

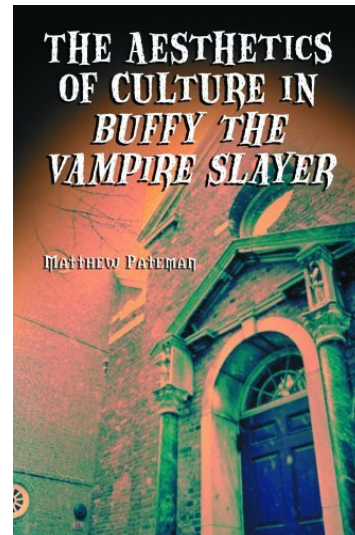


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Restless Readings—Involution, Aesthetics, and *Buffy*



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(1) May 23, 2000 saw the first airing of "Restless" (4022), the finale of Season Four. Along with a number of other episodes, "Restless" would assume for *Buffy* fans and critics a position of pre-eminence. While almost all episodes of the show display a quality of production, writing and acting that are exceptional, these particular

instances propel the possibilities of television drama. Apart from "Restless," episodes in this mould would include Season Two's "Passion" (2017), Season Three's "The Wish" (3009), Season Four's "Hush" (4010) and "superstar" (4017), Season Five's "The Body" (5016), Season Six's "Tabula Rasa" (6008), "Once More with Feeling" (6.7) and "Normal Again" (6017) and Season Seven's "storyteller" (7016)[1]. Each of these episodes, and others, will be engaged with at some point in this section, but all of them will be arrived at through the conduit of "Restless."

(2) The reasons for this is that "Restless" falls just over half way through the complete *Buffy* corpus. As such, it is, at the very least, a useful pragmatic decision to flow back and forth across the whole story from this point. But this itself implies something about both the programme and my approach to reading it. While *Buffy* exists as a story spanning seven seasons and 144 episodes, and while this, clearly, invokes a conception of a narrative that begins at episode one and ends at episode 144, to contain *Buffy* solely within the straightjacket of a superficial linearity would be to deny it one of its greatest achievements: the aesthetics of involution.

(3) This introduction will begin by offering a definition of "the aesthetics of involution." It will then move on to discuss some of the structural and formal features of "Restless" that will contribute to an overall sense of the analysis of the episode and its possibilities, as well as providing a small glossary of useful terms related to the study of narrative in its more classical, literary and film studies sense. Finally, it will present a brief reading of the opening scene which occurs before the dreams themselves start.

(4) The extent to which *Buffy* plays with ideas of narrative can be seen to have implications beyond the immediately aesthetic, or even thematic, to much more general issues.^[2] In many ways, this study of *Buffy* is also an attempt to re-cast television narrative, as exemplified by *Buffy*, with all its attendant aesthetic attributes, as a contribution to these more, seemingly abstract, points of enquiry. One of the reasons for this is the extent to which *Buffy* is so far in excess of many of the categories of classical narratology. This is in large part because narratology was at its inception a literary exercise, though it is still possible to see the ways in which its claims are transferable to films, one-off television shows and other media. It is far less capable of offering a theoretical model that will account for what *Buffy* is: a television serial. While any one scene in *Buffy*, or even a whole episode, may be amenable to narratological analysis (to very interesting ends), the relation between one episode and another is less easily counted for, still less the relationship between one season and another.

(5) There are two very obvious reasons why this is so. First, a television serial can develop much more slowly and over a much greater amount of time than a novel or even a film; second, the visual aspects of television do not open themselves up to the same sorts of narrative elucidation. How, for example, does the use of a lighting effect from an episode in one season that is repeated in an episode in another season work in terms of narrative? It does, I will argue, but in ways that literary and filmic narrative cannot emulate or mimic. In an environment where television criticism is still regarded primarily as a sociological rather than aesthetic venture (that reserved for Literature and certain Films), it can be hard to assert that a television show is worthy of serious analysis as much for its aesthetic / production values as for its "themes" or sociological aspects.^[3] The simple fact of *Buffy* being a television show means that there is an immediate snobbery in relation to its status as a worthy object of academic scrutiny. However, the question of its seriality, and the particular sorts of possibilities that the show explores with this, seems to insist on respectful serious thought. The question has been addressed by Philip Mikosz and Dana C. Och. The predicament outlined by Mikosz and Och is that accounts of narrative drawn from literary and film studies do not really provide a vocabulary sufficient to the needs of televisual serial drama. Where such an account does exist they say, for example in Umberto Eco's "Interpreting Serials" in *The Limits of Interpretation*, the arguments are wholly unable to account for the ways in which *Buffy* works. One that does work, I hope, is the concept of the "aesthetics of involution."

(6) I am indebted to Alfred Appel Jr.'s introduction to, and annotations of, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* for making known the idea of "involution" to me as a tool of criticism. While I have developed the term for my own uses, his work is a magnificent example of its potential. Appel's general argument concerning *Lolita* and his idea of involution is as follows. To read *Lolita* as the confessions of a murdering paedophile, recounted in prison over a certain number of days with the intention of explaining the motivation and history of his relationship with the young girl (in other words, to read it as a realist text) is to miss the point. While Nabokov goes to great lengths to give the impression of a realist discourse amenable to psychoanalytical interpretation, the text is not itself realist; it is a pastiche of realism.

(7) The point of *Lolita*, for Appel, is its allusive, referential, artificial qualities. These exist as either complex relations with other literature (including his own) or else as self-contained, hermetic devices that circulate within the text itself. In the latter category

would be the puns and coincidences, especially of number; in the former an enormous range of reference to literature and other cultural forms. At the heart of the novel, for Appel, is its relationship with Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee" and from this (though with other aspects interfering) grows all the rest. He says, "[T]he verbal *figurae* in *Lolita* limn the novel's involuted design and establish the basis of its artifice" (lvi). As I have mentioned in various ways in Section One, *Buffy* plays with the codes and conventions of realism in order that it can further explore the possibilities of its own artifice both in terms of the imagined world of Sunnydale and environs and also in terms of the production techniques employed to represent this world. Like *Lolita* in some ways, it provides the veneer of a realistic technique in order that this formal pastiche can elaborate and bolster the emotional, thematic and narrative concerns. (8) Additionally to Appel's use, I am drawing from a range of its potential meanings drawn from the *Oxford English Dictionary* 2nd Edition, including: 2a "An involved or entangled condition [...] intricacy of construction or style" and 3 "A rolling, curling or turning inwards." Together, these meanings, and other subsidiary ones, allow for an examination of *Buffy* that pays attention to specific moments within an episode, a particular episode, a relationship between episodes, a relationship between seasons, and also the inter-, intra- and para-textual elements.[4] "Involution" is, then, a necessarily relational term but one in which the relation between two or more points is not simply additive. Meaning six in the *OED* includes "the raising of a quantity to any power, positive, negative, fractional or imaginary." Cognisant of Alan Sokal's timely attack on badly used science and maths in *Bad Theory*, I will only allow for the metaphorical translation of the term from its arithmetic birthplace to my aesthetic adoption[5]. The fact that the word's own meanings seem to encourage a sense of the entangled, commingled, complex, even messy provides a perfect opportunity for it as an aspect of engaging with a text (*Buffy*) that revels in its own textual excess, that seems to enjoy re-writing its own premises, dismantling the world it had created, that invites the audience to laugh at itself and the show, while being utterly serious in its commitment to a notion of art and artistry that pushes television to places it has not been before.

(9) One may also wish to have in mind Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the "tensor sign" as presented in his book *Libidinal Economy*. Lyotard's very difficult argument can best be presented via a small section of his book "Intensity, the Name." Here the writer of *Libidinal Economy* poses a common problem, which is that the name

refers in principle to a single reference and does not appear to be exchangeable against other terms in the logico-linguistic structure: there is no intra-systemic equivalent of the proper name, it points towards the outside like a deictic, it has no connotations, or it is interminable. (55)

While I would be very keen to look at the importance of the name "Buffy" as a version of a tensor sign, this section is rather more concerned with a broader array of signs and signifying practices and the relationships between them. Luckily for me, then, Lyotard claims that names are not a privileged category of the tensorial sign, but are a good example because a name, as tensorial sign, "covers a region of libidinal space open to the undefinability of energetic influxes, a region in flames (56). A tensorial sign, by which is meant in principle *any* sign, refuses to be subordinated to a lack and, therefore, blocks its insertion into a system of replacements / equivalences whether

these be in terms of absent signified or adjacent signifier. Importantly, there is no decision to be made between sign as semiotic unit and sign as tensor. The sign is both of these. The extent to which it acts as one or the other is an effect of the intensities that flow through it at any given instance. Or, in my phrase, "involution."

(10) This notion of involution will tend to operate across episodes and seasons, but it has a certain purchase at the level of individual episodes insofar as these episodes themselves, even when they are stand-alone, operate as part of the structure of a season and have formal qualities that intimately tie them to this. If we think briefly about "Restless" in this regard, the discussion can then broaden out to a consideration of the ways in which the structure of episodes in and of themselves, and as parts of seasons, contributes to the involutorial qualities of them.

(11) Before "Restless" (4022) was aired it was already an anomaly. The three previous seasons had all had the finale episode as the climactic culmination, the end point, of the season's main story line. Season one ends with Buffy fighting and defeating the Master ("Prophecy Girl," 1012); Season Two sees Buffy leaving Sunnydale after having killed Angel ("Becoming II," 2022); and Season Three ends with the killing of the mayor and the thwarting of his ascension ("Graduation Day II," 3022). Season four had revolved around the Frankenstein's monster-esque Adam and the secret government Initiative that had spawned him. The penultimate episode has seen the great battle leading to Adam's death and the supposed destruction of the Initiative's headquarters and laboratory ("Primeval," 4021). So, what would the finale be, and how should it be read? Would there be some additional strand that had appeared peripheral and which would, in fact, mark the end of the story? If not, where should "the end" of the season be located? Would this simply be an afterthought, a curious addendum or, as Joss Whedon has called it, a "coda"?^[6] The choice a term usually associated with music implies the extent to which the seasons are planned in terms of emotional intensities, the rising and falling of the patterns of the shows having a metaphorical relationship with a sonata whose own sense of repeating phrases, returning to motifs and so on has its own involutorial aspect^[7].

(12) To a certain extent then, "Restless" is already posing questions about narrative and seriality by subverting what had appeared to be a structural requirement of the show: the end of a season is the end of that season's overarching storyline. Here, whatever was to happen, was clearly something other than that. Its opening certainly offers a sense of an ending, an "afterwards." We enter just as the Scoobies and Joyce are saying goodbye to Riley, apparently after a gathering at Buffy's house, seemingly not long after the events of the previous episode. Joyce goes to bed, leaving Buffy, Xander, Willow and Giles in the lounge preparing to watch videos for the rest of the night.

(13) This little scene has echoes and presentiments of its own, before we engage with main aspect of the story. The group left on their own at the end of the season is also the group that begins the entire series. The four of them, despite others becoming involved (Cordelia, Oz, Wesley, Angel, Tara) are the focus of the show and their fights and estrangements over the seasons so far, including this one, are here annulled as all others leave the kernel of the show to rest. However, the scene has a morbid prospective element to it too. The group gathered at Buffy's house, seemingly restful and happy as Joyce (as she does here) plays the caring, attentive and understanding mother is also the organizing principle behind the most harrowing of *Buffy* episodes, "The Body" (5016) which occurs in the next season. While "The Body" (5016) also has

Tara, Anya and Dawn present, the familial structure of Joyce, Giles and the gang operates in an organisationally and emotionally similar fashion. Seriality, allied with technology such as DVDs, allows for these moments of stylistic or organizational similitude to be engaged with. The effect of this, or one of them, is to dissipate a linearity of reading. While story arcs and character development occur on an episode-by-episode basis, thereby maintaining the necessity of linear narrative in that respect, points of contact between episodes remote from one another (temporally, emotionally and so on) can be adduced (or more powerfully, simply exert their own force) in the act of re-watching. For me, at least, I cannot watch the opening of "Restless" (4022) without "The Body" (5016) being brought into critical focus. Similarly, the opening of "The Body" (5016) always forces me back to "Restless" (4022). This is not an act of narrative, but an act of involution, the text, as it were, folding back in on itself, to occlude narrative patterns in order to invoke relationships that have no necessary causal pattern.

(14) Even before this moment, however, the episode has already begun and its involutorial aspect has been brought into view. The usual form for the beginning of episodes from about half way through Season Two is a "previously on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" montage of clips from earlier shows that have an influence on the direction that this episode will take. This is then followed by the teaser, which varies in length, but is usually fairly short and sets up an action which will reverberate after we have had the next section, the credits, and then (in America, anyway) the first commercial break. This pattern is not absolute and there are variations, but it is general. I would like to spend a little time thinking about each of these aspects first, before moving onto the episode itself.

(15) The "previously on" section offers to *Buffy* and, in principle all serial shows, the chance to fundamentally dismiss one of the abiding claims made about television serials. This has been posited most notably by Umberto Eco:

[A] series works upon a fixed situation and a restricted number of fixed pivotal characters, around whom the secondary and changing ones turn [which gives] the impression that the new story is different from the preceding ones while in fact the narrative scheme does not change. (86)

And, additionally, for the viewer, the "recurrence of a narrative scheme that remains constant [...] responds to the infantile need of always hearing the same story, of being consoled by the return of "The Identical," superficially disguised" (87). In other words, seriality, for Eco, is a simple repetition of the same, a same which, moreover makes no progress forward, keeping the characters and the viewer in a mythical (because, for Eco, de-historicised) present untainted by such concerns as demise or failure: the future is constantly deferred in a present that remains constant, informed by a secure and total past.

(16) *Buffy's* past is not constant. Nor for that matter is its present at these moments. The voice that says "previously" is Anthony Stewart Head's. The viewer then is placed in a position of undecideability. Either s/he accepts the voice as the actor's in which case an attendant acceptance of the fictionality of the show is understood, as the character is recognized as being just that, and part of a fiction; or the voice is heard as Giles's, in which case the possibility that Giles is both a character *in* the show as well as

a commentator on it *externally* to the show is accepted. In either case, the show's constructedness, its artifice is highlighted and the sort of questions relating to different levels of ontological negotiation discussed in section one are again rehearsed.

(17) The montages that are introduced render the past of the show unstable. This is not to say that they destroy the past, nor that the past of the show is somehow erased in the moment of its attenuated recapitulation. It is, however, to insist that these moments upset the narrativity of *Buffy*. Mikosz and Och's claim that *Buffy* is not a narrative show at all. They write:

Buffy the series, by contrast, although it partakes of elements of narrative, does not amount to a narration. Season by season, and even episode by episode, the series accumulates a multiple past, elements of oftentimes incongruous combinations. Moreover, the series seizes upon the clichés "Buffy" and "Vampire Slayer" and posits them as axioms, as simultaneous conditions that nonetheless retain their incommensurability (this is, after all Buffy's existential crisis!).

I would dispute the general claim and maintain that each season does present an overarching narrative which, while being lost for episodes at a time in some instances, nevertheless does belong to the realm of narration. This is true even for the story (narration) from Season One to Season Seven. It is, however, true, that *Buffy's* games with narrative present difficulties for narration that are brought into immediate focus by the "previously" sections. Before moving forward with this point, a small account of narrative as derived from structuralist theory and narratology might be helpful.

(18) A very limited, definition of narrative would be the one offered by Seymour Chapman in his 1963 *Theory of Literature*. This book, heavily influenced by structuralist theory says:

[...] narrative has two parts: a story (histoire), the content or chain of events (actions happenings), plus what may be called existents (characters, items of setting): and a discourse (discours), that is, the expression, the means by which the content is communicated.[8]

In other words, there is a set of events (the story) and then the means by which those events are put together and represented to a reader (discourse) and the combination of these two elements makes the narrative. This distinction is rather easier to keep in mind if the terms used are 'story' and 'plot.' A basic 'story' might be something like: "I woke up. I went to the window. I saw a wolf. I ran away." The "plot" aspect is the arrangement of the 'story' in a fashion that is not simply its order of happening. So, for example" "I ran away after I had woken up, gone to the window and seen the wolf." This comparatively simple conceptualization is made much more specific and sophisticated by Chapman and the other great narratologists like Propp, Tomashevsky, Bakhtin, Genette and others through the analysis of a number of other aspects that contribute to each of these parts of the combination. While this is not going to be a narratological analysis in the sense implied my referencing the writers above, there are some categories of explanation that classical narratology offers that will be useful to bear in mind during parts of this discussion. Readers who are either familiar with narratological theory, or those who are not interested in the finer points of the theory should probably jump ahead a couple of pages as I am going to enumerate and briefly

define some of the aspects from narratology that might be helpful in considering certain moments in *Buffy*. These, in themselves are not at all sufficient for looking at the ways in *Buffy's* aesthetics of involution operates, but they do provide a way into the more straightforward aspects of 'story-telling' that the show deploys. This list owes a debt of gratitude to that at the end of *The Narrative Reader*, edited by Martin McQuillan:

Act – an event that is narrated and which brings about a state of change by an agent. ("Buffy sleeps with Angel," is an act; "it rained yesterday" is not).

Actant – a category of character (hero, sought-for-person, dispatcher, helper, donor, villain/false-hero) rather than a character itself. Buffy, the character, might, at different times be the hero or the helper, the sought-for-person and so on. In *Buffy* the characters' inhabitation of any number of these actant positions provides much of the opportunity for drama, comedy and so on.

Action – a series of connected events that have unity and purpose and (in many instances, at least) a beginning, middle and an end.

Anachrony – The placing of an event out of sequence in the telling or re-telling of the story. The most obvious examples of this in *Buffy* are the flashbacks (analepsis) to Angel's life as a vampire.

Anterior Narration – the narration of events that occur before the events happen. In *Buffy* there are the occasional prophetic dreams (such as those in "Restless") but it is with Doyle's and later Cordelia's visions on *Angel* that this is most prevalent.

Aporia – a situation where what makes thing possible is also, and paradoxically, what makes the thing impossible at the same time. This results in an impasse of interpretation or a moment of undecideability. The episode "Normal Again" (6017) plays with this notion to some considerable effect as we are left not knowing whether Buffy is insane or not.^[9]

Conative function – a narrative act that focuses on the narratee. Jonathan's seeming address to the viewer in 'storyteller' (7016) is a complex example of this, as is Lorne's account of events in 'spin the Bottle' from *Angel* (AtS 4.6).

Defamiliarisation – a technique by which the world and / or the artwork is "made strange" to heighten, among other things, the artistic effect. The lack of music in "The Body" (5016) is, curiously, a prime example of this, though *Buffy* is constantly in the process of defamiliarising, especially in terms of genre.^[10]

End – this seemingly obvious term which is little more than the last incident in a plot or sequence of actions actually has the force of making all the rest of the narrative lead to that point and act as a site of meaning for the whole. The end of *Buffy*, then, is the final shot of the group looking at the hole that used to be Sunnydale.

Extradiegetic – external to any diegesis (outside of the world or space of the narrative). Most often in *Buffy* this will be found in the music played over the top of a scene (as opposed to, for example, a band playing in The Bronze who are part of the scene and, therefore, part of the diegesis or *intradiegetic*).

Genre – a type or style of narrative. The question of what, if any, genre *Buffy* is will be part of this discussion.

Intertext – one or more texts that are referenced or rewritten by another text and which provide, at least, some of the meaning of the latter text. The plethora of

intertextual moments in *Buffy* will also be a part of this discussion.

Montage – the placing side by side in juxtaposition of a sequence of events that gain meaning from this rather than from contiguity. The "previously on..." sequences are a prime, though not only, example of this in *Buffy* – Andrew's re-introduction of Faith in "Dirty Girls" (7018) is another example.

Teleology – the study of the end; the compulsion of a narrative towards its end point which gives shape and coherence to the preceding events. Chapter 3 has a long discussion about teleology and its related, though different concept, eschatology.

The "previously" sections by virtue of their formal aspect as montages cannot operate as "actions" in the way described above as they derive their meaning through juxtaposition and not continuity. As a consequence, aspects that we might ordinarily associate with narrative as a linear concept are displaced. There is no teleology as such, no end point except the formal cessation of the clip which may or may not have had a structural and thematic end. What we have instead is a set of scenes (or, more usually, partial scenes) spliced together in order that the story to which they refer is brought back into the mind of the viewer. Each section of the montage, then, is synecdochic of a larger story. This juxtapositional synecdoche re-assembles the narratives that have gone before. These scenes initially existed as a combination of 'story' and "plot" but now are decontextualised and have no narrative power at all, in their own terms.

(19) What they do have, and are clearly intended to have, are a different sort of combinatorial capacity whose effect is to provide a specific context for the episode to come. This means that the immediate pre-history to an episode can be made up of excerpts from all and any parts of the existent history of *Buffy* which can be re-assembled such that these histories are foreshortened, contracted. The history that is alluded to from one excerpt is then placed in juxtaposition with a history that may have had no bearing on its own trajectory but now become enmeshed in a new re-visioning of the past of the show in order that the future (the immediate episode and its aftermath) can be altered. The past becomes infinitely malleable, subject to any number of re-visions, thereby opening up the possibility of any number of possible futures. Eco's assessment of the mythical fixed present built on an absolutely certain past denying the fear of futurity is significantly undermined, even just from the paratext of "previously."

(20) The "previously" section on "Restless" (4022) begins with a shot of Adam, and Buffy's assertion that they shall stop him. Immediately this brings the Big Bad of the season to the fore, and reminds us of his genealogy in terms of monsterness. He is part human, part cyborg, a 20th century revision of Frankenstein's monster and as such part of an on-going dispute concerning the legitimate experiments of science.^[11] The initial shot, then, provides a simple reminder of the narrative of the season and a re-enforcement of the inter-textual^[12] links of the monster to Mary Shelley's text. The extent to which this might, in turn, broaden out to a much wider inter-textual^[13] relationship with Romanticism in general will be addressed later. One of the important aspects about involution as a strategy is that it is potentially endless both in terms of its intra- and para-textual elements, but especially of intertextual relations. The relationship of a text to its intertext is never simple or singular. *Frankenstein* cannot have a relationship with *Buffy* that is linear, exclusive and hermetic. Even if a linear

relationship were possible, *Frankenstein* would have other points of contact with other texts (therefore it is not exclusive) each of which has, theoretically, also a relationship with *Buffy* (so it cannot be hermetic). Wilcox and Lavery draw on the work of Robert Stam to indicate the ways in which this is fundamental to a reading of *Buffy*:

As any new-comer to the series quickly realizes, *Buffy* constantly and pervasively draws on its own past history, but it casts its nets widely beyond its own developing text. "Any text that has slept with another text," Robert Stam has noted, extending a central insight into STD prevention into the realm of film theory, "has necessarily slept with all the texts the other text has slept with" (202) [...] the series offers us humor that only the textually promiscuous are likely to get. (xxiv)

It is not only the promiscuous nature of the text that is important for an involuntional reading of *Buffy* but, to continue the sexualised imagery, the incestuous, the exogamous and the fetishistic. Adam takes us, promiscuously to Mary Shelley's text and thence to Romanticism and the gothic. He moves us incestually as described below to other parts of *Buffy*. He demands exogamy by insisting on relations outside of our community not only via intertext, but also through the body of the actor George Hertzberg who brings in from the outside memories of him from his appearances in, for example, *3rd Rock from the Sun* and, more interestingly, *Home Improvements* where he appeared in an episode entitled "Desperately Seeking Willow" which returns us incestually to *Buffy* through Willow, but also opens up through promiscuity Madonna and her gamut of possible meanings, the other star Rosanna Arquette, director Susan Seidelman and the rest of her work and so on. And he provides us with the fetishistic route by virtue of a supposed belief that he (or any other character, event, reference, allusion or whatever) might somehow provide us with the ability to control and stay the superabundance of meaning delivered at almost every moment of the show. The fetishist is always disappointed, of course.

(21) Intratextually (incestually) Adam as a monster and his relationship with *Frankenstein* does draw the character, and therefore this opening moment from the "Previously on..." montage, back to 'some Assembly Required' (202) in which the brother of a disfigured school sports star tries to create a perfect girlfriend for his brother from the bodies of dead students. The fact that this episode has as "Consulting Producer," Howard Gordon who is also a writer and producer of the *X-Files* provides another intertextual link and involuntional contortion.

(22) The next scene in the "previously on..." section is a reprise of the spell undertaken in the previous episode where the four main characters joined in order to provide *Buffy* with the skill, strength, intelligence and heart of the whole group.[14] The viewer is not necessarily certain exactly what power has been invoked in order for the spell to work, but that it did and that *Buffy* defeated Adam is certain. "Primeval" (4021) acts in some senses as final episode in terms of the resolution of the story, so this episode (which begins by reminding us of that one) is re-framed as already strange. It is intriguing that a small clue as to the potential direction of "Restless" (4022) was given in "Primeval" (4021) by Spike referencing yet another English Victorian literary classic, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. While *Buffy* is no Alice, the surreal dream of Carroll's book has some resonance with what, we discover, is to come.[15]

(23) The clearest intertext in the opening sequence is to *The Matrix*, the Wachowski

brothers" groundbreaking, intelligent, cinematically startling 1999 sci-fi thriller. Whedon's admiration for this film is well known and the shot of the dissolving bullets being pulled out of the air and turned to doves is a clear homage. The fact that both the episode and the film engage with questions of "the human," though from significantly different positions, allows a depth of analysis and philosophical speculation to seep into the show by sheer virtue of the connection. This is one of the main strengths of involution: the contact between two points (whether intra- or inter-textual) that magnifies the connotative and interpretive power of both.

(24) The death of Adam that marks the last part of the "previously" montage much more simply tells the audience where the narrative has got to, before the opening credits occur. Even though this montage is nearly all located in the previous episode, and therefore has less revisionist possibility than other montages, it has re-defined and re-focussed what the current episode regards as the most significant moment of the previous one.

(25) The importance of this in terms of a notion of involution is that the programme has an in-built structural feature that already provides elements of seasonal foreshortening and the juxtaposition of moments of it that might previously have had no obvious narrative relation to each other at all. These elements of the montage then usually move straight in to the teaser. Karen Sayer has pointed out how the teaser tends to work in contrast to the main action that will unfold later. Often this is a movement from light to darkness, or vice versa^[16] or from domestic peace to some sort of violence. She continues:

Even without a cut to violence, any happy moment in the teaser will inevitably be framed by the shows' [*Buffy* and *Angel*] credits, which recycle predominantly dark scenes overlain by sudden energetic bursts of action. (103)

The teaser, then, stands in dramatic juxtaposition to the initial montage (that reframes the past of *Buffy* to re-contextualise the present), and with the opening credits.

(26) "Restless" (4022) has no teaser section. After the "previously" section we move straight to the credits and thence to the commercials. In itself this provides a moment of defamiliarisation for anyone who has watched the show regularly. The already strong expectation of an unusual episode is augmented by this formal shift. This formal choice has the effect, by doing, literally, nothing, of furthering the audience's potential excitement or anxiety with respect of the episode (on a first viewing, in sequence, anyway). It is useful to note, however, that this aesthetic moment (the attributes of which work as I have described and are, therefore, properly part of the artistry of the show) comes about due to pragmatic requirements. There were such a lot of guest appearances on this episode that the contractual requirements regarding the placement of actor's names meant that a teaser before the credits was simply impossible.^[17] An external, legal responsibility has an effect on a formal expectation that influences the viewer's response to the opening of an episode whose position within a seasonal structure is already curious. So, lacking a teaser, we head straight into the credits.^[18]

(27) These also offer a montage. This time, however, the clips can be from any previous season or the present-forthcoming one, though once chosen the credits remain the same throughout the season. In addition to the visual aspect of the credits, there is also the musical element and this has been discussed marvelously by Janet K. Halfyard. In her essay, Halfyard shows how *Buffy* plays with allusion (involution) even

at the level of music and not just in relation to the horror tradition, but also with its own off-shoot *Angel*. In terms of the horror tradition as it is presented to us via the music used in the credit sequences, she writes:

Firstly, there is the instrument itself: we have the sound of an organ, accompanied by a wolf's howl, with a visual image of a flickering night sky overlaid with unintelligible archaic script: the associations with both the silent era and films such as *Nosferatu* and with the conventions of the Hammer House of Horror and horror in general are unmistakable. ("Love, Death, Curses and Reverses (in F Minor): Music, Gender and Identity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*")

Halfyard then offers a brief history of the use of the organ in horror, from *The Phantom of the Opera*'s explicit diegetic use to "Dr Jekyll playing the organ in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1932) and the sound of the organ becoming synonymous with Hammer Horror in the 1960s and 70s." From this the turn to comedy and parody is noted in, for example, *Dracula: Dead and Loving It* (1996). *Buffy*, then opens with a musical trope that both pays homage to its filmic heritage at the same time as recognising the potential for cliché that this invites. Involution takes us to the general trope and then to specific films all of which inform and bleed into our reading of the present show. However, being *Buffy*, this already extravagant aesthetic turns the cliché in on itself, recognises its own complicity in its perpetuation and radically shifts its sensibilities:

It removes itself from the sphere of 1960s and 70s horror by replaying the same motif, the organ now supplanted by an aggressively strummed electric guitar, relocating itself in modern youth culture, relocating the series in an altogether different arena than that of both Hammer and its spoofs. (Halfyard)

The repetition of the motif means that, in addition to "relocating" (which it most certainly does) it nevertheless remains moored to its old reference: the aesthetic shift signifies its movement away from a particular tradition of horror while simultaneously insisting on a certain relationship with it, however ironic or iconoclastic. The juxtaposition of the two styles, related through the repeated motif, encourages an involitional set of readings via the filmic tradition and then appears to deny that very tradition at the moment of its invocation

(28) This process is compounded in the episode "superstar" (4017). As mentioned above, the credit sequence tends to provide a montage of shots from previous episodes and season as well as the present. This is played beneath the music with all its attendant involitional and ironic possibilities (as well as its sheer exuberance and strength). This episode is considered by Mikosz and Och in their discussion of seriality in *Buffy*. They first offer a description of Jonathan's usurpation of the credits:

Here is Jonathan upstaging all of the usual suspects: shooting a crossbow; disarming a bomb; smiling back at Xander (Oh Xander you dawg!); some smarmy dude in a tux; secret agent-like in a tux with a gun; doing a kung-fu move; and, finally, walking in grim- reverse-Angelesque-slow-mo towards the camera, trench coat and all.

Following on from this, they provide a wonderful cross-analysis of this with Jon Moritsugu's *Fame Whore* and a discussion of the generative power of cliché. The re-imagined Jonathan and his many versions on the credit sequence draws attention to the images with which *Buffy* is working and, in so doing, cause a re-appraisal of their supposed radicalism from a gendered view-point:

He is one cliché, yet he—rather, his image (for he is nothing but an image: Adam recognizes this instantly, Buffy actually intuitively from the opening scenes) has proliferated to the degree that it has acquired a monopoly over all of the other images. This is why he can simultaneously be Michael Jordan, a swimsuit model, the inventor of the internet, the author of the book *Oh, Jonathan!*, Hugh Hefner, Frank Sinatra, Angel, James Bond, a hard-boiled detective type, a witty roué, friend and advisor to the traumatized and the lovelorn and the downtrodden, military tactical analyst, and so on, and so on. Jonathan literally becomes all things and everything to all people. He is not a superstar, he is THE super-duper-star. (Mikosz and Och)

What Jonathan's alternative credits provide is a counter-point to their usual function. His pastiche version forces us through defamiliarisation to recognise what the credits do. They assert certain sorts of attributes to each of the characters by choosing images from sections of seasons that best fit what we consider those characters to be. They are a moment of structural and formal stability that help (in a fashion similar to that mentioned by Eco, but much more precariously) to render known and safe the narrative space that we shall soon enter. In relation to 'superstar' (4017), however, this supposed solace of the same is undermined, as McNeilly, Sylka and Fisher describe. They take the inevitably discursive nature of characters on television shows to be the source of a specific engagement with a more broadly conceived notion of identity as discourse, though the 'superstar' (4017) episode:

"Near the middle of the episode, Adam sits before an array of surveillance monitors – like us, he watches the Buffyverse on t.v. – and points to the mediatized nature of Jonathan's magic, its mucked up reality effect: [...] Jonathan's image is rendered extensive by mass media; he is a superstar because he appears as the superhero – because he represents himself as a t.v. 'star' [...] The unstable perfection of "Jonathan" comes to appear as a patchwork of deception that cannot resolve into a coherent character; that perfection, after all, is a discursive construct, rather than an ontological given."

(29) The opening sections to 'superstar' (4017) have foregrounded to an exceptional degree the discursively constituted nature of the show, but in so doing have enabled questions about its ontological status to be asked. And we have not even got to the first commercial break yet. From "previously" to teaser, to credits to commercials: it is a surprisingly long journey before we get to the episode's first Act. The commercials, clearly, provide an enormous level of possibility for re-contextualising and de-contextualising what has just gone. Lorne on *Angel* is given a marvellous moment in the excellent 'spin the Bottle' (*AtS* 4.6) where his recounting of the episode's story to the audience in his club, and thence to us, is punctuated, of course, by commercial breaks. After the third commercial break he simply comments (evidently not to the

audience in the club, but to us, in a knowing meta-fictional moment), "Well, those were some exciting products. Am I right? Mmm. Let's all think about buying some of those" 'spin the Bottle' (AtS 4006).

(30) After the episode has finished its story-telling, there is still more that should properly be called a part of the world of the show which would include the closing credits and the legal declaration of ownership of the programme via the company logo. An excellent example of the ways in which involution can operate through paratext is given to us via the logo, the fabulous monster who goes "grr arrgh" at the end of, nearly, every episode. This will be discussed as part of chapter 8.

(31) Bearing in mind all the questions already raised by the preliminary sections of the show, we can now begin an analysis of the opening scene. As mentioned above, we are in Buffy's house, saying goodbye to Riley and seeing Joyce go to bed while Buffy, Willow, Xander and Giles sit up to watch videos. By the time of the season's end, the franchising of *Buffy* was well under way, and the VHS box sets of earlier seasons were selling (outside of the US before in the US due to syndication issues). The fact that such an enormous number of fans would be sitting round having *Buffy* nights in a fashion much akin to our heroes in this episode is a gently affectionate form of the involuntional. This is made much more emphatic when Xander places the first video in the player and the whole screen is taken up by the FBI warning against property theft and the enforcement of copyright law. The FBI aspect throws us back to the Initiative and the presence of government and conspiracy with which the season has partly dealt (which will also remind us of Marcie Ross in "Out of Mind Out of Sight," 1011); and the fact of the image at all means that we understand that we are watching a show that is also available on video and DVD and which is under the same protection and uses the same laws, signaled by the same warning of the same organisation as that which we are currently watching. This moment opens up a possible mise-en-abyme that is significantly more pronounced when viewing the same scene on video or DVD.

(32) The videos have been a source of concern to the group as Xander wants to watch *Apocalypse Now* which Willow is concerned is too *Heart of Darkness*-ey. The constant threat of apocalypse is one with which the characters are always contending; the promise of an imminent demise as suggested by the film (especially as the previous episode saw the defeat of a potentially apocalypse-inducing machine) is a pleasingly subtle self-reflexive joke at the show's expense. However, the role and importance of both *Apocalypse Now* as a film and Conrad's novella is much more central to some of the overarching concerns of the show: the battle between archaism and modernity; the construction of "the human" and the possibilities of narrative.

(33) The questions which *Buffy* raises in general terms about modernity, find a particular aesthetic recapitulation with the show's occasional engagements with Modernist writings. Indeed, one need only look at *The Waste Land*, *Ulysses* or *Mrs Dalloway* to see modernity turned inside out, and it is clear that these texts can also be read alongside *Buffy* in its entirety or individual episodes. Rhonda Wilcox has written an excellent essay 'T.S. Eliot comes to television: *Buffy's* 'Restless'' in which she draws out some of the structural and thematic linkages between Eliot's text and Whedon's. It is difficult to imagine a more perfect example of comparative media analysis. *Heart of Darkness* explicitly manifests a relation to modernity that is both aesthetically challenging and morally outraged from a political perspective, especially as to the question of what constitutes the human, and this, it seems to me is part of its strength in the context of *Buffy* and especially of Xander as he is the only character who remains singularly human in the sense of having no obvious extra- or super-human qualities. The notion of what exactly the 'human' is in terms of the

Buffyverse is still moot.

(34) Even before the dream sections, then, the episode has been dealing in the allusive, referential, involuted games that are such a core element of the show's aesthetic. So pervasive is involution that to pretend to be able to enumerate even each single reference, let alone provide a critical assessment of the possible strands of these, is impossible. There will, inevitably, be many examples of the "attentive viewer" (Rambo) who extrapolate their own involutorial threads in directions which I have not followed, or who dispute some of the connections I have made. This is to be welcomed; involution invites such multiple readings, such tangled critiques, and *Buffy* possibly more than any other television show revels also in its own multiplicity and variousness. Involution celebrates the multiplication of possibilities and, along with Xander, would seek to disavow the stringent reductionism of the critical equivalent of "tick-box" psychometrics who cannot allow deviation: "That would allow too many variables into their mushroom-head, number-crunching little world" ("What's My Line I," 2009).

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[1] The GEOS guide has as the top ten episodes as voted by fans being: 10th 'selfless' (7.5), 9th "Innocence II" (2014), 8th "Fool for Love" (5007), 7th "Becoming I" (2021), 6th "Conversations with Dead People" (7007), 5th "The Body" (5016), 4th "The Gift" (5022), 3rd "Becoming II" (2022), 2nd "Hush" (4010) and 1st "Once More With Feeling" (6.7). "Restless" is counted as 30th. <http://www.geos.tv/index.php/index/>

buf accessed July 25, 2004 (The list is open to change, though the favourite five have remained in place since the time of my initial check).

[2] See, for example, the relationship between narrative and history and narrative and knowledge in chapters 1 and 3 of my *The Aesthetics of Culture in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

[3] Sue Turnbull provides an excellent palliative to this in the previously quoted "Not just another *Buffy* paper: Towards an aesthetics of television."

[4] Intertexts are those text from the "outside" of the show that are drawn "into" it by reference, allusion, quotation, parody, pastiche or any other formal device (drawn from literature, television, film, but also including food stuffs, brand names, sports, and all the other cultural artefacts that become textualised in the show); intratexts are the allusions and references made in one episode to another episode and these include obvious aspects such as plot development and character-growth, but also visual styles, camera angles, lighting techniques and so on). I use paratexts in the way described by Umberto Eco to include "the whole series of messages that accompany and help explain a given text -; messages such as advertisements, jacket copy, titles, subtitles, introduction, reviews and so on" (*Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* pp. 144 – 45).

Donald Keller goes on to say "In a television programme such as *Buffy*, paratext would include the intoned "In every generation [...]" that appeared before early episodes, "Previously on [...]" reminders of past episodes, commercials with previews of future episodes and so on." 'spirit Guides and Shadow Selves" in eds. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery, *Fighting the Forces*, p.176.

[5] See Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Intellectual Impostures: Postmodern Philosophers" Abuse of Science*.

[6] Joss Whedon DVD commentary to "Restless" (4022).

[7] Roz Kaveney's "Introduction" to *Reading the Vampire Slayer* says *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has "a structural pattern as coherent as the statement, development, second statement, recapitulations and coda of the sonata form" (12).

[8] Quoted in ed. Dennis Walder, *Literature and the Modern World*, pp. 106 – 07.

[9] See section one, chapter 1 of my *The Aesthetics of Culture in Buffy the Vampire Slayer* for a further discussion of this episode.

[10] Defamiliarisation as a literary concept outlined three *devices* which could be used to make the work unfamiliar. These were: (1) Canonisation of the junior branch - taking a "degraded" genre (ballad, detective story etc.) and working it in to a more elevated genre thereby upsetting expected formulations: defamiliarizing genre. *Buffy* constantly interjects generic instability not only by including degraded (or for that matter seemingly elevated) genres, but also by the surprising juxtapositions between and within scenes. (2) *Syuzhet* and *Fabula* - the relationship between plot and story. The story would be "a" then "b" then "c" then "d" then "e." The plot (the order in which the story is recounted in the text) might be "d" the "a" then "b" then "e" then "c": Defamiliarizing sequence and causality. This aspect of formalism developed in to the structural / narratological enterprises of Gennette who spent his life finding increasingly sophisticated ways of describing all the possible variations of plot structure (analepsis and prolepsis being the two most common - flash-back, flash-forward). (3) *Skaz* - the differing relationships between narrator and narrated. Famous examples of especially complex relationships are in *Wuthering Heights*, *The Canterbury Tales* and *Bleak House*. Not only is it whole books, however, but moments within books where the

narrative voice seems to be displaced or disrupt the narration up to that point. This happens in nearly all novels at some point, and in *Buffy* by the changing point of view from which a scene is shot.

[11] The immediate involutorial thread to *Frankenstein* provides one extension of the show's hermeneutic possibilities, and the invocation of the debates on science that Shelley's novel and *Buffy* engage in extend this formal aspect to broader notion of cultural critique: the aesthetics of culture.

[12] Inter-texts are part of the process of involution (internal involution not being an "inter-text" as such but an intratext, if one accepts the entire corpus as a single entity comprised of many parts, like a many-chaptered, or a multi-volumed book). Though the terminology is different, Robert A Davis's article "*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Pedagogy of Fear" makes the point with its usual elegance: "The intertextual echoes and allusions have also a serious purpose, as the conflicts they provoke are skillfully used by the writers to deepen and elucidate the show's underpinning mythology and to authenticate its ambitiously conceived inflection of literary vampirism."

[13] While inter-texts certainly do operate as involutorial markers, they also have other functions. As Rhonda V Wilcox notes in her discussion of language on the show ("*There Will Never Be a Very Special Buffy*"), many of the references (in addition to involutorial properties) operate as demarcations of cultural positioning, with the youthful characters creating a linguistic community from which the adult members are excluded by virtue of their failure to recognise the allusions to, for example, popular culture."

[14] Aimee Fifarek provides a probably unintentional account of how the enjoining spell is itself involutorial. She writes, "for a brief time, the Slayer is no longer "one girl in all the world" – she is a network, a continuum of Slayers." The extent to which this foreshadows the unleashing of a network of Slayers in (7022) indicates its involutorial power.

[15] Talking to Adam about their plan to lure Buffy into the Initiative's headquarters, Spike says "Alice heads back down the rabbit hole": the allusion to Carroll's 1865 text is clear, the involutorial link to (4022) rather less so, perhaps.

[16] See chapter 4 of my *The Aesthetics of Culture in Buffy the Vampire Slayer* for a discussion of light and dark in *Buffy*.

[17] Joss Whedon DVD commentary for "Restless" (4022).

[18] The accidental or purely pragmatic nature of some of the aesthetic decisions is commented upon by Kaveney in relation to an aspect of involution: "[while] the show's use of foreshadowing and echo [...] have been largely opportunist improvisations [they] have emotional and metaphysical resonance." In "Introduction" to ed. Roz Kaveney, *Reading the Vampire Slayer*, p.33.

