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## **Abstract**

This article explores emerging intersections between the consumption of mediated popular culture and the real and imagined topographies within which those representations are framed. Through an examination of the ‘televisual tourism’ centred around the successful TV series *Breaking Bad*, we scrutinise the multiple modes of sensorial and embodied travel experience enjoyed by fans of the show as they consume their way around the show’s sites, scenes, and tastes in the city of Albuquerque . This exploitation of media textuality through fan tourism is, we suggest, centred upon a carefully managed commodification of crime, criminality and transgression.

**Keywords:** consumption; crime; drugs; fan cultures; landscape; masculinity; media-induced tourism

## **Introduction**

The suggestion that tourist consumption is organised from a single industry is as established as conceptions of a 'tourist system', the coordination of which may remain dependent on its plural industrial poles – of airports, hotels, amusement venues and more (Jafari 1987). Tourism theory has explored the rationale of 'consuming places' : indeed, due to its identification as a source of authenticity, place is always incorporated into global knowledge economies that package and market it in intelligible formats (Urry 1995; Sheller 2003). Of particular importance in organisations of knowledge about tourist destinations has been the production of groups of 'signs' that brand and circulate images and narratives of place, creating 'imaginative geographies' (Urry and Larsen 2011, 116). In hybrid industries that thrive on a convergence of interests such as those of cinematic tourism or film-induced tourism, the arrangement of signs is necessary for place marking and marketing as a tourist destination (Beeton 2005; Edensor 2005). Framed around the story of the movie, its heroes' characters or even its musical soundtrack, such specialised tourism sustains a 'sign industry' that can turn largely unknown locales into independent tourist hubs (Iwashita 2008; Tzanelli 2007/2010, 18). Regardless of declining cinema attendance and corresponding increases in TV viewing (Page and Connell 2010), increasingly more sophisticated joint initiatives between destination marketing organisations and filmmakers organise hospitality in filmed locations for crews and provide tax-relief incentives for media industries (Christopherson and Rightor 2010). Not only do such synergies promote organized tours to filmed locations, making some places popular, they may change the demand for tourist activities or even promote infrastructural development for new tourist performances in new film-tourism destinations (Buchmann 2006; Reijnders

2011). Such marketed activities attain the nature of pilgrimage, which, in the case of televised drama, constantly draws viewers back to the original pilgrimage sites and creates long-lasting cultural and economic legacies (Couldry 2000; Beeton 2005).

The present paper examines such a convergence of film and tourism in the globally popular TV series *Breaking Bad* (2008-13). The case presents tourist and consumption studies with an interesting twist due to the series' focus on drug crime – a theme that would normally condemn filmed locales to criticism and oblivion. On the one hand, tourism theory stresses that place is recreated through the cinematic story rather than the objective features of landscape imagery (Frost 2010). On the other, film genre theory focusing on crime attests that there is ample business opportunity in crime and violence (Tudor 1989; Tzanelli 2013, chapter 3), so our task is to explain how this fascination links the TV series to tourism. The paper does not provide an empirical study of tourist experiences and performances of the series, but an alternative conceptual and theoretical discourse on the rationale of its tourist industry (Connell 2012, 1008). We argue for a contextualisation of the role of film tourism within cultural and media studies, suggesting that tourism theory alone cannot do the job of other fields such as those of popular culture or the sociology of deviance and crime (Ryan et.al. 2009); nor can it promote cross-disciplinary methodological fertilisation (Beeton 2010, 5). Originally a sleeper hit, the series attained an ever-growing pool of global fans, and it went on to attain record-breaking ratings (Hibberd 2013) Launched on January 2008 in the United States and Canada on the cable network AMC, by the end of the final season, it had won various awards, including ten Primetime Emmy Awards, three consecutive wins for Best Actor for Bryan Cranston (playing its principal character), two wins for Best

Supporting Actor for Paul Aaron (his collaborator in crime) and a Best Supporting Actress win for Anna Gunn (featuring in the series as Cranston's wife). In addition it was nominated for a Golden Globe Award for Best Television Series – Drama.

Cranston was nominated three times for Best Actor and four times for a Screen Actors Guild Award for Best Actor, winning once at the 19th Screen Actors Guild Awards. In 2013, the Writers Guild of America named *Breaking Bad* the 13th best-written TV series of all time (Deadline Hollywood, 2 June 2013).

In order to grasp the attraction of *Breaking Bad* for tourist consumers, we must briefly review the plot, crime content and characterisation of the show. The show focuses upon the travails of Walter White (Cranston), a high school chemistry teacher living with his family in Albuquerque, New Mexico. At the start of the narrative, a frustrated Walter dutifully performs his job in the face of indifferent students, while the family struggles financially on his modest income, supplemented by his wife Skyler's (Gunn) earnings as a part-time bookkeeper. The responsibility for looking after their teenaged son Walter Junior (R.J. Mitte) who has cerebral palsy is intensified when Skyler finds she is pregnant. At this point, Walter is diagnosed with inoperable and apparently terminal lung cancer, and faces a terrible dilemma: paying for cancer treatment will bankrupt the family and leave them in penury – yet foregoing treatment will destroy any chance of surviving the disease. In desperate straits, Walt uses his expertise in chemistry to enter a new line of business – the production of methamphetamine or 'crystal meth'. He teams-up with his former student Jesse Pinkman (Paul) who is now a low-level drug dealer and user, living an aimless and dissolute life. Between Walt's brilliance as a chemist, and Jesse's contacts amongst drug users, they launch a successful enterprise.

Soon, their product ('blue meth', named after its distinctive colour) is being hailed as the best and purest 'product' ever seen. Over the course of the show's span, we see Walt forced to go ever deeper into criminal activity (including multiple murders, arson, and poisoning a child) in order to protect his business, his freedom, his family and the sometimes hapless Jesse. Under the alias of 'Heisenberg', he becomes a ruthless and powerful force in the international drug trade, working alongside drug impresario Gustavo Fring (Giancarlo Esposito), who runs a cross-border distribution empire from behind the front of a fast-food chicken franchise, Los Pollos Hermanos ('The Chicken Brothers'). Meanwhile, Walt's family remain oblivious to his double life (including his brother-in-law Hank (Dean Norris), a Drugs Enforcement Agency officer, who himself becomes increasingly obsessive in his pursuit of the mysterious 'Heisenberg'). The confluence of the crime (producing and dealing in 'crystal meth') and the protagonist (a respectable, middle-class family man-turned-master criminal) furnish the basis of audience fascination, and consequently the tourist industry that has emerged around the show.

### **Consuming social (extra-) ordinariness: on anomie and crime**

The show's focus upon the production and distribution of 'crystal meth' draws upon the cultural notoriety that the drug has acquired over recent years. The major attraction of *Breaking Bad* lies, we suggest, in its portrayal of white middle class masculinity in contemporary America during the global economic recession. D'Andrea's (2004) argument that mobility and marginality provide ideal conditions for transgressive experiences might work in this instance at the fantastic level, as a libidinal economy for *Breaking Bad* audiences, once affluent social groups who now experience adverse

lifestyle changes. Walter serves as the archetype of this identity, and his travails appeal to audiences because of the way they articulate experiences of unfairness, marginalisation, and frustration. Walter is the hard-working, responsible, law-abiding American who finds his contribution to society ignored, and when he needs support and recognition the most, he finds himself forgotten in a country that seems to place little value on men like him (the issue of ill-health is especially resonant, as medical bills are held to be the most frequent cause of bankruptcies in the US – reaching some 2 million in 2013 alone – Mangan 2013). The notion of a white middle class masculinity ‘pushed to breaking point’ by socio-cultural change has featured repeatedly in American popular culture – for example, the 1993 film *Falling Down* depicts a middle-aged unemployed engineer who ‘cracks’ under the pressure of his frustrations and goes on a violent rampage across Los Angeles (Prince 2000). Likewise, Walter White offers a point of identification for the audience’s resentments at ‘the system’, and his growing resume of violent crimes is contextualised through an appeal to values such as family, responsibility, loyalty and above all ‘getting what’s due’ to a ‘model citizen’ (the evocation of familial loyalty as a motivation and justification for crime recuperates popular themes in the representation of the Italian-American Mafioso, apparent in films such as the *Godfather* series – Hess 1975). In sociological terms, Walter is the ‘innovator’ who responds to anomie by turning to crime – his attempts to live the ‘American Dream’ by playing fair have been sabotaged so he turns instead to crime to secure a ‘good life’ for his family (Merton 1938). This depiction makes Walter available as an ‘anti-hero’ for whom audiences can ‘root’, rather than the conventionally villainous ‘drug lord’ of Hollywood - typically represented as either a Black inner city ‘gangsta’ or a Latin American cartel boss (Boyd 2002). The consumption and



enjoyment of *Breaking Bad* is inextricably tied to the possibilities that Walter White offers for middle-class white America to vicariously release its frustrations – one Albuquerque newspaper (the Albuquerque Journal) even went so far as to publish an ‘obituary’ for the fictional Walter, concluding with the words ‘he will be greatly missed’ (Huffpost 2013).

*Breaking Bad*’s most notable impact has been the emergence of a budding cultural industry capitalising on the series’ ethnographic exposition of some ordinary human characters. More specifically, the centrality of Walter’s moral ‘fall’ associates the series with both criminological and tourist understandings of anomie in terms of the human subject’s re- location outside acceptable boundaries and norms that define everyday life. We should briefly reflect here upon the seeming perversity of consumption experiences that find pleasure in crime, death and murder as these frame *Breaking Bad*’s hybrid sign industry. Far from being a fetish consigned to the morbid few, the very popularity of crime in its various cultural incarnations points to a widespread (if not universal) appeal of such experiences. Of course, myriad psychological, psychoanalytic and sociological explanations might be mobilised to account for such interests. From our sociologically-informed standpoint, we should note two strands of thinking that bear centrally on this question. Firstly, following classical Durkheimian theory, it can be suggested that the ‘spectacle’ of crime serves a valuable social function in that its confrontation and condemnation activates conventional norms and moral sentiments and in doing so helps sustain the ‘collective consciousness’ of the social group (Durkheim 1982, 99-101). In a society where the incidence of murder and violent crime has followed a long-term historical trend of decline (Elias 2000; Spierenburg 2008), we might view the public

fascination instead with the cultural representation, simulation and staging of such offences as an ersatz opportunity for the activation of moral norms in the terms set-out by Durkheim.

However, such explanations are not entirely adequate in the face of the popular enjoyment of crime, precisely because so much of the pleasure taken in it is oriented not to condemnation but to celebration of offenders (spanning the kinds of serial killer enthusiasts and ‘murderabilia’ collectors explored by Jarvis (2007), to the public appetite for autobiographies of ‘celebrated criminals’ examined by Penfold-Mounce (2010). Additionally, the *Breaking Bad* tourist fascination does not present the first instance whereby crime and adventure facilitate the emergence of tourist consumption tied to performances of an imagined masculinity: as Reijnders’ (2010) ethnography of James Bond tourism has shown, cinematic tourists enter the world of Bond through visits to filmed locales because they are afforded the opportunity to perform an imagined masculinity. And although Bond is on the right side of law, his methods are no less criminal and violent. Consequently, we must acknowledge the complex and ambivalent character of our cultural responses to crime: the offender is both an object of vilification and the subject of identification for an audience that takes vicarious pleasure in what Katz (1988) calls ‘seductions of crime’, the joy and existential thrill of transgression and rule-breaking. We suggest that the pleasure afforded by touristic consumption of *Breaking Bad* is closely tied to how show represents both the crimes (primarily those associated with the production of ‘crystal meth’) and crucially the criminal (Walter White).

As offshoot of individual status enhancement, tourist mobility is mostly based on authorised transgression (Dann 1977), which clashes with ego-enhancing profit-making by illicit means. However, *Breaking Bad* successfully bridges this polar opposition to explain Walter's moral descent on the basis of a constantly denied social (and economic) recognition of his worth. Watching on screen, and now immersing themselves into Walter's shady business via visits to his work and family environs allows fans to be publicly accredited tourists, safe and legally protected 'witnesses' of a life hidden behind conspiracy and crime. Cohen (1996), who suggested a phenomenological typology of tourist experiences rooted in the concept of the 'centre', the cosmological point at which heaven, earth and hell meet, nicely sketches both the experimental properties of contemporary risk-free *Breaking Bad* tourism and fan consumption, and the infernal character of its criminal protagonists. *Breaking Bad's* 'experimental' mode of tourism suggests the presence of alternative hedonist consumptions that transcend neat classifications between 'good' and 'evil' – not just because they are harmless as mere simulations of a TV story but also because the story's characters are easily identified as struggling Everymen.

The ensuing anti-hero worship has transformed the principal filming locales in Albuquerque, New Mexico, into tourist attractions, prompting the city's Tourist Bureau to advertise *Breaking Bad* tours on its website (under the umbrella of 'film tourism' that also includes other recent production shot in the city - Visit Albuquerque 2014), and local business associated with the series to brand and market various *Breaking Bad* products accordingly. As Dredge and Jamal (2013) aptly explain, there is no way one can fix the factors that contribute to sustainable film-induced tourism in today's hyper-

neoliberal destinations, and Albuquerque's rise from a postcolonial migration town to a cinematic technological node in the region overflowed with human artistic and professional mobilities is a case in point. Once known mainly for its annual International Balloon Fiesta and a swastika-decorated movie theatre, today Albuquerque boasts that it has attracted Bryan Cranston and Aaron Paul to buy homes (Grout, 8 May 2013; Gray Faust, 1 August 2013). Significantly, the Albuquerque Journal (17 July 2011) celebrates the series' success by highlighting the involvement of some of its principal actors (Bryan Cranston, Giancarlo Esposito) in community politics, local charity events and other activities that advertise the presence of urban solidarity (see also Albuquerque Convention & Visitor's Bureau 2013).

And there is more: as much as it has been noted that unemployment, crystal meth and murder are 'a tough sell for a tourist board' (Shotlist.com, undated), the very assemblage of fictional *Breaking Bad* mobilities (drug trafficking, driving across borders to 'cook' or the various characters' experiential meth journeys) spoke the language of experimental tourism that we associate with 'New Age' travellers (D'Andrea 2004 and 2006). As Dann (1996) explains, tourist industries are framed around specific cultural tropes enabling the tourist to 'buy' their products, which may be both tangible and intangible. Ideas and souvenirs are thus enmeshed into filmed landscapes and architecture with apparent ease to produce ideal types of tourist and traveller (Urry and Larsen 2011,24-5). This para-linguistic framework produces a sign industry that gives new tourist meaning to banal locales and practices in Albuquerque when these are performed by *Breaking Bad* fans. In reality there is nothing 'apparent' in such processes of commodification that enable the production of global brands such as

that of Breaking Bad. Liberated from the burden of stores and product manufacturing, such brands 'are free to soar, less as the dissemination of goods and services than as collective hallucinations' (Klein 2000, 21-2). This does not mean that Breaking Bad is not embedded in ideas of place and its industries but that its ideas and cosmologies can be universalised and streamlined into deterritorialised fan communities who can live the 'bad' life for a day before returning to their everyday routines. Hence, although we explore tourist performances on location, we cannot ignore the role of new media in their global dissemination or the importance of the Internet in our own research into a global Breaking Bad industry.

### **Methodology and epistemology**

Because Breaking Bad centres on an assemblage of mobilities (from doing science to selling and tasting it) our study invites the employment of mobile methodologies to address the impact of socio-cultural (de-)territorialisation on fan communities and practices (Hannam 2008; Hall 2008). We examine how the cosmological structure of Breaking Bad itineraries and consumption rituals is packaged and marketed to global TV fans-come-tourists by Albuquerque's businesses and tourist administration. In order to scrutinise the production of locally orchestrated and officially sanctioned public presentation of the series' consumer-tourist impact, materials were collected from Albuquerque's Convention & Visitors' Bureau official site. This site works today as a node in which materials on Breaking Bad consumption modes converge and are stored. Additional press and Internet data was selected for its compatibility or explicit connection to Albuquerque's self-presentation as a global televisual tourist destination. Following Dredge and Jamal's (2013, 561) reflections on new visions of community in

sustainable tourist business, we note that the idea of a uniform locality or a so-called ‘community consensus’ might distract from ‘the intense complexity or micro-politics that all sides are inevitably imbricated within and shaped by’ (Meethan 2001, 61) but abstain from delving into any local politics.

Instead we note that televisual fan communities can be ‘staged’ with the help of new media technologies (Tzanelli 2007/2010, 17) before or after their independent development through performances of media texts (Hills 2002, 144). There are intersections and disjunctions between televisual and tourist imaginaries we explore as discursive tropes – or rather, the ways such discourses are interpreted and marketed by various agents virtually and terrestrially (D’Andrea 2006, 114-5). The internet as a medium absorbs and recreates itself through hyperlinked content, breaking this up into ‘searchable chunks’ while also surrounding itself ‘with various other media it has absorbed’ (Carr 2010, 91; Adams 2006, 33; Anastasiou and Schäler 2010). Considering that web texts have an intertextual and hyperlinked nature (Mitra and Cohen 1999), we focus on the ways *Breaking Bad*’s anti-heroes produce anodyne consumer and tourist rituals in filmed sites and through ‘bad’ souvenirs addressed to tourist senses (candies or bath salts). As internet tourists ourselves we acknowledge the potency of gender stereotyping in consumption rituals and cinematic tourist pilgrimages. Though not focusing on gendered representations, we note that the series’ arc constructs a masculine gaze which is nevertheless feminised through shopping rituals and tourist pilgrimages in Albuquerque and on the web (Friedberg 1995; Mulvey 2006). This gendered play of (dis-)embodied mobilities matches the global criticism of *Breaking Bad* consumption as ‘socially risky’, irresponsible and shameful – tropes that remain traditionally gendered

and correspond to Walter's move from disempowerment to illicit control and high status in criminal networks. To examine the nature of the *Breaking Bad* industry the following section unpacks the emergence of Albuquerque as a televisual tourist destination and the third part explores such advertised rituals and consumption practices.

### **Guilty cinematic locations and the aesthetics of crime**

Place and cultural narrative are closely connected. Several scholars have explained that both individuals and social groups connect (auto-) biographical story-telling to landscapes so as to consolidate socio-cultural identities. Uses of landscape in cinema and film-induced tourism are significant in analyses of cinematic or film-induced tourism (Connell 2012). As instant identifiers or promoters of cultural specificity, landscapes may crystallise the essence of televisual narratives. We may indeed talk about cultural 'topophilia' (Tuan 1974) or love of place in its various narrative forms. Topophilic rites promoting rural innocence reach their digital apogee in the enclaves of postmodernity: global cities (Sassen 2001). In contemporary televisual tourist contexts the city acts as repository of phantasmagorical images, readily available to global flâneurs and tourist visitors for inspection, consumption and reinvention in personal narratives.

The explosion of tourism-inducing urban filmographies is closely connected to post-modern adulations of contemporary 'speed cultures' including those of the specialised (televisual) tour (Savelli 2009, 151). Albuquerque's media staging as a city that is both intimidatingly grand and comfortingly communal, 'where small towns find themselves

neighbouring seas of desert and the looming shadows of the mountainous teeth' (Kelly, 10 August 2013), participates in *Breaking Bad*'s topophilic marketing. Originally scripted for California, the series' relocation to Albuquerque's desert landscape convinced its creator Vince Gilligan that the place would develop into a character in a show resembling a modern-day Western (Albuquerque Convention & Visitor's Bureau, 2013). 'All the wonderful topographical and geographical elements, we put to good use', he explained, stressing the significance of the dramatic clouds, 'which you don't see in the blank blue skies of Southern California'. The interview advertised the city's 'stealth charm' and stark beauty, with the Sandias, the mountains to the east, as a centrepiece (Brennan, 6 August 2013).

Topophilic art means business: the economic effect of the show has been such that new legislation (known as the *Breaking Bad* bill) was passed to provide tax breaks to productions filming in New Mexico – an initiative harmonised with the Albuquerque Film Office's decision in 2002 to offer tax incentives to film industries (Gray Faust, 1 August 2013). Albuquerque studios figure today amongst the most attractive filming destinations with a record of hosting series such as *In Plain Sight* and blockbusters such as *Avengers Assemble*, *Transformers* and the recent *Lone Ranger* (Shortlist.com 2013). It is therefore unsurprising that sites advertising Albuquerque tourism insert the city into a global urban network directed by America's media centres: close enough to one of the foremost digital hubs, Los Angeles, Albuquerque is already well connected. In addition, a late October exhibition by the Museum of the Moving Image in New York featured an exhibit entitled 'From Mr. Chips to Scarface: Walter White's Transformation in



*Breaking Bad*', further proving the same point (Gray Faust, 1 August 2013). This is not an insignificant town but a glamorous node in America's cultural network.

And yet, defining a city's iconicity on the basis of drug trafficking is at best risky. The fact that *Breaking Bad*'s staging in Albuquerque came dangerously close to *The Wire*'s depiction of Baltimore as the city of crack presented local administration with a challenge. As a representative of the local Tourist Board noted, the fear was that all this grimness 'would put people off...I mean, you know, it was still a show about drugs' (Kelly, 10 August 2013). Albuquerque mayor Richard Berry ameliorates anticipated criticism by flagging the city's recent drop in serious crime rates: 'I'm confident viewers have no difficulty distinguishing fiction from reality', he says (Gray Faust, 1 August 2013). The fear was not merely about associations of the city with drug trafficking but also with the endless trail of crimes committed in their name.

The relationship between crime, landscape and the media spans several decades. Prominent amongst the early offerings of British mass culture were the 'penny dreadfuls', cheap publications that serialised lurid and sensational stories about banditry, theft and murder, often inspired by notorious real-life characters such as Jack the Ripper, Ned Kelly, and Charles Peace (Springhall 1988). In The USA, similar 'dime novels' and 'pulp fictions' became a staple of popular consumption, serving up a heady brew of sex, crime and violence (Denning 1986). Crime narratives went on to feature in 20th-century popular culture in the form of novels, comic books, movies and television shows (Carrabine 2008, 106-118; Yar 2010, 2013). Moreover, as Jarvis (2007, 327) notes, consumption of mass media representation of crime is now supplemented by a

burgeoning industry of ‘murderabilia’, spanning art, T-shirts, calendars, trading cards, board games, and action figures centred on notorious real-life killers. Inspired by the avant-garde filmmaker Kenneth Anger’s book *Hollywood Babylon* (1959) (which detailed murders, suicides and grisly accidental deaths involving famous stars), in the 1980s the likes of Grave Line Tours began offering guided trips around Hollywood in a vintage hearse, stopping to view the sites at which the famous met their untimely and undignified ends (Besten 2000).

A notable feature of such tours is the interweaving of sight-seeing that involves both fictional and factual crimes; one of *Grave Line*’s successors, Oh Heavenly Tour, included within its itinerary the sites associated with actual deaths alongside settings where fictional crimes were filmed in movies such as *Halloween* and *L.A. Confidential*. A more recent iteration of the same type of guided tour, Dearly Departed: The Tragical History Tour of Los Angeles, ‘unravels some of the most gruesome and notorious cases that made headlines, and takes a look at where these events actually unfolded’ (dearlydepartedtours.com 2013). Other tour operators likewise ‘seamlessly combine the sites of real crimes and movie locations’, such as the Sopranos Tour of New York and New Jersey (Sacco and Horton 2013), and the Untouchables Tour of Chicago (Gangster Tour undated). Other couplings of crime and tourism include the conversion of penitentiaries into visitor attractions and even hotels (as with the HI Ottawa Jail Hostel, formerly the Carlton County Gaol – ‘steeped in history and built on fun, we guarantee that you’ll agree that the Jail is the best place to Hang!’ – hihostels.com 2013). The kinds of tourist experience (of sights, locations, goods and services) we explore in this article, centred around the TV series, can thus be placed within this wider span of

crime-related travel and consumption that has grown notably in recent decades (see for example Klein 1998; Gibson 2006; Wilbert and Hanson 2009).

Crime enhances topophilia, producing a unique aesthetics we often associate with European tours to sites ready to be visually consumed (Urry 1995; Tzanelli 2013). As explored in Reijnders' (2009) exposition of Dutch writer Armando's writings, landscapes riddled with horrific crimes harbour a feeling of guilt. It is precisely this lingering feeling that underscores the fascination of *Breaking Bad* fans, who turn tourists of the cinematic Albuquerque. Reijnders borrows from the buoyant literature on 'thanatotourism' or 'dark tourism' to re-interpret Armando's (1998 in Reijnders 2009, 175) conception of 'guilty landscapes'. Armando grew up in a Police Transit Camp and had opportunity to reflect on the clash between the locality's tourism-inducing landscapes and the war crimes committed in the local concentration camp. Generally, thanatotourism focuses on human visits to locations wholly or partially motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death (Foley and Lennon 2000). The consumerist desire to visit and consume the exotic essence of such sites reinvents them as tourist and media-ethnographic topographies (Cohen 1995). Dann and Seaton (2001) note that slavery as 'dissonant heritage' has left its mark on tourism across the world. The Freudian couple of eros and thanatos, the collective social drive to death that underlines most of this scholarship, nicely complements the consumerist drive of *Breaking Bad* tourism.

But we would claim that the *Breaking Bad* consumer drive does not sustain thanatotourism's historic links. Unlike Reijnders, we identify the allure of *Breaking*

Bad's Albuquerque in the male heroes' overall ethos or social habitus. Especially Walter's double life (as a loving father and teacher/polymath on the one hand and a ruthless drug lord on the other) has been explicitly identified with Albuquerque as a cinematic site. His firm association with a deadly trade might serve as link to an alternative type of tourism. Commonly known as 'drug tourism', this counter-cultural trend stresses the inner, experiential dimensions of travel, which are enhanced by hallucinatory substances. Hallucination is etymologically connected to the act of wandering like a vagabond and the need to satisfy one's need for purpose in life. Walter and Jesse are neither tourists nor vagabonds in the traditional sense but producers of substances that allow new tourist industries such as that of *Breaking Bad* to interpellate a new ideal type of tourist: an *alítis* or privileged vagabond. This ideal type of tourist etymologically derives from *aláomai* (to wander (Vardiabasis 2002)), and calls into being a Simmelian peripatetic stranger in Albuquerque's guilty urban lifeworlds, who is in search for new stimuli through 'photographic' elicitations of memory (Wolff/Simmel 1959). Incidentally, the series' final season concludes with White's memorial travels back in time, before his crimes dissolved his family and he became a true criminal outcast.

Dubbed America's 'high desert Hollywood', Albuquerque is packaged today even in 'two-night getaways at \$500 including airfare' lodging at Parq Central (a former mental hospital featured in the show) and some better-known filmed sites (Jones, 27 July 2013). The BaD Tour, which is run by Jesse Heron and Mike Silva of the Albuquerque Trolley Company, is described as 'a 3.5 hour open-air joyride'. The tour featured in *USA Today*, *People* magazine, *The LA Times*, *The Huffington Post* and is sponsored by

Albuquerque's own Back Alley Draft House, a popular local brewery. It covers 38 miles and 13 main locations from the series, including the exteriors of Walter, Jesse, and Gus' houses, the car wash and laundry facilities that act as the meth-maker's storefronts, Tuco's headquarters, the Crossroads Motel, and the infamous railroad tracks. A complimentary drink is provided during a stop at Twisters Grill, the restaurant that doubles as Los Pollos Hermanos on the show (Conforti 2013). When the tour is fully booked, an alternative is provided that combines visits to some Breaking Bad locations with cultural sightseeing. The 85-minute long 'Best of ABQ City Tour' features a peek at Jesse's house and Hank's DEA office during a trip through Historic Old Town, Museum Row, Nob Hill, the University of New Mexico, the historic Barelás neighbourhood, and along Historic Route 66. This itinerary capitalises on the city's long road to colonisation, migration and successive gentrification, suggesting to visitors a different 'bad' process of inscription, erasure and re-inscription of ethnic memories and human mobilities – a convergence of ethnoscapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes (Appadurai 1990). The blended option better enmeshes the series' story into Albuquerque's real biography, producing a marketable urban palimpsest: as Huyssen (2003) reminds us, 'many of the mass-marketed memories we consume are "imagined memories" to begin with, and thus more easily forgettable'.

Combined use of clips and music from the series contributes to this safe hallucinatory tourist adventure. As D'Andrea (2006, 106) notes in the case of global countercultural journeys (Ibiza, Goa, Bali, Ko Pangnan, Bahia, Byron Bay, Pune, Marrakech etc.), DJs describe their task as 'taking the crowd on a journey', whereas the tourists' psychedelic experiences are described as 'intergalactic journeys' inducing self-transformation (D'Andrea 2004). Again, their hallucinogenic musical travels refer to the ancient Greek

‘hallucinogen’ as ‘wandering practice’. Little attention is paid to the fact that Albuquerque tours are organised by trusted operators, as the aim is to sustain the illusion of demediation, the idea that nothing mediates between experience and reality ‘out there’ (Strain 2003): tourists are supposed to be on a dangerous adventure at all times. We would also add that constant distancing from the televisual heroes’ evil core partakes in traditional differentiations between ‘authentic’ travel and ‘inauthentic’ mass tourism experience: McCabe’s (2005) emic approach to authenticity prioritises the experiential dimension of vacationing that can be ‘valid and fulfilling, no matter how “superficial” it may seem to the social scientist’ (Gottlieb 1982, 167). This is reiterated in online testimonies of the BaD tour, which may be pre-packaged but can still be constantly re-drafted by individual visitors.

Such tourist hermeneutics centre on the potential of performances in *Breaking Bad*’s guilty landscapes, whose evident banality does not affect their cinematic value.

Individual performances of landscapes have become sine qua non in touring, especially where photographing places is involved (Bærenholdt et.al. 2004). Instead of stressing the banality of such encapsulations of the everyday, tourist photographs of *Breaking Bad* locations enhance the sense of media pilgrimage, adding to the conviction of visitors (Kelly, 10 August 2013) that they partake in extra-ordinary rituals (Couldry 2000; Haldrup and Larsen 2010; Tzanelli 2013). As artist Grayson Perry said in this context, ‘television is now our literature, the tour is like a walk around the pages of your favourite book’ (Kelly, 10 August 2013). Clever tourist marketing by the city’s official representatives has included the incorporation of the series into Albuquerque Museum of Art and History exhibits (Dibdin, 31 May 2013). Framed *Breaking Bad* posters and

stills promote a story about drugs as tourist art that can only be consumed by knowledgeable, ‘aesthetically reflexive’ agents rather than visitors suffering from lack of conspicuous consumption skills (Giddens 1994; Beck 2002; Norris 2013, 3.2).

The Breaking Bad industry also enables convergences between mind-walking through cinematic narrative and terrestrial travel promoting alternative hedonist consumption and countering the ‘dictatorship’ of drug speed (Virilio 2006; Ingold 2010). The Biking Bad Tour proffers a philosophy of ‘slow travel’ that might even allow ‘bad’ cyclists to be ‘good’ and enjoy landscape away from the strains of postmodern consumerist imperatives (Rojek 2010; Fullagar 2012, 99-101). The ‘Guided Biking Bad Tours’ showcase ‘vivid southwestern landscapes of [the] city (and the show)...in stunning detail from the comfortable seats of our unique bicycles’. They market ‘intimate’ and ‘interactive’ engagement with the filmed locations with the help of professional tour guides through ‘character montage detailing one of our five distinct tour routes, each with a unique perspective and sequence of locations to be explored’ (Routes – Rentals & Tours 2013). Merging ‘dangerous’ media pilgrimage with the aesthetic principles of an alternative hedonism in which slowness is both beautiful and beneficial ennobles the series’ ‘bad’ heroes as aesthetic products, ready to be consumed by tourists (Couldry 2000; Haybron 2008). Indeed, as we explain in the following section, such topophilic mobilities are not complete without material consumption rituals, which are often dubbed ‘bad’ due to their fabulist links to crime.

### **Souvenirs and bad consumption rituals**

As a ‘system’ in its own right, ‘a single field with multiple attractions to carry out in its complex and changing totality’ (Amendola 1999 in Savelli 2009, 150-15), the city

accommodated filmographic narratives of mobility while generating surprising connections with unlikely industries such as fashion. In the case of global fan communities, locations transform into tourist attractions with the help of film & television when tourists begin to enact the fictional heroes' journeys on location. With or without the help of emerging tourist industries such as itineraries institute journeys (see Couldry's (2000) 'media pilgrimages' and Graburn's (1983) 'tourist pilgrimages') from which urban locales become fashionable destinations. But how do *Breaking Bad's* 'cult geographies' of place articulate fan consumption rituals? (Hills 2002); and why are relevant *Breaking Bad* products and props consumed in ways that may be fictionally 'bad' but in reality harmless?

Undoubtedly, Albuquerque's guilty landscapes partake in the production of a tourist fan community that simulates the use of intoxicating elements such as drugs and music. Yet, by teasing more than one sense (tasting candies, bathing in bath salts, visiting, scrutinising and touching props and residences), the *Breaking Bad* tourist experience dissolves established boundaries between ideas of cooking drugs, eating branded foodstuff and being photographed in guilty landscapes ('People take 30 to 40 pictures a day', says Twisters manager (Gray Faust, 1 August 2013)). Deleuze and Guattari's differentiation between architecture and cooking (as manifestations of the State machine (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 402)), and music and drugs (as manifestations of the 'nomadic machine' of tourism (ibid. 381-2)) is not sustained in *Breaking Bad* consumption rituals. With an emphasis on the senses, such rituals invite tourists to indulge in safe hedonist acts that enable them to be(come) more than heroes for a day. Musical stimuli in the tour tie the *Breaking Bad* narrative to the global project of urban



regeneration with the help of music events (Cohen 2002). For example, as the ABQ BaD tour commences, passengers listen to ‘Crystal Blue Persuasion’ by Tommy James & the Shondells – soundtrack to a fantastic montage in series five (Kelly, 10 August 2013). The practice complements the introduction of relevant clips from the series in subsequent stops – i.e. outside the house belonging to Jesse, a relevant clip plays in the trolley on a screen overhead. Instant transitions from the role of simulated drug tourist to that of fast food consumer and the (anti-)hero of Los Pollos Hermanos (Gus) enable first distant enactments of mediated archetypes (akin to what Seaton (2002, 237-8) calls tourist ‘metempsychosis’) and finally proximate engagement with the plurality of Breaking Bad lives (Seaton’s (2002, 150-4) ‘tourist metensomatosis’).

There is a long history of mass-media inspired moral panics about drug ‘epidemics’ – for example, marijuana as ‘the weed of madness’ in the 1950s (Goode & Ben-Yehuda 1994); ‘crack’ cocaine in the 1980s (Reinarman 1997); heroin and ‘heroin chic’ in the 1990s (Denham 2008); and ‘ecstasy’ in the 2000s (Hier 2002). In recent years, ‘crystal meth’ has been featured heavily in press reportage as the new drug ‘epidemic’, with stories about its supposedly destructive power supported with arresting before-and-after images of the users’ broken faces (Ayres & Jewkes 2012). The drug’s users are depicted in a state of ‘zombie-like corporeal ruin—scarred sunken faces, blisters, and broken rotting teeth’ (Linneman & Wall 2013, 316). Breaking Bad draws upon this public awareness of ‘crystal meth’ as the ‘death drug’ of the moment, trading upon its notorious reputation. However, we should also note that media constructions of drug ‘epidemics’ draw upon associations of different substances with particular social class, ethnic and gender identities. Thus, for example, the 1950s panic about ‘reefer madness’

drew heavily upon marijuana's associations with African-American jazz and 'Beatnik' cultures; the representation of 'crack' was closely linked to associations with urban crime, poverty and African-American culture – a ghetto landscape populated with 'crack dens' and 'crack whores' (Meyers 2004). In the case of 'crystal meth', the drug has been closely allied to constructions of rural 'white trash' in America (Linneman & Wall 2013). In contrast, however, one of *Breaking Bad*'s innovations is to subvert this association through its protagonists who represent identifiable stereotypes of 'respectable' middle-class America - scientist and school teacher Walter; the dapper, punctilious and precisely-spoken entrepreneur Gustavo; even Jesse, his 'slacker' demeanour notwithstanding, hails from a suburban middle class family. This ambivalent figure of the familiar drug stranger is in fact constitutive of the *Breaking Bad* consumption rituals we explore below.

Significantly, sensory *Breaking Bad* experiences are more self-guided and independently organised than the standard ABQ tours. For such self-guided tours suggestions are made of some of the series' hotspots such as Los Pollos Hermanos and the Octopus Car Wash. Tasting the show figures prominently in such self-guided consumption: the free drink during the stop at Twisters Grill extends to safe DIY cooking with branded Los Pollos Hermanos herbs, which can also be bought online (Greatfaceandbody.com 2013). The shift from public sightseeing to one's private kitchen is suggestive of the ways tourism can extend to traditionally feminised, ordinary work spaces (Tzanelli 2012) – only now these can be occupied by Heisenberg wannabes. A 'Rebel Donut' (2013) has also been released as the winner of The Food Network's new show *Donut Showdown* for consumption by *Breaking Bad* clientele. It is

reported that the Rebel Donut shop gets orders for their Breaking Bad Blue Sky donuts from all over the country. Topped with 'blue meth' sugar crystals, the donut is the first to sell out at weekends, beating out all of Rebel's other offerings. The product, which according to assistant manager Dylan Mettling makes 'rabid fans' drive cross-country just to buy it, is supported by Aaron Paul, who declares himself a 'sweet addict' (Grout, 8 May 2013). The sweet trade has picked up also with Albuquerque folk artist, Steve White, who has been crafting custom Pez dispensers of everyone from Frida Kahlo and Kim Kardashian to the Beatles and Elvis Pez-ley since 1999, but his bestsellers are the characters from Breaking Bad.

However, 'die hard' fans are mostly prompted on the site to buy the iconic blue ice candy, a coloured rock candy resembling White's special meth mix, from The Candy Lady, a specialty sweet shop located in Albuquerque's Historic Old Town (Conforti 2013). Debbie Ball, (aka Candy Lady), has been dubbed by the Albuquerque tourist board 'a character' (Kelly, 10 August 2013) - an ambivalent nomination given her TV-inspired trade. Her sweet shop on Old Town's Romero Road rose to local notoriety in the 1980s when she started selling erotic confectionery. Her 'meth' is now sold for a dollar each in little 'drug dealer' bags that were used as props in the series' first two seasons. 'We really didn't think it was going to take off like it did. At least now I can say that we sell sex and drugs' (ibid.), she explains. Her business is another moot point in *Breaking Bad's* guilty industry because critics consider that it cynically glamorises crystal meth. Ball's response to such accusations is that not only do buyers not 'see it as a drug - they see it as a prop' but the sweets 'are never, ever sold to children' (ibid.). Centring on fusions of erotica and crime souvenirs, Ball's business comes close to ideas

that frame dark cinematic genres (Tudor 1989; Langford 2005, 167) in which embodied 'threats' and 'risks' are never quite managed by civilising technologies. Just like *Breaking Bad*'s fictional risks, her 'bad candy' enterprise seems ready to corrupt one's soul and body but is too sweet to be resisted.

The defence is shared by Keith and Andre West-Harrison, whose spa, Great Face & Body, also offers Bathing Bad, a line of blue bath salts in 8oz plastic bags. They claim that they received only one email outlining the dangers of crystal meth. 'But real meth isn't even blue', Keith argues, 'I know what meth looks like, and that's not it' ((Kelly, 10 August 2010). The business does not hesitate to use the series' plot in its advertising that promises customers lifestyle luxury in crime's stead. Focusing on caring for the body, Keith and Andre remark on their website that 'it's hard to believe "Heisenberg" himself isn't on our payroll, cooking the cerulean soap somewhere. Cooked right in downtown Albuquerque, Bathing Bad is what happens when two fans of *Breaking Bad* buy a 9,000 sq ft building that had been vacant for 10 years. They needed major money to renovate and asked themselves "What Would Walter White Do? Bathing Bad was a much better option than meth' (Greatfaceandbody.com 2013). The product line, which features blue bathing organic products (lotions, soaps and scrubs), targets consumers with an interest in cosmetic rituals. Stressing that Bathing Bad chemistry 'isn't breaking any laws' (ibid.) allows space for associations with celebrity cultures that promote equations between looking healthy with feeling self-confident and glamorous (Featherstone 1991, 182; Plummer 1995, 124--25).

Other merchandise appears less menacing to consumers or is presented in acceptable terms – for example BaD Trolley organisers were quick to note on the tour’s website that children are brought at the visitors’ ‘own discretion’ (ABQ Trolley Co., undated). Similarly, Breaking Bad T-shirts and other merchandise including Walter White's signature black hat, are less offensive to the public. Likewise the branding of Albuquerque’s alcoholic drinks by Marble Brewery that sells ‘Walt’s White Lie’ and ‘Heisenberg’s Dark Ale’ or *O’Niell’s* that offers a Blue Breaking Bad themed cocktail attract less negative commentary as they are addressed to adult fans (Albuquerque Convention & Visitor’s Bureau 2013). Ironically, the ubiquitous critical focus on consumables enhances established connections between food and travel (du Rand and Heath 2006) with anecdotal travel stories connected to the filmed locations – and hence the televisual script. The visit to Walter’s house, whose owner is rumoured to have pocketed around \$500,000 from filming, is marked by one such story: apparently, the tour guide explains, ‘the guy who owns the place goes out to pick up his newspaper some days and has to remove a giant pizza a fan has thrown [on the roof]’ (Shortlist.com 2013). Food items are treated in such media pilgrimages as fetishistic props that add to the tourist experience – but this time not by tasting but gazing at their place in the media text.

Crime thrives on silence, conspiracy and suspicions that may repress or exacerbate emotions, as Heisenberg’s tale attests. Unsurprisingly, even though Breaking Bad consumption is pictured, photographed and verbally articulated in fan, tourist and the televisual artists’ narratives, there is always something left unsaid in these rituals. Filmed landscape and its consumables thus partake in a non-representational game

whereby new media technologies such as digital cameras, video cameras, YouTube films and relevant materials stored in Internet repositories and press sites reinterpret Breaking Bad filmed landscapes by ameliorating the heroes' emotions such as fear, guilt, anger or remorse (Lefebvre 2006; Thrift 2007). On the one hand, online journals' readers are encouraged to post their own experiences of Breaking Bad tours that are pictured, google-mapped and cross-referenced with production stills and professional celebrity photography. In websites such as OLV (Christine, 11 August 2013) photos of the cast filming and Breaking Bad actors' tweets thus figure as integral testimony of terrestrial tours by anonymous individual tourists who are happy to post memories of their journeys. On the other hand, as the principal actor in the story, Albuquerque's landscape is identified with the rugged White and the damaged Pinkmann or with Gus' professional cover to communicate what lies beneath the characters' ennobled peaceful surface. This respectability is rife with emotions transferred to the fans that both abhor and are excited by *Breaking Bad's* criminal travel arc. The shift from non-represented to landscaped emotions turns a banal shopping visit for designer donuts and bathing salts into the core of the experiential journey (also Norris 2013): tourists commune in emotions painted with New Mexico's red desert and Albuquerque's sweetened donuts. As tokens, souvenirs or gifts from the Breaking Bad tour, cinematically branded products attain a magical relationship with the city's landscape and their producers.

## **Conclusion**

In this article we have sought to illuminate how new intersections emerge between the consumption of mediated popular culture and the real and imagined topographies within which those representations are framed. In the case of Breaking Bad this amounts to an

array of tourist experiences (both formally organised and self-guided) focused upon sensory consumption (sights, sounds, tastes and touches) onto which an array of symbolic and narrative meanings have been projected through the success of the show. On the one hand, this hybridised touristic experience partakes of a now conventional form of fan ‘pilgrimage’ in which the landscapes associated with popular films and television shows are commercially packaged, exploited and marketed, transforming otherwise largely unremarkable places into ‘must see’ destinations. On the other hand, given the textual and narrative parameters of the show itself, such tourism actively adduces, aestheticizes and domesticates the risk, danger, harm and violence associated with the drug trade. The appeal of Breaking Bad tourism is dependent upon the ability to offer transgression as a point of imaginary identification and vicarious pleasure. Yet, at the same time, for the locality and those who offer it as a consumer experience, it generates notable tensions and the potential for unwelcome associations and moral opprobrium arising from accusations that it ‘glamorises’ or ‘trivialises’ crime. Consequently, the selling of Breaking Bad as a form of tourist experience simultaneously activates fans’ attachment to the show’s depictions of criminality while denying those very meanings by emphasising its status as fiction, simulation and fun. The management of this apparent conflict by experts allows a tourist industry to thrive on constantly manipulated signs, which are conveniently ‘sweetened’, ‘cooked’ or ‘softened’ – civilised - for the tourist palate.

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