Undead Objects of a "Queer Gaze":

A Visual Approach to *Buffy*'s Vampires using Lacan's

Extended RSI Model

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"[A] genuine psychoanalytic film theory advocates fully immersing oneself in cinematic fascination and focusing on the points of rupture where the gaze emerges. These are the points where film disturbs the spectator, but at the same time they are the points where the spectator enjoys. To be a psychoanalytically informed spectator is to allow oneself to enjoy and to pay attention to the moments of one's enjoyment" (McGowan 15).

[1] In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *Angel the Series* (1999-2004), we can find a few unusual gender depictions of protagonists, which seem to depart from heteronormativity, such as deviating sexualities, leaving the visualization of reproductive sex, BDSM and other neosexual (Sigusch) practices mainly between Buffy and Spike; gender bending in the case of Lorne's mother as a female with a full-grown beard (*Angel*, "Through the Looking Glass," 2.21); and adding the topic of male disability in the case of Spike in a wheelchair (*Buffy*, "I Only Have Eyes for You," 2.19). However, this article attempts to find queer elements based on the visual structure of the show itself. The series *Buffy* is still widely studied on the basis of plot and narration and has feminist potential (Vint 3; Pender

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"Kicking*," I'm Buffy* 164; Jowett; Recht "Buffy – Superheldin"). Yet by focusing so intently on the context of TV production and reception, many critics have lost the ability to see the medium as an aesthetic object. A detailed investigation based on the visual has hardly ever been made.

Method

[2] Often, the *mise-en-scène* is beyond the narrative and has elements, such as the gaze, that affect the viewers. For this reason, a purely visual selection of TV stills beyond plot, dialogue and episode descriptions—that is, with minimal use of written or spoken word—constitutes the basis of my research, centered here on the topic of the queer gaze. Therefore, I surveyed every episode of *Buffy* and *Angel* without sound, often in slow motion, while taking screenshots of every scene with the sympathetic male vampire characters, Angel and Spike. In the next step, an archive was created in which the images were sorted by series, character, and episode and were finally tagged. The advantage of this first selection method is that one does not choose images based on dialogue, and secondly, one has at least one visual image of every scene of the characters that can be used to recognize unusual phenomenological patterns. This is an inductive method, where the observation comes before a more specific theory or hypothesis. Within a strong narrative and visual medium of moving images, it is furthermore significant to use a sequence of pictures—to group sequential key frames of a scene. Otherwise, it is easily possible for barely visible micro-gestures, normally invisible in the flowing stream of images, to gain too much importance.

[3] The two undead subjects of my research are not human, and therefore do not have to accept culturally constructed gender norms, but this is precisely what happens. Because of their status as "sympathetic vampires" (Recht "Der 'Sympathische Vampir' im TV"), this gender assignment is sometimes constructed in opposition to their biological sex. This is not particularly surprising when one considers that the horror genre usually works with the deconstruction of binary categories and with the concept of the *abject* (Creed). Kristeva was the first to define the abject as something that denies borders, positions, and laws and distorts identity and systems (4). Characteristics of the abject include sexual immorality and perversion,

physical transformation, decay and death, sacrifice, killing, the body, and bodily excrements (Creed 9). These are all characteristics that can be found in association with the male vampire characters from the TV show *Buffy*. Borders, positions, and identity systems are mixed up through the topic of the mind-body dualism within the characters Angel and Spike, as the antipodes between human and monstrous or dead and alive are deconstructed. As stated by Creed, "sexual immorality" and "perversion" are to be found as well within the sympathetic vampires. Their faces transform physically. Likewise, Creed names the criteria of the corpse and the thematic focus of death, which are of course part of the vampire genre and are repeatedly displayed. Creed writes about the monstrous male bodies: "They assume characteristics usually associated with the female body: they experience a blood cycle, change shape, bleed, give birth, become penetrable, are castrated" (Creed 118). This is exactly what connects the vampires of *Buffy* with the feminine and queerly deconstructs the binary. They drink blood and are often wounded and bleed or can give birth to new vampires by letting a human drink their blood—thus can create life out of themselves. Likewise, the face can turn into the typical vampire-face, and they are afraid of the penetration by a wooden stake by which they are transformed into dust. So one of the assumptions of this article is that it is possible for the characters under analysis to break through traditional gender roles because of their otherness based on their vampire status. Such gender-deconstructing strategies can lead to more gender equality, getting the viewers used to gender-deviating images.

Moving into the Field of Queer Studies

[4] Aside from establishing these premises, a criticism of the constructed and limited distinction between sex and gender is important when working in the field of queer-studies. This distinction has not freed itself from the binary, as Judith Butler has demonstrated that both terms, "gender" and "sex," are socially and culturally constructed. She argues that feminism made a mistake in trying to make "women" a discrete, ahistorical group with common characteristics. However, Teresa de Lauretis first coined the term "queer theory" in 1991 to transcend identity politics and categorical restrictions ("Queer Theory"). The concept was, however, heavily

influenced by the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith [Jack] Halberstam, and Michel Foucault. Queer theory works with the politics of visibility, the critique of heteronormativity and heterosexual bisexuality as the norm as well as a criticism of all gay and lesbian identity models. The main difference between queer studies and gender studies (including critical men's studies) is the recognition of several sexes. The novelty of queer studies is a comprehensive critique of heteronormativity, demonstrating the impossibility of any "natural" sexuality and calling into question even such apparently unproblematic terms as "man" and "woman" that ignore intersexuality, transsexuality, crossdressing, transgender, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity, and gender-corrective surgery.

[5] Nevertheless, the sex/gender distinction is indispensable when working in the field of gender studies or when investigating the gaze, but it could be more precise. Gender can be divided into *gender identity*, that is, how you in your mind define your gender, and *gender expression*, how you present your gender through dress, hair, actions, etc. Gender identity is of less importance for the analysis of a TV character, because we cannot look into that character's brain. Gender expression is especially central to a visual approach when working in the field of the visual. Furthermore, *desire* (or lack of sexual desire in the case of asexuality) should be included as an important factor in the investigation of the gaze of TV characters and the audience. It can appear as a *sexual desire* toward (for instance) man/males/masculinity, a *romantic desire* toward (for example) women/females/femininity or a general *emotional attraction* as in a Platonic desire toward a person. Getting deeper into the theory of desire as a basis of identity will take us too far off topic. I will concentrate on the Lacanian perspective (*Écrits*). For Lacan, desire is understood within a negative ontology of lack, and have to subjugate the Deleuzoguattarian (Deleuze/Guattari) perspective, which sees in desire a positive force characterized as abundance (Starr 7). Here, desire constantly couples continuous flows of desiring-machines. With Lacan, we can never identify fully with the Other because the Other is also lacking: a gap always remains. This lack in the Other creates a crack—a crack opening up possibilities for a autonomy and freedom of the subject (Zupančič *Ethics* 28).

Back to the Binary: Mulvey's Male Gaze

[6] I will now proceed to the gaze by first explaining its meaning; secondly, exploring its visual gender function in *Buffy*; and thirdly, using additional Lacanian psychoanalytical methods to verify the visual results within two representative scenes with vampire characters and as a test group with an additional human character. The voyeuristic and desiring gaze is perfectly suited to identify the power imbalances of gender constructions. With her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" from 1975, Laura Mulvey laid the discursive basis for the observation of a gendered power imbalance through the example of Hollywood cinema from the 1930s to the 1950s. She demonstrated this on the topic of the objectifying male gaze directed upon the "object woman" (Mulvey "Afterthoughts"). Mulvey's theory initiated a shift from the previously-conducted study of gender-relevant *content* to the *structure* of the visual media of film. Following Mulvey, the "male gaze" cannot be directed upon a man because "[...] the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like" ("Afterthoughts" 20).

[7] Based on the visual construction of male vampire characters in *Buffy*, I demonstrate below that Mulvey's power hierarchy of the gaze can be particularly undermined by non-human characters (Recht "(De)constructing"). The existence of a "male gaze" is by no means to be called into question—no doubt, it is present as the dominant form in the visual medium. However, the possibility of a voyeuristic female gaze directed at the male vampires is shown and analyzed first. According to Mulvey, such a hierarchy of the gaze, due to the all-male castration anxiety, is not possible (Mulvey "Afterthoughts" 21, 23, 25, 26). Mulvey's investigation of the gaze is based on the psychoanalytically-influenced notion of scopophilia, the pleasure of looking (Freud 37). This pleasure is transferred to the big screen, with its darkness in the cinema and the gaze toward the bright "movie room." By raising the topics of projector, darkened hall, and screen, Mulvey clearly refers to Jean-Louis Baudry (539), who connects this setting to Plato's cave and finally reconstructs the situation necessary for Lacan's mirror stage. Within this constellation, the viewer has the illusion of a voyeuristic separation with the possibility to look, but without the risk of being

looked upon. As already mentioned in the example of scopophilia, the desire to look at other people originates from the pregenital, autoerotic pleasure that Mulvey expands upon with her second argument by consulting Lacan's mirror stage. Following Lacan, the "I" (*je*) is constructed in the child's psyche by the mirror image. This "I" is based on an image and therefore constitutes the imaginary, which in turn is part of his place of narcissistic fantasies of omnipotence (Lacan "Das Spiegelstadium" 68).

[8] In analogy, in Mulvey's second thesis, the parallel between the screen of the cinema and the mirror is established. The pleasure of the audience watching the bodies is comparable to the mirror stage through identification with the body image of the screen characters (Mulvey "Afterthoughts" 17). Viewing thus produces a doubled satisfaction: First, by scopophilia, a person is made into an object, and through observation, a desire is created. Secondly, through the identification with the person, narcissism is gratified as in the mirror stage. Up to this point, Mulvey's theories apply to both sexes and are gender-neutral. This changes, however, within a differential gender approach, as Mulvey determines that the man is active and the women is passive, thus establishing fundamental differences between the sexes. Similar to John Berger's "[…] men act and women appear" (45, 47), cinema sets the female character as a sex object that has no importance but to inspire the male hero and to motivate his actions (Mulvey "Afterthoughts" 19). In addition, her body is fragmented by close-ups (Mulvey "Afterthoughts" 20). The viewer identifies with the male leading actor and projects his view onto his representative on the cinematic canvas, which gives him the feeling of omnipotence.

[9] Looking at the different possibilities of Mulvey's conception, a triple male gaze emerges. The view of the male protagonist upon the female protagonist, that of the male spectator through identification with the male protagonist who looks toward the female protagonist, and finally the "look of the camera," which controls the eye of the viewer and directs it toward the female protagonist (Mulvey "Afterthoughts" 25). As I have written (*Recht Der Sympathische Vampir* 78), this third "look of the camera" is not only the product of the person who operates the camera. It can also be staged by the screenwriter, director, or executive producer, or finally the gaffer, the head of the lighting department who directs the viewers' gaze upon the female character by giving her more light. Additional methods to

increase her visibility are using powder or light makeup to give her an increased glow (Dyer 132). This asymmetry is not only to be found in cinema and TV but is also an often-reproduced mechanism throughout art history.

[10] Mulvey explains this asymmetry of the gaze—in which the female protagonist is always the object of the gaze, whereas the man (viewer, the male protagonist of the film or someone on the production level) has the active subject status—by means of castration anxiety (Mulvey "Afterthoughts" 21, 23, 25, 26). The male unconscious has two ways to deal with this fear of castration: The first one is the voyeuristic way, investigating the woman and demystifying her. It eventually leads to punishment, where the pleasure is in blaming her and is thus linked with sadism (Mulvey "Afterthoughts" 21, 22). This path will be referred to as the approach of *voyeuristic sadism*. The second way is *fetishistic scopophilia*, where the female protagonist is transformed through a complete repression of castration into a fetish (Mulvey "Afterthoughts" 21). One method of fetishistic scopophilia is the fragmentation of the female body through "close-ups." At this point, Mulvey's feminist approach takes on such a phallocentric turn that I would deny the validity of such an explanation. First, castration anxiety is a very old and outdated theory and is directly linked to penis envy—a topic that not only has been criticized by feminists as a masculine fantasy, which denies the female genitals their own right to exist—and at the same time ignores, for example, male birth envy. Secondly, Lacanian psychoanalysis speaks of a symbolic castration (Lacan "Die Bedeutung" 130), which concerns men and women. Finally, women do show a real anxiety of castration in modern psychoanalysis (Mayer). Mulvey's affirmative perspective on psychoanalysis seems outdated and is phallocentric. As the Lacanian psychoanalytical philosopher Alenka Zupančič puts it in her feminist defense: "Psychoanalysis is not the science of sexuality. It doesn't tell us what sex really is; it tells us that there is no 'really' of the sex. But this nonexistence is not the same as, say, the nonexistence of the unicorn. It is a nonexistence in the real that, paradoxically, leaves traces in the real. It is a void that registers in the real. It is a nothing, or negativity, with consequences" (Zupančič "Sexual Difference" 7). I will come back to element of the real later and do not want to lose myself in psychoanalytical details, but the fact that the man's castration anxiety, as Mulvey puts it, is no longer a

genuinely male experience in today's psychoanalysis indicates that her reasoning of a gender-asymmetry is no longer tenable.

Post-Mulvey

[11] Mulvey has not remained the only author who has written on the topic of the cinematic gaze. Ann Kaplan asks in her 1983 essay, "Is the gaze male?" and illustrates the possibility of a female gaze. Following Kaplan, there can only be a female gaze when the woman takes on a masculine role and lays down all her traditional feminine characteristics (128, 129). Even Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment write in the introduction of their book entitled *The Female Gaze* that men in popular media often have control over the gaze, while women are controlled by it (1). Gamman and Marshment wonder whether the gaze is always male. What happens if there is nothing other than men to observe, as in many war movies or westerns? How does the gaze work in the representation of gay relationships? In addition, Kaja Silverman is committed to the idea that both male and female subjects can be carriers of the gaze because the man cannot always be a controlling subject, just as the woman is not always a passive object. Finally, Teresa de Lauretis argues that the female spectator, regardless of the sex of the characters, does not necessarily have to take the male recipient position and is rather involved in a double identification with both active and passive subject positions *(Alice Doesn't* 67, 69, 79). She closes her argument by saying that even if the male body were feminized, there can be only one desirable body that is visible: the female. A simple role reversal would not work.

[12] The criticism of Mulvey's first essay on the topic of the gaze was most often centered on her failure to account for differences among spectators, which she tried to compensate for by writing "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by *Duel in the Sun*" in 1989. Nevertheless, David Bordwell and Noël Carroll proclaimed the death of all Lacanian-centered psychoanalytic film theory (Carroll 45; Prince 83) and were themselves criticized for focusing on the intentional act and excluding everything that might be described as unconscious (Shaviro 51). The followers of post-theory would argue that there are an unlimited number of different positions of empirical spectatorship, and that it

could even be that no actual person watches *Buffy* from the intended position. I would reply that a TV show like *Buffy* produces a space into which hypothetical spectators can insert themselves. I am talking about the spectator that the filmic text itself demands, not an empirical spectator. The gaze is a blank point within the aesthetic structure of the show, where the spectator is indirectly included, and empirical surveys are less beneficial than thought experiments, which could play through the different possible spectator positions. If applied to one single scene of the show, the possible spectator positions become even smaller, especially when taking into account the aesthetic structure of a scene.

The gaze in Lacan's RSI model

[13] I do see the general problems that can occur when using Lacanian theories, and one must be careful not to use a complex concept for its own sake. It will be shown, after three image examinations, that Lacan's RSI model will be of further importance, validating the specific conditions of a gaze. Lacan never theorized about film. French theorists such as Christian Metz and Jean-Louis Baudry, and British theorists associated with the journal *Screen*, such as Mulvey, systematized psychoanalytic concepts for the study of cinema. The following diagram, which can be found in Lacan's seminar *Encore* (97), is not originally designed for the study of looking-hierarchies appearing in a television series and is certainly not designed for the gaze directed upon a vampire character, nor has it ever found application in such a context.

Lacan, *Encore*, p. 97
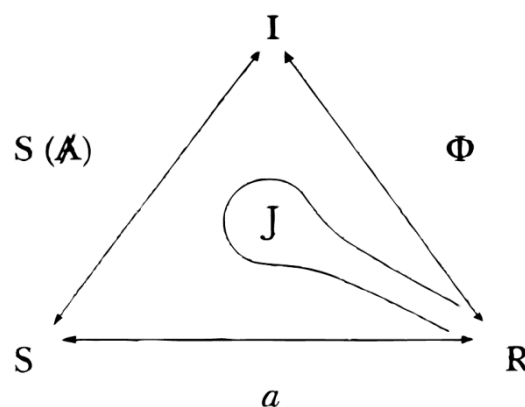
[14] Here, the three corners of the diagram, which structure the Lacanian universe, are formed by the three fundamental dimensions: the real (R), the symbolic (S) and the imaginary (I). Lacan's imaginary is visual and illusory and hides the real up to the point at which signification breaks down and opens up a gap in the social structure. The symbolic is the structure, which supports and regulates this visible world by using language, which structures our experience, our identities and our world. As the real shows the incompleteness of the symbolic order, by showing the limitations of language in its inability to say everything or speak the whole truth, the real is not to be confused with reality (*Žižek Liebe* 128). Reality is what "really exists" whereas the real is like a dream; no matter whether it exists, it shows visible effects. In addition, the real denies language, is non-verbal, which makes it ideal for a purely visual examination. As Žižek asserts, the real can be found in the realms of sexuality, death and violence *(Liebe* 130). In the psychoanalytic film theory of the 1970s, this real did not appear.

[15] On the axes of these fundamental dimensions we can find *objet petit a* (a), the great Phi (Φ), and the "signifier of the barred big other" (S (A̶)). The big Other lacks something. It seems that the signifier and the signified belong together, but there is always a remaining part that deprives of meaning. This lack of complete assignment allows the signifier to slip under the signified and results in a fundamental absence. Therefore, the signifier of the Other appears as barred (struck-through). In Lacan's terminology, Φ is the phallus, an imaginary representation of the real and an image embodying enjoyment. This is because the great Phi is settled in the area of the phantasm, the field of the fascinating and the impossible (*Žižek Die Pest* 156). In the center of this diagram is *jouissance*, which provides for the real. It is particularly the lower right side of the diagram that is of interest for the study of gaze: a, Φ, R and J. The most important category in this context is the *object petit a*—the small other. For *petit a*, the only French word was *le regard*, but in English, it can be more precisely defined as the much more specific gaze: it is libidinous, fetishizing, and fragmenting. For this reason, *petit a* and all its directly related categories are important for the investigation of the gaze. It is an object of desire, a "libidinous occupied" object that is essentially unattainable. The gaze is the *object petit a* of the scopic drive. What makes it complicated is that the subject sees a complete

image but not how his own desire distorts what he sees because the gaze does not become present in the field of the visible.

[16] In the center of the scheme, we can find *jouissance* (J), which is directed toward the Real. *Jouissance* is the abyss of traumatic and excessive enjoyment, from which the subject is desperately trying to keep a proper distance. For Lacan, *jouissance* brings an immediate gratification of needs and thus stands in contrast with desire (Lacan and Miller 81). For him, desire has little to do with material sexuality: "[..] it is caught up, rather, in social structures and strictures, in the fantasy version of reality that forever dominated our lives after our entrance into language" (Felluga §2). Our desire is, therefore, never properly our own, but is created through fantasies that are caught up in cultural ideologies, as through *Buffy*, rather than material sexuality. As desire thrives on absence—on what it lacks—enjoyment lacks nothing. "Desire […] would no doubt be willing to call itself 'will to jouissance'" (Lacan *Écrits* 773). As McGowan states, "The gaze triggers the subject's desire because it appears to hold the key not to the subject's achievement of self-completion or wholeness but to the disappearance of self in the experience of enjoyment" (11).

Gazing at Angel

[17] The classical male gaze was mostly avoided in *Buffy* through the feminist agenda of Joss Whedon (e.g. "Equality Now"), which seemed more central to his early works. There are a few examples in which we can recognize an intended avoidance of the male gaze; for example, in a scene in which Buffy has sex with Spike while being invisible (*Buffy*, "Gone," 6.11). In this scene, he is naked and made into a visual object while she might be naked, too, but, being invisible, cannot be gazed upon. As a second example of the avoidance of the male gaze, I want to bring forward Xander's dream sequence in "Restless" (*Buffy*, 4.22), in which he is sitting in his ice cream truck and watching Willow and Tara making out. Here (after a shot of Willow and Tara next to each other), the audience just sees his long, perplexed reaction and hears the girls moaning. The visual male gaze is transformed into a mitigated auditory male gaze.

[18] At this point, it is important to look at two scenes, in which Mulvey's male gaze is deconstructed through a female gaze to finally arrive at the queer gaze and further validate and explain the findings

through Lacan's model. *Buffy* has a pool of scenes that include a female gaze (for nine additional examples, see Recht "Die Figur" 267–308). As the gaze is objectifying and desire is central, male bodies clothed as little as possible were preferentially selected (see meaning of nudity and on the skin/clothing-coefficient in: Recht "Die Figur" 52), as this is a factor that produces the greatest possible objectification and opens the possibility of female *jouissance*. *Buffy* contains a remarkably large pool of images of barely-dressed male vampire characters in comparison to female characters (living and undead). At this point, an image analysis follows, in which it is assumed that the sexualizing, objectifying and voyeuristic aspects of the gaze can be found in the three different gazes associated with cinema: the gaze upon the actor, the gaze of the camera, and that of the spectators.

Topless Quigong – Buffy *3.06*

[19] In the first camera shot, we see the backyard of Angel's estate, which is surrounded by the high walls of the house. The architecture of his house and garden is beyond normal design standards and oscillates between post-modern, sacred, and medieval architecture. Due to the strangeness of the house and the reference to a bygone era, the possibility of a divergent gender representation is already established. A distance to stereotypes or heterosexual gender

metaphysics can be particularly established when the fantastic, futuristic, or historic comes to the fore: this also applies to architecture. Angel is filmed through a gap, trimmed through the gate of the garden on the right side and a curtain that crops the image from the left side. This camera work results in a voyeuristic effect of opening a tunnel-like view upon the sheltered garden, and finally with a tracking shot up to Angel. This trimming shows only a small part of the actual garden and illustrates the connection between scopophilia and its sexual nature. According to Freud, scopophilia is closely associated with the experience of the primal scene; a look at the screen (or in the case of *Buffy*, at the TV) is like the child's forbidden gaze through the keyhole of the parents' bedroom (Freud 37 et sqq.).

[20] Angel is, as the approaching camera indicates, involved in his *qigong* exercises and, as often, is not wearing a shirt. In the first elements of the sequence, the camera is representatively arranged out of the perspective of the spectator, who unconsciously asks him- or herself from whose perspective he or she is viewing. This question is answered with a counter shot that shows Buffy's erotically charged and, at the same time, astonished face. Buffy's eyes stare at Angel's body (cf. McCracken 120-21). She is still undetected, while Angel presents his muscular body toward the camera, Buffy, and the TV audience without noticing this observation. This scene, in which Angel moves slowly, is shown over a long period, as is Buffy's reaction. The eroticization of her gaze is visualized not only by her staring, but also by her tense posture, her heavy breathing, and her slightly open lips.

[21] In the following shot, the audience is torn out of its voyeuristic perspective, because Buffy is now visible from a blurred decentralized rear view in the picture showing the unaware Angel. As the suture theory (Rothman, Oudart, Miller) points out, the first shot establishes the perspective of the subject—that of the main character, Buffy, and that of the audience—while simultaneously presenting the object, Angel, in the counter-shot. By identifying with Buffy, the spectator now reveals a part of him- or herself and his or her voyeurism, until Angel finally lifts his head and looks almost directly into the camera, toward the audience and toward Buffy. In the situation of the destruction of the voyeuristic setting, Buffy lowers her head for a small fraction of a second and swallows hard. By revealing the gaze, the erotically charged one-directional look is no

longer possible without being looked at. The lowering of the head can be interpreted as a sign that a woman cannot stare at a man in the same erotically objectifying way as would be possible the other way around. The bashfulness of her look could come from the taboo of sneaking into someone's house and, at the same time, from being caught red-handed in voyeuristic gazing. The most important point is that the gaze is active because the subject, which is the bearer of the gaze, has no interest in the object *per se*. This object is a threat to the subject's autonomy by the danger of discovery. The voyeuristic scopophilic gaze generates sexual stimulation in the subject, which can be experienced only alone, not together with another person. Therefore, the gaze is characterized by a spatial or mental separation. It is caused by an active subject and passive object. This is an important reason why Buffy, after her gaze was discovered, looks down and has to swallow hard. It is the moment where the one-directional gaze becomes impossible. It is transformed immediately into a look and loses its sexual voyeuristic intensity. As Lacan puts it: "a gaze surprises [the subject] in the function of voyeur, disturbs him, overwhelms him and reduces him to shame" (*Lacan The Four* 84). At this moment, when the subject sees the gaze directly, the gaze ceases to be one. The discovery of such a sexual and at the same time objectifying gaze, by the object of the gaze itself, results in an embodiment: From a Sartrean perspective, through the deconstruction of the voyeuristic gaze, the body is the only thing that remains (Sartre 345). Where before, only the gaze existed in a primary process, now the person is ripped out of this state and perceives his vulnerable flesh.

[22] It is Buffy's viewing, as long as it is voyeuristic, undiscovered and sexualized, that meets the definition of the gaze; Angel's slightly-clothed male body provides the possibility to be gazed upon and thereby is sexualized also by the camera and thus by the audience. Despite Kaplan's (128) argument that it could only be possible if the female character takes on a masculine role and lays down all her traditional feminine characteristics, Buffy's heteronormative appearance—her makeup, clothes and body— remain classically feminine. Despite her lustful gaze itself, she is not overly sexualized by a lack of, or in any kind of conspicuous clothing. On a phenomenological level, it can already be assumed that the fantastic genre with its specific vampire character and the unusual

nature of the *mise-en-scène* opens the possibility of a deviating gaze hierarchy.

[23] After this character-centered analysis, we should further investigate the different sex/gender/desire possibilities of the audience. Besides the female gaze of Buffy and the heterosexual female viewers, which could objectify Angel's attractive body, there could be also be a gay gaze of a homosexual male viewer, whose biological sex is male and sexual desire is directed toward a same-sex choice of partner. Here we leave the male/female opposites of heteronormativity but still do not leave the binary system by defining it as male/male. The possibility of a queer gaze emerges through the viewers who can enjoy Angel's body despite sexual attraction. Mulvey has already mentioned that scopophilia is a general pleasure in looking, as is self-identification through the mirror stage: enjoying and identifying with the moving human form on screen, despite the biological sex of the protagonist. After these phenomenological and Mulvey-centered findings, it becomes necessary to look at a second example of a sympathetic vampire character, Spike, followed by the comparison with a human character. Afterwards, I will return to an extended Lacanian perspective of the results.

Gazing at Spike

[24] For this example, Spike is in the center of the scene and of the first image. The fact that Spike wears less clothing than the other characters already suggests the possibility of a sexual objectification. All characters look at Spike's bare back, while he himself does not seem to feel comfortable in this position as a victim of their looking. This impression is reinforced with Spike's closed body posture, his arms folded across his chest to reduce his visible amount of skin to a minimum. Furthermore, his depiction is frontal and close, achieved by using a surreal wide angle lens with a focal length around 35 mm and by tilting the camera, which is typical for the representation of an alien autopsy. The tilting supports the surreal while the wide angle underlines the "neutrality" of a "documentary" perspective. As mentioned, such a strange setting supports the possibility of a deviation from a classical gender representation.

Spike's back. Buffy *4.13*

[25] The second shot shows Anya looking at the vampire's back, examining it with a flashlight to get more detail. The nature of her looking is voyeuristic and lustful, which is indicated by her slightly parted lips, her raised left eyebrow and the intensity of her gaze, and thus corresponds to a gaze. Anya is protected from being looked at herself, because all participating characters are focused on Spike's back. The flashlight fulfills the same task, by illuminating the object Spike and by opening the possibility for the person gazing to be hidden in a darker area.

[26] The third shot shows the intrusion of a pair of tweezers into an existing hole on the back of the male body as well as a little blood. The body is fragmented through a close-up, which visually isolates a part of Spike's back and thus shows his body as an object. This effect is further enhanced by the pincers in the function of a phallus, which penetrate the hole in his back. We can find voyeuristic sadism (tweezers in Spike's back, blood and visual fragmentation as an aggressive act) and the fetishizing scopophilia (fragmentation by a close-up and thus sexualizing non-genital body parts). In some psychoanalytically-centered film theories, objects are quite often referred to as phallic as the symbolic representation of the male genitals (not in Lacanian terminology). However, as has been shown in numerous examples, phallic objects in possession of the opposing character reoccur in scenes with male vampires (*Recht Der Sympathische Vampir* 198). This is especially interesting regarding the topic of castration anxiety, which is, according to Mulvey, closely related to her asymmetrical function of gaze.

[27] In the last element of the sequence, we see Anya in a very classical representation of female sexualization: she bites into a candy bar for the synergistic enhancement of her pleasure experience, while her eyes do not move away from the opened male vampire body. In addition to the tweezers and the flashlight, which is held firmly by Anya in both hands, the candy bar is a phallic object, which in this case brings gratification by regression to an earlier psychosexual stage, the oral, and sexualizes Anya herself, who likewise becomes the object of the viewer's gaze. Again, if we direct the attention away from the heteronormative female character's gaze toward the gaze of the audience, we could leave the binary. Despite sexual orientation, Spike's body becomes a desirable object of scopophilia and of the need to identify with a character through the mirror stage—despite sexual orientation.

[28] Up to this point, one example of each of the two male vampire characters has been selected as a representative example, and it has been noted that they could be made an object of a female gaze of the character and possibly a queer gaze of the different viewers. Now, a rarer example from the series will be analyzed, wherein a human character with less clothing is chosen. We can find such an example in the episode "Go Fish" (*Buffy* 2.20).

A feigned Gaze at Xander

[29] As stated often in academic *Buffy* discourse, Xander is subject to permanent feminization (Camron). However, there are only a few scenes in which he is sexualized by looks. Such a scene is made possible by the fact that Xander must help Buffy by investigating as a member of the high school swim team.

Xander in red swimwear. Buffy *2.20.*

[30] The sequence opens with a panning shot over a fragmented body in slow motion, starting from the legs via the narrow wine-red Speedo swim shorts, to the upper body, ending in a shot of Xander's face. This panning has strong parallels with the representation of Pamela Anderson as a Malibu lifeguard in the credit sequence of the show *Baywatch* (Schwartz 1989–2001). Not only the connection of walking with simultaneous panning in slow motion from bottom to top is satirized, but also the combination of swimming, the red color of the swimwear, and the sexualization are a pastiche of the show. The typical red foam kickboard of the lifeguards is later represented through an actual red kickboard. The viewers do not yet know who is looking, and Xander is still not aware

until this moment that he is being watched by his friends Buffy and Willow and by his girlfriend, Cordelia. The response of these girls alternates between shock and surprise, maybe because their good friend is usually feminized at regular intervals yet at the same time has such a surprisingly male and muscular body. Nevertheless, a sexual charge of the scene is quickly prevented. For one thing, the looks of Buffy and Willow are not of a sexual or desiring nature; instead, the scene shifts into comedy, thereby avoiding sexualization. As Xander notices his friends' looks, he instantly covers his frontal middle part with the big red kickboard and later tries to cover his buttocks with his yellow cap, a venture that fails due to the small size of the headgear. Cordelia appears rather proud of the newfound prominence of her partner, while her friends try to prevent an outburst of laughter. To escape the situation and avoid the female looks, he takes flight by jumping into the swimming pool.

[31] The first shot of this sequence allows the viewer a voyeuristic look at the scantily dressed, well-lit and visually fragmented male body. Through the fragmentation, the body is made a fetish, as is Pam Anderson in *Baywatch*. As soon as the other characters appear, this fragmentation is neutralized and the humor of the scene is superimposed on the sexualization. Buffy and especially Willow objectify Xander's body to such an amount that his only possibility is to escape. The viewer is not included by a reverse shot, which could show Willows first-person view: it is only the sexual looks of the female characters, not that of the camera or the audience, that objectify Xander in these later image elements while he looks back.

[32] The scene described here with a human character differs from those with vampires (for an additional example of Xander with a feigned gaze, compare his nightmare in underwear in front of his school class in "Nightmares" (*Buffy*, 1.10). It takes place in a public space, while the other previously described scenes are located in strange or historic private spaces or through unusual camerawork. In addition, the element of comedy is not to be found in any form in the vampire characters in the scenes discussed earlier. As it turns out, not only the place, but also the distinction between human or vampire could be of crucial importance for the establishment of gaze. Not even a desiring voyeurism from a hidden place can be found in the scene with the male human character. A gaze is not apparent in the

last visual example. It seems essential at this point to examine the reasons for the different representation of humans and vampires and, furthermore, the importance of an unfamiliar place. With the help of a mutually-validating and controlling triangulating method, the observed deviation of the gaze will be further investigated and supplemented by Lacan's RSI model. By the addition of Lacan's theory, new perspectives may be revealed on the field of the gaze.

Applying the Lacanian RSI model

[33] The Lacanian extended RSI model confirms the issues raised for the analysis of images, which illustrate both the gaze directed on the vampire body and the necessity of the foreign place. *Object a* is a partial object that sets desire in motion and thus can support fetishism and desire toward objects that are not of primary genital nature, such as Spike's naked back and Angel's bare chest. In the case of the series, the objects of desire are therefore a triple-occupied *object petit a*: first, through the gaze, which creates an enjoyment or even *jouissance* by voyeurism, and second, through fetishistic scopophilia, by creating a sexualized partial object through fragmentation. Third, the camera can also establish itself as the "partial object eye," again by inaugurating voyeurism or fetishism within the viewer. According to Lacan, a fear is always indicated by *object a* that has parallels with voyeurism. In the case of the gaze, it is the fear of being discovered.

[34] For *jouissance*, an excessive and traumatic enjoying is essential, as within the analyzed sequences of Buffy gazing on Angel and Anya gazing upon Spike. Their clinging to the objects Angel and Spike is central here, as is the death drive, here additionally the drive toward the dead vampire and the characteristic problem of *jouissance*, to find a balance between closeness and distance. This is because the result of transgressing the pleasure principle does not only lead to more pleasure. The enjoying subject can only bear a certain amount of pleasure—beyond this limit, *jouissance* becomes pain (Evans 93). It is at least bound toward a desire and could lead to feminine *jouissance*, which can be experienced by men and women without knowing anything about it (Lacan and Miller 81), and that is "beyond the phallus" (Lacan and Miller 74). This is, at the same time, the kind of attraction that is the basis for identifying with a beloved TV character.

[35] As the *jouissance* supplies the real [R], which determines the setting of the often non-verbal sequences, and thus also the place where something happens, one result of analyzing the scenes with vampires is that a strange, surreal, or historical place or a divergent *mise-en-scène* opens the possibility of the gaze. With the example of Xander, the gaze could not be established. As the real is beyond language and can be found in the realms of sexuality, death, and violence, we find the scenes with a gaze upon a vampire in exactly those realms. The real—as something incomprehensible, inexpressible or not controllable, a kind of horror or trauma that shows a purely visual effect and which is made possible on the basis of the fantasy and the horror genre—is central for establishing the gaze. This predestines it for a visual approach.

[36] The vampire would be Φ in Lacan's terminology, the phallus, an imaginary representation of the real and an image embodying fetishistic or even a neurotic enjoyment. As already mentioned, great Phi is settled in the area of the phantasm, the field of the fascinating and the impossible where the vampire is to be found: he is a phantasm, a non-existing thing, impossible, yet fascinating, not dead, nor alive. In the scenes with the human Xander, the area of the phantasm is not present. This means for the scenes examined that the vampire as abject is important for the establishment of a deviating gaze.

[37] The phenomenological results that have been shown earlier are supported by Lacan's theory using a mutually validating and controlling methodological triangulation. In the scenes with Xander, neither the visual setting of the real, nor the great Phi, nor the jouissance were completely established. For this reason, *petit a*, as in the female gaze of the character, was not to be found, in contrast to the examples with the vampires.

Conclusion

[38] As the gaze originated, in the classical theories, from the man alone, who thus expresses his superior position of power by turning the woman into a sexualized object, the possibility of a reversal is confirmed here, so that a female character can direct her gaze upon a male vampire character. Ann Kaplan's argument that the woman, from which the female gaze originates, must be necessarily

masculinized (128f.) cannot be confirmed. Neither Buffy's nor Anya's appearance is coded masculine—their makeup, clothes and bodies remain classically feminine. Therefore, the gazing female representation does not correspond to a simple role reversal, in which the female character is to be read as a man or as a form of masculinity, as in the case of a "tomboy" or a "butch." Gender representation in *Buffy* is ambivalent and complex, whereby the female character can keep her feminine attributes (Recht *Der Sympathische Vampir*) and still be a bearer of the gaze while objectifying the male body. As it has been shown, these objectified male bodies can be desirable—in contrast to de Lauretis' argument *(Alice Doesn't* 82)—for the female characters and additionally for the many fans of the series: male, female, hetero-, homo-, or pansexual. Being an object of the gaze is not necessarily a negative thing for a male: objectification opens the possibility of admiration, a property that was under-represented in depictions of male characters in the media during the time *Buffy* aired.

[39] With the example of the gaze, a partial deconstruction of a gender-stereotyped cliché of a classical power relation between the sexes was shown, but it did not leave the binary of the sexes within the characters. A queer gaze is not to be found based on the characters (*contra* McCracken 126-27), but a gaze opens up the possibility for a non-binary desire of the recipients. The gaze does not define the sex or gender identity of the spectator, but can celebrate the body of the protagonist additionally as being a part of the star system (McDonald). The special *surplus* of the scenes with a gaze is that the immersed viewer leaves the secondary process of reflecting and enters the dreamlike and mostly unconscious primary process. In this state of mind, the social dictate of heteronormativity loses its constraint and opens new possibilities of desire and *jouissance*, which can go beyond the fixation with one sex and can open up the possibility of a queer gaze in the viewers.

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