

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer:*  
**The Insurgence of Television as a Performance Text**

**By**

**Michele Byers**

**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education  
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Michele Byers, Ph.D. 2000

Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education

University of Toronto

ABSTRACT

For several years I have been trying find a way to study television that would allow me say what I wanted to say about it. This thesis is the result of a desire to explore the potential of television texts. To this end, I have turned to theories of performance, which have not yet focused on the mass media. This thesis retains an interest in traditional aspects of television theory - images and dialogue - but reframes the interrogation in terms of the performances through which all aspects of the medium are produced.

To demonstrate how a performance framework would work in a study of television, I focus on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a contemporary television show. It chronicles Buffy's ambivalent position between childhood and adulthood, between masculinity and femininity, and between her role as superhero and her desire to be a 'normal girl.' I chose this program because it appeared to be playing with assumptions about gender and the skewing of these assumptions was often carried out, not through representation, but through performance. My interest in television and performance attempts to acknowledge that the medium may be both insurgent and hegemonic in the spontaneous and mediated performances of the text. That is, hegemonic and insurgent performances may occur within the same televisual space. At the same time that I see gendered performances being insurgently reworked in this show, other axes of difference

are not so insurgently performed. Thus the hegemonic inscription of race, sexuality and class are interrogated.

In this thesis I use a wide range of theory to show that performance is an expansive framework through which to study television texts. By focusing on themes which organize this show, I demonstrate that performance is central to the construction of these categories and to their implication in moments of insurgence and hegemony. Each publication in the field of television has the possibility to take this work in new directions. Opening the study of television to performance may not bring either of these areas to the center of the academy, but it may create a space for serious and potentially radical critique.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Like many North American twenty-somethings, I spent a lot of time during my youth taking acting classes and dreaming about Hollywood stars. I wanted to climb into the glamour of my parents' heavily sanctioned television set and climb out into its parallel universe in sunny California. It was a long-standing romance and I remain, although more critically, a fan. Television, viewing it (and specifically what I choose to view), discussing it, studying it, critiquing it, has become part of how I define myself personally as well as intellectually. I find it necessary to state this at the outset because, following Mercer (1994), I feel it is important to mark my own location and reading practices, as well as to make clear my relation to television, its texts and the theories I will try out and use to examine them. The *Buffy* text and characters resonate with my own experiences as a white, middle-class adolescent. This show also addresses my concerns about how performances of femininity are produced in contemporary television. My ability to find points of identification within this text is central to mapping my desire to enter into its televisual world. As for my interest in performance, during my undergraduate work in theater my focus moved away from acting to the applicability of theatrical performance to pedagogical and therapeutic practices. I was, in particular, struck by the omission in these theories of categories of difference such as ability, race, ethnicity and gender. Later, in graduate school, my interests shifted once again, this time towards the mass media and television specifically. This thesis represents the apex of a decade long interest by bringing together performance and the mass media.

In July 1997 a less-than-well-received 1992 movie starring Kristy Swanson, teen-idol Luke Perry and Hollywood heavyweights Rutger Hauer and Donald Sutherland followed what was becoming a rather mundane move towards a televisual reincarnation.<sup>1</sup> *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the series, was born, featuring a cast of virtual unknowns and headed by *All My Children* alum Sarah Michelle Geller. Where Swanson was perky, prom-friendly and carefree, Geller brought Buffy to a deeper, wittier and more street savvy level, while keeping intact her

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<sup>1</sup>Other examples include *Clueless*, *Lois and Clark* and the short-lived *The Outsiders* and *Ferris Bueller* (which featured a pre-great hair day Jennifer Aniston) (*People* April 17, 1995,



keen fashion sense and high-kicking skill. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is the legacy of a decade's focus on youth-oriented media: Xena's ferocity, *90210*'s shoppability, *Dawson's Creek*'s relational angst, *The X-Files*' preoccupation with the ab- and paranormal, and the requisite repartee *Heathers* bequeathed to all teen dialogue since 1989. *Buffy* was an almost immediate hit, garnering critical acclaim and a growing percentage of the youth audience with each passing season (Tracy 1998).

I was not immediately won over to *Buffy*. I liked the movie and thought it somewhat tiresome that TV executives were so script-poor that they constantly had to regurgitate last year's Hollywood films. But my friend Liane, who is a wealth of pop culture trivia, kept at me and once I began watching I was hooked. Geller, as The Slayer, joins the ranks of female grotesques right alongside her nemeses (Russo 1994). Her stake-wielding status refutes her physical conformity: Buffy can never properly fit in, her alliances are never complete, she takes Veronica Sawyer's (Winona Ryder) "teen-angst bullshit" to an extreme because she carries a burden that only death can erase.<sup>2</sup> While Buffy and her motley crew of semi-fits scour the back alleys of their hometown – Sunnydale, California - for the undead, they simultaneously deal with curfews, homework, relationships, popularity and corrupt politicians.

*Buffy* appeals to me because it crosses so many of the traditional boundaries associated with youth-oriented television. *Buffy* is part action, part horror, part mystery, part teen drama, part romance and occasionally part comedy. It plays havoc with traditional notions of gender and, to a lesser extent family, generation and sexuality while often re-entrenching divisions of race, class, ethnicity, attractiveness and ability. This television text leaves a great deal of room for critical inquiry, which will be the focus of this thesis.

I have watched *Buffy* almost since its inception and am familiar with its development, characters, plots and mythologies. *Buffy* is somewhat iconic in the

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83).

<sup>2</sup>Also like Sawyer, Buffy's "teen-angst bullshit has a body count" (*Heathers* 1989). However, Buffy's vampire-slaying-world-saving birthright can be contrasted with the perhaps more sinister evil Sawyer attempts to rid the world of: psychotic boyfriends, elitist popular cliques and "beer-guzzling-asshole-jerks." Also unlike Sawyer who says: "we should all just grow up, be adults and die," there is neither childhood or adulthood for Buffy, just slaying until she dies and a new Slayer is called forth.

realm of contemporary television: it is a phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> *Buffy* is becoming an industry of movies, television shows (a spin-off - *Angel* - aired in the fall of 1999), tabloid fodder, books, and an uncannily vast matrix of web sites and consumer products, including a *Buffy* store which will, presumably, sell all types of *Buffy* products.<sup>4</sup> I own the movie and a few of the books published on the series (*Bite Me* by Nikki Stafford, *The Girl's Got Bite* by Kathleen Tracy and *The Buffy Chronicles* by N.E. Genge, all 1998).<sup>5</sup> I have collected many magazines and newspaper articles devoted to the series and its now famous cast. I have visited many web sites (corporate and personal) devoted to various aspects to the show (including one devoted entirely to merchandise) and signed up to be on two *Buffy* list-serves. I seek out friends and acquaintances who watch the show (and make converts of others) in order to discuss my thoughts and have them challenged. I take notes while I watch and talk and think about the show. I do not have a *Buffy* doll yet, but I have read that they are in the works. When the dolls come onto the market, I will buy one and hang it over my computer: a muse to this work.<sup>6</sup>

While *Buffy* is produced across a wide range of sites, it is, foremost if not first, a television series. *Buffy* is also a site of performance. This study will be informed by and argues that theories of performance can/should be expanded to include television. Expanding studies of performance to include television will add to both areas of study. Television can be more fully understood if theories of performance are used to analyze it. It is at the intersection of mass media and performance, often understood as antithetical spaces of inquiry, that this thesis

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<sup>3</sup> Although I would not claim that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is unique in this respect, I would suggest that, for a program which began so marginally, it has become an enormously successful mass-market commodity that functions across a wide range of mediums, audiences and products.

<sup>4</sup>The web sites concerned with *Buffy* are in the thousands. They include information on characters and actors, information about vampires and the occult, chat groups, posting boards, fan fiction, pictures, sound bites, episode guides and programming and product information.

<sup>5</sup> To date, I know of six *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* related books on the market, though there may be more. I have had the opportunity to examine the books I have not purchased. Although each book covers slightly different aspects of the *Buffy* text, there is a great deal of overlap between them.

<sup>6</sup>Since a line of Jay and Silent Bob dolls (from *Clerks* 1994, *Mall Rats* 1995 and *Chasing Amy* 1997) have recently hit the streets, can *Buffy* dolls be far behind?

will begin to take shape. I will argue that television is inherently structured by performances and I will therefore conduct this study in relation to theories of performance. I will argue that *Buffy* and television cannot be reduced to either representation or narrative (the areas with which the study of television has traditionally been concerned) but must also be read in terms of the active movement (performance) of the text itself.

Both television and performance theories employ interdisciplinary discourses to develop their research. Both have (on occasion) drawn on (for example) psychoanalytic theory, history, feminism, the postmodern and both have at times tried to understand their relation to the production of race, sexuality and class difference. This makes their combination all the more feasible, since points of intersection already exist. The focus of this thesis will be television, which, though it eclipses all other media in terms of scope, has been left virtually un-theorized within the realm of performance. I will argue that television is a performance medium *par excellence* and that the time has come to explore television's performative practices. This thesis is an attempt to develop new ways of theorizing performance and performativity, in order allow them to include the study of television. I will seek to develop and mobilize a framework which will allow mediated performances to be studied within television.

Throughout this thesis I will be teasing out an understanding of performance and the performative in an attempt to demonstrate how these terms and the theoretical frameworks that are employed around them will be useful to the study of television. Although these terms will be elaborated in chapter three, it will be useful to make some preliminary statements about them now. Performance, as it has been used within theories of performance, is a wide and often liberally used term. The primary concern of performance theorists has been with 'live' performances (that is, with little or no space between performer and viewer), whether in theater, dance, music, ritual and performance art. The concept of performance has also been taken up to study a wide range of other subjects, such as how more inanimate objects (buildings, events, literature, photographs) perform in their relation to lived experiences of human beings (see, for example, Hanson 1995, Cohen 1996, Phelan 1996, Diamond 1997, Lane 1998, Sember 1998). Performativity, on the other hand, has developed from speech act

theory and is concerned with how reiterated terms may potentially bring into being that which they name. Perhaps the most well known example would be the words that come at the end of a traditional wedding ceremony: "I now pronounce you husband and wife." Performativity has been made known, at least in part, through the work of Judith Butler (i.e. 1993, 1997) who has focused on the performativity of gender and sexuality. She suggests that it is through the reiteration of words and actions that gender and sexuality come into being. I believe that both of these terms – performance and performativity - can be used in relation to televisual (mediated) performance. First, because television is structured by visual performances, although it has not often been read as such. And second, because the medium and its narratives are deeply embedded in visual reiterative processes, which bring into being categories of difference (such as gender and race).

In recent scholarship, performance theories and theories of the performative have been drawn out of their traditional locations in theater and anthropology and captured the attention of philosophy, literary criticism, film, sociology and psychoanalysis, as well as the studies of race, gender and sexuality. It is in this complex diversity that performance holds its most radical potential. These theories break down barriers between traditional, rigidly demarcated disciplines and develop frameworks which take ideas from a broad variety of sources in order to illuminate each particular project. If there is one lacuna in the work of theories of performance and performativity, it is their failure to interrogate the mass media. Virtually nothing has been written about advertising, television and mainstream film and what might be revealed through their study in relation to performance and performativity. I will argue in this thesis that the mass media is as important a site for study as the theater, performance art and avant-guard film. Though in a perhaps less obvious fashion, the mass media also offers a space from which to critique contemporary ideologies at their most resistant, reactionary and mundane. Unlike avant-guard products, however, mass media performances are available to audiences both vast and diverse. This thesis aims to expand performance theory to encourage its use as a framework for the study of mass media.

It is important to make some distinction as to how different streams of performance analysis are distinguished from one another. I understand Performance Studies to refer to a specific academic department and the work that has tended to be done by their members. It encompasses the theoretical work of many theater and performance art practitioners. I use performance theory or theories to delineate how other theoreticians have taken up research, which began in the area of performance, across many disciplines. In order to demonstrate the applicability of performance to the study of media texts (which is one of the primary aims of my work) it will be necessary to understand how performance branches out as it passes from a theoretical concept, to a practice and, finally, to a discipline. The fact that performance – the concept - has been mobilized by a wide variety of academics and non-academics, in widely different locations, shows that its ‘application’ is mobile. It may also suggest that its meanings are diverse, that is, as ‘performance’ is moved across disciplines and practices it changes its uses, effects and referents. It is my intention to continue this movement by linking performance to the television text.

While television theorists have been more focused on the mainstream, their methodologies have often lagged behind both the most current academic theories and the innovations which are happening within television programming itself. Some of the areas which have traditionally made up the study of television include: semiotics (Seiter 1987), narrative theory (Kozloff 1987), reader-oriented criticism (Allen 1987c), genre study (Feuer 1987), ideological analysis (White 1987), psychoanalysis (Flitterman-Lewis 1987), feminist criticism (Kaplan 1987) and British Cultural Studies (Fiske 1987b). Extensive ethnographic studies of television viewers have also been conducted in response to what was seen as an overwhelming emphasis on text-based research, as well as a desire to examine individuals’ and groups’ personal relationships to televisual culture (Walters 1995). Ethnographies, ranging from short articles to book length dissertations, have made a great contribution to our understanding of viewing practices. Ethnographic studies have explored the relationship between the viewer, the medium and the television text in order to show the impact and effects of the latter on the daily lives of viewers. These studies have a very broad range of interests - including gender, work, family, community,

ethnicity and diaspora – and the intention of the work is to show how television is implicated in and affects the life of the individual and/or the group. However, they too have often failed to engage with the most current trends in television and theoretical discourse. There are some notable exceptions to this omission. Joyrich (1996), for example, uses postmodern theory to examine the impact of television texts on gender, while Ang (1996) uses postmodern and chaos theories to demonstrate the impossibility of television rating systems. Kellner (1995) reads the construction of postmodern identity through television and advertising imagery. In this thesis I will add to the literature of television theory by looking at a very current example of mainstream television programming through the lens of a growing and innovative theoretical framework.

Feminist television criticism emerged from feminist film theory and has adopted several terms and concepts from that more established discipline. But television is a very different medium from film, one that has more traditionally been associated with active female bodies (that is, women who worked while they watched) and the domestic sphere. The research which grew out of the understanding of television's relation to gender and domestic space has tended to focus on women-centered and, particularly, 'positive image' shows such as *Kate&Allie* or *Cagney&Lacey* and traditionally feminine genres, such as melodramas, day/nighttime soap operas, domestic comedies and children's programming. Despite the narrow vision of much of this work, it is useful for understanding the initial impetus towards doing research on television and women's position in relation to the medium on both sides of the screen.

Performance theories have also been strongly influenced by feminism and several anthologies have been published which focus specifically on performances of gender (Hart 1989, Case 1990, Senelick 1992). The authors included in these books use feminist theory to elaborate how gender is constructed within the creative matrices of performance art, theater, photography, painting, dance and literature. Performance theorists, however, have not begun to interrogate media performances and their implication for the construction of gender. Although a great deal of research has been done in the area of youth in television theory, including works which are informed by a feminist perspective, this work has failed to adequately address current trends in

youth-oriented programming and contemporary youth subcultures more generally. The elision of youth can be equally made a criticism of theories of performance.

Theories of the postmodern have, to a greater or lesser extent, influenced the study of television, performance and feminism. The postmodern, as I am using the term, refers to the fragmentary quality of contemporary social relations, especially as these are filtered through the lens of global markets and media.<sup>7</sup> I use the term postmodern to refer to the breakdown in unities and certainties which had previously described such terms as reality, identity (the I or subject), experience, truth and text; and a refusal to simply accept the ideological and theoretical parameters set out by traditional 'grand narratives.' This is not to dismiss these terms or theories, but to rethink them within a framework of indeterminacy in which the context of enunciation is always contingent. Especially in discussions of the mass media (of which television has been called the postmodern medium *par excellence*), the postmodern refers to the constructed quality of images and identities and a fluidity of form which emerges from an increasing immersion in simulation (Baudrillard 1983). If the performance of media is categorized by its postmodernity than so too is performativity. Pellegrini (1997) writes that "performativity seems actually to describe the postmodern condition" (8) and McKenzie (1998) concurs: "performativity is the postmodern condition" (232).<sup>8</sup> In using postmodern theory to examine media performances I have been influenced by the work of Baudrillard (1983), Kellner (1995), Joyrich (1996) and others, who have made the link between postmodern theory and media culture.

Despite the heavy criticism which has been leveled at them, I find the theories of Jean Baudrillard (1983, 1988) very useful.<sup>9</sup> Baudrillard has been highly criticized for what is supposed to be an inherent nihilism in his work, the

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<sup>7</sup>Usefully, Ang (1996) writes that "one of the most prominent features of living in a postmodern world means living with a heightened sense of permanent and pervasive cultural contradiction" (2).

<sup>8</sup> Emphasis in the original.

<sup>9</sup>The criticisms, like those of Kellner (1995) are also informative. Although I disagree with Kellner's take on Baudrillard, his concerns are legitimate. I have my own difficulties with Baudrillard's insistence on the superficiality of postmodern culture; however, I find his overall theory to be very applicable.

reduction of reality to endless reproducibility and simulation, and a refusal of unity, materiality, authority and subjecthood. But Baudrillard's work does present a very thoughtful framework for the study of contemporary culture, one which is particularly well suited for the study of media which often follow his understanding of the postmodern to a 'T.' That is, the media seem to embody the inherently fragmentation, simulation, reproduction, seeming absence of a real referent, author and material reality that Baudrillard associates with the postmodern. Television and performance theorists like Auslander (1996, 1997), Ang (1991, 1996), Joyrich (1996), Schneider (1997), Diamond (1997) and others have taken up postmodern concepts. The value of postmodern theory to this work is that it reflects so well the actual processes employed by television and contemporary performance. Ang (1996) writes: "television itself has undergone a massive postmodernization" (3) and Feuer (1995) agrees that "[T]elevision is the technical apparatus of the postmodern moment" (158). This sentiment is echoed by performance theorists such as Schneider (1997), who writes:

[P]ostmodern artworks garner their postmodernity in their ghost dancing, their playful mimicry of precedence, positioning themselves relative to an extant, continually eruptive field of precursory modernist imagery and modernist obsession. In artworks with a conscious political agenda - such a feminist works - this playful, ping-pong mimesis is also political strategy (21).

In this view, postmodern theory informs performances in traditional areas as well as the mass media and retains the possibility for political cultivation and radical critique which are often seen as antithetical to postmodernism. In this project I take postmodernism to offer a positive force for illuminating the power and fragmentary quality of mass media performances.

One final category will be used to frame this thesis: the category of youth. Performance theorists seem to have very little interest in young people, leading me to wonder if any performances worth writing about are performed, viewed or critiqued by anyone born after 1965. Not only has age been taken for granted and a large segment of the population been omitted from study, but there has also been no critical engagement with the way different generations see and relate to the changing world and what kind of performances this prompts them



to seek out and create.<sup>10</sup> Some of the most important examinations of contemporary youth culture are found in Grossberg (1992), McRobbie (1994), Kellner (1995), Giroux (1996, 1998), Pomerance and Sakeris (1996) and Epstein (1998), but few of these works are devoted to the study of either television or performance.<sup>11</sup>

Performance, television, feminism, postmodernism and youth. Although these are not equivalent categories, they will form the structure from which this project will emerge. The focus of this work is twofold. First, to elaborate the study of performance in order to develop a framework through which to conduct television inquiry. Second, to demonstrate the applicability of this framework by critically examining a particular television text: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I have chosen performance theories because I feel that there is a crucial importance in reading the performances which constitute the mass media because such readings enable us to see its dynamic and multi-layered productivity and permit an analysis of oppositional or insurgent readings. Although it is not often written about as such, one of television's primary manners of structuration is performance. Without it the television text is rendered static, motionless, like a photograph or, better, a series of stills. But television is not static, it is continually moving and evolving through performance. As such, performance is a concept which is necessary to understanding and studying television texts. I will show that performance theories can give the study of television an expanded

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<sup>10</sup>I certainly do not mean to suggest that each generation has one defining viewpoint, but that as time passes, ways of seeing the world and relating to it change. Television is deeply imbricated in all aspects of social life today, in a way that it was not forty years ago, twenty years ago, or even ten years ago. Feminists coming of age in the 1990's have a different relationship to feminism (both politically and theoretically) than their parents and grandparents did. The technology available today, the sheer vastness of the mediascape (and the intertextuality of television, film, advertising, theory, books, fashion, etc.), have made the (post)modern arena of performance into something quite different from what has been imagined in much current theory. Further, television studies which have focused on age have dealt almost exclusively with children, adolescents and young adults and decidedly not with the elderly. Gender has been a more primary focus of the last two decades of television criticism.

<sup>11</sup>The major exception to this is a book by McKinley (1997) which deals with the show *Beverly Hills, 90210* and its viewers. Although it makes some compelling arguments (which I shall draw on in section two), the author's reticence at being recognized as a viewer herself makes this book somewhat problematic, although it does not discount the excellent insights her work provides. (Also see note 14.)

forum which incorporates both the visual and narrative structures of the medium and allows for an interrogation of its potential for insurgent performances and expansive intertextual web. It will offer the theorist a way to look at visual media texts as active moments of performance, as well as narrative structures and moments of audience reception (areas more traditionally associated with the study of television). Reading Ellsworth's (1997) excellent chapter on "modes of address" I noticed a dichotomy in the ways that visual mass media (in Ellsworth's case, film) have been theorized. In the first, the media is seen as a static text containing a certain number of inherent and sometimes contradictory messages. In the second, the moment of audience reception is seen as primary and as engaging the texts in an almost limitless number of possible interpretations. However, what I find is missing in both of these is a way to study the texts themselves as active performances of multi-layered cultural production. Performance, as I will demonstrate, allows for a more complicated reading of text. While television offers extraordinary opportunities for consumption (of text, image, product) it also provides space for every text to be written and rewritten by the viewer. On the other hand, the reading pursued here looks not at the viewer, but at the text itself. In a sense it addresses a readerless text, not in the sense that the text does not require a reader, but that the text itself is considered an active site of performance. It is with the latter position that this thesis concerns itself.

I use the term performance in its broadest sense, not restricting myself to the traditional realm of 'liveness,' which has characterized much of the study of performance to date. In this expanded understanding, performance includes mediated acts as well as live ones and refers to the study of constructed actions, in this case televisual and how televisual bodies are constructed across and through such axes as race, class, ability, age, sexuality, location and beauty. The incredible diversity of subjects which have been taken up by performance theorists attests to the resonance the expanded meaning of this term holds for the intellectual community. Performance theory has engaged such topics as photography (Sember 1998), colonialism (Lane 1998), writing (Della Pollock 1998, Sedgwick 1998), plastic surgery (Augsburg 1998), speech acts (Butler 1997), the explicit body (Schneider 1997), *The Rose Theater* (Phelan 1996), dance (Foster

1996), liveness (Auslander 1996), house music (Currid 1995), Shamu (Desmond 1995), the tango (Savigliano 1995) and Michael Jackson's penis (Fuchs 1995). In adding my work to this list I hope to engage in the study of performance in two ways: through the formulation of a method for studying televisual texts as active sites of performance and, second, by examining the televisual performances of social bodies in all their differences.

The intersection of performance and television and of theory and text can be mobilized by engaging in a rigorous examination of one example of current television programming. For this endeavor I propose to study *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a contemporary prime-time fantasy/drama developed for a youth audience, particularly young women. Rather than looking at the show as a complete and contained text, a multi-layered reading will demonstrate how issues are dealt with and prescribed through its narratives, visual and dialogic. The focus will be a thematic analysis drawing on and developing from the theoretical frameworks I have begun to describe above. To produce the results that will be set out in this thesis, I began by simply watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. At that time, although I was taping each episode, I was primarily viewing the show as a fan. During this time I began to think about the themes and questions that I was interested in developing throughout this work. I then went back to my collection of video tapes and watched them over the course of several weeks in great detail, attempting to view them with my questions about performance in mind. I made copious notes about the program at that time and transcribed sections of the text that I thought would be of particular relevance to the arguments I was making in this thesis. I then moved into the task of linking what I had gleaned about television and performance from watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to the theoretical material I had been reading. Through this analysis I hope that a new way of looking at and thinking about television and the performances it engenders will be described.

As this suggests, what will be of concern in this thesis are the performances that occur in the diegesis, or the diegetic spaces, of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Diegetic space or diegesis refers to the entirety of the universe in a work of fiction. Developed in the area of narrative theory, the diegesis refers to the world in which the action of a story takes place. I believe that this term can

be useful for understanding media texts as well. In my case, I am using the term diegesis to describe the universe in which *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* takes place and the rules and customs of that universe by which the narrative is guided.

I will be particularly interested in the interplay of hegemonic and insurgent moments of these performances. By hegemonic, I mean that the text performs certain impulses which act to reinforce existing structures of dominance and to curtail, as much as possible, performances which would breach those boundaries. Insurgent performances, on the other hand, are read as actively working to restructure existing hierarchies by constructing performances which move against hegemonic impulses. Television narratives (especially those Network shows marketed to young people) are often constrained by impossibly conservative censorship standards and pressure from the political Right. This thesis will argue that the texts themselves may contain the possibility of radical revisions, insurgent voices and transgressive identifications. There is always the possibility of reading against the intention of the text, but that in itself suggests that there is an intended position from which it is anticipated that the text will be taken up. My suggestion, then, is that it is important to recognize the intentionality that exists within the television text, but not to allow it to close down the possibility for other readings and interpretations to exist.

With the help of performance theories I hope to illuminate the multiplicity of discourses which are at work in television, a medium whose texts are often seen as being unified and uni-dimensional. My excavation (and I use this term intentionally because it marks depth as well as surface exploration) will demonstrate how (even seemingly progressive or liberal) television texts may shore up hegemonic discourses on difference. At the same time, it will show that even the seemingly reactionary or conservative discourses deployed within television texts may perform insurgency and be read in oppositional ways.<sup>12</sup> In

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<sup>12</sup>Following Foster, Auslander (1997) makes an argument for the possibility of resistance in art rather than the transgressive practices which characterized radical art of the sixties and seventies. Auslander suggests that rather than taking a nihilistic, apolitical view of the postmodern turn, the "transgressive" politics of avant-gardism presuppose cultural limits which are no longer relevant to the seemingly limitless horizon of multinational capitalism and calls for an understanding of political art as "resistant" rather than transgressive (60). It seems likely that this resistant potential exists within the viewer and text as well as the artist.

my reading of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* I am looking for moments of insurgence within the text, both as overt, explicit and available sites and practices and as potential, covert or indirect nuances which open aspects of the text to scrutiny. I understand insurgence to be linked to the narrativizing of difference within texts. de Lauretis (1984) writes that insurgent practice is “to oppose the simply totalizing closure of final statements... to seek out contradictions, heterogeneity, ruptures in the fabric of representation so thinly stretched - if powerful - to contain excess, division, difference, resistance; to open up critical spaces in the seamless narrative space constructed by dominant cinema [media] and by dominant discourse” (29).<sup>13</sup> That is also the aim of this project. I will show that insurgence appears in televisual texts when performances are mobilized across lines of difference (such as gender, race or sexuality) or when performances reinvent how televisual difference may be seen.

When I initially began to conceive of this project I wanted to study how adolescent dramas performed axes of difference. As it became apparent that this was too large a field of inquiry, I hoped that by focusing on a single text I could better elucidate how difference may be interpreted through the lens of performance. I chose to focus on *Buffy* for several reasons, foremost that it is a show I am familiar with and that I enjoy. I have found it disconcerting that researchers who are unfamiliar with or unappreciative of this medium sometimes conduct studies of television, especially those programs associated with youth. Perhaps it reflects television's uncertain status in the academy.<sup>14</sup> In my previous works (Byers 1996/7, 1998, forthcoming) I have attempted to focus on television texts which I enjoy, even if ambivalently. This juxtaposition of critic, feminist and fan (Penley 1992), between what I desire and what I ‘should’ desire (Davies 1990), makes possible the soul-searching which develops into profound critique.

The other reasons I have chosen to focus on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are more pragmatic, if no less instrumental. It is a show about young people dealing with growing up, complicated by the fact that their sunny, California hometown

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<sup>13</sup>Emphasis in the original.

<sup>14</sup>Imagine an art historian who was unfamiliar with works of art or an English major who did not like to read.

is located on a Hellmouth.<sup>15</sup> Buffy Summers is a very contemporary young, white woman, tough and independent, chic and witty, searching for a way to be 'normal' under circumstances which are decidedly not. Her comrades in arms are smart and slick, confused, loyal and brave, and while the characters are somewhat stereotyped (the smart girl, the popular narcissist, the geeky boy, the handsome vampire, the befuddled schoolteacher) their insertion into a fantasy rather than realistic drama allows each to engage in performances which necessitate their growth beyond these stereotypes. It also allows this fantasy to be offered for viewer identification. The scripts and plots are interesting and the dialogue is as hip as the show's use of fashion (like carrying your stakes in a cute backpack). Further, *Buffy* is very media-referential, drawing implicitly from a broad range of television, film and artistic genres and explicitly on current events, tabloids, media moments, fashion, music and consumer products. *Buffy* does, however, do poorly in its depictions of anyone who is not white, straight, thin, suburban, middle-class and able-bodied.<sup>16</sup> And yet while not fully 'correct,' the text does focus on a movement between positive and negative – hegemonic and insurgent - understandings of the self. The focus of my work will be, in part, to attend to how performances are organized and how identities and differences are made possible and/or contained by the text.

This project will proceed thematically, with the aim of excavating televisual bodies/communities as they perform (and exclude) axes of difference. These are salient aspects of performance and are often both explicit and implicit within television texts. Reading through difference in relation to such textual productions as *Buffy*, vampires, friendship, sexuality, love and romance, and space will suggest how hegemonic structures of differences may be challenged and/or maintained by mainstream television discourses. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

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<sup>15</sup> In the *Buffy* text, the Hellmouth is, literally, a portal between the demon world and the human one. It is a central component to the town of Sunnydale and, although unbeknownst to many of Sunnydale's inhabitants, the town has been built around it. It is because of its proximity to the Hellmouth that Sunnydale attracts so many vampires and demons, who draw power from its source.

<sup>16</sup>There are characters who cross this wall. Willow is Jewish, Spike uses a wheelchair, there is a high-ranking African-American vampire, and Oz is a werewolf. It could also be argued that the vampires represent (a) a specific subcultural or ethnic community with their own history, religion, rituals, etc. or (b) a form of disability akin to albinism (inability to come into contact with sunlight) and severe allergy to garlic (also see *Blade* 1998).

is one of several prime-time dramas that are oriented towards the production and performance of youth. Focusing on one show will allow for an in-depth analysis of its particular features, its particular performances and moments of performativity, and the particular kinds of bodies it portrays. Other, similar shows may be drawn on as illustrations and there is certainly work to be done on what is reiterated across a number of intertextually linked shows. However, I see this type of analysis as further work to be done rather than the focus of this particular project.

Deconstructing *Buffy* is a challenge and one that must be undertaken with the appropriate tools. A more detailed discussion of the text, characters, genres and themes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* will be undertaken in chapter two. Chapter three will explore at greater length the theories that will inform this inquiry: television, postmodernism and feminism. This will not only be a strategic mapping of the salient points of these theories and a search for the lacunae which this project will seek to fill, but also a teasing out of the how these theories intersect and complements one another, despite their potential contradictions. Developing an approach to mediated performance, expanding existing performance theory to include mediated performances, is inherently fraught with problems and contradictions. For instance, some theorists believe that performance, as a discipline, must expand as new agendas are brought to light (Schechner 1998) while others see the need for performance studies to remain a space in which to study 'live' performances exclusively (Ugwu 1995). This is complicated by the fact that the mass media is increasingly incorporated into 'live' performances and that it is no longer so uncommon for mainstream media to employ the techniques of the avant-guard, including the co-optation of a certain 'liveness.' The task of chapter four, then, will be to elaborate the possibilities of what a theory of mediated performances will look like and what it will enable us to say about mass media texts.

Media performances are waiting to be deciphered and this will require innovations in performance theories. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a program which is very indicative of contemporary styles of television production. The show demands a new style, a slickness in dialogue and production value, and a self-reflexiveness which marks it as different from its predecessors. Decoding it

requires a familiarity with the history of the mass media and its genres, knowledge of actors and of general popular culture and history. Critical readings of new, mediated performances which these changes engender will uncover a wealth of reiteration, a mainstay of performativity (Butler 1993). Every moment of media performance is reminiscent of other performances, moments of history, cultural legacies, layers upon layers only some of which are knowable, in part, to a particular viewer in a particular time and place. Mediated performances reiterate/cite not only what came before them in terms of performance but constantly, if obliquely, (re)inscribe structures of difference across their texts.<sup>17</sup> In this work, I will show that these 'new,' mediated performances are always less than themselves in that they are constantly in a state of reiteration of genres, norms, fashions, locations, quotations, cinematic devices and consumer products. At the same time they are always in excess of themselves. First, because reiteration marks them as being part of something larger than the moment of their production. And second, because their inherent intertextuality within television and other mass media makes them part of an ever widening universe of mediated, popular culture.

After laying the theoretical groundwork for this thesis in the first four chapters, I will be examining the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the axes of difference it mobilizes. Difference refers to how the subject is positioned in relation to dominant axes of culturally defined identities (such as gender, race and class) which bring into being multiple and often diffuse regimes of power. It also is central in a cultural critique which "aims not only to criticize representation that obscures difference in the name of the dominant cultural tradition but also to claim a space within the field for representation for previously excluded minorities" (Childers and Hentzi 1995, 84). In the study of television, the narrative structure of image and dialogue work together to produce and exclude difference within the text. Part of this project will be an attempt to formulate more clearly how differences are produced and obscured within the domain of television. Television narratives include and exclude on the basis of difference. This is made obvious by examining what differences can

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<sup>17</sup>While the structures re-inscribed are often hegemonic, mass media performances also provide spaces in which insurgent performances of difference may be inscribed.



be shown on television and how they can be shown.<sup>18</sup> However, by the inclusion of difference into the narrative “a tiny space is created by the mismatch of dominant visions with muted ones” (Deming 1990, 58). Difference in this project extends to the examination of class and location, race, ethnicity, gender, beauty, the body, age, ability, sexuality, morality, and lifestyle. In the second part of this thesis I will examine how *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* constructs characters, spaces and narratives which open or constrain the production of difference within a very particular organization of power.

Chapter five will read the central figure in the text: Buffy Summers, prom queen turned vampire slaying street fighter. Buffy is an unusually complex heroine for a teen drama, constantly treading the line between her responsibility to society and her desire to return to her pre-Slayer life of boys, shopping, cheerleading and running for prom queen. She is angry about her responsibilities, as well as moody, disrespectful, narcissistic, impetuous, loyal, brave, and sexual. These descriptors make Buffy, if not the most likable young woman of her peer group, certainly one of the most innovatively written and thought provoking. In this chapter I will examine the conformist and revolutionary aspects of the Buffy Summers character. Buffy, in both these aspects is an important figure in teen mythology because she offers unique opportunities for identification.<sup>19</sup> Identification describes the process by which the subject sees fragments of her or himself (or how they would like to be) within the image of the other and becomes invested in them. This process is ongoing, as more and more images are examined some are taken up, some passed over and others discarded. Although in this thesis I am examining texts rather than viewers, processes of identification are still important for they point to the ways in which characters are developed and how identification is taken up within the text. I will trace hegemonic and insurgent indentificatory processes as they occur within the text, that is, there are always moments of identification which

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<sup>18</sup>For example, non-white characters are often employed as villains. It is also true that characters who do not conform to the norm (white, straight, able, middle-class, etc.) may be mobilized by the text in an instructional manner (to teach other characters about racism, homophobia, poverty, disability...) and then discarded once this function is completed.

<sup>19</sup>In the chapter on vampires and on Buffy's friends (Willow, Xander, Angel, Cordelia and Oz) I will argue that they, too, offer the potential for radical identifications.

structure the performance of character within the television text, through friendships, families, organizations, work, leisure, community and so on. I suggest that reading through the specificities of these identificatory processes at work within the text will be an important part of understanding how difference performs on *Buffy*.

In chapter six I will describe some of the ways in which vampires have been envisioned within theoretical discourse and discuss our continued fascination with them. I will then posit *Buffy's* position within these greater narrative structures. The construction of the vampire community and its relation to the inhabitants of Sunnydale is somewhat different from its television and film predecessors. Television shows about vampires have tended to be rare and short lived, but vampire films have run the gamut from cheesy comedy (*Love at First Bite*), historical drama (*Bram Stoker's Dracula*), high tech action film (*Blade*) and to a plethora of B-movies from the seventies and eighties. *Buffy's* vampires exist somewhere within the continuum of this vampiric universe, but have their own much more fully developed world that is afforded to a long running series. This chapter will discuss the intricacies of the vampire world which exists beneath the clean streets and in the back alleys of Sunnydale and the community which is forged there. I will examine the vampire characters and consider them and their community in relation to the normative, North American, middle-class, suburban society.

*Buffy's* friends are almost as fascinating as she is and they will form the subject of chapter seven. This crew is diverse if, as I have already mentioned, somewhat stereotypical. In chapter two I will begin to discuss who these characters are and in chapter seven I will elaborate on how they are constructed in relation to the implicit norms of the specific diegetic spaces they inhabit. Willow, the nerdy, brilliant witch wannabe; Xander, the sexually frustrated, immature geek; Oz, the sensitive musician/werewolf with the high I.Q.; Cordelia, the popular prom queen with hidden depth; Giles, *Buffy's* overly earnest British Watcher, as well as Kendra and Faith, two other Slayers introduced during the second and third seasons.<sup>20</sup> The ways in which difference

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<sup>20</sup> In the *Buffy* universe, a Watcher is a member of The Council (an archaic organization which oversees the functioning of The Slayer and monitors vampire and other demonic

is integrated and yet marginalized within the construction of these and some of the more minor characters, will be analyzed in this chapter. I will also excavate the relational matrix they navigate in their unusual town and circumstances. Like Buffy, Willow, Xander, Oz, Cordelia, Kendra and Faith are multi-faceted and complex adolescent characters who offer multiple possibilities for identification, including ones which run contrary to traditional notions of appropriate identities for young women and men.

Friendships are important, but like any group of suburban, North American high schoolers Buffy and her friends find themselves in the throes of hormonal turmoil. Chapter eight will explore the romantic aspects of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Most significantly, this chapter will focus on the construction of couples and the delineation of appropriate sexual behavior. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is not a traditional romance, even if it does rely on traditional romantic tropes. Buffy and Angel's relationship, which formed the nexus of the show's romance storyline in the first two seasons, is such a case. In some ways their romance is not unlike what one would find in traditional vampiric tales, where the dapper vampire in disguise seduces the young maiden and makes her his undead bride. *Buffy* moves several steps away from this narrative trope by developing a romance between The Slayer and one of *her* prey.

By the second half of the second season all the characters were trying to figure out what their romantic feelings were and for whom. Not just the young people, Giles' brief romance with Ms Carpenter and the eternal devotion of Spike to Drusilla have made romance a central aspect of this series. But because of its fantasy structure there are many episodes in which havoc is wreaked with the characters' relational quests. Buffy's old boyfriend wants to be a vampire, Xander's love potions run amok, a sexy teacher turns out to be an enormous insect, Willow has an internet romance with a demon, Xander falls for a foreign exchange student who turns out to be a mummy, cute fraternity boys worship a reptilian monster which they placate by feeding it their dates (including Buffy and Cordelia), a werewolf terrorizes lover's lane, and a forty year old murder is replayed ad nauseam by everyone in the high school. The way romance and romantic alliances are constructed through this fantasy drama will unveil how

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activity) whose primary job is to train, educate and watch over a Slayer.

certain hegemonic structures of romance are held in place while the liminality of the 'genre' allows other, insurgent moments to be played out.

Chapter nine will focus on the diegetic spaces where *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* unfolds. Most importantly, this chapter will examine the construction of Sunnydale, California and the critique provided by the superimposition of middle-class suburbia and the Hellmouth that thrives beneath it. Los Angeles has been a consuming passion for postmodern geographer Edward W. Soja (1989, 1996) and I will draw on his work, as well as that of Baudrillard (specifically his 1988 work *America*) and other theorists of spatiality. Of this fascinating and uncanny city, Soja (1996) writes that "many residents of the City of Los Angeles have never been downtown and experience it only vicariously, on television and film" (298). Although Sunnydale is not Los Angeles (not even, perhaps, part of its sprawl) it is forever linked to L.A. through dialogue: the place from which parents have fled and one which offers a multitude of possibilities to escape suburban ennui. But as the quintessential hyperreal town in an increasingly hyperreal landscape, Sunnydale offers a literal view of what increasing numbers of people fear: a thriving underworld existing right alongside our most cherished familial safe zones. Sunnydale plays to a nightmare in which suburbia begins to make Los Angeles look safe.

*Buffy* stalks the liminal zones of adolescence, Otherness and suburbanism, as well as between fantasy and realism. But alongside the physical locations which set the stage for the performances of Buffy and her friends and foes, there are also more subtly constructed spaces of community. As I have written elsewhere, a great deal can be gleaned by examining how televisual communities are put together (Byers, forthcoming; also see McKinley 1997). Like real communities, these function on the basis of both inclusion and exclusion. The communities in Buffy's world are based on family, locality, popularity and relation to good and evil. But the decision to locate *Buffy* in suburban California seems to legitimize the extreme homogeneity of the characters, something which is characteristic of many shows.<sup>21</sup> It constructs (or re-invents) what Frankenberg (1993) claims is a "[R]acial social geography," which she describes as "the racial

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<sup>21</sup>Even shows which take place in large cities (90210 in Beverly Hills/Los Angeles, *Party of Five* in San Francisco, *Felicity*, *Friends* and *Seinfeld* in New York City) tend to be

and ethnic mapping of environments in physical and social terms and enables also the beginning of an understanding of the conceptual mappings of self and other" (44).<sup>22</sup> These communities – material and mediated - are characterized as much by what they exclude as by what they include: people of color, gays and lesbians, people with disabilities, ethnic diversity, people who are overweight or unattractive, and the elderly. The vampire community is similarly homogenized, despite their prosthetic faces and fangs. This chapter will explore how the construction of community within television diegeses maintains and even promotes the image of homogeneity (in this case) while delving beneath the fragile surfaces of these communities and exposing the falsity of their supposed ideals of safety, family and purity.

In the concluding chapter of the thesis, I will return to the questions raised in section one and try to see how the thesis has begun to answer them. Specifically, I will re-examine the potential of a theory of mediated performance for illuminating aspects of television which have previously been left un-theorized. This chapter will also demonstrate the fit between performance as a framework and the medium of television. The question of insurgent voices/texts will also be returned to in a discussion of how this radical aspect functions in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and is elucidated through this theoretical work. Although this thesis will end with a formulation for studying mediated performances and the insurgent voices they contain, as a somewhat exploratory work it will, of necessity, leave certain things un-theorized. The final part of this thesis will begin to delineate the questions which this work has raised and which must now be answered, as well as point to directions future research could take in relation to performance and the mass media.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I will examine the concept of intertextuality and its importance to any study of television and the mass media more generally. Julia Kristeva is usually credited with coining this term in the 1960's. She writes that "studying the text as intertextuality, considers it as such within (the text of) society and history" (1980, 37). Barthes (1977) writes that "the Text: [it] can be only in its difference (which does not mean its individuality)..."

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populated with pretty, thin, white, straight, able, middle and upper class people.

<sup>22</sup> Emphasis in the original.

and nevertheless woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages... The intertextual in which every text is held, is itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text" (160). Fairclough's (1992) writing on intertextuality is also important and, perhaps, most useful for an examination of the mass media. He writes that intertextuality "points to the productivity of texts, to how texts can transform prior texts and restructure existing conventions (genres, discourses) to generate new ones. But this productivity is not in practice available to people as a limitless space for textual innovation and play; it is socially limited and constrained, and conditional upon relations of power" (102-03). In discussions of intertextuality, Fairclough's assertions are important because they can be linked more easily to visual media than Barthes and Kristeva's works, which focus on literature. Most important in these definitions are their acknowledgment of the text's social and historical context (citation), its (limited) potential for transformation, its web of reiterations and its productivity. Intertextuality points to a way in which to read the media text through all other texts and discourses which inform its production both implicit and explicitly.

The study of a text like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is almost necessarily incomplete. *Buffy*, the television series, is only a small part of the larger world of *Buffy*, which is made up of books, articles, comics, soundtracks, web sites, video games, spin-offs, movies and consumer products. These are just *Buffy*-related items, there is a whole other matrix of products which are linked intertextually to *Buffy* through explicit citation or implicit reference.<sup>23</sup> It is with both of these aspects of intertextuality that the final chapter of this thesis will concern itself. First, to expand the analysis of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and, second, to suggest a further method of inquiry that would examine themes as they exist intertextually within television texts. Intertextuality has been rather absent in studies of both performance and television although I believe that it is an integral part of both.

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<sup>23</sup>Nikki Stafford's book *Bite Me!* has a special section in its episode guides called best pop culture reference. In relation to the third episode of season two she writes: "Spike to Angel: "You were my sire, man! You were my Yoda!" Yoda, for all those who live under rocks, was the Jedi Master who trained Luke Skywalker to be a Jedi Knight in *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)" (Emphases in the original). As for implicit references, they're virtually endless, encompassing other series, films, books, comics, etc. that contribute to the show's sense of style, genre, narrative structure, plot development, fashion, dialogue...

It will be impossible to fully rectify this lacuna in one chapter, but it will make some suggestions as to how this type of work might be conducted and the usefulness it will have for future research.

This thesis is the result of a strong desire to explore the radical potential of television texts. It is my firm belief that television is a medium worthy of intensive critique rather than the merely reiterated and often banal criticisms which have so traditionally been leveled at it from the academy. Each new publication in the field of television has the possibility to take this work in new and provocative directions. Opening the study of television to the methods and theories of performance (and of performance to television) may not bring either of these areas to a central position within the academy, but it may create a space for serious and potentially radical critique.

Vampires are nothing new in the lore of fiction and popular culture. From the introduction of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (not to be confused with the 1992 film starring Gary Oldman and Winona Ryder called *Bram Stoker's Dracula*) vampires have been part of mainstream mythology. The continuing use of the vampire theme in film and television, the incredible popularity of the books of Anne Rice, and the continued presence of the 'goth' subculture - complete with coffins, capes and vampiric pallor - attests to the enormous resonance the fanged ones have on the North American popular imagination. But whether these depictions have been comedic, dramatic or action-packed, *Buffy* has taken the vampire genre to yet another level: the level of The Slayer. Unlike traditional vampire fare, where dapper eons-old men seduced innocent corseted maids while being hunted by their pure-hearted and infinitely more appropriate suitors, on *Buffy* the responsibility for saving humanity from the undead lies in the hands (and feet) of a teenaged girl. Buffy Summers and her motley crew of semi-willing apprentices have created a whole new genre of teen rebellion, complete with vigilantism. Like other tough women garnering praise on television today (notably the *X-Files*' Dana Scully, as well as Nikita and Xena), Buffy has attitude. *Buffy* represents the promise that the insurgent voice of powerful young womanhood has finally entered the public imagination.

In *The Girl's Got Bite* (1998) Kathleen Tracy gives an extensive account of the metamorphosis *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* went through in its transition from a cute and 'campy' minor movie to a slick television hit. I will give a brief outline of this Cinderella story here, as I have been witness to it almost from the start. In 1991, a screenplay developed by twenty-something Joss Weedon was accepted by a major studio and began pre-production. Building on the surge in vampire popularity, 20th Century Fox produced the project for nine million dollars. The film was called *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In the leading roles were cast a semi well-known blond actress named Kristy Swanson and *Beverly Hills, 90210*'s favorite bad boy Luke Perry. The film, which was launched on July 31st, 1992, did poorly despite the heavy public relations campaign Fox had leveled at

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<sup>24</sup>The biographical information in this chapter is indebted to the work done by *Buffy* chroniclers Stafford (*Bite Me!* 1998), Tracy (*The Girl's Got Bite* 1998) and Genge (*The Buffy*



American viewers with billboards reading: "She knows a sucker when she sees one" and "Pert. Wholesome. Way Lethal." *Buffy* proved to be detrimental to the careers of both Swanson and Perry, but Weedon went on to pen *Toy Story* and *Alien Resurrection*, as well as remaining a central force in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: the series.<sup>25</sup>

Aside from the title, the film and the series could hardly be more different. Taking off from where the film ended, television's *Buffy* is infinitely darker and more sophisticated. Moving to the quiet suburbanism of Sunnydale, California, Buffy Summers encounters a plethora of evils that lurk in the Hellmouth not far beneath the town's pristine surface (in fact the Hellmouth is located in the high school library). Vampires, witches, werewolves, demons and swim team members that turn into reptilian monsters are just a few markers in the weekly chronicle that a much more subdued and pom-pom free Buffy Summers has moved into. Originally it was hoped that the series would be picked up by Fox, the Mecca of youth programming that has spawned *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Melrose Place* and *The Simpsons*, but they passed. The show was eventually picked up by the WB (a relatively new network from Time Warner) who were trying to attract some of the youth audience away from Fox. Starting midway through the 1996-97 season, *Buffy* was received with critical acclaim, garnering 3.3 million viewers, a Golden Petcabus and becoming the WB's biggest show (Stafford 1998, 34).<sup>26</sup> The WB quickly followed up on its surge in popularity by introducing another (though somewhat less quirky) adolescent drama, *Dawson's Creek*, into its line-up in the time slot right after *Buffy*. Although *Dawson's* lags just slightly behind *Felicity* in the garnering of acclaim as 'quality television' for youth, *Buffy* has consistently received higher praise from the popular press.<sup>27</sup> The media

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*Chronicles* 1998)

<sup>25</sup>Swanson has made some minor screen ventures including John Singleton's critically acclaimed *Higher Learning*. Perry's film career has been even more dismal and he seemed to virtually disappear after leaving *Beverly Hills, 90210* in 1995 (perhaps that is the reason he rejoined that cast in December of 1998).

<sup>26</sup>The Golden Petcabus awards are given to television shows which are considered unappreciated. *Buffy* won three in 1998: Best Show, Best Ensemble Cast and Best Recurring Character (Juliet Landau for Drusilla) (Stafford 1998, 44).

<sup>27</sup>Betsy Williams (1994) explores the meaning of quality television within the changing paradigm of network programming during the last thirty years. She suggests that quality is linked to the polyvocality of any text and to the targeting of specific though diverse

immediately saw that *Buffy* was doing something new and they were unhesitant with their praise: "Less cheesy than nearly every show on Fox, and edgier than every teen show that ABC, NBC, and CBS have put out in years" (Feinberg); "far from being the stuff of fantasy or mere over-the-top satire, is the most realistic portrayal of contemporary teenage life on television" (Queenan); "*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is the coolest show on TV" (Hine); "the show's clear-eyed recognition that autonomy can be one hard row to hoe... puts it miles ahead of upbeat ads about girl Little Leaguers" (Pierce). Even Howard Stern had no lewd retort when he told Sarah Michelle Geller that *Buffy* "was one of the best hours on television" (all in Stafford 1998, 34-35). Two years after its introduction, the decidedly mainstream *Entertainment Weekly* hailed it as the best show on TV. *Buffy* had certainly arrived.

Comparisons to other teen-oriented television series are odious but *Buffy* none-the-less tends to come out on top. Ken Tucker, in the November 6th issue of *Entertainment Weekly*, compares *Buffy* to Fox's new supernatural series *Charmed*. He writes: "No other show balances so many elements as deftly, without a trace of corniness or melodrama. I can admire *Charmed* for its shrewd casting and pop-culture timing, but week in and week out, *Buffy* just slays me" (60). In the September 1998 issue of *Spin* Kim France has a lot to say about why it is unlikely that anyone will care more about the overly emotive charms of the much lauded *Felicity* than about *Buffy*. She writes: "unless *Buffy* Summers herself makes a guest appearance in which she kicks open *Felicity*'s dorm-room door, grabs her by the collar of her big fuzzy sweater, and tells her to stop being such a simp, it doesn't look like the odds of this happening are good" (114); and later that "[T]he multisyllabic emoting goes on and on like this, the irony being that for all of *Felicity*'s hand-wringing, *Buffy* reveals more truths. Because of its fantastical premise... the drama does not need to center around a bunch of kids sitting around relating *or something*" (118).<sup>28</sup> And praise for *Buffy* on its own is generally very high. In Toronto, *The Star* proclaimed that "*Buffy* Rules" (Philpot 1998, B1) and the University of Toronto's *Varsity* insisted that "*Buffy* beats *Beverly*" (Huffman 1998, 25). In the February 1999 issue of *Spin* Maureen

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audiences.

<sup>28</sup> Emphasis in the original.

Callahan writes: "*Buffy's* metaphorical dilemmas allow it to be one of the most subversive shows on television" (64). And in the usually hyper-critical *Adbusters* Mark Kingswell (1999) writes "I'd *really* rather watch *Buffy* the Vampire Slayer. Now there's an action hero you can look up to: smart, stylish, funny and brave. Can an action figure be far behind?" (50).<sup>29</sup>

In Canada, the WB is a rather inaccessible station, requiring pay-per-view, as well as regular cable. *Buffy* is available on two channels, originally on the youth channel YTV and more recently on the suburban (Barrie) The New VR. Interestingly, these channels cater to very different audiences, giving credence to the wide appeal of the show.<sup>30</sup> This diversification of audience is also apparent in the advertisers each channel has procured during the *Buffy* timeslot (Saturday's at seven p.m. on YVT and Tuesday at eight p.m. on The New VR). On YTV, ads have included Cheese Strips, Baby Mine, Dark Knight 5, Sailor Moon Fashion Clothes, Hot Wheels, Sleeping Beauty, Rice Crispies, Honeycomb, Oopsie Daisy Doll and X-Men water war toys. This suggests that YTV was aiming for an audience of very young children, both female and male, and their parents. On The New VR, the commercials included spots for Clairol, McDonalds, Always, Folgers, Eatons, Royale, Pantene, Milk, the Raptors, Florida Vacations, Sleep Country Canada and Lay's potato chips, suggesting that they were hoping for an older audience of not only teenagers but adults as well. Youth oriented programming, especially when paired with *Buffy's* fantastic elements, seems to have the potential to attract a very wide age segment of the television audience.

*Spin's* Maureen Callahan (Feb. 1999) attributes the popularity of *Buffy* and other adolescent-centric media products to a cyclical phenomenon that brings young people into focus for the rest of the population. She calls the phenomenon "teensploitation," writing that "[T]he feelings of loneliness. The explorations of self. The felonious assault on school administrative staff. From 1955's *Blackboard Jungle* to *The Faculty*, teen movies have... barely changed" (62). While they were castigated as slackers and Xers in the late eighties and early nineties, in the

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<sup>29</sup>Emphasis in the Original. According to my Toronto sources, a *Buffy* doll is expected sometime early in 2000.

<sup>30</sup>YTV is primarily marketed to children and includes a lot of animation. The New VR's fare includes *ER*, *The Crow* and *Dead Man's Gun*.

second half of this decade teenagers are being given (and taking) back their own. This has happened not only because of the talented young actors, writers and directors making waves today, but "because behind the teen face of this revolution is an army of thirtysomethings wallowing in a steamy, hormonally charged gymnasium of arrested development" (Nashawaty 1997, 31). In the eighties we had the John Hughes pandemic of *Sixteen Candles*, *The Breakfast Club*, *Some Kind of Wonderful*, *Pretty in Pink* and the more revolutionary *Heathers* (written by Daniel Waters and directed by Michael Lehman). These films and the impossible aspirations they set for a generation of pre and post adolescents, are another reason why teenagers are making a comeback. It has been put best in the tiny Toronto 'zine *Bad Monkey* by Ann Hastios (1995) who entitled her article "My Love Affair with the Post-Pubescent World of John Hughes... Or how I Never got Over the Fact That I was Not Molly Ringwald." She continues: "I believed that beyond the Toronto metropolis lay the possibility of Hughes proportion teen melodrama. It was with a perverse thrill that I met the news that my family was suburban bound -- moving to the mecca where the divine Hughesian prophecy was feasible. I could have a new wave soundtracked life" (6). In the midst of a generation trying to create a universe their own adolescence had failed to provide, Hastios (and a million others) probably could have written *Buffy* herself.

Uncannily timely, Joss Weedon's project - that might have gone entirely unnoticed in 1988, which barely registered on the blockbuster scale in 1992 - was set to be taken notice of in 1997, '98 and '99. Once again, in the late 1990's youth is at the forefront of the popular imagination, whether it is as a roadmap to the future, a reflection of the present or a cynically nostalgic look at the past. And *Buffy* (and *Buffy*), being so timely, well lauded and reflective of the current appetite for all things adolescent, is an important text to study for it tells us not only about what television says about youth, but about ourselves and the communities we live in. Hartley (1992) writes that "[Y]outh is a scandalous category because it offends binary logic" (31). *Buffy* is scandalous because it refuses to conform to assumed notions of what youth television should be. It presents a radical departure from what we traditionally associate with youth-oriented television and the two-dimensional images we expect it to present.

## BUFFY'S CHARACTERS

Character is among the most important axes upon which any script is built. Character is what makes the link between text and viewer possible and the construction of plausible, even if fantastic characters keeps viewers coming back for more. Performance is most strongly illustrated in character and it is through a reading of character, both textual and visual, that axes of difference are elucidated. One of the ways in which difference is manifested in the visual text is through the stereotype. More and more, however, the stereotype lurks beneath a mask of self-reflexivity, suggesting that it does not reaffirm a stereotypical meaning but works actively to deconstruct it. Apter (1996) writes that “[D]isavowed, the stereotype rebounds re-avowed, as that upon which [gender] destabilization pins itself as a point of departure or referent of resignification. The irrepressible coherence of characterology embedded in the stereotype introduces a kind of psychic ossification that re-assimilates subjective novelties into the *doxa*. The stereotype, I would maintain, is the Achilles' heel of performativity” (27).<sup>31</sup> By this I would suggest that Apter means that even seemingly new aspects of character which are introduced are subject to a reinvention of stereotype which tends to ground every character's development. Through the nexus of performativity character is crystallized or, as Apter puts it, ossified, reaffirming the stereotype which it may, contradictorily, seem to attempt to dismantle. Her use of the Achilles heel as illustration is apt for it points to the tendency within characterology to move towards the performance of the stereotype.<sup>32</sup> I will show, however, that there may also be a counterpunal move in the direction of insurgence where the character performance belies its more intrinsic stereotypical aspects.

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<sup>31</sup> Emphasis in the original.

<sup>32</sup> To simplify excessively, the return of the stereotype might look something like this: It is noted that there is an absence of gay and/or lesbian characters on television. At a certain point in time it becomes marginally more acceptable to have gay and/or lesbian characters on mainstream television programs. But as the inclusion of these characters evolves, it becomes apparent that they are working with a preconceived notion of homosexuality, which devolves into stereotype. Thus the inclusion, which is important in making visible a previously invisible group, must be critiqued in terms of its stereotypical investment.

The study of character has been a preoccupation of theorists of performance, media and literature.<sup>33</sup> With the advent of each new medium or genre, the study of character has had to be reconsidered in order to accommodate the visual, the 'live,' the simulation and the serial. Television puts in place a particular relationship between actor, character and text. This process, which can be understood as akin to identification, occurs at many levels. The characters must identify with each other and with the world within which the text takes place. The viewer identifies with the characters and, often, with the actors who portray them. The actor must identify with the character in order to create a 'true' performance. The viewer identifies with the text, which makes it pleasurable and worthy of return. And so on... It is the complex (inter)textuality of desire and identification which allows for a reading of character which inundates the text with meaning and which necessitates an inquiry of performance.

Character in television is more and more commodity based and the necessity of commercial appeal is as intrinsic to contemporary characterology as realism or stereotype. Schneider (1997) describes the link between the construction of character and commodity as a parallel to desire and inaccessibility. She writes "[C]ommodity-land dreamgirls, angels of billboards and emblems of desire, recess into the mockery of their own empty stares and whispers of inaccessibility. This recessive inaccessibility simply argues for the desire for access, propelling the purchase of the commodity pitched" (93). But television functions in a dual mode wherein the image gods and goddesses are forever accessible through the screen, the image is ever more desirable than the icon for which it stands in. Theorists of performance and the performative, among them Butler, Diamond and Schneider, have written that the body does not exist in reified form, but is always socially constructed. But the televised body is even more so, excessively so because the construction occurs at the levels of actor, character and production. The character embedded in the televised

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<sup>33</sup>Even advertizing relies on the construction of character, from Ronald McDonald to Dave of Wendy's to Michael Jordan for Nike to the couple in the serialized Nescafe commercials (which, ironically, starred *Buffy's* Anthony Stewart Head). Although products themselves are supposed to have resonance with consumers, having identifiable faces linked to products makes them even more desirable.

body rebels against its extra-textual link to flesh, taking on a textual life and reality all its own. As I will describe later in this chapter in relation to the textual construction of difference in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the glorification of the icon may have a two-fold effect. On the one hand, as Diamond (1997) puts it: “[a]llientaing (not simply rejecting it) iconicity, by foregrounding the expectation of resemblance, the ideology [of gender] is exposed and thrown back to the spectator” (46). I would argue that in embracing iconicity a similar type of remove is effected in television, as the structural strain between the iconic body and the textual roles it is supposed to play are exposed. In this thesis I will show that one of the major techniques *Buffy* employs is to alienate the icon by exposing the misalignment of the actor's body with the character beneath the mask. On the other hand, the reality of television bodies as consumable products means that *Buffy*, like most television shows, is replete with characters who reaffirm that the television landscape belongs primarily to bodies which are beautiful, thin, young, able, straight and white. To begin to understand how character, text, context and difference work, it is necessary to describe in some detail who these characters are and their relations within the textual landscape of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.<sup>34</sup>

#### *Buffy Summers (Sarah Michelle Geller)*

When Buffy was introduced in the 1993 film, she was a cheerleading valley-girl who wore her spunk by favoring Doc Martin boots above Keds and pumps. The Buffy who moved to Sunnydale in 1996 (after the destruction of her Los Angeles high school and much of its student body) was more thoughtful if only slightly more accepting of her role as Slayer and its implications for her present and future. While somewhat ambivalent about the neglect of her social life (spending many of her evenings patrolling her town for vampires) Buffy is also aware that her position enables her to be an individual, even in the highly normalizing atmosphere of her suburban high school. In the episode “Helpless,” when Buffy fears she has lost her powers, she tells Angel: “Before I was The Slayer I was... well I, I don't want to say shallow but let's say a certain person

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<sup>34</sup>I must acknowledge, in this area, my indebtedness to Kathleen Tracy's book *The Girl's Got Bite* (1998), especially the chapter on the show's characters (47-60). Most of the other

who will remain nameless, we'll just call her Spordelia, look like a classical philosopher next to me. Angel, if I'm not The Slayer, what do I do? What do I have to offer? Why would you like me?" By the third season Buffy realizes that being different is not so bad, in fact the idea of going back to normalcy, of losing her individuality and strength, is terrifying.

But Buffy is not completely different from other young, white, North American, middle-class women, still concerned about being liked and admired and keeping the peace with her mother. As well as the armies of the undead, she must also battle schoolwork, exams, a principal who will do anything to get her expelled and finding time for her friends. Her ongoing relationship with Angel, a tumultuous affair worthy of a soap opera, is a new take on the story of the inappropriate boyfriend and is served up with a lot of pathos and humor. On the surface, the diminutive Buffy is sleek, sexy and blond, but beneath she is a complicated young woman struggling with her own demons as well as the world's.

*Xander Harris (Nicolas Brendon)*

Xander is the boy in the movie who has many girls for friends but can never get anyone to go out with him (think John Cusack in *Say Anything* before he attracted the attention of Ione Skye). He developed a crush on Buffy as soon as she arrived in Sunnydale, ignoring the puppy-dog looks he was getting from his best friend Willow (think Eric Stoltz and Mary Stuart Masterson in *Some Kind of Wonderful*). Through the seasons his devotion to Buffy has remained unflagging, despite his occasional irritation that she is perhaps more 'manly' than he. Xander's one male friend Jessie (Eric Balfour) died in the second episode and Xander does not seem to have any other male friends, not fitting in with the jocks, the geeks, the popular clique or the grunge set.<sup>35</sup> Even he and Oz – the other main male character of the adolescent group - seem to have a tenuous friendship based only on their inclusion in The Slayer's circle and knowledge of certain popular boy things' (i.e. Superman). In season two Xander became involved with the popular Cordelia, sending high school hierarchic conventions

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books and articles on the subject deal primarily with actors.

<sup>35</sup>Of intertextual note: Balfour turned up as a sexually harassing jock in the first season of



into orbit and giving Xander a boost of much needed self-confidence. However, Xander's character continues to perform those most typical aspects of adolescence: the desire to discover who one is, what ones strengths are and to find someone to love.

*Willow Rosenberg (Alyson Hannigan)*

Buffy's best girlfriend in Sunnydale and her perfect foil, Willow is the good girl with the perfect g.p.a. and the occasional desire to be bad. Originally defined by her affection for studying and her unrequited love for Xander, Willow's character has developed over the seasons as she honed her amateur skills in witchcraft, won the heart of Oz and became Giles' second in command in vampiric folklore. Willow is supposed to be 'the plain one' although the occasional episode allows her to be as sexy as Buffy ("Halloween," "The Wish" and "Doppelgangland"). Her steadfast loyalty to her friends reveals a home life in which her professional parents are markedly absent. Willow allows the smart girl motif to be performed at a new level where she can also be social and even cool.

*Cordelia Chase (Charisma Carpenter)*

The quintessential prom queen - in a classic horror film she would have met an early demise - on *Buffy* her whip-smart wit and occasionally unperky toughness made her a prime candidate for rehabilitation and inclusion into The Slayer's circle. Self-obsessed, rich and part of the 'in' crowd, Cordy was a peripheral cast member until the end of the first season when she discovered Buffy's secret. In a bizarre twist of circumstances, Cordelia turned her back on her 'in' group ties to go out with Xander and hang out with his friends. But she is never completely sure that she would rather be participating in keeping the world safe from vampires than shopping for new shoes at the mall. As she says to Xander in typical disbelief: "Oh, right, 'cause I lie awake at night hoping you tweakos will be my best friends. And that my first husband will a balding, demented, homeless man" (in "What's my Line?"). Cordelia also acts as foil for Buffy, providing a skewed mirror of who she was before she became The Slayer.

At the same time she performs the possibility that under good hair and a predilection for conventional social admiration can hide strength, wit and possibly even friendship.

*Rupert Giles (Anthony Stewart Head)*

The role of The Watcher is to train and guide The Slayer. Though The Watcher is supposed to be more concerned with protocol and tradition than with the safety of his charge, Giles is very paternalistic towards Buffy, which often leads him into precarious situations (in "Helpless" he is dismissed from his position as Watcher when he aids Buffy in a Slayer test). Giles is a former employee of the British Museum, a linguist and master of supernatural lore who finds himself in sunny Sunnydale playing the role of the school librarian. Though he clearly loves his work, his headstrong young charge and her friends often mystify him. But Giles has had his own misadventurous youth. As we discover in "The Dark Age" Giles was a 'ripper' who, with his friends, performed satanic rituals and unleashed a demon from hell. Giles' stuffiness performs antithetically to the impetuosity of The Slayer, but is tempered by his kindness and his ability to make and admit mistakes.

*Angel (David Boreanaz)*

Born in Ireland in 1755, Angelus, the vampire with the angelic face ravaged the European continent for a century until he took the life of a Roma woman and was cursed to have a soul and live forever in torment for the evils he had committed. He moved to America (perhaps explaining why he has no trace of an accent) and spent another century destitute until a helpful demon persuaded him of his ability to do good. Angel followed Buffy to Sunnydale, pledged to help her on her quest despite the danger it would put him in and promptly fell in love with her. It took longer for the other Sunnydale teenagers to trust Angel, especially Xander who was always jealous of Buffy's affections, but he won their favor by proving his loyalty again and again. In the second season Angel was turned back into the evil Angelus when his curse was lifted and Buffy had to send him to hell in order to save the world. His love for her proved so strong that he returned and continued to conspire against his vampire

brethren to keep the streets of Sunnydale safe (until he moved to L.A. at the end of season three).

*Oz (Seth Green)*

First introduced as a band mate of one of Cordelia's crushes, Oz joined the cast as a full-time member in the second season as a love interest for Willow. Later it was revealed that he was a werewolf, a sure sign that he would fit right in with Buffy's crowd. Oz also performs the brilliant, artistic, sensitive young man. When Willow tries to get Oz to kiss her but still seems to be thinking of Xander, Oz tells her: "See, in my fantasy, when I'm kissing you, you're kissing me" (In "Innocence (Part Two)"). Oz performs a masculinity that acts as a foil for both Xander's insecurity and Angel's brooding romanticism. Despite his diminutive size and rather awkward looks, his self-assuredness and even-keel make him a very contemporary male role model.

*Joyce Summers (Kristine Sutherland)*

Buffy's mother takes on all responsibility for her daughter when they move to Sunnydale, away from Los Angeles and Buffy's father. She had hoped to find some peace of mind in this idyllic suburb after the tragedy in which her daughter was implicated in her last high school. Kept in the dark for two and a half seasons, Joyce attributed her daughter's moodiness and disobedience to adolescence. When she finally discovered her daughter's pivotal role in Sunnydale's underground economy she was shocked and terrified (once she realized Buffy was not delusional), but after a few episode she began to accept Buffy as The Slayer and to even show up on Buffy's night stalks with snacks.

*Jenny Calendar (Robin La Morte)*

A cyber wiz and techno pagan computer teacher, Jenny Calendar was also tied to the Roma family who laid the curse on Angel. She and Giles became a couple for a few episodes before she met an untimely end when Angel returned to his evil ways.

*Principal Snyder (Armin Shimerman)*

A close cousin to the principal from *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, Snyder lives to make his students' lives miserable, especially Buffy's. His conviction that she and her friends (and all young people) are up to something suspicious makes him go out of his way to complicate their plans and to make them participate in humiliating after school activities.

*Drusilla and Spike (Juliet Landau and James Masters)*

Drusilla, Spike and Angel have a long history together. Dru was a noblewoman who Angel drove insane by killing off her family one at a time before finally turning her into a vampire. She then met Spike, once called William the Bloody, who earned his nickname for his affection for torturing people with railroad spikes. They became constant companions and fled to the Hellmouth to find a cure for Dru's madness after an angry mob in Prague nearly did them in. Although they are both uncannily evil characters they are decidedly devoted to each other (most of the time). Spike is the most notorious of vampires, having killed two Slayers in battle in one century. Like Dru, he has also been sired by Angel and is sickened to find that his mentor has turned to the side of The Slayer.

*Kendra and Faith (Bianca Lawson and Eliza Dashku)*

When a Slayer dies another is called forth. In the episode "Prophecy Girl," Buffy is drowned for a few minutes and because she is assumed to be dead another Slayer arrives in Sunnydale. Kendra is a beautiful Caribbean woman who has been raised in isolation in order to keep her completely focused on slaying. She is disapproving of Buffy and her friends, especially Angel. Kendra's performance of the 'appropriate slayer' lasted only a few episodes when she was killed off by Drusilla. Because of her death, Faith, who *Spin* (Beato et al. 1999) has called "the party-girl slayer" (72), arrived on the scene. Unlike Kendra, Faith makes a wonderful impression of Buffy's friends and even her mother. She is passionate about slaying due to the fact that her Watcher was killed by an ancient vampire, Kaikistos. Without family or friends, she performs an intensity of rage that had only been seen in the antagonistic characters of the

show previously. Faith is an interesting addition to the *Buffy* cast because she makes Buffy look like a good girl. Whether in slaying, sex or partying, Faith embodies the excesses of her position as Slayer with an ownership that makes her as insurgent as the other characters, if not more.

Character construction on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* offers a plethora of multi-layered performances. Although most series rely on consistency of character as a central identificatory mechanism, *Buffy* allows its characters an 'uncharacteristic' (so to speak) inconsistency based both on the fantastic nature of the text (spells, bites, curses...) and the very 'real' nature of personal development. Propp (1968), in *Morphology of the Folktale*, sets out an extensive examination of the characterization and plots which make up the folkloric imagination. He insists that the tradition – one which is gendered and (hetero)sexualized - from which these tales emerge is consistent, often developing out of a set stock of characters (the hero, princess, obstacle, villain, helper) and plots (adventure, marriage, quest, murder, imprisonment). de Lauretis (1984) has used Propp's work extensively in her reading of the Oedipus myth. Although it differs from the traditional tales described by Propp, de Lauretis links these differences to the rise in patriarchy, in which the development of succession and prophecy was made necessary by the impossibility of succession through patricide.<sup>36</sup> Like Oedipus, *Buffy* conforms but rails against the fulfillment of the prophecy, not because she will kill her mother and sleep with her father (as it would have to be in this case) but for the unwillingness of simply accepting her destiny and death as designed by fate (of course this is exactly what got Laius in trouble in the first place). Also like Oedipus, *Buffy* follows many of the principles of Propp's analysis, if standing them on their heads.<sup>37</sup> There is the same set of characters but the hero and the

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<sup>36</sup>She writes "The theme of the prophecy, Propp claims, is absent from tales reflecting the earlier, matriarchal form of succession, where the function of regicide is performed by the son-in-law who is a stranger, often unknown and unrelated by blood. But with the advent of patriarchy and the strengthening of paternal power as the very foundation of the state, that function (regicide, now patricide) becomes extremely ambiguous. For such a system, a son cannot wish, let alone execute the killing of his father... Hence the role of the prophecy" (114).

<sup>37</sup>The similarities between the traditional folktale and the *Buffy* text are quite remarkable

quest in this case belong to the feminine and the prince/obstacle can be sacrificed for the continuance of the quest. Also unlike the traditional folktale, the modern myth refuses any simple resolution through death and/or marriage, for the quest is never fully resolved, but reveals itself to be merely one adventure among many the heroine must fulfill. In the case of this fable, as I will show, the end can only come with the death of the hero(ine), not by her marriage, but by her succession through the prophecy. These reversals also resemble what Davies (1989) found in relation to 'feminist' reformulation of traditional fairy tales. She writes: "The resolution of female struggle in romance and domesticity is what *The Paper Bag Princess* is attempting to erode. The beautiful princess who loves her prince and plans to marry him reveals that she is also brave and witty" (75). In *Buffy* as well, romance and domesticity are made secondary to bravery and wit, to action or performance. Thus, *Buffy* incorporates elements of the traditional folktale, retold through a patriarchal legacy but with the insurgent promise of feminism.

#### PLOT AND NARRATIVITY

The plot structure of a fantastic serial like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is complex because certain storylines run continuously through the text, while others start and finish within the program's one-hour time slot. Many of the plots on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can be characterized by the focus of their stories and, perhaps, the best way to address them at this point is through some of their common narratives. There are probably other ways to group *Buffy's* plots together, but this will provide a simple way to examine them for those readers who may be unfamiliar with the series. In discussing plot here, however, I am more interested in the specificities of plot, which are recurrent within the overall structure than with that structure itself. As I described in the previous section on character, *Buffy* taken as an overall narrative also conforms quite well to

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and it is not surprising that a contemporary television serial would necessitate a much more complex formulation. The characters certainly follow Propp's types: the hero (Buffy: the Chosen One), the helper (Giles, Buffy's friends), the obstacle (the principal, Buffy's mother, Angel), the princess (various characters in need of saving), the villain (vampires, demons).

Propp's folkloric delineation of plot structure in terms of following a pattern of prophecy, recognition, adventure, quest, magic, help, struggle, villainy, murder, deception, betrayal, imprisonment, punishment and victory.<sup>38</sup>

de Lauretis (1984) cites Lotman who writes that "plot represents a powerful means of making sense of life" and she continues that "it is because plot (narrative) mediates, integrates, and ultimately reconciles the mythical and the historical, norm and excess, the spatial and temporal orders, the individual and the collectivity" (120). Later, she continues: "[T]he work of narrative, then, is a mapping of differences... into text; and hence, by a sort of accumulation, into the universe of meaning, fiction, and history, represented by the literary-artistic tradition and all the texts of culture" (121). Plot, in *Buffy* has just such a function, pushing at the boundaries of the acceptable depiction of difference (especially gender difference) on television. For example, in the third season episode "The Prom," Buffy is awarded the title of Class Protector because she has saved so many of her classmates' lives. In several other episodes Buffy is shown defending herself and her friends from more human monsters: bullies and the school's star athletes. In these scenes Buffy demonstrates with her fists and her wit that girls can be strong and take care of themselves. The narrative works through the gender confusion that more and more permeates our understanding of how our gendered selves are constructed and performed. Further, it enables them into history and into the legitimate and intertextual universe of culture and (to repeat de Lauretis) fiction and history.

Plot is sometimes overlooked in the study of television, or subsumed under the heading of genre which describes attributes of certain narratives. Mumford (1995) has written about the nature of plot within the genre of the soap opera. She describes this term as being attributable to elements which are returned to again and again within the structure of the genre. While *Buffy* cannot be linked to any specific genre, it is readable across genres including the soap opera and also the romance, drama, dark comedy, action, horror and

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<sup>38</sup>The general narrative structure, or plot, follows the traditional format described by Propp in a number of ways: there is a prophecy which is fulfilled by the coming of the Chosen One, the helper trains her in what she lacks, the villains are identified, often they kill or imprison the 'princess,' there is a quest for information, a battle ensues, order is restored... but then the quest begins again, and again, and again.

supernatural genres. Therefore, the specific plots associated with a traditional genre are difficult to address in relation to a text like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. My interest is in, rather, the specificity of plot development within this text, which is perhaps more akin to what Mumford describes as “subplot” in relation to the soap opera (74).

The dissimulation of traditional genre boundaries allocates a certain freedom to contemporary texts, including the introduction of counterintuitive plot lines through the motifs of the supernatural and fantastic. But some discussion of genre is still necessary to elucidate how the *Buffy* text and its plots are woven together. Fiske (1987a) has written that “[E]ach new show shifts genre boundaries and develops definitions” and that “[G]enres rise and fall in popularity as popular taste shifts with social and historical changes... Genres are popular when their conventions bear a close relationship to the dominant ideology of the time” (112). This may partly explain the increasing popularity of polygeneric programming in a historical period immersed in postmodern fragmentation.<sup>39</sup> As Miller (1986) states: “TV spectacle has long since broken down or overwhelmed the old dramatic forms that once comprised it” (225). While I agree with this statement I do not think Miller takes it to its logical conclusion, especially when he writes that “TV points largely to itself, and so genre has been all but superannuated” (226). TV’s self-referentiality does not rid it of genre but, rather, brings genre back with a vengeance, albeit in a newer and radically fragmented form. This sometimes erupts discomfitingly, as when a comedy inserts a melodramatic, supernatural or romantic story line. Kellner (1995) agrees that “the postmodern intervention within television is a reaction against realism and the system of coded genres” (225). While I would argue that realism is still a major component of television (even in its most fantastic guises) I also think that unified genres have been broken up and haphazardly reassembled: comedy erupts in drama, action makes us laugh, melodrama introduces the supernatural, romance dwells within horror... This refusal to conform to traditional generic boundaries suggests the development of new

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<sup>39</sup> Of course, this is only true up to a certain point. These texts do not do away with basic structures such as genre and narrative, but rework them and allow them to co-exist.



paradigms from which to explore the multi-generic terrain of contemporary television and the characters that live there.

The structure of genre has been of particular interest to feminist writers who have studied what have been labeled 'women's genres' and on occasion 'girl's genres' (soap operas and melodrama primarily, as well as the domestic sitcom).<sup>40</sup> Although some genres continue to reign in a largely female audience, many new shows are not so easily classified, *Buffy* among them (and *The X-Files*, *E.R.*). Nightingale (1990) says of television that "its promotion and construction of its own audience lessens the possibility for genre subversion" (35). But this assumes that there is a unified method to that construction/promotion and overlooks the fact that many television programs attempt to attract a diverse audience.<sup>41</sup> Of course, it is possible to attract a diverse audience while reinforcing narrow conceptions of genre or appeal. The one manner in which television does unify its viewers is through their positioning as consumers. As Houston (1994) writes: "these discursive possibilities and cultural imperatives ("Meanings")... from which the desire of the other is learned are thus partly those specific to American television at this moment: aggressive direct address, the single-minded leveling of difference in formal structures, genres and narrative content in an attempt to unify all spectators as consumers" (85). But even within this recognition of the consumptive matrix of rampant consumerism Houston overlooks the potential insurgence this leveling of formalism can effect. In this thesis I will show that televisual performances allow for the possibility of playing with gender and other axes of difference. McKenzie (1998) writes that "the performativity of gender has everything to do with subverting not only the genders but also the genres" (219). In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the performativity of gender is subversive and disrupts traditional generic boundaries, not only through the narrative, but through characterology and the plot formations that

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<sup>40</sup>Walters (1995) has an excellent chapter called "Positioning Women: Gender, Narrative, Genre" which describes at length the work which has been done in this area (67-85).

<sup>41</sup>This is demonstrated at least in part by my earlier discussion of how different channels on which *Buffy* was shown use different advertizing strategies depending on their assumed audience. But it is also evident in (i.e.) the incorporation and development of soap opera plots aimed at youth audience, and the advertizing of these in popular youth magazines like *Seventeen*.

these subversive disruptions allow. These are the events that make possible the voice of insurgence to speak through the text.

### *The love plots*

Arguably, love is as central, thematically, to *Buffy* as vampire slaying. Like many groups of young people familiar from recent television series, Buffy and her friends are hormone ridden and anxious to explore their emotions.<sup>42</sup> There is a lot of truth in Walkerdine's (1990) assertion that "the semiotic chain slides into romance as solution" (98), but unlike the traditional romantic formulation, *Buffy's* narrative dilemmas can only be complicated rather than resolved by love and romance. The love plot works in two ways: as a solid branch, which follows the major relationships between the show's main characters, and through smaller, episodic romances.

The major romance in this series occurs between Buffy and Angel and takes the viewer through twists of the most unnatural kind. Following close behind are Willow and Oz, Xander and Cordelia, Drusilla and Spike, Giles and Ms Calendar and the extraneous complications of Willow and Xander and Xander and Faith. None of these romances play out simply and by the middle of season three all have been at least temporarily terminated through deception, jealousy and infidelity. The minor romances are primarily linked to the supernatural plot motifs: Xander is seduced by a beautiful teacher who is actually a giant insect (in "Teacher's Pet"); Willow is romanced by a demon on the internet (in "I Robot, You Jane"); Xander takes a beautiful girl to a dance only to discover she is a five-hundred year old Mummy (in "Inca Mummy Girl"); Buffy and Cordelia are almost sacrificed by reptile demon worshipping fraternity boys (in "Reptile Boy"); Buffy's grade five crush moves to Sunnydale and wants to be a vampire (in "Lie to Me"); Joyce's boyfriend turns out to be a robot (in "Ted"); Cordelia's wish creates an alternate universe where Willow and Xander are lovers... and vampires (in "The Wish").

In her article on women and the horror movie, Linda Williams (1994) describes how "[T]he strange sympathy and affinity that often develops between

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<sup>42</sup> This is a specific historical/cultural construction of youth. It is a very Western notion which, it could be argued, television has both exploited and amplified.

the monster and the girl may be less an expression of sexual desire... and more a flash of sympathetic identification" (568). In *Buffy*, however, it is both, with love or the potential of love often growing out of the possibility for characters of both sexes to identify and come to love both their monsters and the monstrous within themselves. Love is not only a performative dance that occurs between two characters, it is also an aspiration to performance. The love plot often collapses into the romance plot, making romantic love central to the desires which motivate character performances. This desire is always coded as heterosexual and reasserts the heteronormative censure which is at work in this text. On the rare occasion that the hetero- is kept at bay, it is in the form of homosociality. The love or romance plot is, on occasion, made secondary to the intensity of same-sex friendship.

Love, in this text, is closely related to narcissism and the self-definition of character. As Freud (1966) explains it: "the sexual object attracts a portion of the ego's narcissism to itself" (418). Because of the tenuous situation in which the characters find themselves, this attachment is always in danger of breach. This situation can be related to the early childhood danger wherein there is a "separation from a person who is important to the child as a source of gratification" or "loss of the object" described in psychoanalytic literature (Brenner 1977). In her book *Necessary Losses*, Judith Voirst (1986) explains that "we lose not only through death, but also by leaving and being left, by changing and letting go and moving on" (2). The loss of early romantic relationships during adolescence has been called "disenfranchised grief... the grief from a loss which is not acknowledged" (Doka cited in Kaczmarek and Backlund 1991, 253). Kaczmarek and Backlund (1991) emphasize that most adults have insensitively dismissed this issue, insisting young people should simply move on to new things. The fact that the often intense feelings that result from the loss of a relationship during one's teenage years are minimized by adults, causes the person experiencing these emotions to feel guilty, depressed and isolated (Ibid., 254). This heightened possibility of loss is especially resonant in characters whose losses have occurred not only through betrayal but also through death. This gives them even more reason than the rest of their peer-group to be nostalgic for

the simpler days of childhood, the favorite social construction of equating childhood with innocence.<sup>43</sup>

The love plot's complexity within the *Buffy* text complicates dictums about gender in relation to love and caring. While emotionality is a key aspect of *Buffy*, sex is a real part of it too and the young women in this text are as vocal about their desires and as active in them as their male counterparts as each of the young women actively courts the object of their sexual desire. The young women and men are also equally adept at occupying passive and aggressive roles. The traditional – heterosexual – motif of the sexually demure young woman and the man who is the undoing of both her and their relationship is present in this text as one of many options. The possibility for insurgent re-readings of the love motif is deployed at every turn in relation to gender as the young women and men turn traditional assumptions about gender and the occupation of role on their heads.<sup>44</sup> However, it maintains a certain fairy tale traditionalism by using love as a measure of growth and self-knowledge. As Bettelheim (1976) writes: “[H]aving truly become himself, the hero or heroine has become worthy of being loved” (p. 278). Each new struggle, internal and external, and the self-knowledge it offers, allows the hope that true love will follow.

### *The vampire plots*

This is a program about slaying vampires and vampires are always lurking in the text, even if not always at its forefront. Because The Slayer must be

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<sup>43</sup>This is particularly true in relation to love and the losses it brings with it: Cordelia wishes she had stayed with the pack and never met Xander, Willow and Xander long for the days when they were merely best friends without sexual feelings for each other, Buffy wishes she had never loved Angel. Since these teenagers seem to have ambivalent familial relations, this feeling extends to a nostalgized image of childhood: the wish to be young and loved unconditionally, as well as to be unfettered with responsibilities and romantic desires.

<sup>44</sup>Although this is the only way that difference is breached within the love plot. It can be argued that Buffy's relationship with a vampire or Willow's with a werewolf can be read as relationships which exists outside of acceptable bounds, however, Angel and Oz are not so different by day (or night). Xander's relationship with Cordelia can be read as crossing class or social hierarchic boundaries, but this not an unusual romance plot. In *Buffy* there is no possibility for love across race or ability and virtually no mention of non-heterosexual orientation.

constantly in action only certain vampire characters can survive her onslaught, while others are continually brought into the text for her to overcome. Early in the series we learn of The Master, an ancient and powerful vampire who wants to rid the world of humanity and reclaim it for the undead. We also meet Darla, Angel's ever-youthful sire and The Master's favorite. They both meet their ends before the culmination of the second season. Then there is The Anointed One who, in the form of a young boy, becomes the head vampire after the death of The Master. The Anointed One is killed by Spike in the second season. Spike and Drusilla also live to kill The Slayer and bring about the end of the world in the process. In the third season Kaikistos and his sidekick Mr. Trick were introduced. Mr. Trick's intention was to bring vampirism into the twenty first century. There is also an unending stream of general vampire peons for Buffy to slay and to amuse the audience as they turn to dust. They and their victims serve the same plot function that the extraneous members of every *Star Trek's* away team have: to die.

Although the series applies a basic dichotomy between the good people and the evil vampires, the show refuses any simple dualism. Beyond the question of good and evil, despite their unsavory feeding habits, vampires lead interesting lives. In "The Wish," Xander and Willow exist in another possible present where vampires are victorious and they are among the vampire elite. The first thing we notice is that Xander and Willow are sexy and unselfconscious, grounded, focused and exciting (if a little twisted) in this episode. They are very different from their former selves and yet show a hint of what they would both like to be. The vampire plot then, is about change and possibility, the shades of good and evil. Auerbach (1995) writes: "since vampires are immortal, they are free to change incessantly. Eternally alive, they embody not fear of death, but fear of life; their power and their curse is their undying vitality" (5). The vampires are dramatically counterpoised to the inhabitants of Sunnydale and it is not always clear who the good guys are. Vampires sometimes seem to embrace their undeath more than people embrace life.

### *The supernatural plots*

If the vampire plots are long running themes in the *Buffy* narrative, the supernatural plots function as diversions and information providers that broaden the narrative. These mini-plots also function to expand the cast and to introduce obstacles to the greater plot lines of love, vampirism and friendship. There is no particular pattern for the emergence of the supernatural plots and they are incredibly diverse, but they are usually a means of moving the larger narrative forward. For instance, "Invisible Girl" and "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" give the viewer a more in-depth, if skewed, view of life at Sunnydale High School. "The Dark Age" adds a whole new dimension to Giles' character by illuminating his past as a 'ripper.' "Ted" delves into Buffy's relationship with her mother, "Phases" discloses Ms Calendar's link to Angel's curse and "Becoming," informs us of Angel's past.

One of the repetitive supernatural plots in this series involves witches. Early in the first season Buffy believed that one of her classmates, Amy, was a witch (although it was actually her mother who had taken over her daughter's body in a desperate attempt to relive her days as a popular cheerleader). In the second season, Xander accidentally discovered that Amy really was a witch (after seeing her put a spell on their teacher) and blackmailed her into making him a love charm for Cordelia. In the last episodes of the second season Ms Calendar and Willow work together to try and cast a spell which would return Angel his soul. After this episode Willow develops a strong interest in witchcraft (her best friend is a Slayer and her boyfriend is a werewolf so...) which allows the witchcraft theme to become more entrenched in the general narrative. In one episode ("Lover's Walk") Willow casts a spell to try and subdue her and Xander's feelings for each other, and in several other episodes she talks to Buffy about the small spells she has been practicing. In "The Zeppo," the people of Sunnydale (including Buffy and Willow's mothers) are tricked by demons into starting a witch-hunt and Buffy, Willow and Amy are almost burned at the stake.

The other supernatural plots include the discovery of all types of creatures: particularly demons. In "The Wish," Anya is introduced as a thousand-year-old demon whose magic necklace allows her to grant wishes to wronged women. At the end of this episode she is thwarted by Giles who takes

her necklace and remands her to a life in Sunnydale without her powers. In “Doppelgandland” Anya uses Willow to help her retrieve the necklace from an alternate reality so she can stop being a high school girl. More intriguingly, the Mayor of Sunnydale turns out to be a demon in cahoots with Mr. Trick and the vampires, who makes himself immortal in order to destroy The Slayers and take over the world. These plots continue the theme that secrets exist within the most obvious places and in the most appealing packages.

### *The prophecy plots*

Unlike many of the other plot themes, the prophecy plot is secondary and exists as a minor thematic structure throughout the greater narrative. Reading again what de Lauretis (1984) has gleaned from Propp, tales of prophecy are seen to begin with the development of the state and the rise of patriarchal culture where succession from father to son must be bloodless (114). This makes her reading of Oedipus so interesting, because the prophecy supplants will, making patricide a matter of God’s will rather than evil. Although in *Buffy* will is also supplanted by prophecy and despite the very Christian iconography present in the series (Buffy wears a large cross, crosses and holy water are used to kill or maim vampires) God is largely absent from the text.<sup>45</sup> Demons and the undead are related to a more primordial moment and live by an equally ancient code, and a prophetic one. And yet, the prophecy plots, although not travestied to the extent described by Bakhtin (1984) in his reading of Rabelais, are laced with a certain humor which derives from the juxtaposition of the ancient prophetic past and the statist, technological present. This is illustrated in the rebellion which Buffy exhibits towards her role (and the reminders that she is the first Slayer to be so rebellious), the fact that the Judge - unkillable by any weapon forged - is destroyed by a hand-held missile, the fact that vampires proselytize and demons thrive on the Internet and lost Roma spells are reconstructed by computer programs. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* prophecy is also encountered in the form of clairvoyance, primarily in the character of the mad Drusilla and in Buffy’s

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<sup>45</sup>A recent vampire film (John Carpenter’s *Vampires* starring James Woods) suggests why this is. In this story, vampires are the creation of the Catholic Church. During the exorcism of a young priest who had rejected the priesthood and accident occurred and he became the world’s first vampire.

dreams. Usually entrusted to the realm of the feminine, the ownership of the prophecy spans the divide between good and evil, a trope owed largely to Romantic literature and the potential for rebellion offered by identification primarily with the latter, but in the end, with both (Gilbert and Gubar 1979).

The main function of the prophecy plots is to remind the viewer of why they are there in the first place. The prophecy intones that in every generation there is a Slayer: a young woman who must slay demons and protect the world from evil. The function of the prophecy is to draw the viewer into the fantasy and to set out its parameters. But *Buffy* rebels against prophecy as well, giving a thoroughly modern twist to the tale. Unlike Oedipus (to return to de Lauretis' example), who illustrates the impossibility of avoiding fate, of changing the prophecy, *Buffy* puts her own mettle above the ordained. While she comes to accept her role as Slayer, she battles against the prophecies that would see her dead at the hands of The Master (in "Prophecy Girl") and bring about the end of the world (in "Surprise" and "Innocence").

#### *The secrecy plots*

These are similar to the prophecy plots in that they are important but minor themes, which run through the text and have major importance for the construction of the diegetic space. Secrecy is crucial to this series, it parallels the suspension of disbelief of the viewer. The most important secret to be kept is, of course, *Buffy's* identity as The Slayer. As the need for new characters is mandated by the text, more people are initiated into The Slayer's circle. Almost as important is the story of Angel, which unfolds slowly, always unveiling new secrets (that he was a vampire, that he was under a curse...). Many of the other characters, regulars and guest stars, also have secrets: Oz is a werewolf, Jenny Calendar is a member of the Roma group who cursed Angel, Willow studies to become a witch, *Buffy* runs away and hides her identity, Giles has a secret past, *Buffy's* exchange student is an ancient mummy and frat boys have a demon in their basement.

Michel Foucault (1990), in a critique of the repression of children's sexuality, writes:



What this actually entailed, throughout this whole secular campaign that mobilized the adult world around the sex of children, was using these tenuous pleasures as a prop, constituting them as secrets (that is, forcing them into hiding so as to make possible their discovery), tracing them back to their source, tracking them from their origins to their effects, searching out everything that might cause them or simply enable them to exist (42).

And later that “silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its holds and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance” (101). The hidden secrets that constantly resurface as the program moves from season to season function in just these ways. First, the constitution of virtually every aspect of *Buffy* as secret means that the text is constantly offering moments of discovery, both to the viewer and characters simultaneously and more delightfully, to the characters, while the viewer is already ‘in the know.’

In the second instance, the powerful secrets that the program uses to anchor its diegetic space are rendered powerful not only through the force of discovery, but also by the allegorical allowances they make for the text, allegories which allow for the examination of traditionally obscured areas. *Buffy's* secrets are catalysts for a dialectical understanding of the text which reads like Taussig's ironic image of “a street which runs both one way (fantasy) and another (reality) *at once* - like a public secret and known to everyone” (in Schneider 1997, 107).<sup>46</sup> In *Buffy* this works in two ways. First, through the juxtaposition of fantasy and reality (that is, metaphor): the dilemma of The Slayer and the dilemma of being a powerful, independent young woman. And second, in the enormous suspension of disbelief necessary for the plot to evolve. How could Buffy's mother not know she was The Slayer (kids keep things from their parents all the time); and how could a small suburb like Sunnydale fail to notice all the demons, vampires and deaths in their midst (communities can turn a blind eye to what they do not want to see).

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<sup>46</sup>Emphasis in the original.

*The friendship plots*

Like most programs, especially those which target a youth audience, friendship is integral to the show's narrative structure. In season one we are introduced to Sunnydale's adolescent population through the device of movement: Buffy leaves her life as a popular cheerleader in Los Angeles and begins her tenure as a slightly freaky sophomore in the superficially straight laced S.H.S. Attractive enough to be given more than a passing glance from Cordelia, Buffy soon realizes that being The Slayer will pre-empt her inclusion into the inner social sanctums of her new high school and finds better friends in the more marginal Willow and Xander. Their group is rounded out by the inclusion of Angel, later Cordelia and Oz and finally Faith. Although a somewhat normal group of teenagers (with the exception of the bicentennial Angel), their friendship is always both strengthened and complicated by their need to save the world from evil (which could itself perhaps be considered another plot line).<sup>47</sup> The friendship motif is especially tenuous because of the characters' proximity to the Hellmouth and the mind-altering havoc it wreaks (an apt analogy for adolescence). Buffy's burden of slaying often makes her behave impetuously and draws the irritation of her friends. Faith's troubled past puts everyone in danger. Cordelia is nasty when she does not get her own way. Willow and Xander's attraction threatens the cohesion of the group.

In their study of adolescent girls, Brown and Gilligan (1992) have written: "[P]oised at the edge and suspecting that people prefer the 'perfect' girl to the real one, these girls experiment with her image and the protection and security and happiness she promises" (100). *Buffy* presumes the elevation of the perfect girl and then dashes our expectations by exposing her clay feet. Indeed, the supposition of perfection is largely grounded in beauty and the cast of *Buffy* is certainly attractive by the standards of contemporary television. However, the duplicity of this attractiveness is made evident in the playing out of social hierarchies that belie any simple attainment of perfection through action or look. The character of Darla, on the surface the beautiful schoolgirl, beneath the blood-lusting vampire, attests to this fact. Faith's personal demons repeatedly draw her

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<sup>47</sup>In "The Judge," Buffy tells Willow: "You think he's too old because he's a senior? Please, my boyfriend had a bi-centennial!"

toward the dark forces of the Hellmouth. The impossibility of performing all levels of perfection is one of the central motivators of this text; friendship grows out of this impossibility of perfection, and grows stronger for it.

Friendship on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is of paramount importance and, interestingly, it is the women who have the most complex friendship plots while male friendships are made peripheral. Oz and Xander, for example, seem to be friends only because they are the only two young men in the group. And while there are inter-gender friendships, they are constantly problematized by the possibility of coupling (i.e. Willow and Xander's kiss is discovered by Cordelia and Oz in "Lover's Walk"). The trope of inclusion is called upon to define friendship in a number of ways in this text. The young women seem to bond because of their gender and sexuality. Willow befriends Cordelia when they have problems with their boyfriends (in "Phases"). Buffy and Cordelia grow closer when they battle demons on their way to a dance (in "Homecoming"). Buffy and Willow share an intimate friendship based on the sharing of secrets. Buffy tries to be a friend to Faith when she seems at her most self-destructive.

In *Buffy* not only is there an attempt to dismantle the parameters of perfection, but the desire to be different (even if not recognizably so) is an achievement which each of these young people struggles to attain. Further, a sense of themselves as unique becomes important in ensuring their continued inclusion into the friendship circle. Complicating this even more are the tenuous moments of friendship between the mortals and the vampires or demons. The most obvious examples of this are Angel and Oz, but there are other moments when mortal and immortal join forces to attain a common goal (i.e. Buffy and Spike, Faith and The Mayor). Auerbach (1995) describes the movement of the vampire from solicitous lover and friend associated with rural Europe in the nineteenth century to the later twentieth century motif of the urban associated as much with emotion(less) vampirism as with blood-lust. *Buffy* moves the themes of vampirism and friendship into the twenty first century where all bets are off. The vampire has found its true home in the hyperreal recesses of suburban America where the s/he sometimes has almost as much potential as an ally as of being reduced to dust.

## TEXTUAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER ROLES AND DIFFERENCE

The offense to binary logic, which Hartley (1992) points to in his remarks about the scandalous category of youth (5), is made especially evident in *Buffy's* portrayal of gender. Although there are some stereotypes on the show, including gender stereotypes, the proximity of the Hellmouth seems to have played havoc with traditional gender alignments in this television enclave. Even more importantly, the removal of a strict gender binary is obtained without a simple reversal, allowing the characters to portray a range of characteristics traditionally associated both femininity and masculinity. "The femininity discourse exists as a set of expectations that attempts to restrict girls behavior and choices, especially at the time of adolescence" Lewis (1990) writes, "girls, during this phase of life, are required to display a driving independence at the same time they prepare for a social role predicated on an acceptance of dependency" (94). But on *Buffy* the notions of female social role and dependency are sublimated to the more immediate concerns of the hunt. The future Buffy, Willow, Faith and Cordelia face is ambivalent, unsure and while they are narratively compelled to seek out heterosexual relationships these are hardly normative. Buffy puts her fate above her love for Angel; Cordelia breaks with the popular clique to pursue the inappropriate Xander; Willow acts on her feelings for Xander despite her budding relationship with Oz; Faith deflowers Xander because she needs a release; and Drusilla, one of toughest vampires, puts her devious plans to end the world before everything including her lover Spike. Significantly, these women own and act on their desires rather than waiting to be taken up by the desires of the men around them.

The men in this program tend to let the women take the lead in moments of action, both relational and world saving. But the positions of masculinity on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are ambivalent only in relation to the greater texts of the mediascape where gender tends to exist as a coercive binary. Angel, Oz, Xander and Giles are all intensely emotional, relational and caring and yet struggle to remain normatively masculine. Even the notorious Spike tries to move hell and earth to save his beloved Dru. The ethic of care which so many feminist in the 1980's linked to femininity, to an intrinsic quality of being a 'woman,' is here

taken up by men (i.e. Gilligan 1982, Balenky et al. 1986). Joyrich (1996) describes another kind of binary in which (within media texts) maleness is defined in two opposing dynamics: the excessive machismo of the action hero and the excessive nurturance of the mothering man (the latter usually occurring in a text where adult women are absent). But the men on *Buffy* are not really mothering, they are, rather, grappling with a set of circumstances (something like a war) in which they are secondary figures to The Slayer. While Buffy, Willow and Cordelia exist somewhat within the realm of the uncanny; the boys live more fully in it. Angel must come to terms with his vampirism, Oz with his werewolf days, Giles with his almost paternal responsibility for his young charges, and Xander with his desire to 'be a man' in a space which continually rejects that possibility in traditional terms. On *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the attributes of gender are often ambiguously labeled and what is performed by this particular program is a landscape in which "[M]asculinity and femininity are both up for grabs" (Pellegrini 1997, 143).<sup>48</sup>

The gender ambiguity which exists on *Buffy* is primarily related to action and action, here, belongs primarily to the realm of the feminine. While Buffy Summers is certainly not the first or only female action hero to walk the television landscape, she is unique in her independence. Giles, her watcher, is, as she constantly reminds him, there to provide information and guidance, while action is left entirely to her. The nature of gender ambiguity in Buffy's world is primarily textual, a narrative structure rather than a visual code. The characters are costumed in entirely gender 'appropriate' clothing: the girls wear cute outfits, camisoles and dresses, the boys wear jeans and sweaters, Angel and Giles wear jackets, black for the former, tweed for the latter. Even Willow, who as the

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<sup>48</sup>The writers are very aware at how gendered performances are played with in their show and they play this strategy very self-reflexively. In the episode "Helpless" which aired Monday, January 18th, 1999 (on The New VR) Buffy turned eighteen and temporarily lost her powers in an archaic ritual set up by The Council. After she has passed with flying colors, her friends all return to Buffy's house for an impromptu celebration. Seeing Buffy struggling to open a jar of Kraft peanut butter Xander remarks "Give ya a hand with that, little lady?" "You're loving this far too much" she responds. "Admit it," he replies "sometimes you just need a big, strong man." But he too is struggling with the jar. As the screen fades out to the credits we hear Xander laugh and say: "Ah Will, give me hand with that." This kind of reflexive play marks *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s awareness of the gender ambiguity it propagates.

brain tends to have the dowdiest raiments, is propelled to femininity through the fantastic nature of the text as when she dresses up for Halloween and when a wish propels both her and Xander into a present where they are sexy vampires. Further, the gender ambiguity in this text is seen as problematic by the characters. Buffy often wishes she could forgo slaying in favor of 'girl stuff' (running for prom queen, shopping, being a cheerleader). Xander constantly wishes he could be more 'manly,' especially when the object of his crush, Buffy, has to bail him out of tight spots. Cordelia, blaming Buffy for the changes in herself and her town, wonders what could have driven her so askew that she should desire one of the school misfits instead of the college guys and star athletes she always desired before.

The nostalgia for conventional roles is compounded by the physical look of the show's characters, reminding the viewer that even the toughest Slayer is visually coded as intensely feminine, complete with dyed blond hair, make-up and form fitting clothes. The disjunction of costume and role is reminiscent of Riviere's (1986) description of her client who dressed herself in excessively feminine attire and addressed her colleagues in a very masculine manner. Pellegrini (1997) remarks that this masquerade (which Riviere described as the "hidden danger" lurking behind the mask of womanliness) "suggests that her feminine dress and inappropriate speaking style simultaneously conceal and advertize her usurpation of masculine prerogatives" (142). Perhaps this provides a better way of understanding the apparent disjunction between gender as apparel and gender as action which are deployed in the *Buffy* text. As much as Buffy and her friends must play on a pretext of adolescent normalcy, their excessively normative costuming is a masquerade which hides their disruptive gender alliances. Bruzzi (1997) has written at length about the role of costume in the cinema and her arguments are useful for television as well. She describes how clothing may, rather than simply reaffirm the reality of the narrative, function as an oppositional visual discourse as well. In *Buffy*, the fashion discourse may work in two ways. On the one hand, it insists that despite the gender violations to which the viewer is witness, the characters remain firmly within appropriate hetero-normative gender alignments, as well as being coded in terms of white, middle-class femininities and masculinities. On the other

hand, it reveals the masquerade of those who perform something which they clearly are not and raises the fearful question that difference lurks beneath the most carefully prepared surfaces.<sup>49</sup> This is also an aspect of the 'suburb' as a bastion of white, middle-class life, whose appearances of order hides 'ugly' and abject secrets.

This doubling of the persona, of the mask and the hidden self, of the explicit and implicit performance, brings *Buffy* into the realm of the uncanny, and "what marks the uncanny... is the confounding of the self as it is multiplied, mirrored, divided, and interchanged" (Joyrich 1996, 141). Seen most obviously in the characters of Buffy and Angel, the uncanny is here also merged with the grotesque or the obvious transgression of normative values. Buffy and Angel, Oz, Willow, Xander, Faith, Ms Calendar, Spike, Drusilla, Giles and the vampires, demons, witches and undead are uncanny and grotesque and, most frighteningly for high schoolers both real and fantastic, they are freaks. In a later chapter I will explore the production of the freak in greater detail, but I will say here that the freak operates on several levels in this series and is inducted into a play of binaries as well. On the most superficial level it operates by means of a kind of visual analysis, those who are freaks (vampires, demons) are revealed by the way that they look. At the same time, it works on a deeper level as Buffy and her friends may also be categorized as freakish in their difference (as Slayer, werewolf, vampire, or merely geek) and inability to fully blend in with the normative codes of Sunnydale High. The freak operates in other ways as well, by location for instance, as the undead are literally positioned beneath the 'pleasant' surface of Sunnydale. Further, the freak here exists at the bottom of a lengthy list of binary terms in which s/he is always aligned with the dark, the night, evil, immorality, and that which is decidedly not normal. Russo (1994) writes that "the freak embodies the most capacious aspects of media culture, taking in and consolidating otherwise lost or fragile identities. The freak can be read as a trope not only of the "secret self", but of the most externalized, "out

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<sup>49</sup>This is a traditional fear evoked by the vampire who looks just like anyone else until its hunger is aroused. It is also true of werewolves and witches and demons who assume human form. In the narrative of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the new terror almost always comes from the inside, in a moment of change from human to monster and in the recognition of how fine the line between the two really is.

there", hypervisible, and exposed aspect of contemporary culture and of the phantasmic experience of that culture by social subjects" (85). The maintenance of their external sameness belies the differences which lurk beneath in terms of who they are (Slayers, witches, vampires, werewolves, etc.) and who they would like to be (popular, just like everyone else, independent, unique, powerful, loved, manly, etc.). The characters who populate Sunnydale are constantly primping their external facets in order to hide their marginality, their freakishness, but within their marginal aspects they are propelled to action and insurgence.

Outside of gender, there is little disruption of normativity in Sunnydale. The characters are all expected to be read as attractive (even the vampires and many of the demons) and thin. They are also all white. In season two a Peruvian exchange student turned out to be a cursed Mummy. Also in the second season a new Slayer, a woman of color from the Caribbean, was introduced but killed off by the end of that season, despite her popularity (Springer 1998). In the third season a high ranking African-American vampire, Mr. Trick, was brought into the narrative. Despite his mentor's demise Mr. Trick forged alliances with the Mayor of Sunnydale and we saw more of him until he was killed off near the end of the third season. But these characters who are visibly different are marginal and transient and are mostly relegated to background shots of vampire caves and high school halls. The town of Sunnydale and its populace are almost unerringly white Americana.

Not just race, but all ethnic affiliation seems to have been washed away within the Sunnydale borders.<sup>50</sup> The only non-U.S. nationality to appear with any regularity is British and, aside from Giles, this is mostly in the vampire realm including the notorious Spike and Drusilla.<sup>51</sup> Jenny Calendar, computer science teacher and Giles' love interest in season two, is revealed to be a member of the Kalderesh Roma clan. Although Ms Calendar's relationship to her cultural heritage is only brought to light mid-season, it is an important textual device as it is her clan who cursed Angel and gave him a soul. Unfortunately, before this can

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<sup>50</sup>This may be an implicit nod to the United States melting pot, particularly the West Coast. In a pulp paperback about the sunshine State from 1989, I quote "The sun bleaches everything out, I guess, down to the same colors" (Jenkel 1989, 23). The glimpses of anyone non-white are diverted to the passing landscape.

<sup>51</sup>It can be supposed that this is in recognition of the antiquity of the vampire legend and



be examined in greater detail she is killed by Angel (in "Becoming"). The main characters are produced in such a way as to suggest they are 'white,' meaning without strong or evident racial or ethnic ties (that here seems to mean not racially marked, to 'have' no race): Willow is Jewish but this only comes up when she has to remind her friends that she does not celebrate Christmas. The one place where issues of race might be complicated – or the only place where presumption of whiteness-as-norm is disrupted - is in relation to the vampires and other demons of the Hellmouth. Although they are never explicitly described as such, vampires exist within Sunnydale as another community, one that lives on the fringes of acceptable society, is seen as dangerous and constantly threatens to overrun the borders of acceptable society. Like the mortals, the vampires are mostly white, able, thin and attractive. That is, many of the vampires are able to shift their facial features when they are not pursuing prey. Without the vampiric mask (which can be read as a facial deformity) these actors conform to North American aesthetics of physical beauty.

Class is similarly an unmarked issue in Sunnydale. Everyone seems to be middle-class (except the popular Cordelia who has her own car and Xander whose family is intimated to be working or lower-middle class) and the homeless population is made up primarily of vampires. That is, Angel has a home, but the other vampires seem to live communally, in underground caverns and dark warehouses. And while the vampires may be read as a threatening homeless population, they also provide a critique of middle-class suburban needs, as they eschew home ownership and blatant consumerism. All of these things enter into a construction of class normativity in which the middle-class is secured as the dominant element, yet is partially deconstructed – always threatened by the fantasy/fear of danger and terror lurking both within and without - by the presence of the vampire. The houses into which we are admitted are large and sedately furnished, everyone has nice clothes and money to go to the mall, or the Prom or the Bronze (a gothic-style underage club where all the Sunnydale kids hang-out). And everyone is healthy and able (there are few smokers or drinkers or drug takers). For several episodes Spike was injured and used a wheelchair, which drew a lot a derision from the other vampire characters, including Drusilla

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its relation to 'the old country.'

whom he had spent more than a season nursing back to health from an unidentified, amorphous illness – perhaps hysteria - right out of the nineteenth century. He was healed and able to walk within a few episodes.

While the absence of diversity in relation to race, ethnicity and class might be explained (although not well) by the placing of the show in a hyperreal California suburb, the questions raised about beauty and ability are common throughout the mediascape. Television, perhaps even more than film, is completely restrictive in a number of areas that involve physical appearance, primarily for women, but for young men as well. What is amazing, as we are walked through the streets of Sunnydale and down the corridors of its schools and hospitals and clubs, is that nearly everyone is thin, white and beautiful. And yet the young people are so astute, so self-reflexive, that you are waiting for one of the characters to blurt out something like ‘how can we be unpopular, look how gorgeous we are’ or ‘have you noticed that this town is weird, there are only white people here’ or ‘what did they do with everyone who was overweight, feed them to the vampires?’ or simply ‘where are all the people of color, persons with disabilities?’ It also insists that another question be asked: did all the Others become vampires? But that is for us perhaps to answer, rather than for them.

## CHAPTER THREE - MAPPING THE FOUNDATIONS: THEORIES OF TELEVISION

Before beginning to develop what a performance theory of television would look like, how it will work and what it will enable me to do, I want to examine other discourses which have influenced the study of television. I will look at a broad range of theories, primarily from the tradition of television and cultural studies. The first part of this chapter will map the historical emergence of television and the development of theories about the medium in the dual modes of theory building and ethnographic research. In the second part I will examine works which have emerged at the intersections of television theory and postmodernism, feminist criticism and studies of youth, respectively. It is my intention to show how these theories have moved television inquiry forward and to point out areas in which I see lacunae and to set the stage for the development of a new direction of television inquiry.

### TELEVISION AS HISTORY

Television captured the imagination of its viewers from the first moment of its introduction into the living and recreation rooms of 1940's America. As Browne (1994) describes that process:

Culturally and historically, the replacement of film by television in the 1950s as the dominant form of American mass entertainment signified an important transformation of American life and culture. It altered the relation of the media, and of entertainment, to "culture" by substituting a system of continuous, "free" viewing for the theatrical system of discrete admissions on a pay-per-view basis. At the same time it restructured the contexts and modes of audience reception and behavior and, indeed, its composition (69).

According to some theorists, one of television's main functions was to contain the households which were defecting into the suburban sprawl by keeping them linked together (Spigel 1989). In this way, television became much more than an animated piece of furniture, it became part of the family (Joyrich 1996). Despite its firm domestic entrenchment, television's cultural installation was not unproblematic. Television historian Lynn Spigel (1992) describes how early consumers were socially unprepared for the incursion of television into their

homes. They remained ambivalent about the medium as well as its possible effects. This ambivalence did not last long and by 1960, 90 percent of American households had at least one television receiver (Spigel 1992, 1). Today that figure is 98 percent and one third of American households own three televisions or more (on which they watch an average of 50 1/2 hours a week and to which we can attribute the 35 billion dollars advertisers spend annually on commercials (Collins and Skover 1996, 5)). Joyrich (1996) acknowledges that the deregulation of programming during the Reagan years has radically changed the medium both economically and programmatically, making it the prime "symbol of "our culture" and "our times" " (10). Television is more and more central to the way many North Americans live and construct the world around themselves.

While television may have quickly found a space in both the living rooms and the hearts of North Americans, recognition of television as a medium worthy of academic study came much more slowly. Studies of television developed in a fashion similar to the medium itself, becoming increasingly sophisticated with each passing year, expanding to envision television's aesthetics and social mores, though existing on the margins of academia. Although many television theorists criticize the neglect of the medium and the ambivalence to taking it seriously, few try to explain why this has occurred. I have some ideas, however. I believe that there is a continued friction between intellectualism and the mundane, couch-potato aesthetic that television is supposed to represent. While some theorists make their 'fandom' part of their inquiry (i.e. Jenkins 1992, Penley 1992) there are others who actually begin their work by deprecating the medium. That is, they admit their unfamiliarity with the shows they are studying and suggest that they are only present to provide a critique. Particularly in the area of reception-studies, some writers have stated explicitly their difference from, and assumed superiority to, the people they have studied in relation to their own viewing practices. While I find this in itself to be problematic – how can research be conducted on a subject with which the researcher is not intimately familiar? - I believe that it can be linked to an embarrassment to admit that one can be both an academic and enjoy television, especially in a North American context. Further, this embarrassed critique continues to marginalize this area of study,

relegating even the most current debates about television studies to liminal spaces in the academy (Joyrich 1996).

Walters (1995) writes that "the media are everywhere and as such can longer be relegated to secondary status in any critical analysis of contemporary society" (22). Her words suggest the growing necessity of integrating television into more accepted areas of the study of late twentieth century culture. Newcomb and Hirsch (1994) suggest that television criticism is "the bridge between a concern for television as a communications medium, central to contemporary society, and television as aesthetic object" (503). Each new publication in the field offers the possibility that it will take this work in new and provocative directions. Despite concerns, the last two decades have seen examinations of the television medium grow exponentially, even if they are still marginalized and looked upon skeptically by some members of the academy. New studies of television have grown out of a variety of disciplines including cultural studies, education and psychology. Advocates of feminist, postmodernist and critical theories have been particularly interested in television, which has contributed a sense of "nowness" to television studies (Schwoch et al. 1992, 11). This suggests a feeling that television is a medium which tells us a great about what is going on in our world and that it is a medium extremely well-suited for study in order to catch a reflection of our current historical moment (Miller 1986). While new technologies continue to develop (virtual reality, digital video, satellite), television remains a central pastime in the lives of billions of people and its place in the academy will likely continue to grow.

#### *What does television look like?*

Television theorists seem to agree that the medium is often seen as 'bad,' or at least not 'quality,' entertainment (Williams (1994), Cubitt (1991) makes a similar argument about video), but it is not immediately obvious by what criteria these judgments are made, why these distinctions matter or how they operate. They are, however, evocative of a modernist art-aesthetic which is difficult, if not impossible, to apply to the product television produces (Miller 1986, Brown

1990d, Joyrich 1996).<sup>52</sup> That is, television does not conform to the aesthetic values associated with (high culture) artistic production, not least in its mass dissemination and market appeal. As Deming (1990) writes, many viewers and academics alike consider “television too prosaic and mundane to engender valuable thoughts” (40). Chambers (1994) has provided a serious critique of this modernist view. He writes:

Here the commonplace, and apparently homogenous, material of popular tastes and cultures, for example, can reveal more complex stories and ways of making sense than often credited. As Michel de Certeau insisted, listening to frequently overlooked activities that are hidden away in the label of the mundane, banal, the quotidian: in other words, in the colloquial differentiation of the popular (99).

As he seems to suggest, it is television's very mundane ubiquity that holds its greatest potential for social revelation. The sheer magnitude of its presence indicates that television, its products and its effects, must be taken very seriously.

Television may indeed represent a departure from modernist aesthetics (the medium, if not the specific texts currently being produced (Kellner 1995)) towards an aesthetic which is often described as postmodern. Baudrillard, one of the foremost theorists of postmodern culture, uses the map as a central metaphor. In *Simulations* (1983), he describes the postmodern condition as one wherein “[T]he territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth it is the map that precedes the territory... it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable of today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map” (2). This same map is sometimes used to explore the televisual terrain and the fable of territory which proceeds from it. It is the map of a specific version of the Western social, historical and cultural world that television produces in its cannon of texts. It is the project of the television theorist to trace these maps, not with the intention of finding the shreds of a real world left somewhere behind, but in discerning the meaning of the specific views of the world that television creates. In this project

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<sup>52</sup>Feuer (1995) believes that in the 1980's, a small number of television shows (among them *thirtysomething*, *Moonlighting*, *Miami Vice*, *Max Headroom*) were seen as ‘art’ within the decade's discourses on modern and postmodern art (82-110). This is true of the later *Twin Peaks* as well.

it is my intention to map the particular world produced within *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and to imagine how it relates to the contemporary culture that spawned it.

*The culture of television*

Television is a central structure in the processes of contemporary cultural production. Television's cultural drives rely not only on its depiction of the present but its assimilation of both the past and the future. Television goes a step further than other mass media in that its self-referentiality encourages viewers to take the medium at its word about what they see on their screens as it proclaims itself to be the litmus test of the 'real' for entire generations. Baudrillard (1983) suggests that in the postmodern moment: "[T]here is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity... there is a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production" (12-13). But this is only half of the story. Although the television text wishes to be taken as a voice of gospel, viewers are constantly appraising it with at least a partially critical eye. Despite the attempts of theorists to do away completely with all but the simulation, the simulation reveals itself to be only a partial truth. The possibility for reading television and other media texts in a manner that opposes their 'intended' reading attests to this.

Kellner (1995) describes how mass cultural forms provide complex representational codes that offer a wide range of 'choices' for points of identification. Others caution that what these images offer are not choices, but reflections of the corporate consumer culture responsible for producing them in the first place (Miller 1986, 186, also see Tomlinson 1996). The maintenance of an illusion of 'choice' is contingent upon a certain ideological function wherein the images remain invisible, making this a very problematic area for study (Allen 1987b).<sup>53</sup> Television does not merely sell products through commercials, today 'product placement' encourages that products enter the consumer's imagination from within television series themselves. Further, and as I will try and show in

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<sup>53</sup>Studying the impact of television on consumption is even further complicated because people are aware that this influence is most often seen as negative and so go out of their way to refute the influence of media on their shopping habits.

my reading of the *Buffy* text, television also 'sells' images of bodies, communities and lifestyles.

Television "integrate[s] oppositional and resistant discourses by absorbing and naturalizing them" (Deming 1992, 203). This argument suggests that television naturalizes all discourses and then integrates them in such a way that they become mystified. On reading the text, then, it is no longer clear, for example, what is progressive and what is reactionary. Foucault (1986) describes how a similar breakdown is occurring in our understanding of spaces, and yet he insists that dualities in private/public, family/social, cultural/useful and leisure/work spaces continue to exist. His work suggests that despite the semblance of breakdown, these binaries continue to exert force in implicit ways. I believe that a close reading of television texts would also show that these binaries (and others) remain at least implicitly at work.<sup>54</sup> In trying to discern strands of hegemony and insurgence within the television text, it will be important to remember that the discourse within which this text is produced works to make this discernment problematic.

Foucault gives the term heterotopia to those liminal spaces which occur in the ever-shifting boundaries or margins of historical times and spaces. He describes both the theater and cinema as heterotopias "capable of juxtaposing in a single real space, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (25). But both the theater and the cinema are, for all their ability to take their audiences through foreign and three-dimensional spaces, linear spaces. Taking their viewers from the lobby, to their seats, through previews, intermissions, dimming of lights, applause and back out into the street. But television, which is omitted from Foucault's discussion of heterotopias, exists in an even more liminal state: at the boundary between public and private, in the disruption of linearity, in the accidental possibilities of viewing, the creation of diegetic spaces, and in the display of all that is both familiar and unfamiliar. Television also contains elements of many of the spaces Foucault has defined as heterotopias in his article: of the mirror in which we see skewed images of ourselves displaced; of the museum where history and information are stored and rewritten; of the

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<sup>54</sup>In later chapters I will be examining the insurgent potential that the breakdown of these binaries hold. Many binaries, however (especially those which suggest hierarchies of



hidden room where we may enter but never inhabit; and of the boat allowing us to live in an enclosed space of fantasy that only momentarily touches the shore. Television is a heterotopia unique to the end of a century dominated by the fantasies of the North American commercial aesthetic. The possibility of reading television as heterotopia is worthy of an entire thesis unto itself. For this project I will be mobilizing this term primarily as a way to read through spaces which are constructed within the television text (chapter nine).

One of the most provocative aspects of television is its seductive sense of "liveness" (Mumford 1995). Baudrillard (1983) writes that this creates a conundrum wherein the particular positions of spectator and screen are dissolved and it becomes unclear who is watching whom. The increasing reliance on live footage (in the news, talk shows, COPS, etc.) blurs the boundaries between what we do and what we see. Television has the capacity to take private life into the public sphere, as well as to take the public sphere into the private realm of family. More and more, things, even people, only seem real if they are seen on television (Tichi cited in Morgan 1995). An apt example of this is the discussion that occurred between American vice-president Dan Quayle and fictional television anchorwoman Murphy Brown (Candice Bergen). Not only did the vice-president feel it was perfectly natural to address a television character in a public forum but the news media covered the debate as though both Quayle and Brown existed on the same plane of reality (Crotty 1995). This "intimacy at a distance" allows viewers to relate to parts of the televisual landscape (characters, locations, situations, temporalities) as though they were all equally real (Livingstone and Lunt 1994, 169).

#### TELEVISION AS THEORY

In the introduction to his anthology of television theory, Robert Allen writes: "[P]erhaps it is the case that a phenomenon so pervasive as television usually remains invisible to scrutiny" (1987b, 1). But television, and media more generally, have long been the subject of public preoccupation and the unwitting source of "media panics" (Drotner 1992). This sense of panic or moral outrage is

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difference) remain firmly entrenched in television texts.

usually delivered within a discourse that posits television viewing as an addictive and/or degenerative process. This discourse finds expression in the theories of culture popularized in the 1950's. For example, the theory of mass culture and ideological hegemony of T.W. Adorno and the Frankfurt School describe "the masses" as being happily narcotized by mass cultural forms. Similarly, American social scientists of the time described the relation of the public to television with the "hypodermic needle model," positing media responsibility for the intellectual atrophy of a passively injected mass audience (Joyrich 1996, 25-27). These discourses have entered into the popular consciousness to such a degree that many books advocating these positions have been published by mass presses. The cover of Marie Winn's *The Plug-In Drug* (1977) extols: "[S]tartling new evidence tells why you should break your child's viewing habit." Postman's (1985) *Amusing Ourselves to Death* depicts a traditional nuclear family, headless, in front of the television. In *No Sense of Place*, Meyrowitz (1985) holds television responsible for blurring the boundaries between child and adult, public and private, woman and man, citizen and politician, onstage and backstage (although he sees this as a largely progressive matter). In a slightly different vein, Morris Wolfe's (1985) *Jolts* posits Canadian television as an "oasis" salvation from the American "wasteland." Some popular feminist works also posit television as inducing a kind of cultural narcolepsy in which women are passively inducted into the patriarchal order. While Ruth Sidel's (1990) *On Her Own*, Naomi Wolf's (1990) *The Beauty Myth* and Susan Faludi's (1991) *Backlash* do engage with the problem of capitalist patriarchy, they rarely allow for the possibility that women may be active and resistant television viewers.

Critical debates about television are missing from both popular and academic discourses. Hartley (1992) insists that this is made even more problematic because the critiques that exist tend to be couched in extremely negative terms. This reflects one side of a debate that media pundits have been engaged in, namely, that discourses about television tend to be either intrinsically negative and nihilistic or intrinsically positive and thereby naive. The first part of this debate is reflected in the hypodermic model mentioned earlier. Some of these theorists have described television as an insidious, even

predatory, medium. The unquenchable seductiveness of television can be linked to Baudrillard's (1993) notion of the obscene which, he writes, "destroys distance. It is a monstrous rapprochement of things: there is no longer the distance of the gaze, of play. It doesn't recognize rules anymore, it mixes everything together" (61-62). Likewise, McKelly (1996) describes a "hegemony [which] thrives on the complicit desire of the subject" (112). It is the desire of the subject for exactly what she or he should not desire that is frequently pointed at as an example of ironic obscenity within the study of television. The repeated reinscription of television as a medium which uses (read manipulates) the desires of its viewers and then seduces them based on those desires makes television appear to be an independent agent acting on the passive citizens of contemporary society.

A second voice in this debate, known as the "uses and gratifications" approach, reverses the hypotheses of the hypodermic model by postulating a democratic mass media and a free flow of information open to viewer interpretation (Joyrich 1996, 28-30). In his chapter "Theory Wars and Cultural Studies," Kellner (1995, 15-54) provides a comprehensive overview of these debates, locating a median point between the extremes of a neo-luddite desire for a return to print media and a "fetishism of audience... in which there is no text outside the reading" (37).<sup>55</sup> Kellner is a text-based researcher and seems to prefer to understand ethnographies as textual by-products. But his point is well taken: it is no longer possible to understand the televisual medium as inherently 'bad' or 'good.' Rather, it is necessary to study the play of hegemonic and insurgent strands within the medium itself.

Robert Allen's (1987a) anthology *Channels of Discourse* is an excellent example of a book of articles on television theories located primarily outside discussions of postmodernism. It covers semiotics, narrative theory, reader-oriented criticism, genre study, ideological analysis, psychoanalysis, feminist criticism, and British Cultural Studies, providing a concise examination of each

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<sup>55</sup> That Kellner (1995) couches his remarks in terms of fetishism (of audiences, resistances, struggles and pleasures) makes them particularly well suited for understanding the stakes for the researcher as well as the researched in television studies. Gitlin who described a fetish of immediate numerical gratification in audience research back in 1983 may have influenced Kellner's use of the fetish in this vein.

area. The chapters focus on bringing television to theory and in the process each begins to develop the various avenues along which future work in television studies w/should develop. Allen (1987b) calls this "contemporary criticism" and recognizes that it is a process which continuously expands as new theories are developed and/or incorporated into the interdisciplinary mix (2). Were this volume to be reproduced today, it would probably offer an even more pluralistic approach, including chapters on deconstruction, post-structuralism, postmodernism, queer theory, etc.

Published a year earlier and edited by Todd Gitlin, *Watching Television* develops theory through the examination of several genres (news, soaps, children's television, music videos and commercial) through textual analysis. The authors use particular texts to expand their understanding of how television functions in the world of the viewer. However, this book (perhaps because it is published by a popular press) does not rely heavily on theory or simply takes theory as implicit within its texts. One can read Sorkin's chapter on simulation (1986, 183-228), for example, as being heavily indebted to postmodern theory although none of this theory is ever mentioned or cited. Gitlin (1986b) writes that the purpose of his book is "to try and peer back at the screen and through it, to use it as a window into the industries that crank out the shows and ultimately into American culture as a whole" (6).

Also published in 1987, John Fiske's *Television Culture* is perhaps the primary introductory reader in television studies. Unlike Allen, Fiske's work is set out as a primer for understanding television texts and their audiences. Unlike Gitlin, he attends closely to the literature of the subject matter he is studying. Fiske's book is centrally focused on the medium of television and its audiences and accomplishes his task of elucidating these elements of television very successfully. He deals with such varied topics as realism, ideology, subjectivity and address, active audiences, activated texts, intertextuality, narrative, character, femininity, masculinity, pleasure and play, carnival and style, and the popular economy. These last three sections distance this book from a very generic examination of television to one which moves into the regions of postmodernism. These three books reflect the basic trends in research on the

television medium in the 1980's.<sup>56</sup> Fiske and Allen's books have become staples in the bibliography of television studies. All three represent the work which underpins this ever expanding and evolving area of inquiry.

In the 1990's, television studies have expanded to encompass more and more disparate areas of the medium and the social landscapes it depicts. Walters (1995), for instance, explores the emergence of a feminist television theory. Her work is a comprehensive exploration of the difficult triptych of femininity, feminism and postfeminism in the mass media and the links between cultural studies and television studies. The general overview Walters provides makes her book comparable in function, although it is not as well known, as Fiske's. The volumes edited by Brown (1990a) and Spigel and Mann (1992) also expand general television theory, but from a feminist stance. Brown's articles (1990b, c, d) are particularly interesting theoretically for their interrogation of "feminist notions of "good television" " (201) and the politics of pleasure (210). This last is and has been a central preoccupation of feminist writers who engage in the critical analysis of the mass media and its audiences.

Axes of difference and their deployment within television have also been a focus of critique, mainly in relation to race, gender and age (youth). With the increasing presence of gay, lesbian and bisexual television characters, it is likely that critiques of these images will also increase. But there remain virtually no characters with disabilities, who are ethnically or religiously diverse, or who even deviate from the 'attractive' norm as it is constructed within mainstream television. The problem of the lack of images of diversity within television texts has been articulated quite strongly from diverse perspectives. Hall (1996), DuCille (1995), Gray (1994), Turner (1994), Bodroghkozy (1992) and hooks (1992) address questions about television from the perspective of race (and sometimes gender). hooks describes audiences as "cultural tourists" (17) exploring unfamiliar persons and places through the safe (dis)location of their living rooms and multiplexes. DuCille expands this argument by exploring the links between the touristic experience and the mandates of capitalism. The question of whiteness is an important one for the study of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* insofar as

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<sup>56</sup>Studies of television did not begin in the 1980's, but developed from the introduction of the medium. However, the 1980's saw a surge in interest in the medium and the

Buffy's domain is the white, suburban milieu and insofar that she is both alienated from it (in a sense) and defending it against presumed or real enemies. These elements will be taken up in greater detail during the analysis of the *Buffy* text.

As Feuer (1995) describes it, the last decade has seen certain television programs and styles develop art-house type followings.<sup>57</sup> While the shows Feuer discusses may represent a high culture niche in television (she describes this somewhat yuppie style as developing from the modernist cinematic works of Woody Allen, Brecht, Godard, Fellini and Bergman), she never makes explicit whether this represents the emergence of a new sub-genre within television. Kellner (1995), moving into the nineties, describes the development of a new genre of "loser television" responding to the "slacker effect" (139) or a general malaise attributed to downwardly mobile youth in the late eighties and early nineties (also see Hoechsmann 1996). Unlike conventional television narratives, this genre displays families and individuals who are neither beautiful, rich nor intelligent and whose crises may reflect the more everyday concerns of the average viewer. Also within the study of genre, Mumford (1995) provides a very contemporary analysis of daytime soap operas, which raises critical questions for the future of the genre as well as the medium more generally. She describes a growing fluidity of place and character on television as characters begin to be allowed to move between diegetic spaces; whole storylines may move from one program to another; a character from one show may show up as a guest on another show; an actor may appear as her or himself on a program.<sup>58</sup>

Genre itself has become destabilized as horror blends in comedy, drama into action and adventure into melodrama. The ability to refer simply to a self-contained genre or generic structure is more and more precluded in television at the end of the twentieth century. New approaches to genre which have captivated the interest of television researchers include Knight's (1989) description of the increasing tabloid quality of the news media as a stylistic

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beginning of a space for it in academia.

<sup>57</sup>Most significant in this respect is the very surreal *Twin Peaks*.

<sup>58</sup> This has become established in television production in the nineteen nineties with linked shows such as: *Ally McBeal* and *The Practice*, *Mad About You* and *Friends*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, *Law and Order* and *Homicide on the Streets*, etc.

device designed to normalize content, Livingstone and Lunt's (1994) use of talk shows as an inroad into a discussion of the reconfiguration of social spaces within postmodernity, Rath's (1989) description of the creation of temporary communities among talk show guests and audiences and Tolson's (1996) description of the creation of personality in similar contexts. There is also White's (1994) analysis of the talk show preoccupation with therapy as contributing to a more overall adoption of therapeutic discourses in television narrative. Talk shows and other areas of live TV have been of great interest to television researchers. Wark (1994) gives an excellent description of how powerful live television has become in his discussion of the mediated telecasting of the Gulf War. Prefiguring Wark's analysis, de Lauretis (1984) describes "[T]he paradox of live TV, our 'window to the world', is that reality is only accessible as televised, as what is captured by an action camera" (45). And Baudrillard (1983), describing an experiment in "TV-verite" from 1971, posits television as an end to the panopticon which watches the viewer just as s/he watches it (49-58). This is made even more provocative with the advent of 'new' genres of 'real TV' (such as COPS); shows which are made up of viewer made videos (such as America's Funniest Home Videos) and the non-actor constructed communities of MTV's Real World. The line between live television and constructed narrative is ever more tenuous.

#### *Nostalgia and media discourse*

One of the critical concerns of television theorists has been the discourse of nostalgia: its use in the remaking of history and its implication in the appropriation of media and media discourses by what are, increasingly, right wing political interests. Focusing primarily on popular music, Grossberg (1992) describes a "nostalgia for nostalgia" which encourages the audience to desire a return to a past which has never existed (267). Joyrich (1996) also acknowledges that "[W]e exhibit an obsession with signs of reality, tradition, and lived experience as nostalgia engulfs us in a hysterical attempt to find stakes of meaning" (54). The creation in the present of nostalgia for a non-existent but fetishized past is seen as an attempt to enact political change in the future. Traube (1992) characterizes this as the New Right's attempt to "capitalize on

popular discontent" by moving beyond their traditional issues of security and economy in a paternalistic drive to expand their circle of supporters (129-33). The right tends to invoke a past which is innocent and safe disregarding the realities of oppression, violence and segregation which continue to exist.

The desire for a nostalgized past is particularly problematic for those groups (most everyone who is not a white, wealthy, Western, Christian, able, heterosexual and male) for whom the past (as well as the present) is a story of oppression and degradation. bell hooks (1992) writes that "[I]n mass culture, imperialist nostalgia takes the form of reenacting and re-ritualizing in different ways the imperialist colonizing journey as narrative fantasy of power and desire" (25); and that "[I]mperialist nostalgia, [which] expresses itself as yearning on the part of the colonizer for the ways of life they have destroyed" (189). The desire to return to a more simple (and often fantasy) past is primarily the passion of groups who have had dominant societal positions during these historical moments. The elision of spaces for the performance of diversity in race, ethnicity, religion, ability, class, sexuality, age, appearance and location underwrite the enormous power of the colonial fetish and mystify the incongruity of such 'pure' spaces. It is possible to read *Buffy* from this perspective, as a continued fantasy of regulating spaces which have previously been marked as clean and pure. This will be taken up later in this thesis, especially with regard to the vampire in chapter six.

Livingstone and Lunt (1994) describe what constitutes television, reality and personhood as contingent and shifting. Politically, this suggests that there is the potential for the media to manipulate both epistemologically and ontologically. Joyrich (1992) suggests that television becomes a space in which viewers attempt to locate "meaning" and "values" they no longer find elsewhere (246).<sup>59</sup> Jameson (1990) has written about the postmodern aesthetic of nostalgia in film and offers, perhaps, the most insightful elaboration when he writes:

Nostalgia film, consistent with postmodernist tendencies generally, seeks to generate images and simulacra of the past, thereby - in a social situation in which genuine historicity or class traditions have become enfeebled - producing something like a

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<sup>59</sup>Meyrowitz (1985) makes a similar argument.



pseudo-past for consumption as a compensation and a substitute for, but also a displacement of, that different kind of past which has (along with active visions of the future) been a necessary component for groups of people in other situations in the projection of their praxis and the energizing of their project (137).

Nostalgia, in this view, provides a compensatory function for those who feel they have been robbed of place or identity. It may also (and this may be a characteristic of a very contemporary works) be a critique of this function and a pointing to the impossibility (who would want to?) of moving backwards.

Livingstone and Lunt (1994) write that "social space is no longer constituted through physical settings but rather through imaginary communities which mix physical and mediated communities" (170). Often, the image[inary] communities produced within the mediascape re-entrench nostalgic notions of a possible return to the traditional hearth and home and to homogeneous social spaces with clearly defined borders. More rarely, television offers an implicit deconstruction of the nostalgized community, creating space for an insurgent reading of its boundaries, secrets and fears. Spigel (1995) describes how viewers come to incorporate images of the past seen on television into their repertoire of personal memories.<sup>60</sup> She suggests that it eventually becomes difficult for viewers to disentangle history as experience from the constructed history of television. Giroux (1996) has written about how discourses of the political right have infiltrated media discourse through the deployment of radio and filmic texts, which apply its rhetoric explicitly or forward its agenda implicitly. Something similar is at work in television, where nostalgic tributes to the past and community are textually inscribed. These include contemporary reconstructions of 'better' times as in *Happy Days* or *The Wonder Years*, shows which demonstrate how far from those times we have come; or shows in which characters wistfully recall how things used to be (the most famous being Carroll O'Connor in Norman Lear's *All in the Family*). It is necessary to ask, for whom

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<sup>60</sup>An interesting example of this is the recent creation of a History station on the Cable roster. It is composed of documentaries, historical reenactments and Hollywood dramas and docudramas based on historical or pseudo historical material. Actually, more of it is pseudo, and according to the History Channel, watching old B movies is a good way to learn about history. In the schedule no distinction is made between these genres and their relationship to "history" and all are treated as equally valid representations of the

was this past good, for this is a very important part of why the fantasy works. And for the most part, this is a white, materially comfortable past. If nostalgia is one of the discourses being deployed by the political right then the creation of an equally nostalgic past through television narrative makes it imperative that researchers monitor this aspect of the medium and apply vigorous critique to it.

*Problems with television and theory*

Kellner's (1995) suggestion that a point of convergence must be found between the negative and positive poles of television studies is realized in some more recent works.<sup>61</sup> In *Re-Viewing Reception*, Joyrich (1996) writes that there is an inherent danger in falsely imbuing the viewer with an unlimited power of choice, and yet she concedes that audiences have always had the ability to 'poach' deviant readings from television texts (Jenkins 1992). She also reminds her readers that the construction of television texts occurs within the over-determined cultural spaces of the television studio, the market-economy, the demands of consumerism, the political climate and cultural aesthetic norms. Each of these contributes to the ideological nature of television and both the preferred and deviant readings which exist within its texts (Deming 1992). Hall (1996) in an article originally published in 1973 describes in detail how this polyvalent reading structure works. He writes: "We say *dominant* not 'determined', because it is always possible to order, classify, assign and decode an event within more than one 'mapping'. But we say 'dominant' because there exists a pattern of 'preferred readings'; and these both have the institutional/political/ideological order imprinted in them and have themselves become institutionalized" (46).<sup>62</sup> Many recent, academic texts, including Feuer's (1995) *Seeing Through the Eighties*, Walters' (1995) *Material girls*, Traube's (1992) *Dreaming Identities* and Mumford's (1995) *Love and Ideology in the Afternoon* have followed this paradigm in presenting an active viewer who is also, potentially, a resistant viewer within the dominant paradigms of television texts. These

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historical.

<sup>61</sup>Kellner may not have had access to these texts at the time of his writing. Feminist writers have produced many of the texts written in this area or writers interested in women and television and these works are poorly represented in Kellner's bibliography.

<sup>62</sup>Emphasis in the original.

authors recognize that the text and the viewer are both constructed within specific contexts and that these are crucial to understanding the specificity of the viewing experience. Television, however, insists upon a mystification of its own historical contextualism and the stories of modern culture are so often fashioned in the image of the television narrative.

#### FEMINIST TELEVISION CRITICISM

It may be remarked on that many of the works which have been discussed up to this point are feminist or women-centered in orientation.<sup>63</sup> While this acknowledges my personal research interests, it also reflects an intense preoccupation with the mass media by feminists and other researchers interested in women. There are reasons for this, among them the fact that television's primary location continues to be in the home and the fact that it is less entrenched in the male gaze than film; television itself is sometimes seen as a feminized and feminizing medium (Joyrich 1996).

#### *Discourses of women and television*

Any understanding of the emergence of discourses in feminist and women-centered television criticism must begin with an examination of feminist film theory. Feminist television criticism has adopted a number of terms and concepts from this more established and academically recognized discipline. Some of these have become mainstays and others have been used as jumping off points from which to develop concepts more specifically suited for the television medium. The most important concept that feminist film theory has offered to feminist television criticism is that of the filmic, or male, gaze. Feminist film theory, prompted by Laura Mulvey's influential 1973 article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," originally posited a problematic position for women viewers of cinema. The masculine was seen as the active viewing position and women were posited as being objectified by his gaze. Whether on screen or in the audience, women were seen as being unable to take up an active position vis a

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<sup>63</sup>Eichler (1986) provides a strong argument for the differentiation of sexist, nonsexist, woman-centered, and feminist research.

vis the text, except by identifying with the male gaze and objectifying both themselves and the woman on the screen (Mulvey 1992). Since this original proposition, feminist film theorists (including Mulvey herself, 1988) have revised the idea of the male gaze - which was often understood to be hermetically sealed - and have continued to strive to find a space for the female gaze in the mass media.<sup>64</sup>

Television is a medium quite different from film. Unlike the cinema with its passive spectator sitting alone in the darkened theater, television was introduced into the active center of the domestic sphere: the family room. Television has been and continues to be associated with the active material bodies of women who watch and listen as they attend to their childcare and domestic labors (Spigel 1989). Joyrich (1996) argues that television perpetually reinscribes this feminine aspect, expanding it to accommodate all viewers, even as women's position within domestic space has changed. The consuming viewer of this diffracted medium with the fractured gaze is understood to be feminized, which, Joyrich (1996) suggests, may offer a potential avenue for new critical inquiry.

Television has been figured as a feminizing medium because it puts its viewers in a passive position of reception (Joyrich 1996). Joyrich notes that despite this, we should not be lulled into any assumptions about the reorganization of gender within the medium which has only sometimes been reflected in the characters it portrays.<sup>65</sup> D'Acci (1992), for example, describes the emergence of a market for "women's television" which coincided with the women's movement of the seventies and early eighties. Television programs like *Kate&Allie* and *Cagney&Lacey* depicted strong female friendships, unconventional living arrangements and women's incursion into male job markets (Clark 1990, Deming 1992). Conversely, day and prime-time soap operas such as *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, and *East Enders* became the subject of intense examination in an attempt to understand their appeal to enormous numbers of women - and men - world

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<sup>64</sup>There have been suggestions that some avant-garde feminist and women-centered films have managed to create the possibility for active female spectatorship where women are not objectified (de Lauretis 1990a, 1991, Gordon 1990, Williams 1992). Also see Silverman (1990) for a progressive rethinking of these issues through the female voice.

<sup>65</sup>It should be noted, however, that it is not only the images of women on the screen that

wide (Rosen 1987, Ang 1990, Brown 1990b, Press 1990, Flitterman-Lewis 1992, Geraghty 1994, Gledhill 1994, Hobson 1994, Katz, Leibes and Berko 1994, Mumford 1995, Modleski 1996). D'Acci (1992) describes how the political backlash of the mid-eighties began to foreclose on the progressive possibilities offered by these and other texts (also see Faludi 1991, Walters 1995), especially those aimed at women. While the backlash may be an ongoing phenomenon, feminist researchers continue to examine programming which centrally features or appeals to women, including *Roseanne* (Mayerle 1994, Rowe 1994) and *thirtysomething* (Feuer 1995). African American feminists like bell hooks (1992) have expanded these dialogues to include the axis of race.

Feminist television critics continue to theorize the possibility of a resistant position for the female spectator (Brown 1990a, Spigel and Mann 1992). In this vein, feminist theorists have attempted to refigure a feminist consciousness as eccentric subject: "multiply positioned across positions of several axes; it is capable of agency or "self-determined dis-location" " (de Lauretis in Hennessey 1993, 84). The female television spectator has, likewise, been conceptualized as a "decentered subject" (Fiske 1987a, Kaplan 1987). But even this theorizing of the resistant (usually female) spectator fails to take into account the possibility that these same spectators may enjoy programming deemed unacceptable by feminist critiques. As Davies (1990) suggests, even feminist spectators may be drawn to decidedly non-feminist texts. The possibilities inherent in the resistant spectator or decentered female subject point to the importance of the discourse the viewer develops alongside her reading, at the same time as the need for a radical reorganization of television texts continues to be discussed.<sup>66</sup>

In order for this decentered female subject to be understood as a tool for the creation of a critical theory of television, it is necessary to turn to a debate that first began in literary theory but which is also important to discussions of film and television. In her 1989 book *Essentially Speaking*, Diane Fuss raises

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make positive-image or feminist television.

<sup>66</sup>It remains necessary to monitor and critique these texts, not only for their depictions of gender but also for their depictions (and exclusions) of other axes of difference including race, ethnicity, age, class, ability and sexual orientation. These are areas which are much more marginal within television than gender. However, while theorizing the decentered subject or viewer realigns possibilities of identification across these divides it does not allow the viewer full control over the interpretation of texts.

questions crucial to the study of television. Fuss asks: "Can a reader [viewer] refuse to take up a subject-position the text constructs for him/her? Does the text construct the reading subject or does the reading subject construct the text" (32)? The debates which have extended from Fuss' (1989) query continue to rage within many recent publications of feminist television criticism. These are crucial questions for feminists because they recognize that the hegemonic identities offered to the viewer are often intensely pleasurable and ambivalent (Brown 1990d). This problematic spectator pleasure is elaborated by McKinley (1996) who describes how television texts induct viewers into community-type relationships with their characters. This process necessitates that the viewer position her or himself in an 'us' (the main characters and viewer) versus 'them' (anyone who does not fit in with and so is excluded from the group) relationship where the subject positions offered by the text are very difficult to refuse.

Davies (1990) suggests that there is always a schism between the spectacles we enjoy and our ideological leanings. However, this does not mean that there is no room for critical interrogation within this schema. The viewer, no matter what her ideological position or spectatorial taste, still has the capacity to engage critically with both these positions. As Mumford (1995) states: "Because a program expresses or appears to express, patriarchal ideas does not mean that regular viewers willingly or uniformly accept that identification. Nor is such acceptance necessarily required in order for viewers to experience pleasure in the program or genre - including feminists" (118). The manner in which the mass media apparatus represents women does remain an inherently political question. Some feminist theorists begin by asking about "the degree to which theories worked out for the dominant Hollywood narratives apply to... the "televisual apparatus,"<sup>67</sup> because the representation of women is produced by the apparatus

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<sup>67</sup>The term apparatus has been used in various ways by different disciplines. Childers and Hentzi (1995) in *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* define it as follows: "The term *apparatus* is often used to describe the ensemble of theories, concepts, and methods brought to bear in the analysis of a work of art or literature, as in the phrase "critical apparatus". It also refers to the trappings of academic writing, such as footnotes, bibliography, index, and appendices. The word has a somewhat different meaning in FILM THEORY, however, where it designates the entire complex of elements and operations that go into the experience of viewing a film (camera, film, projector, screen, and the beam of light in a darkened theater); the text of the film itself; and the psychological mechanism of the spectator, understood in

as much as by the narrative" (Kaplan 1987, 233).<sup>68</sup> A central problem the feminist television literature identifies is the difficulty in engaging the pleasure women experience from television texts, even (or especially) those texts which portray stereotyped or reactionary distortions of femininity. It tends to be suggested that this pleasure is wrong (that is, in a political or moral sense) or anti-feminist and that it should be impossible to enjoy texts which run counter to a feminist ideology. But it is more reasonable to understand that as viewers (and feminists) we are able to have multiple identifications and to derive pleasure for a multitude of images. Mumford (1995) writes that it is time that "we [can] finally acknowledge that our pleasure cannot be wholly disentangled from the densely interwoven expressions of capitalist patriarchy that surround us" (119). This especially difficult task is elaborated by Davies (1990):

If I were the kind of unitary rational being that liberal humanists once convinced most of us we were, then to the extent that my "feminist" desire contradicts "feminine" desire, the feminist would undo the feminine. But our patterns of desire are organized around and in terms of our gendered identity such that rational attention to the contradiction is not sufficient to undo it... We live with multiple contradictions and the contradiction between femininity and feminism is one of these (301).

By making the taking of personal pleasure from the televisual text a political question, the stakes of that question are raised. It is the potential for pleasure which come from the spectacle, the critique and the juxtaposition of these positions which makes television criticism so potentially insurgent.

Pleasure has emerged from these debates as one of the primary issues of concern to the research of women and television. Originally, this pleasure was understood to be a type of masochism "operating below the conscious awareness of the viewer" and instrumental to the production of the docile, heterosexual, female subject (de Lauretis 1984, 48, 1991, Silverman 1990). Recent debates have

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psychoanalytic terms" (17). Kaplan (1987) seems to suggest taking the film theory definition and extending it to the television medium in its specificities.

<sup>68</sup>Equally important are other axes of difference along which television constructs its subjects and is implicated in the construction of its viewers. This is especially problematic because it is such a vast topic and television is unpardonably homogeneous in its (lack of) representation of diverse races, ethnicities, religions, sexualities, abilities, classes, life-

shifted their focus to the capacity of 'real' female viewers (including feminist viewers) to negotiate or reject the identities constructed for them by television texts while retaining the pleasure they receive from the viewing process (Brunt 1992, Mumford 1995, Walters 1995). This perspective reinforces the idea that women who occupy multiple, shifting and often contradictory subject positions will be unlikely to approach any television text from a simple or static point of identification (although networks and advertizers will attend to them as such) (Brown 1990b, Deming 1992). This way of understanding the dilemma of pleasure offers a place from which to continue the theorization of woman as 'eccentric subject' (de Lauretis in Hennessey 1993). In this framework women's selves are seen as mobile and as offering the possibility for equally mobile points of identification. Identification, as I am using it here, relates to the capacity for the viewer to align her or himself pleasurably with the image on the screen. In the process of identification, of identifying with the characters and situations as they are performed within the television text, the viewer is understood to recognize – to identify - something within the Other that is similar – or that they would like to be similar – to the self. The identification that occurs between viewer and text is not an obvious process, but is complicated by the distance between viewer, text and production and by the fantastic nature of the narratives.

The unraveling of our attraction to television is not a normative aspect of the viewing experience, perhaps in part because the processes through which we experience it occur at an almost subliminal level. It is only through critique (and this does not necessarily mean academic inquiry) that the viewer begins to deconstruct how and why particular identifications take hold, have resonance and give pleasure. During the course of writing this thesis I have had to interrogate my own position in relation to the *Buffy* text and its characters. I have questioned my own points of identification within a viewer/character relationship and asked how my subject position enables me to hook myself into this narrative. I do find a certain fit between myself and the characters, having been a white, middle-class adolescent. And although I grew up in an urban and diverse Canadian city, there are a lot of similarities between my own experiences

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styles, geographies, etc.



of adolescence and high school and those I find at play in this text. In many ways I find resemblances between both myself and my high-school friends in these characters and their experiences. I also find myself drawn to the continual questioning of femininity that goes on in this text. It seems to present the question of what it means to grow up and be a 'woman' in a way that takes me beyond the physical appearances of the characters and allows me to identify with them very strongly: with Willow's intellect and marginal Jewishness, Buffy's strength and independence, Faith's fear of isolation and even Cordelia's attempt to grow beyond her crowd. Further, the show's problematic performance of difference – by maintaining that even the most normal surfaces may mask difference – has allowed me to understand my own ambivalent multiple positioning, including my complicities in relations of power. *Buffy* presents a text that allows me, as a real female viewer, to take up many points of identification, both pleasurable and uncomfortable.

Two volumes edited by Spigel and Mann (1992) and Brown (1990a) deal specifically with the theories of women and television. These works reflect the incredible eclecticism with which feminist theorists have come to approach the study of television in the last decade. Brown (1990b) describes her work as a "feminist culturalist television criticism" (12), but there is no single orientation that feminists subscribe to.<sup>69</sup> Like television studies more generally, feminist television criticism's greatest strength is perhaps its ability to view the medium, the viewer and their world through a multiplicity of lenses. The contributors to these anthologies have identified central categories for study, including those programs which have been considered women's genres. While this has been an important endeavor for the discipline of television studies, it has a major shortcoming: only a select few texts have been studied in depth. While many of these conform to accepted notions of 'women's television,' few authors engage the following points: First, that women often watch programs which are preferred by their spouse or children rather than ones of their own choosing (Morley 1986). Second, that these programs may represent the preferences of

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<sup>69</sup>Brown describes her theory as being derived from a broad range of theoretical perspectives. She cites resistance theory as being most similar but also includes reception and response criticism, British cultural studies, content analysis and consciousness raising.

specific women: women who are white, middle-class, heterosexual and over thirty-five.<sup>70</sup> Third, that within this research certain types of girls and women are seen as better, truer or worthier of study.<sup>71</sup>

#### YOUTH AND TELEVISION

Youth-oriented research has a very particular and pervasive central problem: most of it is conducted by adults. A similar problematic has been raised by Rose (1984) on the subject of children's fiction, specifically in relation to the book *Peter Pan*. She describes how the adult always "comes first," as the creator of children's fiction while the child "comes second" as the more passive recipient of the adult's tales (2). In television, as in literature as Rose suggests, the agenda of both producers and researchers may be dramatically different from that which young people consider most crucial to themselves. Though the intention is to draw the young person in, the subject of the creation is not "what the child wants, but what the adult desires" (Ibid.). Though there is more of a history of youth participating in the production of mass media than literature, the majority of those who have been involved have begun and ended with production; dissemination, criticism and research into media forms has been done in the adult domain.<sup>72</sup> Mass media researchers often seem to have a limited

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<sup>70</sup>There are texts which engage the viewing practices of other groups. For example, Gray (1994) and Turner (1994) discuss television and African Americans; Lewis (1990) and Stockbridge (1990) engage youth viewing rock videos; Kinder (1994) looks at children and Saturday morning television. The research on women's viewing practices does not often articulate the view that each woman is unique and each woman will thus have unique viewing experiences. Most importantly, it fails to examine the different choices women make with respect to programming. A college student living in a dorm, a suburban housewife with three children and a recent immigrant who works seventy hours a week will be unlikely to watch the same things. The literature fails to reflect the diversity of choices available to female viewers by focusing on shows stereotypical of 'women's television' (perhaps the personal preferences of the writers themselves).

<sup>71</sup>It is Fuss's (1989) description of an "insinuation that some forms of lesbianism are truer than others" (47) which led me to this insight. Similarly, Jones' (1993) article provides a post-structuralist analysis of girlhood, which insists that no such simple concept exists (although it must be recognized that greater credence may be given to certain definitions at certain times and within certain spaces).

<sup>72</sup>Young people have primarily been involved in the mass media as actors, however, they have been employed more recently as screenwriters and directors. For example, Harmony Kormine wrote the screenplay for *Kids* while still in his teens and John

or negative experience or knowledge of programming aimed at youth or may have singular, homogenous or romantically nostalgized images of youth which underscore their work. To quote Rose again: "the very idea of speaking to *all* children serves to close off a set of cultural divisions, divisions in which not only children, but we ourselves, are necessarily caught" (7).<sup>73</sup> Further, studies of youth and television viewing often proclaim the sophistication of young viewers (i.e. Miller 1996) but rarely gives them credit for using televisual information for sophisticated ends. The young viewer is almost always assumed to use a banal, depoliticized, deconstructive, (and perhaps) critical eye with no apparent agenda, or to accept cynically the ever increasing indoctrination of a desire to consume.

An important question (perhaps the most) is raised by Grossberg (1992) who asks: "[W]ho is youth?" (183). What makes this question important is that much research that purports to be about youth is actually about white, middle-class baby boomers and their desire to excavate and examine their own youth (i.e. Grossberg 1992, Feuer 1995). Hoeschmann (1996) asks the second important question in this vein: "whose youth are we talking about?" (93-94). The author suggests that the questions asked about television and youth are oriented towards white, heterosexual, middle-class, young men and that the use of the general term youth provides the ideological function of mystifying the lack of attention paid to issues of race, class and sexual orientation.

A multitude of studies have focused on a cultural fear of the media's impact on children (i.e. Winn 1977, Postman 1985, Englehardt 1986, Hodge and Tripp 1986a,c, Jenkins 1993, Spigel 1993, Buckingham 1995, 96) and on television and education (i.e. Hodge and Tripp 1986b, Gilbert and Taylor 1991, Schwoch, White and Reilly 1992, Jenkins 1993, Morgan 1995) There are also several ethnographic works which deal with, for example, young girls and television (i.e. Richards 1993, Walkerdine 1993), the use of television by Punjabi youth (Gillespie 1995) and the resistant possibilities of watching music videos (Lewis 1990, Stockbridge 1990). However, even if the years between childhood and adulthood are strongly represented in the sociopsychological literature (i.e. Sidel

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Singleton directed the very critically acclaimed *Boyz in the Hood* at twenty-three.

<sup>73</sup>Emphasis in the original.

1988, Findlen 1995, Orenstein 1995, Thompson 1995, all in relation to girls), the “scandalous category” of youth has largely been ignored (Hartley 1992).<sup>74</sup>

*Boomers and Xers: the sociopolitics of generation*

The only aspect of youth which is routinely studied in the media literature concerns their position within the sociopolitical context of North American culture in the late twentieth century. In television studies particularly, a great deal of attention has been paid to the texts produced under the Reaganist political regime of the 1980's and the concurrent swing towards the political right. Feuer (1995) has devoted an entire book to the study of television's relationship to Reaganism. Her work, however, is firmly focused on those texts which reflect and are popular with the baby boom generation who were born in the edenistic forties and fifties, came of age in the idealistic sixties and tried to make it as yuppies in the economically declining eighties.<sup>75</sup> In the 1980's, films about youth were intent on inducting a new cohort into the prevailing social order (Traube 1992). In most of the 1990's, television increasingly focused on the dismantling of American youth through apathy and downward mobility. The images television presented and the implications of these changes were areas which had only begun to be addressed when the public once again turned a favorably face to its young people. Not since the 1950's and 60's has the world's eye been so trained on a generation of youth. Grossberg (1992), writing about the lack of attention paid to youth in the 1990's states:

Youth itself has become a battlefield on which the current generation of adolescents, baby boomers, parents and corporate media interests are fighting for control of its meanings, investments

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<sup>74</sup>There are, of course, exceptions to this trend. Angela McRobbie, for example, has written several books on the subject of British youth. McKinley's (1997) recently published ethnographic study on *Beverly Hills, 90210* focuses on the viewing practices of teenage girls and undergraduate women. There is also a very large sociological literature on youth, most of which has focused on young men and which has been framed as the study of subcultures (i.e. Hebdige (1988)). For an example of the smaller literature in this area which has focused on young women, see Johnson (1993).

<sup>75</sup>Feuer repeatedly uses the term “our” in discussing television shows marketed to baby boomers. In the margins of page 56 I wrote: what is this “our” she keeps talking about? Since this was written in 1995 I'm sure it excluded many students (including hers) of television/media theory... Not to mention myriad more marginalized Others.

and powers, fighting to articulate and thereby construct its experiences, identities, practices, discourses and social differences (183).

This suggests that what media images reveal are the contradictions of a society in which children grow up fast while their parents' generation tries to avoid growing up at all (see also Meyrowitz 1985).

It has been suggested that a backlash against young people has been played out in the media. In the 1980's the popular press lauded young people, commending them on their industriousness in the face of escalating social pressures and economic decline. The early 1990's, by contrast, saw the coining of the moniker "Generation X" and with it a persistent characterization of young people as lazy, apathetic and apolitical (Hoechsmann 1996, 91-92).<sup>76</sup> But this political tide is turning once again. The July 7th, 1997 issue of the Canadian edition of *Time* magazine read: "You called us slackers. You dismissed us as Generation X. Well, move over. We're not what you thought." The *Time* article focused on the high achievements of twenty and thirtysomethings: director-screenwriter Kevin Smith, nail polish guru Dineh Mohajer and Sierra Club President Adam Werbach. But it also charted the relationship the X generation has had with the media and how the press has more favorably lauded today's teenagers, sometimes called generation Y. "Teensploitation" as coined on the cover of *Spin* magazine is once again one of the hottest phenomenon in media marketing (February 1999). The front cover of the November 14th issue of *Entertainment Weekly* exclaims "The New Teen Age! How the next generation of young stars are sparking a billion-dollar boom in Hollywood" (1997). This recognizes not only the enormous attention being paid to a new generation of actors, musicians, writers and directors, but to their audiences as well. This shift has already captured the attention of the popular press, perhaps it will also spark a renewed interest in youth in academic writing.

Feminist writers have also expressed a generational concern with what they see as young women's lack of political commitment or engagement with feminism. Following the themes taken up with the popular press, a 1994 article

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<sup>76</sup>Generation X is the title of Douglas Copeland's 1991 novel about youth at the end of the millennium. It was quickly taken up by the popular press.

in *Ms* magazine reports: "Young women may believe that a feminist identity puts them out of the pool for many men" (Hogeland, 18-21). An article published the same year by *Esquire* insists that: "Yes. That's the message from a new generation of women thinkers, who are embracing sex (and men!). "Call them "do me" feminists" (Friend, 48). In the same issue Carroll writes: "The future of American Womanhood Has a Nose Ring, and Attitude, and some Questions for a Dying Culture" (58). When questioned directly, however, young women appear to have something quite different to say about themselves and the society in which they are coming of age. In 1995, Barbara Findlen edited an anthology entitled *Listen Up: Voices From the Next Feminist Generation*.<sup>77</sup> In the introduction, Findlen writes:

Young feminists are constantly told that we don't exist. It's a refrain heard from older feminists as well as the popular media: "Young women don't consider themselves feminists." (xiv).

This country hasn't heard enough from young feminists. We're here and we have a lot to say about our ideas and hopes and struggles and our place in feminism. We haven't had many opportunities to tell our stories... (xvi).

This perspective is rarely noted in feminist literature(s).

Shary (1996), in a voice reminiscent of Grossberg (1992), insists that researchers take note of the difference between versions of youth expressed in the terms and voices of youth and those of adulthood, which merely speak for youth. Hoechsmann (1996) insists that Generation X, a construction of the media and advertizing industries, was merely a cry attempting to drown out the funeral dirge which announces the death of the "great [white, middle-class] male story" to the postmodern world (Joyrich 1992, 234). These represent just the tip of the iceberg whose depths are waiting to be charted. Pomerance and Sakeris' (1996) anthology may contain only a few articles which deal specifically with television (Hampson, McKinley, Tovaes and Waiters) or specifically with gender

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<sup>77</sup>Ironically, a later issue of *Ms*. published extracts from Findlen's anthology under the title *Generation F* (perhaps demonstrating Hoechsmann's (1996) view that Generation X really only refers to young, white, heterosexual males). There was never any recognition of the difference between the self-expressed feminism of the young women in Findlen's

(Kearney, McKelly, McKinley and Shary), but it is an excellent example of the direction contemporary studies of the media are headed and how some of the previously mentioned problems may be addressed. The articles demonstrate that there are emergent, contemporary discourses which insist that young people, their viewing practices, pleasures and the images of them television creates, are vital areas for study.

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work and the other-expressed view that young women are afraid of feminism.

## CHAPTER FOUR - PERFORMANCE AND TELEVISION

### PERFORMANCE AND PERFORMATIVITY – PROLOGUE

Studies of performance concern constructed actions, be they theatrical, musical, filmic, televisual, or of daily living. I use the term performance in its broadest sense, not restricting myself to the traditional realm of 'liveness.' I understand performance to include all acts: live, mediated, private, public and those which fall in between. The study of performance is the study of bodies constructed across axes of difference and understood to occupy different positions of normalcy and power. The vast number of subjects which have been studied in relation to performance attests to the resonance the expanded meaning of this term holds for the intellectual community. In adding my work to this list I hope to engage in the study of performance in two ways: first, by demonstrating that the terms performance and performativity are excellent tools for studying the mass media and television in particular, and second, by examining how mediated, performing bodies are constructed across and construct differences.

It is with the active images of televisual performance that this work is concerned, as well as with how these images in turn create a vision of society and construct (and at times deconstruct) boundaries, boundaries which suggest how communities are constructed and which bodies are included and which, excluded. While studies of performance have always interrogated bodily and spatial boundaries, I argue that the mass media offer an extended visual realm of inquiry. I am asking how the concept 'performance' and the practices that have been mobilized by theories of performance can be useful in studying television. I intend to show how central this concept is to the television text through a reading of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* which brings performance to the forefront of inquiry.

Theorists of performance tend to be concerned with bodies and how they are positioned in society, both socially and hierarchically. Auslander (1997) writes that "[T]he performing body is always doubly encoded - it is defined by the code of a particular performance, but has always already been inscribed, in its material aspect, by social discourses" (90). Diamond (1996) extends this line



of thought by pointing out that “[E]very performance, if it is intelligible as such, embeds features of previous performances: gender convention, racial histories, aesthetic traditions - political and cultural pressures that are consciously and unconsciously acknowledged” (1). Performance theory suggests that previous social performances and the conventions which govern them always mediate the production of bodies and spaces. That is, social performances (whether in daily life or in mediated environments) do not materialize out of nowhere, but grow out of a repertoire of previous performances. What is often absent from analyses of contemporary social performance is the fact that the media play an integral role in both defining and disseminating these repertoires, often in their most hegemonic, but at times also insurgent forms. In terms of my work, I suggest that television performances themselves grow out of other, existing performances which give them structure and coherence. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer’s* performances are indebted to a wide variety of sociocultural performances, including those of youth subcultures, teen drama, postfeminism, suburbanism, vampiric lore and demonology, grunge and more.

Some recent writings in performance theory expand the concept of performance and even begin to hint that it may need to be rethought in terms of the mass media.<sup>78</sup> McKenzie (1998) states that although well known theorists like Butler and Schechner have focused on the human body (and I understand this to mean the ‘live’ body), “they raise the possibility of performatives and performances being mechanically and/or electronically cited, stored, played back, and transformed” (231). This is not such a recent development for, as Case (1996) writes: “[T]he tradition of performance as something “live” and embodied has, throughout much of the twentieth century, been challenged by the screen. Movies, television, and new, virtual systems interrogate the “live” body and its tradition by their screenic context” (1). The movement of this line of

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<sup>78</sup>To date the only media which performance theorists have critically studied is the cinema, primarily in its avant-guard forms. However, the way in which performance has been mobilized in these instances points to its further elaboration for use in the study of other mass media. The two terms, media and mass media are often used interchangeably. In the way I am using them here, media pertains to various forms of cultural production including theater, independent cinema, performance art, installation, etc. Mass media refers to forms of cultural production which are intended for a ‘mass’ audience, among them most television, Hollywood films, etc.

inquiry seems to set the stage (so to speak) for the study of mass media within performance theory that I will be developing. Even traditionally live performances are changing in light of the more and more readily accessible mechanisms of media, through the incorporation of television, film and advertisements into the live act. Although this has created anxiety within traditional studies of performance, Auslander (1996) reassures that “[F]ar from being encroached upon, or threatened by mediation, live performance is always already inscribed with traces of the possibility of technological mediation” (p. 199). Performance theory may consider both how the presence of the mass media has affected the very foundations of what has previously been considered performance and ask what new types of performance are being generated in the context of the mass media.

#### PERFORMANCE STUDIES AND PERFORMANCE THEORIES

Performance theory has become a force in the arena of critical cultural inquiry; the academic discipline of Performance Studies has only recently emerged.<sup>79</sup> Victor Turner and Richard Schechner are often credited with beginning the project at the Tisch School at New York University in the early eighties, nearly two decades ago. The theory/discipline, which began as a unique blend of theater and anthropology has burgeoned to encompass diverse interdisciplinary fields of study: philosophy, art, psychoanalysis, sociology, film, fashion, history, literature, as well as remaining loyal to the study of theater and

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<sup>79</sup>By the discipline of Performance Studies I refer to actual departments of Performance Studies such as the ones at New York and Northwestern Universities. How a specific, especially a new, academic discipline is put together is important for understanding what it includes as well as what it omits. Performance Studies departments have grown out of Theater and Anthropology and although some theorists see the need for the discipline to expand as new agendas are brought to light (Schechner 1998) others see the need for Performance Studies to remain a space in which to study ‘live’ performances specifically (Ugwu 1995). Performance Studies as an academic discipline can be contrasted with performance theories which have developed around it from English, Philosophy, Communication Studies, Critical Studies, Education, Music, American Studies, Women’s Studies, Dance, Cultural Studies and Drama departments as well as by professional artists. These eclectic writers and the theories which they elaborate have moved performance out of the limited realm in which it is sometimes inscribed by Performance Studies.

performance art. Performance theories have also participated in the struggle to critically engage difference and power and to try to understand how difference is constituted through performance and performativity.

One of the crucial aspects of the works which engage theories of performance and the performative is their authors' connection to a sense of political struggle and, often, the fringe.<sup>80</sup> This raises questions about the possibility of political struggle and its potential theorizing in relation to performance. On the one hand, there are those authors who mobilize this theory at the level of theory, looking at performance and performativity as modern metaphors for micro and macro political struggles. These works (i.e. Cohen 1996, Phelan 1993, 1996, 1997, 1998, Butler 1990, 1993, 1997) often attempt to deconstruct and/or reintegrate the meta-narratives of (among others) Freud, Lacan, Fanon, Derrida, Austin, Barthes, Aristotle, Artaud, Plato, Brecht, Foucault, Jameson, Lyotard, Marx and Williams. Although this list of authors adheres to very different projects and commitments to meta-narratives, they are mobilized in critical ways which interrogate both the authors and the strategies to which their theories have been put. On the other hand, some works focus on moments of performance as action: plays, pieces of performance art, visual art, music, film, plastic surgery, rituals and so on. What is problematic here is how the theoretical sometimes seems to stand in for political action. Often what fails to be interrogated and problematized is how these texts are understood as political: who makes them, sees them, has access to them, what uses are made of them and so on. My project retains a connection to the political through the mobilization of particular forms of language indebted to, for example, feminism, anti-racism and postmodernism. And while I do not see television or its texts (or this text in particular) as inherently political my intention is to show that there is a certain amount of fluidity of interpretation (dependant on an enormous number of variables) and performance which moves the television narrative between insurgence and hegemony. I recognize that these terms are embedded in a particular political history which has interrogated on the one hand relations of power, and on the other possibilities for resistance, opposition, subversion and

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<sup>80</sup>Schneider (1997) does make explicit, however, the fact that many of the works studied in relation to performance reiterate the blatant omission of engagement with race (etc.) as

refusal. My intention is to use these terms in relation to a feminist reading that does not center on public acts of protest but on those performances that connect with the everyday/night lives of people, in this case the television text.

I have turned to theories of performance for my own work because I feel that it is of crucial importance to read the performances and performative acts which constitute the mass media. This reading will allow me to demonstrate the active movement (performance) of the text, going beyond its representational or narrative aspects. Theories of performance allow the study of television an expanded forum, which incorporates both the visual and narrative structures of the medium while also interrogating its potential performativity and expansive intertextual web. This gives the theorist ways of looking at visual media texts as active moments of performance, as well as narrative structures and moments of audience reception (areas more traditionally associated with the study of television). The increasing tendency to archive films and/or videos of performances has meant that performance studies has, increasingly, moved in the direction of studying mediated as well as live performance. In one of the most recent anthologies to emerge from a Performance Studies Department, Peggy Phelan (1998) writes:

Thinking of performance in the expanded field of the electronic paradigm requires that we reconsider the terms that have been at the contested center of performance studies for the past decade: simulation, representation, virtuality, presence, and above all, the slippery indicative "as if." ... To put it another way, knowledge in the electronic age is post-able and preservable information (8).

This recognition of the mediascape opens all sorts of questions for the future study of performance. It allows television, advertizing, mainstream film and popular culture to enter into performance inquiries. It will make performance theory available to a wider range of readers as well as texts. And, finally, I believe that it will allow for more complex readings of these texts by highlighting the inherent performances and performativities within them. I hope to show that performance, as a form of theory, as a framework, allows for a complicated

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do those theorists who study them (31).

reading of text, an opening up of more than one possibility for reading held within the text itself, before it even reaches the viewer.

Although performance theorists have made forays into the realm of film, they have tended to focus on the avant-guard, most often films and performances which explicitly invoke questions about gender, sexuality and race.<sup>81</sup> One of the major omissions in the study of performance is that of generation. I have repeatedly asked myself the question: where are the young audiences, writers, actors and performance artists of the present moment (as well as the directors, scriptwriters and producers)? Another question to ask at this juncture is: what has prevented scholars of performance (or made them reluctant) from studying the mass media: (i.e.) television, advertising, mainstream and 'indie' film?<sup>82</sup> Is it an embarrassment to admit that such things are worthy of study? Has the fact that film, especially alternative cinema like *Paris is Burning* (studied, at least, by hooks (1992), Butler (1993), Phelan (1993) and Pellegrini (1997)) or the films of Yvonne Rainier, have found a rigorous academic following within studies of performance made it more worthy of study than mainstream film, television, advertising or video? These are certainly areas in which performance plays an intrinsic part, so why has virtually nothing been written about them? I would speculate a two-fold answer. First, that the continued concatenation of performance with the 'live' and the marginal locates the mass media outside of the realm of performance inquiry. Second, that the mass media, while beginning to find acceptance within the academy, still inhabits a problematic space in relation to those marginal and interdisciplinary arenas whose media focus has never tended to stray far from the traditional (i.e. museums, art history) and avant-guard (i.e. performance art, happenings).

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<sup>81</sup>Catherine Ugwu (1995) has edited an anthology which is specifically concerned with "The Politics of Black Performance." Case (1990), Hart (1989) and Senelick (1992) have edited volumes on gender and performance. Case, Brett and Foster's (1995) book has several articles which engage the performance of sexuality. Barbara Taylor and Juan Villegas (1994) have edited a volume on Performance in Latin/o America. Although it does not deal with performance theories specifically, Pointon and Davies (1997) have edited an excellent volume on disability and the media. There are many other examples.

<sup>82</sup>This is an important point and one which needs some clarification. First, there has been a lot written about the mainstream and the mass media in other areas, such as Cultural Studies, Media Studies and Film Studies. However, performance theorists have barely touched on this 'massive' area of study.

In the 1998 anthology *The Ends of Performance*, Richard Schechner writes:

...academic disciplines are most active and important at their ever changing interfaces. In terms of PS, this means between theater and anthropology, folklore and sociology, history and performance theory, gender studies and psychoanalysis, performativity and actual performance events, and more - new interfaces will be added as time goes on, and older ones dropped. Accepting "inter" means opposing the establishment of any single system of knowledge, values, or subject matter. Performance Studies is unfinished, open, multivocal, and self-contradictory. Thus any call for or work toward a "unified field" is, in my view, a misunderstanding of the very fluidity and playfulness fundamental to performance studies (360-61).

In terms of my own project, this statement acknowledges the importance of leaving open all doors of inquiry. Mediated performances, such as those represented in film, television, video and advertising (both marginal and mainstream) certainly deserve a place in this expanding field of critical and theoretical inquiry. It is my intention, with this thesis, to begin to fill this gap by arguing that mediated performances cannot be wholly differentiated from the more standard or 'live' performances favored by performance theorists at present. On the subject of mediation I will quote Williams (1976) at length. He writes:

It is still often used in an unfavorable sense, in a contrast between *real* and **mediated** relations, **mediation** being then one of the essential processes not only of consciousness but of IDEOLOGY (q.v.). This use of **mediation** has chimed with the modern use of MEDIA or MASS MEDIA (q.v.), where certain social agencies are seen as deliberately interposed between reality and social consciousness, to prevent an understanding of reality... These uses depend on an assumed dualism, of reality and consciousness. or of unconscious and conscious: **mediation** acts between them, but indirectly and misleadingly (172).<sup>83</sup>

Williams also describes another sense of mediation where:

**Mediation** is here neither neutral nor 'indirect' (in the sense of devious or misleading). It is a direct and necessary activity between different kinds of activity and consciousness. It has its own, always specific forms... All

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<sup>83</sup> Emphasis in the original.

'objects', and in this context notably works of art, are **mediated** by specific social relations; the **mediation** is positive and in a sense autonomous (172).

I believe it is possible for both of these conceptions of mediation to operate at once, though I am primarily concerned with William's second notion of mediation. Where Williams makes note of objects and works of art, I am relating mediation to media texts and mediated performances. Mediation suggests that what is being performed is produced at a distance from its audience, but that should in no way suggest that what is occurring on television is not performance. While all mediated acts are situated within distinct social, cultural, spatial and historical contexts, succeeding levels of mediation make these relations more complex, as the sites of production move further away from those of reception. Mediation is a key concept that underpins my analysis of performance and television. However, the term itself will not be taken up explicitly in the rest of this thesis. The reason for this is that when the study of performance turns to television (part of the realm of mediation), mediation becomes embedded in that term. Here, mediation can be understood as an inherent part of the performance. And when I mobilize the concept of performance in relation to the television text, I do so with the recognition that mediation is a part of that concept.

Like Baudrillard's (1983) levels of simulation, performances can be thought of in terms of levels of mediation. Even moments of being in daily life are subject to some degree of mediation. How we choose to dress, speak, eat (etc.) are inflected with anterior moments of which the present is a (at least residual) repetition which renders the moment of individual choice always in excess of itself. These moments can be read inter-discursively and it can be argued that the acts to which I just alluded can themselves be taken up as existing within an already extant series of acts (Fairclough 1992). While this is true, to a certain extent, it sets up a discursive/citational lineage in which we are unable to locate an action for study because every action will necessitate a genealogical excavation of the anterior moments of which it is merely a repetition. What I suggest is that we examine actions and utterances and, while remaining aware of their historicity or excess, see them as intentional forms of action. What is specific to the first level of mediation is that the performers are

seen to be performing acts (even if reiterative of other, earlier moments) with intentionality. These actions, which I call the first level of mediation, exist in the everyday experiences of people and are not unconscious but neither are they produced in the same way as a piece of theater or an installation.

The second level of mediation is best expressed in terms of the 'live.' Performances are seen as 'live' if performers and viewers occupy the same physical space. This includes most plays and pieces of performance art.<sup>84</sup> Butler (1993) has written that these performances do not comply with her notion of performativity because the performer is always separated from the inherent intentionality of the text/act. The actor cannot act with any 'choice' or 'will' of her or his own, but is seen as being implicated in the social relations of production. Diamond (1997), arguing with what she sees as Butler's rigid dichotomization of theater and theory (performance and performativity), writes that "[T]hough 'performativity' is not an 'act' but a 'reiteration' or 'citation', why should we restrict its iterative sites to theory and to theorist's acts of seeing?" By this she describes how theater (performance) is not only the repetition of convention, but also an interpretive site where these may be "investigated and reimagined" (47). 'Live' performances then, with their always-recurrent association with script and genre, gesture and videography, are the second level of mediation.<sup>85</sup> Diamond's argument seems, in some sense, to reiterate what Butler says but on her own preferential level of mediation. She argues that performance is performative... as long as it is 'live' performance. She writes that the performative should not be limited to the theorist, but does her argument not reiterate this same sentiment, merely transferring the unique position of the

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<sup>84</sup>Interestingly, I have not seen very much written about live television which occurs between the second and third levels of mediation (Mayerle (1994) does look at the production of the sit-com *Roseanne*, including its taping procedures). Live TV complies with the second level of mediation in that it is live and that the audience occupies the same physical space as the performers in a manner comparable to that of the theater. It complies with the third level of mediation because the performance is mediated through the mass media complex.

<sup>85</sup>In this last, like live television, the second and third levels of mediation begin to bleed together. The videographer works to capture 'liveness' which is the domain of the second level of mediation. But the live act, caught on tape by the videographer, mass marketed and viewed in multiple and divergent places, marks of the third level of mediation.



theorist to the equally uniquely positioned viewer of radical performance art, avant-guard theater and (rarely) cinema?<sup>86</sup>

The argument between Diamond and Butler helps to explain the relationship between performance, performativity and the mass media, or what I am calling the third level of mediation. What marks these media as belonging to the third level of mediation is their mode of production and delivery, as finished products, to local sites often far away from their place of production. It is the displacement between the performance and its dissemination and the way in which the product is produced outside the purview of both the audience and performer which marks the third level of mediation. It is also the possibilities inherent in having a huge budget, masses of sets, time to shoot and re-shoot scenes and an editor to screen out all the mistakes. While 'live' performances have rehearsals, make-up and costuming, mass mediated performances have all of these as well as extensive editing, enormous budgets, advertising campaigns, marketing strategies, censors, elaborate soundtracks and special effects including morphing and animation. Although there is almost always a moment of 'live' performance before the video/film/photographic camera, I would argue that it is the distance (temporal and spatial) between production and performance which delineates the third level of mediation. This raises the question: does the product of 'live' or avant-guard performance occupy a privileged space in the realm of performance and performativity? I believe that the answer is no, that mass media (television, film, advertising) can also be understood through theories of performance and performativity.

I have been arguing that performance theories must be elaborated in order to be opened to the study of mediated performances such as those displayed on the television screen. It may seem that framing this endeavor within the perspectives of performance and performativity works against text-centered theory building. However, it is precisely the performances that occur within the

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<sup>86</sup>This is an important trend to note within the performance literature. Many of the texts which are reviewed are impossible for most people to access. Most of the plays are short run in fringe New York theaters, as are the performance art pieces. Even the shows which are videotaped are not widely distributed, making it hard for even interested, knowledgeable viewers to access them. The focus on liveness (ironically, a space unavailable to most people) simply reiterates the importance (exclusivity) of the theorist, who is, it seems, one of the few people who can get in/to the live performance.

text which are the focus of this thesis. Within this expanded framework the text itself is seen as replete with performances and while there is empirical work to be done with regard to the media text and its relation to the viewer, that is another project. It could perhaps be argued that other, more traditional methodologies, such as role theory, could provide a similar, already established framework for this type of work. While role theory, for example, provides helpful guidelines for undertaking this project, performance theories offer a contemporary and flexible framework, one more suitable for exploring the interdisciplinary and intertextual matrices of the mass media. Television performances, like theatrical ones, are carefully constructed idioms of contemporary society, parables of community, personhood and acceptance.

#### PERFORMANCE VERSUS PERFORMATIVITY

While I began to describe the dialectic between performance and performativity (as articulated by Butler and Diamond) in the previous pages, some performance theorists have begun to play the concepts of performance and performativity off one another, insisting on their implication, or at minimum, intersection. Schechner (1998), for example, writes: “[T]he subjects of performance studies are both what is performance and the performative - and the myriad contact points and overlaps, tensions and loose spots, separating and connecting these two categories” (p. 362). In the realm of the hyper/inter/textual/visual mass media it is necessary to engage both performance and performativity: what is being shown in the mediascape, what is telling us about how life outside it is diegetically imagined, what is it doing to that world, how can this be understood?

Why have theorists of performance and performativity so consistently insisted on the dichotomization of action and reiteration/citation? It seems to me important to explore the possibility that there are several ways the mass media, theater, music, even history and politics both act and reiterate previous actions. Useful in this discussion is Bakhtin's (1984) notion of doubleness, or that of Gilles Deleuze as invoked by Probyn (1993): “As Gilles Deleuze argues, rather than the one or the other [inside and outside], we need to think in terms of the

double: 'the double is never a projection of the interior, it is on the contrary an interiorization of the outside' " (88). Doubleness is equally present in-between liveness and mediation. Is there not always a moment of liveness or action in the reading of a script in front of the camera, performing a play, interpreting a Bach prelude, reading a novel and so on? It seems a little narrow to assume that impromptu moments of daily life are the only ones which can be considered truly performative, and equally narrow to think that only unmediated or 'live' performances can be truly performative. Mediated performances are equally embedded in a contextual history which inevitably makes the performative moment reiterative/citational. This works in many ways but two, very general examples will clarify this process. The first can be gleaned by examining any television text (putting aside the question of 'live television'). That the performance is not live is incontestable; there have been temporal/spatial displacements between the moment of performance of actor to camera, of unfinished to finished text, and of finished text to viewer.<sup>87</sup> I do, however, believe that by expanding the notions of performance and performativity, television texts can come to be understood as sites of performance. There is a moment of liveness when the actors perform in front of the camera. This is especially so for shows which are filmed in front of a 'live' audience, but continues to be true whether the performance occurs in front of the camera, 'live' audience or home audience.<sup>88</sup> This performance is complicated by the processes the text goes through before its completion and which give the finished text the quality of being looked at, at a distance. The second example relates more

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<sup>87</sup>There are, certainly, many more displacements which may be at work within mediated performance. Michaels (1994), for example, describes the appropriation of television by the Yuendumu community in Australia. In his article he describes the displacement which occurs when a community which is neither a traditional viewing audience or programming subject uses the medium to promote Aboriginal culture.

<sup>88</sup>Another example is the impossibility of knowing if scenes in a film are improvised. I will share with you an example which I found very startling. There is a scene early in *Apocalypse Now* where Martin Sheen gets drunk and puts his fist through a mirror. It is a scene which is both moving and disturbing and, I had always thought, brilliantly acted. Upon viewing Francis Ford Coppola's wife's documentary *Hearts of Darkness* several years later, a new facet of this scene was revealed to me. In this film, she documents the filming of *Apocalypse Now*, chronicling the rigors of the famous work which took too many years, too much money and was almost left unfinished. *Hearts* reveals that Sheen was actually intoxicated when the scene was shot and that the violence that devolved

specifically to television performances themselves, which use bodies of actors, scripted texts and constructed sets to cite actual persons and places. The performance is constituted not only by choices in casting, location, costuming and censorship, but also by cinematography, editing and flow.<sup>89</sup> What is evidenced in the final product is the reiteration of a plethora of social norms of action, address and appearance and the delineation of both acceptable actions, social spaces and their populations. We have all heard the somewhat clichéd maxim about nothing being ‘real’ or ‘true’ unless it has first been seen on television. It is this investment in ‘reality’ which confirms the reiterative quality of television performances as well as their performativity.<sup>90</sup>

The reiterability of the mass media event extends beyond its own moment to recall its embeddedness in history, culture, myth and so on. Every moment of the performance reminds us of other performances, moments in history, cultural legacies, layers upon layers only some of which are knowable, in part, to a particular viewer in a particular time/place. I would argue that new performances add layers to existing culture which wait to be deciphered both now and tomorrow. Analysts of this phenomenon may require not only innovations in theory, but the incorporation of as disparate theoretical paradigms as postmodernism, cultural studies, ethnography, television studies, visual culture studies, film theory, queer theory, postcolonial studies, and others. Take, for example, a new television program. Its production may demand a new style, a slickness in dialogue or production value, a self-reflexiveness or deconstruction which marks it as different from its predecessors. Decoding it requires of the viewer a familiarity with the history of the medium and its genres, knowledge of actors and of more general popular culture and history.<sup>91</sup>

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was unscripted, but so appropriate to the film - so real - that it was left in.

<sup>89</sup>I still believe Williams' (1974) definition of flow is useful. He writes that “the real program that is offered is a *sequence* or set of alternative sequences of these and other similar events” (87, emphasis in the original). Williams' understanding of flow must be elaborated in the face of changes which have occurred within the medium since the time of his writing (i.e. the increase in channels, cable, pay TV, VCR, mute buttons, virtual reality, the internet; their increasing concatenation and the ability to ‘click’ or ‘zap’ between these at will).

<sup>90</sup>They both reiterate the norms (performance) and bring them into being (performativity).

<sup>91</sup>There are a million examples of this, but here is one: An episode of *Seinfeld* revolves

Critical readings of new, mediated performances uncover a wealth of reiteration; in fact it sometimes seems that nothing about them is new. Mediated performances reiterate/cite not only what came before them in terms of media performances but constantly, if obliquely, (re)inscribe structures of difference; sometimes hegemonically but also, at times, insurgently as well.<sup>92</sup>

#### PERFORMANCE AND TELEVISION/TELEVISION AS PERFORMATIVE

It is perhaps television's difference from cinema, theater and performance art that results in the lack of recognition between it and performance theory, for television is certainly a medium of performance. It is perhaps also that unlike these other mediums, television is considered somehow banal and suburban. In *America* (1988), Baudrillard takes his readers on a guided driving tour of this 'truthful' American suburbanism. What Baudrillard remarks on in his study of "America" are the same interplay of cliches fundamental to television, especially 'lowbrow' forms like sit-coms and made-for-TV-movies. This is hardly surprising, since television is very much the product of "America," especially the period of suburbanization in which it was introduced. In her article *Banality in Cultural Studies*, Meghan Morris (1990) has attempted to recover the term banality for its polarities of fatality and exuberance as reflected in the works of Jean Baudrillard and British Cultural Studies, respectively. She writes:

"banality", after all, is one of the group of words-including "trivial" and "mundane" - whose modern history inscribes the disintegration of old European ideals about the common people, the common place, the common culture... It is only in the eighteenth century... that these words begin to acquire their modern sense of the trite, the platitudinous, the unoriginal.

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completely around another show, *Melrose Place*. In order to understand the episode one must have knowledge of the show but also of why Jerry would be embarrassed about watching it. A another example comes from *Dawson's Creek*. When the main characters are all given a week-end detention one remarks that it is just like *The Breakfast Club*, John Hughes' celebration of teen angst (which, if we try and read this program in a realistic mode, would have come to theaters when these high school sophomores were in preschool).

<sup>92</sup>They also provide spaces in which insurgent performances of difference may be

So if banality is an irritant that repeatedly returns to trouble cultural theory, it is because the very concept is part of the modern history of taste, value, and critique of judgment that constitutes the polemical field within which cultural studies now takes issue with classical aesthetics. "Banality" as mythic signifier is thus always a mask for questions of value, of value judgment, and discrimination-especially in the sense of how we distinguish and evaluate *problems* (rather than cultural "products"), legitimate our priorities, and defend our choice of what matters (40)."<sup>93</sup>

Television has tended to be taken up, both within academic and more popular discourses, as banal in the extreme.

Performativity and performance are under-theorized in the literature of television studies. The most overt reference to performance is a chapter entitled "Performing Media Events" in Dayan and Katz's (1992) *Media Events*. While the authors begin by citing the performative nature of television (78), their primary interest is in television's ability to bring large-scale public ceremonies to large numbers of geographically displaced viewers. This adoption of performance as live act seen through the television screen only functions for select areas of programming. I will argue performances insert themselves into all types of discussions of the mass media. The reason for the focus on theater (especially the more avant-guard variety) and performance art is immediately made evident by descriptions which focus on their immediacy and transience. Phelan (1993), for example, describes performance as being "at the threshold of the present" (27). And Diamond (1995) writes that "performance is the immediate act of doing and the thing done" (155). Even some mass media theorists have absorbed this presentism, focusing on the moment that the image is captured as the point of performance. Grant (1996) writes that "video is the theater where identity becomes performance. It provides us with a stage on which we may strut and fret" (p. 69). While anyone with a video camera may turn the lens back on her or himself - capturing, editing, rewinding and beginning again with the same tape - television's production occurs in a space far from accessible to the average viewer. But I would suggest that performance links the performer to the viewer in a moment of (mis)recognition. This is obvious when there are two live bodies

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inscribed.

<sup>93</sup>Emphasis in the original.

in the same room, but less clear when time, space and dimension separate the performer and viewer. What remains similar to all types of performance is their equal, though more or less unspoken, desire to impart a certain agenda (whether radically political or hegemonic) to the viewer. Butler (1993) describes "*a process of materialization that stabilizes over time*"<sup>94</sup> (9), a type of construction which seems eminently suited to understanding television's agenda. The performativity of television is implicated in the process of materializing not only the bodies of audiences but the virtual bodies of the screen as well. Characters are manipulated in order to make them perform certain desirable aspects of themselves. The way bodies come to be materialized (fixed and bounded, as Butler writes), however, is never a complete or static process. There is always the possibility of (re)construction, brought about by changes in daily life, entry into different discourses and the bombardment of various media (including television). There will be work to do in the future which links a reading of television performance to an ethnography that studies the impact of viewing on the day to day performances of viewers. Understanding the performative act as Derridean iterability (Butler 1993, 244 note 7) works very well for the study of television, both because images are constantly in repetition and because their extreme self-referentiality creates paradoxes which a straightforward reading cannot untangle. The act always refers to something just beyond the realm of recognition, to a past which could have only been created in the televised present. The future becomes the past which is in turn pushed forward into a romanticized present. The character/actor who performs and is made performative within the televisual image is (somewhere) a material body in three-dimensional space and becomes a topography where identity and culture can be read.

#### VISUAL CULTURE

In a somewhat parallel fashion to performance theories, studies of visual culture have emerged, even more recently, as a multi-disciplinary field of academic study. Also like performance, visual culture studies developed out of

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<sup>94</sup>Emphasis in the original.

an established discipline, art history, but has since captured the attention of many writers interested in the realm of visual culture and frustrated by the existing paradigms for studying it. Though the visual has been the subject of inquiry for a very long time, as an academic sub-discipline its works date mostly from this decade, where we find several introductory volumes and readers. The question of the definitional status of visual culture is addressed directly by Nicolas Mirzoeff, in the introduction to the anthology *The Visual Culture Reader* (1998a), which he edited. He describes visual culture studies as emerging at the intersection of two discrete but interrelated phenomena. First, the historical location and importance of the visual within both modernism and antiquity. Second, the growing acceptance of postmodern culture at the end of a millennium which is foundationally visual and increasingly virtual.

Theorists of visual culture tend to emphasize its interpenetration with daily life (in the manner of de Certeau), its challenges to the strategic deployment of difference and the historical location of the visual including its excessive importance to the postmodern period. Mirzoeff's writing recalls both the problematic marginality of theories of performance within the academy and my own difficulty of developing theory in the shadow of an overarching partiality to avant-guard elitism. As he writes: "Everyday life is the key terrain for visual culture, just as it has been for cultural studies. This represents an ethical choice to concentrate on the culture of the majority rather than the elite practices of a few" (1998c, 125). His thoughts also recall those of Schechner on disciplinarity:

Visual Culture ought not to sit comfortably in already existing university structures. It should rather form part of an emerging body of post-disciplinary academic endeavors from cultural studies, gay and lesbian studies, to African-American studies, and so on, whose focus crosses the borders of traditional academic disciplines at will. The viability of such approaches relies on their continued ability to challenge their host institutions, not in their easy absorption within them (1998a, 11).

Visual culture also makes its presence felt in this work, for television is certainly a central aspect of how visual culture is defined today for a great many people, which may help to provide a space to interrogate the televisual as a legitimate terrain of intellectual inquiry. As Josephson (1996) writes: "Television



thus becomes a mental space akin to perception. We perceive the world through television. It becomes our eyes and ears. We get new information from it, and dreams" (179).

Theories of visual culture and performance are imbricated, although there is little or no acknowledgment of one another, except for the ubiquitous Judith Butler, who appears in Mirzoeff's book. The focus of performance is performance and the focus of visual culture is visual culture, but it would seem that each is, in fact, both. Visual culture is, perhaps, more attuned to the drama of mass culture and the social spaces in which it adheres, but both 'post-disciplines' share a desire to interrogate the cultural production of bodies, histories, spaces, representations, texts, etc. Thus they are certainly not strange bedfellows but, rather, exist in overlapping spaces. Like theorists of performance, visual culture theorists recognize the need to interrogate the visual through the immense intertextual matrix. Rogoff (1998) writes that "visual culture opens up an entire world of intertextuality in which images, sounds and spatial delineations are read on to and through one another, lending ever-accruing layers of meanings and subjective responses to each encounter we might have with film, advertising, art works, buildings or urban environments" (14). Thus the study of television through visual culture includes its performances, spaces, citations, recitations and more.

Shohat and Stam (1998) describe how "visual culture manifests what Canclini calls 'multi-temporal heterogeneity' i.e. the simultaneous, superimposed spatio-temporalities which characterize the contemporary social text" (29). It is interesting that they refer here to the text since text and image are so often taken as somewhat opposite terms. Here the two appear to be conflated and, I would argue, a third term - performance - could also be added in a kind of triangulation of terms which are often invested with similar meanings. But more importantly, their words point to the imperative within the visual (or performance) of doubling and, within that aspect, of contestation. As Rogoff (1998) elaborates: "the field of vision becomes a ground for contestation in which unstable normativity constantly attempts to shore itself up" (22). This can be seen with special clarity in mainstream works where a foundational aspect is often the inculcation of a normativity to be read as absolute, while it is actually derivative

of specific cultural and subcultural norms. In chapter five, as I read through the superimposition of the body of Buffy and her portrayer, Sarah Michelle Geller, this type of work will be made evident in the juxtaposition of normalcy and the 'not-normal' in body and action. What is exposed in such an analysis is the lie of normalcy in the text and/or image, the impossibility of ever completely shoring up a vision of the norm or normal and the insistence on the elision or marginalization of that which is perceived not to be normal. Working in conjunction with the different scopic regimes identified by Jay (1998), visual performance (and the work of both visual culture and performance) demonstrates, at different pitches, both the desired model of normalcy in all its excesses and the impossibility of attaining it. To quote Rogoff (1998) once again: "To some extent the project of visual culture has been to try and repopulate space with all the obstacles and all the unknown images, which the illusion of transparency evacuated from it" (p. 22).

Television may be understood as being very well suited for study in both realms: visual and performance. Visual culture, however, has taken a far greater interest in the popular mass media and the problematic issues surrounding its study in the academy. Mirzoeff (1998b) writes, in relation to Clifford's article in the same volume:

Many critics disparage the mass culture of Hollywood films, while praising the independent film sector. Likewise television is widely condemned by intellectuals with appropriate exceptions being made for documentaries and programs on the arts. In Clifford's view, these seeming alternatives are really interdependent; they are two sides of the same visual system of representation. By trying to exclude certain objects as mere culture and others as art, traditional criticism finds itself endlessly repeating the terms of this binary opposition, so characteristic of modernism (57).

Thus, despite the overdetermination of television within postmodern culture, many theorists cling steadfastly to antiquated binaries in which the mass media - especially in its more mainstream forms - continues to be seen as banal (in the bad sense) and while perhaps not unworthy of study, at least too much of an embarrassing predilection to be made the subject of serious critique (rather than merely criticism which itself tends to be banal in the worst sense).

Television has occupied a strategic place in social life despite its continued insertion in the bottom half of an outdated high/low binary. However, it may be that television can be rethought in terms of what Shohat and Stam (1998) call an "aesthetics of garbage" (41), which they describe as a "transformative impulse [which] takes an object considered worthless and turns it into something of value" (42); and later as "grossly material, garbage is society's id; it steams and smells below the threshold of ideological rationalization and sublimation" (p. 43). From the balmy breezeways of Los Angeles and New York's social elites to the more grotesque posturing on Jerry Springer, television usurps the visual life of both high and low culture and performs them for all to see. Television takes the detritus of (usually) American visual culture and makes it not only a commodity but also a guide to those spaces we may enter, those we may not and all those we may or may not desire in-between. Although media texts and images may be constructed and/or deployed hegemonically, what they actually say and how that can be interpreted, are always up for grabs (within certain limits). The importance of recognizing this contestation of meaning lies in the devaluation of all things seen as mainstream because of some intrinsic hegemony, while embracing more marginal acts/arts as intrinsically insurgent. It is more likely that each performance carries residual traces of both hegemony and insurgence and the contestation of meaning includes an oscillation between these two points. If each is actually part and parcel of the other, then the only way to move forward is to acknowledge both, at their most opposite and at their intersection.

#### PERFORMANCE, IDENTITY AND IDENTIFICATION

Identification and identity formation captured the interest of theorists (of the media, postmodernism, and feminism) long before the performative came into the picture. But as Pellegrini (1997) writes, performance "succeeds only to the degree that it brings the audience to identify with it" (9). de Lauretis (1984) describes identification, like materialization, as being "actively involved as subject in a process, a series of relations; a process that, it must be stressed, is materially supported by [the] specific practices - textual, discursive, behavioral"

(141). Kellner (1995), in the vein of postmodernism, writes that: “[P]ostmodern identity, then, is constructed theatrically through [the] role playing and image construction... postmodern identity revolves around leisure, centered on looks, images, and consumption... postmodern identity is a function of leisure and is grounded in play, in gamesmanship, in producing an image” (242). The play on the word image (for lifestyle in this case) is important for the possibility of engaging the idea of performance and performativity in television studies. What television disseminates are images and narratives, which provide points of identification for the viewer to peruse. These are identities which may be chosen, retained, rearranged or rejected. The fragmented pieces of images which go into the construction of identity become a performance, or as Kellner says, the production of an image (lifestyle). And so in the televisual performance, image begets image as well as identity.

With the increasing presence of media and the speed with which images are deployed within both the public and private spheres, some theorists have seen identity, like history, as one of the disappearing aspects of postmodern society. Kellner (1995), however, writes that:

[R]ather than identity disappearing in a postmodern society, it is merely subject to new determinations and new forces while offering as well new possibilities, styles, models, forms... Yet the overwhelming variety of possibilities for identity in an affluent image culture no doubt creates highly unstable identities while constantly providing new openings to restructure one's identity (257).

Katz, Liebes and Berko (1994), like Butler (1993), believe that viewers have the capacity to adopt different identities, though not so easily. Similarly, Hartley (1992) suggests that “[T]here are clusters of significant identifications that may combine, split, contradict or confirm each other in provisional orientations that will for the time being serve the purposes of a social “I” “ (23). And so it would seem that any discussion of identity (including postmodern identity) must first recognize that it is a contingent performative rather than an essential construct. Thus building identity and identification must be conceptualized as fluid and ongoing processes. Second, that although the identities deployed on television may primarily serve a hegemonic function, there is always room for insurgence

and resistance. In terms of performance and television: “[I]t is only in the critical viewing of this text, the bodies that perform it, and the way in which the performance is taken up by the viewer that resistance and rupture are made possible” (Byers, forthcoming).

Joyrich (1996) writes that “[F]ramed by the discourses of television, contemporary formations of knowledge, identity and reality have shifted in ways that radically alter the epistemological, aesthetic, and ideological space of American culture” (22). Fuss (1989) – though problematically - discussing the problem of experience, describes how an inner circle is formed in which certain persons “in the know” are included while others are kept outside the circle's limits (115). This notion of “experience” and the circle of those in the know is precisely how television attempts to promote the viewer's identification with a particular television community. This works by constantly re-inscribing the viewer's need to be knowledgeable in order to read the text and to be able to participate in extra diegetic discussions of it.<sup>95</sup> Miller (1986) writes that: “TV now exalts TV spectatorship by preserving a hermetic vision that is uniformly televisual” (193). The episode of *Seinfeld* mentioned earlier successfully parodies this experience when Elaine (Julia Louis-Dreyfus) discovers that Jerry has been lying about watching *Melrose Place*. She says: “You mean all this time we could have been talking about Amanda and Allison and Billy...” and he responds: “Yes, Yes and Michael and...”<sup>96</sup> This exchange immediately identifies them (to each other) as insiders of a knowledge community based on the common experience of watching *Melrose Place*. This is a position from which they can practice exclusion (although whether people will care about being excluded is another story, one worthy of study) of others within the television text and external to it.

Identification describes the processes by which the subject sees fragments of her or himself within the image (be it visual or textual) of the other. Through identification the subject becomes invested in what is seen or read. This process is ongoing: as more and more images are examined some are taken up, some passed over and earlier ones are discarded. Butler (1993) describes identification as the “assimilating passion” (13) and I believe that understanding identification

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<sup>95</sup>Hobson's (1990) work on women, television and the workplace examines this idea.

<sup>96</sup>This is a paraphrased excerpt not a direct quote from the text.

as assimilation rather than as a type of modeling (which is the way it has traditionally been theorized) will open up the concept in many ways. Conceptualizing identification as a process of fragmentary assimilation further allows for an understanding of how a multitude of conflictual images could be absorbed through identificatory processes, while also allowing for contradictions and points of resistance/insurgence. It also suggests that acts of identification, rather than just being superficial attempts to be or understand something which we are not, are deep processes which can revolutionize how we see the world.

I am using the concept of identity as the accumulation of social, cultural, historical and spatial references by which persons (including characters) delineate who they are. Identity is not understood as static but, rather, as constantly changing and “rarely identical to itself but instead [has] multiple and sometimes contradictory” (Fuss 1989, 98). Identity, in this sense, is intimately tied to processes of identification by which the subject makes contact with others throughout her or his life, in the real or through the simulations of performance. Diamond (1997) writes that “the subject’s identity is no more, or less, than the accumulated history of her identifications” (111) and Pellegrini (1997), making the link to mediation more explicit, elaborates: “ “identity” re-presents the history of a subject’s identifications and desires for others (real and imagined)” (68).

I am interested in how character identities are produced for consumption and what images they provide as possible points of identification both inside and outside the televisual mediascape. The characters of television ‘have’ identities (and ‘do’ identities), complex concoctions that blend actor, dialogue and action in order to present a simulation of an actual living person with a context and history that exceeds the television text itself. McRobbie’s (1994) insistence on the continued importance and relevance of identity to cultural theory resonates with this work. She writes:

Identity could be seen as dragging cultural studies into the 1990s by acting as a kind of guide to how people see themselves, not as class subjects, not as psychoanalytical subjects, not as subjects of ideology, not as textual subjects, but as active agents whose sense of self is projected on to and expressed in an expansive range of cultural practices, including texts, images and commodities (58).

The identity of character, that matrix of text, image and narrative, is a performance that resonates both on and off the screen through identification.

Jennifer Devere Brody (1995) writes of performance artist Papo Colo that “[H]is philosophy exposed the fact that the active process of proclaiming one's identity requires (false) separation: one must first draw a line between the self and other and artificially mark an impossible boundary.” She then quotes him as saying that “in reality we are all so mixed up, not only Latinos, Blacks, but Russians, Italians, and Irish, that to have an identity is like having a fake passport.” She continues by writing that “[T]echnically he is right; however, one is still required to carry such identifications, even as one strives to deconstruct it by paying attention to the historicity of such “identities” ” (154-55). As Devere Brody seems to suggest, despite the impossibility of determining fixed and unified identifications, it remains necessary to maintain some sort of coherent identity in order to define oneself in a visual culture intent on creating a human taxonomy of difference. Further, the visual culture at large, especially mass culture, repeatedly reinforces the necessity of these identifications (or (mis)identifications) by delineating a visual culture in which difference is often virtually absent. This can be tied to my discussion of the stereotype in chapter two, stereotypes also reflect a desire for the performance of homogeneity in visual culture, like the image of the melting pot, and not unlike Colo's claims. My study of performance, and the identificatory snares it lays, attempts to reaffirm difference - and the possibility of difference as an identificatory space - even in those mediatized spaces where it is so often absent.

#### MEDIATED PERFORMANCE

As I have been discussing, theories of performance offer an innovative method for exploring the insurgent potential of mediated texts. And yet television, which eclipses all other media in terms of its scope, has been left completely untheorized within the realm of performance. It is time to begin to fill this gap by developing ways to apply theories of performance and performativity to the study of television. It is a question of expanding existing

theory, rethinking it, but also of opening its methods to include studies of mediated performance. Of prime importance is to demonstrate how mediated performance will turn the theoretical focus away from the modernist sense of liveness as conditional on physical presence towards a more postmodern conception of fluid space/time in which the live moment has always already happened and is, conversely, always about to (re)occur.

The intersection of performance and television, of theory and text, of narrative and visuality, can best be mobilized by engaging in a rigorous examination of a television text. For this endeavor I will study a contemporary prime-time program which has been developed to attract a youth audience. A multi-layered reading will demonstrate how issues are dealt with and prescribed by the narrative. Through this work, a new way of looking at performance and performativity will be described, one which embraces the difference of the mass media and the possibility for insurgence which exists within it. This theory of mediated performances will focus on the interplay of hegemonic and insurgent moments at work within the television text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. While there are several prime-time dramas which are oriented towards the production of youth, focusing on one will allow for a more in-depth analysis of this show's particular features, its particular performativity, and the particular kinds of bodies it portrays. Other, similar shows will be drawn on as illustrations and there is certainly work to be done regarding what is reiterated or performed across a number of intertextually linked shows and extra-textually linked events. However, I see this type of analysis as further work to be done rather than the focus of this particular project. At the crossroads of performance and television is a potential space for an enormous amount of critical research into contemporary visual culture. What I am doing is an inter(post?)disciplinary inquiry into the performance of youth in the realm of television and the mediascape. My hope is that the mapping of one small area of mainstream programming will enable the exposure of both the insurgent potential and the hegemonic principles of contemporary television performances.

In the following chapters, this thesis will examine *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* with the aim of excavating televisual bodies and communities (spaces) as they perform (and exclude) axes of difference. Performances of difference are



examined by studying categories constructed through the text itself: Buffy, Vampires, Friendship, Love and Sunnydale. I do this through a critical and in-depth analysis of performances within the textual matrix of the television program selected for study and while I recognize that this could be a potentially endless terrain of inquiry, I believe that by focusing on a single text I am able to elucidate how axes of difference within television may be interpreted through the lens of performance. The composite theory described in chapters three and four are used to illuminate the multiplicity of discourses which are at work in television, a medium whose texts are, conversely, often seen as being unified and uni-dimensional.

*Mediated performance as practice*

At this point it is necessary to begin to explain what a mediated performance theory will look like, what it will do in practice. I have been trying to build this theory for several years now and have made some excursions into this methodology in smaller pieces of work. In a 1998 article on the adolescent drama *My So-Called Life* (1998) I wrote that television often constructs bodies which belie their origins. In that case, I referred to how a beautiful young actress (Claire Danes) was continually performed within that text as an 'average' looking teenaged girl. Danes' internal (life) and external (screen) performances and their contradictions acted performatively to instruct the viewer that even the most average televisual body is a beauty beyond the purview of most viewers. In an earlier article (1996/97) I examined the performance of the character of the female graduate student in prime-time television. In that essay I suggested that such performances have tended to be hegemonically inscribed: "textual metaphors... perform the body of the female graduate student: madness, perversity, loneliness, isolation, exclusion, barrenness, and so forth" (113). Conversely, the very fact that this type of character is now written into television texts suggests the possibility of expansion for television performances.

In a forthcoming article I have focused on performances of (mis)education in the world of *Beverly Hills, 90210*. I wrote then that "(Mis)education is the process by which images attempt to concretize themselves into everyday life. It is the irrevocable problematic in the distance between the screen and the self. It

is how the tropes of gender, race, class, age, ability, location, beauty and morality are performed through hegemonic and (sometimes) transgressive televisual discourses" (3). The same is true of this study. In that context, I used (mis)education as an appendage to performance; one that mitigates the possibility of performativity. (Mis)education is the always present potential for the text to have a hidden agenda, whether a hegemonic or insurgent one. The goal of this analysis is to ferret out textual performances that occur at the most superficial levels and hidden depths of television texts.

This work takes the ideas from my previous research to a higher level by focusing, in a much more in-depth fashion, on a text and its relevant performances; by breaking up the text into its major components and studying how difference is performed by them. It is no longer a question of simply following along the particular axes of difference (i.e. by focusing on class, gender, race, etc. or a combination of them) but, rather, of focusing on a set of textual performances through which many differences are mobilized or omitted. For example, in chapter five I will be excavating the characterology which goes into the creation of Buffy Summers. Buffy performs various axes of difference, some hegemonic and others insurgent. Superficially, Buffy is a beautiful white woman, thin, well-dressed, young, suburban, etc. But she also performs a gender breakdown as she displays incredible physical strength and a sense of her sexual self that has heretofore been reserved only for her male television counterparts. Buffy as character is iconic; she stands in for the upsurge in adolescent, feminine power in the current market – young women as the next big market - and the possibilities for girls in the future. Buffy's performance moments mark the textual links between the diegetic space, the textual landscape and the real world.

#### PERFORMANCE, TRANSGRESSION, RESISTANCE AND INSURGENCE

The notion of transgression has been deemed an outdated aspect of political art in favor of the notion of resistance (Foster cited in Auslander 1997, 60). But within this thesis I demonstrate that television does have the potential to displace dualities usually associated with art and performance, something which

has traditionally been associated with the transgressive. The critique of television, by viewer and theorist does offer the potential for resistance, although the everyday performances of the television viewer/critic, resisting hegemonic structures of representation deployed by the television medium, may create personal acts of transgression as well.<sup>97</sup> The study of television at its intersection with performance may not offer the potential for a new understanding of television as ART, but may instead offer a way of acknowledging that the medium itself can be both resistant and transgressive (also resisted and transgressed) in the spontaneous and mediated performances of viewer and text.

Perhaps part of the problem with the terms transgression and resistance is their long and somewhat problematic histories within studies of performance, media and other disciplines as well. Therefore I have chosen, in lieu of these somewhat overused concepts, the term *insurgence*, meaning insurrection or the opposition of authority. I believe that *insurgence* offers the best of both the other, slightly worn terms. It suggests, like resistance, the possibility of forming oppositional discourses and strategies which run counter to or act to deconstruct more hegemonic ones. And like the perhaps more transgressive, *transgressive*, it illuminates not only the possibilities of moving beyond what is currently acceptable or 'seeable,' but also what lies beyond them, just slightly out of sight. The quest becomes, then, not only to ferret out the hegemonic structures within the text which would reaffirm arcane (though still present) hierarchies and construct spatial boundaries based on difference, but also to follow the less obvious, but equally intriguing possibility that the text erupts in moments of *insurgence* which pave the way for the deconstruction and reconfiguration of those same hierarchies and boundaries.

In my reading of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* I am looking for those moments of *insurgence* in the text which I understand to be linked to the performance of difference. It is, as de Lauretis (1984) writes: "to oppose the simply totalizing closure of final statements... to seek out contradictions, heterogeneity, ruptures in the fabric of representation so thinly stretched - if powerful - to contain excess, division, difference, resistance; to open up critical spaces in the seamless

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<sup>97</sup>These may be seen as mundane acts, although I would argue, with McRobbie (1994) that "to opt for the superficial can be a deliberate political strategy" (4).

narrative space constructed by dominant cinema [media] *and* by dominant discourse" (29).<sup>98</sup> Televisual spaces are even more illusive than those of the cinema because their longevity and location in both the domestic and public spheres seem to offer a window into a space which is no less accessible than that of a photograph in the family album. It is this refracted vision of reality that offers both the most excessive containment of difference and, equally, the most radical potential for insurgency. The study of insurgency in performance has, up to now, been primarily restricted to the obvious margins: avant-guard film, performance art, off-off-off Broadway theater, and the like. But insurgent performances also lurk within the more well trodden halls of mainstream television.

#### IMPLICATIONS OF A MEDIATED PERFORMANCE - EPILOGUE

Expanding theories of performance and performativity will force an engagement with contemporary mediums, including the mass media and the mainstream. This will, hopefully, open up theory to include a broader range of projects and audiences; especially those who may not have an interest in or access to the fringe or avant-guard, but who are still interested in performance. The interdisciplinary lenses at work in this project will insist that performance theories continue to critically engage with axes of difference, hegemonic structures, histories and mythologies, surfaces and depths, localities and temporalities. While a lot has been written about television, rigorous critique has often found only a marginal place in academia. As television becomes more and more deeply intertwined with the daily lives of billions of people, the more important these critiques are going to become. Theories of performance and performativity will provide an innovative approach to such a project.

Television may prove a formidable opponent for study, precisely because there is so much of it, so many components, such rapid transformations. Each study of text widens our collective understanding of how television performances are constructed and their potential to mobilize performative acts. The study of textual performance is crucial to understanding how television

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<sup>98</sup>Emphasis in the original.

works in the postmodern world, the boundaries it erects to community inclusion, the way it shows difference and which differences it shows, and the often overlooked possibilities for insurgence that lie within its texts. But that is only one of the areas of mediated performance which need to be studied in the future. First, there are the very different types of television performances which occur in different types of texts which should be studied for their differences and similarities. Second, the intertextual nature of contemporary media should be examined for performances which occur across texts. Finally, there is the need for ethnographic work in the area of performance and performativity, an area that is as neglected as the study of mediated performance. Ethnographic studies in performance would examine how the performativity of media acts on the bodies of viewers by understanding what we take out of television, be it hairstyles, behavior, education, politics, etc. Eventually, the comprehensive study of all these areas in one work will provide the most radical and inventive framework for television research in the millennium and open a road for the study of new technologies as well.

In the next section I will be focusing on the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its multi-layered performances. It is my intention to show that despite television's mediation and the distance this implies for its dissemination, it remains a medium of extraordinary complexity and diversity in performance. That it can be as important to performance theory as theater or speech will, I hope, become clear as the work unfolds to demonstrate the rich performances that structure the text both hegemonically and insurgently.

## CHAPTER FIVE - PERFORMING BUFFY

"Yes. Date and shop and hang out and go to school and save the world from unspeakable demons...you know, girl stuff." (Buffy Summers)

### FROM SWANSON TO GELLER - REVAMPING BUFFY

Kristy Swanson – the movie Buffy – was as Californian as sea salt, sunshine and palm-lined boulevards. She was blond with just a hint of a tan, her body lithe and athletic from cheerleading. Replete with valley speak, a mall fetish, absent parents, android friends and a jock boyfriend, Swanson's Buffy represented the culmination of the media's portrayal of the nineteen eighties – shifting into the nineties – the upper-middle-class, Californian teenaged girl. In her maladroit transition to Slayer, Swanson's Buffy tries valiantly to hold onto her pom-poms, but finds that saving the world alienates her from her social caste (though allowing her to maintain a keen fashion sense). Those things that mark Buffy's place in the world: her ability to consume and her ability to blend effortlessly into Hollywood's vision of sameness, are rendered ambivalent by her ascension into her prophetic role.<sup>99</sup> Hers is a true performance of femininity in crisis. The crisis comes from the breakdown in her mimetic ability – her ability to mime the actions necessary to mark herself as the same – and it occurs not at the level of flesh, but the level of action and affiliation, both of which are crucial to her continued performance of Buffy the Prom Queen. Brinks (1995) writes that "[M]imesis takes desire to a place where being and wanting become indistinguishable" (7). Swanson's Buffy's initial mimesis of teen pop icon is embedded in her inability to see her own conflation with both consumption and commodification.<sup>100</sup> The unmaking of her mimesis (to borrow from Diamond's,

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<sup>99</sup>This is most vividly depicted in the scene (from the movie) where The Watcher (Merrick, played admirably by Donald Sutherland) asks Buffy about a mole which is the distinguishing mark of The Slayer and she tells him she has had it removed. On another tack, Buffy's exit from the cult of popularity replicates the *Heathers* maxim that popularity is like the ocean, when one person disappears from the pool another rapidly takes her place. So Buffy's breaking with the codes of popularity quickly necessitate her exclusion from its borders.

<sup>100</sup>Later in the scene discussed in the previous footnote Buffy tells Merrick that though she has not really thought about the future she thinks that she might enjoy a career as a buyer. Though unsure of what exactly she would like to buy, it is the act of buying that

1996 title) demonstrates that, henceforth, she will be consistently marked as different despite the fact that she has so little changed. Her travesty is awareness and the naive rejection of what she previously held so dear: her purchasing power, her commodity value and her unmediated inclusiveness.

Buffy's transition from prom queen to Slayer seems to point to the unstable ground of sameness, indicating that the constantly shifting boundaries of inclusion are, at best, tenuous. Buffy's transition from sameness to difference suggests that mimesis is related to Riviere's (1986) notion of masquerade wherein the mask of extreme femininity stands as protection for what lies beneath. Difference though, is more often performed through physical transformation, a trope familiar from fairy tales.<sup>101</sup> In Buffy's case, it is not the exterior but the interior that undergoes radical transformation. Rather than being aligned with Irigaray's notion of femininity as "mimesis imposed" (in Diamond 1997, 172) Buffy's transformation signals a performance of mimesis exposed; her sameness becomes arbitrary, her body and beauty and class position shown to be as cultivated as that of the action hero which she will become (Tasker 1993). In the climactic scene of the movie, Buffy shows up at the school dance in full virginal regalia - white prom dress and matching white dock-martin boots - to kick some vampire butt. In this final homage to horror, Buffy is neither mimesis imposed nor mimesis exposed, but mimesis as mockery, that is, she cannot be fixed.

Paying tribute to eighties kinder-hero John Hughes (in *Pretty in Pink*) Buffy's dance night is saved by the appearance of a spiffed up lower-class Pike (Luke Perry), sporting a leather jacket instead of a tuxedo.<sup>102</sup> The mayhem that ensues is *Carrie* meets *Evil Dead II* with a postmodern bent. It is ultimately action

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appeals to her. Indeed, much of the early part of the movie centers on consumption (typified by scenes at the mall) and the commodification/fetishization of Buffy and her friends. It is the move from this narrative to a rejection of it that marks one of the major transitions of the film.

<sup>101</sup>In the fairy tale, transformations are heavily embedded in gender binaries. Most often it is beautiful queens within whom lurk evil witches (i.e. Snow White); ugly, animalistic forms which hide handsome princes (i.e. The Frog Prince). Class transitions (i.e. Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty) usually concern beautiful girls who are freed from oppression through the love of a prince who restores them to their rightful social status. There are, of course, exceptions, in Blue Beard and Puss-in-Boots for instance, but the gender binary often adheres to the form described above.

<sup>102</sup>Again in true *Heathers* fashion, her boyfriend has thrown her over from one of her clones.

masked as comedy with extreme self-referentiality and a base-line discourse of the refutation of adolescent (high school) hierarchies. What Buffy mocks is the entirety of her original mimetic self; the self that is constantly for sale in glossies, the self that is supposed to be desired. But mockery does not quite represent rejection and Buffy continues to maintain that it is her fashionability that will finally win the day. In the concluding scene Buffy and Pike drive off on his motorcycle through the back alleys of a very urban Los Angeles. He drives... she wears his leather jacket.<sup>103</sup> The symbolism of this may be obvious, Buffy leaving behind the structures of mimesis, which have, up to that point, continued to be the foundation of her narrative and her performances. Grosz (1995) describes how “[M]imesis is particularly significant in outlining the ways in which the relations between an organism and its environment are blurred and confused - the way in which its environment is not clearly distinct from the organism but is an active component of its identity” (88). Buffy is just such a product of her environment, of the California sun, the class and race hierarchies of the West and especially of the intertextual matrix of media moments which she and her fellow travelers incessantly quote and mimic.<sup>104</sup> The breakdown in Buffy's ability to successfully mimic her environment first makes her painfully aware of her lack of fit (her loss of both innocence and camouflage) and, second, makes it imperative for her to leave. The destruction of mimetic cohesion comes when Buffy is revealed as The Slayer, which makes it impossible for her previous performances to remain intact; they must shift in all directions, including spatially. Pushing Buffy to the end of the film's narrative, to the edge of the screen as it were, leaves room for her reemergence, in more subversive form, in the equally mimetic body of Sarah Michelle Geller, television's Buffy.

The process by which Swanson's Buffy morphs into Geller's Buffy replicates doubleness through separation, like a transparent overlay in a

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<sup>103</sup>As the credits role, a television screen on which the nightly news is covering the carnage at Emory High School dominates the screen. Andy (Andrew Lowery) describes the vampires and suggests that they were Young Republicans. This transference of conservatism is taken up in a more central and comprehensive fashion in the television series.

<sup>104</sup>My personal favorite is from vampire Benny (then unknown David Arquette) who, during the dance debacle says to his old friend Pike that Buffy is: “Meat for the beast.” This is a direct quote from Clive Barker's (1990) *Night Breed*, one of my favorites of the



textbook. In the transition from film to television, the doubling of Buffy from Swanson to Geller, one crucial aspect is absent. There is little or no obvious visual or character similarity between the first and the second Buffy. Except for their names and their roles (The Slayer), the bond that usually binds different reworkings of a text together are virtually absent.<sup>105</sup> There is little left of Swanson in Geller's Buffy, except perhaps for her plaintive desire for keen footwear and periodic reminiscences of a simpler life in the past. Where Swanson expresses mimetically a somewhat strangled and decidedly specific version of sameness, Geller redresses this sameness by splitting it into difference. The Buffy who moved to Sunnydale, in fact, has completely rejected the possibility of mimicking her predecessor, and to complete their differentiation she has gone amnesiac about Pike, Merrick, Lothos, and just about everyone else who inhabited the film. This again is mimesis as mockery in which the text mocks its former self, exposing its lack of fit by rejecting even the possibility of continuity.

The Buffy that we rediscover in 1996 has undergone enormous changes. She is a pared-down version of the movie Buffy, darker-haired, petite and more slender, tougher. She has lost her valley-speak in favor of the witty repartee that characterizes so much of the teenage mediascape in the late nineties. She is also quieter, more sophisticated and yet more of a suburban teen. It is as though the transition from large to small screen necessitated a paradigm shift. Though she continues to pine for her old life at times, her mimetic prowess is limited primarily to bodily structures, while the global fit and mall-lust are gone.<sup>106</sup>

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horror genre.

<sup>105</sup>Usually, when movies are remade or are made into television series, there is an attempt to make a strong mimetic link between the original characters and those who come after them. A good example is the film *Clueless* which kept three of its five original cast members for the television series. An actress who bore her a very strong resemblance quickly filled the title role which was vacated by Alicia Silverstone. It is also true of as disparate movies turned television series (and vice-versa) as *M\*A\*S\*H\**, *The Odd Couple*, *Lois and Clark*, *Star Trek*... Even where there are physical discrepancies between the actors in each medium (it could be argued that, for example, Donald Sutherland and Alan Alda (as Hockeye Pierce) do not look anything alike) usually there is continuity, or mimesis, that insists on a great deal of continuity between the original performances and the new ones.

<sup>106</sup>There continues to be an ardent interest in shopping and footwear, but there does not seem to even be a mall in Sunnydale, or at least, it is not part of the representational space

Phelan (1997) writes that: “[W]ithin the arc of resemblance and mimesis that perspective inaugurates, the stand-in stands for a real that, like God and the Other, forever eludes us. The point is not so much to “find” the Other, but rather to play the drama in such a way that the stand-ins come to reveal that *the kernel of the drama of the Other is that the Other is always a stand-in*” (33).<sup>107</sup> What Phelan seems to say is that Otherness itself (and by connection sameness) is always the stand-in for another, Other. Phelan's Other always exists elsewhere. In the transitional moment when Swanson disappears from Los Angeles, she reappears as both Other and elsewhere in the form of Geller and suburban Sunnydale. Somehow, during the two-hour drive from LA to Sunnydale, Buffy has come to be the mimetic stand-in for differences that are, on the surface, as elusive as ever.

The transition from big to small screen Buffy might be described as a kind of “mimetic rivalry” (Russo 1994, 65), which I take to mean a rivalry between the possibilities of mimesis and the politics of difference. The television text refutes the obvious route of recreating the film in any straightforward way and instead rewrites its earlier self to allow for a more dramatic (if continually problematic) depiction of difference. Geller's Buffy does what Swanson's could only intimate: expose the “mimetic phallacy” of sameness (Kaufmann 1998, 263). Kaufmann's example stems from a study of Bateman, the central character of Brett Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, which was recently made into a major motion picture. Bateman is a serial killer, a Wall Street broker with a trust fund.<sup>108</sup> His ability to prey on others and elude capture rests, at least in part, on his ability to blend in so well with his surroundings. He has, in fact, made it his life's study. He performs the mimesis better than those he attempts to mimic and it is only through his own rigid self-analysis that the mimicry is exposed. He performs Lacan's second level of mimesis which Silverman (1992) describes as “presumably fully available only to the subject capable of acknowledging the split between its “being” and its “semblance,” or, to put the matter somewhat differently, between “being” and its specular image” (149). Bateman is fully

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of the story.

<sup>107</sup>Emphases in the original.

<sup>108</sup>Many critics, including Kaufmann have suggested that Bateman is not, in fact, a serial killer and that the extremely violent episodes he describes over the course of the novel are actually fantasies. However, they are startlingly real to Bateman, as to the reader.

aware of both his mimesis and chameleon adeptness. Whereas Swanson's Buffy embodies mimesis' first level which "hinges less upon the parody or deformation than upon the passive duplication of a preexisting image" (Ibid.), the televisual Buffy, like Bateman, uses her memories of this mimetic sameness to work at its recreation in her new arena. Her performance is, however, mitigated by this insight as she no longer mimes sameness indiscriminately but uses it as a mask. Buffy's mimetic performances are a fallacy because she only appears to embody conventional femininity; they are counter, because they provide a critique of the need to embody those ideals in the first place. Swanson's Buffy was always in the spotlight as popular girl and prom queen, and while that legacy is shared by Geller's Buffy, she can no longer keep up the charade even though she often pines for it. Buffy remains beautiful, tiny, groomed, immaculately dressed and shod; her lip-gloss is always glistening and she still bats her eyelashes and pouts as well as any girlie-girl ever did. But, as Diamond (1997) reminds: "The body is never fully subsumed in impersonation. Experience is never captured in the words and gesture we use to speak it" (180). The televisual culture in which Buffy performs necessitates that she at least try and impersonate her former self, though she can never be fully successful. Her fundamental difference always performs in excess of the superficial mimesis of sameness.

#### THE MIMETICS OF SAMENESS: THE PROM QUEEN SLAYER

While difference has been a category preoccupying critics in all manner of disciplines, sameness has tended to be overlooked. This is somewhat perplexing as the terms are so intrinsically linked. Like difference, sameness is a socially constructed category, shifting radically with even the smallest movements of time and space, contingent on an endless number of variables. The time and space which are the subject of this study are, first, the mediascape that dictates which bodies are acceptable for televisual display. Second, the space of contemporary, suburban California performed through the televisual lens. Taken together they offer a very specific vision of sameness, one that is ubiquitous in media displays. The corporeal body is crucial here, inscribed

across the flesh of television actors whose bodies tend to be - along their most important axes - beautiful, young, able-bodied, white and heterosexual.

But how does sameness operate and why is it important? Its importance lies in the enforcement of specific codes of visual culture to which actor and character must conform. On the surface this sameness seems to operate through processes similar to those of identification. As Diamond (1997) explains:

Identity. Identification. Sharing the Latin root, *idem*, for 'same,' ... Indeed all identity claims are propped on the hierarchical structure of classical mimesis: identity is imagined to be the truthful origin or model that grounds the subject, shapes the subject, and endows her with a continuous sense of self-sameness or being... Identification, on the other hand, is a passionate mimesis, a fantasy assimilation not locatable in time or responsive to political ethics. Identifications can only be 'recognized' and narrated from a temporal distance... Drawing another into oneself projecting oneself onto another, identification *creates* sameness not with the self but another; you are (like) me, I am (like) you (106).<sup>109</sup>

Identification, in other words, is something of a bridge between sameness and difference. While on one level identification may be sameness, it is, more likely, the desire for sameness which is actually the reminder of difference. This dialectic is at work within the figure of Buffy who seems, superficially, to personify sameness but actually inculcates difference. What Diamond suggests is important because it marks the lines of difference within Buffy herself. Identity, that moniker of sameness, is what marks Buffy's difference, her 'true' identity as The Slayer. The Other that is subsumed within that self, the point of identification which remains within her and which she often desires to reclaim: her Othered self is that ubiquitous persona of American teen cosmology, the prom queen. Buffy's performance of sameness is, just as Diamond states, the desire for others to see her as 'the same.'

But Buffy's dialectic of sameness and difference is never static, the two are always fighting to be at the fore. And though difference seems most often to win the day, the specter of sameness is always equally present, especially to Buffy herself. In "Homecoming," when Buffy is informed that she will not even be

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<sup>109</sup>Emphases in the original.

getting one picture in the yearbook because Cordelia has “forgotten” to remind her, Buffy decides to run against her for Homecoming Queen:

- Buffy: Oh yeah, campaigning, rough gig.  
 Cordelia: What would you know about it? Just because you were Guacamole Queen when you were three doesn't mean you understand how this works.  
 Buffy: Obviously it involves handing out entirely lame flyers.  
 Cordelia: No. It involves being part of this school and having actual friends. Now, if it was about monsters, blood and innards, then you'd be a shoo-in. I'd like to see you try and win the crown.  
 Buffy: You would?  
 Cordelia: Hah.  
 Buffy: You will.  
 Cordelia: What does that mean?  
 Buffy: I'm gonna show you how it's done. I'm gonna to run for Homecoming Queen and I'm going to win.  
 Cordelia: This is starting to be sad.  
 Buffy: Sorry Cordy, but you have no idea who you're messing with.  
 Cordelia: What, The Slayer?  
 Buffy: I'm not talking about The Slayer. I'm talking about Buffy. You've awakened the prom queen within...And that crown is going to be mine.

This exchange highlights Buffy's desire for sameness as well as for recognition. Despite Buffy's increasing acceptance of the space of difference she occupies as The Slayer, she cannot completely let go of the desire for her sameness (as well as her difference) to be recognized. The knowledge that she continues to carry with her those physical attributes that measure sameness in its most perfect guise insures that she will never be able to fully abandon either persona.

One of the most important areas in which Buffy's performance exceeds her mimetics of sameness is in the disruption of traditional gender hierarchies. What then can be made of Buffy's participation in parochial, patriarchal visual culture, which would have her move ontologically to the level of reductive femininity when she, simultaneously, inhabits another level, apparently in opposition to the first. By inscribing her body very clearly within the boundaries of the norms of femininity, Buffy enters the imagination as the prom queen she once was. But as she accedes to her role as The Slayer that boundary is breached, as she becomes the personification of both the hunter and protector of sanctified, social spaces. It

is in her performance of The Slayer that Buffy rejects participation in the femininity she mimes so well. Moi (1985) writes: "One way of disrupting patriarchal logic is through mimeticism, or the mimicry of male discourse" (139). Buffy does this in two ways, which are, of course, implicated in one another. First, Buffy's performance employs the masquerade in the manner already discussed, earlier in this chapter, in relation to the work of Riviere (1986). Buffy's excessive visual coding as white and feminine - her tiny tank tops with the bra strap always showing, her flawlessly made-up pout and blonde-streaked hair, her talent for accessorising - works counter-intuitively to disrupt the gender binary it seems to entrench. Buffy's excessive visual femininity stands in stark contrast to her physical prowess, independence and control. On the other hand, Buffy does not allow this binary to remain unchallenged and often yearns to just do 'girlie stuff.' The performance that she mimes so well is itself the miming of a desire to return to an uncultivated sameness which will forever elude her. Buffy continues to espouse a desire for simpler times, with more and consistent gender binaries and social hierarchies, all of which seem to suggest a conservatism, a nostalgia for order and knowing your place. However, she also comes to not only accept but also to desire the insurgent gender position she has taken up.

This mimesis of insurgence, in which the performance is its own disruptive critique, might be understood, in Irigaray's words, as:

'the third meaning of mimesis,' which is 'different as a positivity, a joyful reappropriation of attributes of the other that is not in any way confused with a mere reversal of the existing phallogocentric distribution of power.' This mimesis 'lies beyond masquerade and mimecry' and signifies 'an emergence of the feminine... from [the specular patriarchal] femininity within which it lies buried' (in Diamond 1997, 174).

This is actually a pretty accurate analysis of what happens within this text. The prom queen does, in fact, lay buried within The Slayer. The obvious femininity that is Buffy's surface display is constantly pulled back to reveal an equally spec[tac]ular femininity that takes its strength not only from miming a certain assumed maleness, but from a mockery of the belief that strength could ever have been thought of as exclusively masculine in the first place. When Buffy lays flat every opponent she comes into contact with she recodes her independence,

assertiveness and physical strength as truly belonging to the visual culture of the feminine. What Buffy exposes is a virile femininity, one whose superficial frailty problematizes, and equally rejoices in, an association of female virility with the grotesque or freakish.<sup>110</sup> Like the action heroines Tasker (1993) discusses in her book, Buffy's character is mobilized through the distortion of gender hierarchies. Unlike them, Buffy's action is not expressed through muscle but through speed, strength and internal change. She seems fearless, with none of the anxiety usually associated with the feminine. Despite her retention of a strictly coded feminine exterior, it remains problematic to suggest that this dispels her potential as an icon of perverse femininity.

Perversion, as Phelan (1997) describes it is, rather than a rejection of norms, a challenge to them. She writes: "Perversion is the disavowal of singular perspective in favor of mutative, transforming identifications. Identifications that penetrate the skin-ego and cause it to turn away from itself, cause it to doubt its own boundaries and limits, constitute what we might call the theater of perversions" (39). The self-reflection that appears intrinsic in this delineation of perversion refutes the possibility of a simplistic, narcissistic identification. The erosion of boundaries is reflected in Buffy's perverse gender performance, by her failure to live within the bounded spaces and actions deemed feminine. The process that Phelan (1997) calls conversion of Other to Same, that Freud calls fetishization and Lacan calls metaphor are rejected because Buffy cannot be converted (6). Already living in the perverse liminality between same and Other, Buffy as either fetish or metaphor is never complete. Buffy's perversion lies in her refusal of the chaotic – yet ordered – system in which she lives. What she shares with other perverse heroines is an insistence of taking on roles traditionally associated with men. This is mental-drag rather than the usual visual kind, as she takes on not masculine appearances but actions.

Perversion though, has usually been discussed in relation to 'deviant' sexuality. In fact, in the index of *Cruising the Performative* (Case, Brett and Foster

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<sup>110</sup>There is tendency to view these terms - freak, grotesque - and the like - uncanny, witch, hysteric - as inherently negative. But, as will be discussed throughout these chapters (especially chapters six and seven), there is a strong argument for the reappropriation of these terms and the liminal borders they haunt.

1995) the citation reads: “perversion, 40. *See also queers.*”<sup>111</sup> Nadeau (1995) writes that by “regulating the scene of perversion through rules, laws and moral codes, societies institute a political control over what constitutes the space of representation [for sexual identities]” (214). This tendency to associate perversion with sexuality can be attributed, at least in part, to Sigmund Freud and his extensive work on the polymorphous perversity of children (a phrase which has recently been reappropriated by theorists), problematic object-choice and sexual fetishism (Bruzzi 1997). But perversion actually extends much further and can be associated with any transgression of firmly entrenched boundaries. Buffy's perversion lies not in her rejection of the obvious codes of femininity or heterosexuality, but in her more active performances as The Slayer. Somehow, whenever Buffy moves into her active role she moves from somewhat rebellious adolescent to perverse *tour-de-force*. But critically aware that her performance is being read as perverse (as when she throws a very large football player up against some lockers) Buffy tries to act as if in opposition to her perversity. Her excessive femininity can thus be read as an attempt to reinsert herself into a discourse which runs in opposition to that of perversity.

What is problematic about Buffy's constant desire for a normative femininity is its - and her - yearning to make the internal and external images of self come into alignment. That is, Buffy cannot give up her ambivalent pining for the internal femininity she seems to feel she has had to give up in order to become The Slayer. This is resonant with Davies (1990) work on the problem of desire. The mimesis which participates in what it mimes might be thought of as a ‘mimesis of nostalgia.’ Buffy cannot quite give up her prom queen persona, she cannot yet leave behind her desire to be perky and popular, to date football players and be, finally, carefree and mall-bound. Pike says to Buffy (in the movie): “You're not like other girls,” and Buffy, in the end, cannot return to sameness but can only mime it, nostalgically, from a distance. She begins to manifest what Diamond (1997) describes as:

A feminist mimesis, if there is such a thing, would take the relation to the real as productive, not referential, geared to change, not to reproducing the same. It would explore the tendency to tyrannical

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<sup>111</sup>Emphasis in the original.



modeling (subjective/ideological projections masquerading as universal truths), even in its own operations. Finally, it would clarify the humanist sedi-mentation in the concept as a means of releasing the historical particularity and transgressive corporeality of the *mimos* (xvi).<sup>112</sup>

Buffy's mimetic narrative of femininity and action mark a critical break between the female body that lives sameness and that which lives difference, despite the necessary ambivalence that the latter implies.

#### ICONICITY: THE BODY THAT MATTERS

Freedman (1990) insists that within the narrative of performance, "identity is destiny" (59). But which is Buffy's identity - the pretty-girl facade or the action hero? The question may be unnecessary because both identities live, potentially, within the same space. But the problematic is well expressed by Diamond (1997) who writes: "Whereas identity operates through a logic of exclusion - my being or conscious affirms its self-sameness by *not being* you - identification is trespass, denying the other's difference by assuming her behavior, taking her place, killing her off" (107).<sup>113</sup> Buffy operates through the logic of the double, making room for both the consolidation of identity and the diffusion of identification to occur within the text. What occurs is a paradox that exists within Buffy herself: The Slayer identifies with the prom queen though the identity eludes her, but the prom queen could not identify with The Slayer and is thus so subsumed she seems only to appear in the most fragmentary and residual of ways: the tilt of the head, a flirtatious line delivery, an impulse to shop... To take Diamond's analysis through to its conclusion, however, is to show that this is no simple process. Buffy's identity as the prom queen was, of necessity, predicated on the exclusion of almost everyone outside of her age, class and aesthetics. When she became The Slayer, Buffy was positioned where she both was and was not herself. Put another way, while the prom queen cannot identify with The Slayer, The Slayer not only identifies with the prom queen but also often covets her, not only for what she represents but also for what she elides. As Buffy explains to

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<sup>112</sup>Emphasis in the original.

<sup>113</sup>Emphases in the original.

Cordelia in "Homecoming," she wants to be Homecoming Queen as "proof that I was chosen for something other than this... beside, I look great in a tiara." There is trespass here, as well as humour and parody, but The Slayer cannot assume the behavior of the prom queen, she can only take her place in the most superficial ways. The prom queen never dies; she, rather, becomes the icon of unfulfilled desires.

But what is the icon? In theory icons have tended to be recognized as "signs that resemble what they denote" (Childers and Hentzi 1995, 143). As theories of the icon have grown more complex they have come to include "a[n] consideration of the image as an ideologically informed and informing entity - one that relies upon its social context for its force, even as it shapes that context" (Ibid., 145). As has been argued in innumerable pages of theory, television provides both the space and context for the creation of icons, both in the form of living beings (who come to stand in for wealth, beauty, power, luxury, etc.) and two-dimensional characters who often come to seem more real than the stars who portray them.<sup>114</sup> The icon itself - in its enormity, refusal to stay within boundaries and insistence on garnering the look - is also somehow perverse. The icon and perversity share a tendency to always move toward the excessive, extreme and potentially insurgent. The icon within performance differs from the icon in art: because although it is constructed it also has a certain life of its own. As Diamond (1997) writes: "In its conventional iconicity, theater laminates the body to character, but the body in historicization stands visibly and palpably separate from the 'being' of the actor as well as the role of the character, it is always insufficient and open" (52).<sup>115</sup> The character of Buffy (or, indeed, most television characters) can be read as having no space between actor and character and yet the larger than life image of the actress insists that her distance from the character never be forgotten. Both character and actor are open to the shifts of time, trendiness, etc. and so can never be thought of as completely bounded by either narrative or cultural display.

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<sup>114</sup>There are an almost infinite number of examples of this, from Rambo who has come to stand for vigilante American heroism to Beavis and Butthead recognizing a certain suburban slackerdom.

<sup>115</sup>Emphasis in the original.

If Buffy can be thought of in terms of iconicity, what sort of icon might she be? I would suggest that within the fragmentary, shifting, postmodern diegetic space of television, the icon itself takes on a fluid quality. de Lauretis (1984) writes that “the similarity of represented (images) to real objects - which is the burden of iconicity and the problem of any theory of pictorial or cinematic realism - is transferred from the representation to the viewer's judgment” (64). I believe that this becomes more complex as the viewer moves through more and more complicated levels of simulation. When a perfected virtual technology is developed, how will the representational and real be differentiated from one another? If the icon can be read only as an image, Buffy The Slayer is difficult to differentiate from Buffy the prom queen. Neither is of necessity more ‘real.’ Both The Slayer and the prom queen can be thought of as icons, making Buffy a doubled icon, or one which slides between possible readings and modes of representation. Saying that the icon is fluid refuses its status as a reified category and makes the icon itself a term which is ambivalent and open to both change and manipulation. On the surface Buffy is iconic of Hollywood beauty and conventional femininity: extreme thinness, conventional beauty, sexy attire, elision of all racial, ethnic, cultural traits, and so on and so on - as I am sure this litany is familiar to most people. But as The Slayer, Buffy also has enormous potential to perform as an insurgent icon of a radically revamped femininity that embraces strength, independence, loyalty, wit, sexuality and bravery. Perhaps it is to the viewer to choose which iconic facet of Buffy to see? My main argument, however, is that they are both there, that they exist side by side all the time, fighting to gain authority. And in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the insurgent icon wins out most often.

The most provocative aspect of the Buffy icon is her refusal to conform to conventional norms of gender in performance. The vision of dismantled gender hierarchies performed in a public forum as diffused as television gives it new meaning and power. As Senelick (1992) describes: “when [such] social behavior is put on stage, it takes on an iconic value, heightening and drawing attention to the conventional or overlooked aspects of the behavior. How [these] signs of gender are to be read may or may not be the authorized method, just as [their] transmission may or may not employ a body identical to the body

represented" (x). Buffy's heightened femininity in looks and dress work counter-intuitively to make her unladylike actions even more disruptive. Senelick later writes that: "gender roles performed by "performers" never merely replicate those in everyday life; they are more sharply defined and more emphatically presented, the inherent iconicity offering both an ideal and a critique" (xi). Likewise, we do not expect Buffy to exist in life, staking vampires, saving werewolves and battling demons to stave off the end of the world. What we do glean from her action is the possibility for young women to be strong and battle abuse, harassment and discrimination from those who would label and restrict them based on their gender.

But it necessary to always return to the body that performs both hegemonic and insurgent iconicity and the problematic that this dualism promotes, especially within the visual culture of television. The problem here is that televisual bodies do not merely choose to perform, they are selected in a very rigorous process. This process of selection means that the bodies which perform on television have already been approved of, already adhere to a constructed notion of bodily - and feminine - normalcy. All insurgent aspects of televisual performance must then be read within this more general, overarching hegemonic framework. Where there is mimicry there is always a body in performance and that body is itself subjected to a plethora of boundaries, with different bodies being differently hampered. This becomes clear in Pellegrini's (1997) reading of Sandra Bernhard's performance of her hit one-woman show/film *Without You I'm Nothing*. She reads Bernhard's performance as mobilizing differences between hetero/homosexuality, black/whiteness, Christian/Jew etc. But she acknowledges the problematic involved with Bernhard's production; with the position she already holds as bisexual, the facility with which the secular Jew can pass and, on the other hand, her more overt performance in blackface. Pellegrini notes the recognition within the performance of the impossibility of Bernhard as a Black woman. It is in the difficulty if not impossibility for certain bodies to perform across difference that makes the question of which body is performing so important. So even within the complexity and insurgence of Buffy's performance it remains impossible not

to read her completely outside her physical body.<sup>116</sup> This raises the question: which bodies can perform what kinds of icons?

Hart (1989) writes that "spectators' expectations of a character's appearance must correlate with the performer's appearance, or other inferences are drawn based on culturally dictated readings of the body they see in space" (330). Hart is writing about the theater and I think in film and television it can be even more emphatically stated, if more complicatedly. The casting of character in mass mediums are guided by expectations of what an 'actor' should look like. As Grossberg (1992) elaborates: "The star as an image of lifestyle and/or attitude, as the hook into the new niche - of lifestyle - marketing practice, becomes a primary commodity, delivering the audience to a particular market or product appeal" (158). There is an increasing necessity for stars to embody those things the viewer is supposed to hold dear both aesthetically and economically. Phelan (1993) suggests that "[S]ome bodies become *apparently* more valuable legally, psychically, "healthier", aesthetically more appealing, and seemingly more Real than other bodies. The particular bodies which appear to matter more change across history, class, race, age, aesthetics, and gender (again, a short list of variables)" (173).<sup>117</sup> What can be added to Phelan's analysis is that the very fact of being on the screen (and to a lesser extent on the stage) insists on the apparent worth of the body performing in that space, although certain bodies can be positioned on screen as literally worthless.<sup>118</sup> The body that occupies screenic space is seen as inherently valuable, as occupying a privileged space, of being worthy of mimesis. It is thus important to read the body of the performer (in this case Sarah Michelle Geller) as being particularly situated within a discourse of

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<sup>116</sup>There is also the necessity of reading Sarah Michelle Geller intertextually. I first heard of her when she was playing Kendall, Susan Lucci's estranged daughter on *All My Children*. Though she had been acting since childhood, it has only been since *Buffy* that she has risen to such star status. As well as the television series, Geller has also starred in *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, *Cruel Intentions*, and other many other mainstream and high profile Hollywood feature films.

<sup>117</sup>Emphasis in the original.

<sup>118</sup>This may sound like a paradox but it is not. It speaks to the necessary differentiation between actor and character. The actor, in character, may perform a body that is literally worthless, but the actor's body, on-screen, continues to be highly valued as a commodity.

diegetic bodies AND as being specifically chosen for those bodily attributes which she exemplifies.<sup>119</sup>

Butler (1990) writes of gender that “[T]he body is not passively scripted with cultural codes... But neither do embodied selves pre-exist the cultural conventions which essentially signify bodies. Actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of performance” (277). So too, the body on-screen is actively cultivated by the actor and equally sought out by the scout, casting agent, director, producer and public. Geller/Buffy represents just such a body but harbors a conflict of representation within it. The body beautiful projected onto the screen on both *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the slew of feature films Geller has starred in of late attest to her attainment of a certain cultural ideal which is, basically, the norm of white femininity in mass media culture. As Vickers (in Finke 1990) elaborates: “the development of a code of beauty that causes us to view the fetishized body as a norm and encourages [women]...to seek to be ‘ideal types, beautiful monsters composed of every individual perfection’ ” (229). Pointing to the monstrous embedded in the beautiful lies, of course, at the center of Buffy’s iconic power. On the surface she remains the prom queen while beneath lurks a more liminal and monstrous beauty. The ‘hidden truth’ of Buffy’s identity poses questions to the normative gender hierarchy that continues to pervade the mediascape. But it also points to a more insurgent question of societal desires that the monster/Slayer evokes. The buff body represents the appropriate object of both the fetish and the gaze/glance

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<sup>119</sup>It is also interesting to examine those characters (again especially women) who do not embody this ideal, where one can find them. Writers have most often looked at these bodies in terms of monsters and overweight women (i.e. Roseanne or *The Practice*’s Camryn Manheim). But there are more stunning examples, especially as they are presented in the highly conformist arenas of the youth market. First, I would cite the character of Hatchet Face in John Waters’ *CryBaby*. Her name says it all really and her performance - embellished by makeup, costume, blocking and cinematography - enhances the discomfort of both that performance and the viewer’s position in watching her perform. Likewise, *Heathers*’ Martha Dunnstock’s (called Dumptruck) obesity is characterized by her refusal to conform with ANY of the other characters. Not only the suprapopular Heathers, Veronica Sawyer, Jason Dean, the popular clique and the jocks, she is removed from screenic companionship with anyone (until Veronica takes her under her wing in the final scene, though again, it is not her prerogative). What is so difficult to see and yet so often overlooked is that these characters are represented by the material bodies of actors chosen specifically for these role because of what is seen as a tragic flaw in appearance.

while the Slayer's body in action represents the more insurgent desires that are often repressed. The body in which The Slayer lurks is a mask through which the insurgent body and the all the desires it provokes may be made manifest without fear of reprisal and so is allowed to slip into the repertoire of diegetic bodies.

#### GRRRL POWER AS ACTION HEROINE

Although there is no obvious or direct link between Buffy and the primarily American Riot Grrrl subculture, I think that an examination of this youth subculture is useful for understanding some of the more marginal ways young girls are defining themselves (and being defined) in the 1990's. Buffy may be an apt demonstration of how subculture can be revamped and consumerised in television. That is not to say that Buffy emulates a Riot Grrrl aesthetic in any literal sense, but that she takes certain things from their cultural legacy. In particular, Riot Grrrl articulated the possibility that young women could be independent and responsible for their own actions. They advocated a return to a homosocial emphasis and called for young women to support each other. Buffy performs these desires in a pared down form. She picks and chooses from the aesthetics that work with the text and rejects those (i.e. separatism, d.i.y.) that do not enable the consumerist impulse that mainstream television so values. I believe that Buffy performs exactly the problematic of the representation of radical girlhood in the mass media that has been raised, albeit much more subculturally, by Riot Grrrl.

While there are no statistics to rely on, the little critical literature there is on the subject of the Riot Grrrl phenomenon suggests that this scene is made up mostly of middle-class white grrrls who feel disenfranchised because of the way they are treated and represented in society. This is, however, a somewhat problematic delineation. As Kearney (1998) has written, despite the surface homogeneity of this subculture, Riot Grrrls have remained staunchly political in their praxis; including interrogations of ageism, patriarchy, heterosexism and the mainstream. Their primary concerns have been the empowerment of girl-centric (often separatist) communities in which diverse interests are addressed through

dialogue, 'zines, music and the internet, including incest, harassment, rape, oppression and the need for grrrls to have a community which fosters their unique voices. The failure of the subculture to attract more diverse membership (especially in relation to race and class), as well as to critically engage their own position of privilege, have been among the primary criticisms of Riot Grrrl.

In the chapter on Riot Grrrls in her book: *Girl Power: Young Women Speak Out*, Carlip (1995) writes:

The Riot Grrrls were born out of the "punk" scene where rebellion was expressed in attitude, appearance, style, and music. However, the philosophy of "you can do anything" and "do it yourself" seemed to apply mostly to boys, who were making the music and dictating the styles. By 1991, more and more girl bands started springing up, but ironically they often found themselves battling sexism and discrimination within a movement originally based on a consciousness about youth and oppression (31-32).

The etymology of 'Riot Grrrl' is ambiguous. Most often, it is attributed to Kathleen Hanna of Bikini Kill, but she in fact points to a more complicated genealogy. In dialogue with Andrea Juno in *Angry Women in Rock: Volume One* (1996), Hanna writes: "Jean Smith, a woman we know who's a writer and musician, said something like, "We need a girl riot, too!"... At the same time, Allison and Molly from Bratmobile were also in D.C., and they heard this and said, "We're going to start a fanzine called *Riot Grrrl*" " (98).<sup>120</sup> She describes how their one-page 'zine grew into a meeting space for issues around punk rock and feminism and, finally, into an international phenomenon. Kearney (1997) suggests that Riot Grrrl "has reformulated adolescent girlhood as a powerful location of cultural and political identity" (210). And Leonard (1997) writes that: "Where 'woman' was equated with an empowered feminist adult, 'girls', defined by their immaturity, were depoliticized. Riot Grrrl was, then, a reclamation of the word 'girl' and a representation of it as a wholly positive term" (232). Riot Grrrls have insisted on reclaiming girlhood while rejecting those who would see them as strictly bodies to be manipulated and controlled by adults, men and the media. As Rosenberg (1998) writes: "The name *Riot Grrrl* was chosen to reclaim the vitality and power of youth with an added growl to replace the perceived



passivity of "girl" "(809).<sup>121</sup> While this may or may not have been the original intention in the germination of this subculture, it certainly has become resonant in its continuing incarnation.<sup>122</sup>

What, if any, is the connection between Riot Grrrl as a subculture and Buffy as both a media icon and action heroine? Riot Grrrl culture has, since its beginnings, fought against conformist representations of bodies propagated by the mainstream, against what Phelan (1993) has described as: "the force of feeling that one does not conform to that model, that one is always other - than the model, lead to a desire to revise and/or enhance one's own physical body so that it more closely imitates and conforms to that body" (95). Riot Grrrls have toasted their refusal to fall into the conformist trap and to bind their bodies into alignment with traditional images of 'perfect' girlhood. And yet, Riot Grrrls sometimes also refuse the strict, non-sensual codes of 'older' feminists, so it is possible for them to be sexy while being independent. It is Buffy's body that aligns her, at least in part with the spirit of Riot Grrrl. The philosophy Grrrls have espoused alludes to independence, strength, camaraderie and creativity, which can all be read through the body of Buffy as well. Buffy may be read as the distillation of the Riot Grrrl philosophy into a mainstream form. It might be argued that this is impossible, that by the very nature of her performing body Buffy belies the insurgence this subculture attempts to garner for Grrrls. But on closer examination the lie of Buffy's conformity (if not Geller's<sup>123</sup>) is in the disjunction of her body and the power it yields. Buffy performs what is often seen as the futility of youth in an adult world, the difficulty in transgressing gender boundaries, and the need of an empathic community. Though she fails to interrogate sexuality, ignores issues of race and class, cannot be more than a size

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<sup>120</sup>Emphases in the original.

<sup>121</sup>Emphases in the original.

<sup>122</sup>Though written outside of discussion of Riot Grrrls, Jones (1993) had written a very interesting article on the nature of "girl" and the problematic in its essentialization.

<sup>123</sup>Auslander (1997) writes that: "[I]n performance, physical presence, the body itself, is the locus at which the workings of ideological codes are perhaps the most insidious and also the most difficult to analyze, for the performing body is always both a vehicle for representation and, simply, itself... The performing body is always doubly encoded - it is defined by the code of a particular performance, but has always already been inscribed, in its material aspect, by social discourses" (90). So too, Buffy exists as Buffy the powerful but reluctant teenage Slayer and as Geller, the beautiful Hollywood starlet.

two and makes sure her lip-gloss matches her bag which matches her shoes, Buffy certainly puts a riot into girlhood. She is rioting a specific kind of girlhood and producing it at the same time. It is not only that differences are ignored, but that certain sameness-es are produced.

Creed (1995) states that “[T]he body is both so important in itself and yet so clearly a sign or symbol referring to things outside of itself in our culture” (101). Buffy’s body may not represent a significant shift in representations of the female body per se, but does so in relation to the realm of action accorded to those bodies. Griselda Pollock (1998), though writing about the previous century, insists that “[W]omen did not enjoy the freedom of incognito in the crowd. They were never positioned as the normal occupants of the public realm. They did not have the right to look, to stare, scrutinize or watch” (77). And though this is no longer a fundamental truth, women continue to be positioned problematically in relation both the public sphere and the wandering eyes of others.<sup>124</sup> Buffy’s body refuses to stay within these confines; it lashes out at those who would underestimate her ‘grrrlness’ and associate it with passivity, weakness and vulnerability to penetration.<sup>125</sup> Buffy represents a vision of girlhood in transition from static or passive states to more active ones. Buffy has power and strength – action/performance - but her body’s continued conformity to a certain idealized standard makes her image problematic as it continues to recapitulate into desires for sameness and fetishization which make her actions seem incongruous with the body that performs them. Russo (1994) writes that:

The classical body is transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical, and sleek; it is identified with the “high” or official culture of the Renaissance and later, with the

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<sup>124</sup>Think, for instance, of how unsafe it often continues to be for women to walk alone at night.

<sup>125</sup>The idea of penetration is very important in this text and will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters. The link between sexualized violence and the construction of women’s bodies as penetrable (and men’s as able to penetrate) is well elaborated by Markus (1992). She writes: “These views enact, in effect, a gendered polarization of the grammar of violence in which the male body can wield weapons, can make itself into a weapon, and benefits from an enforced ignorance concerning its own vulnerability; the female body is predicated by this grammar as universally vulnerable, lacking force, and incompetent to supplement its deficiencies with tools which could vanquish the penis’s power by dissimulating it” (395).

rationalism, individualism, and normalizing aspirations for the bourgeoisie. The grotesque body is open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing; it is identified with non-official "low" culture or the carnivalesque, and with social transformation (7-8).

There are, however, no diametrically opposed points of classic-grotesque, but rather a continuum of bodies that fall somewhere between the two in the order of both body and performance. While Buffy's physique may fall close to the classical edge, her performances move her more and more towards the grotesque. Buffy may not be (obviously) protruding, irregular and secreting, all aspects associated with the physical or grotesque body, but she is multiple and changing: the prom queen and The Slayer, she is 'low' culture and carnivalesque: as televised, as action, as drag... She is social transformation: her performance alludes to the insurgent potential of young women, girls and grrrls and the always impossible congruency between the classical body and the person residing within it.

Buffy can be read as an allegorical tale of a young girl (grrrl) learning that she has the right to be strong and independent. This fiction finds a strong corollary in the figure of the action heroine in contemporary popular culture. Tasker (1993) describes the tendency to ascribe masculine characteristics to the (often reluctant) action heroine through tropes of muscles, machinery (guns - especially really big guns - and cars) and office (usually some aspect of law enforcement). What is often assumed in her analysis is the fact that action heroines tend to be adult women. The conflation of adult woman with masculinity is, I would suggest, less problematic than ascribing these traits to a younger woman who does not yet belong to the adult world. In *Buffy*, the text often attempts to position its heroine within this discourse of masculinity but it always fails. Even when Buffy is beating a two hundred-pound vampire into the concrete, she remains coded as feminine. There are ways, however, in which Buffy is similar to other action heroines. First, there is her isolation within both the frame and narrative. Like more traditional action heroines Buffy often occupies a conflictual narrative space: lauded as heroine and yet detested as somehow grotesque. Because of this conflict, the narratives which employ an

action heroine and/or monster often position them as occupying the same social space.<sup>126</sup> As de Lauretis (1984) describes:

Medusa and the Sphinx, like other ancient monsters, have survived inscribed in hero narratives, in someone else's story, not their own; so they are figures or markers of positions - places and topoi - through which the hero and his story move to their destination and to accomplish meaning... What these monsters stand for, to us, is the symbolic transposition of the place where they stand, the literary topos being literally, in this case, a topographical projection; the *limen*, frontier between desert and the city, threshold to the inner recesses of the cave or maze, metaphorizes the symbolic boundary between nature and culture, the limit and the test imposed on man (109).<sup>127</sup>

That Buffy is aligned with the monstrous may not be immediately apparent, as her role positions her as good against forces of evil both supernatural and out of her control. As The Slayer she is marked as monstrous for her excessive strength, independence and the problematic relation these pose for her as a young woman. She performs the need and impossibility for controlling one's destiny through definitive action, an especially difficult position for women and youth.

Tasker (1993) posits a certain duality between the feminine and masculine action hero. But the liminal figure of The Slayer, at the threshold of adulthood, does not fit so easily into these prefabricated categories. Because of her youth, Buffy is not easily aligned with the maternal as is often the case with the action heroine. Despite her sexuality she is not often portrayed as at risk for the sexual abuses that Tasker suggests is one of the textual imperatives which spur the action heroine into her action sequences. Like the characters portrayed by Stallone and Schwarzenegger, Buffy is a product of the society that created her. As the suburban teen becomes ubiquitous in the media's eye, Buffy represents a critical reappraisal of its typical form, one which refuses to be characterized by frivolity or naiveté and takes a stand for its own self-worth and unique position in contemporary society. While Traube (1992) suggests, in relation to the film *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, that "the neo-American "heroic" ideals it

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<sup>126</sup>This is especially discussed in terms of the character of Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in the *Alien* movies. Through a mutual coding of femaleness and mothering, Ripley and the Alien are continually juxtaposed and concatenated.

clings to are not innocently nostalgic ...they become dangerous in their anachronism" (38), I would argue that in the form of a young girl, the action heroine takes on a form which is neither nostalgic nor anachronistic, although she continues to be a revitalized version of the neo-American heroic ideal. Buffy's nostalgic pining for a return to traditional binaries in fact reinforces the impossibility of that return and forces her to embrace her monstrous difference.

The appropriation of subcultural forms within media is problematic, especially in television which is so firmly based in maintaining an aesthetic hegemony. Muscular or not, the action heroine is unlikely to be anything but a beautiful, straight, white woman. When the body of a young woman performs the televised action heroine she begins to embody the insurgent discourse associated with Riot Grrrl by refusing to stand on the sidelines of either action or life. While Tasker (1993) points out that many action narratives have the heroine in service to a higher male or patriarchal power (i.e. a boss, the government, politicians) a reading of *Buffy* yields no such attachments. Though Giles, her Watcher, is there to oversee her work, it is made clear again and again that she is neither in his employ nor is she, in the end, answerable to him. As he himself says in "School Hard:" "Yes, well, your help is greatly appreciated. But when it comes to battle, Buffy must fight alone. After all, you are The Slayer." Further, the powerful men who do dominate both the public and private spheres of the show (the Mayor, Judge, Principal Snyder, the Master) are held up, not as powers to aspire to, but as structures of oppression to be fought, despised and dispossessed. In the guise of action heroine Buffy performs action as based not on revenge but a certain recognition of the space in which she must both live and embody. Her narrative enters into the history of the action hero(ine) and finds that history wanting. Rackin (1990) writes: "In Foucault's view, the hero's death represents a kind of trade-off between the hero and his story: "if he was willing to die young, it was so that his life, consecrated and magnified by death, might pass into immortality" " (208). Although in film and television hero(ine)s do not tend to die, it is their willingness to face death that makes them both heroic and iconic. But Buffy, showing at once the bravado and assumed immortality of adolescence refutes the possibility of her own demise into legacy. Legacy,

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<sup>127</sup>Emphasis in the original.

immortality, call it whatever you like, without Buffy Summers, there simply is no show! Rackin (1990) goes on to insist that within competing discourses “heroism becomes impossible” (209), but I would suggest that is precisely the difficulty in determining the heroic that makes Buffy's action insurgent. Her actions perform the reluctant heroine who can never fully fit into her heroic garb and whose continued decision to stay and fight may make her even more heroic.

#### DUALITIES: BUFFY VERSUS FAITH

In both the action and horror genres, narratives are structured through a binary of good and evil, where the good hero(ine) is pit against some form of evil: monsters, government agencies, ‘bad’ people, technology, a seductive (evil) woman and so on. Tasker (1993) describes how the action movie often mobilizes a dual action team (i.e. the buddy movie) by which to concretize heroic difference through the body of the actors. In these films it is often assumed that the central body is white and that difference is expressed through race, in the body of either Black man or woman. In her analysis, these gendered and racialized figures work in strikingly different ways. The Black man, she writes, often functions as the hero's sidekick, “there to marvel at the white hero's achievements and to support him through difficult situations” (44). The role of the Black woman is quite opposite, as Tasker writes: “Black female stars who have played action roles, such as Tamara Dobson, Pam Grier and Grace Jones, often function as ‘exotic’ creatures within the narrative” (21). Dualities within the hero narrative are not always expressed through the trope of race but may also employ other differences to enhance the central hero by exposing her to and juxtaposing her with another.

In the second season a new character, Kendra, was briefly introduced to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. A few points in relation to her character are worth mentioning. With her lilting Caribbean accent and hair pulled back in tight braids, Kendra was one of the few persons of color who have graced Sunnydale's diegetic space. Like Faith (as I will shortly demonstrate), Kendra was constructed to perform in opposition to Buffy. Having been raised in relative isolation, she performed The Slayer as rigidity and precision. The normalcy that

Buffy yearned for was foreign to Kendra, who lived only to fulfill her prophetic purpose. While Buffy and Kendra are both beautiful women, Kendra performs as stern, unsmiling, un-laughing, adult, unconcerned with what she sees as the frivolity of youth. Her presence announces Buffy's girlhood charm, her openness to need others and to accept that things may not always be as they seem.<sup>128</sup> Kendra's sojourn in Sunnydale lasts less than a season and she meets with an untimely death at the hand of the vampire Drusilla.<sup>129</sup> The loss of Kendra to the diegesis is important because she performed difference in its most visual aspect within the core group of youth in this text.

The introduction of Faith in the third season shifted the juxtaposition of difference between Slayers from a visual level to one which focused more closely on bodily behavior. If Kendra represented the cold formality of The Slayer, then Faith, even more than Buffy, performs her antithesis, the body of The Slayer which is "too much/too close - the grotesque body" (Brown 1990c, 198). It becomes her function, throughout the third season, to illustrate through comparison Buffy's growing security in her role and her increasing maturity. Faith performs the potential of The Slayer to be out of control: a woman of indomitable power used indiscriminately. It is through Faith's performances that Buffy, not without reservation, becomes the 'good girl,' as we learn from almost their very first meeting (in "Faith, Hope and Trick"):

Faith: Gee, if doing violence to vampires upsets you, I think you're in the wrong line of work.  
 Buffy: Or maybe you like it too much.  
 Faith: I'm getting the job done.  
 Buffy: The job is to slay demons, not to beat them to as bloody pulp while their friends corner me.  
 Faith: Thought you could handle yourself.

de Lauretis (1984) describes "[R]epresentation as the negative term of sexual differentiation, spectacle-fetish or specular image, in any case ob-scene.

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<sup>128</sup>And this is especially evident in Buffy's relationship with Angel, who Kendra feels, as a vampire - even one with a soul - should be put to death.

<sup>129</sup>Apparently Kendra's death was unexpected even to Bianca Lawson, the actress who portrayed her. According to Lawson: "I never knew I was going to die... My understanding was that something was going to happen to me where you thought I was dead, and then I was gonna come back. Then I just stayed dead" (in Springer 1998, 39).

Woman is constituted as the ground of representation, the looking-glass held up to man" (15). In this text Faith is the looking glass held up to Buffy as they vie for the ground of both the fetish and the spec(tac)ular. From the moment Faith bounded onto the set of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* she was all representation. Dark, tousled hair, dark lipstick, cleavage, leather and lace, Faith performs a femininity which not only devours but ravages as well. She is, as Best (1995) describes, a feminine space which "because it is female, should be appropriately docile or able to be dominated. But, on the other hand, this very same production also underscores an anxiety about this 'entity' and the precariousness of its boundedness" (183). If Buffy represents the emergence of a femininity which exudes strength and independence but also embodies the anxiety of abandoning the traditionally docile role, Faith performs the complete rejection of any recognition of moral law. As she explains to Buffy in "Bad Girls:"

Buffy: What else can we do?  
 Faith: Whatever we want. We're Slayers girlfriend. The chosen two. Why should we let him take all the fun out of it?  
 Buffy: Oh, that would be tragic. Taking all the fun out of slaying, stabbing, beheading.  
 Faith: Oh, like you don't dig it.  
 Buffy: I don't.  
 Faith: You liar. I've seen you. Tell me staking a vamp doesn't get you a little juiced. Come on, say it. You can't fool me. The look in your eyes right after a kill just says begging for more.  
 Buffy: You're way off base.  
 Faith: Tell me that if you don't get on a good slay after a while you just start itching for some vamp to show up so that you can give him a good - ugh!  
 Buffy: Again with the grunting. You realize that I'm not comfortable with this.  
 Faith: Hey! Slaying's what we were built for. If you don't enjoy it you're doing something wrong.

Later in this episode, when Faith has persuaded Buffy to break into a store full of weapons, Faith continues to explain her philosophy of 'Life As Slayer:'



Faith: (as she breaks the glass display cases) Score!  
 Buffy: Think they're insured?  
 Faith: Strangely, not my priority. When are you gonna get this  
 B. Life of a Slayer's very simple Buffy. Want. Take.  
 Have.  
 Buffy: (walking over and smashing another glass case) Want.  
 Take. Have. I'm getting it.

Buffy's mimesis of Faith's actions quickly becomes disrupted by questions of morality. During this episode, Faith accidentally kills a man thinking he is a vampire. The dilemma this raises is clear, Slayers kill demons and vampires not humans. To do so is to align yourself with 'them.'<sup>130</sup>

Two examples will better clarify the ways in which Faith and Buffy are held up against one another for comparison. The first concerns sexuality. Both young women are very sexual beings, a fact which the text does not make light of. But Buffy has chosen to become sexually active with a lover – Angel - with whom she has been in a relationship. Although their relationship can be read as the consumption of the Other in the form of the inappropriate boyfriend, the text leaves little room for doubt that Buffy and Angel love each other. Tolman (1994), in her study of 'real' girls and their relationship to sex and sexuality, writes that "[G]irls do not want sex; what girls really want is intimacy and a relationship... girls have sex in the service of relationships" (250). This point is well expressed within both the psychological and cultural literature of female adolescence. This work also insists that girls only feel legitimated in engaging in sexual activity through the presence of relationship.<sup>131</sup> In contrast, Faith acts as a sexual aggressor, taking her pleasure when, where and how she wants it. In a particularly provocative scene, she deflowers Xander after he saves her from a vampire attack. As Xander holds her arm so she can put her dislocated shoulder back into place she says to him: "He got me really wound up. A fight like that and no kill... I'm about ready to pop." As Xander acquiesces to her need she throws him back onto the bed and promises "I'll steer you around the curves." After they have made love we see Xander holding her, caressing her bare arm,

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<sup>130</sup> This is an interesting way of raising questions about accidents which occur 'in the line of duty,' and the responsibility that must (?) be taken in their regard.

<sup>131</sup> Walkerline (1990) makes a similar point when she writes that, for girls, "romance not sex is key to sexuality" (99).

then the image cuts to Faith throwing him out in his skivvies, saying dismissively, "That was great. I've got to shower" (in "The Zeppo").

Faith's behavior can be read as masculinized, performing a usurpation of the presumed male sexual prerogative. While Buffy represents a departure from a traditional feminine sexuality which is passive, responsive and nurturing, Faith is the sexual predator, using men according to her own desires. Traube (1992) describes a "fear about sexual desire and bodily integrity; about change, flux, transition; about lost identities, uncertain boundaries, shifting and unstable social roles" (120). While Buffy and Faith may share a resonance with the phallic mother/woman, Buffy continues to allay the fear these provoke through tropes of femininity which mitigate against the anxiety brought about by her railing against hetero-patriarchal norms. Faith refuses to cater to any such anxiety, although in her blatant reversal she presents less a radical alternative than an appropriation of the worst aspects of sexist male machismo. And yet, her reversal does seem propitious in that it is a performance that refuses to be regulated by any boundaries of either femininity or romantic fantasy.

Thompson (1990) describes how cliques of girls ('real' girls) tend to erect boundaries around themselves through discourses which posit differences between themselves and others. These differences, though not arbitrarily assigned, do not necessarily focus on any overt reference to bodies but, rather, on actions (performances), especially those related to sexuality and/or morality. So too, Buffy and Faith are opposed not only by their sexuality but also by their relationship to the moral order. This is not such a simple duality either, as the diegesis of Sunnydale is divided between two moral orders already: that of humanity (the mortals) and that of vampires and demons (the un-dead). The text tends to have recourse to an assumed hierarchy of these orders though that in itself is problematic as it is evident that in any society there are many moral orders, only those in power have the right to impose theirs through the regulation of the bodies of others. As Grosz (1995) paraphrases Nietzsche: "At the horizon of culture... social morality and memory are not inscribed by man's unique reason, compassion, or morality, but by mnemotechniques-methods of

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branding or permanently etching the body" (33). So too, Faith's body comes to be more and more inscribed with affiliation to the underworld and the un-dead.

McRobbie (1994) has written about moral panics and the inscription of morality through these panics by the media. She sets out to examine these moments of moral anxiety as they have been theorized over the last few decades and in this brief genealogy she recognizes a shift. At its inception in the late 1960's and early 1970's, this term designated a hegemonic inscription of morality through media and legislation. But today, she argues, the moral panic often undermines itself as the actors in this drama refuse "to concede ground entirely to the loud voices of the moral guardians" (218). Today, even in the most overarching discourse of moral panic there is room for a voice of opposition, of insurgence to speak through. In the story of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which seems to pride itself on being progressive, sexuality itself cannot be played as immoral.<sup>132</sup> But neither does it seem to believe that fiction "should destroy conventional morality" (Hawkes in Kaufmann 1998, 207). That is, there is a hegemonic discourse that surrounds issues of sexuality, especially youth sexuality. Though sex itself is made legitimate within the show, its conventions do, as we have seen, continue to come under scrutiny. Further, the deviation from gender appropriate sexual conduct is here concatenated with a degradation in morality more generally. The idea of a moral panic about youth sexuality is mocked and yet is seeps back in through hegemonic strands of discourse.

Gibbs (1995) writes: "For the body, as Michel de Certeau so clearly shows, is a surface for the multifarious writings of the social, and it is this writing that at the same time constitutes the body as individual, as distinct from other bodies" (140). So Faith's body is constituted as different from that of her diegetic peers, as representing the laxity of a society replete with moral decay and emotional despair.<sup>133</sup> There are several examples of how this is played out within the text.

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<sup>132</sup>I mean progressive in the sense of portraying the limit of what can be allowed in television performance. Youth sexuality has very often been problematically portrayed in this medium, often associated with risk, disease, rape... By making sex both natural and a choice, *Buffy* refuses to fall into the trap of making sex itself an obviously moral issue.

<sup>133</sup>This is even more vividly depicted in the character of The Mayor who is also a supernatural being bent on immortality and mass destruction. He exists as the ultimate authority of Sunnydale (in terms of politics and law and order) and performs the

In "Consequences," Faith incites Buffy to break into a store with her and when they are arrested and being taken to the police station, Buffy and Faith cause a traffic accident. Faith insists that there is no need to call an ambulance for the injured officers. The next morning, Buffy performs remorse, while Faith insists that they have only done what is necessary in fulfilling their roles as Slayers. Buffy performs introspection and perhaps youthful impulsiveness, while Faith is shown to have no moral qualms at all but to merely exhibit an Objectivist desire to fulfill both her desires and goals. Faith absorbs Buffy's potential sins by allowing her to perform self-reflexivity and a certain innocence, while she herself becomes Other. Later in the episode, Faith accidentally slays a man (the Mayor's nervous assistant) thinking he is a vampire. While Buffy is traumatized looking into the dying man's terrified eyes, Faith insists that this is merely one of the prices to be paid for being a Slayer. Faith represents neither the death nor rehabilitation of the rebel, as described by McKelly (1996), but the death of moral responsibility for the innocent. The viewer is encouraged to believe in the possibility for Faith's rehabilitation - for that is the logical conclusion to the narrative structure - as we see her kneel before her victim and touch his bloody chest. But just a few moments later we hear her tell Buffy she has disposed of the body and simply that "I don't care." Buffy, unable to believe that Faith cannot feel the guilt that wears upon her, repeatedly tries to inscribe Faith within her discourse of morality:

- Buffy: It's just look at you Faith. Less than twenty four hours ago you killed a man. And now it's all zippedidooda. That's not your real face and I know it. I know what you're feeling because I'm feeling it too.
- Faith: Do you. So, fill me in see, because I'd like to hear this.
- Buffy: Dirty. Like something sick crept inside you and you can't get it out. And you keep hoping that it was just some nightmare but it wasn't. What we're going to figure out-
- Faith: Is there going to be an intermission in this?
- Buffy: Just let me talk to Giles. I swear-
- Faith: No. Don't bring anybody else into this. You gotta keep your head B. It'll blow over in a few days.
- Buffy: And if it doesn't?

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immorality and corruption so often evident in the workings of structural power.

- Faith: If it doesn't. They've got a freighter leaving the docks at least twice every day. It's not fancy but it'll get you where you're going.
- Buffy: And that's it? You live with it? You see the dead guy in your head everyday for the rest of your life?
- Faith: Buffy. I'm not gonna see anything. I missed the mark last night and I'm sorry about the guy, I really am, but it happens. Anyway how many people do you think we've saved by now? Thousands? Didn't you stop the world from ending? Because that puts you and me in the plus column.
- Buffy: We save people. It doesn't mean we can do whatever we want.
- Faith: Why not? That guy I offed was no Ghandi. I mean, we just saw he was messed up in dirty dealings.
- Buffy: But what if he was coming to us for help?
- Faith: What if he was? You're still not seeing the big picture B. Something made us different. We're warriors. We're built to kill.
- Buffy: To kill demons. But it does not mean we get to pass judgement on people like we're better than everyone else.
- Faith: We are better. That's right. Better. People need us to survive. In the balance, nobody's gonna cry over some random bystander who got caught in the crossfire.
- Buffy: I am.
- Faith: That's your loss.

Walkerdine (1990) writes that “[B]ad girls are punished, positioned in various ways. Identities are created to deal with those characteristics” (102). So Faith’s identity/performance is characterized by her seeming immorality and inability to be swayed by Buffy’s moral argument. Murder and lies are portrayed as her domain, while Buffy stands beside Faith, sensitive and trying to rehabilitate her. But it is through the trope of betrayal that Faith is most severely punished, by ostracization and devolution into madness. In “Doppelgangland,” Faith insists that Buffy has committed the murder. Though during the episode Buffy’s innocence is revealed, Faith has already switched sides, finding herself a place alongside The Mayor, a place where her penchant for blood and immorality are welcomed and admired. In “Enemies,” Faith tries to turn Angel back into the evil Angelus in order to destroy Buffy. Until the end of the episode, when we are made aware that Angel is merely playing along with Faith and the Mayor, we watch as Faith appears to seduce Angel and prepares to torture Buffy.

Faith's rage is intimately tied up in jealousy and her desire to occupy Buffy's space within the diegesis, a space she is destined never to inhabit, as the following scene vividly shows:

Faith: You know, I come to Sunnydale, I'm a Slayer, I do my job kicking butt. And who does everybody thank? Buffy.  
 Buffy: That's not my fault.  
 Faith: Everybody always asks, why can't you be more like Buffy? But did anyone ever ask if you could be more like me?  
 Angel: I know I didn't.  
 Faith: You get the Watcher, you get the mom, you get the little Scooby-gang and what do I get? Jack-squat. This was supposed to be my town.  
 Buffy: Faith listen to me.  
 Faith: Why? So you can impart some special Buffy wisdom, that it? D'you think you're better than me, do you? Say it, you think you're better than me.  
 Buffy: I am. Always have been.  
 Faith: Um, maybe you didn't notice, Angel's with me.  
 Buffy: And how'd you get him Faith? Magic? You cast some sort of spell? Because in the real world, Angel would never touch you and we both know it. (Faith hits her, hard across the face) You had to tie me up to beat me, there's a word for people like you Faith... loser.  
 Faith: Un-hun. You're just trying to make me mad so I'll kill you. I'm too smart for that. Stick around.  
 Buffy: For what? Your boss' lame ascension? Like I couldn't stop it?  
 Faith: You can't.  
 Buffy: I will.  
 Faith: Keep dreaming. No one can stop the ascension. Mayor's got it wired B. He built this town for demons to feed on and come graduation day, he's getting paid and I'll be sitting at his right hand... assuming he has hands after the transformation, I'm not too clear on that part. And all you're little lame-ass friends are gonna be kibbles and bits, think about that when your boyfriend's cutting into you.  
 Buffy: I never knew you had so much rage in you.  
 Faith: What can I say, I'm the world's best actor.  
 Angel: Second best.

In the final moments, as Buffy's own deception is revealed, her shackles fall to the floor, she and Faith both grab for the sharp torture instruments Faith had been planning to use on Buffy. Holding them against each others' throats Faith

whispers to Buffy: "What are you gonna do B? Kill me? You become me. You're not ready for that..." (kisses her on the top of the head) "Yet."

Faith's body becomes the barometer against which other bodies are read. Not just in action, her 'badness' is also represented through her dark, tousled hair and penchant for leather, against Buffy's blonde innocence. Faith is also constructed along working-class lines as opposed to Buffy's middle-classness. Faith, to return to Walkerdine's quote above, is the body that allows the others to remain good. But, as we see in her final words to Buffy, the potential to move into the space she occupies is always present. Given the prejudice of the narrative it is difficult to read Faith from a redemptive or insurgent discourse. However, both her rage (against abuse, isolation, and the impossibility of meeting a standard of perfection) and her insistence on her own choice and moral voice make her another radical reworking of girlhood within the pantheon of popular culture images. Rarely have we, in popular culture, read the terrain of the woman's body as the site of rage. As it is performed through Faith's body in this text, it is the cause of anxiety, ridicule, sanction and retains the possibility of insurgence.

#### BUFFY AS DRAG: FROM THE BLOND TO THE BEAST<sup>134</sup>

In classic fairy tales the demarcation between good and evil is often written on the body. Where that manifestation is problematic (through spells, etc.) it is often devolved back into normalcy through the narrative: frogs and beasts turn into princes, witches and sprites meet with the appropriately devastating ends. Often, what lurks beneath the disguise is radically different from the mask it wears. Another way Buffy's position in the diegetic space of her eponymous narrative can be read, is that of drag. Butler (1993) writes that "drag is a site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power" (125). Buffy is implicated in two almost diametrically opposed regimes of power. First, as The Slayer and, second, as prom queen. Like the impossibility of the drag queen attaining any entry into a 'true' womanhood, so Buffy can never recapture the originary self that remains

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<sup>134</sup> This title references a book by Warner (1995) which will be drawn on in this section.

imprinted in her memory. As Buffy becomes entrenched in being The Slayer, her prom queen performances can be read through the blond which has been appropriated by the beast it will, inevitably, become.

On reading Butler's work on drag, I have often felt a certain reversal is at work. Her analysis of the film *Paris is Burning* (1993) suggests a traditional narrative fantasy of rescue by a strategic male character (also see Walkerdine 1990). Buffy's performances, though not masculinized per se, still disrupt the narrative flow which continues to suggest she should be rescued by the handsome prince. Buffy's drag is not that of a cross-dresser (as described by Garber 1993, Bruzzi 1997, and others), nor of gendered ambivalence, but of a disorder of action which refutes traditional orders of gender. Buffy's drag persona is that of the action hero who cannot contain her performance within the boundaries of her work. While she must battle vampires and demons (many of whom take male form) it is within her more social battles that the breakdown in gender norms is made most apparent. Most often it is Xander who acts as Buffy's foil in an unwitting battle of the sexes. Somewhat sensitive and ungainly, Xander exudes none of the masculine self-confidence associated with even the most adolescent male lead. Not only does no one expect Xander to save them, in "The Zeppo," he is asked to stay away from the action because the others are afraid for his life. In this narrative, Xander often falls into the position of the princess waiting for a handsome knight in the form of a beautiful blonde to rescue him. Again and again Buffy must come to Xander's aid as he finds himself engaged in battles he cannot win but which she does, easily. More generally, Buffy physically engages the high school jocks who are used to dominating their weaker classmates. But this not a total reversal, Buffy is (if that) a butch-femme.<sup>135</sup> It is the brandishing of her femininity in the face of the radical reversal of her strength which is one aspect of her drag performance which is potentially insurgent.

In the guise of drag Buffy slides through the spectrum of signification from blond to beast. I use the term beast not in its usual, lowly invocation but in

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<sup>135</sup>As Tasker (1993) describes Linda Hamilton in *Terminator 2*: "This persona juxtaposes traditionally masculine and feminine characteristics" (143). Tasker, however, focuses on Hamilton's muscular physique and use of machinery, whereas Buffy's binary opposition is more subtly inflected.



its changeable and Othered aspect. The beast need not only be that which terrifies but that which, as it so often remains unknown, presents the possibility for change. Warner (1995), on the position of the blond in narrative history, writes:

Blondness and beauty have provided a conceptual rhythm in visual and literary imagery ever since the goddess of Love's tresses were described as *xanthe*, golden, by Homer... ..Storytellers may have intended a shade or tint of blonde hair but it is unlikely, the colour fulfills a symbolic function... Blondness is less a descriptive term about hair pigmentation than a blazon in code, a piece of a value system that it is urgent to confront and analyze because its implications, in moral and social terms, are so dire and still so unthinkingly embedded in the most ordinary, popular materials of the imagination (364)<sup>136</sup>

In the fairy tales and historical narratives that Warner explores the blonde is always set in opposition to the beast. It is, if anyone, the prince who lies within. These tales often omit the heroine completely, or remand her to the status of captive waiting for the hero to set her free. Women in the guise of beasts are rarely redemptive, instead their beastliness is meant to demonstrate some inner evil. The evil women of fairy tales also tend to look like Faith, who takes certain cues from the evil queen in Cinderella who is perhaps the prototype for this image. Warner also discusses the beast in her work. She writes:

At a fundamental level, 'Beauty and the beast' in numerous variations forms a group of tales which work out this basic plot, moving from the terrifying encounter with Otherness, to its acceptance, or, in some variations, its annihilation. In either case, the menace of the Other has been met, dealt with and exercised by the end of the fairy tale (276).

In Buffy's story, however, she herself often lies at the heart of beastliness. What is uncontrollable in Buffy's retelling is the conflation of the blond and the beast, which can no longer be either adequately dealt with or annihilated but, in the end, is sometimes accepted for what lies within.

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<sup>136</sup>Emphasis in the original.

Buffy's ascent into the order of beasts also precipitates in her a loss of both her former self and the telltale signs of femininity on which the tale seems to rest. Buffy, always trying to return to the site of the lost object, finds only herself. For she is, in fact, her own lost object. In terms of the narrative, Buffy's lost object is not the Mother as is so often posited in psychoanalytic literature, but the self. The lost object has become conflated with the Lacanian ego-ideal where the mirror has become internalized. But to return, as so many feminist film theorists have done, to the realm of Lacanian psychoanalysis, what do we find? The structured mirror, in which the infant fails to recognize itself, doomed to search forever for the elusive ego-ideal. Lacan (1977) writes: "the mirror-image would seem to be the threshold of the visible world, if we go by the mirror disposition of the *imago of one's own body* presents in hallucinations or dreams... or if we observe the role of the mirror apparatus in the appearances of the *double*, in which physical realities, however heterogeneous, are manifested" (3).<sup>137</sup> Buffy has, since her introduction into the media universe at least, always recognized her idealized self as a mirror image (and a skewed one at that), for she has lived it. The cracked facade of the mirror shows that her performance - however idealized - was always lacking. For her, the REAL has always been a masquerade. Like Alice, she too has passed through to the Other side, but for her, there is no possibility for return.

Buffy: Slayer and prom queen, fetish and monster, blond and beast, friend and enemy... these contradictions are written across her diminutive body. As she continually shifts from surface to depth, we are kept guessing as to which is more coveted, which is truly Other. Then again, perhaps she is shifting from surface to surface and there is no 'real' Buffy deep within. It is the refusal to ground Buffy within a static field or visual frame which allows her action to be seen as insurgent. Buffy may indeed yield to popular desires, but she also fights against them to be allowed to perform her 'true' self.

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<sup>137</sup>Emphases in the original.

"In a couple of days we're gonna get to do what every American teen should have the chance to do...Die young and stay pretty."  
(Ford)

The vampire exists both within culture and outside it, a liminal figure. Having haunted the shadows of the human mind for centuries s/he devolved into a stock character of modern literature, film and television.<sup>138</sup> The insistent performance of vampirism within contemporary visual (and literary) culture seems to indicate that the figure of the vampire speaks to something in human nature. Tracking the vampire<sup>139</sup>, insisting on its contextualization, reveals a great deal about the particular cultural moment which has spawned her/him.<sup>140</sup> Not only the vampires but the spaces which they choose to inhabit, the persons on whom they chose to feed and those who mark their destiny in the destruction of vampires, all tell a cultural tale. In fact, the performance of vampirism is constructed across so many levels that it becomes difficult to untangle and follow them. This chapter aims to examine certain facets of the vampire's performance that are most resonant with contemporary North American culture and with the particular performances at work within *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

There is no 'true nature' of the vampire. As soon as the critic has identified its characteristics, they have shifted once again. The critical literature draws an umbilical cord from Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula* to all the vampires who have come after him. But, more and more, the vampire refuses to be held to such eighteenth century parameters, seeking out spaces for itself deeper and deeper in the postmodern world. Through this movement, I will argue, the vampire becomes mimesis, our uncanny double, reflecting our world in its un-dead eyes. While the vampire has always been Other, it now takes on more particular characteristics of simulated desire, performing the freak, the phallus and the object lost, while remaining all along a production and a fiction. In reading the vampiric performances of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in conjunction

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<sup>138</sup>Some authors point out, with particular glee, the Count puppet on Sesame Street, as well as Count Chokula of breakfast cereal fame.

<sup>139</sup> This phrase is taken from the title of Case's (1991) article.

<sup>140</sup>And the very fact of gender may tell the reader a great deal about the where the vampire comes from (see, for example, Auerbach (1995) and Case (1991)).

with literature on the vampire, I will show how all these possibilities may be mobilized.

#### THE VAMPIRE AS DRACULA: A GENEALOGY<sup>141</sup>

Before launching into a discussion of vampires it is wise to situate them, in some way, within the cultural representations of the horror genre. *Dracula* is often credited with making the horror genre as popular as it is today. The character of Dracula has certainly been subject to endless reinterpretation in literature, film and television. The subject of horror in popular culture has been examined with much scrutiny by academics, most of whom have linked it to the human struggle between good and evil. Waller (1986) writes that “[I]n return for frightening us, the story of Evil, of “unmixed malignity,” offers its own consolation by bringing the terms of existence into clear, certain focus, ridding life of its impurities and its complications, removing man, for a time at least, from history. Man's most historic act - indeed, his only alternative besides capitulation and defeat - is to challenge this Evil. For it must be destroyed” (251, also see Carroll 1990). Serf (1988) cautions that this focus has failed to examine the larger context of the horror text which first, transfers the conflict from the internal to external and second, fails to address the ambiguity with which the text itself treats the Dracula figure. She writes that “he [Stoker] adds a number of humanizing touches to make Dracula appear noble and vulnerable as well as demonic and threatening; and it becomes difficult to determine whether he is a hideous bloodsucker whose touch breeds death or a lonely and silent figure who is hunted and persecuted” (95). In *Buffy* as well, the vampire wears a changeable mask.

The central figure of the horror film is the monster. This monster has the particular function, a central one, of driving the text forward. As Craft (1988) writes: “Each of these texts [of the vampire genre] admit a monster, then entertains and is entertained by monstrosity for some duration, until in its closing pages it expels or repudiates the monster and all the disruption that

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<sup>141</sup>This section of chapter six functions as a sort of introduction. Many of the concepts touched on here will be elaborated throughout the rest of the chapter.

he/she/it brings" (167). This centralizes the monster within the literary and filmic text and points to its disruption of the televisual one. In a television series like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, even more than in film, the monster may never be completely vanquished. True, 'minor' monsters are introduced episodically to fulfill this function (and sometimes more major evils are dispelled) but the monstrous is never excised. Indeed, it is the function of the televisual monster to remind the viewer that the monster, the Other, must always remain within the borders of the screen. Craft continues that the need of the horror is "to produce the monster... both to destroy the monster it has previously admitted and to end the narrative that houses the monster" (168). Of course, Craft is talking about the literary monster who lives and dies within the time frame of the novel (within a limited number of pages). Televisual monstrosity offers a different set of parameters, ones whose narratives may never be ended and whose excessive monstrosity must, equally, always leave some trace of itself behind for the next episode.

There are other differences between film vampires and those which belong to television and Flynn (1992) attempts to delineate them. Television, as he describes, has been as entranced by the vampire as film: "Television has produced a number of noteworthy vampire stories during its fifty year history in forms as varied as the anthology series, the made-for-television movie, the miniseries, the daytime soap, and the weekly program" (212). But television culture is different from film and this has caused the vampire to be less welcome there. He writes:

Horror films (particularly vampire movies) have generally proven moneymakers in the cinema, but the commercial possibilities on television have always been uncertain. Fearing poor ratings from the A.C. Neilson Company, retribution from network censors, or outright boycotts from special viewer groups, programming executives have been cautious about the use of vampires in prime-time shows other than situation comedies or the gratuitous "monsters" in science-fiction or fantasy shows. Potentially, television, unlike its counterparts, is an ideal medium to bring those "foul things of the night" into the dark living rooms of America, but seldom has it been used to its fullest advantage (212 - 13).

*Buffy's* success speaks to the resonance the ambiguous vampire motif has for television viewers. While its text resuscitates old motifs of love and desire, friendship and faith, its most critical ingenuities are the monsters themselves who have finally crept in beyond television's own liminal boundaries.

It is not surprising that almost every book and article which deals with the subject of vampires takes Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as both unquestioned patriarch and litmus test by which all vampires must be judged. In this tale, the vampire takes the form of an Eastern European noble who makes his way to England and threatens the sanctity of both English middle-class sensibility and feminine virtue. It is *Dracula's* seduction of the middle-class Englishwoman that marks him most seriously as a threat and which leads, finally, to his being hunted down and destroyed. Senf (1988), writes that " " *Dracula* " and "vampire" have become virtually indistinguishable" (110) while Flynn (1992) acknowledges that "vampire and *Dracula* have become synonymous with sexual seduction, power, and domination, and are an integral part of our daily vocabulary" (1).<sup>142</sup> But as Auerbach (1995) describes in great detail, the vampire myth has pervaded human consciousness for eons, existing in one form or another in myth and legend throughout the world. Even before *Dracula* came onto the scene, vampires were familiar residents of Byronic poetry and gothic romance, patriarchal aristocratic figures involved in complex homoerotic friendships.

With *Dracula*, the male vampire became isolated, sinister and firmly heterosexual and so he has tended to remain, while the female vampire has more often been queered. What these traditional performances have worked through is a strict encoding of gender: the male vampire as progenitor of future generations, the female vampire as his servant who also performs as sexual Other, moving between heterosexual vessel and seductive lesbian. Where the male vampire strikes fear in the hearts of humanity, the female evokes their deepest and most repressed desires: for the woman to be queered and for the man to be penetrated (thus also to be queered). That is, the male vampire (especially the contemporary male vampire who has tended to feed on women) recapitulates the heterosexual order by allowing the masculine to penetrate the feminine. When the woman appears in vampiric form, whether she feeds on

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<sup>142</sup>Emphasis in the original.

men or women, she is queered by her possession of the capacity (the need) to penetrate. Thus, as many writers have pointed out, the staking of the vampire (especially in feminine form) re-establishes (at least for a time) the hegemony of heterosexual relations.

Waller (1986) has described how the vampiric tale has been structured around "the journey" (233). In *Dracula* this takes the form of an Empiric trek from the Transylvanian border country to the folds of English urbanity. The contrast, which is intended to unsettle the reader, is between the presumed normalcy of English civility and the primitivity and superstitious natures of the Eastern European peasantry. But, as Waller points out, the vampire film quickly mobilized to engage the West, moving from the Old Country (Europe) to America's so-called New World. This move was not only physical but entailed a more sociocultural change as well. As Auerbach (1995) writes: "Before *Dracula*, vampires embodied forbidden ideals of intimacy; after *Dracula* they moved to America and turned into rulers" (101). The ruling supremacy of the vampire class was evidenced in their ability to acquire wealth over generations and their proclivity towards the larger urban centers (usually New York and Los Angeles) where they could blend in among the eccentricities of the ruling elite. This move has tended to represent both the promise of America - its fantasy of glamour and wealth - as well as its degeneracy into which the vampire could so easily blend.<sup>143</sup>

But it is the city's more secretive (though represented as straight and normal) suburbs and their inhabitants that concern this inquiry. Not entirely unfamiliar to vampires, the suburbs are a representation of the presumed nine to five, straight life of middle-America - an especially enticing challenge for monstrous disruption - through which the vampire, like so many Others, may only pass with a great deal of difficulty. Television's vampires, when not in the city, lurk on the rural outskirts of suburbia and, often in comedy, tend to be happy families of which the community is questioning but not afraid (as on *The Munsters* and *The Adams Family*). In *Buffy*, the suburb has moved from quiet rurality to the freeways and malls of the West. With this movement has come an

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<sup>143</sup>In the guise of the American city the vampire becomes the ever more present figure of the serial killer.

evil, only partly imposed from within but, mostly, from without, just as suburbia has imposed itself on the once beautiful landscape of the American West. Its vampires are likewise conflictual, sometimes good, sometimes evil. They have abandoned Dracula not only in name but also in a certain spirit and refuse to be governed by his stories. In *Buffy*, vampires become (to slightly skew Auerbach's (1995) words) "the type of vampires who, for the first time, belong in the age that bred them" (135); and later that "the rapidity with which our Draculas become dated tells us only that every age embraces the vampire it needs" (145). In *Buffy* we find one of the vampire's most current incarnations.

In the suburbia that *Buffy* both mocks and emulates, the Other is regarded as a social disease which must be scourged from the sanctity of the white suburban bosom (Bentley 1988, 30). Evil has always been so much more palatable in the form of the monster, but that shadowy figure constantly returns the viewer to a danger (real or imagined) present in their own comfortable spaces. It must be destroyed as it "cannot be cured or reformed... these stories demonstrate how easily our bodies, our homes, our cities, our country, and our universe can be invaded" (Waller 1986, 251). The vampires of the mediascape have responded to that threat in kind: while Dracula merely intended to feed, *Buffy's* vampires plan to make the whole world their dominion. And true to Auerbach's (1995) earlier assertion, they even have technology at their disposal. As Mr. Trick tells Kaikistos (in "Faith, Hope and Trick"):

See, this whole town, this very street - wired with fiber optics. See, we jack in a G3 2500 Megs and we have the whole world at our fingertips. And I'm saying is, we stay local where the humans are jumping and the cotton is high, but we live global, you know, you get a hankering for the blood of a fifteen year old Filipino and I'm onto that and she's here the next day Express Air.<sup>144</sup>

In the history of the vampire, its performances have been restricted by mobility, by the necessity of moving by night, of being invited in, and remaining unseen. In contrast the contemporary vampire often finds ways to move without borders

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<sup>144</sup>There is more to this speech than the identification of the modern vampire as capable of acquiring advanced technology (also see *Blade*). Mr. Trick's allusion to an old spiritual marks him racially, hierarchically and historically. The remark about the Filipino girl suggests an exotic appetite, unfulfilled in Sunnydale.



and within the matrices of the mediascape it exceeds many of its old boundaries.<sup>145</sup>

#### THE VAMPIRE AND THE PHALLUS

In common parlance, the phallus is often used synonymously with the penis. But in psychoanalytic theory - particularly Lacanian - the phallus is seen as a signifier belonging to the Symbolic order, by which the subject is effected or brought into being (Lacan 1977). This subject, in psychoanalytic terms, is prediscursively defined as male. The male *has* the phallus, both symbolically and in the real. The woman *desires* the phallus and, as Other, may stand in for its symbolic value. Feminist theorists have worked very hard to unscramble the Lacanian paradox wherein the woman is both fetish and phallus. As Garber (in Pellegrini 1997), for example, asks: -"why [is] the phallus [is] a fetish only when it is *not* attached to a man?" (159).<sup>146</sup> Pellegrini goes on to point out two more important questions in relation to the phallus: first: "If gender is a speech act, then Riviere's woman is a thief of language. In speaking publicly, she steals the phallus" (140); and second: "Everyone wants to be the phallus, or, to use Marcia Ian's more colorful terms, everyone is striving to be "a fucking human penis" " (158-59).

The phallus has tended to be linked to masculinity and power over the feminine Other. In the retheorizing of the phallus, through such tropes as the phallic object, the phallus may take on many guises and, as Butler (1993) writes: "the phallus can attach to a variety of organs, and that the efficacious disjoining of phallus from penis constitutes [both] a narcissistic wound to phallomorphism" (262 note 26). When the phallus is taken away from masculinist prescription it becomes a performative power which can be (re)appropriated by the Other. The phallic Other, though traditionally represented as taking power only through external attributes, may also enjoin the phallus internally. By this I would suggest that it is not only the object that endows the Other with the phallus, but also the knowledge of their ability to move into strength and action (in other words to perform with both agency and power). I will show that the *Buffy* text

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<sup>145</sup>Trick's allusion to fiber optics only suggests what the Net could do for vampires.

performs just such a disjoining and (re)appropriation in two ways, first, by allowing the phallus to be appropriated by the feminine and second, when the male is enjoined to the phallus, it is often the male Other, the vampire.

The phallic woman is not an uncommon icon in visual and literary cultures, and mythology. She is often conflated with the castrating woman, although they are, in fact, expressed through very different performative acts. Creed (1995) writes: "The archetypes of the phallic and castrating woman are quite different and should not be confused; the former ultimately represents a comforting phantasy of sexual sameness, and the latter a terrifying phantasy of sexual difference" (157-58). I am not sure that this simple dichotomy is necessary, or that the phallic woman can be summarily dismissed as a recapitulation into sameness. It is perhaps the establishing of this dichotomy itself that gives some comfort. The castrating woman can be understood to slide into sameness as her castration eliminates the phallus altogether. If the fear of the castrating Mother, in psychoanalytic terms, is the fear that the male too may be expressed as lack, then she herself intends to make him over in her image. As such the castrating woman is a powerfully performative figure, but so too is the phallic. The phallic woman does not, of necessity, acquire the phallus in order to simply reverse the terms of the exclusionary Symbolic - to enter the realm of the Father, as it were. Her acquisition of the phallus marks her usurpation of a performative power previously marked as exclusively male, a power which corrupts previously homogenous male spaces. The phallic woman can be figured as destroying both the gender binary and heterosexual prerogative when she refutes the need for protection and insemination; creates on her own and on her own terms.

Creed (1995) writes that "[A]ccording to Laplanche and Pontalis, the image of the phallic woman has two forms: the woman either has a phallus or phallic attribute or she has retained the male's phallus inside her" (156). It is most often by the phallic object that Buffy is recognized and the litany of phallic objects which surround The Slayer(s) is enormous. Since vampires must be stabbed through the heart in order to be destroyed, their penetration by a sharp object is inherent in the text. Staking vampires is part of Buffy Summers' daily

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<sup>146</sup>Emphasis in the original.

existence and just a few examples should demonstrate the excessively phallic nature of The Slayers' performances. In "Innocence," Buffy destroys an ancient and powerful demon with a rocket launcher. In "Faith, Hope and Trick," Faith uses an enormous, sharpened beam of wood to pierce the heart of the vampire Kaikistos. In both these cases, the appropriation of the phallic object becomes a powerful transformative force in the hands of a young woman.

DuCille (1996) writes that though "the phallus may not be a material object, its action, its "phallic energy", is not immaterial" (68). In Buffy's case the phallic attributes or objects with which Buffy and Faith are endowed are material instances of the phallus, but they are also propelled by a phallic energy. It is the combination of both material object and energy that allow the female wielded phallus to meet its mark. But another example may evidence how the retained phallus (energy) may be developed within the textual performance. In "Surprise," Buffy and Angel make love for the first time and in so doing, Buffy inadvertently transforms Angel into the evil Angelus. This performance produces Buffy's retention of the phallus and in "Becoming II" this performance is taken through to its conclusion. This episode deals with a demon named Akathla who, when awakened by Angelus, will open the gates of hell and devour the world. Once the portal is opened, Buffy must kill Angelus and send him through the portal in order to save the world. While Willow works to restore Angel's soul, Buffy faces off against him at the gates of hell. In the final moments as he taunts her, she stabs him with her sword and suddenly the spell works and Angelus is Angel again. But Buffy steals herself and, with a quiet good-bye, sends him to hell and saves the world. Thus in this scene, Buffy both retains Angel's phallus and uses the phallic attribute to maintain her position of power. The primacy of the phallus is its power and the possibilities it holds for transformation.

Another central aspect of phallicism which is found in *Buffy* and other vampiric texts, is the condition of penetration. Like The Slayer, the female vampire is also phallic, but her penetrative power functions in different ways. Turnbull (1990) writes of "[T]he concepts of transformation, of penetration (a form of possession?), of making visible that which is invisible" (80-01), and in the figure of the female vampire, the penetrative aspect of the phallus is rendered

productive, through her bite. In *Buffy*, the female vampire is rarer than the male, but equally deadly. In the first season the viewer is introduced to Darla, Angel's sire, a centuries old vampire who looks like a young woman and likes to prey on young men. Darla's productive phallicism is performative in her ability to procreate without the need of a mate. Like the male vampire she creates her children in her own image. Through her bite she transforms the living into the un-dead. That is the major difference between the performance of the phallus in the hands of The Slayer and in mouth of the vampire: The Slayer may only penetrate the dead; the transformations she engenders are social, but the individual must be destroyed in the process. In the figure of the female vampire, penetration of the male is enacted as desire. As Hatlen (1998) writes of Stoker's Jonathan Harper: "He want to give "himself" to the kisses of the vampire women; he wants them to penetrate him with their phallic teeth; he wants to lie back and wait as *they* do the work" (124).<sup>147</sup> The bite of the vampire transforms the individual from one state of being to another, from the state of living to the queerer state of being un-dead.

The main focus of the vampire's penetration/bite is transformation into sameness: "the desire to father a new race" (Halberstam 1993, 347); "the contagious nature of vampirism" (Fry 1988, 36); "dreams of a "new order," a world formed in his own image and subservient to his will" (Waller 1986, 49). The vampire acts not only to sate his appetites but also to establish a collective of his own. As Arata (1990) writes: "Since Dracula's growth is not bound by a single lifetime, but instead covers potentially limitless generations, the proper analogy for his development is not that of an individual. He is in effect his own species, or his own race, displaying in his person the progress of ages" (640). The bite of the male vampire enacts much the same transformation as the female, although his must be devoid of homo-libidinal desire. Auerbach (1995) acknowledges that "[T]he female vampire is licensed to realize the erotic, interpenetrative friendship male vampires aroused and denied" (38-30). But the male vampire, nonetheless, has a problematic, penetrative phallic power: the power of the Other. As I will examine further in this chapter, he is seen as the potential ruin of the social order and all relations that fall within it. With his

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<sup>147</sup>Emphasis in the original.

phallic intrusion into the flesh of others he transforms them into pure id; they no longer feel any remorse for their actions, but only exist for the satiation of their desires. In the *Buffy* text, the character of Angel problematizes this most normalized vampiric attribute. Angel is a vampire whose soul has been restored and, with that restoration, has acquired both a conscience and explicitly libidinal desire. His relationship with Buffy in the second season is a complex, phallic dance where his bite is actually replaced by intercourse. But this sexual act is prescribed against by the rules of the diegesis and Angel pays for acting on his desires with his soul, which, in some sense, Buffy acquires along with the phallus. With the elimination of his soul and thus libidinal desire, Angel is freed to return to his earlier, oral phallicism and to bite without personal recrimination.

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the vampire occupies a problematic space, one governed by the principles of censorship defined earlier. Thus, both violence and sex are kept relatively pristine.<sup>148</sup> One of the primary themes of the traditional vampire motif is that of seduction and betrayal: the preying on and sullyng of virgins (Touffic 1993, Halberstam 1993). Bentley writes: "He has loved them with the vampire's phallic bite, and they have become outsiders, Undead... not part of the human race" (37). Within the television serial's format, it is impossible for any of the main characters to come under the sway of the vampire, a motivating force in most vampire films and novels. Further, The Slayer and her friends are already outsiders to the community in which they reside; they do not need the vampire's bite to Other them. Perhaps the virgin motif is so strong because it represents a culturally defined space of acquiescence - much like that of victim to vampire - rather than simply acquisition. In *Buffy*, virginity - and the taking of it - is removed from its phallic/gendered boundaries. Angel may 'deflower' Buffy physically but it is he who is Othered by her defloration, by her introduction of him to both pleasure and libidinal desire. After Angelus has had a romantic moment with Buffy while both were possessed by a poltergeist, he tells Spike and Drusilla (in "I Only Have Eyes for You"):

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<sup>148</sup>When vampires are staked they turn to dust. Sex occurs within the heterosexual couple.

Angelus: What do you know about it? I'm the one who was freaking violated. You didn't have to stand there.  
 Drusilla: What was it? A demon?  
 Angelus: Love.  
 Drusilla: Poor Angel.  
 Angelus: Let's go. I need a real vile kill before sun up to get this crap out of my system.

The phallus, as I have been speaking of it, signals the performative power of transformation. The vampire and The Slayer share the phallus in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, but this is not unusual to the vampire motif. As Craft (1988) writes: "it is all penetrative energy, whether re-fanged or refined, and it is all libidinal; the two strategies of penetration are but different articulations of the same primitive force. *Dracula* certainly problematizes, if it does not quite erase, the line of separation signifying a meaningful difference between Van Helsing and the Count... sympathizes with and finally domesticates vampiric desire; the uncanny, as Freud brilliantly observed, always comes home" (187).<sup>149</sup> Likewise, Buffy and her vampire nemeses share penetrative/phallic power and the performances inculcated within that power. While Craft suggests that buried in the text of *Dracula* is an ambivalence as to who is right in using this power, in *Buffy* this question is both simplified and complicated. For Buffy, the killing of vampires (as long as they are evil) is always right, but in the process she has acquired the phallus, something that was never allowed into the hands of a woman in Stoker's world.

#### THE VAMPIRE AS FREAK

The freak is another pervasive creature in visual culture, with strong ties to the monstrous and, as such, with undeniable links to the spectacle of horror. The vampire as a 'freak of nature,' will be the topic of this section but, as I will demonstrate in later chapters, the freak is of ubiquitous interest to the entire text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Like all freaks, the vampire is positioned against some assumed normalcy in, what Fiedler (1996) has aptly termed "the tyranny of the normal." Where the vampire parts company with the 'normals' of society is

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<sup>149</sup>Emphasis in the original.

immediately apparent: un-death, drinking blood, murder, the destruction of society, its rules and hierarchies. Like other monsters, the vampire is a grotesque figure ruled by the spectacle of the hunt and by the need for its eradication from the text. Russo (1994) writes that:

Freak bodies appear not as a collection of weird images assembled somewhere else, but as events and experiences, as is said of news events, "blown out of proportion." The freak embodies the most capacious aspects of media culture, taking in and consolidating otherwise lost or fragile identities. The freak can be read as a trope not only of the "secret self", but of the most externalized, "out there", hypervisible, and exposed aspect of contemporary culture and of the phantasmic experience of that culture (85).

Thus Russo points to the vampire's function within the text, which is both expositional and introspective: the vampire is both what is most dangerous to social life and what scares us the most about ourselves (the possibility that we ourselves may not make the cut of normalcy). The vampire is, in the structure of these texts, a revelation (Waller 1986).

Many writers who have examined the horror genre have missed the connection between the vampire and the freak, but have noticed the intrinsic relation between horror and the production of normalcy. Waller (1986) quotes: "what Ron Wood calls the "simple and obvious basic formula for the horror film: normality is threatened by the monster." For Wood, it is "the relationship between normality and the Monster that constitutes the essential subject of the horror film" " (16). And later, in relation to the function of the hero in the horror text, that: "Their sacrifice is not recognized by society at large, and they do not live to participate in the return of normality" (225).

In *Buffy*, a central motivating force is Buffy's (impossible) desire to return to normalcy and the struggle against the vampire who threatens normalcy, literalizes that desire. But where the cinematic vampire's death signals the hero's victory and the return to normalcy, the televisual vampire promises that there can be no true return, only that the threat will return again in the next segment. In television, no one lives to participate in the return of normalcy because there can be no return and it thus suggests that in society, normalcy itself is only a product of the struggle against what is freakish within or without. To put it

slightly differently, normalcy is itself only possible in relation to the freak. Foucault (1973) makes a similar comparison in his book *Madness and Civilization*. In a world that constantly insists that social equilibrium is based on hierarchical binaries, the eradication of one side of the binary does not merely vanquish the freak but banishes the normal as well. Foucault makes this clear in his discussions of confinement, as when he writes: "The evil which they had attempted to exclude by confinement reappeared, to the horror of the public, in a fantastical guise. There appeared, ramifying in every direction, the themes of an evil, both physical and moral, that enveloped in this very ambiguity the mingled powers of corruption and horror" (203). For normalcy to return, the freak must always remain somewhere along the periphery (limen) of its borders.

Byers (1988) writes: "Indeed, he [Dracula] is threatening to the normal, and his destruction is not only justifiable, but also morally incumbent upon "normal," "decent" men" (152). Here we see the conflation of normalcy with two things: first, the return to social normalcy is seen as tied to the figure of the exemplary, decent (read moral) person and second, the normal person is here figured in exclusively masculine terms. The original vampire stories were mapped through a "Victorian sense of the normal" which necessitated a male actor/hero to perform the final destruction of the vampire and the female to act as both foil and bait" (Craft 1988, 190). Even contemporary vampire stories often follow this traditional gender delineation, a norm from which *Buffy* tries to escape.<sup>150</sup> In her crusade against the vampire Buffy performs and occupies a heroic space usually reserved for the masculine and the 'normal' masculine at that. But this is problematized by the fact of her femininity and by the impossibility, as such, of truly inscribing her to the space of normalcy. Further, Buffy herself is freakish in her role as The Slayer. If normalcy is predicated upon the fantasy figure of a 'normal' man, then Buffy refutes that possibility as she cannot adequately fulfill the function required of her by the governing rules of the horror text. Instead, she creates her own rules and, through her own

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<sup>150</sup>In many horror movies, the female is the heroine who eludes the monster but must confront "him" in the end. I am thinking, for example, of the *Halloween* movies. While these may seem to deviate from the male/hero, female/victim motif, they continue it through the serialized form the movies take. The woman never actually kills the monster in her confrontations, for he always returns. There is no final destruction of the monster



ambivalent relation to the norm, attempts to rid the text of only those other freakish figures who seem, at times, so uncannily like herself..

In most horror texts even when the monster is ambivalently evil its destruction is immanent, even necessary, to the completion of the text. On *Buffy*, the monster is problematically positioned, occupying a space that shifts in relation to his or her action. One example is Angel. Angel is a freak because he is a vampire. He has escaped death and spent centuries torturing innocent, 'normal' people. And yet, with his soul restored, Angel (when he does not morph into the evil Angelus) is a good vampire, following social norms and working towards social good. Thus is Angel doubly the freak, for what is more monstrous than the vampire who acts against his nature and attempts to emulate normal humanity, or one whose 'true' nature cannot be fixed? By moving into the space of 'man,' Angel also removes himself from the need to be destroyed by the narrative, as Buffy and her friends come to rely on him as part of their group, whose function is to destroy those who are, fundamentally, like him. As a vampire Angel only partially passes and he is constantly at the mercy of both his 'nature' and those who would insist that even a 'good' vampire can never be wholly trusted. Another example does not involve a vampire at all, but a man. Principal Snyder performs the power-hungry freak and the impotent adult who lords it over the young while cowering in the face of his social superiors. Principal Snyder, a farcical figure in this text, represents those who truly believe they are governed by the rules of normalcy which gives them license to exercise their power to restore the moral order. He also embodies many students' image of the principal as an arbitrary authority. But while he is incompetent, unfair and often straightforwardly malicious, he is safe from Buffy's strikes because of his 'humanity.' The human freak, in this like many horror texts, is saved by his humanity.<sup>151</sup> Likewise, the attempt to dehumanize the freak in all his or her

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that she effects. There is always a terrified woman battling an un-killable male monster.

<sup>151</sup>He becomes a type of psychic vampire, preying on the strength and goodwill of others; but psychic vampirism, unlike its more physical other is, as Auerbach (1995) points out, considered normal. She writes that "Dracula preys on the normal, turning its most stalwart adherents into his snarling image; psychic vampires *are* normal" (109, emphasis in the original). Unlike the true vampire, Snyder can never make anyone over in his own image.

performances is what legitimizes their persecution and, ultimately, their murders.

I have already begun to delineate how the freak functions to establish a social binary in which as negative it stabilizes the more positive attribute of normalcy. As Stewart (in Russo 1994) has written: "Often referred to as a 'freak of nature,' the freak, it must be emphasized, is a freak of culture" (79). Thus the freak must always occupy the periphery (in *Buffy* this is made explicit by the vampire's underground habitat), the space where it is no longer necessary to follow cultural imperatives or where cultural imperatives lose their force. The bite of the vampire erases all ties to culture and society, tainting the normalcy of human blood. The vampire bite is performative, it produces the freak. When one of Xander's best friends is bitten by Darla and becomes a vampire in the first episode of the series, Buffy explains that there is no saving him, that his only salvation is eradication through death. Friendship and a lifetime of cultural inculcation are nothing in the face of the vampiric bite, the bite that marks. On the one hand, the vampire works hegemonically to seal the dichotomy between good and evil; on the other hand it works insurgently. The vampire bite insists on the equality of all, everyone can fall victim to the bite of the freak in vampiric disguise. So too for culture, for the vampire acts as an eraser of culture, marking both its constructed nature and the instability of that construction.

The vampire as freak also functions hegemonically in performances which reduce the bite to infection: the passing on of its freakishness through an oral transmission of bodily fluids. Many writers have understood the law of transmutation in vampire mythology to be linked to notions of impurity and genetic inferiority. It can also be linked to the discursive construction of epidemics and the search for the mythic patient zero. The vampires who populate Sunnydale are often changeable figures who wear masks which are at one moment beautiful and at the next freakish and 'unnatural' and are also part of their violation and their power. Humans may wear figurative masks and may be inclined to an equally figurative changeability, but the vampire actually changes in this text from soft-faced youth to fanged and wrinkled cannibal.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>152</sup>The ageist implications of their physicality does not escape me, vampires are also associated with ancientness. This is also true of the pathological implications of the

Diamond (1997) writes that “[B]ecause the mask conventionally conceals the true, because it seduces curiosity, facilitates role-playing, putting on a mask is... emblematic of the impersonations on which theater depends...” (66). So too, the theatricality of the vampire is in its ability to be both the same and Other or a powerful combination of both. Carroll (1990) also writes that the monster is often powerful because of ‘his’ impurity (34). The vampire bite which taints the blood and offers a sentence of un-death also imbues the bitten with eternal life, great strength and community inclusion. While Byers (1988) writes that “[H]is [Dracula] qualities are not seen as generalizable, but as unique, freakish, and unnatural” (151), in the contemporary horror story these vampiric qualities are inherently paradoxical. It is a paradox that most contemporary monster stories deal with: what the vampire embodies is also what many ‘normal’ people desire. Part of the vampire’s attraction is that it entertains or feeds this fantasy. As Hatlen (1988) has written: “if we see Dracula as presenting everything that is “other” to the Victorian bourgeoisie - the “dark” captive races over whom this social class rule, the equally “dark” masses of workers and peasants, and the “dark”, exotic aristocracy-then this problem disappears. It is “otherness” itself, not some particular social group, that Dracula represents; and, for the bourgeoisie, the modes of otherness are infinite” (131). Thus what the death of the vampire symbolizes is also the resurgence of those human impulses that the governing social order would most wish to repress.

When the vampire and freak are collapsed into one another they reveal both the fears and desires of contemporary culture. In the world of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the vampire is a representative of an unspeakable evil, but also a soul capable of redemption and the possibility of an insurgent voice of difference. The “visceral revulsion” Carroll (1990) attributes to the monster is belied by its equally intrinsic allure (19). In one sense, the vampire represents things which are out of reach to the ‘normal’ person, desires held at bay by social norms the breaking free of which would cause society to cease to function. On another level, the vampire represents those social freaks always threatening to impinge upon the borders of ‘civil’ society, those who do not know their place, whose presence causes visceral revulsion by the very fact of their proximity.

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vampire whose wrinkled faces suggest worry, despair and sickness.

Then again, the vampire also represents the danger that society feels from the freak – the fear of the ‘Other’ - a danger which is often masked in a discourse of physical violence but which actually suggests that the freak will change us, will infect us, will cause us to cease to be ‘normal’ (or worse, to stop wanting to be). Finally, as freak the vampire performs the most hegemonic kind of redemption, in which the Other, through death (real or symbolic) begins to acquire the attributes of sameness.

#### THE VAMPIRE AND ITS OTHERS

While all horror films present us with monsters, the vampire holds a particular symbolic place in contemporary Western culture. Perhaps this is because the vampire, unlike other monsters, is presented in human form but devoid of ‘humanity.’ The vampire lurks at the edge of consciousness and in the liminal alleys of social life, always about to impinge on the community who has spent an eternity denying its existence and fortifying its borders against an [imagined] attack. What links the previous sections of this chapter - and will link those that follow - is that no matter how we try and deconstruct the vampire, it is always in its capacity as Other, as somehow removed from what has been socially constructed as ‘normal,’ a figure where the dangers of Otherness that lurk within the apparently ‘normal’ can be expressed. That is, fundamentally, what the vampire represents and has always represented in its narrative mythology: the threat of the Other, the threat that those whom a culture has previously abused and excluded will return to exercise that same destructive privilege with them. As I will show in the following pages, the vampire as Other is the central, though underlying theme in the vampire story, beginning with *Dracula*.

There is an intrinsic movement in vampire tales: the Other who comes from elsewhere and enters into the sovereign spaces of Western culture. Again and again, the articles and books I have read on the subject of the vampire return to the figure of *Dracula*, the Other who moved from the East to the West and walked among ‘us’ without our knowledge and fed on ‘us.’ This raises two important points about the vampiric tale. First, the question of the movement of

the Other and second, the question of the performance of passing. With regard to the first, the vampire legend seems to retrace the steps of exclusionary colonial (or colonial-like) society and threatens to return the favor and seek revenge. Both Hatlen's (1988) article "The Return of the Oppressed/Repressed in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" and Arata's (1990) article "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization," offer particularly in-depth analyses of this movement. Both articles deal explicitly with the question of Otherness by tracking the movements of the vampire. In *Dracula*, the Other is an aristocratic colonial, part Eastern European colonist, part cog in the colonial wheel. He is contrasted with the vampire hunters who are - primarily - members of the British bourgeoisie. As Arata describes, The Count represents "a terrifying reversal... the colonizer finds himself in the position of the colonized, the exploiter exploited, the victimizer victimized" (623). Arata insists that within Stoker's narrative also lies the seeds of cultural guilt, that in "the marauding and invasive Other, British culture sees its own imperial practices mirrored back in monstrous form" (Ibid.).

But the Other, in the form of the vampire, does not merely represent the return of the colonized to take their rightful place among the colonials and in a sense become them. The colonial guilt is such that the Other always takes the form of the monster who insidiously destroys all that the colonial holds dear: distance, purity, recognition, cleanliness, sameness. That which does not meet these criteria is relegated to the margin and, as Douglas (1966) explains: "all margins are dangerous... Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins" (145). Arata (1990) writes: "Stoker probes the heart of culture's sense of itself, its ways of defining and distinguishing itself from other peoples, other cultures, in its hour of perceived decline" (627) and later that: "Vampires are generated by racial enervation and the decline of empire, not vice versa. They are produced, in other words, by the very conditions characterizing late-Victorian Britain" (629). We are talking here about a very specific historical period, place and socio-political formation. This would suggest that the narrative of *Dracula* or the vampire more generally is a reflexive tale that mirrors back not only guilt and anxiety but also the historical context within which the text was written and

produced. This contextualization may offer a good prescription for understanding how the vampire exists as Other in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

In rethinking the vampire myth for America in the nineteen nineties the Other must take on dramatically new performative appearances, as do its hunters. In the vampire's early treks to America s/he tended to perform urban wealth, taking up residence in New York's more opulent lofts and Los Angeles' hillside enclaves as colonizer or urban spaces. When vampires moved into the exopolis there was a tendency for them to seek out the rural township and the degenerate small town. While the *Buffy* movie took place in L.A.'s wealthy inner suburbs, the television series moves into that last bastion of 'safe,' white, bourgeois homogeneity: the L.A. county suburb. The move out of the city tends to be accompanied by a sense of safety and sameness; it has less often been seen as necessary for urban dwellers to have literal borders – gates and walls and gun-toting security guards. Otherness, in Sunnydale, is performed through the intrusion upon these psychic and physical boundaries. The vampires (and demons, etc.) tend to live underground and on the fringes, apt metaphors for an existence which is below or beneath the social order. What is made clear in the text is that these boundaries can never be made impenetrable, even walls must fall eventually. Those who would be kept out, who refuse to conform to the established norms of sanctified suburban space, inevitably find their way back in to destroy and disrupt. Arata (1990) writes that “[T]he appearance of vampires becomes the sign of profound trouble. With vampirism marking the intersection of racial strife, political upheaval, and the fall of empire” (629). The appearance of vampires in Sunnydale signals the impossibility of any continued safety or homogeneity in the suburban exopolis. The fact that the vampire now abandons the urban for the suburban signals the vampire's continual movement between borders.<sup>153</sup> Grosz (1995) elaborates: “Boundaries do not so much define the routes of passage: it is movement that defines and constitutes boundaries. These boundaries, consequently, are more porous and less fixed and rigid than is commonly understood, for there is already an infection by one side of the border of the other, there is a becoming otherwise of each of the terms thus bonded” (131). While the vampiric ambush of the city was seen as a reflection of some

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<sup>153</sup>The question is, perhaps, where will the vampire go from here?

inherent urban violence, suburban slaughter performs a juxtaposition which mocks the idea that there is somewhere out of reach of the Other. The Other is always within the self.

The problematic appearance of the Other is usually marked by a dissonance in visual culture; the Other should be immediately recognizable. Halberstam (1993) remarks that: "Faces and bodies mark the Other as evil so he could be recognized and ostracized" (338). But the vampire is often unrecognizable from those among whom s/he walks, which makes them all the more dangerous and difficult to categorize within the realm of monstrous. The threat, as Jameson (in Hatlen 1988) explains lies in the concept of evil. He writes: "It is becoming increasingly clear that the concept of evil is at one with the category of Otherness itself: evil characterizes whatever is radically different from me, whatever by virtue of precisely that difference seems to constitute a very real and urgent threat to my existence... the point, however, is not that in such figures the Other is feared because he is evil; rather he is evil *because* he is Other, alien, different, strange, unclean, and unfamiliar" (120).<sup>154</sup>

The question of the vampire's appearance is often contradictorily signaled by the ability to pass. Indeed, the vampire is often figured as startlingly human, only devolving into monstrosity when s/he seduces and feeds. Arata (1990) delineates Dracula's movement into and among new spaces as the ability to "pass," and analyses the danger this poses as distinctly colonial and de(con)structive of the traditional literary trope wherein the "pass" only works in the other direction (the powerful may pass among the powerless but not vice-versa). He writes that "Dracula is different, however. A large apart of the terror he inspires originates in his ability to stroll, unrecognized, through the streets of London" (639). Dracula's Otherness, though a pervasive part of his performance, is imbricate in a visual sameness that allows him to become an incongruous part of the visual landscape he chooses to inhabit. Sunnydale's vampires are somewhat different then their most famous progenitor, having lost the ability to shape-shift, they have gained the ability to move - often at will - from difference to sameness. This does not seem to be true of all the vampires in the diegesis, the minion vampires and the ancients all seem locked into rigid visages of difference

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<sup>154</sup>Emphasis in the original.

which forces them to cling to the shadows and caverns. Kaikistos, for instance, is a vampire so old his hands and feet are cloven and thus his deformity does not enable him to pass in the larger community. But Angel, Darla and others may walk the twilight streets, and wander the halls of Sunnydale High and the Bronze looking disarmingly like the children they mimic and then consume.

There is in this process an interesting concatenation of performance, performativity, mimicry and consumption. The insurgence of the vampire lies partly in their ability to mimic their prey so well. In Grosz's (1995) article in which she examines the work of Callois, she notes that the insect's ability to mimic is often a product of its being prey to so many larger animals. So too, the vampire's mimicry allows them to evade those who would destroy them; and yet, conversely, the vampire's mimicry allows them to feed upon those they mimic, allows them to surprise their victims, to get close to them, to be invited in to their most private spaces.<sup>155</sup> This mimetic performance is performative in two directions. First, and most obviously, the vampire bite creates mimesis; it acts performatively to transform the victim into the image of the vampire. Second, the vampire's mimetic performance is performative of their link to humanity, in some sense, they become human through it. In this space the performance of sameness becomes conflated with the ability to pass, or at least to pose, both of which are part of the process of consumption. Robinson (1996) writes, of the pass that "[T]he preconditions of the pass always concern its proximity to a model of identity; a social taxonomy of designation which... has been dominated by a vocabulary of the visual subject" (249). Likewise, Cohen (1996) gives a definition of the pose which shows just how closely the two are linked. He writes: "what posing foregrounds is the imbricated but usually concealed work of representation that (reproduces those mimetic effects which are habitually disposed as "the real")" (40). Thus both the pose and the pass are mimetic functions in which consumption is a precondition for the possibility of mimesis. In order to pose or pass the vampire must have already consumed its victim, must have an intimate knowledge of them in order to accomplish the transition from Other to same. And thus it is not only the physical ability to consume and mimic that

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<sup>155</sup>In *Buffy*, as in many vampire tales, the vampire must be invited into a house and cannot merely force its way inside as s/he pleases.



is frightening about the Other, not only their most terrifying difference, but even more fundamentally their ability to know 'us' better than we know ourselves.

When the Other is introduced, the primary function of the text often becomes its eradication. This is, in fact, an example of what Nisbet calls "the attributes of moral community - a sense of identification, of security, and of membership... the intoxicating atmosphere of spiritual unity that arises out of the common consciousness of participating in a moral crusade" (in Waller 1986, 161). I will return to the concept of 'moral community' later in this thesis. By it I suggest a group which congeals around an idea of morality which is defined by the group but seen as pre-existing it as part of a greater order of morality. The project of the moral community becomes the active policing of its environment, including its own members to ensure their adherence to its moral imperatives. In *Buffy*, the vampire hunters may be understood as forming just such a community. Hunting the vampire necessitates that the hunters believe as a fundamental truth that the vampire (at least the 'bad' vampire) must be destroyed. Buffy and her friends do believe that they participate in a righteous crusade in which they represent the good and the moral. Waller (1986) writes that "the undead also have their unions, alliances, and communal bonds, all of which are to some degree disturbing reflections of the often appealing alternatives to the comradeship of the living" (346); perhaps their own moral communities as well. Their mimicry of the moral crusade is itself constructed by some governing concept of 'truth' which the hunters do not have exclusive rights to. As figures of the Other, the vampires are subsumed to the negative of a binary - the necessary evil without which the moral crusade would be unnecessary.

In the narrative structure of cultural representation, the vampire and its hunters are wholly reciprocal actors. The hunter requires the vampire in order to establish her or himself as a moral being, as 'good.' The vampire requires the hunter/hunted (for they are often one and the same) in order to accumulate strength, power and space. Both are needed to move the story forward. This movement is precipitated by Othering the vampire which makes it necessary for a community to be formed for its eradication. The destruction of the vampire can be read as the production of a "surrogate victim" ending the "sacrificial

crisis" of the Sunnydale community (Girard in Waller 1986, 239-50). In this performance the vampiric Other stands in for the threat of violence which exists within the community itself. It is important that the violence against the vampire be normalized as heroic action while the hunt distracts the community from the violence which erupts within it. The vampire helps redefine the boundaries of the moral community its presence breaches. Without the vampire there is no story; without the Other there are no lines to draw, no battles to win and no community to forge.

#### QUEERING THE VAMPIRE

Viewing the vampire as a queer figure in literary and visual culture - queering it - was not something I came up with on my own. What follows are thoughts that began with the reading of an article by Sue-Ellen Case called "Tracking the Vampire," which appeared in the Summer 1991 issue of *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. The focus of the issue was queer theory. I was already familiar with Case's work within performance and queer theory and was delighted to find that she had made a foray into the realm of the living undead. It will be worthwhile, therefore, to examine her thoughts on the queer figure of the vampire and its relation to *Buffy*. Case, writing from a lesbian position, seems to figure the queered vampire within a feminine pronoun - she. However, I think that her discourse can be expanded to include vampires of both sexes.<sup>156</sup> Case writes: "Life/death becomes the binary of the "natural" limits of Being: the organic is the natural. In contrast, the queer has been historically constituted as unnatural... The queer is the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny... the queer dwells underground" (3). Thus the queer and the vampire are apt 'bedfellows,' sharing the denigration reserved for those whose way of life runs counter to the moral voice of the community. Certainly the vampire is unnatural and uncanny in its un-dead return; a taboo-breaker in the drinking of blood, which denotes cannibalism and at times incest, monstrous in the terror

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<sup>156</sup>The question of how the vampire is sexed is an intriguing one, since all are penetrative and none fertile. There is a suggestion that the vampire is (hetero)sexed through those it feeds on, but this is too simple a split. The sex of the vampire would make an interesting topic for a further article.

which is evoked in others. The vampire, like the queer, dwells hidden underground (in the closet). Queer here is not necessarily an embedded aspect of identity, but a practice of boundary crossing that queers the subject.

The notion of the queer allows the vampire to enter visual culture in a most insurgent way. Case (1991) remarks that "the dominant gaze constructs a vampire that serves only as a proscription - is perceived only as a transgression: interpolated between the viewer and the vampire is the cross -the crossing out of her image. Dominant representation has made the vampire a horror story" (9). This crossing out of the vampire is made resonant in two places in visual culture. First, as a liminal figure who belongs to youth. Although adults may come slowly to 'see' the vampire, they are skeptical, hesitant, trained by decades of inscription into dominant notions of reality. Young people, on the other hand, readily accept the presence of the vampire as part of their social landscape; they have not yet closed their eyes to the queerness that surrounds and permeates them. Second, the erasure of the vampire from visual culture is effected by the absence of the image in the mirror. This is a trope which is rarely used in *Buffy*, but it is indicative of the vampire's status nonetheless in that it is an attribute of the vampire which is part of popular knowledge. Senf (1988) gives an interesting analysis of the vampire's lack of specularity when she writes: "Harker's inability to "see" Dracula [in the mirror] is a manifestation of moral blindness which reveals his insensitivity to others and... his inability to perceive certain traits within himself" (97). Thus the absent image of the vampire is mirrored back to both the hunter and the viewer and attributable to a lack in their ability to see, as much as to the inability of the vampire's image to 'stick.' Further, Craft (1988) suggests that the mirror image of the monster is simply redundant, suggesting that "Dracula need cast no reflection because his presence... would be simply redundant; the monster, indeed, is no one "except myself" " (188).

In Case's speculations the vampire's absent image parallels the exclusion of the lesbian from visual culture, while the presence of woman in any guise always suggests the lesbian. That is, the introduction of woman into cultural representation always bears traces of the lesbian, always leaves the possibility of lesbianism to emerge. Halbertstam (1993), in yet another direction, suggests that the vampire represents the entire spectrum of possible sexualities. Thus we are

left with a queer vampire which represents desire in all its varied forms, especially those which are in violation of normative morality. And yet, the vampire is strongly concatenated with women and with sexual images of blood (Bentley 1988). In many vampire stories the letting of blood has overtly heterosexual overtones and the vampire seems predisposed to prey on members of the opposite sex. But *Buffy's* vampires, in their less discriminating consumption, seem to occupy a sexually neutral position rather than a queer one. Only when the explicit focus of the scene is on biting and drinking does the vampire return to a strictly heterosexual mode. For instance, in "Graduation Day II" Buffy must let Angel drink her blood in order to save his life. The viewer sees Buffy's wide eyes and hears the sucking sounds that are accompanied by heavy breathing and gasping. The sucking of blood becomes a substitute for the (hetero)sexual act in which Buffy and Angel can no longer engage.

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, queering the vampire also effects a queering of the rest of the cast. In some sense, the text reiterates Waller's (1986) assertion that "only a woman is able to break the terrible spell - a woman pure of heart must offer herself to Nosferatu" (189) - and then breaks with it. Buffy should inhabit the space of the pure-hearted woman, but can only do so partially. In the vampire tales which Waller is discussing, the pure-hearted woman is in no sense the story's heroine, but a trope of the text who stands in for a purer state of being, a state in opposition to the vampire or queer. The hero must be male and Case (1991), referring to Williams' work on the monstrous, writes that "[W]ithin the horror genre, she observes, it is in the monster's body that the sexual interest resides, not the bland hero's" (11). This too is problematic when the hero's body is the body of a woman, a hunter's body that can no longer be pure. There is no possibility of breaking the spell, thus the text itself is queered. The sense of purity which previously served as a litmus test for 'good' is, if not entirely absent, at least strained to its limits. When the woman takes up the stake, refusing to be the offering and insisting on her primacy as the hunter she becomes not a bland hero but a queer heroine. She too skews the categories that we are supposed to know.

The dismantling of categorical certainty is a hallmark of the monster. Carroll (1990) writes: "Monsters... are repelling because they violate standing

categories. ...they are also compelling of our attention. They are attractive, in the sense that they elicit interest, and they are the cause of, for many, irresistible attention, again, just because they violate standing categories. They are curiosities" (188). The vampire stands in a disjunctive space in relation to reality, a space of the un-dead, or, like the queer, the violation of the natural order of things. It is a strange space from which to speak or to be (un)seen: at once intensely scrutinized, the subject of dark desires and similarly discarded from the visual. When the vampire does appear it has tended to be under the warrant of the stake in a vortex of repetitive penetration and regeneration. But in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the queerness of The Slayer problematizes the simple dichotomy of good and evil, pure and impure. Craft (1988) writes that the vampire and its hunter share "[A] dangerous sameness [that] waits behind difference; tooth, stake, and hypodermic needle, it would seem, all share a point" (188). But where the vampire motif has tended only to leave a whiff of convolution, when Buffy beds down with Angel it is almost impossible to imagine the continuation of any disjunction between hunter and hunter, good and evil, same and Other.

Periodically, a more straightforward queerness does make itself felt in the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Here too, the viewer is presented with an explicit image of excessive sexual sameness, which almost acts as a mirror image. In the first instance, we find a continual repartee between Buffy and Faith which holds strict sexual overtones. In "Enemies," Faith kidnaps Buffy and, as she is chained to a cavernous wall, taunts her. Faith constantly stands over Buffy, touching her and raging. In the struggle that ensues after Buffy is freed they kneel facing each other, knives to each other's throats, like a mirror image.

Faith: What are you gonna do B? Kill me? You become me. You're not ready for that... (She grabs Buffy, pulling her close and then swoops at the last moment to kiss her on the forehead, a benediction) ...yet.

In "Graduation Day," Buffy goes to meet Faith, her intention is to kill her and use her blood to cure Angel from a poison that Faith has inflicted him with. When the scene opens the first thing the viewer notices is that Buffy has donned leather

pants and jacket, Faith's usual attire. Faith mocks her saying: "Look at you, all dressed up in big sister's clothes." Then note the following exchange:

Buffy: You told me I was just like you. That I was holding out.  
 Faith: Ready to cut loose?  
 Buffy: Try me.  
 Faith: Okay then... Give us a kiss.

There is a type of doubling that occurs in these exchanges, a mocking mimicry. The two women take up the entire space; even when Angel is present he is peripheral, like the princess in fairy tales. Case (1991) writes that "[I]n queer discourse, "she" is the wounding, desiring, transgressive position that weds, through sex, an unnatural being... When two "she's" are constructed, it is a double trope - a double masquerade" (8). Though Buffy and Faith are not sexually entwined, their verbal exchanges are foreplay/seduction to the fight scenes which follow and which take on a certain sexual flavor. Though Faith's words are meant to taunt, it is difficult to ignore these scenes as queered spaces.

In "The Wish," the cast is brought into an alternate universe where the undead rule Sunnydale; Willow and Xander are vampires. In "Doppelgangland," the vampire Willow is brought back to the original Sunnydale. When the two Willows meet face to face for the first time an interesting scene is performed:

v. Willow: Well look at me... I'm all fuzzy.  
 Willow: What do I want with you, uh.  
 v. Willow: Your little school friend Anya said that you're the one that brought me here. She said that you can get me back to my world.  
 Willow: Oh...oh... oops!  
 v. Willow: (Looking her over hungrily) I dunno. I kind of like the idea of the two of us. (She caresses her arm and turns her around) We could be quite a team. If you come around to my way of thinking.  
 Willow: Does that mean we have to snuggle?  
 v. Willow: (Pulling Willow's hair) What do you say? (Licks her neck) Want to be bad?  
 Willow: This just can't get more disturbing. (vampire Willow growls and Willow pulls away.) Ick. Oow. No more. You're starting to freak me out. (She tries to go but vampire Willow shadows her steps)

After the two Willows fight and a tranquilizer gun has subdued the vampire, Willow says to Buffy: "It's horrible. That's what I would be like as a vampire. So evil and skanky... And (whispering) I think I'm kind of gay."<sup>157</sup> Later, vampire Willow chases Cordelia wanting to bite her, in another scene with explicitly queer overtones. And in a scene towards the end of the episode, the two Willows meet again. First we see vampire Willow strangling good Willow, trying to bite her. After Buffy has separated them, Giles and the others work to send the vampire Willow back to her own universe:

Willow: I just can't kill her.  
 Buffy: No, me neither.  
 Willow: I mean, I know she's not me. We have a big nothing in common, but, still...  
 Buffy: There but for the grace of getting bit.  
 Willow: We send her back to her world, then, she stands a chance, that's the way it should be anyway.  
 Giles: Uh... we're about ready... Don't you try any tricks, now, dear.  
 Anya: I don't have any tricks, when I get my powers back you will all grovel before me.  
 Giles: If you uh, Willows, would stand in the circle.  
 Willow: Good luck. Try not to kill people. (She hugs her other, but then jumps back) Hey! Hands! Hands! (Vampire Willow grins at her)

It is possible to read these exchanges through the trope of the double (which we will return to later), but unlike Buffy and Faith, these scenes are marked more explicitly as a sexual, lesbian, doubling. Willow is faced with herself in another, Othered capacity. The fact that the lesbian emerges within the trope of the vampire is equally compelling, for as Case (1991) writes: "The double "she," in combination with the queer fanged creature, produces the vampire. The vampire is queer in the lesbian mode" (9). In the guise of sameness, the self is presented with itself as radical difference. As Auerbach (1995) writes of the female vampire: "her enchantment is her familiarity" (42). *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* takes this idea and literalizes it in the text by making the vampire not only

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<sup>157</sup> In an interesting twist, Willow will actually become involved in a lesbian relationship during the fourth season.

familiar but the same, or better yet, the mirror image. Thus the vampire acts as the mirror, exhibiting hidden facets of the self.

Hanson (1995) writes: "To be queer is to hear strange voices, to answer an obscene call, to answer several different calls in the course of one's life" (p. 53). In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the characters all have occasion to be queered, not only in the strictly sexual sense (although I hope I have shown that this impulse does come through, if almost subliminally), but also in the manner in which the characters perform against accepted norms and expected actions. Looking up the word queer in the thesaurus provides an interesting look at the scope of what the term actually represents:

**unusual**, unaccustomed, unwonted, uncommon; rare, singular, unique, curious, odd, extraordinary, strange, monstrous; wonderful, etc., 870; remarkable, noteworthy, queer, quaint, nondescript, original, unorthodox, unconventional, Bohemian, unprecedented, unparalleled, unexampled, unheard of; fantastic, newfangled, eccentric, grotesque, bizarre; unfamiliar, outlandish (Roget's 1946, 25).<sup>158</sup>

That this litany comes at the end rather than the beginning of this section may seem strange but I am hoping that it will help me elaborate the point I have tried to make throughout: that 'queer' cannot be consolidated entirely as either hidden or Other. Queering the vampire suggests that this shadowy figure dwells along all point of the spectrum, from the most strange to the most familiar and mundane. Further, the vampire in the text cannot help but queer all those she or he touches. All the vampires in *Buffy* are queer – are border-crossers - Angel perhaps most of all as a vampire who chooses not to bite. Buffy, Faith, Willow, Xander, Oz, Giles, Cordelia, Jenny and all the rest become queered through their contact with the vampire. They are lifted out of their mundane existence and brought into a space where boundaries and modes of being are permeable. But this performative is not like the vampire bite which is often seen as a "disease" or "perversion" (Bentley 1988, 27). Rather, proximity to the vampire allows the most insurgent aspects of each character to be elaborated and explored. Case's

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<sup>158</sup>Emphasis and bold in the original. Under wonderful we find: "wondrous, suprising, striking, marvelous, miraculous; unexpected, mysterious, monstrous, prodigious, stupendous, inconceivable, incredible, strange" (263).



(1991) suggestion that the queer is that which lurks and waits and dwells underground to provocatively change the status quo is, in *Buffy*, as elsewhere, made evident.

#### FREUDIAN SLIPS: THE VAMPIRE AS LOST-OBJECT AND FATHER FIGURE

I am not the first to remark on parallels between the stories both psychoanalytic theory and the vampire tell. In my viewing of this program, certain psychoanalytic and pseudo-psychoanalytic concepts have stuck in my mind and it is my intention to examine them in the following pages. They have raised questions for me about the formation of character and how the characters move together through the story. Psychoanalytic concepts have been used symbolically by all sorts of writers: they function well as discursive metaphors for social and cultural life. The struggle between the good and bad father, which figures prominently in psychoanalytic theory, for example, has also been taken up by vampire enthusiasts, especially in relation to the Dracula story. But the vampire also stands in for other symbolic struggles, both internal and external, in the vampiric text. In the following pages I will demonstrate how the introduction of the vampire in visual culture sets in motion a series of performances through which the vampire functions, in turn, as the object of our most ardent desires and fathers by whom we measure all our actions.

##### *The vampire as lost-object*

In psychoanalytic theory the object is usually bound to the mother. As the child grows up, s/he must give up the original object and transfer that cathexis to others. Often, the original object, thought to be lost, is mourned but remains part of the person's subjectivity or ego, always desired and sought-after. Freud (1966) writes: "If one has lost an object or has been obliged to give it up, one often compensates by identifying oneself with it and by setting it up once more in one's ego" (527). Freud notes that despite the differentiation that needs to be maintained between object-choice and identification, the loss of the object often anticipates the subject's move to identify with it; to make the lost object part of the ego's make up. Lacan (1977) also expressed the relationship between object-

choices and identification as dialectic. For Lacan, the assimilation of the object into the self moves it into the realm of fantasy, marking the object as a point of identification within the subject itself. He writes that “these objects... are no doubt won or lost by the subject. He is destroyed by the them or he preserves them, but above all he *is* this object, according to the place where they function in his fundamental phantasy” (251-52).<sup>159</sup> Thus the object represents not only that which is loved and is always (at least) under the threat of loss or destruction, but also a fantasy of the self linked to desire.

How can we understand the vampire, who is supposed to be despised, to function as the lost-object? I believe there are two ways in which this works and both are tied to Freud’s understanding of the ambivalence by which object-cathexis is often attained (588). First, the vampire is, in some sense, metonymic for aspects of life which must be abandoned in the quest for adulthood and inclusion within the moral community. The vampire stands in for what has been lost in that movement: the belief in immortality, the freedom to act on any desire, the absence of need to conform to moral standards. The vampire is metonymic for those things the subject has lost and the fantasy of the vampire represents the ambivalent search which will always lead to emptiness or to self-destruction. Cook (1990) describes “[T]he impossibility of satisfaction through objects... makes possible another kind of satisfaction through fantasy; the pleasure of omnipotence in relation to the object” (184). In the narrative of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the quest signals the power Buffy attempts to wield over the vampire, as over the fantasy the vampire represents. It demonstrates how the vampire permeates the text with loss; the encounter with the vampire excavates those repressed longings that the moral community is charged with silencing. Phelan (1997) writes that what “psychoanalysis makes clear [is] that the experience of loss is one of the central repetitions of subjectivity” (5). The appearance of the vampire acts against the repression of those things we have lost.

The vampire also enters the imagination metonymically, in the second case, as all that has gone wrong with the world. The vampiric text creates a diegetic community which is permeated with malice and corruption, figured

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<sup>159</sup>Emphasis in the original.

prominently in - though not exclusively - the figure of the vampire. Waller (1986) points to a "world of "monotonous horror" " which is an apt term for the day to day violence which is seen to have imposed itself on the world. The vampire gives this monotonous horror the face and character of fantasy onto which all the anger at a world gone wrong can be imposed. The vampire stands in not only for the horrors we can barely even imagine, but equally for those with which we are confronted every day on the news. The vampire stands in metonymically for the world which has been lost, the fictional world of pre-war America: homogenous, upwardly mobile, monogamous, safe, conformist. The vampire is a reminder that that world is an impossible fiction, that borders are permeable and walls fall, that there is no such thing as safety. Carroll (1990) writes: "Understandably, commentators have traded on the suggestive verbal substitutability of the *American Dream* with the *American Nightmare*. The sense of paralysis, engendered not only by massive historical shocks, but by an unrelenting inability to come to terms practically with situations, which persistently seem inconceivable and unbelievable, finds a ready, though not a total, analogue in the recurrent psychic demoralization of the fictional victims left dumbfounded by horrific monsters" (214).<sup>160</sup> *Buffy* suggests that horror has already come home to roost and has taken up residence in the last bastion of middle-class Americana: the West Coast suburb. Here, the vampire signals the impossibility of a return to that fantastic space, the loss of that space. The quest to destroy the vampire is, in some sense, a recapitulation into idealism, a belief that the destruction of the vampire will bring back what has been lost. As Irigaray (1985a) writes: "the quest for the "object" becomes a game of Chinese boxes, infinitely receding" (134). The appearance of the vampire is a paradox, its insistent presence disrupts any easy nostalgia for the world that has been lost while at the same time propels the quest which would effect the extinction of the vampire. The loss of the object is here doubled, for the vampire is both the object lost and the reminder of another, perhaps even greater loss.

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<sup>160</sup>Emphases in the original.

*Good fathers and bad fathers*

The figure of the father is, as in psychoanalytic literature, ubiquitous in the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Truly, there are fathers everywhere, performing all spectrums of action. I will deal with them in turn. But first, allow me to set up the discussion by examining the place of the father within some conceptions of psychoanalytic theory. There, the primary place of the father is in the Oedipal family, in which the father is the parent with whom the son must align himself and the daughter must desire. The father is cast, in turn, as protector and oppressor, competitor and advisor, hunter and hunted (Freud 1966). In Lacanian thinking the father is often conflated with the symbolic Name-of-the-Father, a pure signifier of the Law or Word (also see Gallop 1982). In my own reading the two sides of the father can be understood as assimilated. Within this text the father is rarely ever the biological father but he who stands in and performs the role of the father, the force of both fear and protection. Thus he is always both his physical self and the laws for which the father stands.

The question of the father has not gone unnoticed by those who take the vampire as their object of study. Especially with regard to *Dracula*, the father has been a centrally ambiguous, doubled figure. In *Dracula* this is effected by the superimposition of The Count and Van Helsing (the good and bad fathers (Craft 1988, Twitchell 1988)). Astle (1980), who has written on precisely this subject states: "Van Helsing is... instead a rather "good-father" authority figure. He provides most of the intellectual direction of the hunt, having both science and scholarly vampire lore to draw on" (102). *Dracula* is, of course, most easily read as the bad father but even Stoker did not leave this so obviously closed to interpretation in his novel. The doubling of the father is something we also see in *Buffy* (although here a multiplying). But to return to Astle:

...in Stoker's novel we have a conflict between two "fathers" as well as between fathers and sons... [Freud] "He invented the heroic myth. The hero was a man who by himself had slain the father-the father who still appeared in the myth as a totemic monster"... the difference in *Dracula* is that it is not a hero by *himself* who slays the monster-father, but an articulated *band* of heroes, a corporate structure in which everyone plays his or her part... From the point of view of the Oedipus, the existence of two fathers, *Dracula* and

Van Helsing, is a kind of wish fulfillment, allowing the hunters to both kill *and* to obey the father at the same time (99).<sup>161</sup>

Again we find a kind of recursion between the totemic vampire (Count Dracula) and *Buffy*, who, though she must fight alone, is assisted by her friends. Further, her father-directed anger may be continually displaced from her absent biological father to Giles to any number of older, demonic males. Strictly read, most of the remarks about fathers and aggression (in both psychoanalytic and vampiric literatures) have tended to be male focused. One of the most insurgent hallmarks of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is that she has turned Freudian rebellion of sons against fathers on its head.

The vampire is never the mother, always the sire, the sire of adult children for which s/he rarely feels any further responsibility. In the first season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the patriarchal vampire was The Master. Though he was only a secondary character at best, The Master performed the dangerous or castrating father who takes life as easily as he gives it. When Buffy finally kills him there is no sense of either a void or a succession. The death of the vampire father signals an opening in the power structure of the demon economy: there is no killing the un-dead father for he shall always live again and again. In the figure of The Master, the father symbolizes eternal power.

While there are a plethora of un-dead fathers, there are hardly any biological ones. Through Buffy's biological father we learn about the theme of abandonment. Like Cinderella's father who died and left her at the mercy of a wicked stepmother, Buffy's father has left her to battle the demons alone (Bettleheim 1976, Warner 1995). The biological mother is also kept far from the textual action, but when Joyce Summers rears her head she performs the lionesses share of maternal protection. In *Buffy*, it is not only the surrogate father who protects but the mother as well, and together they attempt to lead Buffy through to adulthood and independence. The mother as father performs protection; the biological father performs abandonment and the surrogate father wisdom.

There are other fathers as well: Principal Snyder performs the ineffective, ridiculing father; Wesley performs the incompetent, immature father and the

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<sup>161</sup>Emphases in the original.

Mayor performs (like the Master) the powerful father who threatens to devour. But, as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* moved towards the culmination of its third season, a pattern emerged that pit fathers and daughters against one another in a triumphant battle worthy of the heirs of Dracula. First, it is important to note that I am talking about daughters, for they are the focus of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* though not often of theory. Take Irigaray's (1985a) claim that "[I]f the father lacks resources, he will at least have "sons" to prove his potency; guarantee his authority" (352). In *Buffy* lineage lies solely in the feminine: the proof of the father's worth (as we shall see) lies in the virility and strength of his daughter... not his son. At the end of the third season we have come down to a battle of two father-daughter groups: Buffy and Giles, Faith and The Mayor. Buffy and Giles have always enjoyed a parental relationship. He is The Watcher and she is The Slayer, they are co-dependents in a battle that began longer ago than can be imagined. But The Watcher is supposed to be impartial and distant and Giles, perhaps because Buffy has no father of her own, has stepped in to perform his part. This asserts a conventional narrative of the heterosexual family where every child needs two parents and the teacher functions as a substitute for what is lacking at home. If there is to be a dichotomy between these father-daughter dyads, this one would represent the good, the attempt make order from chaos, to restore the moral community. Giles and Buffy are bound to each other through fate and duty but their love for one another is genuine and filial. In "Dead Man's Party," for example, Buffy returns to Sunnydale after having run away for the summer. When her friends take her to Giles' house she is afraid of his anger; after he has seen her he goes into the kitchen and weeps.

Faith is not so loved as Buffy; she has no parents, and no Watcher. She is a young woman full of rage and hate. It is these elements which bring her into contact with The Mayor, a one hundred-year-old man trying to become an unstoppable demon. The Mayor gives Faith what no one else has been able to: unconditional love even as she kills and maims. But when the two are together their care for one another is unmistakable, as the following passages show:

Mayor: I know you'll always have me Faith. I'm the most important friend you'll ever have (in "Lie to Me").

Mayor: Let me tell you something. Nobody knows what you are. Not even you, little miss seen-it-all. The ascension isn't just my day, it's yours. Your day to blossom, to show the world what a powerful girl you are. I think of what you've done, of what I know you'll do... No Father could be prouder (in "Graduation Day Part I").

And when the Mayor hears that Buffy and Faith have battled and cannot find Faith, he mutters to himself over and over: "She'll be alright. She'll be all right. She'll be alright" (In "Graduation Day Part II").

When the Mayor sees that Faith is on her deathbed in the hospital, he goes crazy and tries to kill Buffy. In the previous episode The Mayor pays a visit to the Library where Buffy, Giles and her friends have gathered:

Mayor: That's one spunky little girl you've raised. I'm gonna eat her. (Giles stabs him with a sword but since he is invincible he just pulls it right back out) Well, that was a little thoughtless. Violent outbursts like that, in front of the children. They look to you to see how to behave.

In this as in many other scenes the friction between a notion of good and bad father is stretched and problematized. The Mayor cannot really be a good father because he wants to let demons roam the earth and eat people; but he is a good father in that he loves Faith and looks out for her, makes her feel happy, special, loved, safe and above all, useful. Whereas the battle of good and bad fathers is often posited in conflict with one child, one son, in this reconfiguration each child has a good father and the conflict is between dyads in a performance of paternity. The hatred of fathers is passed on between generations as Faith and Buffy perform the battle between their fathers. It is easy enough to cast The Mayor in the part of the bad father but the text refuses any so easy a distinction. Each father is seen to occupy shifting positions. And this helps the series to continue to blur the boundaries between the living and the un-dead, and to allow the text to remain ambivalent and insurgent.

## THE UNCANNY DOUBLE

For Freud, the uncanny represents the familiar which has been repressed and which returns to haunt the subject. He writes: "the 'uncanny' is that class of terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (1959, 367-68). Freud examines many types of uncanny but I am primarily concerned with his thoughts on the uncanny double. The double Freud examines is, quite literally, a repetitive motion which creates an exact copy, a "doubling, dividing and interchanging of self" (387). In Freud's brief genealogy of the uncanny, he insists that the double was once a totemic icon of hope, of the staving off of death, of renewed life which now returned to "become[s] the ghastly harbinger of death" (Ibid.). But Freud also explains that in the process of doubling the road to an unlimited number of unrealized possibilities is opened up. He writes: "There are all those unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy, all those strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed, and all our suppressed acts of volition which nourish in us the illusion of Free Will" (388). Though it will be necessary to play with this concept a little in the course of my analysis, the fundamental nature of the double remains intact. Though the double will be understood as that which is so familiar as to be made strange, the double will not be restricted to the carbon copy but expanded to include a more allegorical resemblance.

One thing is certain, the double is a recurrent leitmotif in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Virtually everyone and thing has a double if you look hard enough. Some are obvious: Buffy and Faith are doubled Slayers, Giles and Wesley, Watchers. Willow is doubled by the vampire Willow introduced earlier; Giles and the Mayor double the Father; and Angel is doubled by his transformation into the evil Angelus. But there are other doublings which hinge on physical transformation and social opposition. The Mayor acts as an elected official and struggles to become a demon. Faith is both a Slayer and a hired killer. Anya is a demon who must learn to be a teenaged girl. Oz is both boy and werewolf and Willow and Amy are girls and witches. Ms Calendar is a teacher who is also involved in Angel's curse. Even the nasty Principal Snyder is doubled by his predecessor, the sweet but ineffectual Principal Flutie. Finally, there is another,



even deeper layer to these doublings as the vampires and the hunters mirror each other in a dance of sameness, rendering the discernment between hunter and hunted virtually impossible. And the entire town of Sunnydale is fused with parallel universes, of which the viewer is sometimes given a glimpse.

One way to think about these doublings in to look at Carroll's (1990) notions of fusion and fission:

In fusion, categorically contradictory elements are fused or condensed or superimposed in one unified spatiotemporal being whose identity is homogeneous. But with fission, the contradictory elements are, so to speak, distributed over *different*, though necessarily physically related, identities. The type of creatures that I have in mind include *doppelgangers*, alter-egos, and werewolves (46).<sup>162</sup>

In this taxonomy, most of the first examples (above) of doubling can be understood as fission, while the latter would be examples of fusion. While there can be no exact mechanism for distinguishing the different types of doubling, I will try an examine them as three discrete levels for the sake of clarification.

In the first grouping – fission - are the doubles who are most physically differentiated but occupy the same diegetic space: Buffy and Faith, Giles and The Mayor, the Willows, Wesley and Giles, and the Principals. This form of doubling points to difference rather than sameness but is no less uncanny. The double occupies the space which should always be singularly attributed: the hunter, the father, the self, the teacher, the authority. The double points the inherently unfixable nature of these positions, which are always precariously attained and subject to any number of counter-claims. It is easy to dismiss these doublings as mere dualities, with one pole representing the good and the other evil and the text does allow for such a reading. However, such a reading cannot be fully endorsed and an insurgent reordering of these doubles always exists. Buffy can never quite give up on Faith, Willow cannot bring herself to allow her doppelganger to be slain, Wesley tries to find a way to work with Giles rather than against him. In this space of doubles, however, there must always be a resolution to the doppelganger's effects, usually one of the binary must be

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<sup>162</sup>Emphases in the original.

destroyed or banished. Thus Buffy stabs Faith, The Mayor is destroyed, and Wesley yearns to return to England, the vampire Willow returns to her Universe and Principal Snyder replaces principal Flutie. Where the doubling occurs through fission, the uncanny double must always be remanded to an exclusionary order.

In the second category of doubling are those doubles that occur between fission and fusion. There are a great many of them: Angel, The Mayor, Faith, Anya, Oz, Willow, Amy and Ms Calendar. These doubles operate out of sameness, but display, through performance, an almost polar opposition of action. In these doubles, there is no other except that part of the self, which, through doubling, finds its self-expression. Although they may be linked to the alter ego which Carroll ascribes to fission, their propensity to find expression in the single body, I think, places them somewhere between the two poles. The hidden self is neither unilaterally embraced nor repressed but functions, rather, as an insight into the construction of character. This is seen most obviously in the shifting between Angel and Angelus: the souled vampire and the souless. Against his will the evil of Angelus takes over and Angel himself becomes lost in repression. In the Mayor's the good is subsumed in evil. His doubling is in power and the inability to attain immense power in human form. Faith's doubling concerns the ability of rage to take over the body and the need to find a space for oneself; Ms Calendar's is about keeping a secret; Anya's about accepting change and Oz's about change out of one's control. Even Buffy's doubling, between pretty prom queen and the fierce vampire Slayer can be read as an attempt to mask difference with sameness, to be normal and fit in. In these disparate performances of doubling there is no possibility of ridding the self of the double, for the double remains part and parcel of the self. The double in this case represents the secret self, the freakish part of one's nature mirrored back and made manifest. They represent a move towards insurgence, a making visible of that which has heretofore been kept hidden. It is the insurgent voice of the Other or, as Russo (1994) suggests, the grotesque, which: "retains [for Bahktin] its association with the carnivalesque view of the body and the world as regenerative and incomplete projects, implying those "unfulfilled but possible futures" which Freud identifies as an important aspect of the uncanny double"

(33). Especially made evident in the cases of Oz (the werewolf) and Angel, the double refuses to be repressed and continually fights to exert control over the self. This type of doubling suggests that there is always a hidden part of the self, ready to leap forward at any moment and perform what is kept most secret.

The third level, the level of fusion, is where distinct objects are superimposed to give a skewed view of homogeneity. In this doubling that which 'is' merges with the infinite possibilities of what it may become; where both come to recognize their face in that of the Other. I have in mind here, first, the tie that binds the vampire to The Slayer. There has been a great deal written about how Stoker makes a strong argument that the vampire mirrors the actions of the men who hunt him, and the hunter comes to represent the vampire's double. But where the vampire is at least an honest feeder, the hunter must set up elaborate rituals to enable his action, a narrative structure often found in fairy tales. Roth (1988) writes: "Obviously, the acting out of such murderous impulses is threatening: in addition to the defenses mentioned above [projection and denial], the use of religion not only exorcises the evil but to justify the murders is striking. In other words, Christianity is on our side, we *must* be right" (61).<sup>163</sup> And Senf (1988) elaborates: "Behavior generally attributed to the vampire - the habit of attacking a sleeping victim, violence, and irrational behavior - is revealed to be the behavior of the civilized Englishman also... Stoker implies that the only difference between Dracula and his opponents is the narrators' ability to state individual desire in terms of what they believe is a common good" (98). Thus through the act of violence the vampire and the hunter/Slayer become doubled. In Stoker's narrative this is best effected in the mirroring of the doctor (Van Helsing) and the Count (Craft, 1988). In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* it is best exemplified by a character who is not even a vampire: Faith. As Faith moves from vampire hunter/Slayer to Slayer hunter, she performs her double, her inner, hidden self that, in a sudden reversal, comes to the fore. Faith's reversal mirrors the vampire's transformative power. Like the vampire bite which actually creates the double, Faith moves herself out of the boundaries of the moral community.

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<sup>163</sup>Emphasis in the original.

It is also with the boundaries of the moral community that this third type of doubling is concerned. Sunnydale itself is a double of the world it represents. It truly is the mirror through which Alice walked, on the other side of which are unimaginable treasures and monsters. It is, as Craft (1988) has suggested in relation to the vampire, a "perverse mirroring," perverse in that it is a mirroring and should in no way be mistaken for reality (186). It is not a fabrication of some unimaginable reality but a funhouse mirror which displays the worst fears of those who occupy privileged and normative positions in society. It is the world that lurks just beyond the borders, not of imagination, but of moral structure. In Sunnydale, everything that should have been kept at bay has breached the borders. It is the double that shows an unspeakable truth about social life. So, the vampire and Sunnydale as uncanny doubles have a more inscriptive function than the earlier examples. They are the doubles which are forever fused to us, which refuse to ever be vanquished, which cannot be killed or cast aside.

The text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* mobilizes the uncanniness of the double in several ways, each performing a specific function and negotiation of textual borders. The examples which have been called fission may be understood to act the most hegemonically. They are bounded by distinctions of visual culture and insist that within any dichotomous situation of terms one must, at the very least, be subjugated if not destroyed. These are examples of the double expressed as a binary, hierarchical function. Those examples which straddle the boundary between fission and fusion perform change in a movement between hegemony and insurgence. They point to the possibility that ever-present inner turmoil may give way to change and the impossibility of ever fully subverting that movement. These examples reveal the double as existing within, as a personal performance of difference and against any notion of a unified self. The third set of examples represent fusion, the most abstract and perhaps uncanny aspect of the double that exists within this text. They reveal the double's inherent enmeshment with the self, revealing its most hidden truths. In these examples the double is more than a doppelganger, it becomes indistinguishable from any truth or external reality, it becomes a simulacra. In this third aspect those most rigid boundaries (in the world and of the mind) that

have been erected become translucent in order to show the fallacy in the creation of both borders and hierarchies.

#### EPILOGUE: BRIEF NOTES ON OTHER MONSTERS

What is meant by the term monster? Halberstam's (1993) work on the monster is informative and relevant for this project. Though she deals primarily the monster in works of gothic fiction, it is important here as well. She writes: "'Gothic'... produces monsters as a kind of temporary but influential response to social, political, and sexual problems... even as Gothic style creates the monster, it calls attention to the plasticity or constructed nature of its creation" (to 340). She goes on to describe how these works, "rather than simply scapegoating, construct[s] a monster out of the traits which ideologies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and capital want to disavow" (345-46). Finally, Halberstam states that "[T]he appeal of the Gothic text then lies in its uncanny power to reveal the mechanism of monster production. The monster, in its otherworldly form, its supernatural shape, wears the traces of its own construction... the technology of monstrosity is written upon the body" (349). The gothic propensity to display the marks of the monster's production leaves its residue in the performance of the monster in contemporary visual culture. The monster continues to be recognizable for its distinctive body and the residual traces of societal discord which cling to it. The monster becomes, as Moretti (in Halberstam 1993) points out, a concretized metaphor, a performance of the monstrous no longer as only an idea of difference, but as difference materialized in bodily form.

The vampire is not the only monster to infiltrate the borders of Sunnydale's textual community. For the most part there are two varieties of monster which appear in this text. The first type perform the same function as minority characters often do in other television texts: to demonstrate some aspect of difference, to educate the other characters, bring them closer together and to provide some relief from the regular story lines. Carroll (1990) writes that "[W]hat appears to demarcate the horror story from mere story with monsters, such as myth, is the attitude of characters in the story to the monsters they

encounter. In works of horror, the humans regard the monsters they meet as abnormal, as disturbances of the natural order" (18). Many of the monsters met on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* receive not only the look of horror but also the possibility of prerequisite destruction. In "Teacher's Pet," Xander is seduced by a sexy new teacher who is revealed to actually be an enormous preying mantis. This episode instructs the viewer about Xander's character, his desire to be recognized and desired by attractive women. The monster herself is also instructive because of what we know of the mantis who takes a mate only to devour him. By displacing this monstrosity onto the body of a woman, the text performs a fear of feminine sexuality and the expectation of adulthood. In a later first season episode, "Invisible Girl," Marcie, an unpopular student, becomes invisible due to neglect and begins seeking her revenge on the students who had ignored her. Marcie performs the problematic social hierarchies of high school and the potentially disastrous effects they can have on everyone confined to that space. Invisibility seems to afford Marcie some power and although - unfortunately - she is also cast as 'mad,' her disappearance from the social structure does allow her the space to act out against it, even if in destructive ways.

Other monstrosities are meant, in some capacity, to be educational. In "Bad Eggs," a parenting experiment runs amok when the eggs' mother (an enormous sloth living under the school) takes possession of students and teachers alike. Stafford (1998) points out that with the insertion of the monster's spell the students actually become slaves to their small charges; perhaps a more realistic performance of teen parenthood.<sup>164</sup> In "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" a love spell leaves everyone *but* Cordelia in love with Xander. This episode shows both the potentially catastrophic consequences of obsession and the impossibility of making anyone love you through manipulation. In "Go Fish," the members of the swim team are turned into monstrous sea creatures after being given a performance-enhancing drug. This episode is an obvious parable about steroid use and its inherent dangers. Finally, in "The Wish," Cordelia's one desire changes the Universe and in this one the vampires rule

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<sup>164</sup>I have to point out that *Degrassi Junior High* did a better job on this subject by inserting it within the story line of a grade eight student (Spike, played by Amanda Stepto) who

Sunnydale. Perhaps the most obvious parable of all: be careful what you wish for.

The monstrous has been a preoccupation throughout the history of myth, storytelling, literature, film and television. The vampire has been particularly suitable for this multimedia inculcation because of its multifaceted and multi-faceted nature and has performed with drama, humor, terror and apathy and has been cast a both hero and scourge (Flynn 1992). *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, while not being radically divergent in the performance of vampirism itself, is set apart by the dramas which unfold around the walking un-dead. While *Buffy's* vampires are in some sense tied to a Draculaic tradition, the text exists somewhere between a teen vampire movie (i.e. *Once Bitten*), a witty fashion flick (i.e. *Clueless*), and a monster hunt movie. The inability to bring about the end of the vampire, because of its necessity to the serial form, is perhaps what makes television vampires so insurgent. They not only mock the moral community, but they refuse to be annihilated by it. Further, by making the hunter a young woman with ambivalent feelings towards vampires (she loves them, she hates them), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* allows the cryptic question of the vampire (and the monster) no easily reducible answer. Rather than an epilogue, *Buffy's* vampires point towards a new beginning.

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actually does get pregnant.

"A Slayer with family and friends, that wasn't in the brochure"  
(Spike, a.k.a. William the Bloody)

THE QUESTION OF NORMATIVITY

This chapter is concerned with performances of self and difference. Television usually differentiates characters through discourses of external opposition. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* manifests difference as internal also. Though the show focuses on the question of good versus evil, it also raises the more ambiguous question of the Normal versus Not. On the one hand, *Buffy* must be read within the visual culture that produces it and as thus performing very fixed notions normalcy. Its textscape is populated by admirably normal bodies, sculpted to a level of conformity that always finds its most explicit expression in mass media representations. On the other hand, characters are always problematized by never allowing the 'fit' with the normal expected within visual culture. The characters' physical perfection is belied by their marginality within the youth culture they inhabit: they are not the in-crowd, the popular kids, the watched, the stars.<sup>165</sup> Further, the normalcy of these characters is revealed to be a carefully constructed mask that hides what Fiedler (1978) calls "the secret self:" A self which is revealed to be a powerful epiphany as often as it is an aberration.

It is important to contextualize normality as it is presented within both the visual culture of television, as well as the more specific culture of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Television presents attractiveness as a cultural norm and even actors who do not conform to this image are positioned within this normative space by their performance as a television 'star.'<sup>166</sup> This norm of attractiveness is intrinsic to the production of *Buffy* as the network is looking for actors who will attract the public's attention - with culturally and historically specific versions of

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<sup>165</sup>A position they only attain extra-diegetically.

<sup>166</sup>While men have had an easier time being accepted as attractive despite wide deviations from a norm of attractiveness, women have had less leeway and what leeway they have been given has primarily concerned weight. Thus women who are considered large in the realm of television (Roseanne Barr, Carmyn Manheim, Rosie O'Donnell) are rendered normatively attractive by their status as celebrities.



beauty - though in the textual universe these characters are not considered beautiful or 'cool' enough to attain the coveted position of belonging to the popular clique.<sup>167</sup> There is further questioning of the normal in the construction of character in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as each character is revealed to be Other than their surface performances suggest. Though masks are often present in discussions of youth, *Buffy* makes these manifest as the most normal characters are revealed to perform freaks and geeks, werewolves and witches, Slayers and prom queens, demons and brains and vampires.

Questioning the normal is never far from the subtext of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, especially as it governs visual culture and performances. While the question of the normal has not been an explicit focus of studies of performance, it has been a preoccupation of other theorists, particularly those who have made their object of inquiry freaks, grotesques and monsters. While all of these overlapping though somewhat taxonomic categories will be examined in the following pages, it is by their binary opposite, the normal, that they are consolidated and marginalized. A very interesting inquiry into the category of the normal comes from Leslie Fiedler who has produced the foundational work on the subject of freaks. In "The Tyranny of the Normal" (1996), he writes:

...the war against "abnormality" implies a dangerous kind of politics, which beginning with a fear of difference, eventuates in a tyranny of the Normal (154).

...those of us allowed to survive by the official enforcers of the Norm will be free to become ever more homogeneously, monotonously beautiful; which is to say, supernormal, however that ideal may be defined (155).

Fiedler's words offer an interesting paradigm for examining how normalcy has been used in the media. The mediascape delineates an environment in which performances of abnormality are either absent or punished and which inculcate in the viewer a strong desire to identify with the normal. Also important is the idea that what is not considered normal is being erased from visual mass culture,

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<sup>167</sup>This, of course, requiring some suspension of our disbelief.

even as the possibility of achieving the supernormal position is demonstrated by a proliferation of medical, surgical and beauty-enhancing treatments.

Stone and Johnstone (1996) write that “[I]t’s comforting to think you’re normal, and it does much to stay back the demons, because being human comes with a price - history, imagination, fate, and the unexpected” (11). Fiedler (1978) writes of how the normals have long used freaks to demonstrate their normalcy (13); and later of how some freaks “strive, therefore, to “pass,” i.e., to become assimilated into the world of “normals” ” (14). He suggests that the freakish and abnormal shore up those who position themselves in opposition to the freak by insisting on their own normalcy and yet also suggests that the freak hides in us all. The impossibility of constructing the normal without its Other means that they are, finally, unable to ever be fully separated from one another. And yet that which refuses the normal becomes impossible to incorporate into its existing paradigm and must be remanded to the margins of discourse/visuality.

The study of freakishness tends to focus the side show, carnival or circus, but is also a salient term for the study of youth (sub)cultures and moments of mass media culture which perform a refutation of any easy incorporation into the normal. The young people who populate the Sunnydale pantheon are remarkably changeable, strangely freakish in their inability to stay within the boundaries drawn out by the laws of normality - *except* the physical. Some of the characters are freaks and others monsters and all embody that particular grotesque: youth. In what follows I will be examining performances of the grotesque, the freak and the monster in order to more fully explain how the characters who populate *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* perform so as to produce both the norm and that which is not the norm as their effects. Television has constructed its own creatures who both mock and tread this liminal border and though, in this case, they come in pretty packages, their underlying performances of freakishness, grotesqueness and monstrosity should not be overlooked.

The grotesque throws into relief the most secret (sacred) acts and the bodies that perform them. In a small volume of literary criticism, Alton Kim Robertson (1996) provides an interesting examination of the function of the grotesque. He writes: “The grotesque... allows neither the subordination nor the

synthesis of its negative terms, and it reflects the violent and twisted struggle occurring in the zone of repulsion that keeps them forever separate" (2). He suggests that rather than evidencing what Derrida calls a return, the grotesque represents the dissimulation of categories, neither a return nor a hierarchy.<sup>168</sup> Where taxonomic categories of freakishness and monstrosity are delineated through their negative positioning in relation to the normal, the grotesque refuses to be ordered according to any hierarchical logic and thus performs "the conflict that arises [is that] between the norm and its subordinate aberration" (6). Rather than seeing the grotesque as that which solidifies the boundaries of the Other, it becomes that which makes the performance of the boundaries between normal and not normal impossible.

Robertson's understanding of the grotesque was likely influenced by the work of Bakhtin, whose famous book on Rabelais is grounded in a positive understanding of the grotesque in culture. But Russo (1994) maintains that Bakhtin's work only represents one aspect of the grotesque and contrasts his work on the carnivalesque grotesque with the uncanny grotesque, which is figured more negatively. Russo brings together the grotesque and the freak in their relation to the spectacle and contextualizes the work of both Bakhtin and Fiedler in terms of their nostalgic conceptions of the past. As she explains: "this attitude can only be understood in relation to grotesque spectacle, not as the ruination of a lost, truer, or more complete world, but in full acknowledgement of the extent to which spectacle, the body, and politics are by now inseparable as distorted and hyperbolized aspects of media culture, which is to say the world we have now" (85). While I would tend to agree with Russo's cautioning about the desire to create an idealized version of the past, her nod to the media recapitulates an equally incipient desire to return to forms seen as somehow more 'true.'

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<sup>168</sup>On the subject of the return, Robertson quotes Derrida as writing: "à une origine ou à une "priorité" simple, intacte, normale, pure, propre, pour penser ensuite la dérivation, la complication, la dégradation, l'accident, etc. Tous les métaphysiciens ont procédé ainsi...: le bien avant le mal, le positif avant le négatif, le pur avant l'impur, le simple avant le compliqué, l'essentiel avant l'accidentel, l'imité avant l'imitant, etc. Ce n'est pas la *un* geste métaphysique parmi d'autres, c'est la requête métaphysique la plus continue, la plus profonde et la plus puissante" (p. 1. Emphases in the original).

What I find most important in these discussions is Robertson's (1996) notion that the grotesque destroys categories rather than sets them up, especially as the image of the grotesque carnival has a lot in common with television culture.<sup>169</sup> Television, often preoccupied with the grotesque and marginal, also often flattens out and entrenches the very categories that these terms throw into opposition. A truly grotesque philosophy in television will never be possible without dismantling the structures of physical beauty which are perhaps among its foundational aspects. Although these conventions are made rather than given, they are deeply entrenched in the processes of mass media production. It is possible, however, to read certain television characters in terms of a surface grotesque (as has been done with, for example, *Roseanne* or *Beavis and Butthead*). This is problematized by questions of race and, especially, class, as is the term 'white trash,' which is often used to describe similar programming. On *Buffy*, on the other hand, the grotesque is internal and rests on the possibility of transformation.

If the grotesque is a paradigm through which to understand social transformations, then the monster - and the freak - are ways of understanding transformations of the material body. The grotesque and the monstrous are as Bakhtin (1984) writes, linked: "The aesthetics of the grotesque are to a certain extent the aesthetics of the monstrous" (43). But where the grotesque is fundamentally changeable, the monster performs that which is already transformed and thus already Other. The body the monster takes is culturally coded, harboring the most illicit fears and desires of the society that spawns it. The monster is also strongly imbricated with visual culture. Even the literary monster, or the mythological, relies on the visual imagination of the reader or listener to inculcate fear and revulsion, even when it appears as aesthetic perfection. As Vickers (in Case 1990) suggests, the imperative to become "beautiful monsters" (229), to achieve mundane, conformist beauty promulgated by industry and media, is itself a grotesque imperative which begets monsters. But more often, the monster catches our attention by its bodily difference and causes us to recoil even as our gaze must again and again return to the screen.

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<sup>169</sup>In fact, James Twitchell (also author of many books including one on horror and one on vampires referenced in this text) has written a book about the mass media called

As Thompson (1996b) writes: "By challenging the boundaries of the human and the coherence of what seemed to be the natural world, monstrous bodies appeared as sublime, merging with the terrible with the wonderful, equalizing repulsion with attraction" (3). The monster, like the grotesque, exists in a paradox of the body, which is at once deficient and excessive, sublime and base, but always insurgent in the impossibility of fully containing it in the text.

Carroll's (1990) *Philosophy of Horror*, makes its project the space from which the contemporary monster often springs: the universe of horror. In his study, the monster becomes the focus of all the viewer's attention and emotion offering startling images of difference and arousing profound feelings, including "visceral revulsion" (19). To understand these feelings the viewer often takes their cue from the protagonist, the normal against whom the monster can be judged. Carroll suggests that the monster is also made dangerous by association with base elements of nature - those things that Bakhtin associated with the glory of the carnival - which in horror, come to signify metonymically for monstrosity, allowing even beautiful monsters to inspire revulsion:

Horrific metonymy need not be restricted to cases where the monsters do not look gruesome; an already misshapen creature can be associated with entities already antecedently thought of in terms of impurity and filth... ..Horrific metonymy is a means of emphasizing the impure and disgusting nature of the creature - from the outside, so to speak - by associating said being with objects and entities that are already reviled: body parts, vermin, skeletons, and all manner of filth. (Carroll 1990, 52).

The monster is concatenated with its hungers and environments: the dark night, hidden corners, blood and insides, animal instincts, bodily fluids, dirt, garbage, rot, as well as what Carroll omits, the stench of death and decay. The monster is that which - as Carroll points out by way of Douglas - is impure, tainted and thus always in need of cleansing (and we all know what that usually means).

Cohen's (1996a, b) work focuses more specifically on the monster. In his introduction to *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, he begins: "We live in a time of monsters" (1996a, vii). This rather provocative statement is elaborated at length,

most saliently in the belief that monstrosity "is a mode of cultural discourse" (viii). Cohen writes:

fin de siècle America, a society that has created and commodified "ambient fear" - a kind of total fear that saturates day-to-day living, prodding and silently antagonizing but never speaking its own name. This anxiety manifests itself symptomatically as a cultural fascination with monsters - a fixation that is born of the twin desire to name that which is difficult to apprehend and to domesticate (and therefore disempower) that which threatens (viii).

Cohen's offers a kind of road map to understanding the function of the monster in culture and society and his reading of the monster is important because it takes into consideration how "the manifold boundaries (temporal, geographic, bodily, technological) that constitute "culture" become imbricated in the construction of the monster" (ix). The monstrous narrative is thus inscriptive of identity, reassuring us that we are truly human, normal, yet may be steps away from monstrosity ourselves. Cohen continues:

The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment - of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataratic or incendiary) giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically "that which reveals," "that which warns," a glyph that seeks a hierophant. Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again (4).<sup>170</sup>

The monster attracts those who imagine themselves as 'normal' because of the lurking suspicion that they too can be made monstrous. Why else do these narratives continue to fascinate, to be made and remade in every generation? Why else do we, like the hero or heroine in every horror film, follow the monster? Cohen suggests that "[T]he monster prevents mobility... delimiting the social spaces through which private bodies may move. To step outside this

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<sup>170</sup>Emphasis in the original.

official geography is to risk attack by some monstrous border patrol or (worse) to become monstrous oneself" (12). The monster polices the boundaries of social life, but the monster is also permeable, to become monstrous may incite fear but also the suggestion that other possibilities (and spaces) await us (will open up to us) as monsters or, at least, in their grotesque embrace. In *Buffy*, the monster is ubiquitous and to perform the monster is often a condition to be embraced rather than feared. Even the fighting of monsters cannot be done with impunity. The fear of the monster's problematic nature remains, but instead of simply providing the impetus for the hunt monstrousness becomes a fluid entity harboring the possibility for new alliances and identities.

Fiedler (1978) sees the monster and freak as existing in a kind of binary opposition: the monster constructed not from a vision of human deformity but from a psychological imperative to create something outside of the natural order. Fiedler, along with Cohen (1996) and Weinstock (1996) insist that this dichotomy is evidenced by the fear of physical harm that the monster instills, the threat of death or, perhaps worse, un-death. Instructive is Fiedler's assertion that: "The pure Freak, however, stirs both supernatural terror and natural sympathy, since, unlike the fabulous monsters, he is one of us, the human child of human parents, however altered by forces we do not quite understand into something mythic and mysterious" (24).

The *Buffy* text seems to produce the progeny of the monster and freak. Nearly all its characters were born of human parents and somehow changed into "something mythic and mysterious." Perhaps we can understand Buffy, Willow and Amy as truer freaks because they more closely follow the taxonomic categories as Fiedler and others (especially Bogdan 1996) have described them. Buffy can be read as something of a strong(wo)man, performing acts of superhuman strength and virility. Willow and Amy (the witches) are self-made freaks as well as novelty acts. This train of thought would lead us to understand Angel, the vampire (also Drusilla, Spike, etc.), Oz, the werewolf, the demons, Mayor Wilkins and Anya, as the show's monsters: invoking terror and pity rather than awe and curiosity and bent on the destruction of humanity. But such a break is too facile, especially in relation to characters who populate the grotesque spaces of the mass media. In the mass media - and in a euphemistic

culture more generally - the only way to speak of difference, of freakishness, is through the monster and the monstrous. Thus in the performance of monstrosity difference infiltrates the pristine boundaries of (tele)visual culture.

The characters of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* tend more towards the freak than the monster, as others have divined these terms. Though I will continue to speak of monsters, I will principally be alluding to the freak in regard to the establishment of identity through performance. This term helps me write about the performances of this text by opening up a terrain of inquiry that studies the body in action. The freak, even more than the monster, is grounded in the body, just as the surest way to read these characters is through the way their bodies perform and change. The freak has always inhabited a liminal space, not only that of the carnival, side show and dime store museum, but also “the impossible middle ground between the oppositions dividing the human from the animal... one being from each other... nature from culture... one sex from the other... adults from children... humans and gods... the dead and the living” (Grosz 1995, 57). It is the impossibility of grounding the freak within a hierarchical binary system that makes the possibility of identification with them so insurgent. It is human nature to stop in amazement at such a spectacle, as Stone and Johnstone (1996) insist they do: “people would (and will) flock like flies. They’ll pay good money to see freaks - aberrations of nature and culture” (11). The freak does not engage the glance but causes the viewer to continually return, in confusion, awe, desire, horror, and lust... Whatever catches our eye, our response to it is never simple, never enough, but provides the opportunity for the freak to be taken up.

The freak speaks to a body’s unique physical attributes or abilities. Thompson (1996b) suggests for it the term “extraordinary body” and insists that it “is fundamental to the narratives by which we make sense of ourselves and our world” (1). The freak may reassure the viewers of their normalcy, but the possibility of descending into freakishness is evidenced by the inability to look away, or not to look at all. The freak inculcates recognition, identification and dis-identification, whereby “the distinction between audience and exhibit, we and them, normal and freak, is revealed as an illusion, desperately, perhaps even necessarily, defended, but untenable in the end” (Fiedler 1978, 36). The freak is the self glimpsed in a mirror that is increasingly the television screen. The freak



is the embodiment of television culture, from Jerry Springer's guests to the prettiest of its stars and starlets. We are haunted by images of multiple and changeable selves (just what the actor in performance embodies), exalted and debased, inherently Other to our selves.

Weinstock (1996) writes that "freaks are already fictional - not born, but made" (329) and so their narratives are already intertwined with the narratives of mythology, literature and the media. In all of these they have been presented for the arousal of our sympathy and antipathy. The freak provokes the narrative in insurgent ways, causing it to leave the trodden path and delve into what lurks beneath in the realm of the grotesque. This new path is inscribed upon the physical body of the freak in performance. Carroll (1990) writes: "As a radical model of sociality, the freak body is as capacious and extensive as the grotesque body in the model of Bakhtin. It reaches out and makes fantastical connections between and within genders, bodies, costumes, subcultures, architectures, landscapes, and temporalities" (106). No longer confined by the banal restrictions of the normal, the freak walks through forbidden spaces, glimpses fantastical figures and, finally, refuses to ever be categorically inscribed. Is *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (and other television texts like it) fully entrenched in television culture and its rigid boundaries? While I do not pretend that this is an example of the complete transgression of the normal, this text does provide some powerful instances of grotesque imagery, freakishness and monstrosity. The characters may be performed by people who embody that other grotesque of idealized aesthetics, but in their performances these revealed not only to be masks which hide more 'secret selves,' but these hidden selves are often found to be more desirable than the normal ones. Can this be understood as a mere recuperation of the freak and the monstrous? Perhaps. And yet, that the characters can even consider divesting themselves of those attributes which are considered most necessary and desirable to others, runs counter to much of what is presented on television today.

Gender identity is central to the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which centers on a teenaged girl – culturally located within the specific matrices of white, middle-class North American girl-dom - destined to save the world. What has become apparent from books as diverse as Carlip's *Girl Power* and the work of Carol Gilligan is that young women and men are given increasingly contradictory messages about their place in society and the social roles that they may and may not take up there. While there is an increasing insistence that daughters show as much independence as sons, girls continue to be appreciated for more traditionally feminine attributes: beauty, passivity, and dependence. Likewise, young men are supposed to exhibit strength, charm, knowledge and independence. These contradictory messages and the confusion they spawn are entrenched in the *Buffy* text. On the one hand the teenagers pine for more rigid gender division, the girls to be 'girlie' and be surrounded by 'manly' men; the boys to be 'manly' and surrounded by 'girly' girls. On the other hand the young women revel in their newly discovered freedom to make choices, be strong, walk alone and engage in battle; while the men discover that being a man does not necessarily involve silence, aggressivity, taking charge and winning.

This is a question of making the conventions of femininity and masculinity grotesque. Butler (1997) asks: "Who speaks when convention speaks? ...it is an inherited set of voices, an echo of others who speak as the "I" " (25). Convention is a dialectic of 'I's' that waft between hegemony and insurgence and a question of reading between the body as representation and performances in visual culture. Rogoff (1998) writes that "the field of vision becomes a ground for contestation in which unstable normativity constantly and vehemently attempts to shore itself up" (22), but perhaps this binary – between the normal and the not normal - is not a binary at all. It becomes a question of what we see when we look at the screen, what image provokes our interest, what is left unseen. Barthes (1998) asks: "How does meaning get into the image? Where does it end?" And if it ends, what is *beyond*?" (70).<sup>171</sup> This question may be answered by expanding his discussion of the image to include performance

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<sup>171</sup>Emphasis in the original.

and by looking for the links between the image, the visual and performance. As Tourneur (in Virillio 1998) writes: "In Hollywood I soon learned that the camera never sees everything. I could see everything, but the camera sees only sections" (118). Thus the context of the image often lies beyond the screen, beyond what we, as the audience, are allowed to see, beyond binary structure. The action (not the static frame of reference that is the image) being performed shows the audience what lies beyond the image. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as image leaves a very reduced understanding of the text. I play a tape, freeze any frame and study it, what do I see? Beautiful girls, thin and pale, short skirts, cute bags, lip gloss... even the fighting is rendered inactive, slowed to an elegant and perhaps sexy dance. I see boys with broad shoulders, short hair, strong features, and tight jaws. But when I allow the tape to run again, when I examine the action that moves beyond the image, suddenly I am confronted with a dialectical image (at least) that allows me to see beyond the surface of the frame. The image remains a testament to the normal, but from the performance emerges the possibility for an insurgently freakish femininity and a maverick masculinity.

### *The femmes*

In a discussion of de Koonig's *Woman I*, installed at the Modern Art Museum in Manhattan, Duncan (1998) describes the ambiguity of a figure that evokes both awe and ridicule. She writes:

The ambiguity of the figure, its power to resemble an awesome mother goddess as well as a modern burlesque queen... It is the *Woman*, powerful and threatening, who must be confronted and transcended on the way to enlightenment... At the same time her vulgarity, her 'girlie' side - de Koonig called it her 'silliness' - renders her harmless (and contemptible) and denies the terror and dread of her Medusa features (89).<sup>172</sup>

I am drawn to this quote because it resonates with the ambivalence to femininity that I find in the *Buffy* text. Though more in the image of Athena than the mother goddess, Buffy performs power and strength set distinctly apart from the "jiggle-core" set (Fudge 1999, 58). When Buffy is not slaying demons and saving the

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<sup>172</sup>Emphasis in the original.

world, however, she is distinctly 'girlie,' a fashionable blonde who pines for the proximity she once had to Neiman-Marcus. Fudge's concern is with Buffy's problematic potential as feminist icon. She wonders how to reconcile her mass market appeal with a reworking of the 'girl' myth. I prefer to let the contradiction stand. Buffy is not of necessity a feminist icon and her insurgence is in her refusal to be confined to any preconceived notion of what a girl should be. *Buffy's* possibility of being read or offering insurgent (whether feminist or other) positions of identification is what I am hoping to point to with this work. What I take issue with is an attempt to read Buffy as somehow representing an inherent icon of feminism, or alternatively, to read her against such an icon and find her wanting.

Jones (1993) has asked if there really can be any definitive answer to the question of what a girl is, and I would concur with her appraisal that there cannot. Buffy is merely 'girl' in one of her most contemporary incarnations. Just as many applauded when "Brenda Walsh lost her virginity and didn't feel remorse" (Rosin in Owen 1997, 79) and cheered when Angela Chase rebelled by dying her hair red and hanging out with a 'bad element,' so Buffy promises us a girl who saves the world, beats up jocks and is handy at turning virtually any found object into a Slayer-worthy weapon. Though all of these characters have some connection to freakishness, Buffy is the one who recalls the sideshows: a strongwoman for the Millennium. In her fluctuation between beauty queen and world savior, acknowledging that these are very classed and racialized positions to take up, Buffy recalls 'choices' that many girls in North American culture must face. As she patrols the borders of her suburban California town Buffy, in the end, takes up those borders as her permanent residence, becoming a liminal figure, a freak. She is so circumscribed not solely by her strength, but by her usurpation of a traditionally male role. This hero rarely needs saving but steps in to save everyone else, including men (adults, friends and even her lover, Angel). And though she may find that her superpowers get in the way of a normal social life, she comes to find them desirable, even necessary, in the end.

Buffy's presence infects the feminine roles around her. Willow is already a freak when she first comes into contact with Buffy: as the class brain, the girl whose best friend is a boy, whose mom still buys her clothes. She is a very

familiar freak from the teen universe. Willow's freakishness goes further when she also becomes (in her words) "a powerful Wicca," adept at casting spells and performing conjuring tricks. She is, in this sense, a self-made freak and something of a novelty act, practicing a kind of "enfreakment" (Hevey in Thomson 1996b, 10) although, because she actually performs the process herself, perhaps has some control over the freak she will become.<sup>173</sup> Another freakish aspect of Willow's character is introduced through the trope of Vampire Willow, her evil doppelganger who I have already described. As it is Willow's magic, as manipulated by Anya, that brings forth the doppelganger, the episode "Doppelgangland" can be read as the materialization of Willow's ambivalence to her enfreakment. The theme of the doppelganger is freakish, especially when the two Willows come face to face with one another in a sisterly cum adversary cum lover's embrace. By employing the device of the double the text makes Willow the object of our prolonged look, as Vampire Willow swishes across the screen in her tight leather pants and heavy make-up. The doppelganger, however, does not restore Willow's femininity, but puts in her place a devouring carnivore who - we can only guess - would eat you as soon as bed you. The Vampire Willow is antithetical to Willow: vapid where Willow is brilliant (she continually says, "bored now"), languid where she is anxious, devouring where she is restrained. And yet, they are linked through their enfreakment, vampire and witch both existing outside acceptable human orders. Willow refuses to kill her doppelganger and though not completely embracing her tries to unify herself by sending her double back where she came from. Both halves mirror the exclusion of the other without ever finding the unity which would produce the normal.

A final point should be made with regard to Willow's characterization within difference on this show, namely that is that she is Jewish. Though this is a very minor point in the text, its recurrence makes it worth examining. In "Bad

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<sup>173</sup> Thomson (1996b) writes: "Enfreakment emerges from cultural rituals that stylize, silence, differentiate, and distance the persons whose bodies the freak-hunters or showmen colonize and commercialize... By constituting the freak as an icon of generalized embodied deviance, the exhibitions also simultaneously reinscribed gender, race, sexual aberrance, ethnicity, and disability as inextricable yet particular exclusionary systems legitimated by bodily variation -- all represented by the single multivalent figure of the freak" (10).

Eggs," an episode about that famous health class assignment where eggs stand in for human children, the following conversation occurs:

- Xander: You know, it's the whole sex leads to responsibility thing. Which I don't personally get. You've got to take care of the egg. It's a baby. You get to keep it safe and teach it Christian values.  
 Willow: My egg's Jewish.  
 Xander: Then you can teach it that dreidle song.

In "Passions," Buffy tries to protect Willow from Angel by nailing a cross to her window, but Willow is unhappy about it, saying: "Ira Rosenberg's only daughter nailing crucifixes to her bedroom wall... I have to go over to Xander's house just to watch *A Charlie Brown Christmas* every year." And in "Amends," a Christmas episode, Willow reminds her friends that not everyone shares in that holiday:

- Buffy: Tree, roast beast. Just me and mom and hopefully an excess of presents. What are you doing for Christmas?  
 Willow: Being Jewish. Remember people. Not everyone worships Santa.

The exchange is not unfamiliar from media or life (I have experienced it myself). Willow's Jewishness is obliquely important to the vampire story, which is so replete with Christian iconography. Her ambivalence to these objects (which is only periodic since she uses them as weapons) is an important interjection into the text which takes for granted that all characters are homogeneously constructed across axes of difference. Willow's comments, while making her freakish and putting her on the border of those Christian rituals central to the text, do bring the very nature of those objects and rituals under scrutiny.

Faith is another character who, from her introduction, has her freakishness made apparent. In the episode "Faith, Hope and Trick," Buffy and the others notice Faith at the Bronze. Faith's physical appearance is summed up with Cordelia's words: "Check out slut-o-rama and her disco date." Faith is a freak from her origins: a daredevil. Though this type of freak is not mentioned in many books, the daredevil commands the circus audience by the impossibility of her/his actions. So Faith has commanded the attention of her peers by

accomplishing with ease those death defying acts - acts often reserved for carefree boys - which terrify and leave the viewer a little bit in awe. Witness the following exchange between Faith and The Mayor in "Graduation Day I:"

- Faith: When I was a kid, a couple miles outside of Boston, there was this quarry and all the kids would go swim there and jump off the rocks. And there was this one rock, like, forty feet up and I was the only one that would jump off it. All the older kids were too scared.
- Mayor: Not you though.
- Faith: Nuh-hun. I could do it easy.

Faith performs the necessity of the spotlight, finding gratification in performing even for those who would consider her distasteful, even grotesque.

Like Buffy, Faith usurps a traditionally male position, but in her case this is accomplished not only through strength and an ability to fight, but also through her capacity for violence and sexual conquest. Faith performs a dyadic function with Buffy and her introduction has the effect of normalizing Buffy's performances. Their contrasts are quite stunning even on the most superficial levels: blond versus brunette, thin versus voluptuous, dresses versus leather pants, good versus bad. When Buffy and Faith enter the ring together the text leaves no question about who is normal and who is not. Faith's enfreakment is often set up by her inability to live up to Buffy's ideal: her refusal to play by any rules, to think of sex as something that must be equated with love, to put others before herself, to obey the law. Faith's femininity is so unruly she makes Buffy look downright school-marmish, but the text consistently positions her in a negative light, making any identification with her problematic.<sup>174</sup>

Possibly Cordelia Chase is Faith's opposite. The incredibly narcissistic and sometimes insightful prom queen is perhaps the most unlikely character to be read as a freak. But if we return to the idea that a certain kind of adherence to beauty ideals is itself freakish, then it becomes easier to understand Cordelia. Her entire character is caught up in the performance of an ideal of perfection and a tongue-in-cheek commentary on those popular girls who concern themselves

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<sup>174</sup>Even viewers who may enjoy her devil-may-care attitude and self-gratifying use of sex may be put off by her alignment with the evil Mayor Wilkins and by episodes where she a) tries to steal Angel from Buffy and b) kills with no remorse.

with finding a rich man to marry and memorizing high-end brand-name consumer goods.<sup>175</sup> Cordelia is an unlikely ally in the war against the creatures of the Hellmouth, but she often performs admirably, even slaying on occasion, both with her hand and with her quick wit (in "Homecoming," she berates a vampire so severely he runs away). Perhaps her most radical gesture is going out with Xander after withstanding the ridicule of her friends. Because of this dating faux-pas, Cordelia realizes that it is time to stand up for herself by finally confronting ringleader Harmony (in "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered"):

Cordelia: Shut up. Do you know what you are Harmony?  
You're a sheep.  
Harmony: I'm not a sheep.  
Cordelia: You're a sheep. All you ever do is what everyone else does so you can say you did it first. And I --- I am scrambling for your approval when I'm cooler than you are because I'm not a sheep. I do what I want and I wear what I want to wear. And I'll date whoever the hell I want to date no matter how lame he is... Oh God! Oh God!

Cordelia has perhaps the most facile function in terms of these characters and the most pedantic. She performs the possibility that every snotty high school girl has hidden depths and could even, possibly, be your friend. Her mask is more ephemeral than those worn by others, it is not even really a mask but a facade of beauty and poise which hide her strength from everyone. In one of the final episodes of the third season, as Xander teases her about her inability to get into college, she displays for him an array of acceptance letters from high powered schools including Brown and Columbia. While Xander humbly accepts his misjudgement, we realize the impossibility of ever fully judging this book by her cover.

The only true adult to make this chapter, Ms Calendar looks no older than Cordelia (they are probably about the same age in 'real' life). This computer teacher surfs the net, spends her weekends at raves and studies the occult. She is

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<sup>175</sup>Cordelia is immediately impressed when Buffy moves to Sunnydale because she is from Los Angeles. When she meets Anya, who recognizes that her bag is made by Prada, Cordelia extols: "Good call. Most people around here can't tell Prada from Pay Less." (in "The Wish")



primarily introduced as a love interest for Giles but proves to be more integral to the story than is at first suggested. Ms Calendar (Jenny) quickly fits into the happy little band of vampire hunters, especially because of her extensive knowledge of the supernatural. It is interesting that she is so easily accepted, since she is a teacher and, even more interestingly, that she never takes on any maternal qualities in relation to her students.<sup>176</sup> But it is eventually unveiled that Jenny is actually Jana, a member of the Kaldarash Roma tribe, the same tribe who long ago cursed Angel with a soul in penance for the murder of their most beloved daughter. Jenny/Jana has been sent to Sunnydale to watch Angel and make sure he never experiences any pure happiness, an event which would (and does) reverse the curse. As an adult, Jenny is supposed to perform maturity. She is years away from the young women she teaches; educated, employed and on her own. But she also performs adult fallibility - another major theme in youth dramas. When her true identity is revealed it is a major blow for the others, especially Buffy and Giles, who feel betrayed and completely exclude her from the group. This reveals something interesting about the quality of freakishness and its relation to the mask. In this text the mask is only a possibility for outsiders, within the group it is necessary to reveal the secret self. This is Jenny's transgression, she reveals her true self too late, hiding behind a normal mask that puts everyone around her in jeopardy. Jenny points to what happens when the freak performs an act of assimilation which then leads to her rejection by her community. This storyline of the true self hidden behind a mask also points to a common trope of adolescent drama: "I cannot show you who I really am." Though Jenny tries to reconcile, it is, in the end, too late. She first destroys the trust of her friends and then works against the dictates of her people; the only amend she can finally make is with her life, which Angelus brutally takes. It is only through mourning her that Jenny is redeemed within the text, her transgressions mutated into performances of regret.

Thus far I have only been looking at human freaks who, despite their propensity for the supernatural, do inhabit a natural realm. Enter Drusilla, a

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<sup>176</sup>We know from other texts that teachers are often objects of ridicule, especially if they try and be "one of the guys." The female teacher often functions as a maternal substitute, filling in the support and guidance young people do not get at home. It is interesting that, in this text, the mothering is often done by the father-substitute.

vampire with a passion for cruelty which sometimes seems almost poetic. Drusilla was a beautiful countrywoman whom Angelus stalked, killing off her loved ones until she finally went insane and he turned her into a vampire. Since then madness and blood lust have been her driving passions, securing for her the devotion of some of the most notorious vampire men (first Angelus, then Spike). Perhaps Drusilla's mask is her madness, perhaps it is her vampirism that hides the frail, devout girl she once was? Either way she performs the vampire woman rethought, known for her cruelty rather than sexuality and able to cow a roomful of vampires with a single word or look. Drusilla feeds on the fear of others but seems fearless herself. She dominates dark spaces, growing stronger on the weakness of those around her – including her lover Spike. What Drusilla seems to perform is that aspect of femininity which is all surface but whose interiority refuses to reflect that surface. Pale skin, black tendrilled hair, lace and velvet dressed and languid appetites hide her desire for power, destruction and the manipulation of others for her own ends. Drusilla may play a sexual part but she refutes every pass with childlike wide-eyes, except when it serves her purposes to pit two men against each other. Drusilla dons the siren's mask: a cross between Medusa and Medea. She is a sexualized icon representing the fear of feminine power. She performs the refutation of all that is supposed to be feminine and thus dons femininity as her mask.

The other supernatural character who is of interest at this point is Anya: a demon who is the 'Patron Saint of Scorned Women.' When she is introduced in the third season (in "The Wish") it is to grant Cordelia a wish after Xander has cheated on her. In the guise of a teenaged girl Anya is most obviously masked, as no one can guess her identity from the body she has chosen to perform in. Her character is deeply connected to femininity, as for a thousand years she has taken up the plight of women whose men have done them wrong. In "The Wish," Anya sends Cordelia to an alternate reality where Sunnydale is overrun with vampires. But, in the end, Giles outwits Anya and her powers are taken away, leaving her, simply, a young girl in suburban California. Trapped in the mask, Anya quickly realizes that this is catastrophic; she is not only powerless but also hormone filled, underage and, as she laments, "stuck as a mortal, a

child, failing math."<sup>177</sup> As a young woman, Anya must reject all she knows about gender structures and give in to her hormonally charged body. From "The Prom:"

Anya: ..I have witnessed a millennium of oppression from the males of the species and I have nothing but contempt for the whole libidinous lot of them.  
 Xander: Then why are you talking to me?  
 Anya: I don't have a date for the prom

Anya's performance of femininity is grotesque as she performs the blinded youth, desperate to find love and to conform to an ideal of femininity someone else has set. As a demon Anya could never even acknowledge the existence of the male, except by the act of retribution. But as a young woman she aptly demonstrates what Davies (1990) has acknowledged as a common incongruence between our desires and what we know we *should* desire. In the end, her performance attempts to make freakish the desire to attain an ideal femininity.

Many of the female characters who populate the *Buffy* universe seem to perform some type of freakishness. While some refute femininity, others try to perform it so well that it too becomes grotesque. Some of these women are truly monstrous while others perform their freakishness in a dialectic between the side show culture to which they allude and the visual culture of television that produced them. None of these women allow themselves to be dominated by men though they do fall in love and sometime give way to confusion. However, in this text, they most often represent strength and power and become the protectors of humanity as well as its fiercest warriors. Though many texts suggest that the young girl as freak is saved by her youth - which allows for the possibility that her freakishness is merely a phase - the adult women of this text equally confound traditional notions of womanhood and maternity. While images of normative femininity pervade this text, it is necessary to step back from its static veil and view the more dialectical performances of femininity that are engendered within. Though these young women never fully embody the freak, they are emboldened through a grotesque categorization to move ever further in that direction.

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<sup>177</sup>A nice nod to those narratives that suggest a return to youth is always desirable.

*Maverick masculinities*

The male actor must never embody as many ideals of physical perfection as the female, although the youth market demands more than most. Male stars tend to have more freedom and perhaps more bodily integrity than their female co-stars, which makes the image to performance dialectic more simplified in some ways than it is for the female characters. But masculinity, like femininity, is constructed and bounded by certain perceptions of the normal and many who have strayed from the prescriptive actions of masculinity have been made the object of ridicule. Though the masculinity myth is slowly being reworked, it is worthwhile examining Kaja Silverman's (1992) study of masculinity to further understand how, as a concept, the term has functioned as the powerful side of an oppressive binary. Silverman writes: "“exemplary” male subjectivity cannot be thought apart from ideology, not only because ideology holds out the mirror within which that subjectivity is constructed, but because the latter depends upon a kind of collective make-believe in the commensurability of penis and phallus" (15). The ideology of television masculinity is ambivalent, projecting at once men who mother and men who dismember. The *Buffy* text traces this problematic dialectic explicitly as the male characters dance a fine line between versions of masculinity. Another important point Silverman makes concerns the question of the “dominant fiction” of masculinity:

“Dominant fiction” is opposed here neither to an ultimately recoverable reality, nor to the condition of “true” consciousness. “Fiction” underscores the *imaginary* rather than the delusory nature of ideology, while “dominant” isolates from the whole repertoire of a culture’s images, sounds, and narrative elaborations those through which the conventional subject is psychologically aligned with the symbolic order (54).<sup>178</sup>

This is an exceptionally good way of understanding how gender roles are manifested in television. First, the constructed nature of the text means that these roles can only serve as a kind of boundary patrol for masculinity. Second, it suggests that certain aspects, that is culturally specific ones, are singled out for scrutiny within the text. Thus *Buffy* is concerned with depicting a dialectic

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<sup>178</sup>Emphasis in the original.

between opposing fictions of masculinity: the hyper masculine hero and the sensitive, often awkward and nearly maternal boy next door.

Like femininity, masculinity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is imbricated with the layering of masks and the fluctuation between the normal and not. I am going to begin this section by looking at the character called Angel (who is also called Angelus when in his evil incarnation) because he performs most obviously both the changeability of masculinity and the nature of the mask. The redemptive vampire, pining for his humanity is not a unique character in vampire mythology. Auerbach (1995), writing about the vampiric hero of the soap opera *Dark Shadows* (1966-1971), Barnabas Collins, states: "Free to construct his own story, he embraced no brave new world: anticipating Anne Rice's beautiful young males, he yearned only for the lost century in which he was mortal" (138). Angel falls somewhere between Barnabas and Rice's creations. While certainly beautiful, he performs the vampire in flux. While not yearning for the past he does wish to be mortal. And I say mortal rather than human because Angel is a vampire whose humanity has been restored by a curse. If the vampire is a 'freak of nature,' what is a vampire with a soul but even more freakish (perhaps a freak of culture).

What is insurgent and grotesque about Angel/Angelus is the impossibility of anticipating his character. Even as Angel he is prone to revealing his 'true face' when aroused by anger or passion. But when Angel turns, when he becomes Angelus, he does so with an utter completeness. In "Innocence," Spike and Drusilla raise the Judge, an ultimately evil demon who can kill any [good] person with a single touch. As Angelus, who has just been turned by the breaking of the curse, approaches him, the demon's touch does no harm and The Judge says: "This one cannot be burned. He is clean... There's no humanity in him." In Angel, the precariousness of being human is called into question.

Angel, in his two hundred and forties, holds the residual traces of traditional masculinity close: stoic and strong, faithful, protective, handsome, fiercely loyal. But when Angel turns he performs the opposite of these so valued traits and becomes monstrous, violent and bloodthirsty. Angel performs the impossibility of maintaining bodily integrity, he can no more control his physical

changes than he can the supernatural shifting of his nature. The discomfort the other characters display towards Angel shows how frightening this fragmentary quality is. But in either guise, Angel(us) performs the most traditional aspects of masculinity and patrols its boundaries far better than the other men. In truth, this performance, while insurgently redefining the vampire, is quite hegemonic. While many of the other characters don masks of their own creation, honing them, producing them, making themselves freakish by their own desires, Angel is at the mercy of fates beyond his control and so becomes even more liminally freakish: a monster who would be man; a man who must remain monstrous.

Xander is antithetical to Angel's easy masculinity. Trying to be a guy's guy, he always seems to be more comfortable with the girls who overlook his geek-status and immature sexual antics. Through Xander *Buffy's* disruptive gender ontology is made most evident. Xander has an idea of what a man is supposed to be and tries his best to fulfill that performance but is foiled at nearly every turn by women who perform it far better than he, as shown in a scene from "Halloween," between Xander and Larry, an obnoxious jock:

Larry: I heard some guys say she [Buffy] was fast.  
 Xander: I hope you mean like the wind.  
 Larry: Hey. You know what I mean.  
 Xander: Hey! That's my friend you're talking about.  
 Larry: Oh yeah? Well, what are you gonna do about it?  
 Xander: I'm gonna do what any man would do about it.  
 Something damn manly (Grabs him).  
 Buffy: (Buffy stops Larry's fist by throwing him into the soda machine) Now get gone. Oh diet!  
 Xander: Do you know what you just did?  
 Buffy: Saved a dollar?  
 Xander: No. Larry was about to pummel me.  
 Buffy: Oh that. Forget about it.  
 Xander: Oh, I'll forget about it. Maybe in fifteen or twenty years when my rep for being a sissy-man finally fades.  
 Buffy: Oh Xander.  
 Xander: A black eye heals, Buffy, but cowardice has an unlimited shelf-life. Oh thanks a lot for your help (He walks off).  
 Buffy: I think I just violated the guy code big time.  
 Willow: Poor Xander. So fragile.

The mockery of traditional masculinity is evident in this exchange, as is the idea of a code of masculinity recognized by a group of peers. But Xander is

continually made ambiguous through his problematic relation to this ideal of the 'normal male.' In "Inca Mummy," he wants to impress a girl and worries "about not being mocked about fat calves" in his costume for the dance. And in "Reptile Boy," members of an elite fraternity humiliate Xander by dressing him in drag and making him dance in front of the entire party. In "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered," a love spell gone wrong makes Xander the object of murderous attention of all the women in Sunnydale (including Drusilla who tells Angel that he is jealous because she has finally found "a real man"). In "Doppelgangland," when Xander is informed about his alter ego in a parallel Universe he says to Vampire Willow: "So, in your reality I'm like this badass vampire, right. People are afraid of me." (She rolls her eyes.) "Oh yeah, I'm bad." And in "The Zeppo," Xander's friends suggest that he should not participate in their anti-Hellmouth activities because he might get hurt. These are just a few examples of how Xander's attempts at normal masculinity are thwarted by those around him. His only recourse to the masculine ideal that he desires is through the supernatural intervention the text allows.

Not only is Xander irrefutably weaker than the others, he also possesses no supernatural powers, as Cordelia points out: "Honest, it must be really hard when all your friends have, like, superpowers: Slayer, werewolf, witches, vampires... and you're like this little nothing" (in "The Zeppo"). Cordelia is, in fact, constantly pointing out Xander's inability to attain the stature of the dominant fiction of masculinity. In "Go Fish," for example, after Xander has found the shed skin of one of the swim team members who has turned into a sea monster, Cordelia mocks him by saying, "Say it... You ran like a woman." And later, when Xander asks how he can help the others in their investigation she insists: "Well, you can go out to the parking lot and practice running like a man." This is, in the end, Xander's ultimate failing, the inability to procure either the powerful masks of his friends, to wear the mask of traditional masculinity, to continually be associated with the feminine.

But Xander does have some characteristics which recall the "dominant fiction" of masculinity. Objectified and feminized (in "Reptile Boy" and in "Go Fish" when the girls all stare at him in his Speedo), Xander is also increasingly sexual as the seasons go on. Though he is set up as a heterosexual neophyte,

Xander does attract his fair share of the opposite sex.<sup>179</sup> First Willow's adoration, through Ampata the Inca Mummy and the Preying Mantis teacher, Xander finally ends up with Cordelia, who fully dominates him. Later, he is sexually initiated by the much more savvy Faith and pined for by the demon Anya. Xander comes to represent the object of desire, a position usually reserved for women. Xander's relationship to desire is freakish, as he continually tries to remain on the objectifying side of the gender debate, but continually fails. The only time he is truly successful is through supernatural intervention, when he dons a more obvious mask (though one that, in the end, must always be removed). In "The Pack," Xander and a group of jocks become renegade hyenas and in "Halloween," Xander becomes a single-minded soldier. In "The Wish," Xander's vampiric self is revealed to be seductive and leather-clad. But even in the doppel-universe, Xander is not the man he wants to be. In a world where torture and a frenzy to feed reign supreme, Xander prefers to take a back seat, telling Vampire Willow as she tortures Angel: "No thanks baby. I just want to watch you go." Now, this can perhaps be seen as a return to the voyeuristic paradigm so well described by feminist film theorists as the granting of the gaze to the masculine. In the vampiric world, however, the refusal to participate, to allow someone else to enjoy before the self, is incongruous. Thus, in any world Xander is ambiguously positioned in relation to masculinity, a freak in his incapacity to attain a version of masculinity which is, in the end, as fictional as he is himself.

More obvious than Xander, Oz is a werewolf and more readily classified as a 'true' freak or monster. There are two ways to think about Oz in his relation to masculinity as well as to the freak. Oz performs a type of masculinity which is familiar from the world of media. He is a musician, playing with a band called "Dingo Ate my Baby," which already allows him a certain sexual ambiguity

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<sup>179</sup>There is little recognition of any position other than heterosexuality in this text though Xander's sexual anxiety is constructed around this possibility. In "Phases," Xander suspects that Larry the jock is a werewolf terrorizing young women (and stalking the heterosexually constructed Lover's Lane). But when Xander confronts Larry, in a scene reminiscent of a comedy of errors, Larry admits to Xander that he is gay and explains his fears about coming out: "Forget about playing football, they'll run me out of this town. I mean, come on. How are people going to look at me after they find out I'm gay? Wow, I said it, and it felt okay. I'm gay. I am gay." It is through this admission that Xander's



within media discourse. Oz is immediately set in dichotomy with Devon (Stuart Hall), the band's lead singer, who is courting Cordelia and an onslaught of other groupie girls. Oz, on the other hand, is caught by Willow, even dressed up in an Inuit costume (read: very covered up) making him a man who can look beyond appearances to what lies beneath. Always cool, Oz is unafraid of revealing his emotions, as when he tells Willow (in "Surprise"): "I'm gonna ask you to go out with me tomorrow night. And I'm kind of nervous about it. Actually, it's interesting;" or in the following episode ("Innocence") where he refuses to make out with Willow because he knows she is trying to make Xander jealous: "See, in my fantasy, when I'm kissing you, you're kissing me. It's okay. I can wait." Oz performs equal parts sensitivity and machismo and thus is also subject to jealousy and passion. When Xander's love spell infects Willow he punches Xander in the face: "I was on the phone all night listening to Willow crying about you. I don't know what happened exactly but I was left with a very strong urge to hit you." Oz performs the fantasy guy of the teen movie (epitomized in my generation by John Cusack in *Say Anything*): cool but slightly outside any cliques, ever thoughtful and always forgiving.

While Oz performs masculinity in transition, his werewolf self goes atavistic. The werewolf represents change (from animal to man), as Oz represents an opposing movement in masculinity - the sensitive werewolf. The werewolf is a monstrous rendition of the sideshow freak who inhabits the liminal boundary of man and animal. The werewolf, however, is only freakish for a few days a month and so Oz's freakishness the rest of the month is residual and anticipatory. The lunar aspect of the werewolf inevitably links it to the feminine, Willow even tells him: "Three days of the month I'm not much fun either" (in "Phases") making this link even more literal. This conflation of the monstrous with the feminine does not go unnoticed but, conversely, it is through Oz's changeability that his most noticeable movement towards a performance of the "dominant fiction" of masculinity is made. In "Lover's Walk," as he and Cordelia hunt for Willow, Oz finds that he can smell her, track her scent, a (as Cordelia puts it) "residual werewolf thing." In "Beauty and the Beast," a monster terrorizes young lovers in Sunnydale and Oz becomes a suspect:

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heterosexuality is entrenched as he worries others will associate Larry with him.

- Oz: You're having a Slayer watch me? Good we're not over-reacting. (Willow goes after him as he walks away) Okay, ah, you know that thing where you bail in the middle of an upsetting conversation...Well, I have to do that, it's kind of dramatic I know but sometimes it's a necessary guy thing.
- Willow: And I want you to do the guy thing but... (Points to the clock, which is moving towards sundown. They lock him up in the book cage). Oz-
- Oz: Get away from the cage.
- Willow: What?
- Oz: It's gonna happen soon. Get away from me.

The refusal to be vulnerable, to change and seen as out of control projects Oz back into a performance of masculinity more congruent with the "dominant fiction," but he never fully conforms. As a musician he performs a made freak, refusing conformity and eschewing the tropes of inclusion that this type of marginality affords him. As a werewolf he performs, superficially, the base animalism of masculinity.<sup>180</sup> But more scrutiny reveals another performance, one which alludes to the freakish space between human and animal and the fluidity that runs between the two. Oz's sensitive masculinity belies any tie to an atavistic animalism (as in why they thought Larry the bully was the werewolf first) and suggests that despite the werewolf's instinctual appetite, the animal is perhaps not the negative binary character to the man, but another mask that he wears to camouflage his deviation from the dominant fiction.

The mask of the sensitive male is not confined to Oz but is also performed through the character of Giles, The Watcher. Giles is familiar as the good father, stern and yet yielding, punishing and forgiving, wise but fallible. In his relationship to his young charges he is always found available, single-minded in his devotion to the cause and to them. Aside from his guardianship of The

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<sup>180</sup>Though Giles points out that the werewolf can be female. In "Phases:"

Giles: It acts on pure instinct. It's predatory and aggressive.

Buffy: In other words, you're typical male.

Xander: On behalf of my gender - hey!

Giles: Don't jump to any conclusions.

Buffy: I didn't. I took a tiny step and there conclusions were.

However, in this text we are never presented with the werewolf in female form (until the forth season that is. At that time she is shown to be much more dominant and lethal than the male) but with the male werewolf both predatory and under the feminine influence of the lunar cycle.

Chosen One, his earnest politeness makes Giles seem completely unmasked, there in the text for the other characters to be read against. This is true of his expert fighting skills, sword play and bravery (unusual for a high school librarian?) which merely place him within a familiar paradigm - one reminiscent of Obi-wan Kenobi or Yoda from *Star Wars*: a figure almost maternal in his guidance. But there is more to Rupert Giles than meets the eye, a hidden past which masks a secret face. In "The Dark Age," it is revealed that in his youth Giles was "a ripper."<sup>181</sup> Through the episode the audience is treated to the story of a rebellious young Giles who, with his friends, experimented with the occult and finally raised a demon which resulted in the death of one of their group. The revelation that Giles wears a mask which hides a tempestuous and misguided youth actually makes him more appealing and more easily inclusive into The Slayer's circle and fragments any easy distinction between youth and adulthood as well as between the normal and the not. Giles performs the assimilated freak, who tries so hard to hide the boy he once was by becoming the man he thinks everyone thinks he should be. But by embracing his earlier self, by sharing his secret self, Giles becomes both less maternal and more freakish. He becomes more than just The Watcher but a parable about the lengths to which a person will go to hide their mistakes and the impossibility of the secret self ever remaining truly hidden.

We now move on to Spike, the truly monstrous image of masculinity, rife with murderous rage and conscienceless action. There is some textual confusion as to whether Spike was sired by Angelus or Drusilla, either way he bears the mark of his lineage, a vampire true to his textual roots. Spike is renown in vampire lore. Also called William the Bloody, he earned his name by torturing his victims with railroad spikes. He has also battled two Slayers and won by killing them. Spike believes in the order of things; evil should stay evil and good must be vanquished. Upon being reunited with Angel in Sunnydale, Spike is overjoyed (in "School Hard"):

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<sup>181</sup> Making a link to the story of Jack the Ripper whose origins, like those of Giles, are British.

Spike: Haven't seen you in the killing fields for an age.  
 Angel: I'm not much for company.  
 Spike: No. You never were. So why're you so scared of the Slayer?  
 Angel: Scared?  
 Spike: Yeah. Time was you would have taken her out in a heartbeat. Now look at you. This ah tortured thing is an act right. You're not house broke.  
 Angel: I saw her kill the Master. You think you can take her alone? Be my guest, I'll just feed and run.  
 Spike: Don't be silly. We're old friends. We'll do it together. (He strikes out at Angel and hits him) You think you can fool me? You were my sire man, you were my Yoda!  
 Angel: Things change.  
 Spike: Not us demons. Man, I can't believe this. You Uncle Tom.

The insertion of this last phrase cannot be purely coincidental. It suggests that Spike and Angel share a position that is narratively linked to a notion of African American brotherhood. Spike delineates the boundaries of the his community and the laws that must be obeyed for inclusion therein. But Spike himself does not completely comply with the rules, as the Judge points out in "Surprise," he and Drusilla are impure and show humanity in their affection and jealousy for one another. The residual emotional ties that he feels for Angel and especially for Drusilla make him vulnerable, and suggest a human face lurks in the vampire.

If Spike represents the performance of humanity lurking in the monster, than Mayor Wilkins represents the monstrous lurking in humanity. He provides a nice allegory of the corrosive mechanisms of power and the destruction that inevitably ensues. The Mayor is the creator of Sunnydale, specifically choosing the location above the Hellmouth to create a breeding/feeding ground (and perhaps a playground) for monsters - including himself. The Mayor is perhaps the scariest character we have met on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. He not as completely evil as The Master or The Judge, but his connection to humanity is so omnipresent that his destruction of others is not only physical but emotional as well. While vampires and demons posses undeath, The Mayor briefly attains true immortality or invincibility, which means that nothing can kill him. But even that is not enough because The Mayor is searching for his true face, the face

of a demon which will feed on the community of Sunnydale he has so carefully cultivated.

The Mayor represents civic authority run amok: not merely content to rule it has decided to devour the populace. But whereas demon emotion arouses sympathy, the inhumanity of the Mayor, who appears so human, provokes a reaction of terror. Unlike the vampires who cower before him, who have one day suddenly found themselves turned into demons, the Mayor is a made freak, having studied the black arts for over a century in order to build the capacity to reveal his secret self. The most grotesque aspect of the Mayor is his paradoxical personality. He is always spouting little epithets like "cleanliness is close to Godliness" and telling his vampire minions not to swear before sending them off to kill people. He performs an old-fashioned paternalism where an expectation of violence and cruelty underlies a strict adherence to other social norms, such as good manners and eloquence. As he says in this analogy (in "Choices"):

Mayor: Rusty. Irish Setter. Swell little pooch. A dog's friendship is stronger than reason. Stronger than his sense of self-preservation. Buffy is like a dog. And hey before you can say Jack Robinson, you'll get to see me kill her like one.

But the Mayor is eventually revealed to wear a similarly dog-like mask, as his devotion to Faith finally brings about his demise. Whereas it is the lack of humanity in the demon that finally brings about its destruction, in The Mayor, his humanity is, finally, never truly vanquished by transformation. In "Graduation Day II," after Faith is nearly killed by Buffy, The Mayor comes to the hospital and is inconsolable about her state, so angry that he tries to kill Buffy. As Buffy dreams in semi-consciousness, Faith comes to her and explains that: "Human weakness... never goes away. Even him." Buffy is then able to use this information to destroy The Mayor. However, the character of The Mayor continues to question any easy dichotomy between good and evil and the impossibility of such a simplistic reading.

There are many more male characters who deserve at least a cursory examination for their performance of masculinity. It is, first, important to note that all the formal authority figures on *Buffy* are male. There is Principal Snyder,

diminutive and pinch-faced, a man whose inadequacy among adults and malevolent distrust of youth make him a familiar stereotype from earlier texts. The majority of the vampires and demons are male as well and all of them meet their fate at the hands of the Slayer. The Master, a totalitarian ruler; The Anointed one, a crown Prince of vampirism; Mr. Trick, the vampire for the technological age; The Judge, a demon bent a world destruction; Kaikistos, an ancient, cloven-hoofed vampire; Akathla, a demon who would swallow the world. These are all performances of rigid paternalism, men who rule their netherworlds with iron fists. Where the human men tend to move towards a fragmentation of masculinity, the demons bring back the question of rule and Law with a vengeance though, ultimately, their power is no match for Buffy's. Through their constant reappearance, the impossibility of truly vanquishing them all, these demons represent the ever present discourse of patriarchy and colonial power which may be pushed back but whose adherents continue to prepare for the reconstruction of the world in their image.

On the other hand, the adolescent boys who populate Sunnydale represent a young masculinity, constantly in need of redefinition. In "The Harvest," Xander's best friend Jesse is seduced by Darla and turned into a vampire; in "Go Fish," a group of popular and arrogant swim team members turn into reptilian monsters; in "Reptile Boy," members of a wealthy fraternity feed young women to a demon; in "Lie to Me," Ford, a childhood friend of Buffy's wants to become a vampire; in "The Zeppo," undead delinquents try to blow up the school; in "Beauty and the Beasts," a jealous, abusive boyfriend - Pete - becomes a demon. These episodes suggest that a rigid adherence to macho roles deserves major retribution. Xander must kill Jesse with little remorse. The swim team never gets to win a State championship. The undead boys are humiliated by Xander. Everyone connected to the fraternity goes to jail or bankrupt. Ford ends up being killed by Spike and Drusilla; and Pete provides a tasty meal for werewolf Oz.

The retribution these young men receive is sometimes of specific interest. "Go Fish," for example, offers a very interesting commentary on institutional collusion, which allows athletes the run of their schools. A similar moral is given in "Doppelgangland," when Willow is forced to tutor an athlete named Percy.

Snyder subtly suggests that Percy's athletic status makes him above the rest of the students and removes his need to fulfill his academic requirements. Percy treats Willow terribly until her doppelganger appears at the Bronze and she throws him across a pool table and tries to choke him. Likewise, in "Go Fish," Buffy is given the assignment of watching Gage, a member of the swim team. When he finds she has followed him to the Bronze they argue and he leaves, only to be confronted by Angelus who tries to feed on him. After Buffy intervenes, she has to reassure Gage who begs her to walk him home. This a very interesting episode, in its constant attacking of the supposed high school norms which allow athletes to torment and harass other students. Earlier in the episode, another swim team member, Cameron, asks Buffy out. In his car in the school parking lot he comes on to her and when she rebuffs him:

Cam: I'm not going to hurt you Buffy.  
 Buffy: It's not you I'm worried about.  
 Cam: Oh, you like it rough. (But she grabs him and breaks his nose on the steering wheel)

When Buffy defends herself to the administration, Cameron insists it is her fault because of her provocative dress and they rally around him. Buffy is suitably disgusted but, in the end, the athletes and their coach meet with suitable ends (the swim team turn into sea monsters and end up eating their coach).

"Beauty and the Beast," introduces Pete, an extremely jealous boyfriend who concocts a potion "to be the man you wanted" for his girlfriend Debbie. But the potion turns him into a violent monster consumed with a murderous rage, who beats Debbie for imagined indiscretions and kills those he imagines come between them. When they realize that Pete has been murdering people and abusing Debbie, Buffy and Willow confront her in the girl's room:

Buffy: It's tricky covering a fresh shiner like that. You know what works?  
 Debbie: What?  
 Buffy: Don't get hit. What's going on Debbie? I'll bet the farm you know.  
 Debbie: You're wrong. I don't know anything.  
 Buffy: Normally I'd say you want to play I have a secret, fine, but people are dying here.

- Debbie: It's not his fault. I mean, he's not himself when he gets like this.
- Buffy: So you mean Pete.
- Debbie: It's me. I make him crazy, I, I mean he does what he does because he loves me so much.
- Willow: But weren't Mr. Platt and Jeff murdered by an animal?
- Buffy: Pete's not like other guys is he Debbie?
- Debbie: I have to go.
- Buffy: You have to talk to us. We can't help you until you do.
- Debbie: I didn't ask for your help.
- Willow: Well when are you going to? I mean, if Pete kills you it'll pretty much be too late.

The text not only implicates the possibility of girlfriend abuse but also suggests the ability to fight back, to be strong and supportive. The young males on this show are often demonstrated to be weak-willed and manipulative, not above using their status to control those around them. The text in no way glorifies this status hierarchy, or allows for any dismissal of these performances as 'boys being boys,' but instead presents a critique of what would happen if people fought back.<sup>182</sup>

There is one final episode I would like to discuss, before going on to look at performances of friendship and its inscription of community borders. In "I Only Have Eyes for You," an episode from the end of the second season, a poltergeist haunts Sunnydale High. This episode is particularly concerned with gender, and centers on a fifty-year-old murder/suicide. It is slowly revealed that Sunnydale High is being haunted by a poltergeist, the ghost a young man who shot the beautiful teacher with whom he was having an affair and then turned the gun on himself. Again and again the murder is replayed as the ghost takes possession of disparate couples and plays out its death scene. In the final minutes, as Buffy and Angelus begin to play out the scene one final time, the viewer realizes that something is askew, that Buffy is possessed by young James Stanley, while Angelus plays the part of Ms Newman.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup>And there is no suggestion that this retaliation should be murderous. But telling a young woman it is okay to fight back when she is being sexually harassed or assaulted is a very important message.

<sup>183</sup>This is a particularly interesting scene, coming as it does when Angel has been turned into Angelus and he and Buffy are estranged. Angel has actually come to the school to



Buffy: Tell me you don't love me.  
 SWITCH<sup>184</sup>  
 James: Say it.  
 Ms Newman: Is that what you need to hear? Will that help? I don't.  
 SWITCH  
 Angelus: I don't. Now let me go.  
 Buffy: No. A person doesn't just wake up and stop loving somebody.  
 SWITCH  
 James: (Waving a gun)  
 SWITCH  
 Buffy: Love is forever. I'm not afraid to use it I swear. If I can't be with you -  
 Angelus: Oh my God.  
 SWITCH  
 Ms Newman: (Beginning to run away)  
 James: Don't walk away from me-  
 SWITCH  
 Buffy: Bitch. (Chases Angelus)  
 SWITCH/SWITCH  
 Buffy: Stop it. Stop it. Don't make me-  
 Angelus: Alright. Just -  
 SWITCH  
 Ms Newman: (Turning) You know you don't want to do this. Let's both just calm down. Now give me the gun.  
 James: Don't. Don't do that damn it.  
 SWITCH  
 Buffy: Don't talk to me like I'm some stupid- (A shot)  
 Angelus: (With blood on his hands) James. James.  
 SWITCH  
 (Ms Newman falls over the railing and then James is walking away)  
 SWITCH  
 (Angelus lying on the stairs, Buffy walking to the music room, Angelus opening his eyes)  
 Buffy: ("I Only Have Eyes for You" is playing and it is James' reflection in the mirror. Ms Newman is in the mirror too. Angel grabs the gun) Grace? But I killed you.  
 Angelus: It was an accident. It wasn't your fault.  
 Buffy: But it was my fault. How could I-  
 Angelus: Don't be sorry James. You thought I stopped loving you but I never did. I loved you with my last breath (A kiss).

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kill Buffy. At the end of the scene he returns to himself and leaves Buffy again.

<sup>184</sup>When "switch" appears it refers to a visual device in the text that flips from Buffy and Angel saying the lines to two other actors - Meredith Salenger and Christopher Gorham, who play the roles of Newman and Stanley in the fifties - and back again.

I find this a very interesting scene because it really gives a performance of gender roles in flux, not by reversal but by actually playing with who plays what roles. Certainly we can imagine a similar replaying of these scene with the roles reversed (with Buffy playing Ms Newman and Angelus, James), but seeing Buffy and hearing her recite young James' lines (and likewise Angel, Ms Newman's) is a radical re-envisioning of the usual *tromp-d'oeil* of accidental transvesticism (i.e. *Just one of the Guys* or *Anything for Love*). Here, instead of reversal, is staged a performance of mimetics which is wonderfully grotesque. The lines of gender become even more blurred because the actors do not overdo their characterization by trying to be what they are not but, rather, allow the subtle nuances of gender and power to be written across their performing bodies.

Masculinity on *Buffy* is not blameless, it continues to construct the male physical body in much the same fashion as it delineates the female; under the rigid constraints of American gender normativity and media aesthetics. But the male characters often act against the constraints of their bodies through revealing performances that question the dominant fictions of masculinity. Intrinsic in this text is the double bind that hegemonic masculinity is as freakish as the deviation from that norm - it just depends on where you happen to be sitting. What the men have to learn in this text is that though they may continually desire to come to a woman's rescue, to play the man, they may find when they get there, that she has already saved herself, has played the part better than they could ever have imagined.

#### FRIENDSHIP AND THE POLITICS OF INCLUSION

Youth media texts are inherently concerned with questions of inclusion. There are two levels on which this works. The first, described by McKinley (1996, 1997) concerns the way in which television texts create communities of viewers, bound together through their viewing practices, intimate textual knowledge and fan devotion. On the second level, the viewer, through her knowledge of the text, learns the boundaries of each textual community and the necessary performances required for inclusion. On a representational level, textual performances may indicate that community boundaries are drawn by

aesthetics: beauty, thinness, fashion. On another level, the text may draw boundaries through exclusion: the failure to include performances that cut across race, class, sexuality... point to the exclusion of these identities from textual communities. Finally, the text may perform a cautionary function whereby characters are chastised or excluded for breaking with community mores or norms: the sexual woman gets pregnant, an s.t.d. or a bad reputation; the queer character is beat up, the interracial couple is forced apart by the malevolence of the community, etc. Television itself sets out performances to be read as (in)appropriate within its visual culture and it is possible that the viewer will come to be familiar with the specific lines of inclusion and exclusion set out by each particular televisual text.

This setting of boundaries for inclusion and exclusion are made in the text itself, which particularly concerns this work. In the most contemporary television texts which take youth as their focus, adults and young people alike stringently patrol the boundaries of their communities. Adults and other authority figures (who include those concerned, extra-diegetically, with the production of the text) carefully observe the performances of those within their community to ascertain their adherence to its norms. Youth populations, even more critically, observe the performances of their peers for any performance to which exclusion and humiliation can be attributable. Each youth group has its own set of standards and anyone who fails to meet their criterion (or breaks with it) is subject to exclusion or expulsion. In the youth text, much of these politics function under the trope of friendship. In the previous pages I have examined performances of character in the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the insurgent revisioning of gender that sometimes occurs within these performances. In the following pages I will elaborate this analysis by examining these performances of character as they work together to create the matrices of textual community.

### *Visual culture*

The importance of visual culture in the constructing of diegetic communities – communities that are produced in television programs and populated by television characters – can be raised in two ways. The first concerns the norms that govern which bodies may enter the mediascape and

how they will be treated once inside it. Televisual bodies are constructed in specific dimensions and embody a societal ideal which they both represent and help generate. Those who would perform on television but cannot mold their bodies into this idealized form are often excluded from its performances. Those who deviate and are allowed to enter almost always do so in an educational capacity, to teach the other characters (those who do conform to television's rigid aesthetics) about difference. Thus, in examining *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* it is important to remain aware that the bodies who perform the text are brought into the text, not for just their talent, but for the bodies they have which fit so well with television's (and the public's) standards. It is important to mark the elision of bodies which perform differences of race, class, sexuality and ability as exclusions from the text.

The second way to understand how community is constructed within visual culture concerns the diegesis itself. For the purpose of this, the viewer must move beyond the questions of representation outlined above and enter a bounded space where only certain bodies are allowed to live. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the exclusion of Buffy, Willow and Xander from coveted social spaces in their high school's hierarchy is a textual construction because as television stars these actors embody the criterion needed to enter exclusive, extra-diegetic social spaces. Because the Sunnydale landscape is so homogeneous, the lines that draw the boundaries of community are abstracted, a matter of choice, exclusion a whim of those who are considered cool. The problematic and often racist/classist implications of exclusion within high school life are almost completely elided.

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* hierarchy is established through high school cliques. They position the text within the intertextual matrix of youth media and provide an ambiguous marker against which the more central characters, who do not belong to these groups, can be read. Take this scene from the show's very first episode, for example (in "Welcome to the Hellmouth"):

Cordelia: If you hang with me and mine, you'll be accepted in no time. First, we have to test your coolness factor. You're from L.A., so you can skip the written, but, let's see... Vamp nail polish?

Buffy: Um... over?

Cordelia: So over. James Spader?  
 Buffy: He has to call me.  
 Cordelia: Frappachinos?  
 Buffy: Trendy... but tasty.  
 Cordelia: John Tesh?  
 Buffy: The devil.  
 Cordelia: That was pretty much a gimme, but you passed.

From the very first moment of the *Buffy* text, inclusion, in the sense of popularity is bounded by popular culture references (knowing what is 'in' and what is not). And although the text seems to mock this exchange – Buffy decides she would rather not be friends with Cordelia and befriends Xander and Willow instead – it inculcates the audience into the desirability of popular culture. The ability to discern the cool from the uncool is learned extra-textually by watching *Buffy*, even as the text seems to mock this form of knowledge.

At Sunnydale High School there are popular cliques who make life for their lowlier classmates a living hell. The boys are usually jocks who sexually harass their female classmates and torment the weaker males. The girls are appearance obsessed nasties, familiar from any number of other youth texts. Leading the herd is diminutive blonde Harmony (Mercedes MacNab) who seeks out every opportunity to torment her less popular classmates. This includes her friend Cordelia, who commits the ultimate act of bad faith: dating a geek. When Harmony finds out that Cordelia and Xander have been 'dating,' she quickly turns on Cordelia, ostracizing her from their group. Though Cordelia eventually rejects the group and their notions of propriety, her performance continues to come under their scrutiny. In "The Wish," after everyone at school has found out that Xander has cheated on Cordelia, Harmony pretends to be sympathetic and then suggests Cordelia date "a geek with a killer-moped... who won't cheat on you." If this was not humiliating enough, Cordelia then approaches a jock named John, hoping to make Xander jealous:

John: Look, the guys are kind of down on me lately. Coach just cut me back to second string. If anyone saw me hanging with Xander Harris' cast-off on top of that... death, you know. But maybe, if you wanna go someplace private...

While Xander and Willow and to a lesser extent Buffy and Oz, already represent the margins of the Sunnydale High hierarchy, Cordelia's performance demonstrates just how tenuous this type of inclusion actually is.

But whether Cordelia is on the ins or outs with her flock, she continues to stand in for the popular girls with whom most viewers will be intertextually familiar. Though she is problematized through her actions (by continuing to date Xander and by reluctantly befriending Willow and Buffy) Cordelia remains the snobbish, petty princess throughout. She refutes her ability to participate fully in Buffy's community by insisting on her superiority and evidencing an unbelievable level of self-involvement. When she showers anyone else with her good grace, they can count on her expecting something in return, as this scene suggests:

Cordelia: Buffy, did you lose weight? Your hair... Alright, I respect you too much to be dishonest. The hair's a little...well that really isn't the point here is it. The Zeta Kappa's need to have a certain balance at their parties and Rich explained it all to me but I was so busy really listening that I didn't actually hear much. The point is they need you to go and if you don't go, I can't. And I'm talking about Richard Anderson. As in Anderson Farms, Anderson Aeronautics and Anderson Cosmetics. Ah, well you see why I have to go. Buffy, these men are rich, and I am not being shallow. Think of all the poor people I can help with all that money (in "Reptile Boy").

Cordelia speaks in a familiar middle-class, feminine voice, one that intimately ties inclusion to consumption (the position occupied by the movie Buffy). The inability to consume, to consume the appropriate things or to want to consume them, marks the others for exclusion.

Knowledge of the social hierarchies of high school and their function in visual and mediated cultures is important to understanding how Buffy and her friends are positioned within the text. However, these hierarchies are, in fact, somewhat peripheral to the movement and performances that are engendered there. The trope of friendship is most often utilized to develop the relationships between the core group of characters and it is with these that the rest of this chapter is concerned.

*Breaking with the norm*

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, exclusion from social groups/spaces often occurs when one character has broken with the norms of the community in which they locate themselves. As each textual community demands adherence to a unique set of social norms, the characters' performances are constantly in negotiation, trying to find an appropriate fit. These exclusionary performances are often couched in a rhetoric of morality and the character who fails to live up to the moral code of their community must be punished with expulsion. Fiske (1998) writes: "Norms are crucial to any surveillance system, for without them it cannot identify the abnormal. Norms are what enable it to decide what information should be turned into knowledge and what individuals need to be monitored... The power to produce and apply norms, as Foucault tells us, is a crucial social power" (155). The function of community in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is to hold each character in its panopticonic gaze. To understand how each character is excluded – indefinitely or briefly – or chastized, it is necessary to examine the moral codes of the community in which they are positioned.

Exclusion through the breaking of norms is a structuring performance of this text and I will make it the first area of examination. At one time or another each of the characters is excluded from their community because of some immorality of action or breaking of norms. I have already discussed how Cordelia comes to be excluded from her social group by dating an unacceptable man. This is a very straightforward example of deviation where exclusion works towards the elaboration and maintenance of community hierarchy and prestige. In this type of community the visual and aesthetic are policed to determine inclusion. Any deviation immediately requires the violator be chastised. Even Cordelia, who is included by virtue of her beauty and ability to consume, is excluded because she fails to rectify her behavior to maintain the standards of her community. Though Cordelia's position in the hierarchy is demonstrated in that she merits being warned, her continued failure to correct her performance and bring it in line with the desires of her community make her expulsion imperative.

Another aspect of exclusionary performance is at work in the character of Angel as he fluctuates between himself and his evil double Angelus. When

Angel is 'good,' when he refuses to kill The Slayer, to drink human blood and to work towards a vampire dominated world, he must be expelled by the vampire group. Likewise, when Angel becomes Angelus, his reversion to an adherence to vampiric norms make it impossible for him to continue to function as part of Buffy's moral community. The inherent contradiction, or fluidity perhaps, of Angel(us)'s character makes his inclusion in either community problematic; neither desires to take a chance on a character whose performance is given to radical revision without warning. As Angel himself asks Buffy: "It's not the demon in me that needs killing, Buffy. It's the man... ...Am I worth saving? Am I a righteous man?" (in "Amends"). Angel himself describes the precariousness of his fragmented position and the exclusionary feeling it inculcates even in himself.

Oz performs a similar exclusion, as he is governed by a changeability in his character exerted beyond his control. But unlike Angel, when Oz becomes a werewolf he retains no semblance of even his human form and thus the community is unable to hold him accountable for his actions as they do with Angel. Oz's changes are predictable as the moon's cycles and he is expected to take adequate precaution to ensure his changes do not bring harm to the community, which he does. His ability to change even becomes redemptive in "Beauty and the Beasts," when he faces off and eats Pete, a jealous and abusive boyfriend who has found a way to become a demon-like monster. At the end of the episode, Pete comes after Oz who has locked himself in the book locker (something he does every night of the full moon). Inculcated as he is in Buffy's moral community, Oz, even in werewolf form, reiterates its norms. In the battle he engages in with Pete, only the real threat to the community is destroyed.

Faith also belongs in this taxonomy, though her changeability is internally rather than externally ascribed. More than any other character, perhaps, Faith performs a rejection of the morality of the community and continually meets with its anger and rejection. She is indiscriminately sexual, tries to seduce her friend's boyfriend, is blinded by power and gives in to murderous impulses. Faith, like Oz and Angel, cannot be held to any binary presupposition as her performance is often brought forth out of rage. The shift in her character, from



tolerated rebel to excluded Other is first expressed at the end of "Bad Girls" when Faith kills a man:

Faith: ...There is no body. I took it and dumped it. It doesn't exist.  
 Buffy: Getting rid of the evidence doesn't make the problem go away.  
 Faith: It does for me.  
 Buffy: Faith. You don't get it. You killed a man.  
 Faith: No, you don't get it. I don't care.

In this episode, Faith has broken the primary rule of both the moral community and the code of The Slayer. But her behavior exceeds more personal moral codes as well, as displayed in the next episode, "Consequences:"

Faith: No. The important part is that Buffy is the accidental murderer.  
 Xander: Faith. You may not think so but I sort of know you. And I've seen you post-battle and I know first hand that you're like a wild thing and half the time you don't know what you're doing.  
 Faith: And you're living proof of that aren't ya.  
 Xander: See, you can try to hurt me but now you need someone on your side. What happened wasn't your fault. And I'm willing to testify to that in court if you need me.  
 Faith: You'd dig that wouldn't you. To get up in front of all your geek pals and go on record about how I made you my boy-toy for a night.  
 Xander: No, no, no, no, no, that's not it.  
 Faith: So that's what this is all about? You just came by here because you want another taste.  
 Xander: No. I mean, it was nice. Great. It was kind of a blur. But okay, some day, sure, yeah, but not now. Not like this.  
 Faith: Well, like how then? Lights on or off? Kinks or vanilla?  
 Xander: I came here to help you. I thought we had a connection.  
 Faith: (Laughs and throws him onto the bed) Do you want to feel our connection? It's just skin. I see. I want. I take. I forget.  
 Xander: No. Wait. It was more than that.  
 Faith: I could do anything to you right now and you want me to. I could make you scream. I could make you die. (Bites and then tries to strangle him)

Faith breaks the moral norms of the community she has tried so hard to be part of. Her inability to ever live up to their standards, in the end, insists that she be excluded from that community.

Part of the code that Faith breaks concerns honesty and loyalty to each community member. This is a code that many of the characters find difficult keep, mostly because each has so many secrets. Even Giles does not always live up to the expectations of his character, as shown in this exchange (in "Helpless"):

Buffy: I can't just be a person. I can't be helpless like that.  
Giles, we have to figure out what's happening to me.

Giles: (Opening a leather case and showing her the syringe within) It's an organic compound of muscle relaxants and adrenal suppressants. The effect is temporary. You'll be yourself in a few days

Buffy: You?

Giles: It's a test Buffy. It's given to The Slayer once she, if she reaches her eighteenth birthday. The Slayer is disabled and then entrapped with a vampire foe whom she must defeat in order to pass the test. The vampire you were to face has escaped. His name is Zachary Kreczech, as a mortal he murdered and tortured more than a dozen women before he was committed to an asylum for the criminally insane. When-

Buffy: (Throws the case at him) You bastard. All this time you saw what it was doing to me, all this time and you didn't say a word.

Giles: I wanted to.

Buffy: Liar.

Giles: It's a matter of tradition and protocol. I must answer to the Council. My role in this was very specific. I was to administer the injection and direct you to the old boarding house on Prescott Lane.

Buffy: I can't, I can't hear this.

Giles: Buffy, please.

Buffy: Who are you? How could you do this to me?

This important scene underscores the fallibility of the Watcher's authority and thus, that of the one adult who is a constant, guiding force in the life of the child. Similarly, Ms Calendar's secret past drives a rift between her and the others, one that eventually leads to her death. In the scene where Buffy discovers that Ms Calendar knew that Angel could become Angelus again (in "Innocence"):

Buffy: (Walking into the classroom where Giles and Ms Calendar are in front of the class. She grabs Ms Calendar by the neck and throws her onto her desk) What do you know?  
 Giles: I'll deal with this. You're all dismissed.  
 Buffy: What did you do to him? Did you change him?  
 Giles: For God's sake, calm down.  
 Buffy: How did you know this was gonna happen?  
 Giles: You can't just go around accusing-  
 Ms C.: I didn't know... exactly. I was told... I was sent here to watch you. They told me to keep you and Angel apart. They never told me what would happen.  
 Giles: Jenny!  
 Ms C.: I'm sorry Rupert. He was supposed to pay for what he did to my people.  
 Buffy: And me? What was I supposed to be paying for?  
 Ms C.: I didn't know what would happen until after, I swear I would have told you.

Like Giles, Jenny Calendar's deception, breaking her loyalty to the group, to Buffy, marks the necessity of her exclusion.

Though many of the characters break with the moral code of their community, almost all are eventually forgiven. And more often than not, it is Buffy herself who moves into a performance of betrayal. Though there are many instances of this, one is particularly resonant. At the end of the second season, after Buffy has sent Angel to hell and saved to world, she decides to run away from home. In the last frames we see her looking through a bus window, passing the sign which welcomes everyone to Sunnydale. Early in the third season, Buffy comes home and finds that returning to the fold is not as easy as she had hoped. As the tension mounts, she feels the urge to leave again (in "Dead Man's Party"):

Xander: You know, maybe you don't want to hear it Buffy, but I think what you did was incredibly selfish and stupid.  
 Buffy: Okay, okay I screwed up. I know this. But you have no idea. You have no idea what was happening to me or what I was feeling.  
 Xander: Did you ever try talking to anybody?  
 Buffy: There was nothing that anybody could do, okay. I just had to deal with this on my own.  
 Xander: And we see how well that one worked out. You can't just bury stuff Buffy, it'll come right back up to get you.

Buffy: As if I could even have gone to you Xander, you made your feelings about Angel perfectly clear.

Xander: Look, I'm sorry that your honey was a demon, but most girls don't hop a Greyhound over boy troubles.

Cordelia: Time out Xander. Put yourself in Buffy's shoes for just a minute. I'm Buffy, freak of nature right, so naturally I pick a freak for a boyfriend and then he turns into Mr. Killing Spree which is pretty much-

Buffy: Cordy, get out of my shoes.

Cordelia: I'm just trying to help Buffy.

Willow: Buffy you-

Buffy: Willow, please, I can't take this from you too.

Xander: Let her finish, you at least owe her that.

Buffy: God Xander, do you think you could stick to annoying me on your own behalf.

Xander: Fine. You stop acting like an idiot and I'll stop annoying you.

Buffy: Oh, you want to talk acting like an idiot... Night Hawk.

Oz: Okay. Going to step in now and play referee guys.

Willow: No Oz, let them go. Talking about it isn't helping. We might as well try violence.

In the end, the whole group must battle an army of zombies and order is restored through renewed allegiance to the moral imperatives of their community. Though in this case there is never really the possibility of expulsion from the community (after all, what kind of show would there be if no one would be Buffy's friend anymore), the threat is always there. Through the mechanism of diffusion of norms each character comes to recognize the fine lines they must tread in order to remain inculcated into the social order of their desires.

The creation of norms in the (moral) community governs the movement of the text by allowing certain linkages between characters and denying others. While the text acknowledges the primacy of friendship within youth culture, it equally insists that these performances are always in danger of breach. Even the closest friends may come to blows, even the most solid citizen may become treasonous, even the prettiest girl may not live up to the expectations of her peers. On the one hand, the breaking of norms on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* delineates, for the viewer, the boundaries of acceptability of the moral community. On the other hand, it demonstrates the inherent difficulty in staying within those borders.

*Bonding over sameness*

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the breaking of norms is balanced by a move toward sameness which appears to inscribe immediate identification between characters, erasing their differences. Whereas I previously noted that characters are taught to observe the fine line between inclusion and exclusion, sameness acts in defense of inclusion. The identification of sameness between characters is an incredibly affective bond which works in two ways. First, by reinforcing the friendship tie between two characters and allowing them to more closely identify with one another. Second, and more elusively, sameness marks the attempt of one character to move another back into the embrace of the moral community. While what is often manifested through the breaking of norms is exclusion, the very fact of this exclusion may work insurgently to create alternate communities outside of this rigid order (as Buffy does by forgoing inclusion in the popular clique and finding a more positive space for herself). But where sameness offers insurgent possibilities of identification across difference, it may recapitulate by refusing to inscribe anything but existing, hegemonic and hierarchical orders.

One very interesting example comes from the episode "Gingerbread." In this episode, the residents of Sunnydale go on a witch-hunt and Amy, Willow and Buffy are their prime targets. This episode represents a culmination of themes dealing with the rejection of community norms, but also evidences several instances of bonding over sameness. The young women, for one, join together their powers to fight the moral community, represented primarily by their parents. But even more interestingly, in this episode Joyce Summers and Sheila Rosenberg have the opportunity to bond. As Joyce and Sheila take up their moral crusade, their devotion is so complete that they would even give up the lives of their children. Like the Salem witch trials, on which this episode draws heavily, the moral community sets itself as judge and executioner and attempts to erase difference from their midst. In the moral community bent on maintaining homogeneity, even the most intense filial bonds are secondary.

Most other episodes which are of interest to me here concern the question of bonding through unusual and difficult circumstances known only to two particular characters. In "Inca Mummy Girl," Buffy's foreign exchange student turns out to be an ancient Inca Princess who was sacrificed by her community:

Ampata: Thank you. You are always thinking of others before yourself. You remind me of someone from very long ago. The Inca Princess.  
 Buffy: Cool. A princess.  
 Ampata: They told her that she was the only one. That only she could defend her people from the Netherworld. Out of all the girls in her generation she was the only one-  
 Buffy: Chosen.  
 Ampata: You know the story?  
 Buffy: It's fairly familiar.

In Ampata's mirroring back of a story so similar to her own, Buffy unwittingly becomes implicated in it. She cannot help identifying with a young girl whose experience was so close to her own. So too, Buffy is connected to Faith through their shared performances as Slayers. Even as Faith moves ever closer to the abyss, Buffy cannot help but try and save her (in "Consequences"):

Faith: You don't give up do you?  
 Buffy: Not on my friends, no.  
 Faith: Oh yeah, cause you and me are such solid buds, right.  
 Buffy: We could be, it's not too late.  
 Faith: For me to change and be more like you, you mean. Little miss goody-two-shoes. It ain't gonna happen B.

As Slayers, Buffy and Faith are inescapably linked through their performances. But the similarity of their stories, in this case, only serves to underscore their differences as each attempts to maintain their individuality in the face of the sameness of the other; a sameness that, in Faith's case, threatens to devour her completely. The only way Faith can abdicate her performance of sameness with Buffy, to strike out and find an identity of her own, is to reject the moral code by which Buffy strives to live.

In the rejection of Buffy's moral code, Faith moves into a performance of sameness with another character: Angel. Though very different, the two are intimately tied by their experience of having taken a human life. In "Enemies," Faith goes to Angel, seeing in him a ghostly reflection of her own shifting self:

Angel: I know the feeling.  
 Faith: That's why I came to you. I don't want to get all... but remember when you told me that killing people would make me feel like some kind of God? Maybe I just came down to earth. (Shows him her bloody hands) It's not human if that's what you're thinking. Not that, that makes me feel any better, or this guy any less dead.  
 Angel: You need help. You can't do this alone.  
 Faith: I know. For real now. I'm scared. Whatever I am, what I'm, turning into, a cold-blooded straight up killer. Like you.  
 Angel: Not like me. I didn't have a choice. But you do, look, you can stop this.  
 Faith: Believe me, I want to. I don't want to end up like everybody said I would: dead or alone or a loser.  
 Angel: You don't have to  
 Faith: I dunno. Maybe it's too late for me. Angel, I'm so scared.

As Faith increasingly rejects her sameness with Buffy, she moves into another type of sameness with Angel, one, ironically, that he himself has rejected.

There are other instances of sameness which occur throughout this text and I will make some note of them now, though in brief. Xander and Angel, in their libidinal devotion to Buffy, find a unique common ground. Cordelia and Buffy also have their moment of recognition as Buffy turns her gaze on her former self and Cordelia realizes that being a prom queen does not necessitate weakness or passivity. In "Halloween," when Buffy finds herself locked in the performance of a seventeenth century maiden, she also finds room to identify with the girl Drusilla once was; the pious child Angel made into a monster in his own image. In his childhood friend, Giles recognizes and accepts the Ripper in his past, as through Amy, Willow comes to acknowledge her adeptness in witchcraft. In each of these examples a mirroring or doubling occurs between the performances of two characters who stand definitively apart. The desire for connection, even if only to immediately reject it, is what binds these characters in sameness. In the moment of recognizing some part of the Other in themselves, each of these characters recognizes something new about their own performance.

## GUYFRIENDS AND GIRLFRIENDS

Though it is the norm today (in North American culture) to depict adolescent social groups as fluidly mixed by gender, young men and women perform these friendships with very different intent and intensity. I will begin by examining the role of friendship in the delineation of masculinity, because it is only negligibly present in this text and almost completely peripheral to its performances. In one sense, this is a story about a girl and so girls and their friendships dominate the text and the main male cast members: Xander, Giles, Angel, Oz and Spike, are understood primarily through their relationships with their female friends and lovers, rather than through each other. Another reason the male characters may not be positioned as friends is that they inhabit different social orders which do not allow them enough common experience to develop friendships. That is, the cool Oz and mis-fit Xander (or the relentlessly hungry Spike and the reformed Angel) can never easily be friends. Another reason may be that many of them are pitted against each other in the struggle for normative, heterosexual relationships. Xander is jealous of Willow's relationship with Oz, Oz is jealous of Willow's quasi-relationship with Xander, Spike is jealous of Angel's relationship with Drusilla, etc. The jealousy that comes from having so few people in the diegesis makes the interaction between the male characters problematic. There are times, however, when the male characters do have the opportunity for closer contact and I would like to examine a few of these.

One such homosocial (that is, occurring between two members of the same sex who are not sexually linked) friendship couple is Angel and Spike. Their friendship is problematized by Angel's fluid movement between his 'good' self and his evil alter ego, Angelus. When performing Angel, he and Spike represent opposite performances and harbor enormous resentment for each other. Angel, having rejected the life of a vampire, fights against everything that Spike stands for. Spike, on his end, is shocked and disgusted by his friend's desire to do good and, even more intensely, by his relationship with The Slayer. But even as Angelus these two have an impossible relationship as they vie for the position of top vampire as well as for Drusilla's affection. Where Spike hates the good in Angel, he equally detests the inherent power that Angelus holds.



Despite the impossibility of their relationship, Spike and Angel are intimately tied together through a legacy of shared experience that spans more than a century and their conflictual performances reveal an interesting pattern of homosocial relations based in historical connection and competition.

The real enigmas are Oz and Xander, who spend a great deal of the second and third seasons on screen together but rarely seem to develop any sort of friendship. There may be a few reasons for this: the fact that Oz once caught Xander and Willow kissing is one, but perhaps even more importantly, they belong to different social groups. Xander is a geek and Oz, a slightly odd, but nevertheless cool, musician. They do share a moment when they try to save Buffy and Willow from the witch-hunting townspeople in "Gingerbread," however unnecessary that was in the end. And they bond over 'guy knowledge' in "Helpless:"

- Xander: You know, maybe we're on the wrong track with the whole spell, curse and whammy thing. Maybe what we should be looking for is like, um, Slayer kryptonite.
- Oz: Faulty metaphor. Kryptonite kills
- Xander: You're assuming I meant the green kryptonite, I was referring, of course, to the red kryptonite that drains Superman's powers
- Oz: Wrong, the gold kryptonite's the power sucker. The red kryptonite mutates Superman into some sort of weird...

Oz and Xander share is a certain sense of what a 'guy' is, based aspects of popular culture. But that Oz posses some invisible attribute of masculine performance that Xander is lacking, is obvious from this exchange (in "The Zeppo"):

- Xander: But, it's just that it's bugging me. This thing. I mean, what is it? How do you get it? Who doesn't have it? And who decides, who doesn't have it? What is the essence of cool?
- Oz: Not sure.
- Xander: I mean, you yourself Oz are considered more or less cool. Why is that?
- Oz: Am I?
- Xander: Is it about the talking? You know, the way you tend to express yourself in short, non-committal phrases?
- Oz: Could be.

- Xander: No, you're in a band. That's like a business class ticket to cool with complimentary mojo after takeoff. I gotta learn an instrument. Is it hard to play guitar?
- Oz: Not the way I play it.
- Xander: Okay, but on the other hand. Eighth grade, I'm taking flugelhorn and getting zero trim. So, the whole instrument thing could be a mislead. I need a thing. One thing nobody else has. What do I have?
- Oz: An exciting new obsession. Which I feel makes you very special.
- Xander: Now with mocking, which I can handle because I know I'm right about this. I'm on the track. I just need to find my thing.
- Oz: It seems like you're over thinking it. I mean you've got some identity issues. It's not the end of the world.

This seems like a rather auspicious start but we really do not get to see much more interaction between these two in any of the episodes that follow.

Other exchanges of comradeship between male characters are similarly stunted. Giles and Ethan, for example, only spend one episode examining their youthful dabbling in black magic (in "The Dark Age") and Xander's one male friend from Sunnydale High, Jesse, is killed off in the second episode of the first season (in "The Harvest"). Where female friendships may be haunted by bitchiness and jealousy they, at least, are performed as an important part of the development of the text. Male friendships are problematic when they appear at all, which suggests two things. First, that the text gives precedence to all things feminine. And second, that the text has difficulty allowing the expression of relationships between men and prefers to feminize or make gender neutral its male characters who, in the end, tend to have women as their primary friends.

Where the lines of male homosocial performance are rather blurred in this text, those same bonds are molded into complex performances in the young women. This is not unusual, first because this text is primarily concerned with the figure of the feminine and second, because youth texts have, more generally, ascribed to the feminine the power of friendship. D'Acci (1992), writing almost a decade ago, bemoaned the lack of televisual female friendships and saw programming instead as continually rendering its female characters as competitors. Though *Buffy* does return to this motif, it also skews this paradigm by making sexual competition a hallmark of the masculine. Perhaps this needs

some clarification because many media texts make male competition central. Many of these texts make competition an attribute of gaining status as men fight to win, to be the best, to save the world... In this text, where the active imperative, more often than not, belongs to the feminine, masculine competition degenerates into a game of heterosexual romance. Now, let me say again that the 'girlfriends' in this text do their share of fighting over men. However, their friendships tend to go far beyond this line of connection and are constructed in much more complex ways.

Unlike the masculine, feminine competition covers more ground than merely a struggle over heterosexual romance, though the romance themes are strong. Willow is a particularly interesting figure in this regard, as she furiously fights for the exclusion of both Cordelia and Faith after learning of their relationships with Xander:

Willow: I knew it. I knew it. Well, not in the sense of having the slightest idea. But I knew in the sense that there was something I didn't know You two were fighting way too much. It's not natural.

Xander: I know it's weird.

Willow: Weird? It's against all laws of God and man. It's Cordelia, remember? The We-Hate-Cordelia-Club of which you are the Treasurer.

Xander: Look, I was going to tell you.

Willow: Gee, what stopped you? Could it be shame?  
(In "Innocence")

And in "Enemies," when Buffy finds herself jealous about the time Angel is spending with Faith, she receives no comfort from Willow who is still shaken after having learned that Xander has slept with Faith:

Willow: No way. No way.

Buffy: You're right. Faith would never do that.

Willow: Faith would totally do that. Faith was built to do that. She's the do-that girl.

Thus in some ways Willow's position most closely aligns with what I have already noted is problematic in homosocial relations between the male characters. Willow is not the only one who gets jealous in this way, however.

Cordelia continually berates Xander for his ongoing ardent affection for Buffy, as well as for his indiscretion with Willow; Faith is so angry that Angel does not return her affections that she would see her friend dead.

One thing that is allowed between young women, however, is the possibility that jealousy gives way to a moment of bonding. As we see happen in "Phases" between Willow and Cordelia:

Cordelia: I mean, with Xander it's always Buffy did this, Willow said that. Buffy, Buffy, Willow, Willow. It's like I don't even exist.

Willow: I sometimes feel like that.

Cordelia: And then when I call him on it he acts all confused like I'm the one with the problem.

Willow: His, do I smell something look.

Cordelia: All part of his little guy games. It's like he's there and then he's not there. He wants it and then he doesn't want it.

Willow: He's so busy looking at what he doesn't have that he doesn't realize what he does have.

Cordelia: Well, he should at least realize that you have Oz.

Willow: Mmm. I'm not sure I do. We're in some sort of holding pattern, only, without the holding, or anything else.

Cordelia: What's he waiting for? What's his problem? Oh. That's right. He's a guy.

Willow: Him and Xander – guys.

Cordelia: Who do they think they are?

Willow: A couple of guys.

For the viewer, the spectacle of Cordelia and Willow bonding is especially entertaining, as they have spent the better part of two seasons detesting each other. Though their common ground is a rather weak one it does present the possibility for young women to negotiate their performances of heterosexual normativity and to find, even within them, the possibility for homosocial connection. These themes and differences between feminine and masculine friendships, however, suggest that a 'normative' reading of North American high school preoccupations is present.

As I have already said, the competition for 'guys' is only one area where these young women compete. There are, for example, the wonderful scenes in "Homecoming" where Buffy and Cordelia battle for who will become Homecoming Queen. There is a montage sequence that shows each character

trying to solicit votes and sabotaging the other's campaigns. It ends with the two of them facing off as Cordelia yells: "Stupid Freak" and Buffy retorts: "Vapid Whore!" This episode pays tongue-in-cheek homage to the spectacle of high school popularity contests. After battling an army of Slayer hunters and then discovering that neither has won the crown:

Cordelia: After all that we've been through tonight, this who gets  
to be Queen 'capade seems pretty-  
Buffy: Damned important.  
Cordelia: Oh yeah.

In the context of the female characters, Buffy is most often the locus of competitive feeling. She and Faith continually battle to see who is the braver, truer Slayer, a central theme in the third season. Likewise, Cordelia and Buffy compete over who is prettier, more sophisticated and even, a bigger bitch. Regardless of the high levels of competition in this text, none of these disallows the possibility for intense friendships to be developed. Even when a gross moral outrage is committed, these young women try to contain each other within the boundaries of their group. Sometimes, as I have already tried to show, competition acts in favor of a deeper and more complex level of intimacy.

Intimacy, indeed, is one of the central themes of youth media which target young women. Though in this text intimacy is often reserved for the heterosexual couple there is still room for the exploration of friendship. The two friendships that are most centrally performed are those which occur between Willow and Xander and Willow and Buffy. Xander, as I have previously examined, often becomes feminized by the text. Willow and Xander have been friends since they were children and often make reference to their shared past (Willow remembers all the Christmas specials she watched at the Harris' and their days of wearing footy pajamas). But in adolescence, Willow's unrequited love and their mutual attraction threaten to destroy their friendship. This theme of friendship growing into love is a hallmark of adolescent drama (i.e. *Dawson's Creek*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Some Kind of Wonderful*, etc.). But unlike many of their predecessors, Willow and Xander weather their hormonal traumas and move out of them with their friendship solidified, without moving into romance. These characters perform an interesting side of hetero-friendship, which acknowledges

the possibility of attraction but does not make it the only point where the characters connect. Instead, the focus shifts to their unshakable loyalty. This text is one of the few which allows young people to have hetero-oriented primary friendships which are only partially reduced to romance.

Another trope which teen drama often employs is to make gender specific groups dominant. Girls and boys can be friends but only through romantic fusion or the conjoining of a larger group. Each gender is usually most intensely cathected to members of their own sex. And while Xander may consider Willow his best friend (or that he, Willow and Buffy are best friends), in this program, the best friend motif really belongs to Buffy and Willow. Over the first three seasons the audience has watched Buffy and Willow become closer, even as they have struggled with their relationship. These two young women have one of the most interesting friendships that I have seen on television in years. But by the middle of the third season, their friendship is problematized by the appearance of Faith, whose presence sets itself as an enormous obstacle (in "Bad Girls"):

Willow: So, what's the plan? For tonight's slayage? We're going aren't we?  
 Buffy: Yeah.  
 Willow: Great.  
 Buffy: But, there's a but and that's but you shouldn't come. Is that cool?  
 Willow: Sure. Makes sense. You'll be facing big hairy danger.  
 Buffy: The biggest. And very hairy.  
 Willow: You'll be risking your life.  
 Buffy: Right. Why risk yours.  
 Willow: Because I'm your friend.  
 Buffy: I know Will, that's why I don't want you going. It's too dangerous.

In the next episode, "Consequences," Willow finally tells Buffy her feelings about being left out:

Buffy: Hey.  
 Willow: Hey.  
 Buffy: I need to talk to you.  
 Willow: Good. 'Cause I've been letting things fester. I don't like, I want to be fester free.  
 Buffy: Yeah, me too.

- Willow: I mean, don't get me wrong. I completely understand why you and Faith have been doing the bonding thing. You guys work together, you should get along.
- Buffy: It's more complicated than that.
- Willow: It's, it's that exact thing that's ticking me off. This whole Slayers Only attitude. Since when wouldn't I understand? You, you talk to me about everything. It's like all of a sudden I'm not cool enough for you 'cause I can't kill things with my bare hands.

These episodes, like the hierarchical scenes discussed in relation to Cordelia and her friends, articulate the question of inclusion/exclusion. Though Buffy and Willow are best friends, there is always a certain subtext which positions Buffy as more able to move between social hierarchies; her more generic good looks continue to attract the attention of her male and female peers. With Faith things are slightly different, the appearance of a second Slayer suggests that some of the isolation which comes with their position is alleviated, leaving Willow feeling superfluous. Buffy's return to Willow only comes after Faith has broken their moral code by committing murder and it is to alleviate her guilt that Buffy seeks solace in her 'best' friend.

The question of inclusion and exclusion and the tropes of friendship and community which structure these concepts within the text are central to understanding the textual performances of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. These performances, in turn, tell the viewer a great deal about each character and allude to the points of identification which are inscribed within the text. On one level, they point to who may perform the text at all, who will be asked to leave, who will be welcomed into each group. On another level, friendship and community set boundaries to the performances of character, insisting and policing which actions are acceptable and which are not. And on yet another level, friendship excavates the problematic restructuring of gender which occurs again and again in this text. The motif of competition, while underlying much homosocial interaction is primarily attributed to the masculine, while the feminine is allowed to develop more complex notions of homosociality including bonds of love and devotion.

## MONSTERS AND MORTALS

By way of conclusion of this chapter I want to make a few remarks about how the notion of monstrosity problematizes both identity construction and inclusion/exclusion in this text. In the beginning of this chapter I wrote that the characters who populate *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are mobilized by monstrosity, which is at once external to them and internal as well. This problematic dichotomization makes it impossible for either unity or a true moral order. Monsters are reduced to mortal dust, just as mortals always run the risk of immortality through not only contact with the un-dead, but equally, through their proximity to the vagaries of nature and acquisition of un-natural powers. The monster is so omnipresent within this text that it is no longer possible for its presence to control community. Simply putting the monsters outside and enclosing the mortals within the community will not hold its borders.

If identity is made problematic by the presence of the monster, then so too are the performances by which inclusion and exclusion are 'normally' effected. As has been noted time and again, the semblance of normalcy in this text is as often the cause of exclusion as is its absence. Rather, this text shores up its ragged vision of normalcy by continually calling on the voice of moral authority. That is not to say that there is an authority figure who holds the key to morality and law (The Mayor aptly dispels such an idea), but that the characters and their actions are judged according to a morality that is seen as inherent to the text. And it is, perhaps, the creation of a community on the margins of the normal. Thus these performances are, in some sense, performative of a hegemonic and rather arbitrary notion of morality which, as Butler (1997) writes, does "not merely reflect prior social conditions, but produces a set of social effects, and though they are not always the effects of "official" discourse, they nevertheless work their social power not only to regulate bodies, but to form them as well" (159-50). The discourse that produces the bodies and governs the performances in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is regulatory and exerts its force in the construction of affiliation between the characters.

The hierarchical boundaries drawn in and by the population of Sunnydale High are, as I have already written, rather peripheral. They exist to demonstrate



*Buffy's* intertextual relation to other, similar works. Thus the popular cliques are familiar from a plethora of pop culture antecedents but only sometimes function as important parts of the text. Indeed, *Buffy's* immediate rejection of Cordelia's popular clique in the first episodes makes inclusion into that group, while somewhat alluring, dispensable. And with this dispensing comes a corollary rejection of other well known teen motifs such as the overthrowing of the popular clique, or of its infiltration. Indeed, these snobby girls are, if anything, the subject of derision and ridicule, certainly less desirable than being part of The Slayer's inner circle. So while there is definitely a hierarchy at work here, it is the somewhat lower term that becomes desirable, in this text, for inclusion. This is an interesting shift from most television programs whose focus is the top of the hierarchy and allows for more options for identification. However, *Buffy's* group, while not being so rigid in term of class or aesthetics, certainly has its own rules of inclusion which are no simple thing to fulfill. The need to be strong, loyal and stringently moral makes this group's rules of entry equally difficult to follow.

For those who have the luck to be included into the Herculean group, maintenance of their inclusion is no simple feat either. Every misguided action holds the possibility for their exclusion. While this elaborate performance proves too much for Angel and Faith, the other, more statically moral characters entrench their friendships through it.<sup>185</sup> The inscription of morality thus functions, in this text, as the guidepost of inclusion and offers a somewhat pedantic voice of morality to the viewer, a voice which is only somewhat softened by its breakdown of other binaries. In *Buffy's* world, everything may be up for grabs, but the voice of morality remains omnipotent. In the seasons that follow, it is predictable that Xander, Willow, Buffy, Giles and Oz will continue to meet with circumstances which challenge their connection to the morality of the text; and equally predictable that they will, in the end, adhere to it.

Finally, through the breakdown of rigid binaries, this program allows its characters the opportunity to perform a wide range of selves and friendships

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<sup>185</sup> Angel and Cordelia leave Sunnydale for Los Angeles where they begin the 1999-2000 season on the *Buffy* spin-off *Angel*. Faith is in a coma at the end of the third season though she puts in a few brief appearance in the fourth. Oz, having new moral dilemmas of his own (and more lucrative movie offers) leaves Sunnydale during the fourth season too.

across gender boundaries as well as the possibility of monstrosity. Although this in itself is not so unusual, where *Buffy* breaks with tradition is in its complex portrayal of the friendship bond. Perhaps because the diegesis itself is so unpredictable, the structures of friendship are among the most important to the text. And because, as always, the female characters are given the opportunity to express the most insurgent spectrum of action, the text allows them to have the most radical potential for friendship as well. While these young women may not completely break from their predecessors and may even continue to be characterized, at least in part, by their competition for romance, they nonetheless perform a model of friendship that is often profoundly moving.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DESIRE AND SUBVERSION OF ROMANCE IN THE HELLMOUTH:  
PERFORMANCES OF GENDER AND HETEROSEXUALITY UNDER SCRUTINY

"Give us a kiss." (Faith)

Media texts aimed at youth audiences tend to follow certain thematic structures, including - but not confined - disruption of patterns of law and authority, the creation and maintenance of community, and performances of romance. The media's preoccupation (both fictional and factual) with adolescent sexuality is rarely far from the center of any narrative that takes this age group as its focus, either as preferred audience or subject of inquiry. Even the most g-rated texts like *Boy Meets World* must, after their characters reach a certain age (usually sixteen), deal with the fact that some of their characters will become sexually active. How each text deals with this move into performances of sexuality is a rather more complicated question. A Canadian show, *Ready or Not*, simply ended its run when the characters were to go into grade ten. As Koch (1998) writes:

While those anxiety-ridden years can provide a rich source of storylines, it's no coincidence the show is coming to an end now. "You want to go out when you're still riding high," says executive producer Jon Brunton, president of Toronto's Insight Productions. "To be true to our concept, the kids have to be of a certain age, when there's a kind of honesty and innocence that is the essence of *Ready or Not*. Once the kids reach Grade 10, they do start getting pregnant, having drug addictions. It changes the innocence, the wonder of going through puberty (3).

It is important to recognize the slightly rose-colored tint to these remarks, the privileging of the (pre)pubertal body (assumed to be virginal) as presumably asexual and innocent. While Koch goes on to mark the contrast of this show to those "south of the border" (*Dawson's Creek* and *90210*) she fails to look at other things that have been going on closer to home. I am thinking, in particular, of the incredibly long-running *Degrassi Junior High* (formerly *The Kids of Degrassi Street* and later *Degrassi High*). This Canadian phenomenon, which has developed a cult following worldwide, refused any such innocent view of teenagers and their sexuality. Long before the central cast reached the tenth

grade, they were dealing with teen pregnancy (and motherhood) and drug addiction, as well as homophobia, inter-racial relations, eating disorders, girlfriend abuse, sexual abuse and experimentation with drugs and alcohol. I am not saying that *Degrassi* represents a better or more realistic a portrayal of adolescent life, only that the tendency to be nostalgic and contain adolescence in a pre-sexual space is problematic. Neither am I suggesting that those shows that Koch alluded to as "south of the border" do not render nostalgic the performance of youth in its sexual as well as other capacities. Whether sexual performances are manifest or not, media performances of adolescent sexuality tend to be nostalgic events.

A rapacious heterosexuality is in some ways a hallmark of the looking-back-at-youth quality in television and film today: nostalgic because youth is already lost to those who are responsible for its production. In this space of reflection, adolescents perform a romanticized (even in its most negative) vision of sexual exploration that remains constantly open, fluid and insatiable. Teen sexuality is never simple, but is, rather, inherently deceptive, changeable and unruly, though usually confined to heterosexuality. The media text tends to push a trajectory which ends with monogamy (heterosexuality and marriage), but youth is allowed a space for experimentation, exceeding many borders while firmly reinscribing others. Youth texts have rejected some moral standings on sexuality by allowing characters, especially in the case of young women, an opportunity to move between partners, even those who fail to meet the standard of heterosexual love and commitment which is often recognized as a necessity for sexualized action. The movement towards sexual maturity, however, tends to be produced within very strict boundaries. The most obvious of those is the prescription to heterosexuality and enforcement that characters do not engage in sexual relations that move across race, class and ability. When this type of transgression does occur, it is usually quickly closed down, allowing the character in question to move into a search for a more 'appropriate' partner.

The search for the perfect or appropriate partner returns this inquiry to the question of normativity and the not normal that stalks its tenuous borders. It also returns us to the problematic of bodies and desires, as these are constructed within the television text. Further, it opens once again the specific question of

heterosexual coupling and gender orientation as performed within the diegetic world of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In this chapter I will be exploring these questions in more detail in order to demonstrate the centrality of performances of sexuality to the movement of this text. Indeed, heterosexual romance and sexuality are critical to the narrative structure of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Though the text is complicated by its supernatural location, it is through the romance that the characters are reinserted into the more traditional teen drama and its norms. The eradication of threatening forces is sometimes made secondary to the quest for 'true love' and sexual exploration. And yet these are complicated by strategic textual devices which allow the heterosexual norm to be performed in slightly insurgent ways and, at the least, to recast gender as a transitional category, even within the tight confines of the teen drama.

#### BODIES IN QUESTION

In television, gender and sexuality are inscribed across the bodies of actors, though these are made problematic by the fluctuating space they occupy: half in the physical world, half in the diegesis. It is a particularly problematic space for the female body. Feminist writers like Diana Fuss (1989) insist on the materiality of the body (that the body is matter), but what of bodies that are only partially anchored to physical reality? Bodies that are equally constructed by the representational structures of the mass media? Certainly, every character that populates the mediascape takes some literal body as its foundation. *Buffy*, for example, starts with the body of Sarah Michele Geller, as much as she starts with the narrative produced by Joss Weedon, the show's creator. Case (1996) writes: "One can live in the screen, onscreen, in the movie set. What, then, is the "live" and in conjunction, the body?" (103). I would suggest that the live body and the body that lives in the mediascape can never really be fully differentiated.

The textual body – the body that is produced for a performance of visual or narrative consumption – always carries the echo, the signature, of the live body that preceded it. But the dichotomy between the live and mediated body falters in the Butlerian notion that the live body is itself produced, something which is never more true than in the case of the body that stands before the

camera. Within the hierarchy of bodies in our culture (one that is at least in part disseminated by the mass media) certain bodies, the bodies that most often end up populating the mediascape, conform to very rigid aesthetic norms. But beyond being 'lucky' enough to have been born with the 'right' aesthetic look, hopeful media performers must follow stringently critical guidelines of weight reduction, muscle tone, skin and hair colour, beauty, fashion and adornment. Thus the actor's body comes under her or his own scrutiny as well as that of the more general culture. Grosz (1995) writes: "The preferred body was one under control, pliable, amenable to the subject's will: the fit and healthy body, the tight body, the street-smart body, the body transcending itself into the infinity of cyberspace. A body more amenable, and more subordinate to mind or will than ever before. Just pick the body you want and it can be yours (for a price)" (1-2). In this view, the actor must not only perform the preferred body but must perform in excess of it, must become the body that the entire world must prefer and desire to emulate. The aesthetics of the body are produced in these performances. But it is important to ask again at this point: whose body? Is it the body of the actor who is coveted or the cybernetic body on the screen?<sup>186</sup> The body on the screen is even more excessively perfect than the actor's flesh and blood body.

There are at least three possible readings of the covetous performance of the preferred body in the mediascape. First, the method of production and capital outlay that go hand in hand with mass media texts means that actors cannot simply walk onto set looking good. Successful actors have teams of personal trainers, costume designers, dressers and hair and make-up people to ensure that they always look as close to the ideal as possible. Lighting and camera work further enhance their best features and camouflage their 'worst.' Second, the blurred lines between inaccessible performers and the characters they play suggests the possibility that it is not the character who is in possession of the preferred body but the actor – recognizing that this life is led by a very small minority of actors - whose life seems as distant and implausible as that of any character: enormous salaries, lifestyles of excessive consumption, entrance

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<sup>186</sup> Have you ever noticed that actors, during interviews, always remark on how fans are disappointed when they meet them in person, how they find the actor shorter or less

to exclusive social enclaves, public adulation. Finally, it is possible that it is the action of the bodies performing in the mediascape which is coveted rather than merely the statically beautiful body of the actor. The opportunity to have certain experiences or powers and to enter distant spaces becomes the measure, in this case, of the body in performance. This last, I think, holds the most potential for insurgent readings of the television text, though all are material for fantasy.

On the subject of the body in film de Lauretis (1984) writes that:

the operations of narrativity construct a full and unified visual space in which events take place as a drama of vision and a memory spectacle...The scopic drive that maps desire into representation, and is so essential to the work of the film and the productive relations of image in general, could be itself a function of social memory, recalling a time when the unity of the subject with the world was achieved and represented as vision. (67)

I really like the way de Lauretis insists on the tie between the narrative and the visual. It is this merger that I have been constantly trying to reiterate in my discussions of performance. The mediated body, for all its enhancement, is both image, performance (or image into performance) and social memory. Whereas the static image of the model on the magazine page may offer both a voyeuristic and envious pleasure and the bounded cinematic image offers performances which include the viewer in a concise visual-narrative space, I would suggest that television creates a potentially endless terrain where the desire to see (and have) and to be become are ever more conflated. In television, bodies become excessive not only because they conform to an unattainable standard (not only that, they set the standard) but because these bodies are so deeply entrenched in the serial narrative that we come to know them not only through a series of static images - or a two hour condensed narrative that may represent hours or years - but over the course of weeks and years and in some instances decades. While the actor's body continues to function extra-diegetically in the public eye, it may be argued that it is with the character that the viewer becomes most strongly cathected.

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attractive then they do on the screen.

What does this mean for the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*? What metonymic functions do its bodies perform and for whom? It is, first, important to point our gaze once again at these bodies in performance. As I have already shown, the bodies of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are primarily defined in a dialectical play between the normal and the not, inherent in which is the play of gender. Many of the characters are moved away from the normal by their inability to fully conform to their gender roles. This is most fully realized in the character of Buffy, who has many qualities associated with the masculine – independence, physical strength, battle skills, and knowledge of weaponry - despite her strikingly feminine physical appearance. In television there is often a rigid fixity between two genders, with the masculine taking precedence over the feminine. In a text like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, however, it is the feminine that takes precedence. This does not mean that the feminine becomes masculinized, but that the feminine is allowed to take on characteristics associated with both genders. The supernatural nature of this text makes both genders endlessly open to reinterpretation. *Buffy* maintains a dialectic of gender (there are women and men, unambiguously) but often works within a predominantly feminine discourse. The static body may be decoded for gender without any problem, but in performance the possibility of reading gender norms becomes more problematic.

Does this mean that the textual feminine body is somehow simplified or that it complicates the reading of the masculine as well? In this text, for instance, the masculine body takes on characteristics that are traditionally feminine, suggesting that the presence of the feminine complicates this text across gender. Bordo (1989, 1997) has written at length about the commodification of the female body and the societal insistence that that body rigidly conform to social expectation: an expectation that is often manifested through the scopic drive (on the street and on the screen), that is by the look, especially the look that is empowered by desire.<sup>187</sup> *Buffy* insists that the viewed body cannot be restricted by gender, and this series makes the male body equally open to the scopic drive.

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<sup>187</sup> The term scopophilia is used to describe the “pleasure in looking” (Childers and Hentzi 1995, 269) and it is through the gaze that pleasure is manifested. The scopic drive refers to the look itself which is often theorized as belonging to the male subject looking at the female object.



In the space traditionally understood as being occupied by the female, here the male character finds himself locked in the desiring look of the feminine. Performed especially in the character of Xander, the viewer is aligned in a position that gawks at him, whether he is being forced to perform a drag show, sporting a Speedo during swim team tryouts, or running from the un-dead. All the male characters fall under this objectifying look which often makes them uncomfortably aware of their bodies and the look which scrutinizes them. The discomfort they feel attests to the novelty of finding a man in this position.

This is not say that the female body escapes being caught in the multiple gazes which are locked onto the screen. Indeed, how can ANY body, even the male body existing within a male scopic paradigm escape this kind of look? While the spectacle of the objectified male body may cause both amusement and discomfort, the objectified female body returns the viewer to a position with which they are comfortably familiar. In North American culture, people are taught to look at women's bodies, to critique, to comment on and to deconstruct them. It becomes second nature to see women in their component parts. This is especially true of two kinds of bodies: those that radically depart from the aesthetic norm and those that come closest to fully attaining it. While it is important to continue the critique of which bodies are allowed access to the mediascape and the damage they may inflict on the viewer's psyche, we must move beyond this to examine these bodies in action in order to understand televisual bodies in performance. It is true that if we look at any of the female bodies in performance in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* we can immediately identify them as belonging to the realm of the North American, white preferred body. But I think even this hierarchy becomes more problematic in performance. Buffy Summers, for example, almost always performs in excess of her body. And the body in performance is incapable of being held within the stasis of any binary but must move into a more complicated dance. The attainment of the preferred body does not render uncomplicated the action of these bodies in performance.

One of the most pervasive aspects of the gendered body and its functions concerns the move of the body into sexuality. The sexualized body is deeply imbricated in notions of gender polarity, especially when that body is projected onto the scopophilic mechanisms of the mass media. De Lauretis (1984) writes:

"The representation of woman as spectacle-body to be looked at, place of sexuality, and object of desire-so pervasive in our culture, finds in narrative cinema its most complex expression and widest circulation" (p. 4). Does television reiterate this excessive specularization of the sexual female body as object of desire? The answer is both yes and no. Certainly television offers the objectified body an even wider circulation than does film. Television series place the body in the position of both spectacle and object of desire even more excessively because they represent more permanent cultural performances than their filmic counterparts (today many mainstream films have a theatrical run of less than a month). The explicitly sexualized body is problematic in television because it is subject to severe censorship (though there are great inconsistencies as to what is prohibited and what is permitted).<sup>188</sup> Nevertheless, the explicitly sexual body does perform on the television screen, for instance on cable channels devoted to pornography. The main body of television texts, however, are denied representation of both the naked body and explicit sexual act. While the woman's body may remain the space of sexuality within television, as de Lauretis suggests, the final moment of visual gratification is always deferred. The body of the sexual woman in television has tended to perform always just off-screen.

Recently the sexualized body is being allowed to perform on television. And that sexual body, the body that we are to invest with our desire, is both female and male. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the woman is both the object of sexual desire and the subject engaging the gaze. The women attract the male gaze (of both the male characters and viewers) but refuse to be held in that position. Instead, they not only meet the gaze head on but force their own desiring look back in the direction from which it came. In doing so, they make the male equally subject to the look, equally the object of sexual desire. In doing so, they take up a position similar to what Bannerji (1993) describes as "returning the gaze." In the face of the incredible power of these women (both sexual and

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<sup>188</sup> This becomes even more apparent in the fourth season. In a very interesting turn one episode had Buffy and her new beau Riley (Marc Blucas) in bed together for its entirety as their intense sexual energy awakened a haunted house. During that same season the WB Network insisted that the characters of Willow and Tara (Amber Benson), who were exploring an emerging lesbian relationship, would not even be allowed to kiss on-screen.

otherwise) it is the men who often perform for the women's sexual desires. I can speculate that the female characters are subject to an extremely sexualized gaze by many viewers. And though the male characters may fall under a similar gaze, it is unlikely to be as powerful (David Borneaz rarely ends up half-naked on the cover of magazines). However, it is possible to hope the powerful, sexual gaze exuded by the young women in the *Buffy* text may infiltrate the viewing population and suggest to its viewers that women may take possession of the gaze and return it to the masculine su(o)bject.

In the *Buffy* text there is an attempt to equalize power relations between the two 'accepted' genders. But the text remains aware that what it is portraying is a fiction. That is, its performances suggest a move towards equal voyeurism between male and female bodies, but does not necessarily reflect the way things actually are beyond the screen. Russo (1994), writing about actresses and female circus performers in the nineteenth century states: "they use their bodies in public, in extravagant ways that could have only provoked wonder and ambivalence in the female viewer, as such latitude of movement was not permitted most women without negative consequences" (p. 68). This is a continuing function of the media text. The power of The Slayer allows her access to spaces usually prohibited to youth and to women by inscribing them with attributes which remove the threat of fear and bodily harm. In this way the text works insurgently to ask (in line with many other discourses) why women's bodies are restricted from certain spaces, why women have to fear for their bodily integrity. While the text reinforces that only certain bodies are 'good enough' for inclusion in visual display, it also reconfigures the body in terms of its gender. Further, through the performance of these bodies, gendered spaces are themselves reconsidered, suggesting a greater equality of access and movement.

The most serious critique to be made of these textual bodies (and those which populate most other North American texts as well) is their blatant refusal of difference. Certainly this can be examined in terms of production (casting, etc.) and viewer expectation (something that has been inculcated by the production end of television), but in the end what is left is a bleakly homogenous landscape where bodily difference is virtually absent. As I have already noted,

the elision of difference can be read in relation to the spatialization of the text. On the one hand this overlaps with the question of production: anyone who watches television may recognize that its spaces are almost always homogeneously populated. But in terms of the specific place where *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is performed, the absence of heterogeneous bodies can also be read as a realist trope. As Davis (1992) has noted, the suburban sprawl of Southern California (especially the counties of Los Angeles) is locationally homogeneous, despite the heterogeneity of the population of that state itself. But can the homogeneity of the *Buffy* text be read as a trope of realism? I do not really think so. The elision of difference in this text merely recapitulates similar absences that occur throughout the mass media. Like the suburbs, it is an achieved homogeneity, accomplished by active exclusion. In *Buffy*, there is a displacement by which physical manifestations of difference are replaced by supernatural ones. The bodies on screen remain aesthetically pure (that is, preferred in the sense of white, straight, and lovely) and it is only through their changeability that difference manifests itself. Where divergences in race, sexuality and ability are virtually absent, difference returns in the form of The Slayer, the vampire, the witch and the werewolf.

hooks (1992) writes that “the body emerges as a site of contestation where sexuality is the metaphoric Other that threatens to take over, consume, transform *via* the experience of pleasure” (22).<sup>189</sup> This is also true of the *Buffy* text. The sexual body is always in the precarious position of being devoured by both its sexual desires and the bodily changes they mark. In the character of Angel, for example, the sexual body always threatens to be marked by the return of the repressed: the vampire. When he and Buffy finally give in to their sexual desire for one another he is, in an almost literal sense, taken over by his desire for her and is both consumed by Buffy and transformed into Angelus by the act of their lovemaking. Somewhat differently, Faith is transformed in part by her sexual voracity which marks her as different from the others both in terms of her body and her performance. The sexual act becomes a means by which the body is transformed into difference. And while the sexual body can be read as

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<sup>189</sup> Emphasis in the original.

liberatory, it also reinscribes that body as precarious, always in danger of losing its cohesion.

#### THE DESIRE TO DESIRE

I take the title for this section from the title of Mary Ann Doane's influential 1987 book, where she describes the female spectator's excessive relation to desire as well as her misplaced attachment to the fantasy at play on the screen. I believe that feminine desire can be understood in the problematic relation of the sexual, fetishized bodies that produce desire on the television screen. If the sexual body propels the characters toward transformation, then desire is its force of propulsion. Perhaps it is problematic that desire is conflated with sexuality, with desire for the other, with heterosexual romance. But I will show that the desire at work in this narrative actually encompasses other aspects, including the desire of inclusion, acceptance, homosociality (friendship between members of the same sex) and status. The fetish, which will be taken up in the next section acts as a visual trope which allows these desires to be performed.

If desire in narrative is not merely understood as the movement towards heterosexual romance then the position of the female spectator becomes more fluid and more potentially insurgent.<sup>190</sup> Walkerdine (1990), for example, gives a very complex reading of romance and fantasy in relation to comics aimed at pre-teen girls, demonstrating the difficulty with which the young girl's psyche is inculcated into heterosexual romance. de Lauretis (1984) also writes: "[W]oman is the very ground of representation, both object and support of a desire which, intimately bound up with power and creativity, is the unmoving force of culture and history... desire provides the impulse, the drive to represent, and dream, the modes of representing" (13). Thus the desired woman somehow becomes the momentum by which the narrative is moved. But what of the desiring woman, the woman who looks back with an equally covetous gaze? What is her function within the narrative? One of the ways that the desiring woman performs in the television narrative is through the mechanism of homosociality. Here, there is a

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<sup>190</sup> Fuss (1995) reorganizes the pleasure of the look (in her case fashion photography) by positing an unconscious lesbian structuration to the voyeuristic pleasure of the female

doubling in which woman becomes both the object and subject of desire. Brinks (1995) writes: "The double traditionally unleashes illicit desires...ones that "oust" the heterosexual love object by ushering in an all-consuming *autoscopia*... Figured as uncanny or monstrous, the double increasingly takes over and commands the subject's desires" (8).<sup>191</sup> This passage does not insist on the femininity of the double but the text Brinks chooses for study (*Single White Female*) is, like the *Buffy* text, concerned with the feminine. In *Single White Female* a successful young woman takes in a roommate, only to find that the roommate is copying her and attempting to take over her life.<sup>192</sup> There is no such structurally overt play of consuming mimesis in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, but it remains residual here. In a final episode of the third season, Buffy goes to confront Faith wearing the leather clothes for which Faith is famous. In her attempt to wrest power and control away from Faith, Buffy mimics her, the clothes acting as a trope for her violent and sexual power. Brinks (1995) writes: "Mimesis takes desire to a place where being and wanting become indistinguishable" (7). Thus in the case of homosocial desire, desire and identification often become conflated: the desire to be the object and to have her become virtually indistinguishable.

The desiring woman in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* most often slides out of homosociality and back into heterosexual romance. But by allowing the female subject to be the primary location of desire, it sets the romance trope slightly askew. Here, more often than not, it is the woman who precipitates the romantic action and the male takes on the role of the object of desire. Faith is, again, instructive in this examination. She performs a state of constant desire, most often sexual. Her mantra of "See. Want. Take. Have." suggests a dangerous sexual predatoriness – the ability to take, by force if necessary, anything she desires - that is rarely associated with the feminine. When Faith locks her sights on a passing male character it is powerful, if somewhat discomfiting. But like other women who are given the power of omnivorous desire, Faith's wants eventually lead to her destruction, she has to be punished for wanting so much. The other female characters also openly desire and lock their gazes on the male

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viewer.

<sup>191</sup> Emphasis in the original.

bodies that they want to possess. And while these are often reciprocal desires, it is the feminine standpoint that is most often performed. These women do not mind being desired but they refuse to remain locked within the male gaze. Instead they insist on returning it, allowing their desire, rather than their desirability, to provide the momentum for performance.

There are two other ways that desire structures this narrative that I would like to examine. The first concerns the construction of community. In this case, desire is conflated with wanting recognition and the struggle to belong. Whenever there are borders that allow some to enter and necessitate the exclusion of others, someone is bound to remain outside wanting to get in (or inside wanting to get out). As such the community may itself take on the characteristics of the desired object. There are many examples of the coveted community in the *Buffy* text. The character of Ford in "Lie to Me," desires the immortality to be had upon inclusion into the vampire community. Angel modifies his behavior to gain entry into the community of The Slayer. Cordelia monitors her actions to stave off a breach with her popular friends. Buffy longs both for the normal communality of high school life (from which she is barred) and, equally, for that of a normal family (which her Father's abandonment has forestalled). Faith desires any community where she will be accepted rather than judged against the standards of others. What each of these characters is searching for is a sense of inclusion which will give their bodies and character performances a sense of cohesion and the need for inclusion is, here, palpably felt as desire.

The second function of desire is elucidated in the work of Laplanche and Pontalis. Their article in *Formations of Fantasy* (1986) has been taken up in the work of Judith Butler and Teresa de Lauretis, both of whom I have drawn on extensively. In their article, Laplanche and Pontalis (1986) write: "Fantasy, however, is not the object of desire, but its setting" (26). The setting of fantasy as the locus of desire holds particular relevance for reading television performance. Indeed, as a setting television seems excessively permeated with desire both within the screen and in the external relation of the viewer to it. It is also an endeavor in which the viewer may, in fantasy, play all the parts. But as the

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<sup>192</sup> And, it can be suggested, that the roommate takes her as an object of lesbian desire.

performing bodies of the television characters also inhabit this fantastic space, the notion of the setting as desire must leave its residual traces on them as well. The performing bodies of television characters bear the self-reflexive mark of their construction. Aware that they provide the fantastic space of desire for the viewer, their performances are replete with the conflation of that desire and their own, textually created ones. While it is possible to examine how the specific setting of desire manifests itself within the *Buffy* text, it is important to note that the production of the text itself fulfills the function of the setting (hence desire) of the fantasy. If we look at the medium as almost entirely permeated with desire, we can pinpoint more singular examples of how the setting becomes conflated with desire as, for example, with youth. In North American media iconography youth is a nostalgic space of desire and experimentation without commitment and responsibility. By setting the fantasy within a youth context the desire for a return to that mythologized sexual space (and its bodies) is enacted. The teenager's bedroom and the High School both represent spaces of such desire. Even the graveyard, so omnipresent in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a recognized setting of desire in the media lexicon. Thus the setting provides the space from which desire springs.

The performance of desire exists in and between characters, between text and viewer, within the fabric of the text, as well as within its settings. Whatever the capacity of desire, it is manifested in bodily performance. Though desire may be performed in a multitude of ways, the media text continues to most often mobilize it in terms of sexuality. It is important to show that desire exceeds sex, but also to remember that sex continues to be central to the concept of desire. Sex permeates the televisual bodies both inside and out of the diegetic space. But whereas the male has been consistently theorized as the desiring subject and the female the object, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* often refuses this economy of desire. Though the male bodies of this text continue to mobilize the look and to attempt to keep the female bodies within it, they no longer find a static object in the female body. Instead they find a skewed reflection of their own desiring look, returned with just as much ardor by the female gaze. More than that, here female desire takes on a dominating form, claiming the discursive space of desire for itself. Not only do these young women recognize their "desire to desire" but,



finally, their actual ability to do that desiring themselves and to try and satisfy their desires in order to obtain pleasure and gratification.

#### THE QUESTION OF THE FETISH

The fetish and desire operate in somewhat similar ways and are thus linked. Sometimes they seem to be virtually the same thing, while at other times the fetish stands in the place of the object of desire to which the self can never be reconciled. The fetish is developed, in its most familiar form, from Freudian theory. Doane (1987) writes: "Fetishism, in the Freudian paradigm, is a phallic defense which allows the subject to distance himself from the object of desire...through the overvaluation of a mediating substitute object" (32). And Grosz (1995) states that "[T]he fetish is a substitute for, a talisman of, the phallus, but not just any old phallus. For the pre-Oedipal boy, the most valued of phallus is not his own... but his mother's - the phallus, that is, that endows her with power and authority" (145). In Freudian theory the Mother, castrated, maintains the power of the phallus and thus the potential to castrate. The fetish offers the boy/man a modicum of relief from the anxiety that the castrating/castrated mother/woman embodies. Within this discourse it is often the female body, or at least a part of it (or an object within which lingers traces of the female form) which functions as the fetish. But the possibility of a female fetishist is confounded: where is the castration anxiety of the women to whom, it would seem, the deed has already been done (Doane 1987)? Lacanian theory offers a space where the female fetishist has her own stage. Silverman (1992) elaborates:

Lacan throws a wrench into both of these arguments by insisting that the penis itself can assume the status of the fetish – by maintaining, that is, that the ostensible referent or base-term within the fetishistic scenario may be no more than a supplement or prop disguising a lack which is no longer conceived in strictly anatomical terms. Woman "finds the signifier of her own desire in the body of him to whom she addressed her demand for love," he writes...the position of fetishist within this tableau is occupied by the female rather than the male subject (118-19).

Within the heterosexual paradigm at least, both the feminine and the masculine have the opportunity to take up the fetish.

In a social/anthropological vein, the fetish becomes somewhat more diverse. McClintock (1995), for example, gives an elaborate view of the colonial conflict as at least partly imbued in the question of intercultural social valuation. She describes the colonials' vehement disregard for the objects of worship of the colonized, attributing to them the value of the fetish while denying their own fetishistic attachment to "their flags, crowns, maps, clocks, guns and soaps" (230). As Childers and Hentzi (1995) elaborate in their definition of fetishism: "Use of the term often betrays a skeptical attitude toward such beliefs; thus Marx coined the term *Commodity fetishism* to express the way that capitalist emphasis on the abstract value of commodities conceals the underlying social relations of their production" (109).<sup>193</sup> This understanding of the fetish serves to explain the value that may be attached to a non-sexual object – although it may have a sexual function - something to which I will return. The category of commodity production does, however, resonate within television as well. This medium, which consumes and generates enormous amounts of capital, is disseminated outside the purview of its producers; produced outside the purview of its viewers (who we count in the billions). It is perhaps the greatest commodity of all time in terms of quantity. As a medium that enters the home, the workplace and nearly all social spaces, television might take on the value of the fetish as it comes to stand in for the more concrete aspects of daily life. By allowing the viewer access to diverse social spaces it also acts as an anxiety prohibitor for the possible emptiness of our own lives, about their lack of potential, or merely lack of 'things.' Televised bodies and spaces take on similarly fetishistic functions, standing in as objects of desire, positions of possibility and assuagers of personal lack.<sup>194</sup> Whether as medium, body or constructed space, television has become one of the primarily purveyors of fetish objects in the last decades.

In the specific example of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* I can find many examples of the fetish at work. I will begin, as it seems very opportune, with the female body. If gender is a model of the fetish, as Butler (1993) suggests, how do

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<sup>193</sup> Emphasis in the original.

<sup>194</sup> How often do we hear or read about how viewers feel closer to some television

we understand its function in a text where gender is itself performed with a periodic disavowal (p. 283 n. 15)? Like the drag queens Butler describes, who perform anatomical femininity while disavowing it with a lift of their skirts, so The Slayer performs an excessive display of the female body while rejecting it with the continual appropriation of the phallus. The fetishizing of the female body in performance (or her parts) is, in this case, somewhat ambivalent. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the female body is sexually fetishized, but is also (in its vigor, sexuality and strength) fetishized for a lack of these attributes and for the taking on of ones which are usually assigned to male characters. The women here are not merely fetishized for their bodies, but for more elusive qualities as well. In the case of Angel, for example, his choice of Buffy as his object of desire is undermined by his fetishization of her humanity (her blood) which works to protect him against the recognition of his own lack.

Perhaps a better way to understand the fetishization of femininity in this text is to, as Cook (1990) does, examine it in relation to the question of the object: "The impossibility of satisfaction through objects, however, makes possible another kind of satisfaction through fantasy; the pleasure of omnipotence in relation to the object... Instead of being that in which desire is satisfied, the object, subsumed in fantasy, becomes that in which desire is kindled, its signs serving a fetishistic function" (184). In this text there are two primary examples of how the fantasy works. The fetishized female in the first case is desired not only for her body, but also for the attributes of performance that the male characters would like to possess as, for example, in the case of Xander and his desire for Faith and Cordelia. It is easy to read these performances as fetishizing the bodies of these young women, but the possession of their bodies is not what Xander truly desires. Rather, it is their sexual presence and the more elusive performances of sexual power that they engender which Xander, lacking, makes into an object of his fetishistic desire. Likewise, his desire for Buffy fluctuates between his obvious physical attraction to her and his attraction to her physical strength and agility, both of which he would claim as masculine attributes but which continually elude him. In each case, desire is cultivated through the

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characters than they do to people in their lives.

fantasy of possession which would endow the male character with what he feels he lacks.

Within this text the female body also functions as a fetish through “the “fetishization” of her own body” (Irigaray 1985a, 114). According to Irigaray, the scopophilic drive that isolates the female body within its grasp is often driven by the eye of another woman. This functions in two ways: between women monitoring each other and within the woman who monitors herself. Just as de Lauretis suggests that there is no room for the lesbian within the discourse of fetishism, so too is there little recognition of the woman who looks at another woman without taking up the masculine position.<sup>195</sup> Part of the problem is the continued theorizing of the fetish in negative terms. Certainly, women can look at each other in the fractured gaze associated with the masculine: the gaze of envy. Faith looks at Buffy as a model of femininity that she cannot achieve. Willow analyses what it is about Cordelia that makes her desirable. Each looks to the other to find what they feel to be missing in their own life: what they lack. But women may also look at each other with love and sexual desire, as a part that completes the whole of themselves. Though this text, for the most part, excludes the woman-desiring-woman gaze of the lesbian, it recreates it in the guise of homosociality. Friendship, especially in adolescence, is a fetish that masks the lack in the movement between parent and lover. Thus the regard that occurs between two female friends represents homosocial attraction between women as fetish. Finally, there is the woman who looks and sees, in her own body, the fetish. Like the skewed mirror image of the anorexic, the woman sees in her body an infinitely receding image of possible selves taking her form. Cordelia, for example, views her body as a fetish, breaking it into its component parts and packaging it for consumption. Buffy also fractures her image, allowing the prom queen to be the fetish. But Faith is perhaps the most obvious character who fetishizes her own body (even more than the vain Cordelia). In her constant performance of sexual voracity she fragments her body, ever vigilant of its status as desired object, she nonetheless makes it most obviously a fetish for herself.

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<sup>195</sup> Fuss (1995) does offer an interesting possibility for opening up this kind of space. She suggests that within the process of women viewing fashion photographs, there lies a homospectatorial look. This look opens the potential for a lesbian viewing position within what was previously understood to be a hegemonically sutured look.

While the female body remains a fetish for both herself and others, the male body also enters the realm of the fetish object. In the first instance, the male body takes on similar characteristics to that of the female. The male body, equally fragmented and caught in the desiring gaze of the feminine (character and viewer) embodies the very lack that his anatomical 'completeness' would deny. There are two ways in which this reversion may be effected. First, the feminine takes the masculine as its fetish in the guise of what it lacks: the sexual object. Within the female gaze, the male is often reduced to the phallus/penis, which is especially true of the adolescent drama which tends to revolve around a quest for sexual maturity. In the more traditional text (though this, like most texts, recapitulates the heterosexual order) the sexual quest is the prerogative of the male. The female's role in this quest is to thwart the male, or to allow (finally) the quest to be seen through to its completion. In this dynamic, there has rarely been room for the female subject to be an active participant in the sexual quest, her sexuality is awakened by default, as she participates in fulfilling the male sexual quest. In this text, the sexual quest belongs to the female as often as it does to the male and this results in the male's movement towards the fetish object. This is demonstrated, for example, as Cordelia watches Xander emerge from the locker room and his swimming trunks. Her breath catches as she stares at his body and Xander is so discomfited that he runs and hides. His actions speak volumes about the hesitance the male figure feels about the fetishization of his body.

The masculine also becomes fetishized through the prerogative that the term itself has traditionally been given. Here, it is the rights of masculinity that are scrutinized. It is, as Pellegrini (1997) writes, that "[E]veryone wants to be the phallus, or, to use Marcia Ian's more colorful terms, everyone is striving to be "a fucking human penis" " (158-59). No matter how literally Pellegrini and Ian may have intended their words, they also suggest a more metaphorical function of the desire for the penis/phallus. The penis/phallus has accorded the masculine a great deal of rights within performance and this aspect of masculinity may also be regarded as a fetish. I have shown earlier that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* often dismantles the phallic prerogative of the masculine and bequeaths it to the feminine, but where the rights of the masculine remain intact they become

fetishized. First, the struggle over the phallus (between the masculine and feminine terms) suggests that for the traditionally excluded female, the accordance of the phallic function to the masculine is fetishized. The desire to return to a more simple dichotomy of masculine and feminine terms (that Buffy often “just want[s] to be a girl,” suggesting that she wishes the boys would just be boys) suggests a fetishization of the masculine. But the phallus is also fetishized because of its slip towards the feminine within this text. The action accorded to the bearer of the phallus (whether masculine or feminine) becomes the fetish. And here is also located the fetishization of masculinity as a homosocial function. In this case it is the male character who, recognizing some lack within himself, makes a fetish of the masculinity of others. This is performed in the scene (described earlier) between Xander and Oz as Xander struggles to ascertain what it is that makes Oz “cool” (read sexually desirable) and how he can attain it himself. Thus coolness and other attributes associated with masculinity become fetish objects.

The third manner in which the masculine comes to function as the fetish within the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is within the guise of patriarchal authority. As I have already shown, within this text, publicly sanctioned authority resides almost entirely in the figure of the adult male. Although the narrative is often structured around Buffy’s challenge to this authority, publicly sanctioned authority (holding office and public power) remains in the hands of men. It is not merely the excessive presence of masculine authority that makes it devolve into the fetish, but the fact that the text itself requires both its objectification and destruction. Since the male authority figure can never be destroyed but always returns in a new guise, he takes on not only the attributes of the fetish but also those of desire. He stands in metonymically for all that remains an obstacle to the desires of the other characters and thus becomes the central figure in their performances. This is true of The Master, The Judge, The Mayor and Principal Snyder, as well as more minor male characters in the *Buffy* text. The relationship between the power and authority these figures exert and their gender is not incidental. The power of their destruction is handed over to the female, particularly Buffy and Faith, which reinforces and fills two lacks which exist within them (the women): adulthood and normalcy. In Buffy’s case,

the eradication of each of these figures brings her closer to her desire to live what she imagines to be a normal life, which can also be read as her desire to usurp the adult position. Faith can be read rather differently. In her taking up of the Mayor as fetish object she reclaims her youth and finds a filial normalcy from which she has heretofore been denied. When Faith takes the father (Mayor) as her fetish she is finally allowed to play the daughter, the good girl, the child who lives up to and exceeds the expectations of her parent. As the feminine, the masculine not only becomes the fetish object but becomes it in many possible guises.

There are other ways that the fetish performs on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, ways that do not revolve specifically around the question of gender. There is, for example, a category of inanimate objects which serve a fetishistic function. The objects in question are weapons, which are central to this text. Though the weapon takes many forms (stake, knife, crossbow, rocket launcher) it is always a phallic object and is most often deployed by (and thus belongs to) the feminine. Silverman (1992) suggests that by taking an object as fetish, the fetishist can incorporate something of the Other into themselves which would otherwise cause them anxiety. This allows for a clearer understanding of the way the weapon works as a fetish. The weapon represents the violent potential of humanity, especially as it is expressed through the feminine. The expected docility and passivity that has traditionally defined the feminine in fictional representation is here absent. The feminine must perform the active and often violent functions of the text. But, as Buffy so often expresses, there is a discomfort in undertaking this role which works against the dictates of femininity. The weapon stands in as a fetish by displacing this gender anxiety onto itself and allowing the performance to continue. The female is not supposed to be comfortable with weaponry: it is her job to wait to be rescued. The rejection of this belief is emphatically performed than in "Innocence" when Buffy destroys The Judge with a hand held rocket launcher. In this scene, the weapon/fetish actually becomes part of the female body, completing it.

Earlier, I wrote that the female possession of the weapon lends her the attributes of phallicism. I also took issue with assertions that the phallic woman is inherently negative and the castrating woman positive. To return to this

argument I will once again turn to Creed's (1995) analysis, this time under the auspice of the fetish. She writes: "The phallic woman is created in response to the fetishist's refusal to believe that woman does not possess a penis" and later that "[T]he phallic woman is the fetishized woman – an image designed to deny the existence of both these figures (woman as castrated/castrating)" (116). Creed suggests that the phallic woman is herself fetishized by the male's castration anxiety, but does not imagine the possibility that she, as much as the castrating woman, may instead take the place of the fetishist.<sup>196</sup> I would suggest that the phallic woman, despite her appropriation of the phallus, continues to hold both it, and the masculine prerogative in which it is traditionally theorized, as fetishes. The phallic woman, it must be understood, is continually regarded in relation to the male term. Her possession of the phallus is tenuous at best and without the recognition accorded to the similarly positioned male. Despite the phallus, the phallic woman is always lacking a true assumption of the masculine, which the fetish serves to mask. In this text, the fetish of the phallic woman often takes the form of weaponry, those I have already described and those of a more personal nature (The Slayer's own physical strength). The manifestation of the fetish in the form of a weapon problematizes the positioning of the phallic woman as purely the fetish object and insists that she herself takes on the attributes of the fetishist. The female characters can finally take up a more strongly agentic position.

In some ways the weapon as fetish object continues the discussion of the fetish in gendered terms. But there are other ways to examine the production of the fetish (and the performance of the fetishist). First is the capacity of the body to perform youth. In some ways, those attributes associated with the female fetish can be read in the fetishization of youth. The young person, in media representation, is always vulnerable to the voyeurism of adulthood and, caught in its quasi-nostalgic gaze, takes on the quality of the fetish. Similarly discussing the adult's view of youth, Grossberg (1992) insists that "[T]his is not nostalgia, or

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<sup>196</sup> It is possible to understand how the castrating woman, taking the phallus as her object, can be understood as a fetishist. But the phallic woman also possesses these attributes. She may be fetishized by the masculine for what she has appropriated, but this does not refute her continued use of the phallus or the masculine prerogative as fetishes. See above.



if it is, it is a nostalgia for an imaginary past, a past we know we did not live through even as we desire to relive it" (185). The category of youth elides, through identification/desire in viewing, the fact of adulthood catapulting the adult back into that pleasurable space of infinite possibility. But youth is not exclusively a fetish object of the adult. In its televised form youth represents a performance that is often absent in western adolescence. The images of youth that flicker across the small and large screens become fetishized images of perfection.

The fetishization of youth has been read according to gender as much as age. It is in the body of nubile young womanhood that the fetish of youth is most often recognized and actively critiqued. We can look, for example, at Fudge's (1999) somewhat plaintive examination of Buffy/Sarah Michelle Geller that continually draws the reader's gaze away from her performance towards her breasts. Likewise, many critiques focus on the unrealistic bodies of young women to be found on magazine pages, billboards and sound stages. But more and more the male body, especially in its youthful form, is being remanded to the status of fetish. I have made note - in relation to a passage by de Lauretis (1987) about the problematic nature of feminist film in relation to the assumption of masculinism in the production of the image and identification with the look - that the image of the male becomes very problematic in the contemporary media. I ask myself: Can the female viewer then become the voyeur of spectacular possibility? Does the male (especially in his youth) become the fetish for a fragmentary patriarchy? But I also see that the question cannot be so easily attributed to a strict gender dichotomy. Certainly the male youth is subject to the fetishistic voyeurism of media culture. This does not in itself necessitate a female viewer or feminist text but questions the status of the body itself. The body of male youth may become the fetish object of a sexual nature (by men or women). It may also become the fetish in other capacities, such as for its virility, bodily aesthetic, or, extra-diegetically (in the 'real' world), for its wealth, fame and community inclusion. The body of youthful masculinity as it crosses into the mediascape takes on the very characteristics that have previously been associated with the feminine. Youth becomes an object of fetishization regardless of its gender.

The body as the fetish often exists to elide the absence of difference. In the case of television as a medium, it is physical or visual difference which is most often absent, which results in the fetishization of dominant terms. Thus in the *Buffy* text, the fetish takes the form of whiteness, heterosexuality, Christianity and ability. The latter three terms can all be examined in relation to specific incidents within the text. In "Phases," Xander is informed that the school bully, who has acted as his nemesis in several episodes, is gay. That Xander is the one to make this discovery is interesting because it is his character who feels the most precariously heterosexual. But in this episode, Xander's heterosexuality is confirmed by proximity to its Other. Homosexuality is not made a truly negative term in this text, but Xander is excessively discomfited by his discovery and the bully, Larry, remains only incidental to the text. Homosexuality becomes buried under the heterosexual fetish. Religion works in a similarly manner. There is only one character, Willow, who breaks with the discourse of Christian iconography, albeit in a minor way. Even the un-dead seem to follow a Christian ethic. In this text (like all vampiric texts) Christian iconography is an intrinsic part of the landscape and textscape. Most of the few things that will keep the characters safe – holy water, crosses – are part of a Christian discourse. Through the fetishization of these objects, Christianity itself is fetishized in the text. So too for ability. In the second season, Spike is injured and begins to use a wheelchair. In Spike's case, the text seems to equate his disability with a lack of virility. He is less a man in the eyes of others and only by physically overcoming his disability (which he does) can he be a whole man again. A less marked example occurs during the episode "Helpless," when Buffy's powers are diminished. She feels disabled by the loss of her powers and only when they are restored does she feel whole again. Here too, ability is the term which is fetishized. In questions of dichotomous terms it is usually the dominant which is fetishized by the text.<sup>197</sup>

I would propose that the question of race is somewhat more problematic and worth examining on its own. Although I see race as functioning in a manner very similar to the terms I have examined above, there is virtually no recourse to explicit examples within the text itself. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* whiteness is as much the fetish because it is the only term available as it is in a dichotomy with

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<sup>197</sup> Except, as we have seen, for gender.

any Other term. There are very few non-white characters who play major roles in this diegesis, and only one ever makes reference to race.<sup>198</sup> This is Mr. Trick, a vampire introduced in the third season, who is African-American. In the first seconds that he appears on screen he says, of Sunnydale: "Admittedly, it's not a haven for the brothers, it's strictly a Caucasian persuasion here in the day" (in "Faith, Hope and Trick"). There is a somewhat self-reflexive critique in this piece of dialogue that is never recreated by the text with regard to race. It acknowledges the absence of racial difference (at least in the opposition of Black and White) but goes no further in its critique. The momentary presence of difference simply underscores the fetishization of the dominant term again, in this case whiteness. In this case as well, the term fetish allows me to conceptualize the continued normalization and hierarchizing of binary terms.

I have already suggested that it is possible to read visual difference, in this text, through the characters of the un-dead. Once again the monster's presence serves to fetishize its dominant term: human. Many writers have acknowledged the link between race and the fetish; hooks (1992) in relation to white femininity and Bhabha (in Apter 1996) in relation to the stereotype, for example. hooks reads the film *Paris Is Burning* as establishing a fetishistic system where white womanhood is the only term. Bhabha sees the stereotype as acting like the fetish and slightly more optimistically, as presenting the possibility of the alienation of the stereotype through repetition (27). Moving outward from Bhabha's work, Robinson (1996) turns the question of the racialized fetish to that of the "pass:"

when appearance is assumed to bear a mimetic relation to identity, but in fact does not and can not, it is easy to bypass the rules of representation and claim an identity by virtue of a "misleading" appearance. Ironically, the logic of readable identity - that you are what you look like - is precisely the precondition for the subject who passes - who appears as what he or she is not (250).

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<sup>198</sup> The other is Kendra who is supposed to be Caribbean born. Though she is set up as a foil for Buffy, performs in marked contrast to her and is quickly removed from the text, there are only superficial ways to discuss her performance in relation to race. Neither Kendra, nor any of the other characters make reference to her race in the text. The third is the guidance counselor, Mr. Platt.

The un-dead in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are tied to the pass, which is (in the case of race), in effect, the fetishization of the dominant terms: white and human. The greatest danger is posed by those who can walk unnoticed among 'us.' In this landscape, as hooks (above) describes, whiteness becomes a fetish in a hierarchy of only one term.

There is one more category that I would like to attend to briefly before moving on: the fetish of aesthetics, including beauty, thinness and clothing. In the study of contemporary visual (mass) culture, both character and actor stand in for an ideal both within the diegesis and outside it. This idealization is an intrinsic aspects of ascension into the mediatized order and those who fail to meet the aesthetic standard set out by the media rarely make it before the camera, never make it on to the screen. The bodies that do appear in this most restricted of spaces perform two aspects of the body that hold particular fetish value. The first is a certain level of physical beauty that meets the Western standard. This is difficult to define in words but suffice it to say that picking up a *People Magazine* or turning on the television or watching any mainstream (and most indie) film will give one a pretty good idea. The face itself, the face of the star, becomes a fetish object that stands in for the absence of physical perfection, glamour and fame for the other ninety-nine point nine percent of the world. Second, but closely concatenated with the first, is a body aesthetic. For women, this tends to mean the attainment of an unnatural thinness, for men, equally a thinness but with a certain lean musculature. Here, the body becomes a fetish of equally unattainable stature. Combined, the star her/himself becomes one of the ultimate fetish objects of our time. These aesthetics are also fetishized within the diegesis. In this text the body is recognized as the site of the fetish by each of the characters as they examine themselves and each other. They acknowledge a hierarchy of appearance, forever ranking themselves, figuring out where they fit in the high school hierarchy of looks and popularity. And it is not only the girls who engage in this sort of taxonomic play. The boys are also aware of judging, being judged and judging themselves according to always-elusive aesthetic criterion. In this way, the characters themselves become fetishized within the text, much as they are fetish objects to the millions of viewers who tune in to watch them every week.

The last aspect of the fetish as an aesthetic object within the text is suggested by Bruzzi's (1997) work on clothing and the cinema. Fashion has always been an intrinsic part of diegetic construction as well as the production and performance of character. She writes: "The power of clothes fetishism is that it exists on the cusp between display and denial, signaling as much a lack as a presence of sexual desire... an allusion to fetish as narrative tool that is pertinent to film, as, likewise, Robert Stoller's definition of a fetish as 'a story masquerading as an object' " (38). Very often in the adolescent drama, clothing becomes a central fetish. *Buffy* is certainly not unique in this manner; it has been true of as diverse youth oriented programs as *Beverly Hills, 90210*, *Friends*, *Felicity*, *Melrose Place* and more. These shows use fashion to define character and fashion is used to bolster the ever-present physical aesthetic of the characters on the screen. The clothes may seem to simply make excessive the fetishization of the body, but, as Bruzzi makes clear, this is too simplistic an analysis. Clothing in the diegesis is fetishized by the position it accords those who can fit into the clothing and wear it well, wear it like it was made for them (and afford it). It is a fetish of status and body and aesthetic good taste and once again it elides a lack that the viewer is supposed to feel in themselves. It presents a model of desire, of what is desirable, that is supposed to permeate the textual boundaries. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* each character is elaborated through their use of costume: Angel in his dark suits, Buffy in her bra-showing tank tops and little dresses, Cordelia in her fashion-victim outfits, Oz in his grungy skater wear, Xander and Willow in their regular high school clothes, Faith in her leather and lace. Each character defines themselves and their fetish qualities through their mode of dress.

In this text the fetish is performed in a wide variety of ways. Though it does not always function in a traditional framework, the fetish is central to how the text is elaborated and how the characters perform and move forward through the text. What I believe is most important to recognize is that the fetish is not reducible to any specific or static object, not even to woman. Instead, the fetish exists as an array of objects that range across difference and move between the animate and inanimate. The fetish is most important in motivating the movement of the text. The fetish object acts as a catalyst to the action of the

narrative. Whatever form it takes, the fetish itself participates in the performances of the text and is, in fact, completely imbricated in them.

#### SCOPIC EXULTATIONS OF VIRGINITY

Virginity follows the fetish because it itself has been held as a fetish object. The adolescent drama has been particularly interested in virginity and its loss, making the question of virginity also one of the body in performance. Irigaray (1985a) describes the presence of the hymen - the litmus test of virginity - as a negation and impossibility (33) and I have made note that it is in this capacity - as lack - that virginity takes on a fetishistic quality. Virginity also has connotations of cleanliness and purity and, of course, loss. Virginity is almost exclusively thought of in heterosexual terms, which is why the young, straight woman is the true virgin, while the young, straight man and the bi or homosexual person are more liminally imagined virgins.

While Dickerson (1990) asserts that "[T]he word "virgin" means belonging to no man, one-in-herself; not maiden inviolate, but maiden alone in herself" (117), the virgin has rarely been theorized as such in popular culture. In fact, one of the most problematic aspects of the virgin's narrative is the expectation that the virgin is a young woman who comes to belong to someone else or, perhaps, loses some defining aspect of herself in the first performance of the sexual act. In this aspect, the performance of virginity's loss is negates female empowerment. Like most adolescent texts, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is concerned with adolescent sexuality and virginity is central to that motif. The quest for sexual maturity, as much as for heterosexual romance, is a crucial narrative structure within the text. In the following pages I will be examining the way the virgin is (de)constructed in this text, as s/he moves to sexual maturity. But first, I would like to take a look at two books which focus of on young women's sexuality.

Sharon Thompson and Peggy Orenstein are American researchers whose work has examined the coming-of-age stories of young women. Though Orenstein's (1994) book *SchoolGirls* focuses on education and Thompson's (1995) *Going All the Way* deals with... well, just that, both look at the question of virginity and its place in the lives of young women. Orenstein writes: "Losing

virginity is considered a rite of passage into maturity. Girls may be encouraged to have sex with boys they hardly know. But unfortunately the double standard still exists. The same girls who are pressured to have sex on Saturday are called sluts on Monday morning. The boys who coaxed them into sex at the parties avoid them in the halls at school" (207). Orenstein though, goes on to note that while sexuality is viewed with a great deal of seriousness, "movies make sexual encounters look exciting and fun" eliding a lot of what goes on in adolescent drama. Television, to an even greater extent than film, has made youth sexuality precarious, especially for young women. The specter of ridicule, pregnancy and disease never lurk far behind the sexual performance. The criticism, I think, lies in the media's inability to balance the two poles of representation, as well as the continued portrayal of a sexual double standard between young women and men.

Thompson's work is somewhat different, as she relies much more heavily on first person testimonials. Examine the following sections:

On the matter of knowledge, they had a familiar theory: Innocence equaled desirability. The more you knew, the more sexual experience you had, the less your worth and the more likely you were to be abandoned (21); She had just turned sixteen, and she took pride in having reached this advanced age a virgin, an achievement she thought was rapidly becoming a rarity in her generation (Ibid.); She had remained a virgin. If innocence could be traded for love, she still had a chance. Despite the emphasis she put on virginity, Tracy realized that teenage romance had changed. She knew that she couldn't condition sexual consent on the promise of a lifetime contract...(25); if she couldn't even exchange virginity for love, what was she going to make a life worth living out of? (p. 26); But for sex to tell her fortune, she had to gamble what she saw as her most valuable attribute, her virginity (Ibid.).<sup>199</sup>

I find these passages terribly depressing but certainly enlightening as to the expectation of virginity both on the part of the researcher and the researched. The words elaborate the emphasis on virginity that has been culturally placed at the doorstep of femininity. The expectation is that young women will fight

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<sup>199</sup> It is important to make note that despite the late date of Thompson's publication, her research was done between 1978 and 1986. These are vivid testimonials, but it is impossible not to speculate that they are somewhat dated. I have to wonder if things

against the impulse to be sexual and, when they finally give in (give it up), it will be within a loving heterosexual relationship which has also been culturally defined. As for the notion that sexuality may be performed outside of the confines of 'love,' the only possibility that can be gleaned from these words is that any girl who chooses to do so is a 'slut,' damaged goods.

But in the media texts of today, despite a continued emphasis on virginity, the tides have somewhat shifted. North American girls are not always punished for their move into sexual maturity and they may even admit to their desire for diverse partners and experimentation, although media, especially television, continues to present youth sexuality within tightly circumscribed boundaries. Examining the performances of sexuality in youth media today, one might expect to find boundaries that look something like this: boys and girls will be equally anxious to 'lose it' but girls will be more anxious, some characters who indulge in sexual 'flings' may be haunted by disease, girls who have many partners or dress provocatively or covet their friend's boyfriends will be considered sluts, girls who have many partners but are 'good girls' will not (neither will boys despite how many partners they have), most young people will lose their virginity in a somewhat serious relationship, homosexuality will rarely be explored, if there is a pregnancy scare no one will have an abortion though there may be a miscarriage, contraception will sometimes be mentioned. This is not an exhaustive list but is meant to give the reader an idea of the cosmology of sex in the teen mediascape.

Buffy does not depart much from these parameters, although the strength of the female characters allows them to enter into stronger performances of sexuality and choice. There is no sense that they enter into sexual relationships for the sake of their male partners but for their own gratification. Like most youth oriented texts, performances of the loss of virginity have been crucial to the movement and evolution of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. By the end of the third season Buffy, Willow and Xander will have all had sex within the visual text. These performances in some sense recapitulate old orders of virginity and gender, but rewrite them also. In the next few pages I will examine the scenes in which each of these characters performs their first sexual experience to

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would look different if girls were interviewed more than a decade years later.



demonstrate how each performance both moves forward and reclaims the boundaries of youth sexuality and the question of virginity as it is presented for the scopical drive.

I will begin with Willow because her story is quite familiar. She is a shy, inexperienced girl fueled mostly by fantasies about her best friend Xander. For much of the text this performance of unrequited desire allows Willow to retreat from sexual maturity and the image of herself as a sexual being. But by early in the second season, Willow finds an admirer of her own: Oz. He is Willow's equal in his braininess and though socially miles ahead of her (he has some status from being a guitarist in a local band) shares many of her quirky character traits.<sup>200</sup> Willow and Oz have a relatively normal courtship, even overcoming infidelity. Oz's performance is much more self-contained and mature than that of the other characters and there is no question that he is more sexually experienced than Willow. But, performing the good boyfriend, Oz never pressures her and, in fact, refuses to move into a sexual relationship before he is sure that they are doing it for the right reason. The following scene (in "Amends") makes this clear:

(Oz enters Willow's house. She greets him wearing a sexy dress, with candle and Barry White playing)

Oz: You ever have that dream that you're in a play and it's the middle of the play and you don't know your lines and you don't know the plot?

Willow: Well. We're alone and we're together. I just wanted it to be special.

Oz: How special are we talking?

Willow: Well, you know, we're alone and we're both mature, younger people and so we could... I'm ready to... with you. (whispers) We could do that thing.

Oz: Ah!

Willow: Where are you going?

Oz: No. I'm not going. I'm just trying to think. That's pretty special.

Willow: Oz. I want to be with you... first.

Oz: I think we should sit down again.

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<sup>200</sup> The musician as sex symbol even in high school has a lot of history. The male musician is often performed in opposition to the other icon of high school virility: the jock. In a particularly favorite scene from *Dazed and Confused*, one young man speculates that he and his friends could get as many girls by being in a band as they could by continuing to play football.

Willow: Oz. I'm, I'm ready.  
 Oz: Okay, well, don't take this the wrong way, but I'm not.  
 Willow: Are you scared? Cause I thought you had-  
 Oz: No. But this is different. I mean, you look great and you got Barry working for you and it's all... good. But when it happens I want it to be because we both need it to for the same reasons. You don't have to prove anything to me.

This scene lays out very well the parameters of the virgin quest in performance. Willow sets out to create a scene of seduction but is thwarted by Oz's ability to read through her performance to the uncertainty of intention beneath. Notice also that Willow whispers her desire, signaling her feeling that sex is something that must not be spoken aloud and belongs to the realm of the secret. She also makes her seduction a gift, signaling the inherent value of her virginity, the most valuable thing that she can bestow. Though he rebuffs her gesture, he does so in way that reinforces both the value of her gift and the enormity of the endeavor they will later undertake, together. Most important are his words that sex is not an ordeal to be gotten through, nor is it to be done to prove something. He sets the stage for the time when they will move into an explicitly sexual performance.

Willow and Oz find themselves back in the bedroom in the first part of the third season finale. In this scene, the students of Sunnydale High are preparing to do battle with The Mayor . The future looks bleak and each character tries to find a way to reaffirm their existence and to find small comforts in the final hours. In this scene, Willow and Oz find themselves back at her house, this time in an attempt to find a spell that will stop The Mayor:

Willow: Who am I kidding? I'm not going to find a spell to stop the ascension. I'm no witch. I can't even turn poor Amy back into a person.  
 Oz: But you've got a superior Habitrail going. I think Amy's in a good place emotionally.  
 Willow: Oz.  
 Oz: What.  
 Willow: Could you just pretend to care about what's happening?  
 Oz: You think I don't care.  
 Willow: I think we could be dead in a day's time and you're being ironic-detachment guy.  
 Oz: Would it help if I panic?

- Willow: Yes. It, it'd be swell. Panic is a thing people can show in times of crisis and, and everything's really scary right now you know. I don't know what's gonna happen. There are all sorts of things that you're supposed get to do after high school and, and I've been really looking forward to doing them and, and now we're probably just going to die and I would- (He kisses her) What are you doing?
- Oz: Panicking. (He kisses her again)

BREAK. LATER.

- (Oz and Willow in bed. Her head on his shoulder)
- Willow: I feel different you know. But I guess that makes sense. D'you feel different? Okay, no, you've already... Probably no big change for you. It, it was nice. Was it nice? Should this be a quiet moment?
- Oz: I know exactly what you mean.
- Willow: Which part?
- Oz: Everything feels different.

Again, this scene tells the viewer a great deal about the performance of virginity in this text. First, is the association of sexuality with both panic and the quelling of panic. Oz kisses Willow to distract her from the anxiety she feels and - we can suppose - to assuage his own feelings of anxiety. The sexual performance (assuming that sex here is equated to intercourse - the first time) creates a neutral zone where their anxieties cancel each other out. Willow also suggests something familiar from the discourse of heterosexual relations: the detachment of the man and the emotional investment of the woman. Oz counters that to panic, to perform out of control, would do nothing to alter their situation and Willow returns to him her fear of loss. It is perhaps her plea that rouses him from his state of detachment. The reminder that this night may be their only time to 'be' together acts as a catalyst (crisis?) in propelling the sexual action/performance.

Of course, the viewer is not allowed to participate voyeuristically in the sexual scene itself. Unlike the performance of a live sex act which is the hallmark of much film, television insists that the action is cut from view early and that the viewer is only returned to the scene for the post-coital embrace. The position that we find Oz and Willow in suggests an establishment of the heterosexual

couple. That he holds her points to his experience, strength and desire to act as protector. Her dialogue speaks eloquently of her move into sexuality, as well as the precariousness of her newfound position as she seeks the criterion for judging her performance in him. She asks him not only how she should act ("Should this be a quiet moment") but also how she should feel ("Was it nice?"). Further, she does not talk about how she feels, or how he has performed for her. In so doing she opens a space which would allow him to define the performance in its entirety. That Oz refuses to provide her with the information she desires makes this performance more insurgent as it forces Willow to assess her first sexual experience on her own terms rather than his. But one of the most interesting aspects of this brief scene is Willow's assertion that she has somehow been fundamentally changed by this first sexual performance. And 'first' is central because she also makes the assumption that since Oz has already been sexually active the performance between them is simply a mundane repetition (mimesis? citation?) of some act already performed. Again, Oz refuses to remain pinned within the boundaries that she assumes contain their performance. His insistence on the similarity of their experience (that it is equally important and changing for him) reasserts that their sexual performance occurred between equals.

Set somewhat in opposition to this scene is the one in which Xander loses his virginity, with (to?) Faith. Xander's performance suggests a recapitulation of the belief that the loss of virginity is somehow less important for a young man (who then has less need for the emotional connection) than a young woman. Of course it can be countered that Faith herself refuses this dichotomization, but since we are not privy to her first sexual experience (it has occurred prior to the text) this is only speculation. Unlike his girlfriends, who make a relationship central to their first sexual performance, Xander falls into his rather accidentally: he just happens to be in the right place at the right time. The viewer is already familiar with Faith's performance as a 'bad' girl, somewhat crude and overtly sexual. She continually quizzes Buffy on her sexual life and is confounded that she is not sexually intimate with her male friends. For Faith, sex is merely another form of physical exertion, very like slaying, and she enters into sexual performance as her sexual needs dictate. The men with whom she performs the

sexual act are merely bodies to be enjoyed and then discarded, something usually associated with the masculine prerogative. Xander, conversely, is sexually inexperienced. Though he seems continually on a quest to find women, he exudes less sensuality and sexual power than any of the other characters. Thus it is by accident that Xander and Faith find themselves sexually entangled. Xander stumbles upon Faith who is struggling to battle a demon. He intervenes by running over the demon with his car allowing Faith the opportunity to escape. Then Xander escorts Faith back to her apartment (in "The Zeppo"):

Faith: I dislocated my shoulder though. Hold me. (She places his hand on her shoulder and counters his weight with her own. Then she pops her shoulder back into place). Ugh. That's better. I'm really wound up. (Caressing his chest) A fight like that and no kill... I'm about ready to pop.

Xander: Really? Wow.

Faith: You up for it?

Xander: Oh, I'm up.

Faith: Hmmmm.

Xander: I'm suddenly very up. It's just um, I've never been up with people before. (She kisses him)

Faith: Just relax. Take your pants off.

Xander: Those two concepts are, antithetical. (She pulls off his shirt and her own and kisses him. Then she throws him backwards onto the bed and herself after, straddling him).

Faith: Don't worry. (Pulling off her camisole) I'll steer you around the curves.

Xander: Did I mention I'm having a very strange night?

BREAK (Mirrored in the television screen we see their figures making love)

(Faith and Xander are lying in bed with their arms around each other. It looks passionate. They are looking into each other's eyes. He caresses her arm. Cut to Faith at the door, pushing Xander out with his clothes in his arms.)

Faith: That was great. I gotta shower.

This scene stands in contrast to the one which took place between Willow and Oz. There is no real sense of connection between these two characters, except for the sexual and it is apparent that Faith primarily values Xander for his

potential to sexually gratify her. She thus takes on a role traditionally associated with the masculine although Xander plays the feminine part only to a point. Because she is the bad girl on this series, there seems to be a suggestion that only bad girls want sex for their (exclusive) own pleasure. Unlike a moment when a young woman might decide to lose her virginity during a one night stand, we are mostly made aware of Xander's excitement that he is finally going to be inculcated into sexual performance. Where the pre-sexual male has often been the object of ridicule in youth texts, here it is the overtly sexual young woman whose breaking of norms obscures his own. Faith's performance is virtually predatory, she seems to devour Xander and then spit him out onto her doorstep. Faith directs the performance, guiding Xander in his role and making clear that he will have to do as she says; undresses herself and him and takes the top position when they are in bed together. Xander leaves looking more befuddled than pleased with himself for his participation in this performance.

While Faith becomes distant from the rest of the group after this, Xander continues to appeal to their connection. In "Consequences," as Buffy tries to decide who should approach Faith, Xander volunteers, proffering his connection with Faith as the basis for being able to get through to her. Buffy rejects the idea:

Buffy: Look. I know that you mean well Xander, but I just don't see Faith opening up to you. She doesn't take the guys she... has a connection with very seriously. Ah... they're kind of a big joke to her. No offense.

But Xander refuses to heed her counsel and goes to see Faith anyway:

Xander: I came here to help you. I thought we had a connection.  
 Faith: (laughs and throws him onto the bed) Do you want to feel our connection? It's just skin. I see. I want. I take. I forget.  
 Xander: No. Wait. It was more than that.  
 Faith: I could do anything I want to you right now and you want me to. I could make you scream. I could make you die.

Despite the cryptic nature of this performance it says a lot about expectations surrounding the first sexual experience. It is expected that a woman will seek an

emotional connection while the man will display an emotional reticence. Xander, once again taking a position traditionally associated with femininity, desires his first sexual experience to have meaning. Faith refuses to acknowledge that their sexual encounter is anything other than a momentary gratification; insists that it is absent of deeper emotional connection. Unlike Oz, who validates the equality of his sexual encounter with Willow, Faith refuses to grant Xander's sexual encounter any special status. On the one hand, this scene is almost entirely scripted in the feminine voice. On the other hand, it in some sense returns to a feeling that the loss of virginity is only an important moment in the life of a woman. Xander's performance does not really allow this hierarchy of loss to remain intact but insists on both the importance and meaning his actions have for him. The fact that he refuses to give up on a possible shared connection between himself and Faith suggests that his inculcation into sexual maturity is as anxiety provoking and life-altering as it is assumed to be for any young woman.

I wanted to keep Buffy for last because the story of her decision to have sex with Angel is particularly poignant and marks one of the most dramatic changes in the text during the second season. In some ways, Buffy and Angel represent the most mundane of heterosexual romantic storylines: the much older, wiser man and the young woman in search of her adult self. Like Romeo and Juliet they are tragic lovers destined to be driven apart. Buffy and Angel do not rush into a sexual relationship but, like Willow and Oz, come to it 'naturally,' over time. Although they profess their love for one another, Buffy and Angel seem doomed from the start: The Slayer who loves a vampire, a vampire who loves The Slayer. The knowledge of their fundamental unsuitability for one another does nothing to keep them apart, or to stay their passion. As Buffy herself suggests, their sexual pairing is almost inevitable after a time. When they finally do fall into bed together, it is, as for Willow and Oz, a performance which acts against anxiety and in the face of fear. Having tracked The Judge to the factory where Drusilla and Spike live, Buffy and Angel are caught but then narrowly escape. They make their way back to Angel's home through the sewers and the driving rain, consumed with the proximity they have come to death once again, as with the knowledge that their fight with The Judge is far from over (in "Surprise"):

Angel: You're shaking like a leaf.  
 Buffy: Cold.  
 Angel: Let me get you something. Put these on. Get under the covers. Just to warm up. (He turns his back) Sorry. What?  
 Buffy: It's alright. I just have a cut or something.  
 Angel: Can I, let me see.  
 Buffy: Okay.  
 Angel: It's already closed. You're fine. (They hug)  
 Buffy: You almost went away today.  
 Angel: We both did.  
 Buffy: Angel. I feel like I lost you. You're right though. We can't be sure of this.  
 Angel: Shh. I... (She turns to him)  
 Buffy: You what?  
 Angel: I love you. I try not to but I can't stop.  
 Buffy: Me too. I can't either. (They kiss)  
 Angel: Buffy, maybe we shouldn't.  
 Buffy: Don't. Just kiss me.

When the scene resumes it is the middle of the night. Buffy is asleep in the bed when Angel awakes in terrible pain. He runs out into the street calling her name in agony. The next time he appears on the screen it is in the guise of Angelus.

This scene also tries to represent a performance of sexual equality. Angel allows Buffy to decide when it is right for them to move into a sexual relationship and Buffy seems to have little anxiety about the act in which she is about to engage. This scene does offer an interesting analysis of the fears some young women may have about what will happen when they lose their virginity: fears about losing their lover, about the possibility that he will change towards them. The predictability of this anxiety (and its basis in reality) is even shown within the text. In the episode "Beauty and the Beasts," Buffy is sent to see the guidance counselor, Mr. Platt. She begins to tell him, euphemistically, about Angel but he anticipates her every thought suggesting "he changed... he turned mean and you kept loving him." In Buffy's ordeal with Angel the young woman's worst nightmares are realized. Buffy has given Angel what she feels is a great gift (her virginity) and that gift of pleasure has made him into a completely different man, one who can only mock her and the gift she has bestowed on him. Here, too, the story does not depart very much from the standard romance plot.



In the next episode Buffy seeks out Angel(us), worried that she has not seen him since they made love, though she pretends that she is just fine:

Angel: You've got a lot to learn about men kiddo. Well, I guess you proved that last night.  
 Buffy: Are you saying-  
 Angel: Let's not make an issue of it, okay? In fact, let's not talk about it at all. It happened.  
 Buffy: I don't understand. Was it me? Was I not good?  
 Angel: (laughs) You were great. Really, I thought you were a pro.  
 Buffy: How could you do this to me?  
 Angel: Lighten up. It was a good time. Isn't like we have to make a big deal-  
 Buffy: It is a big deal.  
 Angel: It's what? Bells ringing? Fireworks? The dulcet choir of pretty little birdies? Come on Buffy. It's not like I haven't been there before.  
 Buffy: Don't touch me.  
 Angel: I should have known you wouldn't be able to handle it.  
 Buffy: Angel. I love you.  
 Angel: Love you too. I'll call you.  
 (in "Innocence")

If the expectation is for a happy romance, this is a devastating scene, but one which sheds light on the problematic question of virginity and its relation to gender. Angel(us) infantilizes Buffy, marking in language her immaturity. He then proceeds to put into question her sexual performance, something which can be anxiety producing for both genders especially when they are being judged by someone older and more experienced. But what emerges as a particularly gendered remark in this exchange is his suggestion that her sexual performance (indeed her move into sexuality at all) can be read as akin to prostitution. A young man, no matter how experienced, no matter how well he performs, is difficult to read as a prostitute. But this kind of reading is always available for the feminine and is, indeed, always a risk the virgin must face if she performs too well.<sup>201</sup> Angel denigrates not only her performance but the emotional investment she has made in both the sexual act and the relationship from which it has

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<sup>201</sup> I recall a scene from *Great Balls of Fire* where Dennis Quaid slaps Winona Ryder (his new teenage bride) around accusing her of being with other men because she is such a proficient lover in bed with him.

sprung. His words mock her expectations and assure her that his experience has been nothing like her own. The final blow comes when he reminds her that she is only one lover among his many and not the most memorable of them. Buffy is, in the end, returned to an infantilized position as Angel insists that she does not even have emotional maturity to engage in the sexual performance. Her excessive emotional involvement and expectation, he seems to suggest, are born of little girls' fantasies and media narratives rather than real life.

These scenes between Buffy and Angel(us) split the second season and provide the catalyst for many of the performances that follow. If Angel had been any but Buffy's first lover, the text could never have endowed his transformation into Angelus with so much textual power. And although Angel's turn is supernaturally motivated (it is the effect of the lifting of a curse that had returned to him his soul) it tells a story which is familiar to its intended audience. The split does return Buffy her independence for a while, but the lingering after effects of these scenes remains throughout the season. Certainly, this text reinscribes the cultural importance placed on virginity, especially when the virgin is a woman. Though Willow and Oz represent a somewhat idealized version of first love and positive heterosexual awakening, they only represent one potential route this 'deflowering' performance may take. At the other ends of the spectrum we find Xander and Buffy, both of whom are mired in the after shocks of their first sexual experiences. For Xander, sex does not erase the ever-present questions about manhood that follow him throughout the narrative. His sensitivity to the lack of emotion Faith shows him returns him to the realm of the feminine and the insistence that sex, especially the first time, must be an intense and reciprocal experience. Buffy's story is even more traumatic as she performs the source of great anxiety in young women embarking on their first sexual experience. Her sexual insecurity and vulnerability also allows her character to embody ambiguity. That is, she is strong and agentic and fearless, and yet also feminine and dependent on men's approval for intimacy and recognition.

The text does not pull these ideas out of thin air but, rather, relies on accepted and often dichotomous ideas about youth, sex and virginity.<sup>202</sup> Tolman

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<sup>202</sup> Something also suggested by Michelle Fine's work on adolescent girls and the 'missing discourse of desire' which Tolman also cites.

(1994), for example, writes (very reminiscent of Walkerdine 1990): “girls do not really want sex; what girls really want is intimacy and a relationship.” She continues that “girls have sex in the service of relationships. However, the assumption that girls are having sex for the sake of relationships rather than in relation to their own desire has precluded empirical explorations of this aspect of girls’ experiences of adolescence” (250). *Buffy* seems to take Tolman’s assertion to heart by refusing to assume that the young women’s move into sexual activity is based solely on the desires of her partner rather than her own. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* moves away from the assumption that young women only have sex to maintain their relationships and seems to reject the idea that young women are without a discourse – without a sexual subjectivity - of their own desires, though it does continue to place a great emphasis on the desirability of sexual initiation within the heterosexual couple. It is possible to read this as somewhat disruptive of a more normative association of sexuality and desire as being strictly a masculine prerogative but the continued insistence on heterosexual romance makes this reading somewhat problematic.

#### SEXUALITY AND GENDER IN THE HELLMOUTH

Gender and sexuality are performed by bodies, articulated in discourses and organized into systems of representation, but they are also bound to context, the space and time in which they are brought into being. This is as true for the characters that greet us from the television screen as it is for the multitude of persons we pass each day on the street. I have already spoken to how gender roles and norms are reconfigured within this text. Part of the reason for this revision is the context in which the text itself unfolds. By this I do not mean the fantastic space of television but the particularly constituted fantasy of Sunnydale and the Hellmouth that belong to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I have to back peddle a little bit by saying that the context for the production of this text is important to its figuration of gender relations and sexuality also. In the last few years, the media has experienced an incredible boom in the production of youth oriented media. Many of these productions have been reworkings of earlier models of the adolescent text, while others have begun to set new standards of sexual and

gender relations which do not follow the old boundaries as rigidly as their predecessors did and allow young women and men to move out of their rigidly assigned gender roles. There are a many of examples of this but I will try and give a brief one. In Kevin Williamson's *Scream*, the entire horror genre is taken issue with. In this text, the characters obsesses over the narrative structure of the horror film especially the 'final girl' phenomenon where the only young woman to survive the bloodbath has to be virgin. When Neve Campbell's character finally succumbs to her boyfriend's (Skeet Ulrich) sexual desires (he turns out to be one of the killers, the other is Matthew Lillard), Ulrich and Lillard point out that since she is no longer a virgin she has abdicated her chance for surviving to the end of the text. Refusing to be confined within these established boundaries, Campbell fights back, kills the killers, and manages to live not only through this text but through two sequels as well. This is only one example of the reconfiguring of gender and sexual relations in the youth text, but it demonstrates that *Buffy* is positioned in a cultural context where these relations are changing intertextually.

#### *The heterosexual mandate*

After arguing that this text allows for a more open play of gender construction and sexuality, I must recant somewhat. The free(ish) play of gender norms and sexual proclivity may only be expressed within the heterosexual mandate. As I will examine more closely in the final section of this chapter, the heterosexual couple is not only the norm in this text, but one of its strongest narrative devices. As in the novels described by Christian-Smith (1994), "boys are presented as the only legitimate objects of girls' desire" (212). And though the drive towards being part of a heterosexual romance is strong in all the characters, it is through the young women that it is, characteristically, given the strongest voice: Willow worries about being the only girl without a boyfriend, Buffy pines for the normal romantic relationship (dates, the prom) that she can never have with Angel. Although this section will deal with the heterosexual mandate in general, I will primarily be reading it from the perspective of the feminine in a desire to understand how the mandate functions to order the characters and, especially, to reinscribe the women within the feminine.

Walkerdine (1990) describes the “adoption of femininity” as a “struggle for heterosexuality” (88) which suggests that other sexual orientations are inherent but their adoption is precluded. While most of a young woman’s life may be governed by homosocial friendship, the move into sexuality is often formulated as necessarily heterosexual.<sup>203</sup> Thus the youth narrative is completely fascinated with the move from homosociality to the heterosexual imperative. In the *Buffy* text the female characters are often stuck between their primary alliance to their girlfriends and their emotional connection to a certain man. For some, like Willow, childhood (which is where homosocial primacy is relegated) is a somewhat nostalgic place that it is hard to leave behind. Cordelia represents the desire to reject childhood in favor of adulthood (preferably in the form of marriage to a wealthy man). Faith, on the other hand, performs both the impossibility of childhood (she never had any toys because her mother drank away all their money), and the most nostalgic pining for it (her love of playing daughter to The Mayor). And Buffy stands at the intersection of these modes of representation, reluctant to put away childish things and homosocial connections but at the same time caught up in the desire for a normal adult life (which in this text, in the end, is marriage and family). For these young women, their struggle is to maneuver the transitional performance between adolescence and adulthood. Part of that struggle is between their homosocial past and the increasing thrust towards heterosexual romantic relationships.

It is through the romance plot that the heterosexual mandate is most often manifested in this – and almost any - text. That is to say, although heterosexuality is assumed to be the orientation of (at least) the majority of the characters, it is only through themes of romance and courtship that heterosexuality is actually established as the condition for sexual performance. Although some headway has been made in the inclusion of homosexual characters in television programming, this has been more problematic in shows which concern adolescents. Perhaps this is, as Whatley (1994) suggests, because homosexuality is understood as an adult choice rather than a normal possibility of the maturing body. When a homosexual character is introduced as an

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<sup>203</sup> Any experimentation that occurs between girls or boys before this is understood in heterosexual/homosocial terms. de Lauretis (1991) describes this as “the representation

adolescent, s/he tends to be peripheral to the larger structure of the text and acts instead as both a heuristic device and to reaffirm the heterosexuality of the core cast members. We can see this in the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, although there are very few moments when homosexuality is recognized. First, there is the occasion when Xander discovers that the school bully, Larry, is gay. Larry's performance demonstrates that sexual orientation is not something that can be read on the surface of character. He also verbalizes the expected homophobia of the Sunnydale community (he expects to be mocked, to be kicked off the football team) and allows Xander's character to be read – while anxious – outside of that homophobia. Finally, in his anxiety that Larry has mistaken him as being gay as well, Xander's heterosexuality is reaffirmed. The other example comes in the form of the Vampire Willow who seems designated bisexual. Though she is provocative in her man-eating guise, it is her seductive focus on Willow, Cordelia and other young women that makes her performance anxiety-ridden. Again, this character is reacted to with sympathy but confusion, especially in the case of Willow, allows the other characters to be read within the heterosexual norm. Further, whatever the case of the adolescent performing homosexuality, it is almost always a performance absent of sexuality.

Romance staves off the possibility of any mistaken homosexual turn. It moves the female and male characters closer together, inevitably leading them towards the bedroom. Romance insists on the seriousness of the relationship and, in turn, controls the circumstances under which the latent sexuality of the characters will move into performance. In her study of adolescent fiction, Christian-Smith (1994) notes that “[L]ike *Sleeping Beauty*, heroines' sexuality is awakened by boys” (211). Later she writes:

At the juncture of the moments of romance and specialness, the heroine becomes sexually aware and is subjected to the male power and control underlying sexuality. This represents the heroine's incorporation into the power relations underlying heterosexuality. The formal control of romance by boyfriends is consolidated through their positions as definers of girls' sexuality... Heroines' sexuality is portrayed as dangerous... Sex then becomes the domain of masculinity, a domain to which girls have access, but legitimately only through a romance with a boy (218).

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of desire heterosexually conceived, even as it is attributed to a woman for another” (252).

While I would argue that in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* there is no such easy dichotomy of ownership in the realm of sexuality, I would agree that the characters only have access to this realm through heterosexual relations and romance. But here admittance to the sexual realm is not limited to a masculine archway. It is equally possible that the man will find his way to sexuality through the feminine. Though Doane (1987) writes that “[I]n patriarchal society, the myth of romantic love is always there to act as an outlet for any excess energy the woman may possess, to, somewhat paradoxically, *domesticate* her” (118), here, the domestication of the heroine is not a textual possibility.<sup>204</sup> Though the text is not removed from patriarchal discourse, it is not within the male prerogative to domesticate the feminine. Though romance may diffuse the vigor and strength of the feminine this can never be realized in the way Doane suggests, as the insurgent power of the feminine can never be fully domesticated by either masculinity or romance.

Romance is the mechanism by which heterosexuality is mobilized in the text, but heterosexuality, especially among youth, is only finalized through sexual performance. Until that performance is enacted, there are still lingering doubts that the characters may return to their homosocial roots, perhaps that is why the first sexual performance is so important to youth-oriented texts. This performance, more than any other, moves the characters into adulthood and heterosexuality. Perhaps this can be understood as “Intercourse as Ideology” (Waldby 1995, 268). The characters of both genders are written to perform and obey a strictly heterosexual imperative that is constantly reinscribed through the act of intercourse. Holland and Eisenhart’s (1990) remarks are suggestive. They write: “an orientation toward heterosexual relations may not be natural, but rather culturally constructed and that the reproduction of this orientation is essential to patriarchy” (148). The culturally constructed normativity of heterosexual relations and its reproduction and dissemination are widely at work in the media text. In this particular text each induction of romantic performance follows a familiar trajectory (even when it wears a supernatural mask) that inevitably leads to the pre-marital bed. In these scenes the transformative power of the sex act (Willow’s feeling that something about her

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<sup>204</sup> Emphasis in the original.

has been changed) is in its inscription of each of the performers into normative heterosexuality.

Once the sex act is performed the character is assumed to ascend into full-blown heterosexuality. Whether the character enters into a couple or chooses to pursue a series of sexual partners, their space within the normative paradigm is set. As I attempted to show in the section which dealt with virginity, it is in the moments after the enactment of heterosexuality that the position of the subject becomes most problematic. Thompson (1994) writes: "When a lover is "mother, brother, father, friends all rolled into one," he can get away with almost anything" (246). This is often the position accorded to the first lover within youth texts. The first sexual experience is supposed to be so overwhelming to a woman that she will be willing to do and be anything to maintain it, she will even give up her other emotional ties. This may explain the trepidation with which Willow approaches the loss of her virginity. It also elaborates Buffy's pain at the loss of Angel. But this text does not allow the lover to get away with anything. Buffy, for example, does not continue to pursue Angelus. When faced with the decision to kill him or allow the world to be destroyed, she acts to save herself. Even in the face of the love that emerges from the heterosexual mandate, the female characters remain and hold on to their ability to perform for themselves.

#### *Gender and mimesis*

Mimesis, related to the copy or reproduction, is also linked to Baudrillard's (1983) conceptualization of the simulacrum. His work suggests that it becomes difficult to envision whether there is any real which precedes the simulacra or whether the simulacra itself precedes the real. Work on the subject of the masquerade also has links to this theory. For instance, Riviere's (1986) understanding of womanliness as masquerade seems to question whether woman (read femininity) is some inherent attribute (belonging to the real) or is itself a construct which can only ever really be a simulation. Mimesis in this instance becomes those peculiar scripts that women learn to adopt in the creation of a feminine identity. Mimesis fragments the possibility of an inherent, stable gender identity and, instead, makes gender a problematic and evolving



discourse of adoption and adaptation. Mimesis is an ongoing process, one which is never complete but whose borders require continual policing because the possibility of disruption is always present.

Feminine mimesis is inevitably caught up in societal expectation, often figured in terms of a male social paradigm. Shutaman (1998) writes that "the mediated woman [also] splits into self and male alter ego, but not by finding a male counterpart. Instead, she masquerades in garish hyperfeminized attire. She blatantly inscribes onto her body that which defines her culturally as feminine; she assumes the "drag" of her erotic fetishization. She absorbs the male imaginary into her appearance blurring, rather than doubling, her self. That is, she reveals that her identity is not her own; she embodies the male imaginary" (142-43). I think that this imaginary space of hyperfeminized mimesis cannot be solely attributed to masculinity, but is also reinforced by an image of hegemonic femininity. That this may have originally evolved out of a patriarchal imperative is worth noting, but in contemporary terms it is also important to acknowledge that the social directive to adhere to these mimetic terms belongs to women as much as to men. I would also suggest that, more in line with Riviere's analysis, the hyperfeminized mimetic may also be just the sort of mask which allows femininity to mutiny against its active restrictions. This is, at least, how I see the function of feminine mimesis in this particular text.

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the mimetic function of femininity is present virtually everywhere. This is primarily a specular function performed through the strict coherence between the character/actor's visual self and expected codes of gender, manifested through body and fashion. Bruzzi (1997) has written about how, in cinema, fashion works to establish the boundaries (including race, class, gender and sexuality) of character. Holland and Eisenhart (1990) write: "Clothing styles [and] served as markers of particular stances toward gender relations and attractiveness" (155). So too, in *Buffy*, fashion is used as a mimetic device which imbues each character with gender specificity and allows the viewer to read the position each character occupies in relation to that gendered identity. Willow's plain, functional clothes and hairstyle enhance her 'pre-sexual' nature, her braininess and difficulty in establishing her femininity. The other young women do not have this particular problem. Buffy's penchant for

straight skirts, tanks tops and ever blonder hair mark her emerging sexual confidence and the ambivalent relation to her old, cheerleader self. Faith's leather, lace and cleavage display her very strong sexuality while also allowing her to be read as promiscuous. And Cordelia's fashion-victim consciousness and pampered hair make her performance as a spoiled popular girl easy to read. The mimetic construction of character through fashion also works for the male characters. Giles' preference for banal beige and elbow patches are perfect for the uptight, English intellectual he performs. Angel's black, fashionable suits are truly appropriate for a creature of the night. Xander's jeans and sweatshirts and schoolboy not-quite-trendy-wear enhance his performance of the awkward boy unsure of his move towards adulthood. And Oz's more careless fashionability enhances his performance as the clique-shunning musician. For each character, fashion constructs the specific, gendered position they occupy within the text.

Gender mimesis is also manifested through the movement between rejection and adherence to normative codes of gender. Brinks (1995) writes: "Mimesis takes desire to a place where being and wanting become indistinguishable" (7). Often, this desire refers not to the desire for the other but to the desire for the elusive self that each character would like to be. Like the adoption of gender identity, this mimesis is never an easy performance but requires an ongoing movement of ambivalence. Each character has, at one time or another, an intense desire to return to a normative gender identity which is problematic within the textual action. Buffy, for instance, often wishes she could just be a normal girl which she defines through dating, shopping, cheerleading, etc. Her role as The Slayer stands in the way of her attaining this normalcy and belies the mimetic femininity that she accrues through sartorial choice. For Xander, his stumbling into a text where action is ruled by the feminine means that he too is hindered from fully attaining the mimetic masculinity he desires. Xander's ideas about what 'makes a man' are very much tied to the ability to act, something that is continually attributed to the feminine in this text. When Buffy intervenes between Xander and a bully or when he is excluded from vampire hunting because the others fear for his life, Xander feels his masculinity to be in question. Even sexually, Faith's deflowering of Xander refuses him the assumed masculine prerogative of advance and conquest. Angel has a somewhat different

problem. His mimetic disruption comes not from a disjunction of visual and active codes of masculinity, but from his conflation of masculinity with humanity. Angel does not only mime 'man' he equally mimes 'human' and is constantly aware that his is only a mimetic act. The impossibility of ever fulfilling a masculine role with regard to his relationship with Buffy is a particularly apt example of how this works. Angel recognizes the incompleteness of his mimetic performance when he tells her that they cannot have a future together, they can never marry and have children, they will always have to live in dark corners and shadows as she grows old and he remains undead. It is the impossibility of the procreative act (especially interesting because the vampire is a mimetic procreator *par excellence*) that Angel's mimesis is most decidedly unmasked. Thus the characters of this program are always in the ambivalent state of being unable to fully meet the expectations of the codes of gender normalcy, but can only mime what they desire.

But as much as these characters pine for the perfect gender fit, they move against their visual gender mimeses in the field of action. Though not as overt as visual representation, gender is performed through the course the action takes. Buffy as The Slayer personifies physical strength and independence of action, both of which are traits associated with the masculine. She is almost incapable of passivity and must always be at the center of the action in order to ensure the protection of the other characters. If the physical belongs to Buffy, the sexual arena of this text belongs to Faith. She does not cling to sexual passivity, nor does she acknowledge the necessity of monogamy. Faith usurps the male sexual position by taking pleasure in desire, the right to sexual conquest and insisting on being the primary sexual agent in any encounter. Willow also usurps a traditionally male domain through her intellectual capacity. Her understanding of technology and ability to consume vast amounts of knowledge make her the true 'brain' of the cast. Each of these characters rejects their visual mimesis by refusing to follow it through to their actions. In fact, their actions carry a quality of transvesticism in that their performances are usually reserved for men. In terms of the male characters this is somewhat less obvious. Though they do sometimes take on feminine characteristics of action that I have here associated with the mimetic, they do so mostly in reaction to the action of the female

characters. Angel's romanticism, Xander's passivity and Oz's sensitivity are all attributes associated with the feminine and they continue to be present in the female characters as well. Conversely, the female mimesis of masculine attributes (physical strength, sexual voracity and intellectual brilliance) repeatedly insists on the recognition of the elision of these qualities from the male characters.<sup>205</sup>

Another way that gender functions as mimesis is through the textual construction of sex and pleasure. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, sexuality is not defined by a dichotomy of gender with the feminine occupying the negative, passive term. In the problematic embrace of gender mimesis, the sexual performance is allowed more play than usual. Often, the sexual encounter takes on more egalitarian tones, which refuse any easy gender role taxonomy, though this is not unproblematic. Creed (1995) describes the female body as "fluid, unstable, chameleon-like" (87), but this allows for the suggestion that this changeability is externally imposed. It does not suggest that the female body may impart these qualities on the Other which comes in contact with it. In the scene which follows Buffy and Angel's lovemaking, the viewer sees Angel wracked with pain as his body goes through a powerful transformation. Though this change is negative what it suggests is not. What Angel's transformation suggests is that it is not uniquely the female body which changes (either in the sense of penetration, giving way, or the emotional changes associated with sex) but that the male body is equally unfixed. More literally, Faith's mimesis of the male sexual role puts her both in control and on top. Even Willow and Oz's sexual encounter insists that he, as much as she, is changed through the sexual act.

Finally, through pleasure, the question of gender mimesis is re-imposed. As I have already shown, in the example of Angel described above, the power to impose change through pleasure is figured as feminine. It is in the imposition of

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<sup>205</sup> Perhaps I should clarify this a bit further. The feminine qualities that I have identified in the male characters are equally present in the female characters of the text. And while Angel may possess superhuman strength and Oz may be as brilliant as Willow these are not equally carried through in the text. There is no question that Willow is the preeminent brain in this text and Oz gives way to her intellectual superiority. Angel also more often gives way to Buffy's strength, allowing her to save him, and never displaces her from her position as savior.

the Other – Buffy - that Angel is taken over in this scene, turning him into Angelus. This is a very literal performance of hooks' theory of the body as a locus of transformation and consumption by the Other (1992, 22). Here, the threat of the Other is not idle speculation but supernatural possibility. In this text, the threat of loss of self through some supernatural intervention/penetration acts as mimesis of the sexual threat hooks describes. This is also true of the vampire bite (also penetrative) which transforms its victims into the un-dead. Pleasure endows the performers with a mimetic power that threatens to destroy the unity of character they have tried to forge through the text. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* traditional gender and sexual roles are often disrupted through performance. That is not say that the heterosexual mandate is in any sense discarded, I think I have shown that, if anything, the opposite is true. And yet, while maintaining heterosexuality as the primary term, this program has still managed not to adhere to a binary code of gender roles which are usually found within mainstream television texts. Instead the characters in performance move through different states in relation to the gender norm: desire, regret and rejection. In a strict representational analysis, there can be no doubt that these actor/characters conform to a visually coded gender binary. But when moved in performance their actions often belie their gendered origins.

#### CONSTRUCTING 'THE COUPLE'

I would like to conclude by examining one final aspect of how gender and sexuality are played out within the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Following from the remarks on gender, sexuality and the heterosexual mandate that I made in the previous section, I would propose to analyze 'the couple' as a culminating feature of the dramatic youth plot. I speak of the couple as a culmination because, in the youth text, it is toward heterosexual relationships that each character aspires. That is not to suggest that trying to gain entrance to this dyad is the epicenter of the text but that, in youth-oriented media, it is a ubiquitous quest. The struggle to find one's 'other half' is founded on the desire to establish heterosexual alliances, to become sexually mature and to move towards adulthood. Each of these are primary motivators of performance. In the

following pages I will examine the couples which are established in the *Buffy* text, how this textual strategy and the performances it spawns are meant to establish and reestablish the boundaries of each character. Waldby (1995) writes that: "each lover is refigured by the other, made to bear the mark of the other upon the self" (266-67). As I will show, in negotiating the "boundary erotics" (Ibid, 266) of coupledness each character redefines themselves in the face of the self-knowledge they glean from the reflection seen in the Other.

### *Giles and Jenny*

The love affair between Rupert Giles and Jenny Calendar is perhaps the least important of the couples, but as the only adult lovers in this text, they are instructive nonetheless. As adults Giles and Jenny are supposed to be mature, to have already passed through the tumultuous adventure of first love and sexual experience. As teachers they need to control their passions for one another and keep them away from their students' watchful eyes. Giles and Jenny are intrigued with one another from her introduction to the text during the second season. As the adult figures closest to the adolescent characters their attraction is monitored and approved. But Giles and Jenny represent opposite poles of potential adulthood. He is restrained and quiet, enjoying the company of old books, tea and quiet music. Jenny is wilder and tries to get Giles to enjoy life and to accompany her on weekend adventures. Despite their differences, the two quickly fall in love, but this is thwarted when Jenny admits that she is the descendant of the Roma tribe who cursed Angel. Giles is devastated by the discovery, by Jenny's deception and what he sees as her betrayal. It is not until the episode "Passions" that they, with Buffy's blessing, reunite. It is also in this episode that Jenny tells Giles she loves him and that she will help Buffy try and restore Angel's soul. But Angelus anticipates her plans and before Jenny can finish her task he finds her at the school and savagely breaks her neck. Giles returns home and believes Jenny is waiting there for him but she is already dead, laid out on the bed by Angelus. Giles attempts to seek revenge but ends up being tortured by Angelus and by the memory of Jenny.

Giles and Jenny represent the impossibility of adult relationships within this text. Their enmeshment with the younger characters makes them prone to

follow a similar narrative path. They lack the innocence that characterizes the other couples, many of who are in love for the first time, and have less patience to forgive indiscretions. They have very little passion until it is too late. They can also be read as suggesting that there is no time for hanging on to anger because there is no way to know what tomorrow will bring. In the following seasons Giles is not offered any other important love interest suggesting that for adults here, paternal love is primary, that he can have no other love but Buffy.

### *Spike and Drusilla*

Spike and Dru are important because they represent the performance of the couple within the realm of the un-dead. This is something of a paradox as they are both, as vampires, supposed to be incapable of positive human emotion. But they do seem to care for each other, even if they demonstrate their affection in rather disturbing ways. When this couple are first introduced in "School Hard," they have just come to Sunnydale after having almost been killed by an angry mob in Prague. It is immediately evident that Drusilla is mentally ill and that Spike acts as both her lover and protector, promising that he will help her get well. But by the time Drusilla has been restored it is Spike - who has been injured and now uses a wheelchair - who has come to depend on her. This is complicated by the return of Angelus who competes with Spike for her attentions. Spike secretly rehabilitates himself, biding his time to strike out against Angelus and to win Dru back. In "Becoming II" he succeeds by joining forces with Buffy and helping her to destroy Angelus and to stop the demon Akathla from devouring the world. Spike escapes with Dru only to reappear, solo, in the third season. In "Lover's Walk" he returns to Sunnydale after Dru has abandoned him in Mexico, hoping that Willow's magic will bring her home again. Over the course of the episode he laments her cruelty while wishing desperately to find his true love again. But after joining forces with Buffy and Angel one last time and giving them some relationship advice too, he realizes that the only way to get Dru back is "to be the man she loved, the man I was."

The relationship between Dru and Spike shows that the un-dead are capable of having just as strong and complicated relationships as their human counterparts. It also performs a reversal of gender roles in the text. In the

beginning Spike plays a care-taking role towards Drusilla. During the end of the second season their roles are reversed and Spike finds that Drusilla is not nearly the caretaker that he has been to her. In fact, he comes very close to losing her to Angelus, the more evil and virile male. Spike continues to count Drusilla's welfare as important as his own and it is only through his intervention that Buffy allows her to live and leave with him. But it is his willingness to align himself with Buffy's goodness that alienates him from Drusilla. As he describes their time in Mexico together, it is a picture of her disappointment and adultery, which he attributes to her sense of his weakness. When Spike realizes that he has to be the man Drusilla wants, what he actually seems to mean is that he has to be as much of a man as she is, once again suggesting a reversal of gender roles. Drusilla plays the Freudian hysteric well for the first episodes after her introduction but even then her performance suggests the powerhouse beneath the frail mask. It is left to Spike to be caretaker and nurturer, to pursue and maintain fidelity while Drusilla dances madly to her own deadly rhythm.

#### *Xander and Cordelia*

These two are perhaps the most mismatched couple in this text. Cordelia, the vain, popular beauty and Xander the slightly nerdy boy-next-door. Their passion comes from a boundary crossing space that neither anticipates or completely enjoys. Cordelia firmly believes that boys like Xander are neither cute enough, rich enough, or cool enough to be worthy of her attentions. And Xander, well, he had been on the board of the 'I Hate Cordelia' club since grade school. From the first it is easy to read Xander and Cordelia's relationship as being simply an error of attraction. It is another facet of the story of the popular person who falls for the person from the wrong end of the cafeteria and is ashamed to admit it (i.e. *Pretty in Pink*). It is also the story of the cool, weird person who falls for the popular person and is ashamed to admit it (i.e. *She's All That*). In a humorous conflation of these, Xander and Cordelia would be equally humiliated if their friends were to find out about them.

But Xander is determined to take their relationship out of the closet. And at this point the inequality of their position is made apparent (in "Surprise"):



- Xander: I dunno. This thing with us, despite our better judgement, it keeps happening. Maybe we should just admit that we're dating.
- Cordelia: groping in a broom closet isn't dating. You don't call it a date until the guy spends money.
- Xander: Fine. I'll spend then we'll grope. Whatever, but I think it's some kind of whack that we have to hide from all our friends.
- Cordelia: Well of course you do. You want to tell everybody that you have nothing to be ashamed of. I, on the other hand, have everything to be ashamed of.
- Xander: You know what? Enough said. Forget it. Must have been my multiple personality guy talking. I call him idiot-Jed.

Here the actual rules of the social hierarchy are verbally performed and define the transgression that Cordelia has committed compared to that of Xander. This is just the beginning. Cordelia and Xander pursue their subterfuge relationship and it develops as Cordelia finds herself jealous of Xander's devotion to Buffy and Willow is furious when she discovers their secret.<sup>206</sup> Bliss between these two could never last.

Cordelia and Xander have a romance which follows established narrative lines. They are two people from different worlds with nothing in common and perhaps even a dislike for one another, who find they have a mutual attraction. But they refuse to perform this familiar narrative with equanimity. Instead the roles are problematized as Xander is, even more often than Cordelia, made the object of desire and jealousy. It is she who is often jealous and insecure and it is also she, in the end, who terminates the relationship. Xander and Cordelia do not seem to have any trouble getting over one another, but I do not think that this belittles their textual relationship. Rather, they were a didactic pair, instructing the viewer of the futility of abstract hierarchy. The relationship teaches Xander that every action has a reaction. It teaches Cordelia that she can be a person without towing the ridiculous lines of her social group. In the end it is she who learns and grows the most and who, while continuing to remain somewhat unpleasant, is the stronger of the two in the end. This couple

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<sup>206</sup> This, of course, reminds me of the scene from the *The Breakfast Club* when Claire (Molly Ringwald) explains why she and Andrew (Emilio Estevez) cannot acknowledge their new friends at school. She reasons that their social positions (as prom queen and

performs the incongruity of surface and depth of character, that what is given voice is often belied by what is felt. They also perform the possibility of relationship across difference, in this case social class. Unfortunately, though both characters learn something from their encounter, in the end, the text forecloses on the possibility that this type of relationship can work. As I will demonstrate later with regard to Buffy and Angel, this is a typical dynamic of the text.

### *Oz and Willow*

On the surface these are two average people who meet, have some difficulty getting together, fall in love, deal with infidelity, really fall in love and live happily ever after (until the end of the third season at least). The fact that Oz is a werewolf and Willow is a Wicca barely seems to disturb their narrative flow at all. As I have already described, Oz is a sensitive and rather cool musician type and Willow a shy brain. Both diminutive redheads, they seem perfectly suited for each other from the first, sharing strong intellectual leanings and a love of technology and music. When Oz is introduced in the second season, his difference from the other male characters is immediately performed when he notices Willow, dressed in a total-coverage Inuit costume, rather than one of the scantily clad girls his bandmate Devon encourages him to ogle (in "Inca Mummy Girl"). Oz finds out, soon gets up the courage to ask Willow out (in "Surprise") and when she invites him to Buffy's birthday party she is very impressed when he reacts calmly to an uninvited vampire and a first look at The Slayer. The main problem that hinders Oz and Willow's relationship is that Willow has not completely relinquished her feelings for Xander. When she finds out that Xander has been involved with Cordelia she tries to use Oz to make him jealous. Oz, demonstrating again what an upstanding young man he is, declines her lips insisting that: "In my fantasy when I'm kissing you, you're kissing me. It's okay. I can wait." Willow will have her chance to prove her devotion in "Phases," when she discovers that Oz is a werewolf. During the rest of the second and third seasons Willow and Oz's relationship intensifies and blossoms as Oz becomes more and more a part of The Slayer's circle.

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jock) is much more stressful and necessitates closer scrutiny of their behavior.

Oz and Willow perform an idealized and somewhat naïve version of the couple. They are sensitive and caring and able to work through their problems. They often seem mature beyond their years. This is especially true of Oz who offers a revamped performance of the perfect adolescent boyfriend. Rather than an image of physical perfection, Oz's character offers a more emotional stability and an intense respect for his partner that provides a good model for viewers. Perhaps these characters grow so well together because they are so similarly constructed, so equally good and nice that there is little room for conflict. But they do deal with their minor indiscretions and the changes in their growing bodies with much aplomb. Oz and Willow may not offer the most interesting or dynamic performance of the couple, but they do provide a mature narrative that is rarely seen in the youth text.

### *Buffy and Angel*

It is only fitting to end this section with a discussion of Buffy and Angel because they are the premiere couple of this text. If Xander and Cordelia represent a mismatched pair then Buffy and Angel represent the attraction of opposites. If Willow and Oz perform slowly developing love then they perform a growing passion which marks the text from the first season to the end of the third. Angel and Buffy do not come together easily, not surprisingly since she is The Slayer and he is a vampire. The laws of this textual universe seem to indicate that these two, of all couples, should never find any happiness with each other, but they seem incapable of staying apart. When Buffy first meets Angel he presents her with a silver cross, a token of his allegiance to her struggle and his desire for her protection. But it is the episode "Angel" in the first season that really marks the beginning of their relationship. At the moment of their first kiss Angel's face transforms revealing it to be a mask which hides his vampirism. Buffy must face the fact that she has fallen for a vampire and Angel must come to terms with the danger his love inevitably puts Buffy in.

Early on, one of the primary problems of Buffy and Angel's relationship is revealed. As The Slayer, Buffy is used to standing and fighting alone and she cannot get used to Angel's desire to help and protect her. She is often unsure about whether she can fully trust him and often demonstrates this anxiety by

challenging him to fight her. It is as though this type of competition would prove to Buffy once and for all that if it were necessary her strength would prove greater than his. Angel always refuses and it is not until the end of the second season that their battle of supernatural powers is put to the test. Long before that, though, Buffy and Angel have many other trials to face. The most obvious is the insecurity that comes from their two hundred odd year age difference. Angel is a man of vast experience and Buffy, despite being The Slayer, is still a sixteen-year-old girl unsure if she possess the qualities necessary to keep the object of her desire. In "Halloween" Buffy dresses up as a eighteenth century maiden (after seeing a picture of one of Angel's lover's in an old book) hoping that by presenting herself as a "fancy girl" she will be the woman that Angel wants. But in a typical reversal Angel reassures her that those women were "just incredibly dull. Simpering morons a lot of them. Always wished I could meet someone, exciting, interesting." Someone, he intimates, like her.

Buffy and Angel are also connected by her prophetic dreams. In "Innocence" after they have made love for the first time, Buffy discovers that her new lover has been transformed into his true vampire self, the evil Angelus. Though it takes Buffy some time to believe that Angel is truly gone, when she does, she makes him the target of her Slayer's strength. This is an important moment for Buffy's character; she refuses to wallow in disappointment and betrayal but puts herself in a position of strength and power, refusing to be Angelus' victim. But when Buffy discovers that Angel's turn was the result of the lifting of a Roma curse, she continues to harbor a hope that he can be cursed again and returned to her. Before this can happen, Angelus and Drusilla plot to awaken the demon Akathla and bring about the end of the world. Since it is Angelus' blood that wakes the sleeping demon, it is only his blood that can quiet Akathla again. As Buffy runs to stop Angelus, armed with the knowledge that she can destroy him if she must, Willow tires to restore Angel's curse. But she is too late and Akathla begins to waken. As the demon's mouth opens only Buffy can see him as she faces Angelus who stands with his back to the demon. Suddenly the curse is imposed again and Angel stirs as if from sleep, confused and unsure. But it is too late and Buffy, quietly reassuring him, tells him to close

his eyes and when he does she stabs him and sends him through the demon portal, closing it. She does not tell the others that the curse has worked.

That is not the end of the story of Buffy and Angel. Their love is so strong that after a hundred years in hell (a mere few months in Sunnydale) he is returned, ravaged and animal-like, but still Angel. Buffy finds him and hides him from the others until he is restored. Although they are unsure of whether to trust Angel, he eventually proves himself to them again. Buffy and Angel resume their relationship though it is strained. Buffy wants more and more from him and Angel becomes ever more aware that he and Buffy cannot have a normal future together. The destructive nature of their love for one another is pointed out by Joyce, who insists that Buffy is still a young girl and that Angel will have to make a choice for her. Other characters make poignant, if less well-intended, remarks:

Spike: You're not friends. You'll never be friends. You'll be in love 'till it kills you both. You'll fight and you'll shag and you'll hate each other 'till it makes you quiver but you'll never be friends. Love isn't braces children, it's blood, blood screaming inside you to work its will. I may be love's bitch but at least I'm man enough to admit it (in "Lover's Walk").

Angel: You're not my elder. I've got a lot of years on you.  
 The Mayor: Yeah. That's just one of the things you're gonna have to deal with. You're immortal she's not. It's not easy. I married my Edna May in '03 and I was with her till the end. Not a pretty picture. Wrinkled and senile and cursing me for my youth. Wasn't our happiest time. And let's not forget the fact that any moment of true happiness will turn you evil. Come on, what kind of a life can you offer her. I don't see a lot of Sunday picnics in the offing. See skulking in the shadows. Hiding from the sun. She's a blossoming young girl and you want to keep her from the life she should have. By, by God I think that's a little selfish. Is that what you came back from hell for? Is that your greater purpose (in "Choices")?

Despite the fact that these words come from some of Buffy and Angel's worst enemies, they begin to ring true for the couple, especially for Angel.

The volatility of Angel's character is never more visibly performed than in "Amends" when he is plagued by a demon who takes the form of Angel's victims. The demon torments him, pushing him to give in to his desire for Buffy and to destroy her. So overcome by his lack of faith in his ability to withstand the voices and visions, Angel decides to commit suicide by exposing himself to the morning sun. It is Christmas Eve when Buffy climbs the hill that overlooks the town of Sunnydale and finds Angel waiting for the dawn (in "Amends"):

- Buffy: You're weak? Everybody is. Everybody fails. Maybe this evil did bring you back because it needs you and that means that you can hurt it. Angel, you have the power to do real good, to make amends. But if you do this then all that you ever were was a monster. Angel please, the sun...(They fight)
- Angel: Am I a thing worth saving? Am I a righteous man? The world wants me gone.
- Buffy: What about me? I love you so much and I tried to make you go away. I killed you and it didn't work (Hits him) and I hate it. I hate it so much that it's so hard and that you can hurt me so much. I know everything that you did because you did it to me. God. I wish that I wished you dead. You know, but I can't.
- Angel: (Crying) Buffy, please, just this once. Let me be strong.
- Buffy: Strong is fighting. It's hard and it's painful and it's every day. It's what we have to do and we can do it together. But if you're too much of a coward then burn. If I can't convince you that you belong in this world then I don't know what can. But do not expect me to watch and don't expect me to mourn for you because – (It begins to snow and they stop to watch it come down over the town)

Once again Buffy has taken up the strong position. She has saved Angel but has refused to offer herself as barter for that salvation. She refuses to give up hope in the face of his nihilism and self-deprecation. And it is not the last time that Buffy will offer herself to save Angel. Proving that if he is not 'man' enough to face the dangers of their world then, at least, she is.

Angel and Buffy are consummate lovers who are unable to consummate their love for one another. But they are offered one more opportunity for a quasi-sexual embrace. In the last episodes of the third season, Faith pierces Angel with a poisoned dart. The only known cure for the poison which is slowly

killing him is for Angel to drink the blood of a Slayer. Buffy, intent on saving her lover decides to kill Faith and bring Angel her body. But when this fails she ultimately offers him her own blood:

Buffy: Angel, listen to me. Sit up. You're gonna live. You have to live.  
 Angel: What do I-  
 Buffy: Drink. (She takes off her jacket) Drink me.  
 Angel: No.  
 Buffy: It's the only way.  
 Angel: Get away  
 Buffy: It'll save you.  
 Angel: It'll kill you.  
 Buffy: Maybe not. Not if you don't take it all.  
 Angel: You can't ask me to do this.  
 Buffy: I won't let you die. I can't. Angel, the blood of a Slayer's the only cure.  
 Angel: Faith.  
 Buffy: I tried. I killed her.  
 Angel: Then it's over. (He falls).  
 Buffy: It is never over. I won't let you die. Drink. (She hits him twice in the face three times until he changes. Then she grabs the back of his head and forces it into her neck. They fall onto the floor. Vivid drinking and sucking sounds. They both moan but it is unclear whether in pain or pleasure).

The impossibility of Buffy and Angel's relationship is finally realized in this scene. After it, neither can deny the need for their separation. She has given him all that she can and more, his life and the only thing he can do is return to her, her own. In the final moments of the last episode of the third season they watch each other across the dark and smoky street. They say nothing to one another. Then Angel turns and Buffy watches as he walks away and disappears into the night.

The Buffy and Angel narrative was one of the more interesting of the carry-over story lines of the first three seasons of this program. It presents several interesting questions about gender and sexuality and the fluidity of these terms of analysis. Certainly there is the possibility of reading their love story as the impossibility of maintaining a relationship across cultural difference. The fact that despite their fight to stay together they are, in the end, forced apart, makes this reading a hegemonic one. It also presents the difficulty of

relationships that cross generational and time divides as well as that (already familiar from other media texts i.e. *Highlander*) of the love between the mortal and immortal. There is another reading that focuses on the impossibility of ever truly knowing your partner and the need for separation, despite how difficult this may be, in the face of discomfort and danger. In this particular analysis, Buffy presents a good role model as she struggles to restrain her feelings in order to keep herself safe. Buffy proves again and again that she is at least as strong as her lover and as willing to use her strength. In the end it is she who saves Angel, the world and herself. The couple, whose performance is always so integral to the youth narrative, is always, in this case, secondary to the question of the self.

In this chapter I have demonstrated how the text makes gender and sexuality problematic performances. There are overarching hegemonic prescriptions which run through these narratives which include: the preferred body, the heterosexual mandate, the normativity of the couple, the importance of virginity and the fetishization of the body. But within these structures there is a mobility that allows a move in the direction of insurgence. Most prominently performed is the refusal to allow masculinity to occupy a dominant position in the gender and sexual paradigm. Bodies conform to the media preferential but their actions belie this conformity. Male bodies are as often the object of objectification and desire as are female bodies. Desire may take on a homosocial as well as a heterosexual momentum. The fetish may take many forms and genders. Virginity is as important (or unimportant) to men as to women. Gender as an unstable referent is always undermined by performances which place the physical body in conflict with the actions it undertakes. Women are strong, powerful, aggressive, violent, sexual, brilliant, random, unpredictable, sensitive, nurturing and playful. Men are rarely allowed to steal the spotlight, to save the woman from herself or from others. Even in the heterosexual, romantic couple the gender dichotomy is never allowed to stabilize. Thus, questions of gender and sexuality and love in the Hellmouth exist on as unstable a ground as the diegetic space from which the spectacle emerges. And it is this refusal to settle into predictable categories and narratives that offers the show's most insurgent potential.



“The Bronze. It’s the only club worth going to around here. They let anybody in but it’s still the scene. It’s in the bad part of town...about a half a block from the good part of town. We don’t have a lot of town here.” (Cordelia)

In this chapter I explore the performance of spatiality as it is manifested in the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I will examine the dialogue between real and diegetic spaces and their mutual implication in constructing the terms of suburbanism, especially in its southwestern American form. I will show how these constitute a spatiality and place specific to California and Sunnydale, as well as questions of community, location, border, gender, difference and insurgence as they relate to this particular text. I will trace the links between spatiality and performance, as it is through performance that space develops away from representation (image) and allows a reading that includes the complexity of action that actually inscribes these as atopic spaces. This type of reading is most strongly associated with literature wherein the production of space is understood to be narratively produced as much as conforming to any pre-existing social landscapes (Miller 1995, Donald 1997). Thus, ‘reading’ spatial performances as a necessary condition of mediation will not only demonstrate the function of those s/pl/aces, but the conditions in which they are inducted into the matrices of performance.

Soja (1996) writes: “The spatial matrix must constantly be reinforced and, when necessary, restructured – that is, spatiality must be socially reproduced, and this reproduction process is a continuing source of conflict and crisis” (129). Television plays an active role in the reinforcement of hegemonic spatiality even as it offers the potential of rewriting space in an insurgent voice. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the hegemonic American suburb is disrupted by an intrusion on its borders by Others whose performances cannot be contained by the values and social mores of the moral community. This requires a violent retaliation which can never be fulfilled as it requires the eradication of difference from the text and which, of course, would mean an end to the text itself. The intrusion of the Other into suburbia was the central focus of an article in a recent issue of *The New York Times Magazine* (an issue which dealt almost entirely with the question of American suburbanism). Patterson (2000) describes the hopes for safety that a

young family experiences as they move into an 'accessibly priced' gated community in Texas. They are shocked to discover, however, that their property has a 'snake problem' which falls under the jurisdiction of the family alone. The discourse they use to describe the quest for safety and the problem which stands between them and the achievement of this safety, echoes the way the vampire is formulated in the *Buffy* text. The author uses phrases such as: "The gate would guard against invaders" (58); "To her mind the only good snake was a dead snake" (60); "...the world is more dangerous than it has ever been" (60); "...a full scale invasion was under way" (60); and "true security depends on the people inside a community" (61). The *Buffy* text, like the *Times Magazine* story, demonstrates that the Other can never be fully remanded to the abject boundaries of the same and yet offers no possibility that the Other may live in full view. Instead the Other takes over spaces which have been abandoned by a panicked society: the underground, graveyards, dark streets, nightclubs, high schools. It is of no surprise that these are also spaces which are generally depicted as scenes of violent performance. If there is a possibility for a redemptive reading of this aspect of the text it is in the possibility that all spaces may be reclaimed for alternate uses not ordered by accepted hierarchies of gender, generation and difference.

Many theorists of the spatial or geographical have noted how television has impacted on that axis of daily life. Television's introduction into the living rooms of 1950's suburban America had a two-fold effect (Spigel 1992). First, it reinscribed the communal space of the family who, in the more remote suburban areas, were thought to be missing the communality of the urban neighborhoods they had left behind. Television represented a fragmentary cohesion suitable to a medium whose reception was most often experienced within the daily domestic routines of suburban women. In this guise, television became increasingly associated with the feminine (Joyrich 1996). On the other hand, television allowed its viewers access to worlds beyond their earlier imaginings. Before the ubiquity of world travel overtook the middle-class of the First world, the larger planetary geography was made accessible through television (and film). Thus television had a dual effect in helping to form postmodern spatial sensibility: it

made the visible world larger while making it less necessary to leave the confines of one's own living room.

The other way television has impacted spatiality is in its positioning of The United States (and especially Southern California) as the visual epicenter of the mediascape. Davis (1992) describes the experience of Latin American migrants on their arrival to Los Angeles: "L.A. was already everywhere. They had watched it every night in San Salvador, in endless reruns of *I Love Lucy* and *Starsky and Hutch*, a city where everyone was young and rich and drove new cars" (12). This particular marketing of American social spaces is as important in what it elides as in what it shows. As Davis' (1992) anecdote continues: "More importantly no one like him was on television; they were all invisible" (Ibid.). While television allows the global living room to explore the regions most remote from it, excessively North American dominated television programming makes sure that everyone in those living rooms is allowed a homogenized view of American life. This, too, causes television's fragmentary quality. Often devoid of diversity, television erects very visible borders - much like those which are springing up all over the U. S. A. - that contain the beautiful, white and rich within their walls.

It is also necessary to examine the function of narrative spaces as they are produced and perform within television. The aim of this chapter is to suggest a way of understanding the television text through an examination of the particular spaces that perform within it, who is allowed to enter them and what is performed there. I will begin by addressing the question of the map, or mapping, which is the process by which any space, real or imagined, comes to be expressed as discourse. When one speaks of space the idea of the map does not follow too far behind. And while at first thought the map evokes a spatial rendering, in miniature, of a territory, the map can be used - metaphorically - to spatialize virtually anything: the human mind, an autobiography, television viewership, or character. In the postmodern world of information overload, the map provides invaluable reference points. As Harley (1988) writes

Both in the selectivity of their content and in their signs of representation maps are a way of conceiving, articulating and structuring the human world which is biased towards, promoted by, and exerts influence upon particular sets of social relations (278).

Baudrillard (1983), in an oft-quoted passage, writes: "The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory... it is the map that engenders the territory" (2). This description also relates to de Certeau's (1984) distinction between the "map" and "tour," or between the simple ordering of spaces and their discursive or "operational" construction (119). This is very much the way that television (and the media more generally) performs in relation to daily life. The television screen functions in a similar way to the traditional map which plotted the acquisition of territory according to the vision of a dominant social group. Television does this in two ways. First, by allowing the viewer a voyeuristic journey through previously 'uncharted' physical landscapes. The viewer assumes the position of colonial eye taking for itself the visual knowledge of a place it has never been. This type of mapping suggests an unlimited access of the viewer to distant spaces and elides the choice and production of the program (to say nothing of censorship) which lie far outside that viewer's power. But it is not only in so-called 'reality' programming that television maps the spaces of the physical world. Every sitcom and drama also maps out its territories. It appears to provide an overlay of the 'real world' produced through the lenses of the media superstructure and fantastical performance.

North American television shows are produced in specific locations which often purport to be actual geographical sites such as Los Angeles, New York or Chicago. With strategic practices, these programs map the city or suburb according to their own representational desires. Take, for example, the opening sequences of *Beverly Hills, 90210*. Though each episode has a different opening sequence, they all show a montage of scenes from Los Angeles and Beverly Hills, very like that described by Natter (1994) in relation to *Berlin: Symphony of a City*. This is a selective mapping which puts on display specific aspects of the Southern California landscape: beaches, Rodeo Drive, palm-lined Boulevards, The Beverly Center, Hollywood, the skyscrapered skyline, all of which are also produced via visual-sopic regimes. What it specifically elides are the multicultural communities of the city, the poverty, the urban blight, the gated-communities, and the police presence. In constructing this partial map of the physical spaces of Los Angeles County, the television text constructs something

else as well, what Grossberg suggests (in relation to music) is a “territorializing machine which articulates the mattering maps by which everyday life becomes navigable and hence livable” (1992, 154). Likewise, Trinh (1991), as both critic and filmmaker, expresses how the images produced by documentary are made up of three regimes which include what the camera sees, what the filmmaker imagines, and what the expectation of documentary holds for the viewer (39). I believe that the same can be said for television. The term territorializing is not insignificant as it suggests that music (or television) actually participates in the materialization culture. Television brings into being certain facets of the physical landscape, just as certain physical landscapes are central to the construction of televisual spaces. What television provides are very explicit ‘mattering maps’ that invoke the desirability of these geographies and what is found within them. In this display it is not only the visual field (i.e. Beverly Hills standing in metonymically for Los Angeles) that matters but what (and who) is found within its borders. In this way various spatial pathways are charted and cathected – made to matter.

Maps provide the viewer with knowledge about what goes on within television’s borders. They also shore up the boundary between what and who can be seen within each particular diegetic landscape and what/who cannot. It is with its elisions, almost as much as what it shows, that television provides the viewer with a mattering map or map of ontology.<sup>207</sup> One thing that is often markedly absent from this map are the vast social differences that make up most societies. Television texts that emerge from Hollywood are predominantly bled of all traces of race and ethnicity, disability and religion, the poor and the obese, the plain and the homosexual. Television provides an edited view of humanity and through this preferred visuality makes up mattering maps of bodies. In this topography only certain bodies can be mapped because only certain bodies are seen to matter. The preferred body in this case is young, white, fit and thin. Other bodies disappear in the televisual map, they are allowed no virtual existence but find themselves reappearing, in Othered form, in the less valued areas of television’s landscape (satellite, specialty programming, day-time, late-

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<sup>207</sup> Shields (1997) has written an excellent article which discusses the ontological, epistemological and ethical relations of spatialization.

night, the news, COPS, etc.), though they often still appear within prime-time as the negative term. Television's inscription of exclusive sites is doubled because the physical sites of production are often already privileged, but the citation (situation) of these sites within television production makes them even more so. Los Angeles may be a bastion of wealth and beauty but Los Angeles as it is depicted in television is an even more exclusive enclave where only those worthy of being stars may reside. Thus the televisual mapping of desire is structured not only by privileging certain physical/geographic landscapes but also by the even more rigorous entry requirements of the television casting and star systems.

#### PLACE VERSUS SPACE

Space and place are often articulated as a dichotomy. This is rendered in somewhat confusing terms and it will be worth looking at how the difference between these two related concepts has been theorized in cultural critique. There are two main ways of understanding the relation between spaces and places. Places are often seen as emerging from a larger spatiality, and in this framework space (and time) is seen as governing the social coordinates of specific places. As Livingstone and Lunt (1994) express: "The physical limits of the human body place a set of spatial and temporal constraints on the social construction of place and on the actions possible within it" (71). It is not explicitly clear what physical limits the authors are referring to but it is possible to understand them as the performative markers which go into the construction of the human form in all its specificity. The limits they refer to are those which allow or deny access to certain physical places, determine which performances are acceptable within these confines and, equally, what kind of place will be constructed around specific bodies. One way to understand this is to examine the Los Angeles genealogy prepared by Davis (1992). In his description of the carcereal city which has grown up around Los Angeles' poor, dangerous streets (streets which are mostly populated with African and Latin-Americans), Davis describes in precise terms the physical construction of place. The urban ghetto functions as a barrier that both keeps some people in and others out. The specificity of these places has grown up around the physical limits imposed on the populations kept

inside, including surveillance techniques (from helicopters to shopping malls which are wired to police headquarters), social and governmental intervention (the rejection of school bussing) and the creation of road blocks (Blakely and Snyder 1997). These physical manifestations of platial/spatial delineation reinforce the borders that keep community residents within a specifically constructed and bounded place, just as they keep others out.

Space and place may also be differentiated in a more abstract way, which is perhaps better for understanding the production of both terms within the narrative and representational spaces of televisual performance. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, Patraha (1996) describes a fluid transformability that occurs between the two. She quotes him: "Thus space is created "by the actions of historical *subjects*" " (90).<sup>208</sup> This suggests that the movement between place and space is a question of performance with specific places growing out of more amorphous spaces through which subjects move and position themselves (or are positioned). Patraha continues: "For my purposes, place refers to a pre-scripted performance of interpretation, while space produces sites for multiple performances of interpretation which situate/produce the spectator as historical subject" (100). de Certeau (1984) makes similar distinctions. He describes place as "an instantaneous configuration of positions... [which] implies an indication of stability;" and space as "composed of intersections of mobile elements" (117). Both of these works return to my own question of the difference between representation or stasis and performance or action, with place being associated with the representational (stability) and space with performance (mobility). Though both may be imbricated in performance, place refers to the spectacular image of representation while space aligns itself with the active movement of performances. Thus in the pages that follow I will be addressing specific places but I will also be interested in how these are interpellated as spaces through performances which situate them within the greater spatiality of the text.

Location and context are terms with close links to space and place. In a sense, location and context are descriptive terms which allow the specificity of spaces to be explored in greater detail and point to the constitutive and constituting properties of spaces. Location is a very important concept in

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<sup>208</sup> Emphasis in the original.

cultural theory for it points to the space from which any action/performance emerges and, also, relates to point of view and the manner in which things can be known. Context provides an understanding of the social matrices which have brought about the particularity of any action/performance. It is important to acknowledge the constructed nature of all social spaces and performances within the televisual landscape, as it is within this social construction that all of television takes place. The particular sites performed in a program are produced to manage the needs of the narrative structure of the text. In the *Buffy* text, the town of Sunnydale is defined both by its location and context. Its position as a suburban space allows the supernatural performances to devolve (or evolve) without too much scrutiny, surveillance or intervention. The context for the creation of Sunnydale is equally important for the textual performance. That The Mayor has plotted the burgeoning suburbia around The Hellmouth as a feeding ground for vampires in preparation for his eventual ascension means that there will never be an end to potential supernatural textual possibilities.

Case (1996) writes that "the body acts as a location, and that location holds back the virtual play of multiple identities" (119). In the supernatural text the fixity of any body is refuted by both its location and context for performance. The play of identity to which Case alludes is an inevitable part of the performances of this text and this in turn complicates the question of location. There are innumerable examples of how this works in the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Buffy's body, for example, is introduced in a spatial flux between the urban (Los Angeles) and the suburban (Sunnydale). She experiences a discontinuity between who she had been in her previous location and who she both desires to be, and yet cannot, in the new location into which the text places her. Buffy experiences a dislocation between the context of her performance as The Slayer and the more mundane, but equally attractive, feminine roles she would like to perform in her daily life: daughter, student, girlfriend, friend, etc. Oz represents a more striking example of dislocation as he shifts from the human body to that of the animal.<sup>209</sup> In each state his body operates under a different set of social assumptions and is contained by the specific contexts and locations of his body. Giles and Jenny Calendar provide another reading of location as one

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<sup>209</sup> Interestingly also a place; one where talking, affective animals are not unusual.



that is both historically contingent and shifting. Both of these characters have been tied to particular locations and contexts in their youth: Giles as the rebellious British 'ripper' and Jenny as the daughter of an ancient Roma tribe. In the text Giles and Jenny attempt to regulate their performances according to the necessities of the particular context and location in which they find themselves: Watcher and teacher. The performances of their earlier locations are subsumed but are demonstrated to never be fully hidden or irrecoverable.

Willow experiences a similar (dis)location when she is confronted with her vampiric doppelganger. In this episode Willow must face the possibility that she does not exist as a unified entity. Her performances are regulated by the spaces into which each facet of herself is placed. These scenes highlight the anxiety that occurs with the unfixing of the body from a unified location and context and represent interesting allegories of the teenage body in the grip of late twentieth-century spatial apparatus. Angel represents the antithesis of this movement. Instead of the body being multiplied spatially across different locations and contexts, Angel represents the body which is internally fragmented. His performance is contingent on variables which are exerted beyond his control. Rather than fixed in location, Angel's 'self' becomes subject to "phantasmatic dislocations" which allow him no final governance over his performances (Pellegrini 1997, 143) and these performances recall those described by Donald (1997) in relation to the "un-narratable" experience of life in the modernist city (194). Drusilla takes on similar performative characteristics in relation to her location and context. In her case it is madness that provides the unfixity or dislocation of her body from the specificity of the site where it stands. Madness allows her to become unfixated from location and context, as her mind seems to roam, unanchored, through the confines of the text. It is only when Spike restores her 'health' that Drusilla becomes capable of action. And it is only through the possibility of action that she comes to be grounded in location and context.

Context and location are implicated in how spatial performances are regulated; space is defined through the specificities of context and location. We, as viewers, come to understand the nature of mediated spatiality through its performances or through its spatializations (the performances which bring space

into being) (Shields 1997), performances through which the nexus of space/context/location is mobilized in action. Spatiality, in which televisual performances are embedded, is performative of many things. Those which are of concern to this work are: community, difference, gender, border and insurgence. This is in no way to suggest that these are somehow immanent in space, but that through performances they are given shape. The visual image of a high school, for example, may itself provide a context which points toward relations of class, values, etc. But it is in the production of space through and in performance that these relations are made visible (produced).

*Real space / diegetic space*

Fundamental to the study of the mass media is the dynamic question of the relationship between real and diegetic spaces. I take 'real' spaces to refer to those which exist beyond the screen. These are the spaces in which people live, work and circumnavigate in the course of their daily lives. That said, it is impossible to fully articulate real space apart from diegetic space in the postmodern world of late twentieth century, capitalist, North America. Westwood and Williams (1997) write: "novels, poetry and film provide us all, and sociologists and cultural theorists in particular, with a never-ending commentary on the city, the urban, city people and institutions, the 'real' and the fictive more and more woven together in textual discourses" (12). Diegetic space refers to the spaces revealed within the world of the screen - filmic, televisual, videographic, digital, virtual, photographic - that provide boundaries which contain visual and narrative performances. These are not fully detached from 'real' spaces, not only because diegetic spaces often begin in the material world or because some 'real' world spaces have been constructed along diegetic principals (Disney World being only the most obvious and oft-cited example). These go only part of the way in explaining the increasing implication of real and diegetic spaces. It is also necessary to try and understand how space is produced by forces of simulation as articulated by Baudrillard (1983). In his 1988 study of America, Baudrillard writes: "The American city seems to have stepped right out of the movies. To grasp its secret, you should not, then, begin with the city and move inwards to the screen; you should begin with the screen and move

outwards to the city" (56). And later that: "They have not destroyed space; they have simply rendered it infinite by the destruction of its center...In so doing they have opened up a true fictional space" (99). The ability to speak of the fictional and the physical within the same comprehensive enunciation makes the project of understanding the relationship between the televisual (mediated or diegetic) and the real crucial for contemporary understandings of the spatial.

One of the key areas where this type of work is being done is at the intersection of geography, urban studies and cinema/film studies. Though writers who work at this intersection have made note of the predominant elision of spatial issues within their disciplines, some headway has been made with recent articles and the book *The Cinematic City* (1997a) edited by David B. Clarke. The impetus for this anthology is the reinsertion of critical thought regarding the production of the city within film. Clarke's (1997b) desire to find a space for this discussion is well-voiced in his assertion that "the city has undeniably been shaped by the cinematic form" (2); and that "[I]f many have, therefore, experienced that sudden, strange feeling whilst walking in the city that we are walking through the set of a film, this is undeniably a part of the cinema" (3). The central dialectic within the chapters of this volume is between the real city and that which is brought to life in the celluloid images of the film screen. The authors suggest that the city of the cinema is ever present and yet somehow elusive, difficult to pin down in a unilateral interpretation. Each is sure that cinematic images of the city are produced in direct relation to the real, just as the real city is produced in relation to the cinematic image. These readings of the cinematic city attempt to reformulate the terms of the real city's evolution.

The function of the cinematic city – and, as I will show, the televisual one as well – is multifold. It allows the viewer to travel, unencumbered by the physical, to global spaces. Westwood and Williams (1997), regarding the writings of Donald and Massey, write: "most of us continue to live in arcane spaces doing arcane things; we go to the movies to *get* to New York." (13).<sup>210</sup> Or, as Ronell (in Case, 1996) insists: "If TV has taught us anything - and I think it is helpful to locate it somewhere between Kansas and Oz, an internal spread of exteriority, an interruption precisely of the phantasmatic difference between

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<sup>210</sup> Emphasis in the original.

interiority and exteriority - the teaching principally concerns, I think, *the impossibility of staying home*" (197).<sup>211</sup> Of course it is also true that we tune into television in order to *get* to Kosovo, or the 'mean streets' of East L.A. without ever having to leave the comforts of home. This is one of the primary functions of diegetic space; the viewer is introduced to the performances that these spaces engender, just as new spaces or sets of spaces can be brought into being through narrative (de Certeau 1984).

The performances which structure the production of diegetic cities and spaces demonstrate who may be responsible for the dystopic city (the loss of utopia) as well as who will be allowed to enter the utopian one (who will be left in the inferno). These visual and ideological performances are an important part of the construction of the mediatized landscape. The televisual city is producing not only the city, but its citizenry as well, by constructing specific communities of characters within each television text. It is constructing what Anderson (1991) has described as an imagined community. He writes: "nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign... ..It is *imagined* because even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6).<sup>212</sup> The production and dissemination of mediatized communities (or cities, nations, citizens) assumes the construction not only of spaces but performances which structure and bound those spaces.

What is it that the viewer is actually being shown in the simulacra of the screen? As a fiction, televisual, like filmic spaces, cannot be contained within the representational. As Jameson (1994) writes in an article on spatial systems in Hitchcock's *North by Northeast*: "the isolated frame in Hitchcock conveys very little of what we then rapidly come to identify as crucial matter: namely, movement itself" (49). Television also fabricates its cities more often than film while at the same time locating them in the material geography of the United States. Jameson (1985) on the similar spatial realism of nineteenth century novelists writes: "their function is not merely to produce new mental and existential habits, but in a virtual and symbolic way to produce this whole new

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<sup>211</sup> Emphasis in the original.

<sup>212</sup> Emphasis in the original.

spatial and temporal configuration itself: what will come to be called “daily life” (374). This is especially true of the daytime soap opera but is also true of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* which proposes a fictional town on the Southern California coast. While the overlap between the mediatized and the real is crucial to understanding representation within media, it is also equally necessary to examine the particularities of screenic spaces themselves; narrative, visual and performative spaces with their own internal relationships. These spaces will tell a great deal about the culture and context within which they were produced not necessarily through a comparison to some external, spatial ‘reality,’ but as spatializations that demonstrate what can enter the (tele)visual imagination.

Instructive here are the words of McArthur (1997):

Clearly then, Hollywood cinema consistently takes ‘real’ American cities such as New York and San Francisco (as in *Vertigo*, 1958 and *Bullit*, 1968) – the ‘real’ being inverted commas because they are already functioning discursively – and then reinscribes them unto discourse once more, predominantly those discourses about the quality of the ‘natural’ and the built world through which meaning has been imposed on the transition to modernity (33).

There is no sense here that there is a city outside the screen which fully precedes the one which is to be discerned within it. Soja (1996) also describes: “the postmetropolis as Simcity, a place where simulations of presumably real worlds increasingly capture and activate our urban imaginary and infiltrate everyday urban life” (28). Soja rectifies what were seen as elisions in his earlier work with regard to the mediatized city. As Burgin (1996) insists: “what this author [Soja] calls the “real city” can never be perceived as totally distinct from the “paper city.” The city in our actual experience is *at the same time* an actual existing physical environment, *and* a city in a novel, a film, a photograph, a city seen on television, a city in a comic strip, a city in a pie chart, and so on” (28).<sup>213</sup> The mediatized or virtual city thus marks the impossibility of any ‘real’ city that exists outside of its fabrications. The mediatized city does not wholly rely on any ‘external reality’ but constructs its images through ideological understandings of what the city might have been and could be. In studying *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

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<sup>213</sup> Emphasis in the original.

it has been important to recognize the discourses through which the production of Sunnydale may have been affected - suburbanism, urban flight, homogeneity, fear of encroachment, etc. – discourses which have also affected the construction of material spaces in the physical world. It has been equally important to remember that the diegetic spaces of this program are not bound to that materiality and are equally influenced (and invested) by the location and context of their production (i.e. Hollywood, Millennial capitalism, merchandizing, political climate, etc.).

The televisual city has several functions; primary among them is bringing the global city into the private spaces of the viewer's world.<sup>214</sup> This work is accomplished along a number of vectors. First, it shows events – especially violent and dangerous events of the (i.e.) anxious, paranoid, television city - which are taking place in the far reaches of the world, as well as close to home. Second, it performs the decay of urbanity, its violence and fear, while at the same time displaying its hidden and almost unattainable recesses of wealth. The third difference concerns the city in – the one which is most central to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* – its anesthetized or suburbanized form. In this text the suburb is performed as the possibility of safety and homogeneity, a space that is not yet supposed to have felt the taint of the urban or global. This is a nostalgic space, pining for a city that never was and will never be, or in Buck-Morss' words (1995) "nostalgia for a world that was *supposed* to be."<sup>215</sup> Taken together the televisual city can be seen as offering a wide spectrum of spatial analyses. These do not emerge out of nowhere, nor are they absent of ideological intent or content. Instead the televisual city offers a very interesting departure point for attempting to understand both the hopes and fears that the city and suburb hold in the popular imagination and the ways that these are mobilized through performance.

### *California versus Sunnydale*

To continue the discussion of real and diegetic spaces, but to bring it closer to the text which is the focus of this thesis, I will examine the performative

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<sup>214</sup> The televisual city is already a globalized city since, in a sense, it circulates globally.

<sup>215</sup> Emphasis in the original.

and discursive constructions of California and Sunnydale. California, and the counties of Los Angeles in particular, have been recurrent concerns of cultural theorists interested in space and spatial theorists interested in cultural representation. The effects of the barrage of media (both visual and print) associated with this State are felt in what Davis (in Soja 1989) has called "the 'Californization' of Late-Imperial America" (229). Not only has the "celluloid of the electronic screen remained the dominant media of the region's self-expression" (Davis 1992, 23) but the screenic image has been the primary mode by which California has been disseminated to the rest of the world. The exact nature of the depiction of California rests in a dialectic between utopia and dystopia. On the one hand, we are regaled with images of street fighting, urban warfare, environmental blight, decay, poverty and the site of post-apocalypse. On the other hand, California is offered as "a theme-park themed paradise where the American Dream is repetitively renewed and made infinitely available: as much like the movies as real-reel life can get" (Soja 1996, 238). California is depicted here as provocatively filled with sun and beaches, tanned beautiful bodies, wealth and opportunity, safety and home, friendship and cleanliness. It is in the impossibility of maintaining the pretensions of utopia, the balance between order and homogeneity, and disruption and violence that Sunnydale emerges.

California offers an image of the end of the known world. Baudrillard (1988) has written that "America is neither dream nor reality. It is a hyperreality" (26). Based on the book from which this passage is taken I can extrapolate that he would find California among America's most hyperreal spaces. Baudrillard's understanding of the hyperreal emerges abreast his conceptualizing of the simulacrum. California is hyperreal because it is even more real than the real and it is a simulacrum because there is no e(x)ternal real from which 'California' emerges. The concatenation of 'real' and mediated images of America's utopic/dystopic landscape are described by Davis (1992):

Hollywood pop's apocalypses and pulp science fiction have been more realistic, and politically perceptive, in representing the programmed hardening of the urban surface in the wake of the social polarizations of the Reagan era. Images of carcereal inner cities (*Escape from New York*, *Running Man*), high-tech police death

squads (*Blade Runner*), sentient building (*Die Hard*), urban bantustans (*They Live!*), Vietnam-like street wars (*Colors*), and so on, only extrapolate from actually existing trends (223).

Southern California is home to the most wealthy as well as the most abject and disenfranchised; at once the land of opportunity and the boulevard of broken dreams. Nowhere is this more dramatically evident than in the hyperrealized spaces of Los Angeles and its outlying counties, and the mediascape seems to take these spaces and offer them up as a vision of nostalgic perfection: a utopic vision of pristine, suburban space. It performs what Soja (1996) describes as a “generative utopia, a make-believe paradise that successfully makes you believe in make-believing, the most irresistibly California-looking of all the Californias, the most like the movies and TV “situation comedies,” the most like the promised American Dream” (274). California thus represents both real and imagined spaces, constantly evolving to meet the expectations of a new generation of global viewers with productions that bank on – literally, since these spaces cannot be separated from their market-driven consumption - the appeal of its representational spaces.

The Californian spaces most central to this project have been developed in the televisual landscape: the spaces of Sunnydale. This coastal suburban town - where *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* unfolds - emerges at the intersection of the u/dys/topian dialectic of Californian suburban space and wreaks havoc with the nostalgic impulses found there. Sunnydale represents the impossibility of suburban purity and homogeneity. The production/performance of Sunnydale is mired in a romance with millennial California. Rather than catering to either nostalgia or nihilism, it offers a ludic parody of the West Coast suburb. Sunnydale is not the idyllic suburb of a nostalgic past that never was, but instead confronts the continued construction of that fantasy in the televisual imagination. It is a doubled space where nostalgia meets irony and parody in the creation of the monstrous both without and within.

From a critical perspective it is possible to recognize, in the figure of the vampire and demon, a reinscription of visual difference which is elsewhere absent from the text. The show concerns itself with, on one level, ridding the text of this visual difference, which can be read at best as hegemonic, at worst as



overtly racist. But I am not sure of how stable such a reading is, as the idea of difference, in this text, is introduced through the problematizing of other hierarchies (i.e. feminine /masculine, animal/human, evil/good). Even vampires and demons are not confined to stereotypical roles, and the possibility that vampires may be good, while good, suburban mothers and fathers may become possessed and try to kill their children, is just one way that the text refuses to remain aligned with a strictly hegemonic reading. The story of the town of Sunnydale is that of a man (a white, rich one) so drunk with the desire for absolute power that he makes his home a trough from which 'evil' may feed. But like many 'real' patriarchs he can never fully control the spaces of his creation and surveillance, and upon opening the door to difference he can in no way maintain the hegemony of his position. Instead he also opens spaces from which *The Slayer* can emerge: where girls can become witches and boys werewolves, where vampires and demons can work for good as well as evil and can love, where the popular and powerful do not always emerge victorious, where parents are not always right, where teachers do not always have all the answers, where the law and government do not always keep the interests of the people in mind, where people can act on behalf of others.

### *Suburban spaces*

The specific context of this text - Sunnydale and the Hellmouth - is a space which is make-believe held in check by a familiar fantasy of Southern California at the end of the millennium. Sunnydale represents the far reaches of Californian suburbia, superficially white, middle-class safety but with monsters lurking in every corner. The suburban teen has a particular intertextual history, often seen as living in a banal wasteland of excessive consumption, both commodity and sexual. In her article on desire and the bodies of adolescent girls, Tolman (1994) makes a distinction between urban dwelling girls and the suburban girls she interviewed. She writes: "these suburban girls voiced a more internal conflict in relation to their sexual desire, a discrepancy between what they described feeling in their bodies and the cultural messages about female sexuality and appropriate female behavior that they have internalized" (265-66). In Tolman's designation, the suburban girl exists in an especially excessive relation to representation,

having more difficulty in differentiating between these modes of discourse than her urban counterparts. This analysis seems to posit suburban youth as both more imbricated in representational discourse and more tenuously grounded in reality. This is also manifested in the way suburbia is depicted in the media, as always somehow separate from the 'real' world. This may be useful in explaining why texts which focus on the suburban context are among the most homogeneously populated in the mainstream, but also suggests that suburbia may provide the perfect opportunity for slippage. The suburb, like the setting which is strictly fantastical in nature, is not held to the boundaries of other locales, which is why it seems to make perfect sense that Slayers and werewolves and witches and vampires and demons are manifested there. In the city there would be no slippage, these characters would fit right into the existing social matrix. In the suburb they perform against the false hope of normalcy and their refusal to remain fixed in either body or gender attribute becomes more potentially insurgent.

The creation of the suburb is linked to the ability to achieve prosperity: the 'American' dream. Over the years the suburb's qualities have changed. There has been the growth of fortified suburbs which set out to offer prestige and security to an elite middle-class in an ever more insecure America (Blakely and Synder 1997), while older suburbs have seen a growth in crime and violence. Growing numbers of people continue to flee urban centers in an attempt to find some vestige of the suburb's promised security. Davis (1992) writes: "developers are not just repackaging the myth (the good life in the suburbs) for the next generation; they are also pandering to a new, burgeoning fear of the city" (6). The suburb in television has also changed, although it has continued to promulgate the association of suburbanism with homogeneity, safety and communality. Signs of danger which come to be visible in the televisual suburb are saturated with race and class dynamics, as the suburb's previously white middle-class homogeneity is increasingly challenged, at least indirectly.

The suburb on television remains a space for performances of the same and the normal. But, as Silverstone (1997), cautions: "Suburbia, the product of the complex and untidy histories and geographies of urbanization and modernization, is just such. Instantly recognizable though never entirely

familiar. Ubiquitous but invisible. Secure but fragile. Desired but reviled. Suburbia is neither singular nor unchanging" (4). This is perhaps the most fundamental and perplexing aspect of the performance of suburbia, that it is both detested and yet seen as a sort of salvation. Firth (1997) writes: "Suburban living is characterized by what it lacks – culture, variety, surprise – not by what it offers – safety, privacy, convenience" (276). This cultural aporia is central to two other characteristics of the suburbs: boredom and open possibility (Firth 1997, Savage in Lebeau 1997). The sanctity of suburban life lies in its ability to continually recreate itself as the same in the face of constant outgrowth from the urban centers which threaten to spill over into its pristine spaces. The suburb is not only the space where nothing happens and no one drops by unexpectedly, but also the place where, it is hoped, the possibility of these performances is virtually nil. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the excess of unexpected performances and the impossibility of ever containing them sets a new challenge to the production of the American suburb on television.

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Sunnydale masquerades as a paradigmatic suburb and this spatial production allows for the association of the suburb with qualities of homogeneity, safety, enclosure, exclusion, boredom, possibility and the refusal of the urban.<sup>216</sup> Sunnydale is constructed specifically to perform (and conform to) these expectations. And yet the performances that occur within the text reconfigure the suburb as being open to unexpected possibility, as diverse, dangerous, open, exciting and on the brink or urban decay. On the surface, Sunnydale conforms to the nostalgic visual image of the suburb (white, middle-class and American). It seems to be a place where nothing has ever happened and nothing ever will. But the text continually shows how these suburban qualities are relegated to the surface, to the expectation of what the suburban community and its residents should be, to the nostalgic image, to a certain cultural desire. Beneath this surface lurks another image of suburbia which is

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<sup>216</sup> Although perhaps not the first of such depictions, *Poltergeist* (1982) is certainly at the center of the production of suburban anxiety in film. In his extensive reading of this film Kellner (1995) describes how the film "negotiates middle-class insecurities concerning gender, race and class in the contemporary era" (127). Like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Poltergeist* is firmly rooted in visual and narrative discourses of suburban life and the attempt to keep these spaces free of Others. Interestingly, in *Poltergeist*, the main channel between humanity and the supernatural monsters on the Netherworld in a television set.

not completely unfamiliar, in an uncanny image the suburb is revealed to be a metaphor of disease and contagion: infested with Others, death awaits in every corner, nothing is what it seems to be, corruption is the norm, violence is mundane, families are decimated, children are vigilantes, every day offers the possibility of new and disruptive performances.<sup>217</sup> Sunnydale is the vision of the suburb at the dawn of the millennium where the dangers of urbanity themselves become a nostalgic memory.

### *Community spaces*

Community has particular importance in discussions of spatiality. While there has been some work which has focused on the creation of community through discussion of television and how viewers feel themselves to fit in relation to communities of characters (i.e. McKinley 1997) there has been very little focus on how communities are constituted within the specific spatializations of television programs. One of the few places where televisual community has been theorized is in relation to the daytime soap opera. Rosen (1986) writes:

As the stable small town fades, the soap opera keeps alive its idealized replica, the image of a community in which everyone knows or is related to everyone else, where continuity counts more than transience, where right and wrong are unambiguous, where good triumphs over evil. It is a world dominated by the domestic values of the familiar... Moral failure is tolerated, but never condoned. As long as sinners bow to the community's idea of itself, they can belong and be redeemed (49).

Mumford (1995) writes that soap operas "replicate nostalgic fantasies about the intimacy of the traditional family or small town. Television provided an illusion of the ideal neighborhood – the way it was supposed to be" (63). The soap opera is a specific televisual genre, one which is almost as familiar with monsters (though these even more often take human form) as is the *Buffy* text and which, also like *Buffy*, always seeks recourse to the moral community to restore order.

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<sup>217</sup> Movie suburbs like those depicted in *Suburbia* and *The River's Edge* show a vision of the suburb whose surface matches its depths in apathy and violence. This is also true of the literary suburbs in the works of, for example, A.M. Homes.

The soap opera, as a genre, demands a specificity of community construction that necessitates their (re)creation in opposition to any real space; their interpellation into both diegetic and 'real' spaces by creating rather silly, fictional names: Port Charles (*General Hospital*, *Port Charles*), Sunset Beach (*Sunset Beach*), Pine Valley (*All My Children*), Genoa City (*The Young and the Restless*), Springfield (*Guiding Light*), Landview (*One Life to Live*), Bay City (*Another World*), Salem (*Days of our Lives*) and Harmony (*Passions*). Some soap operas have been performed in extra-textually constructed spaces (i.e. New York City) but that this has not been the norm. Although these cities and towns are supposed to be situated somewhere in the United States, there is little to indicate where they historically and culturally emerge, except the televisual. In fact, it is the lack of filiation to any sociohistory that is one of the most important parts of the construction of territory in the soap opera.

Sunnydale bears a strong resemblance to these towns in the manner of its construction. It is a fictional space firmly embedded in real space but bearing little or no sociohistorical traces of that construction and empty of any historical connection to the California landscape on which it is supposed to stand. It is devoid of traces of difference in its population. Where difference returns, in this space, is through the uncanniness of the un-dead who are displaced onto the spaces of Sunnydale and yet seem to have no claim to it. Again allegorically, this speaks to the very real anxiety espoused in the Western United States about immigration and the infiltration of difference into homogeneous suburban areas. Like the soap opera, *Buffy* follows the silly name trend; it has something of a regressive, children's story quality, like Barry's "never-never land." The naming of Sunnydale, like Harmony mentioned above, is a mocking semantic strategy. It is unclear whether or not there are dales in Sunnydale, but the town's atmosphere is anything but sunny, part of the irony of this excessive, too-good-to-be-true naming. Like modern suburbs and developments, the name suggests that it is a safe and admirable place to live and belies any dangers which might be present. Blakely and Snyder (1997) write that:

Community is a vague term, loaded with history, moral connotations, nostalgia, and romanticism. Community implies sharing: usually shared territories, certainly shared experiences or

social interactions, and also shared traditions, institutions, common goals or purposes, and political or economic structures. It implies not just a feeling of community, but participation in the social life of a place, and often also the political and economic life, because of a sense of shared destiny within the territorial community (32).

Once the boundaries of community are established, what other markers are there for groupings of people (characters) within these communities and the performances they call into being? The generic suburban community of a town like Sunnydale is set out against what it is not: diverse and urban. Frankenberg (1993) focuses on the construction of whiteness by women in California in the eighties and points to the importance of physical location in any construction of difference and community. In *Buffy*, the pervasiveness of a white, middle-class population contributes to the “modes of belonging” articulated within the community (205). But within the boundaries of Sunnydale other communities also developing apart from notions of suburban citizenship.

One of the central aspects of community organization are the politics which govern performances of inclusion and exclusion. Clarke (1997b) writes: “The stranger was, in effect, the personification of all that modernity’s efforts at cognitive spacing sought in vain to annihilate, and merely succeeded in displacing” (4). The stranger’s performance need not be interpreted so literally and can be related to the exclusion of any individual who does not conform to the normative guidelines of a particular community – who is, in effect, made strange. The stranger (in the sense Clarke seems to describe) tends to be excluded on the basis of physical location, class and difference, while in the *Buffy* text the presence of the stranger is mostly felt in the division between humanity and the un-dead. The moral community (discussed in chapter six) – called upon to limit the presence of the ‘stranger’ - acts as border guard, patrolling the boundaries of their community and at the same time securing order and good conduct within the community. In order for the moral community to function adequately, there must be a unified notion of good and evil which empowers the community to action in the defense of their vision of goodness. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the moral community (comprised of Buffy and her shifting group of friends) is the police presence and stands in as the panopticon for the entire town. Against this moral community is set an immoral one whose performances

threaten the sanctified spaces the moral community calls home. In this text the vampires and demons, as well as Faith on occasion, are demonstrated to be an immoral threat to Sunnydale. The presence of these characters, and the performances which they enact in the textual space, necessitate the immediate action of the moral community who are bent on their removal from the text.<sup>218</sup> Of course, the text itself holds this as an impossibility, as it would bring about the end of the narrative. The presence of the immoral community is thus necessary not only for the validation of the moral community (of their morality) but for the perpetuation of the text as a whole. In this sense, this process can be linked to Foucault's notion of governmentality, of which he writes: "it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or states might be directed... It did not only cover the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection, but also modes of action, more or less considered and calculated, which were designed to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of actions of others" (in Allen 1991, 430-31). That is, the moral community depends of the presence of its 'Other' for its ability to perform as well as govern.

Other forms of community which are constituted in this text involve social rather than moral performances, often built out of hierarchical dualisms. The first concerns the humans and the vampires or un-dead. Though related to the question of moral community, it also has a suggestive allegorical element where the vampire comes to represent all those groups deemed socially undesirable. It is not merely that the community of Sunnydale finds the un-dead dangerous and morally bankrupt and wishes to exclude them (or eradicate them) from their territorial spaces, but the converse is also true. A community is also fostered among the un-dead and this community finds the community of humans equally reprehensible. Each group performs mutual disgust for the other and it is through this antipathic performance (which is monstrosity/humanity, immorality/morality, chaos/order, un-dead/alive) that each community is defined. Another axis along which community is formed is age.

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<sup>218</sup> I mean this in the sense that the intention of the moral community is to destroy the vampire. At other times, when they are sent to hell or underground, they remain in the diegesis. This is still within the realm of the fictive text, just another region of it. It is only with their literal destruction (reduced to a pile of ashes) that vampires actually exit the spatial system of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

There is a definite disjuncture between the adolescents and adults in this text. The attainment of adulthood excludes the adult characters from inclusion in the youth community, as being adolescents excludes the younger characters from inclusion in adult community spaces. Among the adolescent characters there is, however, no unified community but a plethora of subcultures related to the performances of each adolescent character. In the text various communities of youth subculture are introduced: popular girls, jocks, musicians, vampire worshippers, cheerleaders, fraternity brother, and The Slayer's circle (sometimes known as the nerds or misfits). These are not necessarily the subcultural groups which are familiar from 'real' life – punks, rockers, preps, goths, skaters, etc. – but they are very familiar from many other youth-oriented texts. Each group is defined by aesthetics (hierarchy) and performances which acknowledge their inclusion and insist on their exclusion from other groups. This is demonstrated, for example, when Cordelia chastizes Willow for her poor fashion sense and how Cordelia is humiliated when her friends discover that she dated unfashionable Xander.

Community is equally defined by the spaces into which its members are allowed and those from which they are restricted. The underground cavern, the Mausoleum, the sewers, the Factory, are all spaces which in part define the community of the un-dead. They are visual cues into the nature of that community: darkness, rock, candles, skulls, etc. In these spaces the un-dead are at home and live with very little sense of threat. The same is true of the cover of night, but by day the vampire is constantly threatened by sunlight and so this space is barred to them. The day then, becomes the spatial community of humanity. Each of these examples structures the narrative alliances between the characters as communities through two sets of relations: spatial and performative. Community space is both produced through performance and performs itself. Within the (tele)visual narrative, performances of space and community are bounded by performances which precipitate inclusion or exclusion, initiation or expulsion. Community is performance regulating how characters align themselves with or against one another along a variety of axes of difference. Whether difference is seen as essential or constructed, communities are only able to define themselves through the presence (performance) of the Other and through the policing of boundaries and membership. In this text, without the immorality of the vampire, the moral community becomes incapable



of performance. Either it withers and disappears or it is forced to seek out a new immorality by which to define itself, in much the same way that dirt comes to “link-up with... symbolic systems of purity” (Douglas 1966, 36). Likewise, different adolescent subcultures must continually rely on each other to define the uniqueness and exclusivity of their membership.

#### DIFFERENCE: SPACES OF ELISION

Difference has recently been accorded a central position in readings of spatiality. In relation to the mass media, this issue takes on two distinct forms. In the first, there is the problem of the elision of difference from the mediascape as a whole. Media texts tend to be closed homogenous spaces which do not afford any room for diversity of race, religion, ethnicity and ability although minor inroads have been made along the axes of sexuality and class. The second concerns the “ ‘fictive ethnicity’ of ‘whiteness’ ” (Doel and Clarke 1997, 10). Whiteness has become a terrain of inquiry for writers like Wray and Newitz (1997) and Dyer (1997) who attempt to demonstrate the impossibility of a unified ‘whiteness’ and to dislodge it from the normative connotations against which all other terms come to be both defined and judged. This is how whiteness and all the terms that occupy the binary’s positive side, operate in the mainstream media.

In his examination of the cities and suburbs of Los Angeles County, Davis (1992) demonstrates how many communities remain strikingly homogeneous despite the increasing diversity of the population as a whole and describes how “[S]ocial polarization has increased almost as rapidly as population” (7). Bhabha (1997), in an essay that deals specifically with the suburb as a spatial form, writes:

There is a culture war going on that seeks to ‘suburbanize’ the world of America. Its agenda is traditional and conservative; its buzzwords are predictable – ‘family values’, ‘opportunity society’, ‘individual responsibility’, ‘free market’, ‘the work ethic’. But the crusading spirit of the campaign is most powerfully conveyed through its negative rhetoric: anti-social-welfare, anti-intellectuals, anti-universities, anti-public-funding for the arts and humanities, anti-minorities (298-99).

He continues: “the conservative suburban attitude is founded on the fear of difference; and a narrow-minded appeal to cultural homogeneity. It is a kind of national paranoia that draws the boundary between what is acceptable and unacceptable ever more tightly around the norm of the ‘known’ ” (299). In demonstrating the representational possibility of a continued spatial hegemony which refuses the inclusion (or the consideration) of difference, media texts pander to the fear of the unknown and different. This is not uniformly so, both because of narrow-cast programming and the impossibility of ever entirely shoring up hegemonic readings.

The media, however, often suggest that boundaries against difference can exist and the paranoia they alleviate is legitimate. Media texts cannot simply do this by eliding difference from the screen. It is necessary to maintain - somewhere at least close to the boundary of social space - the specter of the stranger who threatens the sanctity of the social spaces each text creates. Clarke (1997b) writes: “The hallmark of the stranger...was immediately proximate in physical space yet distant in *social* space. That the social and the physical worlds were no more coterminous gave rise to a new kind of *virtual* or *spectral* presence – a flickering ontology or *hauntology* (Derrida, 1994) – characteristic of the stranger” (4).<sup>219</sup> Hauntology seems a particularly appropriate for the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* where difference most often does appear in the form of the un-dead who have returned to h(a)unt the homogeneous spaces of

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<sup>219</sup> Emphases in the original. Of this term, Derrida (1994) writes: “In its two concepts (conjunction and conjurement, *Verschworung* and *Beschworung*), we must take into account another essential meaning: the act that consists in swearing, taking an oath, therefore promising, deciding, taking a *responsibility*, in short, committing oneself in a performative fashion – as well as in a more or less secret fashion, and thus more or less public, there where this frontier between the public and the private is constantly being displaced, remaining less assured than ever, as the limit that would permit one to identify the political. And if this important frontier is being displaced, it is because the medium in which it is instituted, namely, the medium of the media themselves (news, the press, Tele-communications, techno-Tele-discursivity, techno-tele- iconicity, that which in general assures and determines the *spacing* of public space, the very possibility of the *res publica* add the phenomenality of the political), this element itself is neither living or dead, present nor absent: it spectralizes. It does not belong to ontology, to the discourse on the Being or beings, or to the essence of life or death. It requires, then, what we call, to save time and space rather than just to make up a word, *hauntology*. We will take this category to be irreducible, and first of all to everything it makes possible: ontology, theology, positive or negative onto-theology” (50-51, emphases in the original).

Sunnydale. In this the return of the oppressed the viewer is left with the task of accepting the un-dead to stand in for the elision of other differences within the *Buffy* text. That is, of visual or representational (citational) differences such as race, religion, ethnicity, etc. that seem to disappear from the *Buffy* text. Difference does creep back into this text in various forms: the atavism of the werewolf, the post-feminist Wicca, the 'good' vampire, the prom queen Slayer. These differences are, however, moderated by whether those who perform them are situated inside or outside the moral community. In their presumed lack of humanity the un-dead become the appropriate h[a]unt for a moral community intent on fostering the integrity of their borders. Irigaray (1985a) describes how negative visual spaces can be understood as "blanks [that] sub-tend the scene's structuration and [that] will not yet be read as such" (138). It is this negative space - where the picture is what is left over - that is linked to questions of self/other, 'normal' and 'abject;' the attribution of lack (of beauty, humanity, health, etc.) works powerfully to subordinate and justify power. Consigned to the recesses of the suburban territory, the un-dead seep into the borders of community through the Hellmouth, the cover of darkness, the distance of history and the cavernous underground. They enter and take root in spaces which are beyond the control of humanity.

The un-dead who can 'pass' as Sunnydale residents when they take human form can leave their hidden spaces - at least under the cover of night. As Mr. Trick points out, he is rather conspicuous in Sunnydale because he is Black. That would be true whether he performed a vampire or a human being. In a similar fashion, when Spike is injured and must use a wheelchair, he is forbidden from leaving the underground caverns. And although Drusilla sometimes escapes her underground confines, her madness often keeps her restricted within them. Other demons and vampires can also be read as 'too old' or 'disfigured' or 'obese' to be allowed to pass through the Sunnydale community. In this way the text also restricts the movement of difference to anyone who can pass as part of Sunnydale's homogeneous community. Those who cannot represent excess and disorder, what 'modern' and rational 'man' cannot contain but seeks to control. It is not their presence as such which creates hostility and paranoia in humanity, it is the violence which they are read as performing (as opposed to the violence

of humanity) and the difficulty in reading through their ability to pass themselves off as human ('us').

Related to my earlier discussions of the normal and not, Rose (1993) writes that "the territory of the Same is differentiated between the center of the Same and the margin of the Other" (151). The dichotomy same/other or normal/not works in various ways in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* but is primarily oriented towards a differentiation between Sunnydale's human population and the un-dead who live beneath them. The un-dead live within the boundaries that are defined as belonging to the same (Sunnydale, suburbia); required to live where they are despised and unable (or un-willing) to move off and set up communities away from this center. Aside from their need to feed off the blood of humanity, readings of other vampiric texts show that the moral community will seek out and destroy the un-dead no matter where they live. Even when positioned at the very limit or margin of the same, they can never move far enough away to create their own center.

Most vampiric texts (especially dramatic texts) set up the vampire as a cold-blooded killer. Even though a few texts question the morality of the vampire killer almost as stringently as they question the morality of the vampire, the moral community and its homogeneity are rarely, if ever, made the object of retribution in the way in which the vampire is. In this way, the moral community is given a silent acknowledgement that their actions against the Other are legitimate, moral performances. The elision of visual difference, the assertion of that difference is dangerous and must be annihilated is among the most hegemonic functions that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* performs. There are several ways to read this performance of hegemony. The first is the elision of difference across the visual discourse of mainstream television. Where visual difference is presented as performing only in homogeneous landscapes (that is, entirely African-American or entirely working class). There is a second reading which shows the spatial performances of the text as not merely hegemonic, but racist. If the vampires and other un-dead represent a specific community existing on the fringes of suburban society, then the text's insistence that they must be eradicated is frightening to say the least. That this social group is seen as inherently violent and thus their elimination is found to be acceptable or even

necessary echoes feelings about marginalized social groups, the urban and the immigrant in the 'real' world.<sup>220</sup> This reading is problematized by a third, which posits difference as performed in an excessive manner throughout this text. This, as I have already written, is deployed through the performance of difference within the moral community itself, in the guise of Slayer (Buffy), witch (Willow), werewolf (Oz), demon (Anya, Whistler), vampire (Angel, Spike), ripper (Giles). Though in this text, vampires are sometimes produced along the lines of sociopathic serial killers bent on world domination, or as a dangerous, marginal group, they are not so easily classified as such. Nor is the moral community so simply performed as 'good.'

The elision of visual difference in the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is made no less problematic by the fact that difference tends to be elided unilaterally across the mediascape. It reminds us that the question raised by feminists as to which bodies may be performed on television only touches the tip of the iceberg. It is necessary to ask which other bodies disappear from the mediascape, which Othered bodies may stand in, in their stead, and what those Othered bodies represent. Blakely and Snyder (1997) write that "strangers of any description are an automatic inducement to fear and distrust" (100) and in the television text the stranger often takes on characteristics associated with difference. In *Buffy*, the vampire sometimes stands in for the stranger, sometimes a more 'human' character does. Westwood and Williams (1997) write that "[T]he inability to work with difference is [also] part of the ways in which popular narratives from TV, tabloids, novels and songs actually *domesticate* the city, taking out the *risqué* elements and making it safe – for some" (11).<sup>221</sup> The *Buffy* text, however, refuses to domesticate the city/suburb by inserting danger and difference into supposedly safe space and suggests that this danger comes from within as well as from without. It is not really possible to accept the delineation of the vampire as an eternal evil within this text, as there are still characters – Angel and sometime Spike – who belie this easy dichotomy. Likewise, humans cannot be so easily delineated as 'good.'

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<sup>220</sup> My thanks to Arpen Basu who, although he had not seen a great deal of the *Buffy* text, played devil's advocate with me as we discussed this possible reading and how it might affect my understanding of the text as a whole.

<sup>221</sup> Emphases in the original.

## GENDERED SPACES

The question of gender in relation to space and community is, like difference, being taken up by cultural theorists. Gillian Rose and Daphne Spain, for example, have been asking questions about the quality of feminine spaces and the necessity for a feminist geography to address questions that have been ignored by traditional inquiries in the discipline. Spain (1992) specifically addresses the question of gendered spaces and their importance in the construction of the feminine subject. She writes that “[S]pace is organized in ways that reproduce gender differences in power and privilege. Status is embedded in spatial arrangements, so that changing space potentially changes the status hierarchy and changing status potentially changes spatial institutions” (232). One of the intentions of this section is to question whether the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* attempts to rearrange gendered spaces. Rose’s (1993) work provides the foundation for a specifically feminist geography. She describes that “[F]or feminists, the everyday routines traced by women are never unimportant, because the seemingly banal and trivial events of the everyday are bound into the power structures which limit and confine women” (17). The questions raised and theories proposed by Spain and Rose are central to concerns about women and their relation to space. They provide a map for further inquiry into the production of gendered space (lived, mediated, performative).

Cultural theorists have found that one of the crucial links between space and femininity has been the mid twentieth century drive to the American suburbs. In urban areas, woman often lived in close proximity to family and friends and enjoyed the possibility of maintaining social ties to their diverse religious and ethnic groups. Because of the density of the urban population, women were able to socialize even if they were consumed with domestic duties and child rearing. In rural areas, despite the often large distance between farms and families, women were usually involved with work outside the home. But the suburbs presented a new spatial configuration for women, one that often curtailed their social performances beyond the domestic. Rose (1993) writes: “Feminist geographers have argued that suburbs were built for a commuting husband and a domestic wife, and that their spatial structure reinforces the

separation of women from waged work and public life" (123). Soja (1996), whose work is influenced by that of Rose, writes: "Suburbanization and urban sprawl became materially symbolic of the marginalization or, as it came to be called, the "entrapment" of women, their purposefully designed isolation from the workplace and public life" (110). Hartley (1997) takes this argument further, attributing to the suburbanization of women their "subjugation to the 'feminine career,' tying them to housework, child rearing, and abuse...sexual perversity, domestic violence, incest and anorexia" (185). Silverstone (1997) merely states: "Suburban culture is a gendered culture" (7).

Because *The Slayer* in the most important structuring device of the text, the space she inhabits takes on a feminine quality. The notion of space as feminine is not new. Best (1995), for example, writes: "Henri Lefebvre provides a very curious example of this. He uses the female body to produce his concept of contemporary neocapitalist space. He states: "The ways in which space is thus carved up are reminiscent of the ways in which the body is cut into pieces in images (especially the female body...)" (183). Best then continues that "[T]he female body delivers a conception of bounded mappable space, space which can still be understood as a totality even if it is internally fractured or carved up" (184). In this text it is precisely the feminine nature of the space that makes it difficult to map. This text begins with an appreciation of the ideas that both Lefebvre and Best by suggesting that there is a correlation between the feminine and space. But the contours of that space are rendered ambiguous as 'the feminine' proves again and again that it cannot be contained within a preconceived understanding of that term. Sunnydale may be a spatial creation of the male imagination (Weedon's, *The Mayor's*) but its borders are policed by a female body who refuses that her trajectory be so easily mapped. Buffy may exhibit gendered behavior that is appropriate in larger modes of discourse, but in her shift to *Slayer* she turns these expectations around. It is her context which accords her gender mobility as well as the primacy of action in performance.

Unlike many youth-oriented texts, *Buffy's* movement is governed by a discourse of action rather than sexual relations. That does not mean that the sexual body is done away with, but that it often emerges in relation to more action oriented structures within the text, that is, the fight between *The Slayer*

and the forces of evil. In this text, there is only a minor "policing of sex," that is to say that within the heteronormative mandates of the text sex goes on without intervention by figures of authority (Foucault 1990, 25). These issue of context also problematize questions of sexual danger in relation to gender. Holland and Eisenhart (1990) write: "Because a girl moved in a "sexual space," she could not roam freely or go out alone, as a boy her age might. Roaming around would have resulted in her being labeled a "slag" or a "promiscuous, "easy" girl and possibly in physical assault" (46). Despite the semantic dangers a sexual young woman might in counter in this text, her physical safety is rarely questioned with regard to sexual violence. If the girls can hold their own amongst the threat of demons and vampires, they are supposed to be equally assured of being able to handle the young men who might pose them a sexual threat. This is most obviously performed in "Go Fish," where Buffy easily breaks the nose of a young man who tries to sexually assault her.

The proximity to the Hellmouth and the location of the text within a suburban fantasy rejects many easy expectations of the gendered and sexualized body. If sex and pleasure are to be read as performing within a more overarching power structure than this text allows more space then usual to the feminine. The female body continues to be constructed along gender specific lines, as does the male. But the locus of power (physical, emotional and sexual) is less evenly distributed and often leans heavily in favor of the feminine. The power structure of this text in its specific context revolves around Buffy Summers, The Slayer, and as such allows the female actor, for once, to show just how powerful she can be.

While a gendered configuration of space may continue to some extent in suburban culture, it is no longer the only route offered to the suburban woman, even in her mediated form. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* there is little attribution of restrictive domesticity to the feminine characters, nor is there much aspiration towards this role in the adolescent characters. In the traditional formulation of suburban femininity, there was little or no space for single women, professional women, or divorced women, though all of these are represented in the *Buffy* text. The first adult, suburban woman the viewer encounters is Buffy's mother, Joyce Summers. Recently divorced, she sees Sunnydale as a place to start over, a space



for exerting control over her teenaged daughter, a space for finding employment. Joyce quickly finds a job and a social life, and although Sunnydale does not provide the bounded safety which she had hoped for, it does not force her to be circumscribed to the domestic space of home either. Sheila Rosenberg, Willow's mother provides another example of the working mother. Although still married to Willow's father Ira (though he never makes an appearance in the text) Sheila enjoys a very active career as a psychologist. Though the text does suggest that Sheila is too concerned with her career and does not pay enough attention to her daughter (a contemporary concern about absentee parents), it does manage to convey that suburban motherhood does not have to be consumed by home and children. Jenny Calendar as the single woman provides a third example. She has a busy professional life as a computer teacher at Sunnydale High and though she does become involved with Giles there is no pretext of making their relationship the locus of marriage and procreation. Thus, in this text, many possibilities for women are presented outside those which organized traditional suburban divisions of labor. Willow and Buffy echo this feeling into the next generation, looking to the future they see the possibility of careers as well as marriage, even within the confines of Sunnydale and thus allow the possibility of an insurgent rethinking of suburban space in relation to (white, middle-class) femininity.

There are, of course, hegemonic discourses that exists in opposition to this one. Buffy does sometimes worry about her mother's lack of a mate and seems to picture a life-with-father as perhaps superior to the one she shares with her single-mother. Willow sometimes reaffirms her mother's depiction as a stereotypical workingwoman who 'neglects' her family in order to further her career. The true mouth of hegemony is, however, Cordelia's. Although we know little of her mother, Cordelia's constant reference to her father's wealth suggests a more traditionally suburban structure of family life. Cordelia wishes to perpetuate this cycle of hegemony and repeatedly references her desire to marry a rich man. At the end of the third season, however, her unscrupulous parents have been bankrupted, which throws yet another wrench into the picturesque image of the suburban family that this text never allows to be seen as ideal.

Another interesting aspect of gender and the spaces of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is that it is in the realm of the un-dead that gender boundaries are often best maintained. Most of the high-ranking vampires and demons are masculine figures (The Mayor, The Master, The Anointed One, Akatla, The Judge, Spike, Mr. Trick and Kaikistos), while the female vampires are reduced to minions or, in the case of Darla (or Faith), favorites of the masters. Even among the living, social power tends to be accorded to masculinity (Principal Snyder, Giles, Guidance Counselor Platt and The Council). In this text, spaces of social authority are almost exclusively given over to the masculine. Buffy can be seen to rule in her role of Slayer and to exercise authority as well, but this is always tempered by her age. While the feminine is not always excluded, her inclusion is not the rule in authoritative spaces which tend to be gendered male. Although masculine figures of authority are often questioned and rebelled against, their basic capacity for authoritative performance is rarely questioned.

Other spaces may also be seen as adhering to gendered spatializations. Two of these spaces are located in Sunnydale High School. In the first, although it is possible to speculate that there are women's sports at Sunnydale High, the only ones that are rendered in performance are boys' teams. In all avenues of team sports, the males are dominant (a perhaps dated nineteen-fifties dynamic with nineties touches). The swim team, for example - the focus of "Go Fish" - are repeatedly shown to be given a freedom of movement within the school which is withheld from the other students. Buffy is sanctioned for defending herself when one of the team members tries to molest her in his car. Willow is instructed that she cannot fail a star athlete whose performance is necessary for the continued victory of the team. Larry, a member of the football team, is repeatedly shown bullying male and harassing female students with no administrative intervention. The only female athletic performance which is demonstrated in this text is the cheerleading squad. Although these girls do their share of tormenting, their restrictive delineation of space is directed primarily towards other girls. While they may keep the space around them clear of undesirable males they are not given the power to physically sanction male space.

Women seem to dominate the gender-specific space of the girls bathroom, which is the scene of several encounters. It is where Willow goes to cry after learning that Xander has slept with Faith; where Buffy and Willow interrogate Debbie there after learning that her boyfriend Pete is responsible for several murders; and where the invisible girl tries to get noticed. The girls' bathroom, in some sense, offers a sanctuary in the school where the performance of masculinity is restricted. It is a space where girls can go for silence and to be alone and also for homosocial communion. Similar in its performance is the space of the girls' bedroom. Although this is a space into which males can be invited, it is most often a space which accords status to homosocial performance. Like the bathroom, the bedroom is a contradictory space both public and private, a space for introspection and communion and experimentation. Buffy sits in her room when she is sad about Angel. Buffy and Faith spend a lot of time in Faith's room arguing about morality. Willow and Buffy talk about boys there, as well as about friendship. Like the bathroom, the bedroom offers a space which is gendered female.

Many of the spaces which are bounded by gender do not deviate much from hegemonic expectations. Masculinity is most often granted the space of civic authority and social power while femininity governs the more private spaces of domesticity and homosociality. It is through the intervention of The Slayer that gendered spaces are most obviously remapped. Russo (1994) writes that "in the everyday indicative world, women and their bodies, certain bodies, in certain public framings, in certain public spaces, are always already transgressive - dangerous and in danger" (60). It is exactly this space that The Slayer constitutes through her performance. She refuses to recognize the authoritative spaces of masculinity and constantly breaks the boundaries which surround them. In one sense, this is an insurgent act: Buffy refuses to accord masculine authority its due and insists on questioning or overturning it in favor of her own power. In this text, Buffy's presence is almost always more dangerous than in danger. In fact, the continuation of the series requires that her performance be safe within virtually any situation. Buffy performs that, as The Slayer, almost any space can be reclaimed for the feminine. The most striking of these being the night and the street. Both of these are spaces that have been

barred to women who, upon entering them, do so at the risk of assault and bodily injury. Though in this text the night is ruled by the un-dead (and more mundane terrors), Buffy walks the streets as predator rather than prey. She does not stick to the brightly-lit streets, but seeks out dark corners where danger may lie in wait. She refuses a position of victimization in relation to the bullies and jocks in her school. These fights often take on very gendered tones, as when she breaks a boy's nose who assaults her in his car, or levels the fraternity that uses young women as sacrifices, or shows the school bully that she will not tolerate his repeated harassment of her female classmates, or insists on trying to help stop an abusive boyfriend. In each of these cases there is an attempt, on the part of the masculine characters, to delineate and restrict the spaces and performances of the female characters. The character of The Slayer performs the refusal to allow the feminine to be spatially confined.

Burgin (1996), writing about the photography of Helmut Newton, describes the artist's construction of representations of banality as a "perverse space" (75). Grosz (1995) also references the potential perversity of space in her book *Space, Time and Perversion*. The authors begin their inquiries from very different places, but each work suggests that space may be imbued with perversion. These works also evidence a tactic outlined in Stallybrass and White (1986): the use of carnivalesque (itself heavily drawn from Bakhtin) spaces and their social uses to raise questions regarding power – also a central trope of the *Buffy* text. The authors explicitly link the carnivalesque to both particular rituals (that is, dates of power and reversal, Halloween being the most obvious on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) and "a mobile set of symbolic practices, images and discourses which were employed throughout social revolts and conflicts" (15). In this text it is in the persona of The Slayer that space is most obviously imbued with perversity and carnivalesque reversals, in the sense that accepted orders and dualisms (performances of gender, for example) are made ambivalent. This is made even more so because The Slayer is inculcated within such mundane spaces. That is, the mundane is merely a thin veil - in spaces (i.e. Sunnydale, the Hellmouth) which are excessively perverse – that is always rent by the perverse eventually (even on a weekly basis). Buffy may not completely reject notions of gendered spaces but she refuses to have her own spatial access restricted because

of her gender. Her performances infiltrate and infect masculine spaces and allow the feminine to be more dangerous than in danger.

#### BUFFY'S HETEROTOPIC SPACES

One way of reading the televisual spaces of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* which is both useful and provocative, is Foucault's (1986) notion of heterotopias. In a very brief essay, originally a lecture delivered in 1967, Foucault lays out a schematic of the space of heterotopia and several of his propositions about this concept are relevant for this work. Unlike the utopia, which he understands to be a fantastical space, heterotopias are 'real' spaces that exist and have existed in every culture but with "no one absolutely universal form." (24). Foucault writes that "[T]he heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (25); and that the heterotopia "function[s] in relation to all the space that remains... Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside which human life is partitioned as still more illusory... Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as our is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (27). Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia provides a framework with which to study *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

Foucault discusses many heterotopias in his essay. He cites, for example: the mirror, boarding school, military service, honeymoon, prison, psychiatric hospital, retirement home, cemetery, theater/cinema, garden, carpet, museum, library, fairground, vacation village, famous bedroom, motel rooms, colonies, certain societies, Puritan societies and brothels as heterotopias. Like televisual spaces these are all, in a sense, virtual spaces. In the next pages my intention is to mark spaces performed in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in terms of their function within the narrative structure of the text as well as to examine what kinds of performances are allowed to occur within their borders. I believe that many of these spaces function in a similar manner to Foucault's heterotopias. This concept offers a framework and a tool for mapping spaces that perform and are produced in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, as well as the performances that occur

within them. In particular, Foucault's concept of heterotopia suggests a space which is constructed somewhat apart from other spaces in much the same way that television's spaces are constructed. In this way I will show how spaces within the television diegesis are linked to the performances which are specific to them and to the medium itself.

### *The library*

Foucault (1986) links the library to the collection of time, the modern idea of "accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, that will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside all time and inaccessible to its ravages" (26). The Sunnydale High School library carries out this function in a doubled form. It acts principally as the locus of Giles' knowledge and control, as well as the site where The Slayer and her friends hatch most of their plots. In the dusty books that line the more hidden shelves lie the accumulated knowledge of the arcane subjects of demon and vampire lore necessary to help Buffy battle her opponents. But the library is also the site of the Hellmouth, a portal between the human world and the demon one. 'Hellmouth' is an interesting choice for the name of this portal, resonant as it is with the Medieval morality play, an entry point between the infernal, the scared and the everyday (i.e. Bachelard 1964). The library in this text is thus a space of all times and yet is, equally, outside of time. Despite the trope of a collapse of space/time the physical setting of the library remains very modern. It is a space of knowledge, including knowledge – in this case, vampire and demon lore and the supernatural – that has been forgotten or kept secret. Here, the library represents the hidden facet of supposedly obvious spaces (Bordo 1997). Because the library also acts as a threshold to the Hellmouth (allowing the postmodern and archaic to co-exist here) it moves out of a strictly epistemological state and into a state of action/performance: where Darla kills The Slayer, Kendra and where Buffy destroys the demon Mayor . Though it retains its former status as a quiet space of learning and pre-modern knowledge, it also becomes a site for postmodern performance.

The school library has a function in the more general youth canon as well, as a place of secrets, punishment, and boredom. Except for the students who

while the time away with adolescent liaisons between the stacks, the library is primarily a social space reserved for the intellectual overachievers, the nerds. As we see in the *Buffy* text, the library is almost always empty - save for The Slayer and her friends - and only Willow seems to have any prior knowledge of the library. With the advent of The Slayer's circle, however, the library does develop a somewhat threatening *caché*. *Buffy* bypasses the theme of library punishment, a theme especially associated with the film *The Breakfast Club* where five differently cliqued teenagers find mutual acceptance during a Saturday detention. *Dawson's Creek* paid their homage to director John Hughes with a similarly themed show, but in *Buffy* the library is a more secret space. It is, for example, while hiding in the stacks Xander discovers that Buffy is The Slayer during one of Buffy and Giles' first encounters in the pilot episode of the series. But the library's most important secret is the Hellmouth that lurks within it: the threat that a portal will open up and let a world of demons loose on the fragile countenance of Sunnydale.<sup>222</sup> The library is thus also the scene of demonic attacks, confrontations between the forces of good and evil, and savage destruction, and where strategic meetings are held to plan the salvation of Sunnydale.

#### *The graveyard*

Though he calls it the cemetery, Foucault (1986) attributes an important space to the graveyard within his discussion of heterotopias. He describes the graveyard's relation to discourses of illness and infection and notes how, during the nineteenth century, the urban cemeteries moved outward, finding their final resting-places in more suburban environments. It is thus appropriate that a text as obsessed with death (and un-death) should locate itself within suburban space. But Sunnydale is not like other suburbs which find themselves in close proximity to the graveyard. Sunnydale, as we learn in the third season, has twelve graveyards within the city limits. The excessive presence of the graveyard signals the proximity of (un)death to all aspects of performance in this series.

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<sup>222</sup> This takes on a whole new extra-textual meaning after the tragic events at Columbine High School.

Like the library, the graveyard is a space that seems to exist both out of time and which, simultaneously, attempts to contain time. What this text attempts to contain within its graveyards is not the stench of death, but the stench of un-death.<sup>223</sup> The fear is not simply that the dead will rise from their graves but that they will drag the living kicking and screaming in after them. It is within this space that the link between vampirism and disease is made most evident, and it is why Buffy's nightly patrols are so often centered, visually, around the graveyard. However, the text refuses to allow the graveyard any predetermined place of fear within the characters, who do not avoid them (although, with twelve graveyards in their hometown how could they, really?) but instead continually find themselves within their confines. While there is not always an acknowledgement of the anxiety created by the excessive presence of the graveyard, the text insists on the graveyard's performative status as a space of fear of contamination. The most important performance becomes the necessity of keeping the dead in the ground, which symbolizes the attempt to retain order in the suburban space.

The graveyard is familiar as the site of illicit trysts. This can perhaps be understood through the notion of 'life in death,' that in midst of life there is non-living which is perhaps also a way of living. It is where Buffy and Angel meet, to sit by the gravestones and have a quiet moment together. The mausoleum is a graveyard space where Darla brings the young men that she will eventually feed on. But even these scenes continue the motif of the performances that occur within the boundaries of the graveyard as being those of fragmentation and transformation. The graveyard's liminality, standing at the threshold of the living and the dead, is made literal here. In the graveyard the possibility that the dead will rise is always present, the possibility that a prior historical moment or generation is returning or threatening to. And even if it is not always a site of fear it is, conversely, always a site of un-rest. Those who venture into the graveyard at night run an even greater than usual risk of having the parasitic past return to feed on the present. The lover's stealing a romantic moment in its

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<sup>223</sup> And there are several possible readings of this. First is Sibley's (1995) description of the relationship between smell and the defilement of middle-class space. In the *Buffy* text the vampire is reported to sometimes carry the smell of death. But the stench of un-death can also be read as relating to the perceived boredom and isolation of suburban space.



quiet confines are always at the brink of being ripped apart by unseen forces both within and outside themselves. The romantic body in the graveyard is performed, like that of the un-dead, as always in excess of itself, anticipating the transformations (into vampire, demon, werewolf, etc.) to come.

### *Sunnydale High*

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1979) speaks at length of the more hegemonic functions of the educational institution. Of particular interest is his designation of particular attributes of these spaces, including enclosure, partitioning, functionality and rank which continue to be present in today's educational systems (141-49). Foucault writes, of boarding schools (though I find it apt for contemporary high schools as well), that "they are privileged or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis" (24). In one sense, the high school is assumed to exert control over a segment of the population – adolescents - who are often deemed to be, by their very nature, out of control. High schools function through a sort of metaphorical and literal panoptic system (it depends of course on the high school in question which type is more present) that regulates student behavior through rules, surveillance, punishment, physical enclosure and through the ordering of bodies in time and space. The high school is not only supposed to keep the streets safe by keeping adolescents inside but to keep the students safe by regulating who may have access to its spaces. In contemporary high schools, guards and lockdowns are not unheard of and the high school is often seen less as an educational institution and more as a babysitting center for unruly teenagers.

In 'real life' as in *Sunnydale*, the high school does not offer the provisional safety that could once be assumed. The incidence of mass violence in American high schools has reached a shocking and unprecedented level, culminating with the shootings at and attempted bombing of a suburban Colorado high school in 1999. At *Sunnydale High* the students not only have to fear that they may come to harm from other students (a topic which has been covered in several episodes) but that their school may be breached by vampires and demons. In the first three seasons the high school was overtaken by demons and vampires several times. It

was infiltrated by an insect-like teacher, a demon brood-mother who used the faculty and students to incubate her young, a life-sucking ancient mummy come to life, a poltergeist who made those who fell under its sway relive his murderous last moments on earth, a steroid-using swim team who turned into sea monsters, a group of zombie delinquents who wanted to blow Sunnydale High up, a hungry demon who ate human brains, a scientific-minded student who wanted to make his own Frankenstein, a witch intent on destroying the cheerleading squad, an invisible girl bent on revenge on a popular clique and an irate member of the kitchen staff who intended to kill the entire student body with rat poison. More than any other space in this text, Sunnydale High is the site of supernatural performance and shown to be a site of excessive threat (only contained by the presence of *The Slayer*) rather than safety.

Trouble at Sunnydale High, however, comes as often by means of human characters (sometimes endowed with supernatural powers) as it does by the non-human ones. Like many other youth-oriented shows, this text performs the high school as a hostile site where danger and violence are ubiquitous and mundane parts of everyday life (just as here the exotic and aberrant become mundane). Scattered throughout the traumas incurred by the presence of supernatural beings (i.e. a boy who creates a tonic to make himself more of a man but which actually turns him into a monster) are more traditional examples of the painful exercise of high school sociality: ostracization, harassment, favoritism. The students in supernatural form merely enact exaggerated performances of already existing types: abusive jocks, alienated misfits, etc. There is no real sense that these characters and the performances they engender pose any less of a real threat to Sunnydale High and its students than the more obviously scary characters. If anything, the high school functions as a porous boundary between the frightening outside world and the equally frightening human monsters that lurk within its walls.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> On the subject of porosity in his examination of Naples, (1978) writes: "As porous as this stone is the architecture. Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades, and stairways. In everything they preserve the scope to become a theater of new, unforeseen constellations. The stamp of the definitive is avoided" (165-66).

*The home*

If such a thing as the home of the child can be thought of, it would be a somewhat more liminal space than that of the adult: a space where someone else is expected to take responsibility, act as protector, pay the bills. That being said, adults are typically the dominant figures of the home. Perhaps that is why the home plays such a minor role in the construction of spaces in the *Buffy* text. That is not to say that the home is completely elided, rather, it has a very secondary function compared to other spaces, as well as compared to its primacy in many other youth-oriented television shows. The main function of the home is neither safety nor reassurance, but, like all the other spaces in this text, is constantly in jeopardy of invasion or disruption. Despite the fact that vampires cannot enter many spaces without being invited in, danger continually finds its way into this most sacred and private of suburban enclaves. Each of the character's homes has at least one occasion of invasion, though Buffy's is invaded most often: Angelus uses Angel's invitation to gain access to Buffy and Joyce; zombies invade Buffy's homecoming party; women cursed by a love spell try to murder Xander and Cordelia in Buffy's basement; Joyce's new boyfriend turns out to be an evil robot; the vampire Kriczeck breaks in and takes Joyce hostage, to name just a few. Willow's home is also put at risk by Angelus and, in another episode, believing that Willow is a witch, her mother locks her in her room and then allows a vigilante group to burn her at the stake. Giles' home is similarly desecrated by Angelus, though this time the vampire has not arrived to harm Giles but instead leaves the body of his dead lover, Jenny Calendar, on Giles' bed. Angel's home is most often threatened by his own, internal demons but others make their way in there as well, as when Faith and The Mayor send a demon there to destroy his soul. Faith's home spaces, conversely, are always threatened by those 'good' characters whose performances threaten Faith's sense of integrity. When Buffy or Xander enter her space in order to try and secure her moral performance Faith feels that her space is being invaded and unraveled. All of these, in different ways, present a disruption to safe, middle-class American, domestic space.

It is impossible to discuss the function of the space of the middle-class home without looking more specifically at the bedroom, especially the bedroom of the teenager. The teenaged bedroom is a space for friends, homework and

gossip, however, the tendency to view the bedroom as a sexual site is an intertextual practice. The potential problem of marking the bedroom as a location of sexual performance is inherent in the space itself. The adult refusal to believe that the performance of teenage sex is going on 'under my roof' is precisely what allows the performance to go on unhindered under a blind-eye of parental supervision. Willow makes most obvious use of the home as a locus for sexual exploration. Finding her and Oz in bed together on the night before 'graduation day' the viewer has to wonder where the parents are in all this. The abandonment of parental function or manifest cluelessness of parents is a premise of this serial (and many, many other texts for children and youth) which allows this to become an riotous, anarchic site wherein wise children are always in the position of potential redeemers. Thus the production of the home and bedroom also work against the parental performances that are supposed to occur therein. The home becomes a disrupted space without the possibility of maintaining traditional familial relations or of circumscribing the performances of the teenaged characters.

### *The Bronze*

The nightclub is as a space that exists somewhat outside of time, outside the more regulated spaces of social relations and as a site of extraordinarily complex performances. The club that caters to underage teenagers is even more excessively so because it introduces young people to a space from which they have traditionally been barred, thus a taboo or forbidden zone. The nightclub is a space that has very adult overtones: voyeurism, encounter, sexual liaison, and inebriation. The Bronze functions somewhere between this space and that of a cafe where Buffy and her friends hang out, relatively unsupervised, after school and in the evenings making this, again, a space for the viewer to ask questions about the disruption of authoritative parental relations in this text.

Buffy is introduced to The Bronze immediately upon her move to Sunnydale. Cordelia explains that it is really the only place for young people to socialize in the barren suburb although it is "in a bad part of town" (which, as she notes, is "Right next to the good part"). Its location in a negative space makes it a prime space for vampires to search for their prey, and for Buffy to

search for hers. Its interior mirrors the negative aspects of its physical location: dim lighting, loud music and a very warehouse-gothic feel. The preening and parading that are a necessary part of the club scene make the voyeuristic predatoriness of the vampire most welcome, just as it does for the young people among themselves. The sartorial drama that the characters, especially the female characters, put themselves through in order to enter into the social as well as physical space of *The Bronze* puts them, frequently, in the position of prey. Intertextually it is known that the vampire often finds its prey in sexualized spaces and *The Bronze* offers the opportunity for just such close contact. After a dance, the vampire tends to escort the young woman (or man) outside for some 'fresh air,' where in the even more liminal space of *The Bronze's* back alley, Buffy often comes to their rescue. The anxiety produced by the performances in *The Bronze* make sense in light of the fact that adolescent spaces are often fraught with anxiety and ambivalence, marking this series' focus on adolescence itself as an in-between category. The presence of the vampire merely takes to the extreme the idea that teenaged sexuality necessarily attracts the most predatory of natures.

### *The underground*

What I am here calling the underground actually refers to a matrix of social spaces which, in this text, are associated with the performances of un-death. That most of these spaces are either literally underground, or figuratively take on the characteristics of burial in some way, marks them as belonging to the territory of the un-dead. The most literal of these spaces are the crypts under the Sunnydale Mausoleum where The Master and his minions perform during the first and second seasons. This is really underground, dark and dank with stone walls and where the characters are appropriately dressed in dark clothes with many hints to a European gothic style. There are plenty of candles and bones and cages to give the space its necessarily eerie feeling. There is also The Factory, an abandoned warehouse where Spike locks up Xander and Willow, as well the site where Ford and the vampire wannabees wait for the un-dead to deliver them to their desired state. The Factory is, in some sense, a mock-up of the underground caverns of The Master and is most appropriate for a cult who

worships the un-dead. Despite its high ceilings, The Factory resembles nothing less than a crypt and the text makes this parallel clear by having Buffy and the vampire cult sealed within as they wait for the deliverance of Spike and Drusilla.

The cemetery also belongs to the performative category of the underground. In its spaces (discussed above) there is an attempt to confine death to the darkness of the earth or the stone walls of the Mausoleum. The proximity of the vampire to the underground spaces of the cemetery make literal the association of the vampire with profane and defiled spaces. But in this text it is difficult to keep any 'thing' in the ground, as bodies are continually animated in performance. An enormous demon awakes beneath Sunnydale High (in "Bad Eggs") and takes over the minds of the students and faculty. A fraternity (in "Reptile Boy") who worship a reptilian demon living in the basement of their house must annually kidnap and feed it young women in order to ensure their lifelong success and prosperity. In the basement of Sunnydale High, the Coach tries to contain the mutated, reptilian bodies of the swim team (in "Go Fish"). In each of these cases negative performances are produced in proximity to the underground, to the earth, to death and its rejection. Rather than an association of the earth with nature, performances which occur close to the ground are here reviled as again, life-in-death and death-in-life become spaces defined by their in-betweenness, neither one state or the other but constantly in motion.

The underground, however, is not restricted to the un-dead characters, though it is primarily their domain. When the other characters enter these sites it is always in a state of danger. In underground spaces, the performative powers of the 'human' characters are severely hampered. When Buffy and Cordelia are kidnapped by the reptile boys, they are chained to a stone wall and verbally abused. When Angelus brings Giles to the catacombs he binds him and tortures him. And when Angel and Buffy escape from Spike, Drusilla and The Judge, they do so through the city sewer system, a labyrinth of Benjaminian proportions. This episode offers another reading of the underground: the possibility of escape. The same is true of the sewers under Sunnydale High through which the metamorphosed swim team find their way to the freedom of the open ocean. In these instances the danger of the underground is moderated by the possibility it provides for escape. In this text, the underground produces

performances based on fear of secret and hidden spaces, of the dark and unknown things that are sure to lurk just below the surface. Yet it also presents the possibility that the underground is a potential passage which offers both a way in and a way out.

### *The street*

The importance of the performances which take place on the street (and the performances of the street itself) lie almost as much in their elision as in their presence. Television focuses almost all of its visual attentions on interiority, leaving exteriors much more within the realm of film. The street in television tends to be evoked within performances of transition, movement and threat.<sup>225</sup> In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, in a town bombarded by the presence of un-death, the nighttime street is particularly performative (as it seems to bring into being all manner of fears). It is a familiar scene to see a young woman walking down the street only to be accosted and ultimately mauled by a passing vampire. It is thus in the street that danger takes on particularly gendered characteristics. In "Helpless," when Buffy loses her powers, she realizes just how threatening the streets can be for a young woman and that these threats do not merely come from the un-dead. As she walks by two men who call out sexual remarks to her, for the first time Buffy realizes that she may actually be in physical danger. The only thing she can do is run and try to get off the street.

The other example of the performative nature of the street occurs in the distinction between suburban and city streets. In the episode "Anne," Buffy has run away from home and is working in a diner in a city. If the streets of Sunnydale are primarily dangerous because of the un-dead, the city offers more mundane dangers. Buffy meets and befriends a young woman who lives on the street with her boyfriend. In helping her, Buffy learns of a demon who preys on street youth by enslaving them in hell until they are too old and tired to be of service any longer. As always, Buffy acts as their liberator – she is ever the good, white girl out to rescue the world's victims - and through this experience finds in herself the strength to return home. This episode offers two interesting readings of the street and its dangers. First, it posits an opposition of the city streets and

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<sup>225</sup> This might be contrasted with other dramas, such as *Homicide* or *NYPD Blue* where the

the streets of Sunnydale. Sunnydale's streets are threatened by outside intruders who prey on its good citizens, while the city's dangers are seem to be somehow more indigenous to its streets. Although the danger in this episode also performs in demonic form, the discourse which surrounds its performances are different. The demon in the city preys on the lost and forgotten, youth who are absent in suburbia. In Sunnydale, demons feed on the good children of the good citizens who inhabit it. The streets are visually depicted with striking differences. Although the streets of Sunnydale are dangerous, the city streets are darker, damper, and dirtier; the danger inherent within them is visually represented. The city and suburb here remain dichotomous, though not entirely so as demons and vampires irrupt in both sites.

#### *Panoptic space*

There are two primary ways in which panoptic space functions in this text. The first emerges from electoral space and the performances of The Mayor. Foucault (1980) describes the operation of panoptic power, or panoptism, as follows: "an ensemble of mechanisms brought into play in all the clusters of procedures used by power...This invention had the peculiarity of being utilized first of all on a local level...This was where the experiment of integral surveillance was carried out" (71). In Sunnydale, The Mayor is not only the town's highest-ranking official but also its creator. He is the architect of its social spaces as well as its physical spaces. But it is through his movement into the space of electoral performance that The Mayor is allowed to exercise his greatest strength. As Mayor, the demonic, which has until this time been relegated to Sunnydale's subterranean spaces, comes, if not to light, then to office. What the text suggests in this reading is not unfamiliar: the corruption of the power of civic authority, perhaps an allegory of the perversion of public and civic spaces in the post-Nixon, Reagan, Clinton era of U.S. politics. The Mayor's performs the potential corruption of not only the electoral process - which sees The Mayor elected as father and son - but of the civil rule that the post provides. As architect he has a far greater knowledge of the town than any other resident may

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street is the primary space to be mastered.



possibly possess. But as The Mayor he has the capacity to enforce what performances will occur within the town's spaces as well.

Another aspect of panoptic space and its diffusion in this text is the absence of police authority. Other forms of authoritative surveillance, that of the parents and the school principal, for example, represent ineffectual performances. But the absence of police – that is the actual police are absent from *Buffy* though a great deal of other policing goes on in the show – performance in this text is telling as to its physical location. The concern with urban disease and revolution has been important to social history and contemporary sociology. The absence of regulatory systems to deal with the emergence of these issues suggests that the suburb is understood to be absent of city dangers and thus the police are not so important for 'policing' its spaces. Instead that job becomes Buffy's in another allegory of vigilante generationalism. In one episode it is even suggested that the police are in collusion with The Mayor, thus their function is to insure secrecy rather than manage the spaces of their surveillance.

I would suggest that Buffy functions in a somewhat panoptic way within the spaces of this text. Her performances insure the regulation of the spaces in which the textual action occurs and in some sense she represents a feminine form of policing. Central to her performance is knowing what goes on around her without being known herself. It is possible to think of this as a performance of vigilante panopticism as her power is often necessary in surveying those who have the greatest power of surveillance. Buffy is charged with being most aware of the people and spaces that make up the fabric of the textual space. Although she does not exercise this power in a governing system, she does act as the panopticon between the text's various spaces. This television program itself implies moral/spatial lessons for its audience and encourages forms of self-inspection among viewers. The show is thus somewhat panoptic itself.

## BORDER CROSSINGS AND BOUNDARY PATROLS

Borders and boundaries are, on the one hand, what defines the inside of all the spaces (as well as their outsides) I have discussed up to this point, and on the other hand, who belongs and what may be performed within them. Without border or boundary there is no space as that term is commonly understood; at least no space with any specificity but merely amorphous and undifferentiated space. Although in many readings border and boundary are used to articulate the same concept, I understand them as having slightly different though necessarily related meanings. Border, as I am using it here, refers to actual physical delimitations between spaces as, for example, between the urban and suburban or between physical communities within these territories. Boundary is meant to describe more abstract demarcations between social groups and the spaces they occupy. Where borders tend to be performed architecturally, boundaries are maintained by patrol, by the vigilant eyes of the groups who have, often arbitrarily, imposed them. One way in which borders and boundaries are similar is in their inscription of sameness or homogeneity (inside) and their restriction of difference (outside).

The suburb is often recognized as a border territory, representing a socially constructed space nestled between the urban and rural. Cross (1997) writes: "scholars characterize suburbs as 'borderlands' reflecting the contradictory aesthetic and moral values of their residents torn between rural and urban life" (109). Sunnydale differentiates itself from both the anxiety of the city and the emptiness of the country, a liminal space on the border of social existence and sociohistory. *Buffy's* Sunnydale performs the permeability of suburban border spaces. De Lauretis (1984) writes that "[B]orders stand for the potentially conflictual copresence of different cultures, desires, contradictions, which they articulate or simply delineate" (99). I take this to mean that the border is positioned between difference, the two sides watching each other across a divide which may be a line in the sand or an exit ramp on a transnational highway. In Sunnydale, the border is produced as an effect of a dialectic between what lies above and what lurks below, between what is visible on the surface and what hides in the depths. The vampires and un-dead represent the infiltration of

sanctified suburban spaces, though they do not all possess the freedom to wander them at will. Sunnydale performs inner borders as well as outer ones, as between itself and the Hellmouth. The bridge between the two is represented as a closed door – a closed border *par excellence* – which when open would lead to the merging of two discrete social spaces. The necessity of maintaining the border is here shown to stave off the possibility of chaos, but also the destruction of homogeneity through the miscegenation of the living and the un-dead.

If social change incites a 'borderland' which tends toward panic (Kellner 1995, 49), Sunnydale can be read as a space always on the threshold of change and in which border maintenance necessitates a panic performance. This is certainly one of the guiding logics of the show, an allegory to changes which have already taken place in the larger society. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* tries to restore order to a perceived chaos in relation to the swelling "Others" in the United States seeking access to community and privilege. The threat is not only that the breach of the border will invite structural changes and allow the Other access to what it has previously been denied, but that the entire way of life which the border has protected will be destroyed. Diamond (1997) writes: "Border disputes about differences are not only metaphorical" (47). The maintenance of the physical border is not simply a theoretical enterprise but requires an active performance of border maintenance. In this pursuit Buffy plays the key role as one of the agents through whom the borders of Sunnydale's spaces are controlled. Her constant movement through the visual field of the narrative continually returns to where spatiality and community are most tenuous: night streets, the graveyard, The Bronze, alleys. Her performance necessitates that she patrol these boundaries and eliminate those who attempt to cross them.

The nature of erected spatial borders influences the production and performance of boundaries which establish the limits of self, community and territory. Robinson (1996) explains that "social spaces - be they public toilets or private clubs - are defined against the threat of intrusion produced by the difference of certain kinds of social subjects. It is finally the prerogative of both the "private" subject and "private" space to prohibit anything other than the 'same' identity from inhabiting its exclusive boundaries" (246). It becomes, in essence, a question of who gets in and who gets thrown out.

I will examine the boundaries in this text through the tropes of self, community and territory, each of which commands a different type of performance. The question of self-boundaries relates to the body as it is understood as unified and coherent. Best (1995) writes that "the use of the body-model indicates the demand or desire for a clear limit or boundary - it seems to bestow, or at least to promise, precisely this - and yet it is when the body is invoked that the boundary is probably most uncertain... ...this very same production also underscores an anxiety about this 'entity' and the precariousness of its boundedness" (183). In this text the body is marked by a particular porosity and precarious performance of the self which is performed in three distinct ways. First is the double, as when Willow is presented with her doppelganger in vampire form. Willow's encounter with her Other self ruptures her sense of space, as well as her sense of self and allows for the possibility that both her self and the space she performs in are multiple and fluid rather than stable, unified and fixed. The second form of rupture is internal, as when Oz is transformed into a werewolf according to the phases of the moon. Jenny Calendar and Giles also bear the mark of internal boundary crossing between what they have been and what they have become. The vampires have passed through a similar transformative passage although theirs belong to the third category: those which have been externally imposed. Angel shifts between himself and Angelus by courses of action that are exerted beyond his control. Although all three aspects of the breach of self-boundaries represent threats to unified performances, this third is the one that is represented as most threatening within the textual universe; is truly performative of the danger of self-loss or disintegration. The threat of the vampire is that the victim will be transformed by the bite, will become Other and this anxiety structures virtually all the spatial performances in this text.

de Lauretis (1984) writes: "Medusa and the Sphinx, like other ancient monsters, have survived inscribed in hero narratives, in someone else's story, not their own; so they are figures or markers of positions - places and topoi - through which the hero and his story move to their destination and to accomplish meaning" (109). The vampire and the demon both represent equally ancient incarnations of the monstrousness which, as De Lauretis later intimates, itself

performs a boundary. But while she describes these monsters as the reference point of liminal, border spaces, I find the vampire to also be in line with the notion of abject spaces. As Augsberg (1998), writing about the work of Julia Kristeva, describes "[T]he abject's significance is that it is defined in relation to the self; excluded to the margins, it nevertheless remains a constant threat as it is what makes the constitution of the subject possible... ...a society constitutes itself in terms of what it excludes as unclean (taboo) or uncontrollable" (299) Once again, in this text, self and community are constructed/performed in relation boundary spaces occupied by the un-dead, abject spaces which are also figured as potential sites for desire.

The crisis precipitated by the possibility of breach of community boundaries is not the same as that which comes from the fear for the self. The self fears that it will be subject to dissolution, that it will disappear, the community fears that something (or someone) will be permitted in that does not belong. Leaving aside the community of Sunnydale as a whole, as it has been the subject of much scrutiny already, there are other communities which live in fear of breach. The community of humanity for one lives in fear that this fundamental part of their self-definition (their humanity) will be taken away by the presence of beings whose values conflict with their own. At the same time, The Slayer poses a threat to the continued functioning of the un-dead community and to the fantasy that many members of the Sunnydale community have constructed for themselves. Another way in which the community is threatened is in the ability of characters to 'pass' and thus to reach a very high level of mimetic performance. The Mayor, Darla, Mr. Trick, Gwendolyn Post, Ampata, as well as Oz, Buffy and Giles have the skill to pass fortuitously, giving no real clue as to the Other aspects of their character. Others, including Faith, Angel and even at times Cordelia, present a more complicated aspect of performance where the individual cannot be counted on for consistency in social (or moral) performance and may prove, in fact, to be the opposite of what they, at the first, appear.

Boundaries are also necessary to maintain homogeneity in the delineation of physical territories. Writing on the subject of the gated community, Blakely and Snyder (1997) state: "The setting of boundaries is always a political act.

Boundaries determine membership: someone must be inside and someone must be outside. Boundaries also create and delineate space to facilitate the activities and purposes of political, economic, and social life. Using physical space to create social place is a long and deep American tradition" (1). There are several ways in which Sunnydale performs physical space functioning to create social place. The first refers to The Mayor's calculated performances, including his reasons for developing the town of Sunnydale in the first place. That is, he chose the physical location for Sunnydale because of its proximity to the Hellmouth as this met with his own desire to be raised up to demonic status. The Mayor has chosen Sunnydale astutely: it is far enough away to escape the eye of urban surveillance and it is constructed to attract just the right people who will not want anyone – any outsider – examining their business.

But Sunnydale's proximity to the Hellmouth has unforeseen consequences. Most importantly, it is what attracts The Vampire Slayer. Buffy's appearance does not merely help to even the odds that The Mayor has effected, her presence actually reconfigures the confines of physical space and thus social spaces as well. This is most magnificently performed through acts of destruction, as when Buffy blows up the multiplex in the mall while killing The Judge or destroying the high school in order to kill The Mayor. In both these instances, though especially in the latter, the reconstruction of social space cannot be effected without some correlative act upon physical space. This is, again, an ironic message where destruction re-constructs and may be necessary to maintain the social. Buffy's actions are not so different from The Mayor's, she also tries to circumscribe the specificity of her social spaces by limiting the possibility of entrance into the physical space of Sunnydale. The destruction of the high school is highly symbolic of freeing the graduating students from their bondage to a corrupt and unjust administration. It also serves as a right of passage to the opening of new physical and social s/p/laces to the text: college, dorms, etc.

Both border and boundary are centrally important to the performance of the spaces in this text. These potentially restrictive mechanisms establish a line between the interiority of spaces – the inclusive or same – and their exteriority – the abject or Other. As this text shows, it is impossible to create a bounded space

which is strictly impermeable and the abject always finds a way back inside the walls that have been erected against it. Border spaces do exist: they are occupied by those who do not clearly fit on either side of the wall. It can be Buffy patrolling the town without being able to reveal her true nature, or it can be someone who tags along with the cheerleaders though they never really acknowledge her/his existence. Border/boundary spaces are liminal spaces, existing on the periphery of the mind and vision of the social subject who occupies a more fully central position. In some sense, these spaces are related to Foucault's heterotopias. The character at the border/boundary is always on their way in or on the way out, their time on the border represents a slice that cannot hold their weight for long.

#### INSURGENT SPACES

I will conclude this chapter by briefly discussing the potential for insurgent spaces. First, however, it is necessary to reiterate some of the more general aspects of spatiality and its performance in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Foucault (1986) writes that "we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space, but on the contrary in a space thoroughly imbued with quantities and perhaps thoroughly fantasmatic as well" (23). On the television screen is performed fantasmatic representation of spatiality to which our relationship is ludic and speculative, desiring and repulsive by turns. This makes reading televisual space difficult because it necessitates a balance between allowing the text some relation to reality while at the same time recognizing that its constructed nature places it within the bounds of fantasy.<sup>226</sup> Because of its fantastical nature televisual space requires our constant vigilance as it "can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology" (Soja 1989, 6). It is an error to deny that the spatial performances which take place on television inscribe themselves upon existing spatial matrices of daily life, just as they themselves act as inscriptors. Televisual spaces require critical deconstruction. Televisual spaces may not

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<sup>226</sup> Raising, of course, the question of whose fantasy.

reflect the 'real world,' but they does not exist fully separate from that world either. Increasingly, the line between the televisual and material worlds is diffused, amorphous and reliant of a vast array of types of knowledge and experience (of which the media is one). This does diminish the importance of materiality and 'lived experience,' but insists that the virtual, mediated and simulacraic have an impact on materiality, just as the opposite is also true. Television is not created in a vacuum, but is produced in the 'real' world and thus can never be fully separated from it.

Femininity provides the most insurgent spatial possibilities in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The presence of The Slayer makes problematic most readings that rely on binaristic oppositions between masculinity and femininity, yet since these positions remain necessary to situate my inquiry, they remain pertinent to this discussion. Through the figure of Buffy as Vampire Slayer many traditional spatializations of gender are rendered obsolete, though the revenge/power performances she engages in can be seen as reinscriptions of male forms and hegemonic acts and she tries to put 'Others' back in their 'place.' By taking over the spaces traditionally accorded to masculinity Buffy makes these and other spaces safe for the intrusion of femininity, making herself an eccentric subject by taking over more than her share of the frame. Whether on dark streets, alleys or woods, in cities and suburbs, in deserted graveyards and abandoned buildings, in fraternity houses and boys' cars, in the face of the coach or the principal, Buffy reconfigures the spaces she enters in a way which transcends that of her heroic predecessors. She may possess superhuman abilities, but she remains constantly aware that she is read as female and thus is almost always underestimated. It is the overestimation of the power of masculine performance that is most critically examined in this text. Buffy constantly relocates masculine performance to a space located firmly within a frame whose boundaries she has drawn herself. Those who overstep do so at their own risk.

In the course of the last five chapters I have shown that it is performances of femininity that provide the possibility for the most insurgent readings of the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* text. Women are allowed not only to occupy more representational space but the more active spaces of performance which have often been reserved for the masculine. In representational space, the range of



character is wide enough to allow the feminine to occupy roles she is not usually allowed: superhero, intellectual giant, mad sadist, popular cheerleader, vigilante mother, violent mob, avenging demon and more. Not only the feminine raises questions about the validity of traditional binarisms in this text. Other characters provide inroads in raising questions about the polarization of human and animal, good and evil, past and present, maternal and paternal, madness and sanity, child and adult. In each case the text demonstrates that there is no easy division of the spaces accorded these categories and suggests that they must be read as fluctuating, sliding and overlapping rather than as static and clearly defined. In each case it is difficult for one side of the binary to hold fast enough to become the defining aspect of second term; each term is shown to be a part of the Other.

Though problematizing feminine spaces and dualistic performances does not compensate for the elision of difference which is ever present in this text, it does offer an avenue for positive identification as well as for insurgence. It is necessary to continue the critique of television's elision of difference as well as how this elision is effected in the specificity of certain texts. It will also be important to show how difference may sneak back into the text in startling ways, sometimes insurgently, but in violently hegemonic ways at other times. As has been discussed in relation to the *Star Trek* series, difference often emerges in televisual culture in alternate forms. Penley (1992), for example, makes note of how the character of Spock is frequently read within a context of human difference rather than simply as an alien (Vulcan). *Star Trek* has frequently concerned itself with the question of different species and the attempt to foster 'humanity' among all of them.<sup>227</sup> Weinstock (1996) writes: "Synonymous with goodness, decency, integrity, ingenuity, and compassion, "human" serves not simply as a biological designation, but as a moral marker" (335). Weinstock posits *Star Trek* (the second series *The Next Generation*) as proffering an ethic he refers to as "deep-space multiculturalism" (333-34) which he contrasts with the more problematic *Star Wars* trilogy which he describes as "a Manichean pattern of black-and-white morality in which the metaphors of "light" as good and "dark" as evil are realized not only in the "dark" and (presumably) light sides of

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<sup>227</sup> Certainly a hegemonic if well intentioned narrative ploy.

“the force,” but also in the corporeal divisions of “clean white” rebels and nonwhite alien scum” (331). *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* exists somewhere between the two: marginally manifesting *Star Trek*’s multicultural performance, while rejecting that humanity is fundamentally good. It retains the binary of good and evil (often in its case ‘above’ and ‘below’) that Weinstock attributes to *Star Wars* without attributing unilateral adherence to these terms of division.<sup>228</sup>

Many of the performances of this text may be read in terms of spatialization, pointing to areas which have been neglected in the study of performance and media. Space no longer refers simply to the architectural design of the stage or screen, but to all the mechanisms of production and performance. No less than cinematography, costume, casting and scripting, spaces have an enormous impact on mediated performance. Like other texts, the televisual must be read in relation to those things which inform it extra- and intertextually (which will be taken up further in the conclusion). The characters, actors and settings of television programming are more and more imbricated in a diverse array of texts which span the gamut from advertizing, to film, music, literature and current events. The next chapter will be an initial move towards developing the possibility for a framework of intertextual, mediated performance.

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<sup>228</sup> Then again there are other possible readings of *Star Wars*. For one, although the rebels are (for the most part) a team of good ole boys, the Empire is similarly populated.

Through the study of *Buffy*, vampires, friendship, sexuality and space in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, I have sought to demonstrate that television is a performance medium. I have argued that television texts and other artifacts of mainstream mass and popular culture can be theorized in relation to their performances, just as they have, more traditionally, been studied in terms of representation, narrative and reception. The notion of a static image has captivated the attention of television scholars, even as they purport to examine the nature of television texts. What is elided is the fact that television rarely, if ever, produces a static image.<sup>229</sup> What television does produce, I argue, is a performance, not a 'live' performance, but one which is mediated by the televisual apparatus and the screen. This means that television cannot be reduced to a picture that remains static in time. We cannot examine the body on the small screen without taking into account the narratives which move it into performance and through which it becomes intelligible and/or an object of desire and identification. This is, perhaps, one of the most insurgent aspects of contemporary television: that in performance it manages to escape the confines that the representational image sets up. In performance, the televisual image is always in excess of itself. Performance reiterates and enables me to see both representation and narrative at work in the television text and allows these to be read as more than simply the sum of their parts.

In the first section of this thesis, I argued that theories of performance have not interrogated what their innovative insights might offer for the study of the mass media. I believe that I have shown and supported the assertion that performance is an excellent framework for the study of the mass media through the reasoning and evidence of this work. Thus far, performance theory has obscured its connection to mainstream culture and has focused its analytic energies on the study of 'liveness,' culture, ritual and the avant-guard. What I may not have stated emphatically enough is that within existing performance theory some theorists have set out the possibility for the type of work I am engaging in to flourish. Case (1996) for instance, makes a move to interrogate

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<sup>229</sup> This reduction, if it can be called that, becomes the responsibility of the viewer who has control of the pause button, of the still photographer roaming the set and of the

television (though not its particular texts) in relation to the performance of lesbianism. She writes, that the "tradition of performance as something "live" and embodied has, throughout much of the twentieth century, been challenged by the screen. Movies, television, the computer, and new, virtual systems interrogate the "live" body and its tradition by their screenic context" (1). Later, she writes: "TV is the pioneer screen that represents circulation as economics and simulated space as the social" (199), and describes television's "effect" as creating a "new geography" (201). Case is not alone in acknowledging that mediated performance has long presented itself as a parallel and transgression of the 'live.' Auslander (1996), for instance, insists that "[F]ar from being encroached upon, contaminated, or threatened by mediation, live performance is always already inscribed with traces of the possibility of technical mediation (i.e., mediatization) that defines it as live" (199). In his theorizing, 'live' performance necessitates the presence of the mediated, alongside and against which it defines itself.

Perhaps the strongest words of encouragement (and they are indeed worthy of reiteration in the hopes that this will somehow enhance *their* performativity) come from Richard Schechner (1998). He writes: "As a discipline, PS [Performance Studies] cannot be mapped effectively because it transgresses boundaries, it goes where it is not expected to be. It is inherently "in between" and therefore cannot be pinned down or located exactly" (360). He goes on: "new interfaces will be added as time goes on, and older ones dropped. Accepting "inter" means opposing the establishment of any single system of knowledge, values, or subject matter. Performance studies is unfinished, open, multivocal, and self-contradictory. This call for or work toward a "unified field" is, in my view, a misunderstanding of the very fluidity and playfulness fundamental to performance studies" (361).

My own project has not been written as an incursion into the realm of performance, rather it is an attempt to expand its focus. Performance Studies has, in some sense, created a roadmap of what is 'acceptable' within the study of performance. I would like to see these boundaries pushed back. Indeed, my project has been to show that performance theory offers an innovative way to

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magazine editor choosing this month's glossy pictures.

study television and the mainstream mass media more generally. Although these areas have not been part of the project of performance, thus far, it will undoubtedly be one that will come under greater scrutiny as the boundaries between the 'live' and the mediated continue to blur and become unfixed. This project has attempted to make some first steps in this direction.

One of the initial challenges that concerned me with regard to this project was demonstrating how performance theory could be generative for the study of television. It seems that the mass media (especially in their more mainstream forms) are trivialized within theories of performance (as they are within most academic theory), despite the fact that the media are replete with performances in a common sense way. In fact, if performance is taken out of television, one might wonder what exactly would be left to study there at all. Television is not merely a representational medium, it is a performative medium where performance inculcates strategies of hegemony as well as strategies of insurgence. That is, television performances articulate narratives and representations which can be read as either hegemonic or insurgent or somewhere between the two. This is not to say that the study of television, or mass media more generally, should displace the study of 'live' performance (as some argue that mediated performance has displaced 'live' performance in the 'real'), but that to ignore the question of media is to leave a gaping hole in the ongoing, critical inquiry of performance and performativity.

Employing theories of performance enables us to see television very differently from the way that it has previously been theorized. A great deal of the work of television theorists has focused on the specificities of genre, reception and readings of the static text. With the introduction of performance the television medium and its texts can be theorized in a more poly-vocal and dynamic manner. It is no longer necessary to bind the study of television to traditional unified theories, but to open textual analysis to interdisciplinary readings that connect television's discourses to broader questions of theory and difference. By untying the television text from static representation it can begin to be theorized as a historically contingent and shifting text based on and produced through performance. Performance theory does not necessitate the dismissing of the audience but allows the text itself to take on an active quality,

which opens the possibility for insurgent and well as hegemonic readings. Performance theory does not necessitate that the text be shut down by a final overarching reading imposed by the analyst. Contemporary television no longer follows rigid guidelines of genre and style and performance theory allows for multiple readings which take into account this fluidity. Insurgence manifests itself when the text begins to play with traditional hierarchies and the organization of difference. Finally, performance theory allows the study of television possibilities for interpretation beyond anything that has previously been imagined. It does not raise television up as a positive role model, nor does it reduce it to an inherent evil. Instead it suggests that televisual performance is a multi-layered and complex phenomenon which requires innovative theoretical study.

Maybe I have not done exactly what I started out to do. In the beginning of my thesis I suggested that theories of performance would offer an innovative methodology for studying television. I might have been a bit misguided, or at least premature in this assertion. Performance theory is not a methodology, in the sense that it does not offer a complete, unified manner of studying an object, phenomenon or event. Performance is, instead, something inherent in the medium of television itself, something in the television text which was waiting to be studied. As I have demonstrated, studying performance involves the application of a multi-disciplinary analysis which allows for the excavation of what is 'said' by the specific performances of specific texts. It does fix their meanings but allows for a more open-ended inquiry. In this work I have used such theoretical approaches as postmodern geography, psychoanalysis, film theories, television theories, visual culture studies, feminist theories, and cultural studies to enhance the work of performance theory and to mobilize such concepts as community, mimesis, insurgence, vampirism, normalcy, space, gender, difference and friendship, as they are deployed through the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Performance is not the method that has been employed in this work, it is the framework which structures the field of inquiry. The question, what is being studied, is no longer merely answered: television (which, as I have already stated, tends to assume that what is being studied are representation, narrative and reception), but *television [in] performance*. I suggest that these two

answers are not tautological terms. The study of television has tended to elide the question of performance and reinserting performance into the study of television allows for an entirely new perspective on the medium.

Before looking forward, it is necessary to look back at the beginning of this thesis and to account for some of the things that were proposed at that time. Specifically, it is important to show how this work has met its objective of showing how television can be studied in relation to the performances which occur within its texts. Over the year and half that it has taken me to write (and re-write) this thesis, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has continued to grow as a television phenomenon. This may suggest that the departures this show has made in the question of gender performance and femininity have spoken to the viewing population. It says that Buffy Summers' gender transgressions, enacted through her performances as The Slayer, are being met with approval. As I have suggested, Buffy is not necessarily a feminist icon. She does not speak to a specific notion of feminism or empowerment, nor does she take up and interrogate any of the blatant omissions of difference within the text which circumscribes her performance. What she does do, I suggest, is open a space for viewing an aspect of the feminine that has previously been absent from the canon of televisual characterology. She performs a version of insurgent girlhood which is embedded in performance (action) rather than representation (image). There will be those who continue to insist that Buffy's Hollywood looks and body, not to mention her taste in fashion, take her out of the running for insurgent feminist icon. I do not think that Buffy was ever intended to perform such a role. If she is being read this way, and found lacking, it is because the television screen is empty of images of active and independent femininity and thus she is met with confusion. We are so unused to seeing this type of feminine performance that viewers have had too high expectations of her. Buffy is not our savior (we do not populate Sunnydale, California or television), she is not offering the penultimate re-imagining of feminist girlhood, nor can we expect her to. What her performances do offer is the possibility for reading gender insurgence in television performance and for the return of femininity as an active principle of that performance. Buffy is not an icon, she is a phenomenon.

All that being said, what is it about *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* that makes it such an interesting text for analysis in terms of performance? I chose this show because I felt it mobilized interesting questions about the performance of difference in contemporary television. In particular, I felt that there was an attempt within the show to re-organize, or make ambivalent, how gender categories and norms are performed. I think that television texts, more generally, can be subjected to this type of analysis. There are two major things that connect performance theory to the study of television. The first is that both areas of study are necessarily multi-disciplinary. Because it takes as its object some aspect of action, performance needs to draw upon a wealth of other theories to articulate itself. Further, performance theory has always been produced in relation to a wide range of multi-disciplinary theories. As performance theory has grown up in the last two decades, it has begun to develop its own theory, one that speaks specifically to questions of performance, but its proponents continue to draw from a wide array of theoretical materials. This interdisciplinarity is, in fact, one of the foundational (if this term can be used) tenets of performance studies. Television has had a somewhat similar evolution although it has not been so explicitly articulated. As a relatively new and marginal area of study within the academy, television studies began by defining itself through the language of other discourses such as film theory, postmodernism and feminism. Thus both television and performance studies draw on multi-disciplinary frameworks in order to further and develop their fields of inquiry. They are eminently suited for one another because of their shared emphasis on multi- or interdisciplinarity.

Beyond strictly theoretical questions, television and performance come together because they are fully imbricated in one another. I have sought to show that television is a performative medium and that television is replete with performances. Television is consumed with the repetition of acts and the citation of inter- and extra-textual events. In this way, television participates in bringing into being the whole interconnected matrix of mass media and cultural complexes. Moreover, it also is performative of certain bodies and spaces, borders and communities, relationships and cultures, bringing these into being through performances in its texts. The performative nature of television is



demonstrated through a close reading of the performances that its texts engender. The radical potential for studying performance as part of television – that is, what it adds to existing theory – is that it allows the study of television performances and its performativity to be effected. Through an intensive examination of performances that are produced by and for television, we can begin to show how televisual performances are performative, how they bring certain bodies, identifications, and social relations into being.

What I have written about the implication of theories of performance in relation to television can also be said for how feminism and postmodernism function in relation to television. Postmodernism has been seen as a fundamental aspect of television culture, both in its historical moment of inauguration and in its style of production. The postmodern nature of television is based on the medium's inherent mediation, intertextuality, fragmentation and capacity to produce the simulacrum. These features are recognized as being significant aspects of postmodern culture and they are integral parts of television as well. Television is mediated because it is edited and produced far from the locus of both its performers and viewers, it is intertextual in its reliance on other texts for its construction, it is fragmentary in structure because of commercial insertion and its serial form, it is simulacraic because it constructs a copy from no originally object, a copy which cannot be fully distinguished from the real. In all these respects, television is a fundamentally postmodern medium and therefore it is decipherable through postmodern theory.

Feminism's relation to the study of television is somewhat more complex. Feminist critiques of television initially centered on the absence of positive images of women in televisual culture and on the impact of television on female viewers. Feminist television criticism was later influence by feminist film theorists who applied a more complex and often psychoanalytic model to the study of the film text. Both of these theoretical orientations tried to imagine the possibility of an articulation of 'feminist' television or film. What I have tried to show is how all of these approaches can be brought to bear on the study of televisual performance. Rather than being pitted against each other, these theories can be mobilized and integrated to manifest a more thorough and

complex mapping of the televisual. Performance provides a useful framework within which these theories may come together.

What attention to performance does is expand the forum within which television has previously been studied. The most significant aspect of this expansion occurs in the differentiation that is suggested between representation and performance. Television is comprised of two compelling and integrated structures: visual texts and narratives. Each of these is an integral part of television. Many studies of television have focused on only one or the other and have failed to see their necessary complementarity. It is this complementarity that I have called performance. This has been especially evident in feminist television critiques where so much emphasis has been placed on the representational aspect of television. The focus of these works has been on the images of women as they are produced within the television text and the male dominant hegemony they reproduce. The suggestion is that the nature of televisual representation must be changed in order to allow more positive images of women to be produced in television culture. Against this position, sometimes referred to as "images of woman" was raised an alternate position, sometimes referred to as "woman as image" (Walters 1993, 29) which suggested, by way of post-structuralism, that the very term 'woman' was socially constructed and that its meanings circulated not in the image itself, but through cultural discourses. The first position sees constructions (images) of women as directly linked to and affecting real women. The second position states that there is virtually no material reality to which women have recourse. Because all aspects of life were understood to be constructed and circulated through cultural discourse, the material woman had no greater 'reality' than her image. The debate between these two positions continues today, as television research continues to be firmly focused on the representational aspects of the medium. What I would suggest is that, in television, there are not merely constructed images of women, nor are women merely image. In television, women are [in] performance which allows for the importance of their social construction but does not necessitate the dismissal of lived materiality.

For this project I have used the terms of performance somewhat selectively and in a way that departs from what has been theorized by most other

theorists of performance and performativity. It is the term performance which has been most strongly implicated, as I see it, in the way in which television texts are constructed. Performativity, which excavates how the reiterability of terms brings into being that which is named, also has a place, although at this stage a somewhat lesser one, in this work. In another project I believe that it will be possible to examine how television texts are performative of things that exist outside the screen (for instance bodies, styles, gender, community, etc.). In this work I have focused on certain aspects of television texts that are performative within the televisual matrix itself. Bodies, communities, spaces, and genders are articulated and re-articulated (thus the necessary repetition and citation that performativity calls upon) within particular texts and across texts of different genres, mediums and historical contexts. What I am calling performance is the active movement of character through the text. That virtually every moment of both structures (representational and narrative) are constructed and mediated does not diminish the fact that every moment of teleplay is replete with performance. Thus instead of taking as the object of study the narrative character of television or the representational character of television, this study focuses on their interconnection. By reading *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* through such an interconnected frame, I sought to show that televisual texts cannot be reduced to either representation or narrative but is both a performance and performative.

At the beginning of this thesis I stated that it was my intention to demonstrate how the study of performance would open up new possibilities for televisual inquiry. To do so I sought to show how the performances which structure *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fluctuate between moments of insurgence and hegemony. In each chapter I highlighted one area of the text which could be scrutinized through the lens of performance: Buffy, vampires, friendship, sexuality and space. In each chapter I examined the performances that produced the category under scrutiny and in each case brought to bear a number of discourses on the reading of these performances. The layering of these discourses served to bring forward the intrinsic character of performance which was necessary for textual production. Although this multiplicity of discourses makes the reading of the televisual text quite complex, at every turn I have tried

to show how each area which I have focused on can be returned to the question of performance. I think that I have demonstrated that the television text cannot be wholly separated from the question of performance and that performance addresses an aspect of the televisual which has often been overlooked.

The reading of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as, by turn, hegemonic and insurgent proved more complicated than I had anticipated. It was never my intention to make *Buffy* an example of the most insurgent possibility of televisual performance. That would have been too similar to those critics who have looked to *Buffy* herself as a feminist icon – something I have taken issue with more than once in this work – and then criticized both text and character for failing to live up to this unrealistic expectation. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a mainstream television text and thus I did not expect to find it to be replete with insurgence. Conversely, I have been concerned about the continuing tradition that insists that television texts are, intrinsically, hegemonic and that TV always shores up relations of domination and power. What I have found is that the *Buffy* text moves between insurgence and hegemony (if these must be thought of as two poles) and often hovers between them. Gender is the category which is most insurgently organized by the text. Without affecting a reversal, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* confounds performances that would adhere to strictly gendered expectations. Women are performed as powerful, brilliant, aggressive, loud, sexual and angry as often (if not more often) as they are portrayed as delicate, passive, vain and catty. The male characters are often put in a performance position associated with the feminine: waiting to be saved, taking relationship responsibility, worrying about their appearance and their potential to attract members of the opposite sex.

But if gender is written in an expansive form, allowing for performances which move insurgently across traditional narratives of femininity and masculinity, than other axes of difference are performed in much more hegemonic forms. This is most striking with regard to race. The homogenous and often unquestioned whiteness that permeates the Sunnydale landscape closes down the possibility of identification with any but the white norm. Further, the characters which take on the possibility of racial marking in this text are the demons and vampires who are continually performed negatively and

slated for eradication from the text. Sexuality is rendered similarly problematic as the text continually reinscribes the heterosexual norm as the most desirable mode of being for its characters. The dialectic between the normal and the not – abject – is one that continually returns within the narrative structures of this text. What is potentially insurgent in this dialectic is that it is never as obvious as it seems on the surface. The normal may be represented by the humans and the not by the demons and vampires that populate Sunnydale's hidden spaces, but this is only the beginning. Each of the main, seemingly normal characters are shown to be only tenuously anchored to the normal within their performances. Buffy's performance as The Slayer betrays her inability to ever be a truly normal girl. Angel as the vampire cursed with a soul is refused the normalcy of humanity as well as the normalcy of the vampiric community. And Oz as the werewolf performs the shifting signifier of the normal itself. That being said, the transformative insurgence of this fluidity is partially closed down by the presence of the hegemonic moral community which firmly positions the main characters within the realm of the 'good,' whether they fully conform to the requirements of the normative order or not.

There are two other areas which might be read as performing some type of insurgence within the text. The first, sexuality, is related to gender. Although, as I have already stated, homosexuality is mostly excluded from this text, sexual dynamics, in their heterosexual guise, are put somewhat askew. The sexuality of young women is not regulated in the same stringent manner to which the viewer has become accustomed. Young women are not precluded from being active, desiring agents who can pursue their sexual desires. At the same time, young men are not relegated to a voyeuristic, aggressive position and find themselves being looked at as often as they look and being actively desired as often as they desire. In this show young women do not wait to be urged into sexuality but act upon their own impulses and desires. The other area of possible insurgence in this text relates to how it is spatially plotted. Although it does set up a binary opposition between the city (bad) and the suburb (good), this ultimately fails. The suburb, constructed to assuage the growing urban fears of the white middle-class is quickly revealed to be as deadly as what has been left behind. The walls so carefully erected are shown to be equally permeable. That which was outside,

which made the walls necessary is shown not only to have breached this boundary, but to have always already been inside it. Further, the Other proves to be a necessary textual presence and so the walls themselves become a sham, a pretense at homogeneity and security. Without the Other, the text simply comes to an end.

I would suggest that attending to performance brings insurgent possibilities and hegemonic practices into view. It is the movement of the characters, in and out of situations, relationships and spaces, which produces both of these possibilities. It is necessary to read all of these mutually implicated aspects of performance in order to speculate on how they project insurgent possibilities and practices which sustain hegemony. The *Buffy* text is not insurgent in and of itself, but it suggests that insurgence is within the realm of possibility of televisual performance. The text also shows the direction in which youth-oriented media may be headed, or at least one possible direction. The popularity of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* suggests that many viewers are no longer content with traditional gender structures. The text also provides a critique of youth itself and of the social constrictions that frame this category. It begins to posit youth as diversity while showing how central hegemonic visions of homogeneity are within youth media. That being said, this text also shows what is elided in the youth-text, particularly the question of difference and its insertion as an important and viable textual category. Whether the insurgent depiction of gender points to a more general movement in this direction remains to be seen. At this juncture, I would suggest that the radical displacement of gender performance positions this text within the realm of insurgence while in relation to other questions it often leans more towards the hegemonic.

#### INTERTEXTUALITY AND *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*

As I researched this project, I was struck by how much 'extraneous' material came to bear on my analysis. It seemed that an intertextual reading would point to the next level of analysis of media performance. I would like to take this opportunity to indicate what this work would look like by examining some of the ways that *Buffy* functions intertextually. To do this, I will have to

depart somewhat from traditional notions of intertextuality. Most often it is intended as a literary term which traces the roots of texts to those which predate and infiltrate them. As it is used by Kristeva, Barthes and Fairclough, it suggests the implication of the text with other texts, social conventions and historical specificities. There is a possibility of reading, in *Buffy*, a variety of textual legacies... adolescent, sartorial, dialogic, vampiric, and so on. John L. Flynn's book, *Cinematic Vampires* (1992), does just such a reading (although in brief) for a multitude of vampire films. In relation to the film version of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, he writes that it is "derivative of *Captain Kronos – Vampire Hunter*, *Heathers*, *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, and *The Lost Boys*" (293). He suggests that the film (like the series) cannot be read strictly within the tradition of the vampire or horror film genre. Flynn links the textual production of the filmic *Buffy* to several different films, the last three of which are of particular interest to me. *Heathers* is a cult film-noir about homicidal rebellion against high school hierarchy. Both the film and televisual *Buffy* owe to *Heathers* the heavily ironic and sophisticated banter which almost all youth-oriented texts which proceed from *Heathers* have emulated. From *Bill and Ted*, *Buffy* takes its physical humor, rewriting of history and poking fun at figures of authority. It is perhaps most closely linked in genre to *The Lost Boys*, with which it shares the perspective that the adolescent is most ripe for vampiric conversion. *Buffy*, the television series shares these legacies but it also draws on others which are derived from its medium of dissemination. It falls within the tradition of teen-oriented television shows which grew out of *Beverly Hills, 90210* in the later nineteen eighties and which seems to have reached its climax in the late nineties.<sup>230</sup> It has also positioned itself within the legacy of *The X-Files*, which made the supernatural very popular and which has produced a number of clones.

But this is just one way to trace the expansive intertextuality of a television text. What I find even more exciting is how *Buffy* functions on a horizontal, rather than a vertical, intertextual plane. Fairclough (1992), alluding to Kristeva's

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<sup>230</sup> If I look quickly at the youth-oriented shows which have been produced for television in the last few years, it is an enormous list: *Beverly Hills, 90210*, *Party of Five*, *Felicity*, *Clueless*, *Moesha*, *Get Real*, *Roswell*, *Freaks and Geeks*, *Time of Your Life*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Popular*, *Manchester Prep*, *That 70's Show* and more.

work, does make reference to these two types of intertextuality. What I am here calling intertextuality is actually assumed to contain extra-textuality as well. Today, a television text (especially a mediated text) is rarely, if ever, just a text. Its influence expands beyond the borders of the television screen. In a sense, the television text is just a starting off point from which the narrative and characters (and actors) develop an extra-textual life of their own. To track how a television text like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* functions intertextually (in the manner in which I am using the term) is a potentially enormous undertaking and one which I cannot realize in this thesis. However, I would like to, albeit briefly, show what this type of analysis might entail and sketch a rough outline of what it would look like.

I would begin by dividing the extra-textual reading of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* into several subsections. The first concerns the texts which are by-products of the *Buffy* text. This would include the transition from film to television series which has already come under scrutiny in my work. It would also include where and how the television series is advertized, as well as what kind of advertizers buy space during the airing of the show. This examination could also include which stations carry the show, at what times and how the advertizing may change depending on where the show is situated in relation to both of these variables. In this section I would also put any spin-offs that the show has created. In the case of *Buffy*, the 1999-2000 season has seen the introduction of the show *Angel*, starring two of the main characters from the first three seasons of *Buffy*. *Angel* retains its textual link to *Buffy* but is aimed at a more mature audience so it would be interesting to examine these shows in terms of their similarities and difference.

In the second section I would include those products which are strongly linked to the show, a very large category for analysis. It would include an examination of all types of consumer products which carry the *Buffy* insignia or relate to the show in some other way. It would also look at where these can be purchased and, if possible, who might be doing the purchasing. Other areas that might be of interest in this section would be the *Buffy* soundtrack, now being sold on CD. It would be interested to look at what type of bands are represented or showcased on *Buffy* and how this promotion has affected their popularity. This



section would also look at the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* comic book series produced by *Dark Horse Comics*. An interesting comparison could be made between the storylines depicted by the comics and those of the television series, as well as the differences in how the characters are produced visually. The series of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* novels could be read in a similar comparative analysis. There is also the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Magazine*, a glossy periodical which includes posters, interviews, and inside information about the series, actors and characters, the special edition of *Cinescape* which focuses on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and other magazines which have done the same.<sup>231</sup>

Though closely related to the previous section, another section might deal with materials that provide a commentary on the show. This would include all types of articles from magazines, newspapers, the Internet and the TV Guide. It could also read through the way the program has been taken up by different types of periodicals, for instance mainstream popular culture magazines (i.e. *People*) and feminist magazines (i.e. *BUST*). There have also been a number of books published which act as companions to the series, such as *The Buffy Chronicles* (Genge 1998), *Bite Me!* (Stafford 1998) and *The Girl's Got Bite* (Tracy 1998) and these could also be included in this section. In time, any academic articles which have set out to analyze this show could also be included.

A fourth section of analysis would undertake to examine the relation between the *Buffy* text and events occurring in the outside world. It might trace the political climate and depictions of youth or sexuality in other discourses and compare how these are taken up within the diegesis. This section might also be concerned with how the show itself reacts to external events or takes them up within its discourse. An example of this might be how two episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* were pulled by the WB Network during the 1998-1999 season after the violence that occurred at Columbine High School during that year. One episode, "Earshot," which was to be aired the week following the Columbine shootings dealt with a cafeteria worker's plot to kill Sunnydale High Students by poisoning the cafeteria food. The episode was not aired until the summer. The final episode of that season was also pulled. "Graduation Day II," depicted the

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<sup>231</sup> For instance, *Entertainment Weekly*'s October first (1999) issue, devoted twenty-four pages to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

blowing up of Sunnydale High in order to effect the destruction of a demon bent on destroying the fictional town. Although the broadcast made it through the censors on some stations (in Toronto, it was aired on Barrie's The New VR, Rogers Cable 20), most of the viewing public in the U.S. did not see it until the beginning of the fall. This section of analysis would show the increasing conflation of the real and the televisual and might discuss how television is seen to affect events.

In the fifth section, the examination would turn to the show's cast and their performances outside of the *Buffy* text. This would include how the actors are used in product promotion and their performances on talk shows. It would track their interviews in magazines and their appearances in other television series and films. There would be the possibility of looking at how certain actors are cast and of reading through different characters performed by the same actor. An example of this, to which I have given some thought, would be the link between the character of Buffy Summers and of Katherine, the character portrayed by Sarah Michelle Geller in *Cruel Intentions* (a youth version of *Dangerous Liaisons*) released in 1999. The two characters are strikingly different. Buffy is a good, middle-class girl with rather traditional values and a penchant for saving the world while Katherine is pampered heiress who amuses herself by tormenting others. But there are interesting moments when the two stories intertwine iconically. Buffy wears a silver cross, a gift from Angel which symbolizes his devotion to her fight and which situates her as a member of the moral community. Buffy's cross is often visible and protects her from her enemies. Katherine also wears a plainly visible cross. Hers is bejeweled and has a secret compartment which holds her cocaine. Katherine's cross symbolizes her deceit. She holds it up as a symbol of her Christian goodness and purity and then turns around and uses it to get high. Ultimately, Katherine's deception is revealed and she is punished for her transgression, much as Buffy is elevated for her goodness.

The final section of intertextual inquiry is perhaps the most interesting and represents a whole new area of study: the Internet. When I first searched for *Buffy* on the Internet there were over three thousand related sites, thus it would be virtually impossible to examine them all in depth. But there are some

which are particularly interesting. There is, of course, the official site that belongs to the WB Network and which has subsidiary sites with an interactive game, star biographies, product information, email cards, episode guides, evil characters, fan club, mythology and web links.<sup>232</sup> They also have a posting board, called The Bronze, where an international community of fans can talk about the show. After spending some time on this site, under the moniker GradGirl, I discovered a whole Internet community with its own language and conventions. At first, I found the site somewhat confusing but other posters soon offered to help me out and steered me to The Bronze Welcome Wagon. Their Mission statement: "to welcome all of the newcomers to the Buffy the Vampire Slayer Bronze Posting Board! We hope that you will feel welcome here and hope to help you find your niche."<sup>233</sup> This offered a lot of very straightforward and useful information including other links. One which I found most interesting was called Book Marks of the Bronze.<sup>234</sup> This is a vast site with links to sites with posters, music, FAQs, merchandise, articles and interviews, personal pages, clubs, games, email lists, pictures, fan fiction, character sites, Sunnydale High... all related to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Further, one of the editors of the alternative, feminist magazine *BUST*, recently started a list-serve group dedicated to *Buffy* fans, which has very different characteristics than the one that belongs to the official site. It is compelling to think of the diversity of people engaged in *Buffy*-related Internet activities.

It is impossible to describe in a few sentences just how vast and interesting these on-line communities are. I was especially taken with the posting board where I spent several evenings and made connections with *Buffy* fans from all over the world. I think a very interesting piece of work could be done on just this area alone and how it relates to questions of performance. There is a whole universe going on, on-line, that should be documented and described. The users seem to be helpful and interesting and they are creating a whole new kind of community that problematizes even further questions of 'liveness,' performance and the physical body, as well as location, difference and spatiality. I am suggesting that all of these go towards an new type of mapping of television

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<sup>232</sup> <http://www.buffy.com>

<sup>233</sup> <http://www.angelfire.com/in/btvsjade/newbie.html>.

shows, in this case *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The fact that so much intertextual material exists raises new questions and blurs what are often the assumed boundaries of the television program.

#### THE NEXT LEVEL

It may seem that this further work on intertextuality moves the discussion away from questions of performance, but it does not. The intertextual matrices of production which surround and move outward from the text of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are also important for understanding its performances. Performance becomes one of several interesting and important dimensions of televisual inquiry and lends a complexity to the study of the media text. More and more, the television program does not exist as a single, unified field. All of the intertextual elements I have listed above are involved in the creation of a unique textual universe, one which is newly emergent in the growing context of media and virtual production. To understand the text it will become increasingly important to see what is being done outside of its televisual production and performance, both in its production relations, political economy and marketing, as well as its intertextual proliferation.

I think that this only scratches the surface of where the study of mediated performance can go. In particular, I see two further ways in which this inquiry can develop. The first concerns expanding the study of televisual performance to include a diversity of television texts. In the introduction of this thesis, I stated that it had been my original intention to study performance in relation to a variety of television programs. This proved to be too large a subject for a project that has striven to lay out the initial groundwork for the study of mediated performance. But I would suggest that this work still needs to be done and there are a number of different forms that this type of work might take. First, one could read media performances across genres, historical periods, actors or target audiences, or focus on specific types of performances - race, sexuality, youth, parenthood, family, intellectualism, criminality, community, education or class - across texts. This type of inquiry could also move across mediums to show how

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<sup>234</sup> <http://www.angelfire.com/mo/LisaPage/phblinks.html>.

performances change within and between them. This would allow us to see how visual narratives and their performances move across mediums, locations and contexts. This seems a virtually limitless terrain of inquiry and, indeed, it could be. Performance will offer an inventive way of studying media texts that radically re-imagines what they do and how they exist in the world.

There is another way to further the study of mediated performances that would involve ethnography or reception-studies. This type of study would involve examining the performative nature of mediated performance in relation to the viewing subject. A study of televisual performance would try and trace the trajectory from the screenic performance to that which is emulated by the viewer and would address specifically the issues of mimicry, masquerade and identification. In relation to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, there are several questions which might be asked of women: Has the program affected your view of women's bodies? Of sexuality and experimentation? Of women's physical strength and intelligence? Has it affected your style of dress or hair? Has it changed your attitude about what you can do or how you can act? Has something that happened on the show made you change something in your life? These are just very basic questions that can forge links between mediated performance and the performances that these may influence in the daily lives of viewers.

#### THE FUTURE OF *BUFFY*

As I write the first draft of these final pages, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is getting well into its fourth season. *Angel*, the spin-off, is receiving mediocre reviews from fans and the press alike. In a quick search for "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" on the Internet, I get 10 604 hits. I receive weekly emails from the official *Buffy*-list which keep me apprised as to all *Buffy*-related events, everywhere. Within a week of joining the *BUST*, *Buffy*-list, I received over twenty messages relating to the last few episodes. The Bronze, the official posting board is always full, no matter what time of day or night. Sometimes the cast and crew log on to talk to their fans. One young fan, just starting high school somewhere in the United States, sends me a copy of his by-weekly email *Buffy* 'zine. My local

magazine supplier stocks *Buffy* comics and magazines and I can get *Buffy*-related books at almost any bookstore in Toronto. Newspapers and magazines keep running articles on the show and many of the cast-members have turned up in movies. The first-ever Teen Choice Awards may not have voted (through *Seventeen Magazine*) *Buffy* its number one show, but Sarah Michelle Geller walked away with the award for best actress for her role in *Cruel Intentions*. *BUST* magazine now has a section called "Buffy Watch." *Buffy's* future looks bright indeed.

As for the show itself, some major changes have occurred this year. Everyone has graduated from high school and college life just is not the same. Here they seem to follow many earlier teen shows. Angel and Cordelia have moved on to Los Angeles, Giles finds himself unemployed, and Joyce has faded into the background now that Buffy is living away from home. Wesley, in a roundabout way, ended up as a member of the *Angel* cast. Faith remained in a coma but managed to resurrect herself to cause some more trouble in the forth season. Oz and Willow continued their play for the title of best couple until his werewolfism become too much for him and Oz left in search of a cure and more lucrative movie deals. Willow pined for him for a while but then found that her feeling towards a new Wiccan friend were actually romantic. Xander and Anya are still an item and he continues to live in the family basement. Buffy is learning that University life is a whole new battleground. The classes are harder, the teachers are ornery, the boys you sleep with can be as mean as an un-cursed Angel, and vampires continue to abound. So far, the show is usually as witty as always, but the teen-angst is a little less believable now that the characters are growing up. We will be left to ponder what The Slayer will be like as a grown woman. It also raises the question: Can she be imagined in that position, or will she remain 'forever young' as the vampires she slays.

#### THE FUTURE OF TELEVISION OR MEDIATED PERFORMANCE

It is difficult to deny that television and performance are linked. It will be important to continue the work which performance studies began: the live act, theatrical performance, ritual, dance, historical action, photography, theory and

difference. The necessity for this work is perhaps made even more crucial by their increasing domination by the mass media, which permeate virtually every aspect of contemporary culture. The most significant reason to study television in relation to performance is that, put most simply, it is one of television's most irreducible features. In some sense, even the production of television is a performance of writers, producers, directors, cinematographers, photographers, actors, designers, stunt players, and the like.<sup>235</sup> The text itself, in mediatized or digitized form, is a vast constellation of performances waiting to be read by an audience. In some sense, televisual performance exists somewhere between the photograph and the play. It shares the photograph's seeming verisimilitude and, like the photograph, it can be staged to confound strict readings of the image (in terms of virtually anything: race, class, gender, time, and place). But unlike the photograph, the televisual image has movement, it performs action. This is what it shares with the play, a more or less narrative structure, stylized direction, principles of design, advertizing and marketing and media review. Unlike the play, however, the television text is most often produced (even in the case of the live-audience text) far from the purview of the audience and performers. But no matter what type of other performances television may resemble, to a greater or lesser degree, it remains a medium of performance in its own, unique right. Once media texts are recognized as legitimate avenues of performance inquiry, there are virtually limitless possibilities to explore. Television is nearly ubiquitous and thus it should not be hidden within studies of performance. This type of inquiry becomes increasingly important as television infiltrates larger and larger parts of social and cultural discourses. Performance provides an excellent framework for studying television. I think it will be exciting to see what research emerges in the realm of mediated performance in the future.

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<sup>235</sup> Whoever said that performance had to preclude vast economic resources and corporate structure?

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