

*Negative Space Surrounding “The Body”*  
by Elise Ahrens

Kevin: “What’s going on?”

Dawn: “Um, negative space.”

Kevin: “Yeah, what’s that all about?”



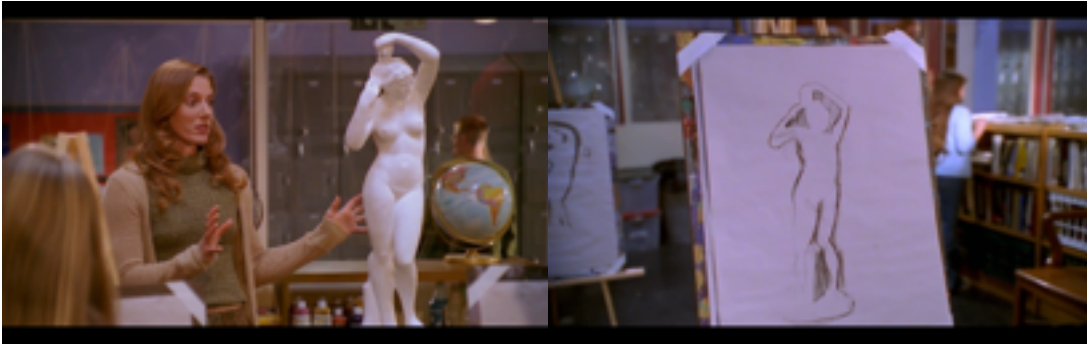
“The Body” – Season 5, Episode 16

[1] A viewing of “The Body” creates such confusion, conflict, and emotion to at first stifle a reviewer’s critical tone. This episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, in which Joyce, a maternal figure to many of the characters, dies, first creates a human response of personal relation and introspective contemplation. The nature of a television series allows Joss Whedon to prolong narrative exposure between character and audience, provoking a real sensation of grief. The event is no mere plot device, but the death of a mother we’ve grown to know and love across seasons of familiarity. Watching Joyce’s death was my first experience of death, as I was sixyears-old when I watched the broadcast of “The

Body” in 2001. My own mother’s usually comforting reassurance that, “It’s all fake, it’s just TV,” began to falter. I imagined finding my mother staring up unblinkingly from a stiff position on the couch, the very couch from which we were watching the show. Four years later, when my best friend’s mother died from a brain aneurism, I imagined her family stumbling through the scenes of this very episode. Not unlike Buffy’s fantasies of hope, I experienced lingering fantasies of horror; I’m sitting in my elementary school classroom when I’m called to the office, my teacher passes on the message with a grave look in her eye. This experience of doubt and contemplation of emptiness tone is carefully created by Whedon and reflected in the theme of the piece, negative space.

While noted as an element of the episode by other critics, its central theme and importance has gone unexplored. Introduced in Dawn’s classroom by her art teacher, the idea of negative space is one of the two components that create the foundations for the episode. In art terms, negative space, “has the effect of placing all of the focus on the subject” with the inclusion of empty space (Lin par. 3). The usual subject, the Scooby Gang, is redirected into this empty space. The second element, as indicated by the title, is the *subject* of the negative space, the physical entity of the body, which is defined by the emptiness of grief around it.

[2] The concept of negative space within the episode is introduced in Dawn’s art classroom. The teacher instructs the class to, “remember, we’re not drawing the object, we’re drawing the negative space around the object.”.



Both Wilcox and Whedon comment on the teacher's close resemblance to Joyce; she is "a live counterpoint to their dead mother" (Wilcox 180). The episode in itself follows the teacher's instruction to, "Give me a sense of the spaces around, the space in between". After refocusing the show's center onto Joyce's physical body, the rest of the cast becomes a revolving reaction to the body, like the air around the statue that the students are told to draw. The concept of death and the reality of grief are other aspects of the negative space; they are the intangible and undefined yet inevitable products of a lifeless body. While death is an overarching theme, the physical importance of the corpse should not be minimized, as it is the focus of the title, camera, and narrative events of the episode. Though once central, the negative subjects in the foreground (Buffy and her friends) continue to interact and react to the subject. The episode balances scene time between subject and negative responses, creating a symbiosis in which neither has meaning without connection to the other. This is why each commercial break, as Stommel observed, returned with increasingly close shots of the body, to reestablish the focal subject before diving into its affected space. As stated in Whedon's commentary, outside of reactions and feelings, there is the fact of the body (Robson). The subject has a physicality that cannot be escaped.

[3] To appreciate its reconfiguration, we must look to the context of the Buffyverse prior to this episode, a construction of which resembles an elliptical universe. The sun-like subject that initiates momentum in the characters and their actions is the monster of the week or season, the big bad that sends the characters through world-saving plots and consequentially emotional hardship. The closest impacted orbit is Buffy herself, our protagonist, who is the center ring in this moving universe. In close second is the rest of the Scooby Gang: Willow, Xander, and Giles, who are the second-most impacted characters. Beyond these immediate characters, increasingly unimportant individuals move in orbit to support overarching and episodic plot. Though more significant than a single-episode damsel in distress or recurring comic character like Harmony, Joyce belongs to one of these outer rings as she serves the contextual role of mother and occasional damsel in distress herself. She provides structure to early seasons by giving Buffy normal teenage girl limitations and consequences<sup>1</sup> and is an element used to balance out supernatural forces in the setting. This sideline role is reflected in a dream sequence in “Restless” (B4022), where Joyce is literally living in the walls of Buffy’s high school. Symbolically, she is an ingrained part of Buffy’s past and upbringing, but is seen as a structural figure without immediate interaction with Buffy’s world.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Buffy is faced with the backlash of running away from home at the beginning of season 3. Despite the supernatural causes for her flight (killing her vampire lover to save the world) she is faced with the same familial consequences when returning home, notably Joyce’s inability to trust her immediately after. These are the normal parameters Joyce introduced to the setting of Buffy’s life.



[4] “The Body” restructures the protagonist-centric Buffyverse to revolve around a physical subject, thus throwing the usual focuses into negative space. The configuration summarized above is completely shifted. Firstly, the focus on fifth season villain Glory is completely neglected. That central, goal-oriented focus of beating the bad is replaced with the physical focus on Joyce’s body. The episode’s reconfiguration is also painfully introspective; rather than focusing on the macro scale villain, who threatens the entire world, we focus on the physical representation of the end of Buffy’s world, her mother’s body. With Joyce’s death, her sidelined contextual role is realized and brought to center focus in the form of her body. The center of a universal model is exchanged, from a motivating central force of evil to the static physical focus of a body. Joyce’s death can’t be resolved by cracking a mystery. The circumstance does not create as an outlet for internal conflict, such as confronting anxiety or insecurity with a good demon slay, but rather is the ultimate cause. Furthermore, it is a break from the science-fiction world, in

which demons and battles are only metaphorical of everyday horrors. The body is as unimaginatively real as the harsh reality of death, presented in an un-cushioned setting. Joyce can only come back to life in a sci-fi world, which the style and presentation of the episode divorces from the circumstances of her death. When characters revolved around a slayable villain, they reacted with determination and group action, eventually to the point of resolution. But when given a static, insurmountable subject like death, grief, or a physical body, the revolving character ellipses are stripped of direction and left to react with a universe that they cannot overcome or solve. They stall in their orbits, and the usual construction of overcoming evil with goal-oriented plots is thrown into a space-like void. This ultimate reconfiguration of the Buffyverse simulates the snap effect of grief and results in the creation of a negative space within the episode that will linger throughout the rest of the series, and ultimately impact viewers like myself.

[5] This drastic restructuring and immense impact of a natural death can be contrasted with the effect of the supernatural death of Jenny Calendar, who was murdered in “Passion” (B2017). Angelus, her murderer, represents a voyeuristic nature in death, as he stalks and observes his targets through windows and drawings. We see Buffy and Willow receive the news intrusively through the window, intensified by the music and muffled voices. The physical body is also theatrically presented and centered on as it is found, almost as if upon an altar, among rose petals in Giles’ bed.<sup>2</sup> The discovery of the body

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Joyce’s is attached to these themes in the episode as well, as she is one of the targets stalked and drawn by Angeles. The episode also displays her normalized maternal role in a supernatural world, fending off whom she believes to simply be Buffy’s deranged ex-boyfriend, followed by a classic mother-daughter sex talk.

and following action is distinctly different. Joyce's death was seamlessly introduced into an otherwise normal day, whereas Miss Calendar's was exceptional and strange from the first rose pinned to Giles' door and the faint sound of opera upon entrance. Another variation is that we, the audience, are already aware of Miss Calendar's death as Giles discovers it. In Joyce's case, however, the death is natural and as stated by Tara, "always sudden"; it is discovered by Buffy and the audience simultaneously and unexpectedly. Dawn's experience parallels Giles', in which Whedon creates a build-up and teardown. We knowingly witness tragedy strike as Giles walks up the stairs with a smile to discover the body. The poignant use of opera, however, cushions the scene with a theatrical drama whereas "The Body" denies the audience this distancing comfort. A jump cut also passes the time spent with Giles quickly, skipping the tedium of dealing with ambulances and cops.<sup>3</sup> This allows the episode to re-center itself on Buffy and the plot at hand, immediate action and revenge. Giles' anger and violence towards Angelus satisfies the audience and insights plot motivation for justice and revenge. We know the rest of the season will be a manhunt, now with heightened stakes and great satisfaction with its conclusion. Neither is possible in the case of a brain aneurism, where nothing can be blamed, avenged, or resolved.

[6] Other scholars' analysis of "The Body" have neglected the significance of negative space, but focus on the critically acclaimed achievement of realism. Lawson Fletcher uses

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<sup>3</sup> Giles' and Buffy's roles are very closely inverted between these two episodes. In "Passion" Giles is shown in shock, incapable of functioning in the immediate aftermath of grief, his first act is to call Buffy. In "The Body," Buffy is in shock and calls Giles, who takes over the "procedure" in the hospital, which he personally struggled to handle in the case of Jenny's death.

a genre approach to discuss the inversion of dramatic realism and horror to “decode the horrific into realistic” and create the “monstrous aspects of the everyday”(Fletcher, par. 9). This critique focuses on the intended physical reaction on the audience, an aspect of the horror genre, and how it is created through “realistic” techniques (Fletcher par 12). Within this analysis of the horror genre, the reorientation of the Buffyverse within the episode is supported by the last scene when a vampire attacks Dawn in the morgue. Like my above summary of a universal shift, Fletcher says the episode reorients fear from the monster or the attack to death itself, loss, and its effect (Fletcher par. 12). These are the focuses that I argue create the negative space. Robert Bianco, on the other hand, acts as a single dissenting opinion and sees less significance in “The Body’s” unique style and distinction from other episodes, calling it a “gimmick” like “Hush”<sup>4</sup> (Bianco par. 4).

[7] Jesse James Stommel views the episode in a similarly theatrical light with his claim that, “Death needs an audience” (Stommel par. 4). Joyce’s death is read as a study of identity, with citations from Judith Butler, as identity is projected onto the body and then stripped down into a corpse. This detail-oriented critique claims, “Whedon is framing death, not just depicting it” (Stommel par. 15). He sees the zipping up of the body bag as the closing of a stage curtain (Stommel par. 11). Even this reading, however, acknowledges the physical body as the focal point of the episode, “The second, third, and fourth commercial breaks are each followed immediately by a close-up of Joyce’s increasingly dead body” (Stommel par. 10).

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<sup>4</sup> “Hush” was an Emmy winning episode that took the approach of a silent movie when demons stole Sunnydale citizens’ voices (B4010). Whedon wrote the episode in response to critiques that *Buffy* was no more than quick, witty dialogue.





The return from commercial breaks

The four images show a progression of stripping down, converting from Joyce the person to the physical entity of the corpse, the body. This is a visual example of abrupt refocusing to remind the audience of reorientation despite broadcast distractions, a detail easily forgotten when viewing the episode now from Netflix, Hulu, or DVD.

[8] Rhonda Wilcox also discusses the realism equated with quality TV (Wilcox 175) and the accomplishment of “realistic shock of loss” and “emotional realism” (Wilcox 176) within “The Body.” Her analysis and Joss Whedon’s own commentary reject close readings of symbolism and patterns for an authentic reading of death and the direct portrayal of “the immediate hours of loss” (Robson). While Stommel reads Willow’s

constant clothes changes as a statement on the theatrical costuming of death<sup>5</sup> (Stommel par 13), Wilcox recognizes Whedon's intended statement on the inexplicable reactions to death and the need to assert control over banal details in the face of uncontrollable death (Wilcox 182). Wilcox focuses on emotional realism within and created by the Buffyverse because emotion is a pure element evoked by natural or supernatural forces (Wilcox 186). Whedon describes the episode as, "the almost boredom of the very first few hours" after losing someone (Robson). This listless boredom is a state unfamiliar to the unusually goal-oriented construction and proves his purposeful creating of an inactive void. Wilcox's focus on emotion and reaction to the body also stresses the impact on the audience, "At the end of this episode, we 'see no light'; it is closer in spirit to Gilgamesh's mourning for Enkidu" (Wilcox 189). She draws an astute parallel between the tone of grief in "The Body" and that of the tragic epic *Gilgamesh*, for both are thrown into the dark "house of dust" that is the negative space created by death (Wilcox 174).

[9] The first act develops the refocused subject of the episode and creates negative space with techniques appropriate to the situation. While Joyce's body is the focal subject, lying stiffly on the living room couch, Buffy's reactions give weight and significance to the subject, like the focus of a photograph on a stark white background. Casual reactions would have dulled the subject, like a camouflage background, whereas Buffy's extreme reactions of horror emphasize the subject.

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<sup>5</sup> The theme of performance frequently reoccurs with Willow, especially in dream sequences, due to her fear of the stage. The idea of masks, acting, and hidden personality emerge from her aversion to the spotlight.



The camera focuses on her reactions to the body and, therefore, her horror and distress sync with and create the void of the situation. Other techniques add to the development of this void. When Buffy is talking to the paramedic, neither are focused in the shot; first we see Joyce's body framed by Buffy and the paramedic despite the dialogue passing between them. Then all we can see is the back of



Buffy's head and the cropped lower half of the paramedic's face as the conversation continues. This is because the subject of the scene is not in the shot, but rather is the body

on the floor behind them, giving this shot no focal point but rather a void in its mise en scène.

[10] The protagonist, and the audience with her, is physically trapped by filmic technique.

Even when Buffy looks out the front and back doors, there are no POV



shots to escape the immediate situation. Negative space is not only physical, but also expressed in time, as Whedon “avoided times cuts” and uses especially long takes (Robson). The notable lack of score to the episode amplifies this void of time, space, and physicality. Silence painfully draws attention the scene length and gives diegetic sound a horrific quality (Fletcher par. 9). Whedon used the power of diegetic sound to highlight “obscene physicality,” such as the crack of Joyce’s rib (Robson). Other details of physicality—fixing Joyce’s skirt, vomiting, the Band-Aid on Buffy’s finger—contrast the abstract and intangible negative space created by grief. Objects take on greater importance, as the mise en scene equates characters and objects as equally secondary to the body. The camera lingers on vomit soaking into a paper towel just as it lingered on Buffy absorbing the situation, which in itself is realized while



staring at another object, the phone's dial pad (Robson). Later, the angle of the camera is in a high corner during the dorm scene with Xander, Anya, Willow, and Tara. They are all made minimal, flat, and object-like from the distant bird's eye view, and seem to be physically trapped in the box of the room.



The

group disperses over the course of the scene, retreating into corners of the room. Anya even denies gestures of comfort from Xander and brushes him off, succumbing physically to negative space. The unique qualities within the negative space are also authentic for what they are *not* (Fletcher par. 5). Unlike the usual Buffyverse, reactions are not responding to the supernatural, not sarcastic, not witty, and not neatly refined by a musical score. The audience is conflicted between an emotional void and the physicality that creates it.

[11] The juxtaposition of before-and-after illustrates the creation of a negative space. We see Dawn's daily school experiences before she receives the news of her mother's death. At this point, the audience has already been submerged in the negative space, which Dawn is about to be plunged into. Whedon justifies the preceding scenes of Dawn at school to "misdirect" the audience (Robinson). These school scenes are routinely self-centered space with the focus on daily drama. This is the first of a very few times that we see Dawn in her school environment (already a shift from the usual Buffyverse).<sup>6</sup> The act connects Joyce's body bag with a cut to Dawn at school, with the overlapping sound of the zipper making the connection between the two. The setup serves the same function as the flashback at the beginning, to revel in the banal hardships of life (like a burnt pie) before submerging in comparatively world-altering grief. Whedon's tactic is to "build up life to tear it down" (Robson). Dawn even receives the news in a negative, nearly soundless space viewed through the glass of the classroom. The teacher and students view sympathetically from the outside, like the audience does (Wilcox 180).

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<sup>6</sup> Dawn makes an allusion to her school day in season 6 "Once More with Feeling," commenting on her math class breaking out into song, but we don't reenter the classroom or her school-day dramas of Dawn's life again until season 7.



When Dawn leaves the classroom that had been focusing on the idea of negative space, she is plunged into it. She leaves the audience in negative space, as they are voyeuristically separated from her pain and made to view it from the outside. The audience's dual separation and submersion continues into the next scene as we view Anya and Xander in silence through the car window (Wilcox 181).

[12] Even as a viewer might share a feeling of void, struggle with shock, and experience the excruciatingly slow passing of time, the episode forces a level of separation from the characters' trials. Whedon reminds us that the world keeps turning in ways that the characters are sometimes blind to. As the paramedics leave Buffy's house, the radio announces, "Dispatch seven, we have a 206," to which the paramedic responds, "We gotta fly." This reality reduces the event to routine for the paramedics and reminds the audience that trauma affects all of Sunnydale, even as Joyce repositioned to the narrative center of the Buffyverse. As Buffy stands looking out her back door, diegetic sound



mingles the laughter of children playing outside with ocean waves. There is no indication of physical proximity to a beach from prior episodes, yet the fluctuating sound of the ocean reminds viewers of a continuing rhythm and unstoppable tide that continues even as individual's worlds come to an end (Wilcox 180). In the third act, we see Xander's car ticketed for double parking, an indication by Whedon that the world keeps turning (Robson).



The shot is specifically for the audience, not for the characters who haven't discovered it yet. These details, unacknowledged by the immediately impacted

characters, create a sort of reassurance for the audience. They are subtle reminders that the world not only turns on in the Buffyverse, but in the real world which viewers get to return to after 45 minutes.

[13] Of all characters, socially inept Anya vocalizes their inability to fill negative space. Her role fulfills the innocence of a child, without an understanding of death or its social expectations. Grief in essence is undefined, as is the space it thrusts griever into, which Anya emphasizes by asking what is right, appropriate, expected, and normal. She also shows awareness and discomfort with the physicality of death, "Are we gonna see the body?... Are they gonna cut the body open?" Willow is repulsed and defensive at these reminders of physicality, as the audience was at the crack in Joyce's rib. Xander and



Willow's<sup>7</sup> rejection of the subject, the body itself, is not allowed to remain cushioned in denial, as Anya embodies all of their conflicting feelings in an emotional, uncontrolled, and confused outburst, "I knew her, and she's just a body. I don't understand how she can't just get back in it." Her voice cracks in the final word of her monologue, on "why," as directed by Whedon to show an innocence and lack of control (Robson). But this final question also gets at the root of the negative space, which is centered on an unanswerable question and a physical representation of an intangible idea.

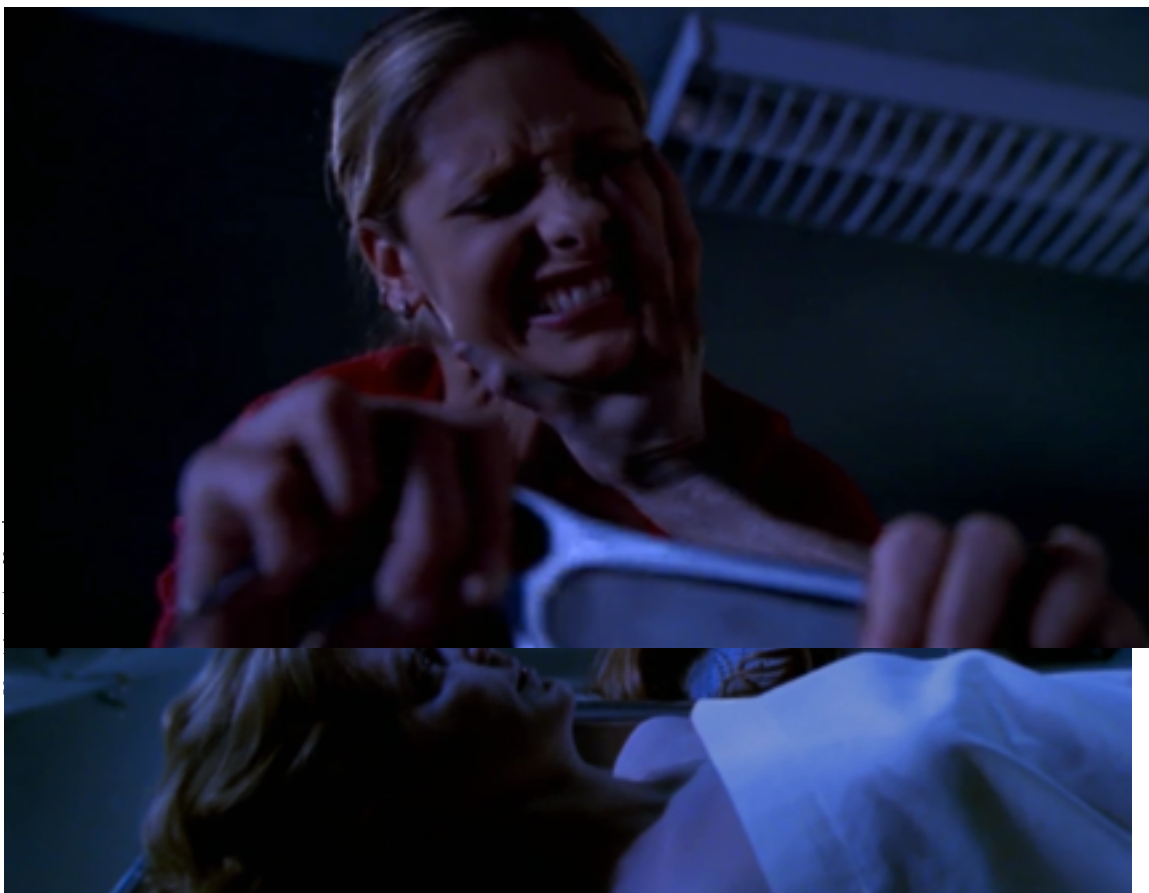
[14] The most debated and controversial scene of the episode is the inclusion of a vampire attack in the morgue. Stommel read the vampire as the embodiment of "the gruesome physicality of death" and found significance in the comparison of a body that can be dusted away as opposed to the solid physicality of Joyce (Stommel par. 19).

Wilcox analyzed the very nature of the vampire in comparison to natural loss. "As Buffy 'dusts' vampires, she holds off the fear of death," whereas natural death is insurmountable and requires no invitation to come into your home (Wilcox 187). Buffy's two fantasies in the episode attempt to fit Joyce's death into the context of her usual antagonist-centered Buffyverse, in which Buffy catches the "big-bad" (in this case,

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<sup>7</sup> Unrelated to negative space, other essays haven't mentioned the regression of these two characters to their original functions despite development since season 1. Xander attempts to take action, such as suggesting vengeance towards Glory, but is ultimately unable to *do* anything. This refers to his function in the trio highlighted in "Zeppo," a desire to help without the skill to do so. Willow forgets her newfound Wicca power and reverts to the adorably mild Willow. She puts up her fists at Xander, "Okay, let's go. Come on, you and me," joking in a high pitched cutesy voice. While embracing these childish actions, she laments over inability to grow up and a lack of grown-up clothes (highlighting a character trope especially prevalent in earlier seasons). Both mirror Buffy's regression in the face of death, "Mom. Mom. Mommy?" (Wilcox 178).

Joyce's headache) and saves the day (Lavery). But this is not enough in the new world of physicality created in the episode, in which Buffy can only react to natural forces. Even her usual success in surmounting the supernatural evil is not enough to cut through the negative space, which continues to focus on the body after the fight is won. Buffy can save Dawn from a vampire, but not the death of their mother. The inclusion of the vampire fight embodies Buffy's physical struggle with grief. The fight itself does not use the more graceful martial arts choreography of most episodes. Rather, she grapples and grunts on the floor; we are forced to see and hear her struggle.<sup>8</sup> The vampire's appearance is also the final reminder that the world turns on within the Buffyverse, despite the show's episodic refocus on Joyce's body. The inclusion of a vampire dusting fulfills the routine and expectation of the viewer in some small degree, as this is a constant element in the show, but is unable to redirect the characters' attentions. The grieving daughters end the scene in the foreground, framing their mother's body.



[15] The vampire is perhaps the only recognizable sign of normal narrative structure in an otherwise directionless episode. The usual episodic structure implodes and follows a narrative of chronological events with time lag and boredom. This represents an event the characters cannot combat, overcome, or resolve like a supernatural villain, but can only react to. The episode is a series of reactions as they ripple through negative space. The Scooby Gang (at this moment in time Willow, Xander, Anya, Giles, and Tara) attempt to find direction and purpose, elements of control usually at their disposal. They start with, “We should take over patrolling,” and settle on Xander’s immediate plan of action, “We’ll go. We’ll deal. We’ll help.” Anya’s inexperienced ignorance questions, “How will we help?” The following hospital scene answers her question: they can’t<sup>9</sup>. When the gang arrives at the hospital, they discover that they cannot help Buffy despite attempts to comfort her with words, embraces, and finally food and coffee. Just as Buffy’s fail-safe slaying of the vampire can’t resolve the episode, the Scooby Gang’s attempts at following a problem, solution, resolution structure is initiated but cannot be realized. This leaves the episode without a plot arch, but rather acts segregated by characters’ reactions.

[16] The impact on the audience of using negative space is created emotionally and through sensory deprivation. Serial television narrative has the ability to build prolonged

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<sup>9</sup> Possibly with the exception of Tara, but even this is an inversion of the usual Scooby Gang’s function. As they rally before the hospital, Willow and Xander are most eager to help, and most unable to do so upon arrival.

attachment between character and viewer, thus simulating death more closely than any other medium (Wilcox 176). By this time, audiences have known Joyce for five years and like a real life acquaintance, have stored memories of their favorite times with her<sup>10</sup> (Wilcox 177). Yet we are unable to interact with the sensory details within the episode: taste the food and wine in the flashback, feel the wind that knocks the chimes, smell the scent of the flowers in the opening. These senses and more are alluded to throughout the episode, despite the audience's inability to interact with them, holding viewers at a distance and within a non-sensory void. Take, for instance, the difference between Buffy's experience of Joyce's death and Dawn's. Buffy has the hand-to-hand interaction and experiences the physicality of the body; Dawn is deprived of this (Robson). She is taught about the theory of physicality in class and informed of her mother's physical death, but does not interact with it. Her attitude at the hospital is that of hostility and denial, which Buffy describes as, "She wouldn't believe me." The audience similarly cannot fully interact with the on-screen experience of death and likely feels a slight denial (this is a supernatural show, after all; surely they have to bring Joyce back.) While the medium can come closer than others, it cannot fully depict the fleshy experience of death. Rather the audience is given a character who parallels a non-physical experience; we are Dawn. As if we could reach out our hands in hopes of reaching the tangible cold skin of

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<sup>10</sup> Such as "School Hard" (B2003), Buffy must protect the school from Spike and his gang on parent teacher night. Joyce teams up with Buffy, takes charge of a room of parents, and usurps authority from Principle Snider (assuming the school is under attack by a teen gang.) In "Lovers Walk" (B3008) Joyce exerts her maternal role over Spike as he divulges the details of his breakup with Drusilla. We are given a touching scene over a cup of hot chocolate between a vulnerable Spike and a comforting Joyce giving him relationship advice with reference to her experiences with Buffy's father.

Joyce's corpse, the audience is suspended out of reach. Dawn simulates this reality as she reaches towards, but never makes physical contact with her mother's body. Fletcher discusses the term "telaesthesia," or the alleged perception of events that are beyond normal perceptual processes. The episode demands a level of clairvoyance from the audience to experience with and for characters, filling in sensual inferences with the



perception of their reality, though Fletcher refers to the term in context of a life between episodes (Fletcher par. 6).

[17] Another element of sensory deprivation

harnessed throughout the episode is the careful use of silence. The piece is stripped of its usual melodramatic score and plunges the audience into the discomfort of quiet. Gerry Bloustien's analysis categorizes four types of silences, three of which have immense impact on this episode: pauses and gaps in speech, wordless silence or lack of dialogue, and empty silence in which there is no sound. As in the comparison above of Jenny Calendar and Joyce's deaths, the impact of absent sound is apparent when compared to the function of score. Opera music and sirens surround Jenny's death, performing a function and cushion summarized by Bloustein, "when reality under the flimsy veil of containment threatens to become too overt, then the noise has to become greater and metaphor needs to become excessive to drown out the fear" (101). While score can be used in horror and

melodrama to intensify suspense or emotion, it simultaneously divorces the scene from reality, as if reminding the viewer of its artfulness rather than its actuality. A guiding tool, score leads the viewer smoothly through a piece by informing them of the appropriate emotions, from love themes to the anticipation of danger. When Buffy discovers her mother's body, the audience is abandoned by this guide and is forced to struggle with his or her own feelings, stripping "the audience's sense of privileged observer" (Bloustein 106). The result is an emotional negative space, filled by the viewer's interpretation and reaction. The removal of non-diegetic sound and failure in dialogue, such as Buffy's inability to communicate when Giles arrives at the house, creates a "powerful negative presence" (Bloustein 96). Language, especially associated with Giles, is a force of the rational and scientific, or the incantation of magic and spells– all forces of agency. But when language fails, so does the ability to express, understand, work through, or overcome. Silence encompasses powerlessness. Therefore the ultimate, unanswerable issue of natural death is "represented most poignantly in the series not through noise and music but through the gaps and silences," which further the creation of void, emptiness, and negative space in "The Body" (Bloustien 92).

[18] The physicality of the body is highlighted and mirrored in aspects of the living characters. It is portrayed as both grotesque and glorious, as physical as the bodily need to vomit or pee (Dawn in the hospital), and yet proof of life. The contrast between "she's cold" and "it hurts" embodies the physical difference between life and death. Xander's ability to put his hand through a wall results in a display of pulsing blood and pain.

Within this collective proof of physicality in life is Willow



and Tara's first on-screen kiss. Whedon strongly advocated for its inclusion, even threatening to walk off set without it (Robson). Before this episode, and even in the flashback with reference to belly rubbing, their physical relationship was inferred with innuendo. The importance of physicality in the episode required a compensating display of physical comfort between the two girls. This is another example of shifting priorities in the Buffyverse, which could afford to play their relationship in the wings in prior episodes but required its full embodiment in the presence of tragedy. The above examples are largely created in two ways, visually and structurally. Visual representations of negative space are prevalent in the actual composition of shots, which isolate subjects, lack focus, or display physicality. The structural creation is within the writing, such as the episode's implosion of plot direction and its narrative refocus on the Scooby Gang as a reaction to a greater subject.

[19] After this episode, the orbit of the Buffyverse never returns to its original center. The body is replaced with the ideas that it embodies as the focal center of the show – death, its meaning and significance. “The Body” raises questions that the rest of the series struggles to answer, such as, “Is there a heaven?” or, as Anya suggests, “Why can't you just bring mortals back?” These are questions that must be confronted in the very next

episode as Dawn attempts to bring Joyce back to life<sup>11</sup> and again in season 6 with Buffy's death and revival. Season 6 in total faces life itself as the big bad. Joyce's body also symbolizes the maternal role; a missing maternal figure that creates a void which Buffy, Tara, and Giles will struggle to compensate for as replacement homemakers. Though the show regains its episodic structure and returns to goal-oriented plots to beat the evil villain, the ultimate realization of natural death lingers on. Critic Mikeangelo Marinaro marks the episode as a series-changer, resulting in a darker and more complex show (Marinaro par. 3). The death of a foundational character forces the teens to grow up, and the show along with them. An honest, authentic, even difficult portrayal of death, that Wilcox refers to as "realism," not only impacts the audience immediately, but challenges the audience with contemplations on death itself. Taking on this challenge, an audience can be positively impacted and ultimately grow from the viewing experience, just as the characters do. The episode's final dialogue is exchanged between Buffy and Dawn, "She's gone," followed by, "Where did she go?" The intangibility of the experience for Dawn and viewers

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<sup>11</sup> This episode is crucial to put audiences' expectations and denial to bed. Given a supernatural, magic-ridden world, the show must prove Joyce's death as irreparable ( *Forever* (B5017)). The nature of her medical death makes resurrection impossible, but the show also stresses the consequences of disturbing death with Buffy's difficult and demon infused resurrection ( *Afterlife* (B6008)).





extends the tension of this emotional negative space into the irresolute void of a dark screen after a cut to black. In the words of Whedon's own commentary, "We want to touch it, but there's nothing there... There is no resolve, no resolution, there's no ending, there's no lesson, there's just death" (Robson).

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