

Drugs and Open Spaces: Traces of Solitude in *Breaking Bad*

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The television series *Breaking Bad* figures as one of the most successful shows of the last years. Located and shot in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the series' five seasons, evolving around the teacher Walter White, offer a study of the dynamics between society and hermit cultures. Suffering inoperably from lung cancer, the chemistry teacher Walter White, whose name points to the poet Walt Whitman, illegally starts cooking crystal meth in order to finance his illness and provide for his family after his predicted death.

Starting from scratch in his provisional laboratory in a van up to his professional high tech lab, he has been cooking his drugs in the desert. Through becoming a drug dealer an additional dimension is brought to his life, which revolves around his secret or hermit life in the desert. Walter White's second and clandestine career in drug dealing can be read as a dark parody on the "artistic and creative potentials of reclusiveness, the spiritual promises of exile". The series plays with the conceptual differences between social and hermit life, associating hermit life as criminal life and at the same time voices criminal life as unescapable consequence of the shortcomings of American society, which cannot provide an adequate care for the members of its middle classes.

Following the intertextual reference to Walt Whitman the show alludes to the concept of drug use and deeper knowledge, as it has been formulated in the context of the Beatnik movement. As in religious contexts the hermit embodied true visions and the knowledge of God, true vision in *Breaking Bad* is brought about in the context of drugs and criminality. In the long narration the hermit Walter inevitably turns into a criminal.