(Re)Cognising the Body: Performativity, Embodiment and Abject Selves in *Buffy The Vampire Slayer.*

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This paper examines the relationship between subjectivity, identity coherence and embodiment in the context of space by analysing character development and characterisation in the television series Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Character transformation in Buffy goes beyond the traditional question of the abjectively transformed vampire body, and instead focuses on the major characters in terms of their embodied subjecthood and the question of subjectivity as a response to the cultural imperative of coherence, intelligibility and recognisability. As characters, Buffy and her friends come into physical contact with demons, vampires, monsters and creatures that are culturally-coded abject not by virtue of a good/evil or subject/abject dichotomy, but through their establishment in the narrative as that which puts into question the fantasy of coherent bodies and coherent subjectivity. I consider here how Butler's theories of subjective performativity and bodily materialisation can be figured within a cultural 'crisis of the subject' by showing that performativity, as a citation of the signifier or category or norm as 'co-ordinate' of self-hood, is conditioned not only by the cultural imperative to articulate a coherent, normalised and regimented body but in distinction from the cultural construction of the abject, or that which threatens coherent subjectivity.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is a text open to an array of active readings, from liberal-feminist readings which praise the surface-level presence of a female super-hero, to those which suggest it abjects race by representing non-white ethnicities as monstrous, vampirous or demonic. As a series dealing with issues of youth, age and maturation, *Buffy* explores across seven years the lives of a handful of Sunnydale residents in their struggle not only against vampires and demonic monsters, but against the tendency to fall into simplistic dichotomies of value, stereotyped attitudes, and narrow morals. To paraphrase what has been said of the *Frankenstein* narrative (O'Flinn, 1986), there is no *Buffy*, only *Buff*ies–a point that is particularly to be borne in mind in light of post-structuralist reception theories in which textual meanings are only activated in accord with discursive reading positions or 'reading formations' (Bennett, 1983: 218). However, what is signalled across many possible readings is a narrative on the disruption of embodied identity and the role of the abject in corporeality.

Like *The X-Files*, *Babylon 5*, *Star Trek Deep Space Nine* and *24*, *Buffy* and *Angel* fall into the category of what I call 'new television narrative', this being the production of television series that can be classified neither as series nor as serial drama and which extend narrative arcs across multiple episodes and, indeed, multiple seasons or years (Cover, 2004; Cover, 2005). Such a format is highly available for the complex critique of identity, embodiment and abjection, particularly because it provides the temporal and spatial scope to examine such issues at length and allow them to play out over time. Strong fan-bases provide an impetus for ensuring strong continuity, and Joss Whedon (Kaveney, 2001: 12) has clearly been particularly interested not only in maintaining continuity, but in setting up narratives (and hinting at plot developments) several years before they go into production. Character change, development and transformation become possible in this new television format, and such transformation does not rely on the cliché of stability-change-return that marks most episodic television. Rather, transformation occurs in the encounter with otherness–often the abject other, in

Kristeva's terms (1982)–and it does so in ways which either leave a character's body indelibly marked or upon which the trace of transformation will remain.

Embodied subjectivity-in-flux is understood here as one condition through which we read the *Buffy* text: As Barbara Creed (1993: 63) points out, 'transformation' is one of the common symbolic elements that cuts across various texts on vampires and vampirism. Transformation in *Buffy*, however, goes beyond the traditional question of the abjectively transformed vampire body, and instead focuses on the major characters in terms of their embodied subjecthood and the question of subjectivity as a response to the cultural imperative of coherence, intelligibility and recognisability. The come into physical contact with demons, vampires, monsters and creatures that are culturally-coded abject not by virtue of a good/evil or subject versus abject dichotomy, but through their establishment in the narrative as that which puts into question the fantasy of coherent bodies and coherent subjectivity.   I consider here how Butler's theories of subjective performativity and bodily materialisation can be figured within a cultural 'crisis of the subject' by showing that performativity, as a citation of the signifier or category or norm as 'co-ordinate' of self-hood, is conditioned not only by the cultural imperative to articulate a coherent, normalised and regimented body but in distinction from the cultural construction of the abject, or that which threatens coherent subjectivity. I will look at this as it is represented–or read–in *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* as an example of new television which relies on multi-year narrative arcs to articulate identity as performative, embodied and reflective of a postmodern critique of subjectivity.

Performative Subjectivity and the Television Narrative

Butler's (1990) highly influential theory of gender performativity suggests that subject identities are not extensions of essentialist, foundationalist or embodied categories of male/female 'sex', but are instead processes of performance which lend the illusion of an inner identity and bodily core. Performativity is the understanding of subjecthood as the non-voluntary citation of the culturally-given signifier in a reiterative process that is never stable or guaranteed, and that always risks its own undoing by the necessity–and instability–of reiteration. While most use of theories of performativity have been made to consider–often in 'political' terms–the cultural constitution and use of identity categories of gender, race and sexuality, they are equally well applied to the ways in which the individual subject of being, the 'I', is constituted and performed in contemporary western culture. For Butler (1997: 27), the subject is an illusion performed, to fulfil the cultural imperatives of *coherence*, *intelligibility* and *recognisability* in order to participate in life and society, and to forge a sense of self and belonging across an array of diverse 'identity co-ordinates'. This cultural imperative is at the root of the articulation of selfhood. For the sake of consolidating individual subjectivity, this requires the establishment of borders, particularly the borders of the body, through the articulation of a *fantasy* of inside and outside. Such a fantasy is, for Butler, necessary for the coherent performance of subjecthood.

Central to Butler's theory of performativity is embodiment as a *process*. For Butler, the body is not 'matter' which is then either socially-conditioned into various forms of subjectivity such as gender as in a purely constructionist or socialisational

account, nor is it the 'matter' which instructs and constitutes the behaviour, actions and desires that form a coherent identity, as in essentialist, biologically-determinist or genetically-determinist theorisations of selfhood (Butler, 1993: 4-8). Rather, the body is *materialised*. It is performed as a process in such a way as to present the illusions of coherence, closure and stability. However, such coherence, closure and stability are discursively-articulated concepts that govern the forms and limits of the ways in which the body can be performed. These are what Alphonso Lingis understands as the body's "capacities, skills and inclinations" (Lingis, 1994:53). It is through repetition of the body's movements, attributes and desires *over time* that an embodied subject 'gives off' a sense of coherence–but as with all iteration, such repetitions are never clearly the same, and the process of coherent identity involves the exclusion, erasure and forgetting of movements, attributes and desires that put the coherence of the body into question. In a television narrative such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the coherence is formulated, constituted and developed *over time* of the series, within episodes, across episodes and over years. Unlike the realities of human subjectivity, the opportunity for exclusion, erasure and forgetting of the past is impossible as the series acts as a memorial record of the performative materialisation of the characters' bodies–a sort of documentation of the Foucauldian confession of selfhood–and as such has to deal with self-performativity in an even more rigorous way.

One of the ways in which Butler's theory of performativity can be deployed best to discuss the subjective *I* of television characters is by considering the ways in which the very concept of the subject has been put in question in contemporary texts. In *Buffy* as in a number of other contemporary texts, subjecthood is shown to be torn between an enlightenment era notion of wholeness and a postmodern fragmentation, selective diversity and internalised variances. Much of this focus can be understood as a symptom of contemporary western culture–a push-and-pull relationship between a compulsion to human subjecthood, and a postmodern or posthuman crisis of the subject. Where, for Fredric Jameson (1985: 15), the late capitalist period is marked by the fragmentation or dissolution of subjectivity such that the old bourgeois individual subject is no more, I suggest that it is not so much dislodged as effected within the constraints of a continuing, residual, humanist imperative for coherent identities and–in a push-and-pull relationship– an ongoing cultural assertion that identities are not authentic but can be made and re-made, most often through various practices of consumption, including the consumption of symbols, practices and fashions. This subjective relationship with humanist imperatives and postmodern fragmentation calls for narratives of subjectivity that highlight the fact that such identity is never in itself complete, but always a *process*. The push-and-pull relationship between the coherent humanist subject and its fragmentation can be illustrated in the ways in which subjects establish borders in their performativity in order to consolidate a sense of subjectivity, but in which the abject that threatens those borders is assumed or assimilated in order to re-consolidate or re-cohere the threatened subject. It is this push-and-pull that forms the crux of the *Buffy* narrative, whereby it is the materialising, processual and performative bodies of the characters that constitute site of struggle for engagement between subjectivity and fragmentation, between coherence and unintelligibility, and between recognition of the self and a type of re-cognition or re-thinking of the embodied self.

Each of the characters in *Buffy* is at some stage involved in bodily transformations, most of which are negotiated along the blurred distinction between good/evil, and most of which involve that categorisation as subject/abject: Xander who temporarily takes on-board the destructive and baleful hyena spirit ('The Pack,' 1x06)[i] causing his identity to be re-cognised as bullying and mean-spirited–the co-ordinates of identity that he performs coming to be re-configured under that abject signifier; Willow whose flirtation with magic results in the magic entering her ('Becoming, Part Two,' 2x22), re-cognising her personality over several years such that this abject and other-worldly element engulfs her to the point that she embraces evil long enough nearly to cause an apocalypse in grief and fury; Cordelia, whose popular, ego-centric, consumer-rampant self is re-cognised through constantly facing the other-worldly abject–a facing of the 'other' to the point that early on in her appearance in *Angel* she has been gifted with the painful and damaging visions from the 'powers that be' ('Hero,' A1x09) turned into a human-demon hybrid in order better to cope with the visions ('Birthday,' A3x11) and eventually ascending to a higher plane of existence ('Tomorrow,' A3x22). We also have the vampire Angel who, constrained from embracing evil by the possession of a soul he periodically loses, is a Jekyll/Hyde intertext: a direct split articulated in the naming–Angel when ensoulled, Angelus when vampiric; in his morose and quiet composure as Angel, and his smoking, cruel laughter and bawdy jokes when Angelus.

A figuration that might be considered useful in illustrating the effect of abjection in the maintenance and destabilisation of the performative subject is to see the act of *recognition* as a *re-cognition* or a re-thinking of the subjective self. I borrow this trope from Alexander Garcìa Düttmann (1997), and in my usage it is to point to the ways in which any 'encounter' by a subject (as it were) with a co-ordinate or node or element of the cultural, in which one is forced to recognise oneself, always involves a re-cognition or re-thinking of the self, a necessary adjustment or re-valuation of subjectivity. Such a point allows us to think about how the abject, as a *culturally recognisable* element in representation brings about the *re-cognition* of subjective performativity–the abject which must be rejected for a stable and coherent performance, but which threatens to undo that coherent performance. To put this in another way, as the abject is encountered and signified *as* the abject, it brings about a re-constitution of subjecthood by changing or re-arranging the co-ordinates by which one performs one's individual personal identity. The subject in seeming to recognise herself is, in effect, re-cognising or re-thinking the *self*, taking *on-board* the abject–rather than repelling or rejecting it–in order to re-cohere the subjectivity that was threatened in that encounter.

Subjectivity and the Abject

The demonic, the magical, the unintelligible and the horrific are characterised in Buffy as the 'abject', but as an abject that is recuperated by the subject in a process not of recognition but of re-cognition or a re-thinking or re-configuration of the performative self. Kristeva's theory of abjection has long been seen to fit neatly into a psychoanalytic framework in which subjectivity is the result of entry into language (the symbolic), the partial disavowal of the semiotic (the residual effects of a childhood prior to language acquisition), and the relegation of the semiotic to a space labelled the 'chora' (Kristeva,

1982). The abject is that which *upsets* subjectivity, reminding us of our construction in the symbolic. It attests to the always tenuous nature of the symbolic order in the face of a series of dispersing semiotic drives (Grosz, 1989: 71). It threatens subjectivity by collapsing meaning, reminding us of the subject's necessary relation to death, corporeality, animality and maternal materiality. To maintain a stable sense of subjective identity it must be repelled, quashed, shied-away-from. As Kristeva (1982: 2) puts it, the abject must be 'radically excluded'.

My use of abjection here is designed around 'rescuing' the concept from a foundationalist psychoanalysis–and 'the abject' from notions of the pre-discursive or pre-cultural–and to make use of it in a theory of performativity as culturally-given (not universal) co-ordinates or signifiers which disrupt the citations of signifiers or categories which make the performance of self *appear* whole, unified, totalised and intelligible. Rather than understanding the split character (Krzwinska, 2002: 181) through the psychoanalytic analysis of the horror genre (eg. Creed, 1993) and viewing the internalised demonic as the repressed or the primal, I want to show that what is culturally-given as the abject is neither an emanation of a hidden 'inner' nature, nor a characterisation of evil as repugnant as it has been endemic to the horror genre since at least F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922). It is instead to be seen as a discursive element that questions the coherent subject and throws it into disarray, yet is taken onboard and performed in an ongoing struggle or process of fulfilling the cultural requirement of coherent subjecthood. It is not, as the rival vampire slayer Faith once remarked, the case that "every man has a beast in him" ('Beauty and the Beasts,' 3x04) but that human subjects have the potential to have an abject beasthood conferred upon them in the instabilities of embodied selfhood. What is–or can be–marked as 'the abject' occurs within the structuration of language according to cultural dictates, but represented through the interplay of concepts of the human and the abject demonic, as it occurs across the surface of the body. For embodied subjectivity, the body requires not only a fantasy of inner/outer, but clearly-demarcated borders of various kinds: purity/impurity, humanity/otherness, self/other, subject/abject. As *Buffy* explores identity across the long narrative arc of several seasons or years (a temporality that is from the perspective of both the characters and the audience), this interplay occurs in time in ways which are both linear–the attainment of subjective coherence in the face of abjection over time–and cyclical–the repetition of the play between subjectivity and abjection across different stories, within different episodes, and along different bodily surfaces.

Articulation of evil or the demonic or monstrousness or 'baddie' as abject in *Buffy* and *Angel* is nothing new to the genre of horror film and television, nor to science fiction or action-adventure. In Buffy, evil and demonic characters, forces and emanations are clearly coded as abject. Vampires, who penetrate the wholeness and containment of the body are the obvious example, teeth which pierce the closed borders of the body and undo the fantasy of containment, vampiric blood which transforms the subject into other. But we also find a number of monsters and demons presented as repugnant and disgusting, particularly the youth-consuming snakelike demon into which the mayor of Sunnydale has conspired to ascend ('Graduation Day, Part Two,' 3x22), the obese demon Balthazar ('Bad Girls,' 3x14); the Der Kindestod which sucks the life out of young children (a reference to abject paedophilic behaviour) ('Killed by Death,' 2x18); *Angel's*

Jasmine who underneath her self-presentation of the beauty and mystique of a goddess is a rotting, maggot-ridden animated corpse ('Peace Out,' A4x21). Relying much less on a visual framework, however, we also have characters such as the invisible Marcie ('Out of Mind, Out of Sight,' 1x11) whose attacks on the students are designed to physically injure, humiliate and scar the bodies of those who had previously ignored her; the 'gentlemen' of Hush, who tear open the bodies and remove the hearts of living townspeople unable to scream ('Hush,' 4x10); and perhaps most importantly the goddess Glory (Season 5), who pre-dates written language, and thereby comes to represent the incomprehensible and incoherent—the ultimate abject which puts any sense, illusional or not, or subjectivity into disarray. Indeed, in placing her hands *into* the heads of her victims, she takes away the essence of coherence, leaving only insane, psychotic, fragmented and incoherent people behind.

What is new about the representation of the abject in Buffy is the fact that the relationship between good/coherent/subject and evil/unintelligible/abject is an ambivalent one. As Rob Breton and Lindsey McMaster (2001) have pointed out, the youthful characters in *Buffy* do not engage in a simplistic kind of binary logic that allows or reinforces this divide between good and evil, subject and abject, body and other. Indeed, they have eschewed such enlightenment era reason and judgment wherever they have found it, which has been particularly in the institutions they encounter (the para-military organisation The Initiative) or those which in some part constitute their social place and relative disempowerment (Sunnydale Highschool, the Town Hall, the Watchers' Council). Representing the logic of binary and dualism at one point, even Buffy's soldier boyfriend Riley comes to embrace what Gina Wisker identifies as a more postmodern mentality in the demarcation of good and evil in the Buffyverse (Wisker, 2001). To reiterate, the complexity of the relationship between performative subjecthood and invasive abjection can occur only through the longer narrative arcs made available in a multi-season series such as *Buffy*.

Slaying the Subject

As Thomas Hibbs (2003: 57) points out, the show has always focused on the "question and problem of Buffy's identity". The question over Buffy's identity has been centred, not exclusively, on the tensions between the co-ordinates of performative identity that make up her human, everyday existence, and the abject co-ordinate of slayer-hood. Buffy is seen to "come to terms" with her slayer status several times throughout the series, most notably at the end of season one where, after her near-death experience by drowning, she charges in a ball-gown to destroy the master vampire and close the hellmouth, full of conviction in the 'truth' of her slayerhood. However, the question of the conversation between humanity and slayerhood continues to rise, season after season, as a narrative 'stumbling block' which heightens the tension experienced in what is given as an ongoing process of 'becoming', a process that is never–and can never be–fulfilled, completed, ended until death (and as it turns out in Buffy's case, not even then). It is in the visual depiction of Buffy's body that this narrative plays out, her body being a space on which is written polysemy and multiplicity–as a self-conscious parody of womanhood, as an angst-ridden location of the desire for coherent womanhood through sexual and

romantic expression, as the point at which gender becomes unintelligible through the representation of immense strength and petite bodily norms, and as the site at which the human itself comes into question in the play between the 'demonic' nature of her strength and powers and the desire for a clear representation of human normalcy.

Buffy's slayer powers are variously characterised as the abject against the notion of a coherent body, which for Buffy early on is constituted in middle-class normality: shopping, dating, schoolwork, socialising–that is, the body performing, moving and desiring in accord with various culturally-given customs and standards Her powers are incompatible with her sense of embodied self, in that it provides her not only with a strength to battle vampires and demons, but a *responsibility* to do so. The fact that she is the 'chosen one', and not in a position to make a 'choice' on how her body is used, utilised and performed is an indication of the incompatibility of her powers with her liberal-humanist sense of subjecthood.   The play between subjectivity and the requirement to recognise abjection occurs throughout the series' seven-year run. The narrative of the first two episodes ('Welcome to the Hellmouth' 1x01, and 'The Harvest' 1x02) is one which is played out again and again through the series, in both shorter and longer narrative arcs. We see Buffy begin with a refusal to acknowledge her slayer responsibilities (Little, 2003: 289), an angry attack on Giles (Wilcox, 1999: 17) for reminding her of this aspect, this co-ordinate, of her selfhood. As Susan Owen (1999: 30) has suggested, Buffy longs to be 'normal', to have a boyfriend and to consume life without these demands–the "narrative opposes the costs of leadership and political potency, with intimacy, stable relationships and material comfort". But when faced with the reality of a responsibility to save, rescue or fight–a responsibility rooted not in the coherent self but in a feminist political ethic of care, concern and compassion–she draws the abject strand into the performance of selfhood and 'works towards' the presentation of a complex, coherent self, much as this presentation continues to be questioned again and again by the changing stresses between various co-ordinates of her performative subjectivity and the ongoing tension between the subject and the abject that she embodies.

There is no question that her slayer powers are understood by Buffy (though not necessarily by her contemporaries and on-lookers) as the abject.   We first really encounter the abject, demonic nature of her powers in the final episode of the fourth season ('Restless,' 4x22) which sets up many of the themes for the remaining three years of the programme. In the dreamscape of Buffy's sleep, the human-demon-cyborg hybrid creature that she had defeated only hours before is conjured in human form and they have the following exchange:

Adam: She's uncomfortable with certain concepts. Aggression is a natural human tendency. [Turning to Buffy] Though you and me come by it another way.
Buffy: We're not demons.
Adam: Is that a fact?

The point here is that this is neither a fact nor a lie. Buffy's body is neither that of a demon nor intelligibly human–she is posthuman by virtue of the play between these two 'aspects' or 'co-ordinates' of bodily identity through the denial and defeat of the binary human/non-human or human/posthuman. The question as to whether or not Buffy is in some way demonic is the question that is not answerable with a retort or a one-liner or in the space available in the remainder of the episode, but across the remaining years of the

narrative arc. The question extends as the dream extends: having in the previous episode invoked and offended the root of Buffy's powers through a spell which temporarily enjoined the essences of Willow, Xander and Giles in her own body, the root of that power comes in the form of the 'first slayer' to seek vengeance. Having attempted to destroy the others, the first slayer and Buffy come to encounter each other in the dreamscape of a desert. We find that the first slayer is abjection personified. Speaking through Tara in Buffy's dream, she says: "I have no speech, no name. I live in the action of death. The blood-cry, the penetrating wound. I am destruction. Absolute. Alone. . . . The First."

Being outside of speech, outside of language is representative of abjection–she is that 'beyond' which puts into question the coherence of a subjectivity forged in discourse; she is the incomprehensible, the incoherent, the unintelligible. She represents that which cannot be represented, and that which puts into question–makes incoherent–that with which she is associated, in this case Buffy herself. Indeed, in a Cartesian sense, the first slayer is *all body*, no mind no civilisation. Her selfhood is collapsed into the capacities and attributes of her body, she is expresses nothing but her responsibility to destroy demons and vampires. Furthermore, as has often been suggested, a particular trait of both *Buffy* and *Angel* has been a structuralist and post-structuralist awareness of the ways in which meaning and being occurs only through language, and that language is not only that through which coherence is found, but that all subjects are embedded in language and proficiency of specific languages (eg. Overbey & Preston-Matto, 2002: 83; Wilcox, 1999: 22). This abjection is reinforced by her statement that she is the "penetrating wound," that which, not unlike the vampires, interferes with the wholeness and containment of the self as it is represented by the consistency and completion of the body.

In an act of defiance, Buffy points out "you're not the source of me," indicating an initial rejection of the abject, a rebellion over the suggestion that an abject co-ordinate of her performative identity is a true and fair depiction of an element of her selfhood. Indeed, the defiance is a claim to selfhood that in which embodiment is materialised through an expression of bodily complexity for a more complex age–Buffy questions the first slayer's self-presentation in terms of hair-care, and asks if she has thought about visual impressions in the workplace. The first slayer is abject-ionable because of the simplicity of her body and the pre-humanist notion of a selfhood that does not articulate, enact or play *beyond* the capacities of her (demonic) body. In the resolution of this episode, however, Buffy is not only opened to new mysteries about her complex subjectivity–"I never thought about it..."–but she comes to find a certain stability between the complex multi-faceted, multi-coordinated body ("I walk. I talk. I shop, I sneeze"), and the self that harbours this incomprehensible, abject power. Both Buffy and the audience are reminded, in the episode's closing repetition of Tara's voice (speaking for the first slayer) that this new revelation is not by any means a resolution or a final word on Buffy's identity, but just another stage in an ongoing process of self-coherence and self-performativity: "You think you know what's to come . . . what you are . . . you haven't even begun."

The following season opens with the episode 'Buffy vs Dracula,' (5x01) which hinges on 'Restless', creating a two-part narrative arc stretching across the break in seasons. Dracula has come to Sunnydale to meet and seduce the infamous slayer.

Specific reference is made to the previous episode as Dracula rehearses a variation on the line given by the first slayer: "You think you know . . . what you are . . . what's to come. You haven't even begun." Although both comic and mysterious, the characterisation of Dracula here is one of specific (if alternative) knowledge: the name culturally-synonymous with the concept of vampires works as both an informing and policing source not only for Buffy but for the programme *Buffy* itself. Dracula embraces the power of decision and (institutional) knowledge, saying to Buffy "there is so much I have to teach you. Your history, your power . . . what your body is capable of . . ." He points out several times during the episode that the slayer's power is rooted in darkness, and attempts to demonstrate by letting her taste his demonic, vampiric blood, claiming that this is where she will find her "true nature." As she drinks from him we see several fast-paced frames of the First Slayer from 'Restless', and a number of shots of Buffy fighting. That Dracula should discuss her body is not merely a representation of his desire for her and all her body harbours (the blood, the power), but a reminder that Buffy's body itself is the site of struggle between abjection and embodied subjectivity, between brute strength and petite style, and between force and sensitivity.

In the closure of this episode, Buffy asks Giles for a return to the slayer/watcher or mentor/student relationship that the two had neglected for much of the previous season. Roz Kaveney (2001: 15) suggests that this is a return to the "seriousness of her vocation," although her vocation here is to be read not merely as 'the slayer' but as a vocation directed towards the exploration of her being, her subjectivity. Having had it confirmed by Dracula that her slayer-power is dark, demonic and of-the-abjectionable, she is compelled to continue the exploration and process of articulating an identity which takes into account all of the varying and conflicting co-ordinates of embodied performativity. Towards the beginning of the very next episode (the poignantly-titled 'Real Me,' 5x02), indeed, we witness Buffy meditating under Giles' guidance–a training method to better learn the capacities, skills and limits of her slayer-body and a process of 'shoring up' a sense of self.

In the seventh season, we see perhaps the strongest articulation of the abject nature of slayer-power and the ways in which the blurring of subject/abject, coherence/unintelligibility and human/demon occur through the processes of embodiment. The episode 'Get it Done' (7x15) tells of how 'the slayer' was created in a time when demons still roamed the earth, at the beginning of the ascendancy of humanity. Buffy is transported into the past and to a desert reminiscent of the one in which she encountered the first slayer ('Restless,' 4x22), in an exchange with a demon which by its markings and dress, is itself reminiscent of the first slayer and comes to represent the brute strength found in the abject power.[ii] In the desert, Buffy meets the 'shadow men' who were responsible for creating the slayer. There to seek answers, they tell her the only answer is to increase her powers, and she finds herself chained up in a cave.

> Shadowmen: We are at the beginning. The source of your strength. The well of the Slayer's power.
> (One of the shadowmen opens a wooden box.)
> Shadowmen: Herein lies your truest strength. The energy of the demon. Its spirit. Its heart.
> [. . .]

(A black, oily, malevolent-appearing cloud streaks through the cave.)

Shadowmen: It must become one with you. This will make you ready for the fight.

Buffy [distraught]: By making me less human?

(The spirit attempts to enter Buffy, first through her mouth, then pushing at her body and particularly her waist, looking for another orifice.)

Buffy: This isn't the way.

Although Buffy here rejects the additional strength being offered, it is again not an outright rejection of the abject or a disavowal of that self of hers, but a reaction against the ensuing instability that would occur with a further, sudden change in the delicate configuration of significatory co-ordinates that are cited in the performativity of her selfhood would bring about.

Buffy's reaction to the idea that her strength can be 'topped up' by an incorporation of the demonic essence is a reaction which betrays the abject nature of the essence as that which puts into question her subjectivity as bodily human purity (already unstable, in her own case). This, too, is not merely a demon in a human/demon set of oppositions or of otherness; rather it is the essence of the demonic and that for Buffy means it is *alien* to her sense of humanity. This essence is biologically-distinct from human-ness, and is what can best be referred to as the "site of monstrous difference" (McLarty, 1999: 353), thereby abject in its unassimilability or uselessness to a human/other boundary. That is, the boundary is never one that is purely clear or that works to uphold human identity coherence. The revulsion and rebellion against the essence crossing the borders of the human body–entering at the orifices or locations of abjection–is the human revulsion towards interiorising the foreign (Derrida, 1995: 240-241). The fact, however, that Buffy later questioned the ethics of putting her sense of human embodiment before the need to gain strength for the upcoming battle is telling: she is aware that in several ways as the 'chosen one' her body is not entirely her own. She has been described as the instrument of the Watcher's Council ('Checkpoint,' 5x12), and her early rejection of the slayer role can be understood as an attempt to evade interpellation. However, rather than rejecting that interpellative force and rather than eluding the abject *im*purity of her body, she works to negotiate an outcome along a politico-ethical set of lines that parlays between the use of her body in the fight against evil and injustice, and the human pleasures she takes in having embodiment. Such negotiation occurs not through recognition of her position, recognition of human rights, recognition of abjection, but a constant and ongoing process of re-cognising or re-configuring her body in accord with those ever-expanding ethical requirements.

Body, Space and Other

One aspect of re-cognition through the embrace of the abject in the longer duration of the multi-year arcs is the way in which other aspects of an identity are re-organised under one abject 'co-ordinate' of identity. Buffy's closest friend, Willow, shows the effect of 'new discursive elements' on the performativity of the self. Although this operates through a range of performances that indicate a negotiation between subjectivity and abject otherness, I will discuss here her sense of embodiment in relation to space.

Willow began in the series as the school 'geek'–shy, daggy, computer-literate, disposed to study. In visually-embodied terms, she is shy, stands back, trembles away from monsters, bully cheerleaders and boys. Her actions while often ethically selfless are directed towards herself: she shields, she cowers, she covers her body with her arms in danger. That which is external is taken into herself: she reads, studies, listens, all of which are in contrast to the spatially-outward movements of the slayer who pokes, penetrates, kicks; whose actions are directed away from the body and in the direction of the other. In the double-episode finale of the second year of the series ('Becoming' Parts I and II; 2x21 and 2x22), she elects to perform a spell to restore the vampire Angel's soul before he is able to bring about an apocalypse. In the dire period of danger in which Buffy's group have for the first time suffered the death of a friend (Ms Callendar the computer teacher and cyber-pagan) Willow, who has been studying Ms Callendar's pagan texts and witchcraft websites, is compelled to turn her learning into an outward movement, to have effect. However, involving witchcraft which is another form of abject otherness in *Buffy*, requires a double-movement of both away from the self (effect) and towards the self (internalisation), as we see in the stern warning given by Giles:

> Giles: (very concerned) Willow... channelling... such potent magicks
> through yourself, it could open a door that you may not be able to
> close.

The potency of the magicks causes her body to be temporarily but horrifically invaded by a gypsy spirit (yet another form of abject otherness), resulting in an empowerment of herself as a witch in her own right. Effectively, she faces the abject magic, recognises it as abject but in the process of recognising it has her performative selfhood reconfigured or re-cognised or re-thought. The invocation of the spell is an interpellation, but one that does not merely respond to an Althusserian hail (Althusser 1971). Rather, it is a turn to the hail that assumes the potency and valency of that interpellative force. As the performativity of her individuality collapses with ramblings in an unknown language, she *takes on* that which was invasive–the abject–and comes to incorporate, through re-cognition, the abject in order to disempower it and re-constitute her performative self.

The fact that this occurs while she performs the spell from a hospital bed is not without significance: the hospital in *Buffy* (and in contemporary lived experience more broadly) represents the place of bodily reconfiguration and abject fears. It has variously been the site of Buffy's mother, Joyce's, cranial surgery ('Listening to Fear,' 5x09), the site of her subsequence autopsy ('The Body,' 5x16). In the second season, Buffy is hospitalised with influenza, and discovers a child-killer demon–Der Kindestod–haunting the hospital and representing the abjectiveness of the paedophile ('Killed by Death,' 2x18). It is where the renegade slayer Faith has been incarcerated in her coma and where she eventually wakes up to launch a career in vengeance, anger and self-hatred ('This Year's Girl,' 4x15), where Spike goes in order to have his chip removed and thereby reconfigure his identity to that of fully-emancipated vampire ('Out of My Mind,' 5x04), where babbling psychiatric patients who have become incoherent through abject exposure to the goddess Glory are incarcerated ('Listening to Fear,' 5x09). It is the site to which Buffy's sister Dawn, having discovered her own abjection as non-human and while experiencing the unravelling of the fantasy of subjecthood, runs and encounters the abject goddess Glory; also the site at which we discover that Glory and the young medical

resident Ben are bodily connected and enjoined–neither singular nor separate, again thereby abject through the upsetting of the fantasy of individuality ('Blood Ties,' 5x13). And it is the fantasy-site to which Buffy withdraws when chemically-deluded to believe that she is not a slayer but a psychiatric patient ('Normal Again,' 6x17).

Hospitalised bodies, in *Buffy*, are re-figured, re-organised and transformed as Cordelia pointed out in referring to plastic surgery while Buffy was recovering from the 'flu: "while she's in here, she might as well get that thing done. You know, that thing on her face? You know that thing." And bodies face the abjection of self in hospitals: death, transformation, the undoing and reconceiving of fantasies of inner/outer that constitute the subject's relationship to the abject. In Willow's case it was the site of her own bodily transformation as the magic entered her, demonstrating a blurring between the normative body and the abject powers. This contrasts against the enlightenment perspective on hospitals, which are the sites at which normative and non-normative bodies are classified, categorised and produced (Foucault, 1973: 34-35; Foucault, 2004: 60). Where for Butler (1990), the discourses of the norm are cited, performed and produced but risk incoherence or transformation in the failure to be recognisably repeated, Willow's transformation can be understood as a failure to repeat either the normal or the abnormal body: she is neither healthy nor sick, neither good nor evil, but converted through taking on-board the abject and embracing its blurred positionality.

The empowerment (literally) that Willow experiences through her engagement with witchcraft is one which marks her body, but most particularly her body in its lived spatiality. Her poise during the following season is altered, and she walks and acts with confidence. She assists more strongly and readily in the slayage of vampires. The long narrative arc on Willow's identity carries forward this increasing confidence and the increasing *presence* of Willow through the remainder of the *Buffy* series. After her girlfriend Tara is attacked by Glory ('Tough Love,' 5x19) she seeks out the evil Goddess to enact revenge. Her arrival at Glory's apartment is preceded by earthquakes, darkening and stormy winds before the door flies open revealing Willow floating several inches above the floor. Lightning flashes from her hands, objects move on her command. Rather than operating within a humanist conception of the body located in space, her body image itself expands. The body image, as Elizabeth Grosz has pointed out is capable of accommodating a wide range of objects, and such objects located in space and with which the subject interacts become parts of the body image–that is, such non-bodily objects in space become psychically invested (Grosz, 1994: 80).

Jes Battis has argued that the narrative 'problem' for the character Willow has been her lack of corporeality, and that each significant event in the series involving Willow has made her body less and less clear, a 'costume' that can be ripped away (Battis, 2003). Indeed, it is quite correct to suggest that the narrative arc across the entire series dealing with Willow's subjectivity has been about her radical attempts at embodiment and embodiment through the investment of her self in a non-objective space. The humanist notion of separation between subjective body and objective space is put in disarray when Willow is at the height of her anger, vengeance or other emotion. In the opening episode of the sixth season, with Buffy (temporarily) dead and buried, we discover that Willow has been elected the gang's leader ('Bargaining Part 1,' 6x01). The opening sequence has Willow leading the slayage of a vampire from a position of

surveillance atop a large cemetery crypt. She communicates her instructions telepathically, again expanding her selfhood through space and utilising the team as her instruments in battle. Her body is located above the others, it infiltrates the minds of others both reading thoughts and transmitting messages in ways the 'organic' body does not do (at least not without communications technologies, and witchcraft here comes to represent the older view of technology as tools of *extension*). Again, Willow's body image is about a movement of expansion: as Merleau-Ponty suggests, movement is not the submission of the body to space and time but actively assumes them and "takes them up in their basic significance which is obscured in the commonplace of established situations" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 100-102). What we witness here is Willow's utilisation of space as something which is *configured unto* herself–she does not recognise herself as located-body but re-cognises body/space and subject/object in such a way as to blur the distinctions and, under the guise of empowering herself, to lose the coherence of embodied selfhood. Indeed, towards the end of the sixth season in which we have watched her trajectory from powerful witch shifting towards magic-addicted megalomania, she becomes incapable of referring to herself as *I* ('Two to Go,' 6x21). Rather, the separation between body and space is so unclear that she has become incoherent, unintelligible and the embodiment of abjection (magic, evil, unjust). Her movement through space is instantaneous (taking to the air, teleportation); her control of spatial objects is powerful, and this includes the control of a large truck while she stands atop its cabin mimicking her stance on the crypt at the opening of the season. And the separation between selfhood and effect is crippled as she points out to Dawn:

Dawn: You're back on the magicks.
Willow: No, honey. I am the magicks ('Two to Go,' 6x22)

Much of this expansion in space and the collapse between spatiality and self is visual, and it is conveyed through the use of particular cueing and specific framing by the camera. Willow is central in each of the scenes in which she appears in the final three-episode sequence of the sixth season, and it is this close-shot focus upon her body that gives the impression of her extension in space. Likewise, the tracking of her movements imitates the expansion of the body in dance, showing up the complexity of the 'spatiality' of space anchored by the positioning of objects in relation to the subject (Grosz, 1995: 92).

What is significant for the 'becoming of Willow' is the relationship between the processes by which she performs her identity and the figure of the play or theatre as–again–the site of the body positioned within a space separate from the audiences perspectival access to that space. In several instances, Willow has expressed fear or horror at the idea of having to perform in a theatrical sense. In 'Nightmares' (1x10) she dreams she is an opera singer who has not learned her lines before the show. During a performance into which she has been forced by Principal Snyder as part of the school talent show, she flees the stage in fear ('The Puppet Show,' 1x09). She articulates her pleasure at the idea of taking drama as one of her university courses ('The Yoko Factor,' 4x20) and then distress to discover she will be taking it alone without Buffy ('Real Me,' 5x02). Finally, during her personal dream-sequence in the episode 'Restless' (4x22), Willow expresses some considerable anxiety over her chaotic appearance in a play put on by the rest of the cast and directed by Giles. The flux between the realm of the play and the non-play within her dream-reality highlights the importance of the theatrics of a

performative identity: to become a coherent self requires the bravery to perform bodily in such a way which ties in all the co-ordinates of identity and which 'shores up' the self into an intelligible, articulate and recognisable *be-ing* in order fully to participate and belong within existing social structures. Ultimately, it is by coming to a poststructuralist understanding of the significance of spatiality to embodiment that Willow achieves some level of peace and an ability to continue her progress towards subjectivity in the final, seventh season. After her sixth season megalomania, Giles has been coaching her not through restraint of her magic powers but through teaching an ethical understanding of selfhood as 'in the world':

> Giles: Everything's connected. You're connected to a great power, whether you feel it or not. It's inside you now…You're responsible for it. […]
> Willow: I wanna be Willow.

As for Buffy herself, it is only when Willow begins to recognise this new understanding of subjectivity that she is able to re-cognise her selfhood in ways which align together space, embodiment and movement with justice and a radical ethics of responsibility. What the series *Buffy* demonstrates, then, is an attitude towards the body and embodiment that actively seeks the gaps in the production of normativity. By showing how figures of the abject are assumed into the performance of bodily coherence, the series seeks to find new ways in which corporeal integrity can be represented.

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NOTES

[i] For convenience, I label *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* episodes by season x episode (3x02); the same format for *Angel* preceded by an A (A4x02).

[ii] In an interesting aside, it is the vampire Spike–who had once forged an existence on killing slayers–who defeats the demon, confirming an aspect of his identity while complexifying Buffy's own.