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## **Buffy, Betrayal, and the Ethic of Truths<sup>1</sup>**

Slayers have only saved the world. The point, however, is to change it.<sup>2</sup>



### **Introduction**

[1] In this essay, I focus on ethics, the establishment of rules by which the morality of actions, individuals and institutions are judged, and use Alain Badiou (2001) as a way of interrogating the ethical foundation of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I use Badiou's arguments to develop a critique of the underlying ethics of *Buffy* and to produce an alternative interpretation of some of its important developments, particularly involving the character Buffy in seasons 7 and 8. I present Badiou's critique of ethics based on human rights, what he calls "hegemonic ethics," before moving on to his alternative "ethic of truths." In doing so, I am not primarily making a claim about what *Buffy* "really" is or that a Badiouesque reading is more correct or better than, say, a Kantian (Stroud 2003) or a Thomist (Curry 2005). I am interested in using something familiar like *BtVS* to show how and why Badiou demands that we rethink ethics, as a way to illuminate the concrete differences his approach might make in the world. To do so, I offer a barest outline of Badiou's philosophical system, focusing on his concepts of Being, Event, Subject, and Truth.<sup>3</sup>

### **Buffy and Hegemonic Ethics**

[2] For many, the attention and approach to ethics is part of the appeal of Whedon and *Buffy*. Not only is Whedon creating artistic works of high caliber but he is also putting forward an ethical perspective with which these viewers agree, and which inspires them. Whedon as a public intellectual reinforces this response. He is an avowed feminist, works to support LGBT rights and other social justice issues, and was particularly active and vocal during the 2008 writer's strike. He has specifically argued that *Buffy* was created to make a political impact on the world and that philosophical and ethical questions were treated very seriously by its writers. Anyone with even a casual acquaintance with *Buffy* fandom could relate numerous anecdotes in which the show's ethics of diversity, feminism, equality, and inclusion has had a positive, even profound, impact on fans. This is one of the many reasons why *Buffy* does indeed matter (cf. Wilcox 2005).

[3] For all its diversity and complexity over seven television seasons and two comics seasons, overall *Buffy* fits into what Badiou calls the hegemonic ethics of progressive humanism. Hegemonic ethics, according to Badiou, is the major trend in ethics today and is one of the principles of the established Western order. This ethics relates above all to the domain of "human rights" and the protection of humans, conceptualized as victims of violations. It takes the form of humanitarian intervention, and presents the liberal defense and expansion of human rights as progress. Thus, "ethics is about busying ourselves with these rights, making sure they are respected" (2001, 4). Badiou argues that liberal/progressive humanist ethics rests upon a

fundamentally flawed ontology and is not just insufficient but is actually antithetical to the political project of equality and human liberation: "[T]oday's socially inflated recourse to ethics" (2001, 2) is "legitimated by a quite unbelievable outpouring of moralizing sermons" (2001, lv) rooted in "a generalized victimization" (2001, liv) and perpetuated through "'democratic' totalitarianism" (2001, lv) Its hegemony draws strength from the collapse of revolutionary and large-scale emancipatory politics, a position which has been adopted by many ex-leftists as a part of a broader lowering of sights and acceptance of the politics of the possible.

[4] Badiou's description of hegemonic ethics rests on four aspects. First, it posits an abstract human subject, on the one hand a passive, pathetic subject who suffers and on the other a determining subject of judgement who intervenes to stop suffering. Second, it always subordinates politics to ethics. Third, Evil comes first and is that from which Good is derived. Fourth, human rights are rights to the non-Evil (2001, 9). Badiou's objections to this foundation are many and far-reaching. Hegemonic ethics reduces man to a contemptible animal, a "being-for-death," when instead man is potentially what he calls an immortal singularity. There is no ethics in general, as there is no abstract subject who would adopt it. Ethics rests on "the misery of the world," a political situation which requires political thought/practice in response. Behind the victim-Man is the good-Man, the white-Man, who engages in a civilizing intervention from a perspective of contempt. This is why, Badiou argues, "the reign of 'ethics' coincides, after decades of outrageous critiques of colonialism and imperialism, with today's sordid self-satisfaction in the 'West,' with the insistent argument according to which the misery of the Third World is the result of its own incompetence, its own inanity—in short, of its subhumanity" (2001, 13). Thus, for Badiou, the institutions, values, and norms of progressive humanism are not, as is widely assumed, actually a bulwark against the various evils of the world. They are the very means by which these predations are perpetuated, and a barrier against the emergence of Good. The solution to this problem is not to employ this ethics "better," or to remove the bad people who are taking a more explicitly reactionary approach to, or violating, them. Badiou would put in the same category neo-conservatives such as George W. Bush and Richard "Dick" Cheney as well as President Obama or the new U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Samantha Power.

[5] If ethical consensus is founded on the recognition of Evil, then it follows that every effort to unite people around a positive idea of Good would be seen as the "real" source of evil. This is concretized around the axiom that revolutionary projects inevitably result in some form of totalitarian nightmare (common signifiers for this include "The Terror," "Khmer Rouge," or "Stalin"). In short, a collective will to the Good is what creates Evil. Badiou argues that this forecloses any vision of a radical transformation of the way things are and is "sophistry at its most devastating" (2001, 13). It prevents real thought, which Badiou defines as "affirmative invention." The result is a "stodgy conservatism" (14), content with defending (and celebrating) what exists, meaning what the Good (read: West) possess. In other words, Good fights Evil and saves the world (and our possessions)—and if it is really, really Good, it saves the world a lot. Badiou concludes that "To forbid man to imagine the Good, to devote collective powers to it, to work toward the realization of unknown possibilities, to think what might be in terms that break with what is, is to forbid him humanity as such" (14).

[6] Because of the negative and a priori determination of Evil, ethics cannot proceed from the "singularity of situations" or the actual, concrete circumstances as they

exist at a particular moment. For Badiou, who is thoroughly committed to materialist dialectics, this is the obligatory starting point for investigating all human action. Ethics is thus always metaphysical, abstract, and reduced to an impotent moralism which is nonetheless loudly proclaimed. Badiou gives the example of a doctor bound by medical ethics to cure those categorized as "the sick," but who lack insurance and thus the doctor abandons them. Or perhaps, "the sick" are injured protesting the Turkish government and thus the doctor does not treat them out of fear of arrest. In contrast, Badiou says that what is needed is not "medical ethics" but a clear understanding of the particular situation. (Editors' note: Cf. Carol Gilligan's response to Lawrence Kohlberg.) On that basis, one should be faithful to the situation and treat it right to the limit of the possible in order to draw from it the affirmative humanity it contains (15). Finally, ethics, even in its most progressive form, and regardless of whether it takes a liberal or post-structuralist turn, entails "anti-politics," with an underlying cynicism, even nihilism. It turns away from change and is content with merely saving. However, this ethics is so hegemonic that the alternative is almost always assumed to be some form of selfish real politik, or a "Machiavellian" position that the ends justifies the means.

[7] *Buffy* consistently demonstrates hegemonic ethics in its mythology. *A priori* evil existed first and can be identified.<sup>4</sup> Good is what arises to intervene against Evil, and humans are victims who need to be protected from violation.<sup>5</sup> The protector is "the chosen one," fundamentally better than the mere victims, with self-selected organizations, methods, and values. There is always a new Big Bad (The Master, Angelus, Mayor Wilkins, Adam)<sup>6</sup> who must be defeated. The world always needs saving, ("I have to save the world - again!") by using violence against the bad guys. *Buffy* deploys the basic metaphysics<sup>7</sup> of hegemonic ethics, that the expansion and multiplication of good things will bring about Good, while the expansion and multiplication of bad things will bring about Evil ("You can't beat evil by doing evil" ["First Date," 7.14]).

[8] Of course, we are discussing Whedon, so *Buffy* complicates this in exciting and interesting ways (Loftis 2009). Ethics in BtVS are not presented in a one-dimensional or dogmatic way. Substantive debates over ethics are often central to the plot, and characters are given complex and reasonable positions to put forward. (Editors' note: See Richardson and Rabb on the situational complexity of the narrative ethics of Whedon). One could also make arguments that this or that episode illustrates a utilitarian or Aristotelian or Kantian approach to ethics, or even presents a direct challenge to hegemonic ethics, but the overall essence of its ethical foundation is hegemonic. This is how the central characters decide what is good/bad, right/wrong in the carrying out of the mission of saving the world. It effectively frames debate within a consideration of tactics. And this is a consensus shared with much of its audience and enthusiasts. It underlies their on-line discussions and debates of the plot, of what characters should or should not have done, whether they are truly good or evil, etc.<sup>8</sup> If you are in opposition to this consensus, if you violate the rules of ethics, then there is a clear verdict: "It's wrong."<sup>9</sup> However, sometimes it is not wrong, if it is done by the right people for the right reasons. An example of this would be in the S5 episode "The Gift," in which Giles kills Ben to prevent the inevitable return of Glory. This is clearly in violation of ethics based on human rights, but it is presented as a necessary though regrettable action, and one for which there are no negative consequences. In other words, Giles's action is not mere hypocrisy, opportunism or inconsistency, but a core part of ethics. This representation is directly analogous to the ideology of imperialist interventionist

ethics: bad guys force us to do bad things, but these actions do not change our self-identity as good. Hegemonic ethics and the commitment to defend human rights hides a deep commitment to violence by the Good. An important aspect of this ideology is the quarantining of the ethical leaders from the necessary bad things in order to maintain this self-identification as Good.

[9] The best illustration of the opposite, of what is Right, is Buffy's death at the end of Season 5. This is widely regarded as a powerful sequence and often held up as the epitome of what *Buffy* is about. There is probably no more iconic image than Buffy's Christ-like dive to close the rift between the worlds.<sup>10</sup> In part, this is because it so fully, and artfully, encapsulates hegemonic ethics. Buffy sacrifices herself at the altar of progressive humanism; she refuses to kill Dawn and dies to protect the world from evil. She is saving the world (again!), without violating human rights and at great personal sacrifice. As she has so many times before, Buffy has rescued Being, she has maintained the status quo—and there's the rub. The world remains the same, and will once again be in need of saving. As Badiou would put, this is precisely the self-perception of the ethics of "humanitarian intervention," or what used to be called imperialism: We are once again sacrificing so that others can be free of oppression in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Panama, Vietnam, East Timor, Congo, Mozambique, Congo, Cambodia, Algeria, El Salvador, Guatemala, etc. It is not, I think, coincidental that this scene is commonly held up as the high point of the series and its message. While obviously this is primarily a question of its artistic quality and emotional impact, it is clear that this is a very effective, concise presentation of what *should be*, and indeed is, from the perspective of hegemonic ethics. Buffy (like Christ) is here the very epitome of Good.

## **Badiou and the Ethic of Truths**

[10] Badiou's philosophy is sharply opposed to much of what is considered axiomatic in the US, both in academia and more broadly, including the cultural left. He rejects liberalism and ethics rooted in Kant as much as he does post-structuralism and ethics rooted in respect for the "other." Though adequately summarizing his philosophy is beyond the scope of this paper,<sup>11</sup> Hallward provides a useful stepping stone in his introduction to Badiou's *Ethics*:

Broadly speaking, Badiou's philosophy seeks to expose and make sense of the potential for radical innovation (revolution, invention, transfiguration ...) in every situation. Simplifying things considerably, we might say that he divides the sphere of human action into two overlapping but sharply differentiated sub-spheres: (a) the 'ordinary' realm of established interests and differences, of approved knowledges that serve to name, recognize and place consolidated identities; and (b) an 'exceptional' realm of singular innovations or truths, which persist only through the militant proclamation of those rare individuals who constitute themselves as the subjects of a truth, as the 'militants' of their cause (Badiou 2001, viii).

Before turning to Badiou's approach to ethics it is necessary to present a bare, if insufficient, outline of his key concepts, namely Being, Event, Truth, and Subject. Badiou calls Being the state of the situation, or the sum of what can be understood at the level of ontology or the "science of being-qua-being" (2007a, 517). Being is structured in dominance and so totalizing that it incorporates "opposition." Thus, such things as

critical thinking, diversity, tolerance of the "other," reformist politics, and ethics are mechanisms which further the totalizing of Being and the violence associated with it. An Event is a rupture in Being, an immanent, incommensurable eruption, which is inconceivable and unpredictable from within Being, but which arises from it: "An event is simply that which interrupts the law, the rules, the structure of the situation, and creates a new possibility. So an event is not initially the creation of a new situation. It is the creation of a new possibility, which is not the same thing" (2013, 3). An Event creates a truth process carried by a Subject and can manifest in any of what Badiou calls the four conditions of philosophy: politics, love, science, and art. "Evental sites" erupt when the margins of Being, the "void" or "inexistent" of the situation, forcefully exceed its sovereign powers: "That is to say, there suddenly appears a non-negotiable rift between the socio-political order as viewed from a legitimist, reformist or social-democratic perspective and that which so far exceeds its grasp as to pose a constant (if hitherto suppressed or dissimulated) threat to its authority" (Norris 8).

[11] Truths for Badiou are separate from the domain of empirical knowledge. Reminiscent of Plato (Badiou, 2012a) or St. Paul (Badiou, 2003), he calls such empirical knowledge the sedimentation from the anarchic debris of circulating opinions within and of Being. And as the debris of opinions, they are representations without Truth, and are structured and determined by Being (2001, 50). Truths, on the other hand, are immanent breaks in Being—immanent because they proceed in the situation and nowhere else, and breaks because what enables the Truth means nothing according to the established knowledge of the situation—a truth "bores a hole in knowledge" (2007a, 525). Badiou actually speaks of "truth procedures," which produce truths as they are pursued within any of the four conditions (politics, love, science, art). A Truth is everywhere and always the case, but it is unnoticed unless there is a rupture in Being, that is, an Event. This rupture allows for a Truth to become discernible, as existing empirical "knowledge does not know of the event" (2007a, 329) and the Truth it produces. The Subject is "the militant of truth"(2007a, xiii). Subjectivity is not an inherent human trait and does not pre-exist the truth process. A Subject is a witness to an Event, who maintains fidelity to it and thus introduces a Truth by bringing it into the world. In other words, the normal, everyday "human animal" becomes a Subject relative to the Truth of an Event. A Subject is not necessarily an individual, nor is it simply the summation of its individual members. The Subject is a singular production which exceeds the individuals. For example, lovers are one loving subject, who exceeds them both, while in politics the subject is not the individual militant but the revolution. Finally, fidelity is the sustained investigation and continuation of the Event. Fidelity gathers together and produces Truth: "To be faithful to an event is to move within the situation that this event has supplemented, by *thinking* (although all thought is practice, a putting to the test) the situation 'according' to the event" (2001, 41).

[12] Badiou uses these concepts to develop an anti-humanist ethics, or what he calls the ethic of truths. This anti-humanist ethics, he argues, should not build upon abstract categories such as Man or the Other, not consist of pity for victims, and not be reduced to "conservatism with a good conscience" (2001, 3). Instead, it should be referred back to particular situations, involve the creation of enduring maxims, and concern the destiny of truths. He puts forward three opposing theses to construct this ethic (2001, 16):

1. Man is to be identified by his affirmative thought, by the singular truths of which he is capable, by the Immortal which makes of him the most resilient and most paradoxical of animals.
2. It is from our positive capability for Good and thus from our boundary-breaking treatment of possibilities and our refusal of conservatism, including the conservation of being, that we are to identify Evil, not vice versa.
3. All humanity has its root in the identification of thought of singular situations. There is no ethics in general. There are only, eventually, ethics of processes by which we treat the possibilities of a situation.

Put succinctly, Badiou's ethic of a truth concerns the emergence of a Subject out of Being through fidelity to a Truth process which arises from an Event. It aims for the organization of a Good, something which is incommensurate and inconceivable from outside of the Event. He sums it up by saying, "Do all that you can to persevere in that which exceeds your perseverance. Persevere in the interruption. Seize in your being that which has seized and broken you" (2001, 47). More specifically, "the Ethic of a truth is the principle that enables the continuation of a truth-process, that which lends consistency to the presence of some-one in the composition of the subject induced by the process of this truth."<sup>12</sup>

[13] Evil must be distinguished from the "banal predation" (67) engaged in by humans to survive or pursue interests. Such violence is "beneath Good and Evil." (59) In sharp contrast to hegemonic ethics, Badiou argues that Evil comes from Good. Evil is not the absence of Good or truth but is in fact a possible outcome of a Truth. The Event is hazardous and unpredictable—things can go wrong, and the Subject which is produced can take different forms.<sup>13</sup> Evil is therefore an aspect of the Subject: "There is only Evil to the extent that man is capable of becoming the Immortal he is" (67). There are three manifestations of Evil which can arise from the Event. Together, they compose Badiou's guidelines for rendering judgement on Events and the truth processes which arise from them. They also make it clear that Badiou is not advocating the simple celebration of transformation for its own sake. The first form of evil is *disaster*, which is the rigid dogmatism involved in identifying a Truth with total power, or the attempt to "name and evaluate all the elements of the objective situation from the perspective of the truth-process . . . to name the whole of the real" (2001, 83). A Truth must not be used to say or determine everything. The second is *simulacrum*, or terror, which is to believe that an Event "convokes not the void of the earlier situation, but its plenitude," not a universality but "the absolute particularity of a community" (73). Fidelity to a simulacrum of a Truth has as its essential content war and massacre, and terror directed towards everyone.<sup>14</sup> Finally, there is *betrayal*, the focus of this paper. Betrayal is the failure of the Subject to live up to a fidelity, to give up on one's self as an Immortal. But it is not simply giving in to the temptation to revert back to Being. It is the denial that the Truth or the Immortal ever existed. It is the defeat of an ethic of Truth and it is the "Evil from which there is no return" (80). These forms of evil are what an ethic of truths aims to ward off, by giving the guidance necessary for a Subject to remain a Subject.<sup>15</sup>

[14] Badiou's ethic of Truths provides an innovative way of reinterpreting various aspects of *Buffy*. For example, the overall character arc of Buffy can be seen as revolving around the question of fidelity to the Event of being chosen as a Slayer. Buffy as a character is about the contradictory development of an immortal Subject, not just a teenager growing up, dealing with adult things, and putting aside her self-interest for

the sake of others. A particularly poignant example of this tension comes at the end of Season 2 when, on the one hand, she maintains her fidelity by killing Angel just as he emerges from the demon Angelus, and, on the other, immediately abandons Sunnydale and her fidelity by becoming a waitress in Los Angeles. Another application could be the emergence of Dark Willow. In this case, both approaches to ethics see Dark Willow as Evil, but for different reasons. As seen from the ethic of Truths, Willow's turn to evil takes the form of disaster, of trying to name everything with the force of the Event, in this case the truth of human suffering and pain understood as a totality and only solvable by ending the world.<sup>16</sup> As Willow's favorite lying, deceitful, sexy snake notes, Dark Willow was "an attempt at total control" (Parker, Gage and Ching, 17). As one final illustration, *Buffy* shows the contingency of the Truth associated with an Event. Badiou notes that Being changes and, more importantly, Truths can become "saturated": they can become in effect no longer true. Badiou points to what is for him as a communist a particularly important real world example, that the party/state matrix is no longer the political form to bring about communism. In Badiou's view, while this was a Truth arising from the Event of the Bolshevik revolution, it is a mistake to continue to employ this idea any more, as the Cultural Revolution in China took it as far as it could go. Similarly, Season 7 of *Buffy* shows that the old model of the Slayer had become saturated. Though Buffy was always an innovative and unconventional Slayer, the assault by the First in Season 7 demonstrated that "it is not enough." Something new was required, something which was outside of what could be known. As beautifully hinted at three seasons earlier in the episode "Restless" (4.22): "You think you know ... what's to come ... what you are. You haven't even begun."

[15] Prior to Season 7, the battles between "good and evil" in *Buffy*, whether in apocalyptic or monster of the week form, were generally contained within the banal predation of daily existence. Season 7 presents perhaps the first opportunity for questions of Badiouan Good and Evil to be deeply developed throughout the major plot arc and thus presents an excellent opportunity to apply the ethic of Truths. In Season 7, and specifically in developing the plan to defeat the First, Buffy is commonly seen by enthusiasts, and is presented by the writers, as going down a wrong path, of violating the established ethics of being a Slayer. There are numerous manifestations of this violation. Buffy exhibits strong authoritarian tendencies. She withdraws from her relationships and treats her friends as means to an end, in clear violation of the Kantian foundation of hegemonic ethics. She is willing to kill Anya and says that now she would sacrifice Dawn if necessary. She rejects Giles' guidance, ignores Xander's pain after the initial attack on Caleb, and significantly disrupts the camaraderie and closeness of the Scoobies. In essence, she adopts a kind of cynical *real politik*, which, as noted earlier, is commonly understood to be the "opposite" of ethics. She seems to be recklessly and selfishly attached to Spike, individualistically putting her emotional needs ahead of everyone else and endangering the Potentials. Finally, there are the various expressions of superiority and arrogant speechifying, something which is widely disparaged by enthusiasts (and sometimes even writers of *Buffy*, as in "Storyteller" [7.16]).

[16] The sharpest illustration of the ethical devolution of Buffy comes from the ways she is portrayed as becoming like the character Faith was in Season 3, and the suggestion that maybe Buffy is becoming a "bad Slayer." Faith's story in the early seasons of *Buffy* is a cautionary tale of having superpowers and failing to inhabit hegemonic ethics. Her arc later becomes one of redemption by way of accepting hegemonic ethics. Buffy's ethical devolution is made most clearly in "Selfless" (7.5). This

episode explicitly calls back to previous seasons—recalling Xander's long-forgotten lie from the Season 2 finale, Willow's early unfortunate clothes, and the slaughter in the Sunnydale High School AV room. When Xander and Buffy argue over whether Anya must be killed for slaughtering the "Abercrombie and Fitch catalogue," Buffy ends the argument by telling Xander that what happens at this point is up to her because, as she puts it, "Human rules don't apply . . . I am the law." This directly recalls Faith's comment that, as Slayers, she and Buffy can do whatever they want, that they are "the law." The path lying open for Buffy is made clear. Like Faith four seasons earlier, she is betraying the ethics which ground the Slayer's mission and keep her and her actions in the realm of the good. The difference is that while Faith's took the form of selfishly embracing evil, Buffy's took the form of the arrogant insistence she was the sole source, or at least arbiter, of good.

[17] Buffy's devolution builds up to the final confrontation with the First. Buffy's plan to defeat the First by using the scythe to activate the Potentials around the world is seen by some enthusiasts as a triumphant victory over the First and the culmination of the fundamental themes of *Buffy*. Others see the Activation as deeply problematic, and emblematic of what was wrong with Buffy and S7 as a whole. (Editors' note: See Hautsch in this issue.) Some points from enthusiast discussions include the view that the decision was undemocratic (no one included the 1700 other Potentials in the discussion of something which would forcibly change their lives forever—a point made by the Big Bad of Season 9, the Slaypire Simone), or that it was un-feminist (due to the reliance upon Spike or because of the revelation that the Slayer's power originally came from men). To focus the discussion, I turn to Spicer's 2004 critique of Buffy and the plan to defeat the First. Spicer accepts the basic principles of hegemonic ethics. The article's approach is rooted in abstract categories, subordinates politics to ethics and Event to Being, entails the disappearance of emancipatory politics, reproduces the axiom that the will to the Good is bad, and so on. And as I aim to show, Spicer ends up (regardless of intention) putting forward a fundamentally nihilist position and exhibiting, in Badiou's terms, "sophistry at its most devastating" (2001, 13). Spicer argues that, despite fan enthusiasm for the empowering message of "Chosen," a close reading of Buffy's approach to fighting the First reveals that it was both ethically wrong and in sharp contrast to the feminist foundation of *Buffy*. According to Spicer, the final plan was presented as a *fait accompli* by an unassailable leader. It involved the silencing and disrespecting of the Scoobies and Potentials, thus violating *Buffy's* established ethos of multi-vocal democracy. As Spicer puts it, "Being silenced is not empowering." (28). Buffy employed an anti-feminist reliance upon authoritarian hierarchy and aimed to create an army, an inherently hierarchical and presumably dangerous institution. Overall, Buffy and the concluding arc of S7 puts forward a "univocal, authoritarian model of society" (6) which undermines the feminist metanarrative of the show. Spicer argues that instead Buffy's allies should have been fully integrated into the discussion using a dialogic approach which would respect and empower them, and uphold the show's "long-standing commitment to dialogic multivocality." This is essential because "[g]ranting expression to multiple discourses through the dialogic interaction of different voices highlights the complexity and ambiguity inherent in human culture and, in so doing, works against the consolidation of power around a single dominant discourse endorsed as 'correct.'" (5) In short, Buffy should have been ethical and respected the rights of her allies.



[18] From Badiou's perspective, there are many criticisms one might have of this argument. First, there is the question of the "established ethos of multi-vocal democracy." Who actually participates in this democracy? The answer is simple: Buffy, Giles, the Scoobies, and a handful of other close allies. Together, they never number more than a dozen or so. In the context of the world, *in whose name they repeatedly act*, this is an *extraordinarily* tiny minority. Approximately 99.999999% of the world's population is excluded from Buffy's various moves to share power through "multi-vocal democracy." And throughout *Buffy*, there is the insistence that this must be the case. No one else may be included in the world-saving process, or even know about it, because this would only make things worse. The rest of humanity are simply the passive effects of the actions undertaken by those who matter. Humanity is thus adamantly, thoroughly, and systematically silenced and disempowered, for how could anyone be empowered if they have no participation in a process, or indeed even any awareness that a process exists? Six billion people are treated as passive, pathetic, and voiceless victims, irrelevant to any questions of empowerment or agency, and yet Spicer does not mention them. I argue that this is not incidental. The combination of celebrating the "ethos of multi-vocal democracy" while discursively erasing the power relationship which in Badiou's terms renders humanity inexistent is not simply a question of hypocrisy. It is in fact the essence of hegemonic ethics because it requires ignoring (and fighting to maintain) the necessary material foundation: a profoundly undemocratic, unequal, unjust and indefensible political situation. Of course, one of the themes of BtVS is Buffy's rebellion against the Council/Watcher/Slayer hierarchy and her transgressions of the often patriarchal assumptions guiding the Slayer's mission. That is, she introduces progressive and feminist reforms. But as laudable as these are, they all take place within this framework. They do nothing to touch the foundation upon which the "established ethos" takes place. The actually existing multi-vocal democracy is quite minimal—it is ultimately just for "me and mine." However much Buffy forced changes in how the Slayer could exist and the kinds of relationships she could have, it would be a mistake to celebrate them as fundamentally an expression of a radical democratic project which could be continually expanded upon. Since it depends upon a systematic exclusion, it is rather what Marxists would call an extension of privilege. It cannot be expanded to encompass ever more people, any more than "democracy" can be. Instead, what is needed is a fundamental interruption of Being, a process which will inevitably come into conflict with a commitment to multi-vocal democracy, or any other political form.

[19] I would argue that the "established ethos" of *Buffy* is much more along the lines of the common Marxist caricature of a Leninist party than anything which could be called "multi-vocal democracy." The Slayer and her allies are a tiny, self-selected group with secret membership and no external transparency. They claim to have special knowledge and abilities, to be the only thing which can save humanity, and that they have the right to decide who is evil and who should die. They presume to act in the best interests of a population (and to know these interests better than this population) which is ignorant of their true aims and would only disrupt the process if they were included. They hold a firm commitment to the need for deadly violence and have an established ideology which justifies their actions and existence. In short, the actual established ethos of *Buffy* is one of astonishing elitism and arrogance. It is significant that this obvious reality is not recognized, and instead the focus is entirely on the positive changes Buffy makes within that organization. Badiou, I think, would suggest that this perspective is analogous to the self-congratulatory nature of the self-perception of the

West for centuries, that of the gradual perfection and spread of the established principles and institutions of the West, while eliding in a "discursive procedure of absolutism" (Badiou 2007b, 5) the unpleasant realities of its foundation of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, genocide, and aggression.

[20] Second, one must consider what the particular circumstances were and what was at stake in the struggle against the First. Again, the answer is simple—the world and everyone in it. Buffy and her allies were not deciding what pizza toppings to get. Buffy was not saying, "It's anchovies or nothing! I am the law!" This is important to grasp. This was the actual, concrete circumstance. This is what was determining the basis for *any* ethical consideration. This situation demonstrates why Badiou insists on proceeding from the "singularity of situations." The differing circumstances of ordering pizza and preventing the horrible death of all humanity cannot, and should not, both be addressed by the dogmatic insistence on a metaphysical methodology (and ontology) and an ethics based on abstractions. They should be addressed separately, proceeding from their particularities and on this basis extracting the greatest amount of humanity from them.<sup>17</sup>

[21] Third, there is the question of whether or not in these circumstances there were any alternatives to Buffy's plan. Spicer does not mention any, nor is any possibility presented in the show (besides running away or dying in a futile fight). This, again, is important. If there were no other possibilities, then pausing to fully empower everyone by listening to their opinions would probably have resulted in failure—and horrible death for billions—even if the same strategy was decided upon, which was not guaranteed. This result would represent not just the elimination of emancipatory or democratic politics, including anything which could be called feminist or multi-vocal, but also of any subject who could embody it. Spicer's preferred approach effectively suggests that it is better to be "empowered" and dead than to be alive and have superpowers, if you got there by following a leader exhibiting "authoritarian" tendencies. Or to put in another way, the imposition of a Truth is the worst thing in the world, worse than everybody in the world dying horribly, even if that Truth objectively results in human liberation. To quote Buffy, this is insane troll logic. Or, as Badiou would put it, this is exactly the nihilist anti-politics which emerges from the subordination of politics to hegemonic ethics.

[22] Finally, there is the question of whether or not Buffy was right. Once again, the answer is simple: yes, in the narrow sense of defeating the First but also in Badiou's sense, that of changing the world.<sup>18</sup> Yes, she violated hegemonic ethics, but *that is precisely the point*. As Badiou notes, the important thing (and the necessary thing to create Good) is to "Be faithful to the situation. Treat it right to the limit of the possible. Draw from the situation the affirmative humanity it contains in order to be the immortal in this situation" (2001, 15). In Badiou's terms, Buffy was profoundly ethical, in her conclusions and her methodology. She was right to assert it, even through "undemocratic" means which violated hegemonic ethics. She was maintaining fidelity to the Truth process emerging from the Event of fighting the First. She was opening the possibility of the emergence of a new Subject (the Slayer army) out of Being through fidelity to a Truth process which arose from an Event, and by doing so she did not just save the world, she *changed* it. In these concrete, contingent circumstances, human rules, in the form of the hegemonic ethics which maintain Being, did not apply. Buffy was, indeed, "the law."<sup>19</sup>

[23] This is why Buffy throughout S7 is the opposite of Faith in S3, even though they say the same words. Buffy is maintaining fidelity to a Truth—the source of Good—in the face of cataclysmic changes in circumstances, while Faith was simply holding fast onto her betrayal—a kind of Evil. This is why none of Buffy's proclamations of importance actually qualify as simple hubris or self-serving rhetoric. When Buffy is speechifying, saying things like “I am the law” (“Selfless” 7.05) or “do what can’t be done!” (“Get It Done” 7.15) or “Are you ready to be strong?” (“Chosen” 7.22) or “Chloe was stupid,” (“Get It Done” 7.15) etc., this is her as the impossible immortal, maintaining fidelity to Truth, taking this Truth into the world, wrenching all that can be extracted from the Event, continuing the disruption of Being on the basis on an idea which is to be carried forward by a Subject in the form of a political organization.<sup>20</sup>

[24] Badiou has said, revealing part of his debt to Plato, that the ethic of a truth is about defending truth from sophistry. He defines sophistry as “a system that creates a dissymmetry of power through the general equivalence of opinions” (2012a, 10). This is exactly what Spicer ends up arguing for. Sophistry is connected with, and is constituted by dogmatism and metaphysics. Spicer rejects the dogmatism involved in the creation of an unassailable female leader (and rejects the idea that she is unassailable simply because she is female). At the same time, Spicer dogmatically insists that multi-vocal democratic dialogue is the only acceptable method and approach, and suggests that “complexity and ambiguity” is only and always what there is. Replacing one dogmatism with another is a hallmark of what Badiou terms metaphysical thinking, and in this case what is being dogmatically excluded is what Badiou calls a Truth process, or, in a word, revolution. Rooted in metaphysics, Spicer does not recognize there are times in which a *dictatorial* assertion of authority, a singular voice which holds the Truth, is exactly the means, and indeed the *only* means, through which human liberation can come about. An ethic of Truth, however, not only recognizes this means but celebrates it:

For what every emancipatory project does, what every emergence of hitherto unknown possibilities does, is to put an end to consensus. How, indeed, could the incalculable novelty of a truth, and the hole that it bores in established knowledges, be inscribed in a situation without encountering resolute opposition? Precisely because a truth, in its invention, is the only thing that is for all, so it can actually be achieved only against dominant opinions, since these always work for the benefit of some rather than all. (2001, 32)

[25] There cannot be, and from the perspective of an ethic of Truths, should not be “consensus” or “multi-vocal democracy” in the circumstances of an Event. As Reinhard notes in his introduction to Badiou’s reboot of Plato’s Republic, what is needed is “the dissymmetry of opinions and truths to create a general equivalence or availability of power” (Badiou 2012a, viii). This is why the sequence of Potentials being activated around the world is so powerful and inspiring, and why it (and not the actual defeat of the First or the epilogue overlooking the ruins of Sunnydale) is the fitting end and ethical culmination to seven television seasons of *Buffy*.<sup>21</sup> It is the concrete representation of an Idea, a Truth wrenched out of an Event—incommensurate, powerful, and demanding fidelity. What was once the void of Being, what Badiou calls the “inexistent” (2012b 67), and the First in “Chosen” (7.22) dismissed as mere “pimple-faced *girls*,” living as contemptible victims waiting for a condescending savior to protect them, emerged as a Subject bearing a Truth.<sup>22</sup> From that point on, questions of Good and Evil are to be decided with regards to this truth process. Nothing, and no one, should remain the same after it. To give up, or to try to go backwards to what is “normal,” would be betrayal. To

fight against it, to force the Subject back into the inexistent void is to engage in reaction. And to trail behind it, gesticulating and criticizing,<sup>23</sup> is mere sophistry.

[26] Buffy's seventh-season moves to redistribute power, representing the desire to exist within a more democratic space, were not something new, of course, and many see this desire's expression in the conclusion of S7 as a significant achievement to be celebrated. Durand (2009) sees S7 as the culmination of Buffy's ongoing "radical reimagining of the nature of power" away from its patriarchal roots. Brannon (2007) comments, in terms Badiou would endorse, that "power as shared phenomenon rather than power concentrated and controlled" is a consistent theme throughout *Buffy*. Petrova (2013) agrees that that Buffy's strength is her willingness to share power. Buffy's continued fidelity to this process is part of what makes her a compelling protagonist. Still, the conclusion of S7 represents something different, a rupture rather than an evolution. Though South (2004, 16) brings up some common complaints about Buffy in S7 ("For Buffy, it's not about what others want to do, it's about what she orders them to do") and approaches from a different philosophical perspective, he gets it exactly right when he says Buffy "inaugurated a momentous shift, a reconfiguration of options" (40). She destroyed the existing understandings and limitations of good and evil and created new possibilities where "it's all about choices, and it's time for her, and by extension the rest of us, to go to work" (40). In opposition to the perspective provided by Badiou, however, South argues in a fairly Foucauldian vein that "it would be a mistake to think that the change is for the better, just as it would be a mistake to think it's a change for the worse" (40).

[27] Petrova (2013) discusses S7 Buffy from the perspective of the state of exception, a political strategy applicable "in situations of foreign attack, siege, or other emergency when there is no time to follow the established legislative procedures, and when the nation is best served by transferring all power into the hands of the executive branch, or even a single leader, and limiting (temporarily) the rights of the citizens in order to preserve their way of life." (1) In short, there are times when it is correct to break the rules. One important difference here with Badiou's approach is that this breaking is done explicitly to preserve Being. Petrova argues that Buffy's actions in S7 raise the specter of dictatorship and totalitarianism. Her exercise of "unilateral power turns out to be counter-productive and philosophically unjustifiable," (15) and marks her as a failed leader who "stands apart from all established sources that legitimize the Slayer's power" (9). It is only later that "Buffy emerges as a true (and victorious) leader as a result of sharing her power with others" (17). Durand (2009) agrees: as a commander inhabiting patriarchal expressions of power through dominance, Buffy could only lose: "Only by participating in a sharing of power that radically turns the hierarchical patriarchal power on its head, does [sic] Buffy, the Scoobies, and the newly minted Slayers thwart the First" (27). What all of these readings have in common is a desire to have things both ways. On the one hand, there is the desire for radically different relations of power which create better conditions of existence for humanity. On the other hand, there is the desire for all this to happen democratically within the institutions of democracy, through consensus, and without violating anyone's rights. In short, they want a dinner party.<sup>24</sup> Badiou insists that this is impossible.

## **Season 8, or "Curse your sudden but inevitable cynicism"**

[28] The final image of *Buffy* on TV, that of Buffy silently smiling at the thought that now she might be able to be more of a normal girl, is in hindsight a foreshadowing of how events would unfold in the Season 8 comics. For the most part Buffy maintained her fidelity. (Though much of what happens could be seen as determined by comic book conventions, and perhaps the need to fit into the continuity created by the earlier *Fray*, there are many ways this could have been accomplished.) She navigated the difficult Truth process the Event opened up, even in the context of war against the US military and Twilight. She organized the Slayer army, what Badiou would call a “political organization” which serves as the discipline of the Event (2012b, 69), to put forward this Truth process, which could be expressed as “It’s about power and it’s about women and you just hate those two words in the same sentence, don’t you” (Whedon 2012b, 103). She continued to reject metaphysical ethics, as when Willow says, “Not killing humans is what separates us from the bad guys” and Buffy replies, “No, not being bad is what separates us from the bad guys.” (Vaughan 187) But at the same time, there are aspects of the old situation which are maintained. For example, there is no real effort to transform the relationship between the Slayers and the rest of humanity (which arguably opens up space for vampires to be seen as the good guys once the secret is out). As throughout *Buffy*, the transformation is ultimately quantitative and contained within the privileged sphere of the Slayer and her allies.

[29] Simply put, though it is difficult to save the world, it is much more so to really change it—and infinitely more so to keep changing it. Indeed, the question of how to keep changing it is arguably the central concern of Badiou’s philosophy and why he draws so much on Mao.<sup>25</sup> Badiou notes (2001, 78):

Everyone is familiar with the moments of crisis faced by a lover, a researcher’s discouragement, a militant’s lassitude, an artist’s sterility . . . . I have explained where such experiences come from: under pressure from the demands of interest—or, on the contrary, because of difficult new demands within the subjective continuation of fidelity—there is a breakdown of the fiction I use to maintain, as an image of myself, the confusion between my ordinary interests and disinterested-interest, between human animal and subject, between mortal and immortal. And at this point, I am confronted with a pure choice between the “Keep going!” proposed by the ethic of this truth, and the logic of the ‘perseverance in being’ of the mere mortal that I am.”

In keeping with this, Badiou summarizes the Good as “the internal norm of a prolonged disorganization of life” (2001, 60).

[30] Season 8 concludes with Buffy’s destruction of the Seed, which brings about the end of magic on Earth, the dispersion of the Slayer army and the end of the Slayer line. This act represents Buffy’s true betrayal and, consistent with her past actions, it involves stepping backward, in an attempt to reclaim “normalcy.” Buffy abandons her fidelity and gives up on truth. By trying to go back to the way things were, she gives in to Evil, to a degree far greater than anything done by, say, Angelus or Mayor Wilkins (whose actions were for the most part simple predation, despite their apocalyptic intentions). In one sweep, she renders the Event, along with its Truth and the Subject which carried it into the world, nonexistent. It is tragic that she is allowed to do this, not just for what it means for *Buffy* but for what it means in the diegesis for actually existing human beings. For the *Buffyverse*, it means, among other things, the Slayer army is gone and that we will probably be denied anything more than the tantalizingly brief

glimpse of it in S5 of *Angel*.<sup>26</sup> For the actual world, it means just another in the infinite encouragements to lower one's sights, focus on "me and mine," and allow the kingdom of necessity to continue its rule. The consequences of this choice are depressingly familiar.

[31] Season 8 opened with the line, "The thing about changing the world ... once you do it, the world's all different" (Whedon 2012a, 7). I would argue that the underlying view of *Buffy* is the opposite: changing the world doesn't, not really, and to the extent that it does the change is untenable at best, deeply wrong and dangerous at worst. I would argue that one of the implicit themes of S8 is that the creation of the Slayer army is fundamentally, if not inherently, problematic, that it, in effect, goes too far—which is the "go to" criticism in the face of every revolutionary change by the diverse defenders of Being. As Willow tells Buffy, "This is where it starts ... Slayers acting above the law" (Whedon 2012a, 244).<sup>27</sup> Badiou suggests instead that the consistent problem with revolutionary transformations is that they do not go far enough, partially with regards to the question of fidelity to the Event and the danger of undoing of what had been fought for at great sacrifice, but also with regards to the commitment to "the internal norm of a prolonged disorganization of life." Ultimately, *Buffy* (and perhaps Whedon) cannot break from the cynicism at the heart of hegemonic ethics and its abandonment of big emancipatory politics. *Buffy* strains at the limits of ethics in S7 but not seeing a way forward, it falls back into the cynical view that the best one can hope for is to maintain the status quo in the face of the predation by bad people.

[32] Season 9 continues this approach. Putting aside the various character and relationship arcs, the overall plot focuses on the restoration of magic to the world and dealing with the season's Big Bad. The focus is not just on "saving the world," it is about effectively restoring the world to the situation pre-Activation, which includes both the return of the Hellmouth and the continued inexistence of the Slayer army. Both plot arcs directly flow from the consequences of Buffy's actions and focus on rectifying the problems she created. She created a world without magic by destroying the Seed, and she created Simone by activating the Potentials. While the latter threatens the existence of the world, the former threatens its humanity. As Willow laments, "Music, poetry, everything is going bad ... It's the inspiration. The dreams. All the things that make life so wonderful, it's just not there like it used to be" (Parker and Ching 2013, 1). While it would be an over-simplification to reduce things to a line drawn from "I am the law" to Activation to destroying the Seed to the dangers and crises of season 9, the line is there. And, based on the conclusion to S9, the next season will involve more of the consequences of Buffy's actions in S7. In some ways, the restoration of S9 goes further, all the way back to S5, with Buffy putting the saving of Dawn before the world. The costs of the revolutionary transformation of the Event are presented as (personally) too high. Big emancipatory change causes more problems than it solves—at least to those who matter. Implicit here is the fear that a big change might negatively affect one's established position, a fundamental paranoia of middle-class ideology. *Buffy* is ultimately about saving the world, using violence, from bad guys who do bad things. It is not only not about transforming the world, it is also effectively opposed to genuine transformation (beyond the small circle of "me and mine").

[33] I tentatively suggest that this cynicism is not limited to *Buffy* but is a recurring undercurrent in the Whedonverse. There seems to be woven throughout Whedon's works, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, expressions of the cynical anti-politics of humanist ethics. For example, in *Angel*, there is the revelation of the

location of the "Home Office" of, in effect, Hell (the same place from which he started); the equation of world peace with Borg-like submission to Jasmine; and the reduction of political struggle to simply fighting the good fight. In *Firefly / Serenity*, there is the explicit identification of trying to make people and the world better with ultimate evil. It is better just to focus on "me and mine," since to aim higher is to court disaster. And of course there is *Fray* and the fact that the cynical future of *Buffy* in which everything has been lost had already been written. Perhaps, however much Whedon wants a better world, he cannot see it happening, and perhaps he fears how things might turn out if it did. As he noted in his the recent Equality Now speech, "I don't think I can change the world. I can just punch it up a little." To the extent that this is the case, then part of the blame lies squarely on the shoulders of the pervasive hegemonic ethics.

[34] At the root of hegemonic ethics is the suspicion, indeed fear, of the Event and of the Subjects who carry it forward, even though from Badiou's perspective they are, and have always been, the essential foundation for the leaps in human emancipation.<sup>28</sup> This is one reason for the common phenomenon of dedicated progressives deeply concerned with human rights suddenly calling for the forceful imposition of authoritative order and defending the sanctity of property when the Event takes the form of, say, angry poor people of color taking to the streets or a People's War in Nepal. It is also part of the reason *why Buffy* had a quite problematic take on race and class, something which was not changed by the relative diversity exhibited in S7.<sup>29</sup> It is why Spicer and others cannot see that Buffy's actions in S7 are the best, and certainly the most important, thing which happened in *Buffy*. The application of Badiou's ethic of Truths demonstrates the need to abandon the hegemonic ethics underlying progressive humanism. It will not only be unable to organize the political forces necessary, it will stand in the way of what needs to be done, especially in those unpredictable, incommensurate circumstances when what is called for is "audacity, audacity, and yet more audacity."<sup>30</sup> To conclude with the subtitle for this paper, the ethical foundation of *Buffy* means that ultimately Slayers can only save the world, when the point is to change it. In the final analysis, saving the world, even saving it a lot, means little. Changing it, even once, can mean everything.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was presented at Joss in June 2013 and benefits from subsequent comments and discussion with conference attendees. I would like to thank M. J. Braun for her insightful comments and editing prowess.

<sup>2</sup> See Marx (1976, 8).

<sup>3</sup> Badiou does not always capitalize these terms. I will, however, simply to make it clear when I am using his concepts.

<sup>4</sup> From the first episode ever ("Welcome to the Hellmouth" 1.1): "This world is older than any of you know. Contrary to popular mythology, it did not begin as a paradise. For untold eons demons walked the Earth. They made it their home, their ... their Hell. From Season 7 ("Get It Done" 7.15): "First, there is the earth ... Okay, then there came the demons. After demons, there came men."

<sup>5</sup> ("Welcome to the Hellmouth" 1.1): "Into each generation a Slayer is born, one girl in all the world, a Chosen One, one born with the strength and skill to hunt the vampires."

<sup>6</sup> Or, the Red Man, Mexicans, the Hun, fascists, communists, terrorists, Muslims, etc.

<sup>7</sup> By metaphysics I mean the approach which relies on categories outside of reality but which are then imposed on reality. This kind of metaphysics rests on the unsustainable logic that if something is X it is always X, regardless of circumstances, or that only X can bring about X. This sometimes finds expression as "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," or "be the change you want to see in the world." As Buffy puts it, "You can't beat evil by doing evil" ("First Date," 7.14). Or to put it in concrete political terms, if, say, hierarchical authority (whether conceptualized as explicitly patriarchal or not) is bad, then doing good means *always* avoiding any reproduction of hierarchical authority.

<sup>8</sup> Examples of subjects of these discussions might include Xander's lie at end of Season 2, Jonathan's casting his hero spell, Buffy and Spike's complex relationship, whether or not to sacrifice Dawn, etc.

<sup>9</sup> Said, of course, in Faith's best impression of Buffy's self-righteousness.

<sup>10</sup> See the cover of Wilcox (2005).

<sup>11</sup> Badiou elaborates on all of this in, among other works, *Being and Event* (2007a) and its sequel *The Logic of Worlds* (2009). Norris (2009) provides a useful reader's guide to the first book.

<sup>12</sup> For Badiou's elaboration of this sentence, see 2001, pages 44-48.

<sup>13</sup> In addition to two different forms of the "faithful subject," there are also the "reactive" and the "obscure" subject. See 2009, 48-78.

<sup>14</sup> Badiou gives as an example of *simulacrum* the rise of the Nazis in Germany.

<sup>15</sup> "This ethics combines, then, under the imperative to 'Keep going!'", resources of discernment (do not fall for simulacra), of courage (do not give up), and of moderation [*r serve*] (do not get carried away to the extremes of Totality)" (2001, 91).

<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting that Willow and Buffy are consistent in how they violate their fidelity when confronting novel circumstances of Being. Buffy retreats inwards towards betrayal, while Willow expands outwards towards disaster. This, I think, is an interesting comment on the quality of *Buffy*, that even from a perspective very different from that of the show, two characters are consistently presented. Buffy wants to subtract herself, while Willow wants to multiply herself (as a tiny manifestation, consider their responses to the UCSD library—enthusiasm over "spurting knowledge" versus anxiety over potential "Nuremberg rallies"). In the face of the world, Buffy violates her ethic inwards, through abandonment, while Willow goes outwards, through an excess of engagement which takes it into the realm of disaster. Buffy's few betrayals outwards were always short-term and atypical, such as the Faith-inspired walk on the wild side of being a Slayer in "Bad Girls" (3.14). She consistently struggles with abandoning her mission, of betraying her fidelity to the Event of being Chosen—the initial refusal to face the Master at the end of Season 1, her difficulty in adjusting to UCSD, her regular self-imposed isolation, particularly in Season 6, even the sacrifice of Season 5. She always wants to pull away, to retreat to being just a girl. Even at the end of S7, she silently smiles, evidently in response to Faith's comment that Buffy was no longer under

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the burden of being the Chosen One. And yet, she still is under the burden, with consequences I discuss below.

<sup>17</sup> The failure to actually address the concrete circumstances in which those attempting to collectively organize the Good find themselves is a hallmark of hegemonic ethics.

<sup>18</sup> The question of success is complicated by the essential role played by Spike and his trinket. However, I would argue that Buffy was right, even if the plan had failed. On Spike's role and the issue of saving versus changing the world, see Wilcox 2005, 99-106.

<sup>19</sup> This is not to say Buffy did not make mistakes, even serious ones (and certainly not that Buffy had become the eternal bearer of Truth since the Subject is always contingent on fidelity). But Badiou would argue that, ethically, it is infinitely better to make mistakes in the process of remaining faithful to a Truth which emerges through the Event than to be 100% correct in preserving the status quo. Nor is it to argue that the approach of multi-vocal democracy is ruled out. I would argue, though perhaps Badiou would disagree, that in the vast majority of circumstances such a method is exactly what is correct.

<sup>20</sup> Indeed, a lot of Buffy's speechifying would likely resonate with Badiou: "Do what can't be done" sounds more than a little like "Be reasonable, demand the impossible," one of slogans from the Events of May.

<sup>21</sup> On a personal note, this is why, despite so many re-watchings, I cannot watch this sequence without transforming into half-man/half-goosebump. For me, it moves *Buffy* out of the realm of a great television series to a singular human experience (and makes S7 the best season of *Buffy*).

<sup>22</sup> This relates to Badiou's discussion of St. Paul. "The ontology underlying Paul's preaching valorizes nonbeings against beings, or rather, it establishes that, for the subject of a truth, what exists is generally held by established discourses to be nonexistent, while the beings validated by these discourses are, for the subject, nonexistent" (2003 98).

<sup>23</sup> See Mao (1965, 23), "Report of an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan."

<sup>24</sup> See Mao (1965, 28). For those who have a wiggins at the use of Mao, there is Frederick Douglass (2000, 367): "The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all-absorbing, and for the time being, putting all other tumults to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."

<sup>25</sup> While Mao spoke of the continuation of the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat, Badiou speaks of fidelity to the Event and "movement communism" (2012b, 111).

<sup>26</sup> In all seriousness, someone needs to produce a show called *Slayers*, which would cover the adventures of the Slayer army, ideally those in different countries and far away from Buffy, between the period of their activation and the beginning of Season 8.

<sup>27</sup> See Mao (1975, 27) for a response to this common criticism and the necessity for going "too far."

<sup>28</sup> As an illustration, consider Amber Benson's contribution to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Tales* which condemns the Terror of the French Revolution as the equivalent of vampire predation. For one response to this, see Wahnich's *In Defense of the Terror* (2012). For another, there is Mark Twain from *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (64): "There were two 'Reigns of Terror', if we could but remember and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passions, the other in heartless cold blood; the one lasted mere months, the other had lasted a thousand years; the one inflicted death upon a thousand persons, the other upon a hundred million; but our shudders are all for the horrors of the... momentary Terror, so to speak; whereas, what is the horror of swift death by the axe compared with lifelong death from hunger, cold, insult, cruelty and heartbreak? A city cemetery could contain the coffins filled by that brief terror that we have all been so diligently taught to shiver at and mourn over; but all France could hardly contain the coffins filled by that older and real Terror - that unspeakable bitter and awful Terror which none of us has been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves."

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<sup>29</sup> This is also one reason why the critique by Ono (2000) that Buffy and the Scoobies represent white middle-class vigilantes defending civilization from the predation of undesirable and dark-skinned Others has validity. Along these lines Hautsch (2011, 7) argues that "Buffy relies on reproducing and employing the cultural discourses of U.S. domestic colonization and policies of assimilation. Within the ideological discourse of the show, demons and vampires come to represent the colonized Other: oppressed, massacred, and relegated to the margins of society." Kirkland (2005, 3) suggests that "a tentative case might be made for Buffy as a white-supremacy text." See also Middents (2005).

<sup>30</sup> From Lenin (1977, 180): "Marx summed up the lessons of all revolutions in respect to armed uprising in the words of 'Danton, the greatest master of revolutionary policy yet known: *de l'audace, de l'audace, encore de l'audace* "".