses surrounding the events were highly charged, overly vague, and closely monitored. I did not have a clear understanding of what had happened that first week in October, and it is likely that I never will. Still, as I crafted the text of *X-Communication* there was a tangible sense of risk, weight, and power looking over my shoulder as

I wrote. Was there any merit to the speculation that the LDS church had direct influence over the workings of the university? Would there have been recourse if the show went on? Was communication or performance studies placed in a tenuous position because of *BTB*? I can't answer these questions. However, there was an accepted awareness that these risks and speculations *could* have merit and have real consequences. This potentially tenuous position within the institution placed performance studies in a defensive climate where it became necessary to fight for its legitimacy, "dotting each 'i' and crossing each 't'" (Park-Fuller, "Socio"). Every word that followed my deployment of "I" in the text of *X-Communication* was guarded, strategic, and quivering in hesitation.

As an additional consideration, I've found myself uncomfortable when I audience narratives that instruct me how I should think, feel, and engage, potentially trapping audience identification and asserting definitional authority (Langellier and Peterson). I resist performances where the subtext begs the audience to "love me," "hate them," or "please, pick me," further perpetuating the illusion of a fixed self in the narrative (Hantzis). I approach my own work as self-interrogation, self-criticism, and perhaps self-deprecation, working from an ethic of "messiness," and embracing the act of "skin-scraping." I interrogate myself. I am implicated in the very "monsters" (Park-Fuller, "Absence") I unmask, as they also live and breathe in my body as a socialized being.

In constructing my arguments for why the *BTB* should not be performed, I realized that neither the charges of academic policy, nor hate speech, supplied a strong argument for canceling the show once the script was considered. Additionally, these arguments fail to account for, what I felt was, the larger problem the LDS church had with the production. The underlying tension seemed to be the prospect of a gay male discussing temple rituals and church doctrine alongside discussions of masturbation and gay bathhouses, potentially mocking, exposing, or violating sacred practices. In many ways, I felt the dialogue I wanted to engage in with the LDS members was a discussion of spirituality, more specifically the church doctrines on free agency and sacred covenants.

PERFORMER. Yes, I talk about the temple⁸ in the show. No specifics, but enough that I believe I am breaking my word. In this show, I break covenants with God. I speak and witness that which I swore I would not. If there is a reason this show should not be performed, it is because I'm going back on my word, my word to God, my relationship with God.

As there is no clear cut "I" (Butler 8) who is positioned against the master's (Corey) or monster's (Park-Fuller, "Absence") discourse, I chose to represent a fragmented identity on stage, occupying multiple positions through staging, physical choices, and media. In the narrative, time and physical context were continually blurred. In some scenes, my voice is prerecorded, disembodied from onstage movement. I prerecorded myself on video, delivering lines and timing pauses, to construct a simulated natural exchange with my body on stage.

TV. I know I cannot convince those who pity or reject me to embrace my truth. I know that if I tell you I bear witness to God and he embraces me, you must, you have to, find some way to qualify or dismiss this.

PERFORMER. One truth. One true church. One true prophet.

TV. I can even respect that.

PERFORMER. You broke covenants.

TV. I accept those consequences, and they are mine to accept.

PERFORMER. Standing here, on this mountain, no. No. No, Dust.

TV. There is no hate in this show.

PERFORMER. Your words hurt. Your words hurt me.

TV. Truth hurts. I flinch at passages of this show, but it is my agency. It is my free will to do so.

PERFORMER. What would have happened if you stayed in Utah?

TV. Your truth hurts as well.

⁸ The Mormon temple and the rituals conducted inside are highly secretive. The mere discussion of the temple, outside of temple walls, especially with non-members is absolutely forbidden. Covenants are made in the temple, where an individual promises to cut their own throat and belly before revealing the details of these rituals. The breaking of this covenant is the basis for my spiritual argument against my show.

PERFORMER. What would have happened if you were stronger?

TV. My best friends in the world, who have loved me and cared for me and taught me more about God than anyone, they are the weak and lost to others.

PERFORMER. There is a difference between happiness and pleasure.

TV. My heart is mocked everyday.

PERFORMER. This I understand.

The theater was filled with tremendous history, pressure, and opinion before I stepped onto the stage. The (con)text was overpowering. Who was in the audience? Peter Benson, whom I reference in the baptism monologue, revealing my sexual desires for him for the first time. Why did I invite him? The LDS faculty members were seated in the audience, men I have never met but who have made public statements about the offensiveness of my work, my “lurid portrayal,” the violence I conjure, the irrelevance of my experiences, and the viciousness of my intentions. How do I “go there” in this performance? What was I thinking? I look out to the audience before I stand to deliver my first lines. I see members of the administration and departmental faculty. I imagine snickers and doubt about the scholarly integrity of this project. Should I have put citations on the video? Scribbled them in marker across my arm? I need to breathe. This is going to be a mess. Breathe. Okay, I see my boyfriend’s face, along with some friends, thankfully, to support me. Everything felt loaded. Shed your usual sarcastic delivery, which could be misconstrued as defensive, if not aggressive. Still, don’t force the sincerity either because that makes me gag. Go back to the day rehearsal was cancelled. Explore the text with my body and trust it as my guide. Humor was my usual way to connect with an audience up front, but I couldn’t take that risk. I was afraid of it in this space. Language and content were under close inspection. The text is so scaled down, so direct, lacking the complexity of form and language I am accustomed to. I barely even use sound or video, which are primary to my aesthetic. I’ve never felt so confined and alienated on stage. Performing has always been my site of freedom, of exploration, and now the restrictions were suffocating. Did I warm up enough? I know I smoked too much. Now there’s no way I’ll be able to sing the

higher notes. My mother was right. I should have stuck with musical theater. I was good at musical.... Crap! That's my cue. Get up. Just take it one line at a time. I delivered my first line. Then, I delivered my last. "And this is where I write from, and this is where I perform from. I don't point fingers. I don't judge. I just scrape away at my own skin."

As I held the final moment of the performance, my nerves raced back into my body. I fought off impulses of flight long enough to announce a short break prior to the discussion and left the stage. What happened in those twenty minutes? I don't know. Thank God for that blessed escape into "the moment" on stage that takes me there, away from my head, and off onto the mountain, into the temple, and into my past. I promised, as I stood in that temple, so many years ago, that I would cut my throat before revealing certain truths. I swore to slice my belly before I would speak. Now they claim my work is violent, and I suppose it is. I tear away at skin, my own skin; acts of mutilation as a method for finding my own versions of "truth."

The discussion that followed the performance drifted back to the comfortable land of abstraction and academic jargon, rarely addressing the performance directly. In fact, any discussion of *X-Communication* seemed to be avoided, particularly by the LDS members who were present. During the break, a faculty member, who is an ex-Mormon himself, said to me, "There really isn't any discussion to be had after that [the performance]. That's it." He believed that *X-Communication* identified my intentions for writing *BTB*, dispelling the numerous "hate" charges that were launched against the production. However, the gentlemen who protested the performance of *BTB* did not change their previous complaints. These men felt attacked by the advertisement, and they stood firmly on this point. What I found interesting was how "the attacker" became abstracted in their current narratives. It was no longer "I" attacking them, my "lurid portrayal." Their narrative shifted to an unnamed attacker, an abstract and anonymous force that made them feel attacked. This is how I felt about my attackers two months ago, these anonymous men whom I'd never met who so quickly judged me. Things had changed.

On the surface, the dialogue remained fairly stagnant. The explanation of my intentions behind the *BTB* seemed irrelevant to these men in that particular space and time, and they simply restated their position repeatedly. The facilitator asked, “now that you’ve seen this performance, do you still feel that *BTB* was a direct attack?” The question was avoided, asked again, but never answered. Explanations or justifications did not matter. They wanted an apology, although my name was never spoken by any of these men. In over an hour of discussion, the dialogue never progressed beyond this point. The gentlemen also avoided commenting to the fact that the text of *BTB* had been read by the administration and was found to be free of any potential hate speech. I found out that the man who wrote the original letter was told the meaning of the phrase, “banging the bishop” before he wrote the initial complaint. A day before crafting his letter, in a meeting with the director of *BTB*, he was informed that it was a euphemism for masturbation and that there was no content in the show dealing with sexual activity or violence against bishops. Still, he wrote the letter. It was never about “hate speech” and, it seems, everyone knew that from the beginning. When *BTB* was finally staged in April 2005, one member of the administration, who was integral in the postponement, attended the performance. After the performance, I said to this administrator, “See, no hate.” Her/His response was, “We never really thought there was in the first place. It was never about the show.”

So did this performance matter? If the LDS faculty members were impervious to the piece, what was the point of all this? The performance created a context for discussion. Dialogue occurred, handshakes were exchanged, and people came together in a face-to-face unmediated presence that “cannot be denied” (Madison as cited in Park-Fuller, “Absence” 35). “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12).⁹ We shared space, heard each other’s stories, and hopefully demystified the “other” in some ways. Both the performer and audience were placed in a position of

⁹ The biblical passage is from Corinthians 13:12, as Paul addresses the infantile perspective through which we engage in our affairs. It is not until the coming of Christ that our perspectives will be clear.

risk (Jones; Park-Fuller, “Absence”), as we all were asked to stand in the position of the other and negotiate those locations. It was no longer possible to simply cast anyone in this controversy in clear-cut positions. We had to own our positions while facing each other, and I believe all perceptions were altered for the better. Tensions were aired publicly, and I believe that this communication offered great assistance in tempering the controversy. The LDS gentlemen suggested that canceling *BTB* was not their objective, but felt they had a right to speak their own position. The polarized positions that characterized the early voices of the controversy seemed more reasoned, less sure, and more open to the ideas of another. Greater understanding was achieved, or at least, we’ve heard each other out, body to body. I do believe *X-Communication* helped problematize the anti-LDS sentiment that was rampant among those “in my camp.” I hope it raised some more questions for the LDS faculty as well. Perhaps it was too soon after the performance to expect these ideas to sink in, be exchanged, and take hold of each of us. Performance sits in our bodies long after we leave the performance space. The rush to verbalize the experience might undercut the bodily experience. I’d like to think that I became a little more human to these men in that space, and that is why their attacker became abstract. This I cannot know for sure.

The greatest testament to the efficacy of *X-Communication* is that when we restaged *BTB* in April of 2005, there was no further protest. The performance was successfully staged without any visible opposition. However, *BTB* can never be the same performance it would have been if it had been performed on 15 October 2004. The performance has changed, and continues to change. The words mean something else. Audiences attended the piece expecting to find controversy, hate speech, the story of a boy having sex with a church leader, or some justified fuel that started the fire a semester before. In November 2005, two days before I performed the piece in a small downtown art gallery space, I received an anonymous letter at my home address that insured me that I will get what’s coming to me in the next life for the evil I do. In March of 2006, the campus newspaper ranked the controversy the second most controversial event in recent university history, although the story inaccurately

reported that the “play” was “banned.” As the (con)text expands, *BTB*, the events surrounding the production, and my identity will continue to shift through the negotiation of multiple and differing voices, never static or agreed upon.

This story sought to document the controversy surrounding *Banging the Bishop: Latter Day Prophecy*, which provided a (con)text for multiple pedagogical and political discussions. Although I never could have (or would have) believed this to be the case in October of 2004, the postponement of the production, and the (con)text surrounding it, became a vehicle to fulfill many of my initial hopes and objectives for *BTB*. It generated discussion, reached several audiences, and worked to push ideas forward. One of these (con)textual extensions was the performance of *X-Communication*, examining the ways Mormon, academic, and gay identities were negotiated through my personal experience within the controversy. In turn, the *X-Communication* project further investigates potential applications for educational performance and performance as a tool for triggering intercultural dialogue. I strongly disagreed with the decision to postpone the performance and still struggle with how some of the events unfolded. However, “I” find myself looking back on the events with an increasing faith that there was a guiding logic and an emergent productivity at work, which continue to give shape to the chaos.

I have asserted an “I.” The context of the *BTB* controversy placed my Mormonism and gayness in the forefront of the discourse, constructing an overly simplistic tension between two marginalized and seemingly incongruent identities. However, there is much that remains remarkably absent from this construction of identity and continues to remain absent in my own crank call to academia. My voice claims a Mormon, gay, and academic self, but this narrative has been shaped through an assemblage of identities, and each of them continues to feed me lines. Simultaneously they speak in unison, in harmony, in conflict, in turn, and in relation to one another. These identities collaborate with and resist each other in infinite and indecipherable formations, shifting in time and across various contexts. Extending outside of the messy assemblage of my gay, not not Mormon, and academic self, the reader should know that my

whiteness, masculinity, middle-class privilege, age and a multitude of other voices have also been speaking to you, feeding lines to the “I” that you have come to know through this conversation. I can’t begin to parse out their contributions, except to tell you that they were always present, never leaving the room, speaking to you throughout this entire essay. I know this because they are the ones that usually feel the most privileged to speak at all, fueling my Mormon, gay, and academic performances with a sense of entitlement and authority. They don’t take turns speaking and who “they” are is always changing. Thus, the crank call metaphor is limited in what it can offer the theorizing of identity. Then again, so are the words I have at my disposal. The ones I am typing into my computer while I munch on stale trail mix before sneaking outside for another cigarette.

The complaint letters, my responses, the entire documentation of events, and the *X-Communication* performance are much noisier, congested, and indecipherable than I have put forth. It’s why live performance, bodies in the physical space with other bodies, can extend beyond some of the limitations of the crank call, this disembodied essay about identity. Sure, the spoken text will always create false illusions of coherent identities, but in live performance the words will always speak with, through, and against the body. Bodies speak to one another in space, affording much greater risk of multiple exposures and contradictions in the presence of a speaking subject claiming their “I” before an audience. Performance has the potential to cross, dislodge, and complicate identities and identity boundaries, creating identifications between audience and performer that rupture the ways discourse constructs rigid binaries. Peter claimed the LDS complaints were launched because, “They just don’t know who you are.” My hope is that they did get to know “me” a little more fully, as deceptive and suspect of a practice as that may be.

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