Patrick Shade

Screaming to be Heard: Reminders and Insights on Community and Communication in "Hush"

[1] Philosophers have long recognized the power of employing imaginative scenarios to illuminate meanings and structures we normally take for granted. Plato, for instance, sought to better understand justice not by examining existing institutions but by exploring a city *in logos*. Indeed, he discusses a city "with a fever" whose pursuit of luxuries (such as fine foods, furniture, perfumes, prostitutes, actors and artists) helps illuminate the genesis and nature of justice.1 Similarly, Descartes developed his malicious demon scenario to discover what certainty remained if he imagined a catastrophic epistemic situation in which such a demon tried to deceive him about everything.2 The chief goal of such endeavors is to isolate ideas or elements that are otherwise confused or obscured. Imaginative presentation thus aids the analysis of complex phenomena, such as justice or the foundations of knowledge. Contemporary scholars increasingly recognize that television and film afford opportunities to imaginatively explore and test complex ideas, sometimes with significant depth of insight.3 In the following, I will argue that the extreme scenario presented in "Hush" (4010) wherein all the citizens of Sunnydale lose the ability to speak deepens our understanding of the complex dynamics of communication.4

[2] The episode's chief value appears to be highlighting nonverbal modes of communication that are typically obscured by our penchant for talking. Indeed, writer/director Joss Whedon legitimates this interpretation in his commentary on the episode when he notes that "when you stop talking, you start communicating."5 I say this theme "appears" to be the chief value of "Hush," however, for the episode creatively uncovers the various dimensions of both nonverbal *and* verbal communication.6 Moreover, "Hush" illustrates a theme common to American philosophers like John Dewey and G. H. Mead who contend that communication provides the basis for community; a disruption in communication thus negatively affects the functioning of the corresponding community. I will argue that "Hush" gains dramatic and educative value by imaginatively exposing these diverse modes of communication and, importantly, their corresponding impact on community and communal living.

The Dynamics of Communication

[3] I begin by noting the limitations and virtues of verbal communication that "Hush" demonstrates. Attention to its virtues complicates Whedon's remark that "what ['Hush' is] about is the idea that when you stop talking, you start communicating—the idea that language, because it's so specific and constrictive, can interfere with actual communication. Everything was about language." Even a casual viewing of the episode reveals its emphasis on the various limitations—and sometimes abuses—of talking or verbal communication; these include our use of it as a distancing tactic to separate ourselves from others and as white noise to avoid confronting real issues. Like all the best episodes of *Buffy*, however, "Hush" treats its topic with complexity and so presents more than a single simple lesson. The episode demonstrates not only the limits of verbal communication but

also its virtues. Similarly, while it ostensibly celebrates the vitality of nonverbal modes of communication, it also displays their shortcomings.[7]

[4] The early scenes of "Hush" focus on ordinary ways in which talking impedes rather than facilitates genuine communication. Our main characters are at odds, failing to communicate with one another. Buffy and Riley each possess a secret vocation that leaves them unable to act on their mutual attraction. In a seemingly innocent exchange after Dr. Walsh's class, Buffy uses verbal banter to mask the truth.

> Riley: So what have you got going on tonight?
> Buffy: Oh, patrolling.
> Riley: Patrolling?
> Buffy: Eh, Petroleum.
> Riley: Petroleum?
> Buffy: Uh huh.

Riley similarly covers up his duties with the Initiative by explaining that his evening plan is to grade papers. As they lean in for what would be their first kiss, Buffy interrupts the act when she realizes that, since there are no papers to grade, Riley's comment does not make sense. The two part in relative confusion, without kissing. Buffy later acknowledges to Willow that talking is impeding the development of her romantic relationship.

Buffy: I get nervous and I start babbling, and he starts babbling, and it's a babble fest. Plus, every time we talk I have to lie. The slayer thing comes up one way or another. I wish I could just come clean.
Buffy and Riley both, perhaps unwittingly, allow verbal exchanges to construct barriers between them.

[5] Xander and Willow also face impasses arising from verbal communication. Confused about the status of their relationship, Anya asks Xander to explain how he feels about her. He resorts to jokes ("You really did turn into a real girl didn't you?") and finally a stuttering deferral to avoid addressing her concerns:

> Anya: What do I mean to you?
> Xander: I ... we, you know, we spend ... we'll talk about it later.

Xander's bumbled reply leaves Anya questioning whether the direct and obvious physical act of sex is the true basis of their relationship. In a different storyline, Willow wishes her Wicca group would move beyond idly chattering about witchcraft to actually practicing it. She later gives Buffy the following overview of the latest Wicca meeting:

Willow: Talk, all talk. Blah blah Gaia. Blah blah moon, menstrual lifeforce power thingy. You know after a couple sessions I was hoping we would get into something real, but …
Hence, the opening scenes of "Hush" stress ways in which the spoken word can be used to mask the truth, forestall significant action, and deflect communication needed to help nurture relationships. These scenes reveal how readily we use talking to postpone overt action and to cover or lie about how we feel. Thus, even though it is such a pervasive medium, the verbal sometimes undermines the usual goals of communication—whether sharing meaning, preparing for consummating action, or presenting the truth.

[6] Once Sunnydale's ghoulish new visitors, the Gentlemen, arrive, "Hush" highlights the advantages of the nonverbal by creatively exposing the vast field of gestures that underlies and often goes unnoticed because of the verbal.8 Although at an impasse early in the episode, our heroes' relationships show signs of renewed growth once the Gentlemen rob them (and all the citizens of Sunnydale) of their voices. Constrained to nonverbal modes of communicating, Buffy and Riley eventually reveal the truth about their relationship and respective identities. The night after losing their voices, Buffy and Riley run into one another on the street, each patrolling to help curb Sunnydale's chaos. At first, they show their concern for one another with an embrace and appropriate facial expressions (mostly through eyebrow movement); they also mouth simple sentences (e.g., "Are you ok?"). When they hear a crashing noise in the background, however, each remembers the secret nature of his or her nocturnal walk and moves to depart. Unable to resort to creative rationalizations about their reasons for abruptly leaving, Buffy and Riley allow themselves to express the depth of their concern for one another with a first kiss. The situation of losing their voices requires them to draw on means of communicating that verbal language obscures or enables them to ignore. In this new situation, a single look complemented by an overture to kiss is able to overcome the walls they have created with words. Nonverbal communication further erodes the barriers between them later in the episode. When the two encounter one another while fighting the Gentlemen, their skilled actions reveal their respective talents and vocations (Buffy as the slayer and Riley as a member of the Initiative) in a way that cannot be deflected with witty banter. While simply telling one another what they *do* would likely lead to incredulity (indeed, even after seeing Buffy in action, Riley remains confused about what a Slayer really is), their skilled actions reveal an unadulterated truth. The Buffy-Riley storyline, then, demonstrates how nonverbal physical gestures can reveal the truth about feelings and abilities.

[7] Developments in the other storylines also reinforce these lessons. When Xander walks into Giles' place and finds Spike hovering over Anya on a couch, he mistakenly concludes that Spike has killed her. Unable to verbally interrogate him, Xander pummels Spike, even though Anya awakes and is quite notably alive in the background. Anya thus learns the depth of Xander's feelings and communicates her joy with a suggestive sexual gesture. The special events of "Hush" significantly affect Willow's storyline as well, since this episode marks the beginning of her romantic relationship with Tara.9 When the two flee to the laundry room to escape the Gentlemen, Tara observes Willow's attempts to mentally move the drink machine to block the door. Understanding Willow's power via her facial expression and body movements, Tara subsequently conveys her own power by joining hands with Willow. Although she was shy and stuttered at the Wicca meeting, Tara has little difficulty expressing her powers and interests in this context. Willow has now found what she was looking for in her Wicca group: a partner with whom she can actually practice witchcraft. Importantly, the two continue holding hands after they successfully block the door, their lingering contact signifying potential intimacy. Though they lack a shared past, they still communicate much about themselves without the assistance of written or spoken symbols and so begin one of the series' longest romantic relationships.

[8] Whedon thus rightly underscores the fact that genuine communication occurs in the absence of talking. Gestures can speak

volumes, and they prove especially well-suited to revealing feelings and demonstrating abilities. While on first impression we might be tempted to interpret "Hush" as celebrating and even prioritizing the nonverbal, doing so would mask the manner in which the episode emphasizes that *both* the nonverbal *and* the verbal are vital instruments of ongoing communication, each with its attendant advantages and liabilities. By creatively exploring both in the same episode, "Hush" reminds us of the complexity of human communication and prevents us from simplistically overlooking or prioritizing one mode.

[9] Though "Hush" does emphasize the advantages of the nonverbal, a variety of scenes expose its limits by revealing how gestures can be misinterpreted, often with humorous results. A first example occurs during the expository scene in which Giles uses overhead transparencies to explain who the Gentlemen are and how they can be defeated. Indicating how she proposes to destroy the Gentlemen, Buffy gesticulates vertically with her fist to indicate that she should slay them. The gang, however, misinterprets her gesture to be sexual in nature and glances at her askew. Once she repeats the motion with a stake in hand, the misunderstanding is cleared up. In a second example, Buffy is held captive by the footmen and tries to direct Riley to smash the box containing the town's voices. The box is on a table with jars bearing the hearts of the Gentlemen's victims. Thrusting her body forward and raising her eyebrows, Buffy motions to the table to indicate that something should be destroyed. Riley mistakenly thinks a jar is the appropriate object and shatters it with exuberance. Buffy urgently corrects him by mimicking a hinge with her hands to indicate opening a lid. Riley finally understands and, smashing the box, frees the voices.

[10] These scenes expose important shortcomings that beset nonverbal gestures. First, these gestures are often imprecise and prone to misunderstanding. Compare Buffy's various moves with the proposal "I should stake them!" or the command "Smash the box!" Using the spoken word, Buffy readily could have directed Riley's attention to *the box*, or *the small brown box*, or *the box next to the jar*. We do well not to forget the power that adjectives and prepositional phrases possess in increasing our ability to discriminate and identify things; they enable us to communicate about relationships among objects and agents (both present and absent, both real and ideal) in ways the nonverbal can only dimly suggest. A second limitation is that nonverbal gestures restrict interaction and communication to the proximate environment. While body language possesses a significant directness (evidenced in the Buffy-Riley kiss, for instance) that heightens its capacity to convey truth (especially about feelings and abilities), this immediacy is also a liability. The absence of the voice severely limits the scope of the environment with which we can interact, as is clearly illustrated when the Gentlemen extract their first heart. Their victim is alone in his dorm room. Although there are students in adjacent rooms, he is unable to summon them since he cannot communicate with anyone who does not see him. Verbal language enables us to extend the environment with which we interact, thereby increasing the number of people with whom we communicate. "Hush" exposes and plays on these limitations of the nonverbal just as readily as it draws our attention to the liabilities of the verbal.

[11] An additional, albeit subtle, example underscores the contextuality of gestures. As they first learn they have lost their voices, Xander and Spike struggle to understand what has happened to them. Xander points an accusing finger at Spike, clearly blaming the vampire for

this new condition.10 Spike responds by raising two fingers in the form of a V (with his palm facing himself), the British equivalent of giving "the finger."11 Whether Xander registers the insult is difficult to tell, since after a momentary look of confusion he turns his attention to the telephone, thinking he can contact Buffy with it. Even so, it is quite likely that he missed the point (as, apparently, did the broadcast censors) since he is not a particularly cosmopolitan character. This simple scene reminds us that different cultures not only have unique languages and verbal expressions, they also have distinctive means of moving and gesturing. Hence, even nonverbal modes of communication are affected by the limits of cultural context.

[12] While the episode's drama grows out of the impediments talking can generate, its development positively reinforces the value and virtues of verbal language. Although the verbal can obscure the truth, it also offers great precision and conveys complex information. The final scene of "Hush" shows Buffy and Riley unable to say anything even though they have regained their voices. Importantly, at the beginning of the next episode ("Doomed," 4011), they break their silence and finally talk honestly about their respective vocations. Progress in the storyline (and their relationship) requires revelations about their identities that can only be conveyed through stories about the past.12 Just as it broadens our spatial horizon, verbal communication similarly expands our temporal horizon in ways nonverbal modes of expression cannot. Each person has a history and a present vocation whose complexity transcends what can be identified or shared by the nonverbal. Verbal communication is highly symbolic, making "present" what is strictly speaking "absent" from the environment so that it can bear on our behavior.13 Talking, then, enables us to *re*present the past (and foretell the future) to ourselves and to one another, thereby enhancing our resources for interacting with one another.

[13] Consequently, "Hush" celebrates the limits and virtues of *both* the nonverbal *and* the verbal. The episode reminds us that each offers a unique mode of communication, even though each is also capable of distortion and correction. We tend to be most readily aware of verbal means, so closely linked are they to our conscious lives,14 but "Hush" stresses that we are embodied creatures whose communication consists in more than the spoken word. It reminds us that we have multiple resources we regularly employ in communicating. These different modes of communication not only offer us unique possibilities for interacting but also frequently function in tandem. The verbal and nonverbal supplement one another to render our communicative acts all the more powerful. For instance, a dimly felt sense of danger complemented by a precise articulation of its source can render us that much more safe. Similarly, a kiss gains significance (and is often complicated) when followed by a personal revelation. Consequently, meaning and communication are not simply located in words; each grows from and represents a vital facet of the living movement of interaction. These insights have practical import, especially to the extent that we (especially philosophers) tend to forget or fail to consider them. Human communication is not simply a matter of words or propositions; nor is it simply a matter of physical acts or gestures. It consists in interweaving *both* modes to express, direct, and enhance meaningful action.

Communication and Community

[14] What happens, then, when one of these modes is denied us? Our ability to communicate is obviously restricted, but—and this is my second main point—so are the possibilities for communal action. To interpret "Hush" as romantically celebrating the more embodied and often primitive forms of nonverbal communication is to overlook the lessons it teaches us about the complicated dynamics of human community. Indeed, the episode offers significant insights concerning the connections between communication and community.15 In his commentary, Whedon acknowledges that he took pains to make the presence of community palpable in "Hush." For instance, he used large sets and many extras so that the larger communal life of Sunnydale would be more apparent to audience than it usually is. Also important is the introduction of the two new characters, Olivia and Tara. Their responses to the Gentlemen are less sophisticated than those of the Scoobies, and so they are representative of the larger community (and, quite likely, of the viewer). Because they lack the powers and abilities of the Scoobies, Olivia's gasp on seeing a Gentleman pass by her window and Tara's realization that she is being followed while walking across campus heighten our sense of vulnerability and so make these scenes more frightening. The Gentlemen are nightmarish not only because of their deathly skeletal appearance, but also because they weaken shared habits and institutions vital to the functioning of the community at large. In the process, they restrict modes of interaction, thereby cutting people off from one another and circumscribing the human self.16

[15] Drawing on insights of American pragmatists helps us articulate the lessons concerning community implicit in "Hush." A central thesis Dewey and Mead defend is that communication makes community possible in the first place. Dewey, for instance, argues that language utilizes sounds as signs for mutual assistance and direction, making participation—acting *with* rather than merely *alongside* others—possible.17 Indeed, community signifies an extension of our field of action, since it represents our capacity to coordinate and cooperate via communication, thereby realizing goals impossible to achieve individually.

[16] At the heart of communicative acts is a tripartite relationship between at least two individuals.18 One person expresses something via a gesture, sign, or symbol to another person. This transaction allows for shared interaction wherein each participant's contribution is a constitutive element of the other's act, thereby creating richer modes of association. Mead explains that while others' basic gestures may stimulate us to respond in a specific manner (as when in a dog fight, the growling of a larger dog typically calls out a cowering response in the smaller dog), *significant* gestures call out the *same* response in the self and in others, thereby establishing shared meanings that form the basis of concerted (rather than reactionary) behavior.19 Hence, communication is predicated on common responses that make possible cooperative actions each individual may identify as belonging to him or her self.20 When playing a baseball game, for instance, Mead explains that the players select their individual actions according to the team's goal (namely, to win the game). Each player identifies his or her function in reference to common meanings and responses (e.g., to catch the ball to stop the other team) that are defined in light of a shared purpose. Consequently, the players act in reference to one another; their collective actions make possible the realization of a common goal via different but coordinated activities. Without communication, we could *react* to our environment but we could not *deliberately coordinate* our actions to realize a shared goal. The

metaphor of a game happily implicates the various nonverbal abilities and embodied habits that operate and are organized by means of explicitly articulated strategies, reinforcing the themes of the first section of this paper.

[17] From a pragmatist perspective, communities are constituted of complex patterns of nonverbal and verbal habits whereby we share meanings and participate in common actions. The reaction of the tight-knit Scoobies to the Gentlemen illustrates how these communal dynamics function. As a general rule, the Scoobies' witty verbal exchanges help identify and define their membership in this "gang" or community.21 In "Hush," of course, they lack recourse to such resources, but their shared history gives them a common understanding of the meanings of gestures, artifacts, and acts related to the practice of slaying that remain intact. Congregating at Giles' primary abode (initially the library, and in "Hush" his home) bears special meaning for the Scoobies, for it represents central headquarters where they do research and begin to address whatever threat they face. The Scoobies all know that when danger arises they should meet at Giles', and this is exactly what they do the morning after losing their voices. A second dynamic of the Scooby community whose meaning is embedded in the network of slaying activities is the apparently simple act of walking the streets of Sunnydale.22 Far from merely wandering around or getting from one place to another, this act signifies (to the Scoobies and to viewers) that Buffy is patrolling for dangers to which most Sunnydale citizens are blind. Finally, a stake represents Buffy's primary weapon, and it has a significance which all the Scoobies comprehend. This, however, was not always the case. In the first episode of the series, Xander jokingly proposes that Buffy is carrying around a stake to build "a really little fence" ("Welcome To The Hellmouth," 1.01). Now, however, its use is familiar to him and the other Scoobies so that Buffy is able to clarify the true meaning of her pseudo-masturbatory gesture by simply grabbing a stake. Without the shared background of the activity of slaying, these objects and acts would lack their specific meaning; they would puzzle the outsider and be as meaningless as Spike's V gesture is to most non-British viewers. Context shapes the shared meanings conveyed by communication (whether verbal or nonverbal) which allow a community to function.

[18] The Gentlemen and their footmen also constitute a community, albeit one whose purposes seriously threaten the Scoobies and Sunnydale.23 Even though they lack any form of speaking, the Gentlemen appear to have a clearly structured way of life and their own unique way of communicating. Their activities are governed by norms of politeness and deference, and they have footmen who do their dirty work. Theirs is, unsurprisingly, a patriarchal community built on sharp class distinctions.24 The Gentlemen are the brains of the community, using instruments of precision and following norms of civility that regulate their relations among one another. Their footmen, by contrast, are thoroughly embodied beings whose actions are wild and imprecise, representing brute force that lacks its own direction.25 Together these classes form a community with its own structures and purposes—albeit modes impenetrable to Buffy and to the audience.

[19] While the Gentlemen aim to achieve their objective by robbing humans of voices, it is important to note what the Gentlemen do and do not accomplish. Although they silence everyone, they do not paralyze the city. We have already noted that the Scoobies respond to the crisis with well-established habits, such as meeting at Giles' and patrolling. Much in

Sunnydale's communal life also remains intact. This should not be a surprise, especially if community employs nonverbal means of communication as well as verbal. An early scene after the Gentlemen steal the voices brings to light some of the deep-rooted communal structures that persist in the absence of talking. Buffy and Willow walk the streets which are populated by various individuals who seek consolation in either religious or commercial activity. They see a man hurry from a liquor store, one of the few establishments open for business. Further along, a group gathers around a minister, with one participant holding up a sign indicating Revelation 15:1.[26] Also, an enterprising fellow is selling message boards (at inflated prices). In his commentary, Whedon rather sarcastically describes these actions as "religious craziness" and "rampant capitalism." His apparent disdain for such responses to the chaos caused by the Gentlemen should not obscure their significance. Mead, for instance, identifies the economic and religious attitudes as two of the most basic forms of cooperation which make community possible. Each requires its participants to occupy the perspective of the other and to share meanings; without this fundamental act, we would not be able to help others (the focal goal of the religious attitude) or trade goods each party deems of comparable value (the core of the economic attitude).[27] Such forms of cooperative activity are both common and familiar, representing basic social patterns that structure interaction in established communities. Unsurprisingly, in the face of danger we resort to basic resources which include not only personal relationships of friends and family, but also the public structures represented by economics and religion.[28] Even though they may weaken them, the Gentlemen are not able to eradicate these basic communal forces. Neither economics nor religion could develop or last indefinitely in the absence of verbal communication, but each is anchored in shared ways of acting that habitually assert themselves even after voices are silenced.

[20] Although communal action is still possible following the theft of voices, it is nevertheless deeply impoverished. The Gentlemen successfully interrupt and restrict the activities of both the Scoobies and Sunnydale.[29] While the Scoobies share many habits that enable them to function as a group, the absence of language impedes the more complex coordination of their actions. Importantly, the gang does not act as a unit to confront or destroy the Gentlemen. Defeating the Gentlemen is left to Buffy, with the accidental assistance of Riley. The larger community of Sunnydale is more loosely related and so even more seriously damaged. By silencing the town, the Gentlemen effectively isolate Sunnydale citizens from one another. In the process, they destroy the basis of rights and duties which define human interactions. Joel Feinberg notes that rights are closely linked to the ability to cry out.[30] Having a right is akin to having a claim against others, so that when the claim is not met, we are justified in crying out in a manner to which others must respond. Rights function to protect us and provide a partial basis for inclusion in community. The isolating effects of the Gentlemen's activities are apparent when they corner their first victim. The boy struggles against the footmen and tries to cry out, but to no avail. He is physically and socially alone, trapped in his room as though on a desert island. Tara's flight from the Gentlemen bears similar overtones. After encountering them, she understandably flees to seek safety in a dorm. She frantically bangs on doors, but the community has been so fractured that no one will respond (until Willow does). Tara is now isolated both by her own inability to communicate and by the fear others have of the Gentlemen.[31]

Hence, the Gentlemen undermine human community both directly and indirectly. Their task is one that requires the destruction of another community; in turn, the only way to destroy their community is to restore our capacity to cry out.

[21] "Hush" thus offers us a political allegory representative of significant ways in which we are oppressed by (and also oppress) others. Michel Foucault contends that power is frequently disseminated by governing what can be spoken and what must remain silent, thereby underscoring the centrality of communication to communal structures and interaction.32 Similarly, the educational writer Paulo Freire argues that a key ingredient in liberation from oppression is the power to speak, a power that the oppressed must win for themselves. Freire explains that "[t]he dialogue which is radically necessary to revolution corresponds to another radical need: that of men and women as beings who cannot be truly human apart from communication, for they are essentially communicative creatures. To impede communication is to reduce men to the status of 'things'—and this is a job for oppressors, not for revolutionaries."33 "Hush" sounds the same liberationist message, especially since Buffy can only defeat the Gentlemen by regaining her voice and breaking the silence with a scream.34 She cannot expect salvation or even aid from external agencies—whether in the form of people outside the community (Sunnydale has been quarantined) or authorities within it (although language can be affected by power structures, none of these can return it to existence; that requires the concrete act of individuals). As in the revolution recommended by Freire, the oppressed must assume responsibility for their liberation. It will not be given or handed over to them; they can only achieve it by crying out and exercising their own voices.35

[22] We see, then, that "Hush" does considerably more than celebrate the nonverbal. It offers a complicated view of both the verbal and the nonverbal, prompting us to note their virtues and limits even as they interrelate in human communication. Moreover, "Hush" demonstrates that what affects communication affects communal activity. In the process it offers us a powerful reminder that community and communication are not ready-made artifacts that we can take for granted. They are not pre-existing entities with an independent existence but vital instruments we use and constitute. Community and communication are achievements that continuously challenge us, especially as communal life responds to the ebb and flow of communicative acts and resources. Each is living and requires reconstruction in the face of new problems and threats. "Hush" uncovers the complex dynamics which constitute the life of communication and community and so helps us prepare to meet those challenges.

NOTES

[1] See Plato's *Republic* 372d-373a.

[2] See Descartes, *Meditation* I.

[3] Witness the publication of Open Court Publishing's *Culture and Philosophy Series* that includes such titles as: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale*, *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy: One Book to Rule Them All*, *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, *Seinfeld and Philosophy: A Book about Everything and Nothing*, and *The Simpsons and Philosophy: The D'oh! of Homer*.

[4] I build on the theme of reminders suggested by Ludwig Wittgenstein's claim that "the work of a philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose"

(*Philosophical Investigations* §127). My special concern in this paper is to demonstrate that examples drawn from popular media similarly function as reminders.

[5] Comment by Joss Whedon in the "Hush Featurette" on the Season Four DVD. Whedon offers a similar statement in the audio commentary that accompanies "Hush": "I had a general notion that what [the episode] was about was the idea that when people stop talking they start communicating – that language can interfere with communication because language limits. As soon as you say something, you've eliminated every other possibility of what you might be talking about. And we also use language to separate ourselves from other people. We also use language as white noise. There's [*sic*] many ways we also misuse it horribly. All of those things appear on the show because once I realized that the episode was about communication, I then found that absolutely everything I wrote was completely on theme."

[6] Alice Jenkins and Susan Stuart have thoughtfully explored the role writing plays in "Hush," arguing that the episode inverts our tendency to prioritize the spoken over the written word. See Jenkins and Stuart's "Extending Your Mind: Non-Standard Perlocutionary Acts in 'Hush'."

[7] We could employ more technical terminology (e.g., propositional claims vs. embodied corporeal acts), but the distinction between *verbal* and *nonverbal* forms of communication serves my purpose here. By the latter, I mean physical gestures, body language, and bodily comportment. By the former, I mean vocal symbols. Written symbols are closest to the verbal, though I shall not discuss them here.

[8] It thereby sounds a theme emphasized by Dewey and Mead that our cognitive life, of which verbal communication is a principle part, is rooted in and represents a sophisticated development of more basic organic modes of interaction. This position differs from the more traditional view (represented by Descartes, for instance) that renders verbal communication the external vehicle for cognitive processes that are thought to occur independently of biological and physical activities. Mead, by contrast, argues that although verbal gestures function via sophisticated symbols, they derive from more basic gestures. The verbal is then better thought of as a refinement than an alternative or opponent of basic nonverbal cues. We regularly employ body language—whether gestures of the hand, comportment of the body, or more notable movements in which the entire body is a communicative instrument—sometimes by itself but also sometimes in tandem with verbal symbols.

[9] It is most appropriate that this lesbian relationship should begin in an episode dominated by silence, since homosexual love has frequently been characterized as the love that dare not speak its name.

[10] The irony here is that Xander repeatedly told Spike to shut up the night before.

[11] My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this example.

[12] Note, for instance, that in "Doomed" Buffy appeals to the Slayer's ancestry (both early on and in her fry cook analogy) and questions Riley about his home state. Both acts underscore the significant role stories about the past play in explaining present identities and meanings.

[13] It is for this reason that Josiah Royce emphasizes the link between time, communication, and community. See *The Problem of Christianity*, especially chapter 9.

[14] Indeed, as Mead and Dewey both argue, mind itself is not a *thing* but a capacity made possible by language. See George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self & Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Jenkins and Stuart end their article with a similar conclusion.

[15] As others have noted, it is certainly true that *BtVS* series problematizes community and the institutions that constitute it. (See Asim Ali's "Community, Language, and Postmodernism at the Mouth of Hell" for a nice presentation of this point.) Even so, and true to form, the series offers us multiple and complex perspectives on the issues it addresses. Consequently, we should not be surprised to see community celebrated even as it is questioned or transformed by the drama of the episode. **Editors' note:** See also Wilcox's "Hush" chapter, e.g. her discussion on "the difference between formal groups

and organic communities" (159-60): ". . .the organic, domestic, linguistically playful group is posed against the formality of those who wish to replicate an unspoken agenda or 'power thingy'" (160).

[16] One could go so far as to say that in threatening communication and thereby community, the Gentlemen attack our humanity, our ability to form human modes of association.

[17] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, pp. 138-9.

[18] The self can perform both roles, as occurs when we communicate with ourselves.

[19] See Mead, pp. 66-7. These shared meanings need not be thought of as merely linguistic, for as Dewey and Mead would both argue, we share meanings through common habits.

[20] Royce similarly contends we belong to a *community of memory* when different individuals interpret the same historical event as belonging to their identity. Common purposes provide the basis for a *community of hope*. See *The Problem of Christianity*, pp. 248-9.

[21] For more on the Scoobies' creative use of language, see Karen Overby and Lahney Preston-Matto's "Staking in Tongues," Rhonda Wilcox's "There Will Never Be A 'Very Special' Buffy," Michael Adams' *Slayer Slang*, and the articles in *Slayage* 20 (May 2006).

[22] Of course, Buffy typically patrols not streets but cemeteries. This difference is an additional factor that stresses the centrality of community in "Hush."

[23] This point is significant in indicating that community per se is not necessarily good. In a pluralistic society like our own, communities are evaluated in light of their tendency to silence, exclude, or crush alternative modes of associated living. Royce argues that to avoid the insulation and provincialism that often arises in communities, we need to cultivate not a loyalty to our own community, but loyalty to loyalty per se. See *The Philosophy of Loyalty*.

[24] Whedon even describes the relation of the Gentlemen to the footmen as a "class thing" in the Featurette. In addition, this relation also parallels the classic philosophical dichotomy of mind and body. Rhonda Wilcox notes that the Gentlemen are more than a political symbol. She argues that "they also symbolize mortality and something about sex, something we can all relate to—the kind of basic foundational experience and fear that make the bones of a good fairy tale" (151).

[25] The footmen probably represent the likely fate for Sunnydale citizens who, lacking the resources of community, will lose their autonomy and become enslaved by the Gentlemen.

[26] The content of the verse is the following: "And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God." The passage evokes apocalyptic imagery, with ties to the seven hearts required by the Gentlemen. Unsurprisingly, an apocalypse is the theme of the next episode, "Doomed."

[27] See Mead, pp. 289-98.

[28] U.S. citizens demonstrated similar responses to September 11, as Whedon notes. An additional response, importantly related to these, is turning to family and friends. "Hush" demonstrates this as well in a number of scenes. Upon awakening without a voice, Xander calls Buffy, his friend. Also, as we have noted, the Scoobies' first reaction thereafter is to convene at Giles' apartment to learn what has happened and plan a response. Reid B. Locklin explores the relations between family and the larger community in "*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Domestic Church: Revisioning Family and the Common Good."

[29] The Initiative has its own structures and resources that remain relatively intact. Still, the Initiative as a community contributes little to the fight.

[30] See Feinberg, especially pp. 142-3. Pragmatists would add that rights, though a significant refinement of the more basic cry, are nevertheless organically related to it.

[31] All noise has thus become suspect. With voices, we could at least call out, "Who's there?" This fact again reinforces the idea that verbal language represents the possibility

of community. Of this scene, Whedon offers the following comment: “The idea that society is crumbling, that everybody is too frightened to help [Tara]. Very important.”
[32] See, for instance, his discussion of the modes of regulating discourses of sexuality in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, especially pp. 17-35.
[33] *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 128. Lord Byron makes a similar point: "Hereditary bondsmen! know ye not,/Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow?" (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto ii. Stanza 76).
[34] This suggests that the basic ability to vocalize—to exert that power even without specific symbols or words—is enough to shatter the oppression of the Gentlemen.
[35] Exercising rights requires the more complex and sophisticated modes of interaction made possible by verbal communication. This is one of the special offices of the verbal.

WORKS CITED

Adams, Michael. *Slayer Slang: A Buffy the Vampire Slayer Lexicon.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
Ali, Asim. “Community, Language, and Postmodernism at the Mouth of Hell.” http://www.wam.umd.edu/~aali/buffnog.html.
Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Tr. John Cottingham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
Dewey, John. *Experience and Nature.* New York: Dover Publications, 1958.
Feinberg, Joel. “Duties, Rights, and Claims.” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 3 (1966): 137-144.
Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage, 1980.
Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Continuum Books, 2002.
Jenkins, Alice & Susan Stuart. “Extending Your Mind: Non-Standard Perlocutionary Acts in ‘Hush’.” *Slayage* 9 (August 2003). http://www.slayage.tv.
Locklin, Reid B. “*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Domestic Church: Revisioning Family and the Common Good.” *Slayage* 6 (September 2002). http://www.slayage.tv.
Mead, George Herbert. *Mind, Self & Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Ed. Charles W. Morris. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967.
Overby, Karen Eileen and Lahney Preston-Matto. “Staking in Tongues: Speech Act as Weapon in Buffy.” *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery. Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002. 73-84.
Plato, *The Republic*. Tr. G.M.A. Grube. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992.
Royce, Josiah. *The Philosophy of Loyalty.* Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995.
___. *The Problem of Christianity*. Washington D.C.: The Catholic university of America Press, 2001.
Wilcox, Rhonda V. “Fear: The Princess Screamed Once. Power, Silence, and Fear in ‘Hush’.” *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005. 146-161.
___. “There Will Never Be A ‘Very Special’ *Buffy*: Symbol and Language.” *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005. 17-29.
Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations.* Tr. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.