Lewis Call
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The publication of *Post-Anarchism: A Reader* confirms what many of us have suspected (and cautiously hoped for) these past few years: a kind of post-anarchist moment has arrived. Benjamin Franks has argued that this moment has already enabled a small but identifiable post-anarchist *movement* to emerge; he quite sensibly names Todd May, Saul Newman, Bob Black, Hakim Bey and me as members of this movement (2007: 127). Legend has it that Bey got the whole thing started back in the 1980s, when he called for a 'post-anarchism anarchy' which would build on the legacy of Situationism in order to reinvigorate anarchism from within (1985: 62). Interestingly, Bey identified popular entertainment as a vehicle for 'radical re-education' (ibid.). It is in this spirit that I offer my post-anarchist reading of Joss Whedon's popular fantasy programme *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. My text will be Buffy's fourth season. This season undeniably represents Buffy's anarchist moment; I will argue that season four also offers its audience an accessible yet sophisticated post-anarchist politics.

But what does a post-anarchist politics look like? Newman has pointed out that post-anarchism is not 'after' anarchism and does not seek to dismiss the classical anarchist tradition; rather, post-anarchism attempts to radicalize the possibilities of that tradition (2008: 101). Broadly speaking, post-anarchists believe that an effective anarchist politics must address not only the modern forms of economic and state power, but also the more pervasive and insidious forms of power which haunt our postmodern world. These include what Foucault called biopower (1978: 140ff.), and what Deleuze and Guattari called overcoding or the imperialism of the sign (1983: 199ff.). The kinds of power which structuralists and post-structuralists have located in the realm of language are of particular importance to post-anarchism. For example, Newman (2001) has shown that Lacan's concept of the Symbolic order is crucial to the post-anarchist project. For Lacan, the Symbolic is the place of language and thus of Law; the Symbolic order creates us as indi-

viduals, structures our desires and determines the limits within which resistance can happen. This has serious implications for radical thought: if Lacan's model is correct, then anarchist theory must offer an account of the Symbolic. Furthermore, if the Symbolic is the place where Law happens, and if Law is the speech of the state, then anarchists should seek to subvert the Symbolic order. In other words, if we really want to do something about *the Law*, we must find a way out of the Symbolic. Otherwise, we're just fighting *laws*, a losing proposition.

What I'm really saying is that we just want to let anarchism take its structuralist turn, because we think that will lead us to a place that's fascinating and possibly liberatory. This desire is motivated by what Franks has called one of the 'great strengths' of post-anarchism: its ability to spot the 'essentialisms and dogmatisms' of classical anarchisms, and its capacity to open up original areas for critical scrutiny (2007: 140). Yet Franks and others have also noted a serious potential problem with post-anarchism: it often rejects or ignores the concept of class, and thus disregards important forms of oppression (ibid.: 137). It seems that a dangerous elitism lurks within post-anarchism. My turn to popular culture was motivated, in part, by my desire to purge the project of this elitism. After all, it's true that the workers don't read much Lacan. They have better things to do. But in our postmodern world, everybody watches television. As post-anarchist ideas are represented on TV, they become accessible to a broad audience, which includes many working-class viewers. Pop culture in general, and television in particular, can take post-anarchism out of its bourgeois ivory tower and broadcast it into living rooms around the world.

This is where *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* comes in. *Buffy* is a pop-culture phenomenon. The show ran for seven seasons. Its spinoff, *Angel*, ran for five. Both narratives have continued in comic book form. *Buffy* has a large, loyal, dedicated audience. That audience does include many bourgeois academics: David

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ing the Spanish civil war. As for Buffy herself, she's a reluctant revolutionary. For most of her career she has been the sheriff of the Symbolic, wielder of the Name, bearer of the Law. But to her credit, when the Real came calling, she answered. By returning to the very moment of the Symbolic's creation, she found a space before language, a space of resistance. She made that space into a weapon and used it to fragment the Symbolic order which had imprisoned the slayers for so long. In this way Buffy modeled an effective, engaged post-anarchist politics. *Buffy* made that politics available to audiences of various ethnicities, genders, sexualities and social classes. Let the Buffy Studies and post-anarchist communities rejoice together at the arrival of Buffy, the post-anarchist vampire slayer.

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Lavery (2004) has described Buffy Studies as an academic cult, and I am a card-carrying member of that cult. But Buffy is not just for scholar-fans; it is for everybody. *Buffy*'s most working-class character, Xander Harris, starts season four by stating his ethical imperative. He solves his moral dilemmas by asking himself, 'What would Buffy do?' (4.1).[1] The answer, I will argue, is that *Buffy* would launch a classical anarchist assault on the military–scientific complex, followed by an all-out post-anarchist attack on the Symbolic. And then have hot chocolate.

Not everyone agrees; *Buffy* criticism, especially in its early years, has often denied the show's revolutionary potential. Jeffrey Pasley equated Buffy and her demon-hunting friends with the 'primitive rebels' and 'social bandits' of leftist lore, but concluded that they ended up offering only 'piecemeal' resistance, not revolution (2003: 262–3). Reading the programme through the lens of Marxist historiography, Pasley failed to see the more radical elements of anarchist resistance in *Buffy*. Even less plausibly, Neal King (2003) denied that there was anything anti-authoritarian about Buffy's 'Scooby gang'; for him, Buffy and her (mainly female) friends were nothing more than fascist 'brownskirts'. This position was based largely on a tortured interpretation of *Buffy*'s first three seasons; by the fourth season, it had become quite impossible to identify Buffy with any kind of fascist politics.

Season four shows us Buffy's freshman year at the University of California, Sunnydale. As Bussolini has pointed out, this is the same U.C. that brought us the American nuclear arsenal (2005; paragraph 16). Buffy begins dating Riley Finn, her handsome young teaching assistant. (Whoops!) Buffy soon discov-

[1] Dialogue quotations are taken from the excellent Buffyverse Dialogue Database at `http://vrya.net/bdb/`. I have made minor corrections to some dialogue. Episodes are cited by season number and episode number, e.g. (4.1) for season four, episode one. For a complete episode list, see `http://vrya.net/bdb/ep.php`. Thanks to Peggy Q for loaning me season four DVDs.

ers that Riley is actually a special forces soldier working for the U.S. government's secret demon-hunting project, the Initiative. Buffy tries to work with the Initiative, but soon finds that she can't handle its military hierarchies and authoritarian power structures. So season four actually establishes Buffy's politics as *anti*-fascist. Wall and Zryd have argued compellingly that Buffy's 'critical way of thinking about the fascistic and military-structured Initiative' facilitate Riley's transformation from loyal soldier to self-proclaimed anarchist by the end of the season (2001: 61). Riley's 'anarchism', they claim, is not rigorous, but rather represents a 'shorthand alternative to institutional logic' similar to that used by opponents of globalization (ibid.). The fact that it is non-rigorous or post-rational may be to its advantage, however. Bussolini makes the important point that the famous mass protests against the World Trade Organization, later known as the 'Battle of Seattle', took place while season four was originally being broadcast in November 1999 (2005; paragraph 29). Bussolini emphasizes, correctly, that the anti-globalization politics which were contemporary with season four criticize the kind of state-based, hierarchical politics which motivate the Initiative (ibid.). The show presents Seattle-style anarchism as a real and legitimate option for an Iowa farm boy like Riley Finn, or for a working-class carpenter like Xander Harris. The show thus makes anarchism an option for various non-bourgeois audiences. As the streets of Seattle filled with those who believed another world was possible, *Buffy* was broadcasting a radical endorsement of this belief – on network television!

If *Buffy*'s fourth season had 'only' portrayed a relevant form of contemporary anarchist politics in a highly positive light, that alone would secure the show a place in the history of popular culture. But this season did much more than that. In addition to its compelling narrative about the emergence of a classical anarchist consciousness, season four offered a bold post-anarchist vision. Kenneth Hicks has recently accused season

olation the Symbolic was born. As Lacan surmised, the Law originates in the crucible of Oedipal desire.

But Buffy's been flirting with the Real for a while now, and she's ready to take back this ancient night. She defeats the Shadow Men, and breaks their staff. 'It's always the staff': Buffy knows a Lacanian phallus when she sees one. For the remainder of the series, Buffy pursues the destruction of this primal, patriarchal Symbolic. And at last she succeeds. At the end of the show, Buffy and her friends change the world. Buffy rallies her army of potential slayers, and makes her 'Crispin's Day' speech before the big battle: 'In every generation one slayer is born because a bunch of men who died thousands of years ago made up that rule' (7.22). Buffy rejects her own foundational myth. She rejects the Oedipal logic which established the Symbolic. She acknowledges that the ancient patriarchs 'were powerful men'. But she insists that her best friend Willow is 'more powerful than all of them combined'. And indeed, Willow lives up to her press. The young witch works a spell which makes every 'potential' into a full-fledged slayer. In this way Buffy's power is diffused through an entire community. It's a radically democratic move. Buffy is no longer 'Slayer, comma, The'. The Law has been thoroughly fragmented. Indeed, following this rupture in the Symbolic, there is no longer a monolithic Law at all. There is instead a play of forces and flows, a give and take. Buffy has created a community of post-anarchist vampire slayers.

The show's conclusion demonstrates that Buffy is anything but a fascist brownskirt. At the end of season seven, Buffy holds nominal command over an army of slayers. But *Buffy* season eight comic books reveal that this 'army' is really a diverse collection of free-thinking riot grrrls, third-wave feminists and lesbian separatists. They're *all* 'hot chicks with superpowers' (7.21) now, and they're anarchists to boot. They would just as soon kick Buffy's ass as salute her. The slayers are an anarchist army, not unlike those that fought against Franco's fascists dur-

Buffy's still the voice of the Law, and the space outside language has vanished once again. But here we have to look at the big picture. Baudrillard once observed that the events of May 1968 created a rift in the Symbolic order which remained open for years (1976: 34). The events of 'Restless' have a similar effect on the Buffyverse. 'Restless' appeared almost exactly halfway through Buffy's seven-season narrative. Seasons five, six and seven are largely concerned with Buffy's quest to understand the primal nature of her power. In a way, Buffy never wakes up from her dream. She now knows that the Real is out there. She continues to live in the Symbolic as she must, as we all must. But she has learned that her power comes from a place outside language. 'I need to know more. About where I come from, about the other slayers', she tells Giles at the beginning of season five (5.1). In a most unlikely move, Buffy becomes a student of history. She studies the ancient stories of the slayer line, seeking the place where it all began, in the time *before* the Symbolic.

Buffy finally finds what she's looking for towards the end of the show's seventh and final season. In 'Get it Done' (7.15), Buffy visits the dreamtime once again. This time she goes all the way back to the beginning, to re-enact the event which created the first Slayer. Here *Buffy* examines its own creation myth. Since the slayers seem to represent the Symbolic order, this also lets the show examine the foundational myth of *our* culture. Buffy meets the Shadow Men, the ancient patriarchs who made the Primal Slayer. They chain Buffy, promising to show her the source of her power. Buffy protests. 'The First Slayer did not talk so much', remarks a Shadow Man. Nor could she, for she had not yet created the Symbolic order. The patriarchs show Buffy the demon energy which gives the slayers their power. She refuses it, but they won't listen. Suddenly she realizes that she is experiencing a rape, a violation. These men forced this demonic essence into a young woman against her will. These ancient fathers raped their daughter; from this vi-

four of assuming that 'government is incompetent because it's incompetent'; Hicks finds this assumption 'inconclusive and unsatisfying' (2008: 69). But there is, in fact, a perfectly convincing reason for the Initiative's failures. Richardson and Rabb have quite rightly interpreted Riley's rejection of the Initiative as a rejection of 'humanity's militarization of reason and scientific knowledge' (2007: 70). Riley's 'anarchism', then, is in part an anarchist critique of what Habermas and others have called instrumental rationality.

This is *Buffy*'s entry point into post-anarchism. A Habermasian critique of instrumental rationality, while certainly radical by the standards of network television, would nonetheless have remained wedded to the modernist position of the Frankfurt School. To avoid this, the show must take a post-structuralist turn. Amazingly, this is precisely what it does. The second half of season four takes as its central concern the operations of power within the realm of language and Law. *Buffy* has always shown a strong fascination with language (see M. Adams, 2003), but here that fascination takes on a specifically political form. The show enacts an escape from what Fredric Jameson called the 'prison-house of language' (1972). This escape begins with the silent episode, 'Hush' (4.10), which performs the elimination of the Symbolic in order to stage a very post-anarchist return to the Lacanian Real. The alternate reality episode 'Superstar' (4.17) rewrites the Symbolic order, to make a minor character into the star of the show. *Buffy*'s post-anarchist project culminates in the season four finale, 'Restless' (4.22). This episode is a tour of the dreamworld, the world beneath the rational. As much as any symbolic artefact could, 'Restless' approaches the unrepresentable world Lacan called the Real.

So *Buffy*'s fourth season does not only provide a savvy, vibrant representation of an anarchist praxis which was real and relevant when the programme aired in 1999. The show also models a very viable post-anarchist politics, one which is based

on a radical subversion of the dominant Symbolic regime. This politics is the heir of 60s Situationism and the 'ontological anarchy' of the 80s. It builds on radical street theatre and the symbolic interventions associated with Carnival against Capitalism and other contemporary anarchist movements. Most crucially, this post-anarchism challenges the hegemony of language. It locates the places where effective revolutionary action is still possible: in the space where there is no speech, and in the mystical space of the unconscious. Lacan named this last space the Real. We can never represent it, but if we approach it even obliquely, we contribute to our liberation from the tyranny of language. *This* is what Buffy would do. She would be an anarchist, certainly: after all, Riley and all the other kids are doing it. But being an anarchist means something specific in *Buffy*'s millennial moment. It means that she will be Buffy, the post-anarchist vampire slayer.

'WE'VE GOT IMPORTANT WORK HERE. A LOT OF FILING, GIVING THINGS NAMES.'

Post-Anarchist Themes in Late Season Four of Buffy

Jacques Lacan is justly infamous for his incomprehensible prose, but his structuralist version of psychoanalysis is nonetheless crucial to many contemporary intellectual projects, including post-anarchism. Thankfully, there is a rich secondary literature on Lacan. Marini (1992) provides a useful summary of Lacan's conceptual revolution. In 1953, Lacan replaced the traditional Freudian system with a structural system which divided human reality into a Symbolic realm of language and culture, an unrepresentable and unknowable Real, and an Imaginary composed of our fantasies of reality (ibid.: 43). Lacan reformulated the Oedipus complex; he made it our entrance into the Symbolic, which was the 'universe of the law'

naming, are the distilled essence of bureaucracy. Buffy's dream becomes a nightmare as Riley embraces Symbolic power. The dream reveals to us that Riley's political education is not over. He may call himself an anarchist, but now he needs to learn how to be a post-anarchist.

Finally, Buffy meets the mysterious primal force which has been pursuing her and her friends through the dreamworld. This force turns out to be the spirit of the original Slayer, the woman who first took on the burden of slayerhood in the ancient world. Tara shows up to mediate between Buffy and the speechless Primal Slayer. As Tara says, 'Someone has to speak for her.' This ancient tribal woman confirms Irigaray's interpretation, for she is definitely outside the Symbolic. 'Let her speak for herself', Buffy demands. Buffy is still the voice of the Law here, constantly trying to reassert the Symbolic order. '*Make her speak*', Buffy insists. Speech is an imperative here, for the Symbolic order is in a state of crisis. The Primal Slayer is a creature of the radical Real. If she cannot be made to speak, she threatens to undermine the entire Symbolic regime. Speaking through Tara, the first Slayer insists upon her position outside language: 'I have no speech. No name. I live in the action of death, the blood cry, the penetrating wound. I am destruction. Absolute … alone.' She is pure action, and she has nothing to do with language. Buffy reasserts the Symbolic one more time, with a twinkling speech that rolls off Sarah Michelle Gellar's tongue like a waterfall in springtime: 'I walk. I talk. I shop. I sneeze. I'm gonna be a fireman when the floods roll back. There's trees in the desert since you moved out. And I don't sleep on a bed of bones. Now give me back my friends.' This is finally enough to force the first Slayer to speak. 'No … friends! Just the kill. We … are … alone!' But it's Buffy's position that prevails. She defeats her ancient ancestor, everybody wakes up, and things get back to normal.

Wait a minute. Doesn't that just mean that the Symbolic always wins in the end? What's revolutionary about that?

realize the nature of their dilemma. 'There's a great deal going on, and all at once!' observes Giles. He's right: as the Symbolic erodes, everything becomes simultaneous. The Scoobies are entering the eternal Now of the Real. This world is seductive; it's hard to leave. Willow and Giles start to work out the fact that they are being pursued by some kind of primal force. Xander resists: 'Don't get linear on me now, man!' He doesn't want to re-enter the Symbolic – who would? That would mean going through the whole Oedipal thing again. 'Restless' literalizes Oedipal fear through Xander's pseudo-incestuous desire for Buffy's mom, and through his aggression towards his drunken father, who makes a rare and violent appearance in Xander's dream.

Buffy's dream provides the strongest challenge to the Symbolic. Buffy meets Riley in an Initiative conference room. He's dressed in coat and tie, as befits his new rank: 'They made me Surgeon General.' In the dreamworld, Buffy's critique of instrumental rationality can reach new heights of beautiful absurdity. It transpires that Riley is drawing up a plan for world domination with Adam (the season four 'Big Bad', now in human form). 'The key element?' Riley reveals: 'Coffee-makers that think'. It's a wonderful absurdist send-up, in the tradition of Situationism, Dadaism or Surrealism. When Buffy questions this plan to achieve the apotheosis of state power, Riley replies, 'Baby, we're the government. It's what we do.' It's important to note that Riley did not participate in the joining spell, and is not part of this dream voyage. What we are seeing here is Buffy's unconscious *perception* of Riley. This is the show's way of explaining how Riley could call himself an anarchist without actually understanding what that meant. Although Riley has rejected the external power structures which once ruled him, he has not yet killed his inner fascist. Riley remains a statist, and an especially nasty sort of statist at that. He dismisses his girlfriend: 'Buffy, we've got important work here. A lot of filing, giving things names.' The work he mentions, the filing and

(ibid.). The Lacanian model should be of tremendous interest to contemporary anarchists, for it's just possible that Lacan located the place where Law happens. That place is the Symbolic, which we first enter via the name of the Father. As Elizabeth Grosz has pointed out, the Lacanian model implies that 'language alone is capable of positioning the subject as a social being' (1990: 99). Language does this by deploying the rules, structures and hierarchies of the social. Since these are also the conduits through which political power flows, language advances the statist agenda. That makes the Symbolic a legitimate target for post-anarchism.

If the Symbolic is post-anarchism's natural enemy, the Real is its natural ally. It was Saul Newman who first recognized this important point: 'this gap, this surplus of meaning that cannot be signified, is a void in the symbolic structure – the "Real"' (2001: 139). The Real ensures that the hegemony of the Symbolic is never complete. Thinking about the Real helps us to find fissure points in the structures of postmodern power. The Real is a jackpot for post-anarchists, suggesting as it does that 'there is always something missing from the social totality, something that escapes social signification – a gap upon which society is radically founded' (ibid.: 147). It's certainly a relief to realize that society and its myriad power structures must always remain incomplete. Society might appear to be monolithic and omnipotent, as might the state which claims to represent society. But both were built upon this gap in the system of signification: their foundations are hollow.

Newman uses this Lacanian notion of the gap 'to theorize a non-essentialist outside to power' (2001: 160). This is post-anarchism in a nutshell – or in a bombshell, as Jason Adams (2003) would have it. Post-anarchism seeks a space outside power, and endeavours to use that space as the staging area for a project of radical liberation. Like Newman, I believe that this space is to be found in the Lacanian Real. Of course, the Real is not a destination we can reach; it will always elude us.

But we can think about the Real. We can develop an awareness of its effects. We can feel its presence in our lives. When we do these things, we challenge the authority of the Symbolic. We question its *jurisdiction*, in the most literal sense: we dispute its right and its ability to *speak the Law*. What could be more anarchist than that?

Buffy makes its post-anarchist move about halfway through season four, in Joss Whedon's celebrated silent episode 'Hush' (4.10). In this Emmy-nominated episode, an especially terrifying band of monsters descends on Sunnydale. The Gentlemen are neat, tidy and Victorian in their appearance. They are also completely silent. And the moment they arrive in Sunnydale, they steal everyone's voices. In Lacanian terms, the Gentlemen rip the Symbolic order away and lock it in a box. In an excellent Lacanian reading of 'Hush', Kelly Kromer notes that Buffy normally acts as the Law in Sunnydale: she creates the world by classifying creatures as wicked or good (2006: 1). Buffy wields the power of the Name, a weapon just as potent as her trusty stake, Mr. Pointy. From a post-anarchist perspective, of course, this power is problematic, since it is precisely the kind of power that underwrites the postmodern state. But Buffy, like all slayers, is a woman. And as Luce Irigaray (1985) has pointed out, women are connected to the Symbolic in a way which is tenuous at best. As Irigaray argues, women assure the possibility of the Symbolic without being recipients of it: 'their nonaccess to the symbolic is what has established the social order' (ibid.: 189). Buffy's gender is important here. As a woman, she's used to being denied access to the Symbolic. This denial of access is literalized in 'Beer Bad', (4.5) when magic beer causes Buffy

[2] It turns out that the working-class tavern owner spiked the beer in order to get back at the snotty, elitist upper-class students who frequent his pub. 'Beer Bad' thus enacts a bar-room class struggle between bourgeois students and working-class 'townies'. Mainstream films like *Good Will Hunting* have tried this before, but *Buffy* is able to take it much further by stripping the arrogant intellectual elite of its weapons of rationalism.

The stage is set for season four's climactic post-anarchist battle. To defeat Adam, the Scoobies must use a spell which combines the strengths of Buffy, Willow, Xander and Giles. It's a moment of radical mysticism. 'We are forever', declares Combo Buffy. Here we see a powerful expression of *Buffy*'s typical argument: Buffy needs her friends, and is always better off when she has their help. She may be a kick-ass Stirnerean superhero, but she can't do it alone. A strong collectivist spirit lies deep at the heart of *Buffy*. Maybe this is what Fredric Jameson was talking about when he described the attempt to dissolve the subject into the Symbolic as an awareness of the 'dawning collective character of life' (1972: 196). By the end of season four, *Buffy* was post-Seattle and post-structuralist. The show increasingly pointed towards a radically collectivist politics, and it increasingly found space for such a politics in the place beyond the Symbolic.

This trend culminates in Joss Whedon's 'Restless' (4.22), the denouement of season four.[3] It turns out that the joining spell which created Combo Buffy has a price, as such spells often do. The Scoobies try to sleep off the spell's after-effects, but they are plagued by troubling dreams. These dreams reveal a persistent need to overcome language and embrace the Real. Willow dreams of 'homework' which requires her to cover every inch of Tara's skin with mysterious calligraphy. In this dream, Tara is over-inscribed. She is completely contained and constrained within the Symbolic. This reiterates the argument of 'Hush': Tara is always better off without language. Indeed, all the Scoobies are. Dream-Giles directs a play. He gives an inspirational speech just before the curtain goes up, and cheerfully instructs his troupe to 'lie like dogs'. Public speech is ridiculed here, dismissed as a pack of lies. Gradually the Scoobies start to

[3] The narrative structure of season four is unique, for this is the only season of *Buffy* which features a denouement. Every other season concludes with a climactic battle between Buffy and the current 'Big Bad'. But in season four, this battle occurs in the season's penultimate episode, 'Primeval'.

minutes into this astonishing 'Espensode', Jonathan has taken control of the Symbolic in the Buffyverse and in our world, too.

Throughout 'Superstar', the image of Jonathan continues to proliferate across every available surface. We see rows and rows of identical Jonathan posters lining the walls of Sunnydale. The aesthetic is unmistakably fascist: infinite copies of Jonathan's sad, shy face gaze down on the population. Jonathan has become all things to all people: brilliant musician, vampire slayer, author, basketball player. He is the subject of comic books and trading cards. Jonathan advertises sporting goods on billboards. A poster on the back of Riley's dorm room door shows Jonathan as a basketball superstar – like Michael Jordan, only short and Jewish. This infinite propagation of Jonathans slides smoothly into a very smart critique of consumer culture. Here is a radical assault on the corporate logo, for those who may never get around to reading Naomi Klein. In this strange and disturbing world, there is only one logo, and it is Jonathan. His image has monopolized the Symbolic system more effectively than Nike's swoosh ever did. And now we see where consumer capitalism is headed: towards a barren, totalitarian Symbolic, a world with only one sign. Here the Name has been distilled down to its most basic, oppressive essence. That essence is Jonathan.

Naturally, the magic which Jonathan used to rewrite the Symbolic order proves to be 'unstable'. It's one thing to disrupt the narrative of the show, but Jonathan's magic is threatening to spill over into *our* Symbolic, and that won't do. This is television, after all, and the name of the show must be identical with the name of its protagonist. So the spell is broken. Jonathan goes back to being a nobody, and Buffy's on top of the world once again. But the damage has been done. Buffy's viewers can no longer take the Symbolic for granted. 'Hush' has already taught us that the Symbolic comes and goes in the Buffyverse. Now we know that our own Symbolic is no safer than Buffy's.

to devolve into a cavewoman.[2] By the end of the episode, she is incapable of forming multi-word sentences. Xander asks her what lesson she has learned about beer; she replies, 'foamy'. When the womanizing Parker asks forgiveness for his use and abuse of Buffy, she is beyond language, and can only bonk him on the head with a club. At this point we realize that actually, Buffy is often outside the Symbolic. So when the Symbolic suddenly vanishes from Sunnydale in 'Hush', she can cope better than an old patriarch like Giles or a young one like Riley. In silent Sunnydale, the Real reigns supreme, and consequently social Law begins to disintegrate (Kromer, paragraph 8). This is bad news for Buffy, but good news for post-anarchists. Life would indeed be really good, if only the Real could be domesticated (Marini,1992: page 43). At least, that's how the state sees things. But 'Hush' argues powerfully that this domestication can never be achieved. Indeed, 'Hush' performs the polar opposite of this domestication: a radical release of the Real.

In 'Hush', the Real is dramatically erotic. That's understandable, since Eros always contains the excess of meaning which characterizes the Real. Erotic gestures thus approach the Real in a way that language never can. 'Hush' begins with a daydream. Buffy is in her psych class. Professor Walsh (the mad scientist who runs the Initiative) is lecturing about communication, language and the difference between the two. As part of a demonstration, Walsh asks Riley to kiss Buffy. 'If I kiss you, it'll make the sun go down', warns Riley. He does, and it does. Clearly this kiss has performative powers which language can't match. Of course, the Symbolic immediately tries to reassert itself. 'Fortune favours the brave', observes Buffy. She doesn't usually quote Virgil, so this looks like the voice of the Empire speaking through Buffy – in this case an Empire of Signs, as Barthes might say. 'Hush' is all about the kiss. Riley complains to Forrest that he has trouble talking to Buffy. 'Then get with the kissing', Forrest quite sensibly replies. But the really interesting thing about Buffy and Riley is that they actually *can't*

kiss anywhere near the Symbolic. Their first kiss happened in the Imaginary, in Buffy's daydream. Their second kiss happens in the Real. Stripped of speech, the two mute heroes meet in downtown Sunnydale, which has become a chaotic no-man's-land. They hug. Each checks, silently, to see that the other is OK. They hear the sounds of nearby violence. Preparing to do their duty, they start to turn away from one another. They think better of this, turn back, and kiss. The entire kiss is negotiated and consummated without speech, which gives it a great deal of power. This kiss becomes the foundation of their relationship. Buffy and Riley never do get the hang of the talking. But when they are fighting demons together – and afterwards, when they are making love – they move with effortless grace. Buffy and Riley don't need speech; indeed, they are visibly better off without it. They show us that we can actually operate much closer to the Real than we typically believe.

The other major erotic event in 'Hush' is an incident of same-sex hand-holding, which represents the beginning of Willow's first lesbian relationship. In 'Hush' we meet a young witch named Tara. When Sunnydale goes silent, Tara seeks out Willow, the one person who might understand what's happening. Tara and Willow are attacked by the Gentlemen. They're forced to barricade themselves in the dorm laundry room. With the Gentlemen banging on the door, Willow tries to use her magic to move a soda machine up against the door. It's too heavy, and she fails. Then Tara takes Willow's hand. Their fingers intertwine. They look at each other. In a very well choreographed move, they turn simultaneously towards the soda machine, which flies across the room and blocks the door. (This shot would later reappear in the show's opening credits.) Willow and Tara don't stop holding hands after their spell is done, and they are basically inseparable from this moment. Their shared magical power illustrates the nature of their relationship: vital, energetic, and very much greater than the sum of its parts. All of this is accomplished without language. Indeed, 'Hush'

makes us realize that if the Gentlemen hadn't come to Sunnydale, Willow and Tara might never have got together. Willow is a hyper-articulate nerdy type, and Tara has a stutter which gets worse when she's nervous. In normal times, the two of them live on two very different margins of the Symbolic. None of that matters in the laundry room. Here there is no language, only a Real composed of power and love.

'Hush' argues consistently that love happens where there is no language. Naturally, Buffy finds her voice at last, and her scream destroys the Gentlemen. The Law returns to Sunnydale. But no one is actually happy about that. 'Hush' concludes with a brilliant meditation on the misery of the Symbolic. During the reign of silence, Buffy and Riley have discovered each other's secret identities. At the end of the episode, Riley visits Buffy in her dorm room. He sits down awkwardly on Willow's bed. 'I guess we have to talk', he begins. 'I guess we do', Buffy agrees. The two of them then sit in complete silence, staring at one another across the gulf between the two beds. Their longing is palpable, and it is a longing for the Real. Their plight suggests that we should resist the Symbolic not only because it's the right thing to do, but also because it might be the only way that we can find happiness.

Jane Espenson's 'Superstar' (4.17) explores the fascist tendencies of the Symbolic. The teaser shows us a typical monster hunt, with one bizarre twist: Buffy can't handle things, so she has to get help from … Jonathan Levinson? This geeky, alienated graduate of Sunnydale High has somehow been transformed into a super-suave James Bond type. Things get worse fast: Jonathan has even colonized the *opening credit sequence*, in which he gets as much screen time as any Scooby. This is big trouble, because it means that Jonathan has broken out of the Buffyverse's narrative space. The credits are the part of the programme which knows itself to be a television show. In the credits, Jonathan is not just part of the story; he is part of the real-world cultural artefact we call *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Ten