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Kiss the Librarian, But Close the Hellmouth: "It's Like a Whole Big Sucking Thing"

1.

(1) *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* investigates the means of its production as a television series. It examines the meaning of viewership, or what, in Buffyspeak, we should call being a watcher. *Buffy* parodies television language and mass-media iconography to seek out an affective politics for its medium, refusing anaesthetic passivity in favour of culturally astute self-consciousness. The program invites viewers to negotiate the tension between access and restriction; at issue are the structure and dissemination of information itself. *Buffy* offers a critique of the social and the cultural — of the content of the on-screen world, of television as a genre, and of the American socius — and of the processes by which those bodies of cultural and social knowledge are shaped. Two correspondent modes of viewer response are interrogated and challenged in *Buffy*: identification and mediatization. Its viewers consider how watching television fosters passivity, in audience identification with characters and events — how we learn the thrill of looking at things happen, rather than making them happen.

(2) We also witness an abrogation of agency in viewing: we are mediatized, willingly relieved of our immediate rights as social or cultural actors. Buffy works as our proxy in the human cosmos, reduced on the small screen to the Buffyverse; she fights for us and for our values, not so much in the literal sense — clearly, she's a fictional construct — but figurally, by representation. Displacing real emotional and moral conflict into that illusion, we invest her figure with our political energies, and she dispels our anxieties over worldly action and having to make a difference. At the same time, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* formally refuses to function as a substitute, and consistently draws attention to the disabling and desensitizing mechanics of watching. By foregrounding its illusory capacity, the show refuses the proxy and exposes representation as a ruse. As television, it sucks us in, but it also demonstrates our resistance to getting suckered. Two key spaces in *Buffy*, the library and the Hellmouth, and a specific visual figure, the kiss, point up this contradiction in television form, which operates simultaneously as inhibitor and as enabler, as filter and as gate. Watching flattens out experience into representational schema, as if thrown on a scrim, and attends to the structures of delivery, the screens, that produce and subtend the act of watching itself. *Buffy* both enacts and interrogates its screening.

(3) Kissing is a bodily trope for the connections and impediments that the library — the figural node from which information flows — and the Hellmouth — the ultimate sucking orifice — create. Kisses are sacramental and illicit, visual displacements of erotic connection; they mark points of contact, exchange, and collusion, vital functions of both Hellmouth and library. But they are also transgressive, as their deadly extension in the vampire's bite confirms. "Smoochies," as Willow calls them, both enliven and threaten, caress and wound. When, in "Something Blue," an emasculated Spike drinks from a blood-filled mug emblazoned with "Kiss the Librarian," *Buffy*'s twinned flows of eroticism and information — otherworldly and ordinary — intersect. Buffy and cohorts expend their energies stopping the ravenous mouths of vampires and keeping the Hellmouth closed; they prevent the mutual exchange of fluids between vampires and victims, what Buffy herself calls "a whole big sucking thing," thus preserving the sanctity of Sunnydale and "saving the world." Concurrently, the library, as the Hellmouth's flipside, must remain open, its information flowing. A discursive intercourse needs to be sustained and enabled by the library, if Buffy is to know what demon she faces. Television viewing both faces and effaces that demonic visual flow.

2.

(4) Giles is the Watcher, a nominal displacement of the show's viewers who participate in events by proxy, at best. He allegorizes us, our stand-in in a very specific way. Watchers are never proactive; things are done before our eyes, even to us, but never by us. Yet the librarian, as watcher, stands for a paradoxical mode of activity, of enactment as a self-effacement from the field of action. The librarian is a decentred center, the subject organizing information flows, who provides a mechanism for the dissemination of Buffy's strength, her moral will, but who is nonetheless removed from will or agency: a catalyst. Giles gives Buffy a context, a body of knowledge and a form within which to operate. The librarian is an unremarked figure of control. As the one who grants access to what was previously unknown, to the true nature of things, he governs the unfolding of events with clarity and ruthless accuracy. But access is never his to attain; he can only act as an enabler for others: a gatekeeper rather than hero. He reads, he watches, he articulates, he maps, he diagrams: he arranges the field through which the other characters move, act, do. Occasionally, as in "Passion" following the death of Jenny Calendar, he enters the field of action (in this case, battling Angel), but almost immediately he is taken out again, slugged by Buffy herself: "You

can't leave me. I can't do this alone." She needs him not as a fighter, but as her support, her guide, her watcher.

(5) Giles mediates, discursively, between Buffy and her world. After we learn of his past as "Ripper," his role becomes increasingly that of spell-caster and summoner; in "The Witch," for example, Giles works with Amy to reverse her mother's incantations. But "spell" in the context of *Buffy* has another, more literal meaning: *spel*, in Old English, refers not to magic but to narrative — a story, a telling. His interventions are verbal; Giles "consults his books," which typically (after sufficient "research") yield proper names, strengths, weaknesses and histories of Buffy's foes. He tells her, and us, what we're dealing with. Library-work provides and shapes the narrative line of each episode, the path to follow.

(6) The library is not exactly a physical location. In the conclusion to the third season, the books are removed from the shelves and taken away to Giles's apartment, so that the space, dead-center over the Hellmouth, can be used to explode the ascended Mayor. Throughout the fourth season, Giles, unemployed both as librarian and watcher, remains the "knowledge guy," still able to consult "his books": volumes always identified by the possessive adjective as belonging explicitly to Giles. The library, as channeled knowledge, goes with Giles and is wherever he is. Giles, no matter how sidelined he may appear — watcher rather than agent — always offers the framework, that allows Buffy's repeated heroic narratives to unfold, and to close. His agency is not as character, but as narrator. This is not to claim that he is a stand-in for the writers or the producers of the show, or even for Joss Whedon; it does suggest exactly how what we've been calling viewer "identification" really operates in the show itself.

(7) For viewers, identification implies passivity and disempowerment: reduced to a relation of sameness (Latin *idem*, the same), we are placed in a mimetic relationship with those we watch, and relinquish individuation to those we view. We ally ourselves voyeuristically to type, discovering pleasure in the displaced mirroring to which we accede. Watching becomes doubly complex in Buffy, inasmuch as this acceding is enacted and interrogated in the show itself: it's about watching, even as it demands that it be watched. Narrative unfolding, *diegesis*, absorbs us because it bears witness to the ways we look, to how we have learned to watch. Mimesis, imitation and identification produce a parodic style, one which mirrors us back to ourselves even as it presents us with a break: a reminder that, as parody, it puts our identifications rather caustically, though perhaps lovingly, at issue.

(8) Giles embodies this identification, this self-erasure, for us. He is, literally, our advocate, our mouthpiece: kissing the librarian amounts to acknowledging the parodic aspect of our own implication in the work of watching, of our immersion in the medium. In *The Art of the Motor* (1995), Paul Virilio interrogates the hegemony of t.v. journalism through this same concept:

> Up until the twentieth century, to be MEDIATIZED meant literally being stripped of one's immediate rights. . . . Beating an enemy involves not so much capturing them and captivating them. The economic battlefield would soon blur into the field of military perception, and the project of the . . . communications complex would then become explicit: it would aim at world mediatization. (6, 14)

The dichotomous divisions in the Buffyverse — friend or enemy, human or demon — mesh thoroughly with Virilio's martial terminology, and the moral overtones of Buffy's battles to save the universe from evil suggest a coincidence of polity and mass media that Virilio also explores:

> [T]echnical mediatization has progressively revived the techniques of primitive mediatization; attempting to confiscate our immediate rights, without overt violence, it endlessly aggravates the casting aside that excommunication used to accomplish, plunging the greatest number into a now socially untenable *reality effect* with all the resultant geopolitical chaos. (20)

(9) Vampires, as human-demon hybrids, unknit the fixed dualism that undergirds Virilio's pointedly anti-television argument — and suggest, particularly in the figure of Angel, a redemptive possibility within a mediatized cosmos. Virilio's evocation of the "reality effect" also points to a means of securing a critical vantage-point from which our complicity in our mediatization might be seen; we are allowed the possibility, briefly, of gating the surge of visual information and reasserting our privilege as agents in our own viewing lives. Virilio's point is taken up by Pierre Bourdieu, in his short essay *On Television*:

> The political dangers inherent in the ordinary use of television have to do with the fact that images have the peculiar capacity to produce what literary critics call a *reality effect*. They show things and make people believe in what they show. The power to show is also a power to mobilize. . . . [It] implies a social construction of reality that can mobilize (or demobilize) individuals or groups. (21)

Whereas for Virilio, the reality effect of television news points up an increasing chaotic global instability, for Bourdieu the impingement of the real onto the viewed offers a purchase for effective political action, for changing the way things are. The reality effect permits us to resist the swell of identification, to assert our contradictory presences in that flow.

(10) What constitutes Buffy's reality effect? It is fiction, not news. We do not necessarily mistake ourselves in her white "one Starbucks" California town. Vampires and superheroes preternaturally gifted in the martial arts aren't *real* (a fatal doubt in most vampire films). The verisimilitude that permits our self-recognition is not so much of a specific world-view, but pertains to viewing itself. Buffy and the Scooby gang, as we watch, put watching to the test. What remains real about the show is its insistence on acknowledging its own formal limits as television: its reality effect inheres in its parodic style. It reminds us, while we're watching, that we are watchers. We identify with their wry, media-literate gaze.

(11) No episode foregrounds this self-conscious visualization better than "Superstar." The program — overrun with narrative conventions standardized in the show (fighting, research "Scoobies," demonic necromancy) — is permeated and rewritten from within, as the content of the show spills over onto the television framework. Jonathan emerged in the second season as an in-joke, an extra repeatedly threatened and rescued. Over the course of three seasons, Jonathan develops from a non-speaking bit part at the margins of the program to the focus of an episode, "Earshot," where his attempted suicide is thwarted by Buffy, who has overheard his thoughts. As Jonathan is recognized, so too the invisibility and normalcy of the sidelined viewer, a bystander without the power to speak or act, is brought to the fore. Like Xander, Giles and Willow — but without even the privilege of being in the gang of rejects — Jonathan is the show's most unremarkable person. Unlike Giles, who at least watches and informs, or Xander and Willow, who bear witness to Buffy's secret acts of cosmic heroism, Jonathan really does nothing that contributes to the narrative; he lurks on the margins, and sees things happen. He's not just shy, but camera-shy.

(12) In "Superstar," Jonathan magically turns the tables to become the protagonist of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The program begins *in medias res*, as if Jonathan were the hero of the series; the confusion and delight we experience at the outset, recognizing playful inversions, is tempered by the show's thorough misrecognition of itself. We know what the characters, initially even Buffy, cannot: that things aren't quite right. Near the middle of the episode, Adam sits before an array of surveillance monitors — like us, he watches the Buffyverse on t.v.— and points to the mediatized nature of Jonathan's magic, its mucked-up reality effect: "These are lies. None of this is real. The world has been changed. It's intriguing, but it's wrong." Human beings are put under a spell by television, because, according to Adam, they "sense so little," as opposed to his supernal "awareness"; or, as Jonathan tells Riley, "People can't always see what's right in front of them." Jonathan's image is rendered extensive by mass media; he is a superstar because he appears as the superhero — because he represents himself as a t.v. "star." Cracks appear in the magic when Buffy wonders how he can have been in so many places simultaneously, which is a pluralizing function of the multi-channel universe; Adam, after all, watches many screens at once. The unstable perfection of "Jonathan" comes to appear as a patchwork of deceptions that cannot resolve into a coherent character; that perfection, after all, is a discursive construct rather than an ontological given. Buffy, replaying Jonathan's shift from bystander to hero, must overcome her "ordinary" weakling status — a flawed slayer relative to Jonathan's flawless prowess — and expose Jonathan's spell as mere glamour. When she kills the demon externalizing Jonathan's sloughed-off failings, Jonathan returns to his ineffectual status, and the artificial memory of his heroism ebbs from the collective consciousness of Sunnydale.

(13) Like viewers, Jonathan resumes his unremarkable position on the sidelines. Buffy exposes misrecognitions engendered by the spell of television, and sets things right by undoing the mediatized identifications in us, as we long to belong, to be "friends" with her. We watch her demonstrate how not to get sucked in by watching. Still, things do not return to the way they were before. In the epilogue, Buffy notices Jonathan standing off to the side, and reproaches him for forcing Sunnydale to be "actors in your sock puppet theater": victims without agency. What persists, even as memories of the altered television cosmos fade, is human resilience, and a piece of advice: "Things are complicated. They take time and work." Spells don't achieve what "work" — thinking, seeing clearly — can: true friendship (or, for Buffy and Riley, true love). Jonathan reminds us temporarily that something true exists beyond the mediatized confines of what we watch; action on *Buffy* is not so much staking and kung fu as it is critical thinking, using what we see and hear to resist the seductive vampirism, the life-draining mediatization, of how we look on, overlooked.

3.

(14) Representations of the tension between access and restriction shift from figures of visual mediatization — glamours, spells, illusions — to embodiments in kisses, a change most precisely articulated in "I Only Have Eyes for You," when Buffy as spurned schoolboy lover and Angel as transgressive teacher share a transgendered embrace. The kiss not only dispels the

spirits at the show's climax, but also allows Buffy to come to terms, momentarily, with her unresolved guilt over her demon lover, and to reidentify herself as Slayer. It inverts the "true" kiss that released Angel's soul in "Surprise." But more is at stake than erotic reversal. The dialogue is laced with ocular tropes from the beginning, a visual language that focuses on Buffy's subjectivity, and on reasserting her heroic capabilities. Early on, Buffy is approached by a classmate who wants her to invite him to the upcoming Sadie Hawkins dance (another instance of gender-role reversal). "I'm not *seeing* anybody," she replies, "ever . . . again, actually." The dialogue between the ghost-lovers, ventriloquized through three sets of characters in the episode, begins with James crying out "I'm going crazy not *seeing* you." Giles, presuming the poltergeist is Jenny Calendar, gesticulates at Willow: "Don't you *see*?" The visual is explicitly linked with an erotic dissonance and loss, a failure in the lover's bond, an absence. To see (someone) means simultaneously to be connected, to understand, and to sense their presence — all modes of identification.

(15) The visual structure of the episode both assumes and enhances this fractious seeing. When those possessed by James assert they won't "just disappear," viewers confront a visual irony, since what we see is not what they see, at least not immediately. The ghosts, until Buffy envisions them, remain invisible to us. Only when Buffy finally assumes the role of James does the point-of-view cut from the present to 1955, shifting back and forth between visual (and visionary) frameworks, tracing an essentially duplicitous mimicry. At crucial junctures, mirrors are used to foreground the disjunction of appearance and reality created by haunting — Cordelia watching her snake-bitten face deform — and then in the climactic encounter in the music room, when a possessed Buffy sees James return her gaze. Faces, markers of human appearance (as well as loci of kissing), are also structures of mimicry; Buffy refers to Angel's evil incarnation as "the demon that wears his face." What we see and who we are are at odds.

(16) Xander explicitly names this irony "some freaky channeling thing," referring to his history teacher saying one thing and writing another — a snatch of the ghost-lovers' dialogue — on the blackboard. His metaphor is doubly resonant: what happens is not only spiritual channeling, but also television channeling. The juxtaposed visual frameworks create an effect of channel-switching, or really the bleeding of one channel into another, as dialogue and images shift contexts. Principal Snyder, near the beginning of the episodes, coordinates all of these threads — visual media, visual language, visual multiplicity — in a single tirade directed at Buffy:

> I'm no stranger to conspiracy. I saw *JFK*. I'm a truth seeker. I've got a missing gun and two confused kids on my hands. Pieces of the puzzle. And I'm going to look at all the pieces carefully, and I'm going to keep looking until I know exactly how this is all your fault.

Despite the foregone conclusion, Snyder's quest for truth through "looking" is exactly the narrative trajectory of the episode: to resolve fractured channels into a coherent, truthful view.

(17) This truth is given its absolute form — as absolution, forgiveness, and even healing — in the episode's title-song, music to which ghostly student and teacher secretly dance and which James plays as he prepares to shoot himself; "I can't see anyone," the first line of the lyric runs, "but you," coupling disappearance and longing to visual enthrallment. But rather than one subjectivity subsuming another, and the "I" (or even eye) of James overwhelming the identities of those he possesses (in a version of the loss of viewing agency through identification and mediatization that we have been mapping), what manifests in this embrace is actually a resistance. When he returns to his lair thoroughly disturbed by the kiss, the evil Angel washes his face and torso, a displaced Lady MacBeth, describing himself as "violated." When Drusilla and Spike press him to say what has contaminated him, he answers with one word: love. As in the gypsy curse, when the purity of Angelus's evil is disrupted and blocked by the return of his soul, love seems to constitute a resilience, a residue that won't wash away. Even the demon who wears Angel's face (an appearance of innocence, we're told in "Angel," that gave him his vampire name) still has some repressed inkling of who he was, and of what it means to love. "Love" and "soul" variously name the truth that Buffy, and even Snyder, are seeking; more importantly, in terms of the visual schema of *Buffy*, what emerges in the kiss is not a loss of agency but rather the realization of a resistance to being spellbound, possessed, overwhelmed. "I Only Have Eyes for You" produces a model for proactive watching, a means by which to assert, even through viewing, one's autonomy as a viewing subject, to disable being "sucked in" by a vampire's kiss.

4.

(18) "The Zeppo" most potently invites viewers to enact this resistant watching, visually actualizing critical response. "The Zeppo" was directed by James Whitmore, Jr., who also directed "I Only Have Eyes for You," and the two episodes evince a thematic and a formal continuity. The technique of juxtaposing narrative threads is extended here, to incorporate forms of intersection, interruption, and cross-talk. The reversals of "I Only Have Eyes for You"

become thoroughly enmeshed in the episode; the marginal and the central tug at one another, changing places and forcing the invisible to gain visibility, the weak strength, the decentred to find their focus. We learn to notice what has gone unremarked, and to be noticed ourselves, as viewers. "The Zeppo" leaves an opening, formally, through which watchers can impact, televisually. Our marginalized stand-in is Xander, on whom the episode focuses, but who is notably absent from the opening battle, having been knocked unconscious and left under some debris before the on-screen action commences. All the Scooby gang insist that Xander stay "safe . . . out of harm's way," away from the action. An ostensibly separate storyline emerges when he can't integrate himself with the rest of the gang, and must follow his own sub-plot — a marginal narrative that becomes both crucial for and unacknowledged by the "main" battles that Buffy and the others must fight, once again, to save the human universe. Xander, significantly, is also excluded from the heroic spectacle of the show itself, as his opening lines ironically make clear: "Good show everyone. I think we have a hit." Playing the role of Jimmy Olsen or Zeppo Marx, Xander can't be a protagonist: he is effeminized, pacified and side-lined — "fray-adjacent" as Buffy puts it.

(19) But as the gender-reversals in "I Only Have Eyes for You" and throughout the whole run of *Buffy* make clear, the typology of machismo and effeminacy won't hold up. Stereotypical roles are interrogated, to dismantle the polarities of activity and passivity, agency and victimization that they produce. Throughout "The Zeppo," Xander's masculinity gets called into question: he can't play football with the other "guys"; Jack O'Toole — the "psycho" with the big phallic knife named Katy — tells Xander to "be a man" and tries to initiate him into a "gang" of dead bullies; Xander picks up a car-obsessed girl to prove he can be a chick-magnet (as opposed to "demon magnet"), even thought he is sexually passive, needing Faith as macho woman *cum* driver to "steer him around the curves." His goal, in the terms laid out by the episode, is to attain "cool," which appears at first (as Cordelia teases him and compares him to O'Toole) to be machismo, but actually goes much deeper. "Cool" is a version of what other episodes name "soul" or "love": that unperturbed and durable aspect of self, that will not surrender. Xander queries Oz, for example, about what makes him cool, and Oz, ever taciturn, remains non-committal (foreshadowing Xander's own silence at the end of the episode, when he does attain "cool"). Cool is precisely what escapes discursive framing, the tactics of overwriting and subsuming that characterize both identification and mediatization — or, for that matter, vampirism. Oz responds to Xander, "You've got some identity issues." He affirms the ways Xander's relentless self-consciousness and outsider status put identity, sameness, in question, and also the instabilities in the production of a subjectivity capable of meaning and action.

(20) Having sex with Faith marks a transition to "cool." Their encounter is an inversion of Buffy's first and fatal time with Angel. But where Angel loses his soul after the purity of intercourse with the virginal Buffy, Xander gains an irreducible sense of self-possession when the very experienced Faith shows him how to be "up with people." When we glimpse the mirror image of Faith and Xander in bed, reflected in a dormant television screen, the conceit becomes plain: their vital, energizing, corporeal encounter is mediated by the screen. The reflection produces a meta-image, frame within televisual frame — we're watching an image of a t.v. set on our own televisions — but can only throw back an image of lived experience when the t. v. is turned off; if we switch our own sets off, for example, we would likely see our own images reflected back at us. The intense bluish gloam of an activated screen effectively obliterates our own image, overwhelming it with cathode light. Xander, overwhelmed by Faith (who perches atop him and whose back is really all we see in the reflection), nonetheless discovers who he is, momentarily, when he is pushed off-screen, frame-adjacent.

(21) "The Zeppo" isn't really demanding that we turn off *Buffy* to watch our own reflections (even if this might be an effective means of refusing mediatization). Rather, it reminds us of our own presence as watchers, our implication in the viewing process of the show itself. It suggests how to rediscover ourselves when we're faced with obliteration, with potentially losing ourselves in the spectacular image. Our absorption by image throughout "The Zeppo" is strategically interrupted. For example, earlier in the episode Xander looks to others for what to do about his problems with Jack and the boys; but, just as Giles goes looking to the "spirit guides" for answers and is refused (at a point where he meets Xander in a graveyard), Xander's calls for help are either deflected or silenced. He tells himself, "Buffy'll know what to do," and heads off to find her, but we immediately cut to Buffy in a hyper-bathetic encounter with Angel — by this time, a set-piece in *Buffy* — who exclaims, "I don't know what to do." Not only does the irony of the montage force Xander back on his own resources, but it also produces a key interruption. When Xander walks in on Angel and Buffy, the romantic mood-music abruptly fades and they glare at him; his presence essentially breaks the frame, and reminds us that this is a *Buffy* cliché, with Angel and Buffy playing the same roles and spouting the same dialogue they do on the verge of every cosmic catastrophe. Xander backs off, and the romance resumes, but as viewers our attention has been redirected, and fractured. We recognize the ways our expectations have been controlled by the conventions of generic television. We might compare the failed romantic encounter between Wesley and Cordelia in "Graduation Day," a kiss that takes place in the library adjacent to the Hellmouth; here, a kiss is not a giving of self but a reminder, as Cordelia wipes her mouth and

their mutual lack of passion becomes self-evident, of autonomy. A kiss is a means of resistance, as it was in "I Only Have Eyes for You," to getting lost in someone else. It draws us back to reality, as the contrived romantic mood — misty lenses and swelling violins — fractures and dissipates.

(22) Xander, post coitus, repeatedly interrupts his own train of thought in amazement, drifting in and out of attention: "I just had sex." While he may seem distracted, his distraction also reintroduces a self-conscious subjectivity into the mix; we aren't allowed any sympathetic absorption or unqualified identification alongside him. Xander enters the fray of self-awareness, of knowing what to do, and then steps back, critically distant from what he's doing, considering what has happened and what might; his dialogue throughout the episode involves a running commentary on what's happening to him, and what he's making happen: "I should have . . . ," "I shouldn't have . . . ." The episode calls this scrutiny *noticing*; a crucial component of being cool, as Cordelia sarcastically points out, is being perceived, as if — she tells Xander — anyone "actually noticed you were there." Xander's quest for notoriety parallels the ways in which viewers are implicated in the show as it unfolds: we get noticed, but in a specific way. Xander's heroic actions, after all, are unnoticed even by Buffy and the Scooby gang, whose own heroics "nobody will ever know." To be cool is not so much to be perceived by others as it is to attain a self-perception, a confidence in one's physical and cognitive capacities. Xander is able to respond to Cordelia, at the episode's close, by not responding. Viewing, by implication, does not depend on interactivity, on characters or situations actually reacting to our presence. Viewer response, our agency as watcher, is rather a mode of self-awareness engendered by the interruption of the televisual by itself. Once we become even liminally cognizant of our mediatization, its alluring absorption cannot wholly succeed. We notice ourselves, momentarily, in the screen.

(23) To recognize what this awareness produces in us beyond itself, we need to consider the Hellmouth. Pursuing Xander, one of O'Toole's "boys" pauses to peer through the round portal in the library doors — a kind of displaced camera lens. We do not see what he sees (nor do we ever catch more than glimpses of parts of the emerging demon, as Willow notes in the aftermath, claiming to have seen its unforgettable "real face," a view from which our mundane perspective is barred). But we do see his face, hear his inarticulate reaction: "Woah." If the Hellmouth, once opened, provides access to a supernatural world-view, a transcendental perspective on "the truth" which, as the spirit guides inform Giles, could only bring about "chaos," then the narrative thwarts that access. Just as, once attained, "cool" becomes inexpressible, so too is the "truth" always beyond verbal frameworks. Instead, the librarian, the slayer and their cohorts strive to control the unruly tentacles of such knowledge that threaten to overwhelm and devour. They mediate, intervening and interrupting to cut off our mediatization, our glamorized gaze. Xander's role, in "The Zeppo," is emblematic; despite his fray-adjacency, in the boiler room at the climactic battle in a sidelined skirmish with a villain from another narrative, his action is central, at ground-zero. The explosion he averts by playing it cool ("I like the quiet") threatens to rip the Hellmouth wide; by not doing anything, by standing by, Xander effectively shuts the Hellmouth tight — even if no one will ever know it. Closing the Hellmouth restricts access, but also keeps the world — the Buffyverse — cool, and ultimately gives it shape, both as a visual framework and as a set of narrative conventions. Still, Xander's subplot ends on an ironic note; Oz, now a werewolf, is inadvertently released from containment and devours the chaotic O'Toole. Containment, that is, can never be absolute, but remains a question of careful, critical and self-conscious access.

(24) Despite his Zeppo-like behavior, Xander has from the first season always been enmeshed in the dynamics of fray and containment that shape Buffy's battles. In "Welcome to the Hellmouth," he emerges from the library stacks having overheard Giles and Buffy parlay over the role of the slayer. His proximity is not voyeuristic or parasitic, however. He never remains in the background, but always contributes crucially to the action — despite his presentation at the opening "The Zeppo." In "Prophecy Girl," it is Xander not Angel who can revive Buffy; vampires, as Angel points out, have "no breath." Xander acts as a repository of a certain life-force, which can never be overruled by the demonic no matter how sidelined he may appear to be. He acts as the viewers' stand-in, not to the extent that we identify with him, but so that we discover the means to figure our own self awareness, and resist the mediatizing vampirism of the television image. Through Xander, we notice.

(25) Throughout *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, we refuse — temporarily, perhaps, but effectively — to allow ourselves to be sucked in. The Hellmouth-Library subtends a necessary contradiction; to stop an unruly disclosure of demonic power and an overwriting of self by forces beyond its grasp, a counterflow of information, of kissing, of narrative works to be let loose. Knowledge, and sometimes blood, wants to be streamed through proper channels. And those channels — circulatory systems, discursive constructs — both shape and are shaped by the channel structure of television. At the same time, *Buffy* produces a resistance to channeling, a refusal to be governed by frameworks outside of individual agency: watching both accedes to mediatized vision and fractures the means by which mediatization, and conscious absorption, can take place. We are made aware of the contradiction embedded in

looking on. And as a program thoroughly aware of television genres and conventions, *Buffy* confronts this paradox in its own visual form: the mutual vampirism of viewer and viewed.

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