

ITINERANCY AT THE MARGINS: THE PROPHETIC RE-DEFINITION OF SPACE

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“In their eyes I would be strange and ragged and like the Prophet that has walked across the land to bring the dark Word, and the only Word I had was wow!”<sup>1</sup> (Jack Kerouac)

### Thesis:

In contrast to the hegemonic features of static, centralized politics, the “itinerant” concomitantly displays nomadic yet dissident behaviour—a geography of subversion. Literary references to travel and itinerancy are never casual or happenstance, they creatively position the protagonist in antagonistic, marginalized spatial arrangements. These marginal spatial arrangements are critical to the development of subversive prophetic behaviour and the subsequent relocation of sacred space beyond hegemonic grasp.

### Method:

Through a post-colonial analysis of travel, and contemporary socio-scientific spatial theories, this essay will creatively connect the politics of itinerancy with the geography of marginalization. Specifically, our model will reveal a literary synergism between the itinerant struggles of Jack Kerouac, Elijah the Tishbite (from Tishbe) and Jesus of Nazareth. Specifically, my aim is to re-orientate the way we read spatial imagery in biblical documents, and subsequently encourage renewed critical analysis of hierarchical spatial arrangements and their contemporary implications. I will employ the structural binary pairings of marginalized/oppressed, sacred/profane and centre/periphery to identify spatial-social distinctions within biblical narrative arrangements.

### Jack Kerouac and the “Beats”

Juxtaposed against what Jack Kerouac and the Beat Generation perceived as disingenuous post-war conformity, Kerouac and his contemporaries evidence a cultural subversion through travel and itinerant non-conformity.<sup>2</sup> The literary characterizations of Kerouac consistently attempt to articulate an identity outside the mainstream of American power structures. *On the Road* creatively defines a new

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<sup>1</sup>Kerouac, *On the Road: The Original Scroll*. 138.

<sup>2</sup>In her introduction to the biography *Jack Kerouac: A Biography*, Carolyn Cassady suggests it was Kerouac's forays into Buddhism (and alcohol) that helped him to develop his prophetic vision, particularly the distinctions between reality and illusion, and the impermanence of matter.

space of radical dissent:<sup>3</sup>

I saw the potential for attaining such an authenticity...outside the boundaries of the conservative social institutions and cultural norms—dominant at the time—above all an existence that transcended the constrictions of immutable time and its regimentation of experience and expression.<sup>4</sup>

For Kerouac and the Beat Generation, the political struggle against intense “McCarthyism” and American post-war conformity was manifest in the itinerant strategy of travel. The open road represented a sense of new possibilities, the emerging potential for radical cultural formation; a formation that might redefine hierarchical power structures and sacred/profane binary relationships in post-war America:<sup>5</sup>

The quality of life which for Kerouac, existed outside objective boundaries is incumbent in the socioculturally transgressive pursuit of authenticity, the search for the beckoning pearl handed to the traveller on the road, the promised paradise at the end of the journey.<sup>6</sup>

The literary reference to travel and itinerancy in Kerouac's writing are directly related to the overall project of cultural subversion. Kerouac's characters respond to the cultural marginalization of dissent through a lifestyle of contingency, struggle and movement. Itinerant travel references indicate a literary decentralization; the politics of marginalization are manifest in disparate spatial and social arrangements. Kerouac is intensely critical of American post-war consumptive tendencies; the relationship between centralization and over-consumption are manifest in specific spatial references:

I had travelled eight thousand miles around the American continent and I was back at Times Square; and right in the middle of a rush hour too, making me see with my innocent road eyes the absolute madness and fantastic hoorair of New York with its millions and millions hustling forever for a buck among themselves...grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island city.<sup>7</sup>

Kerouac evidences an intense prophetic disposition, a creative imagination beyond the centralizing features of dominant culture. This disposition is critical of cultural hegemony, a hegemony that robs the

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<sup>3</sup>Holton. *On the Road: Kerouac's Ragged American Journey*. 8.

<sup>4</sup>Mouratidis. “Into the Heart of Things: Neil Cassady and the Search for the Authentic”. 72.

<sup>5</sup>Holton. *On the Road: Kerouac's Ragged American Journey*. 37.

<sup>6</sup>Mouratidis. “Into the Heart of Things: Neil Cassady and the Search for the Authentic”. 73.

<sup>7</sup>Kerouac. *On the Road—the Original Scroll*. 211.

individual of an authentic creative social experience. The itinerant genius of Kerouac and the Beatnik generation lies in their ability to develop a cultural identity apart from the centralizing features of hegemonic conformity. This itinerancy is never casual, or apolitical. Kerouac was neither bored, nor lazy. Rather, his itinerant strategy purposely rejected conformity through alternative spatial arrangement:

Neil had a sweater wrapped around his ears to keep warm. He said we were a band of Arabs coming in to blow up New York.<sup>8</sup>

Itinerant behaviour ultimately manifests itself in the confrontation of hegemonic authority, a reassessment of principle and presupposed cultural or religious norms. Itinerancy offers a new identity beyond the narrow confines of conformity, establishing a freedom to question common conventional behaviour and religious tradition. Essentially, spatial dislocation effects socio-political legitimization.

#### Itinerancy and the Rejection of Centre

The clear antithesis between “centralization” and itinerancy is best understood through the lens of a post-colonial socio-scientific analysis. While centralization—with its emphasis on social structure—seeks to channel recognition toward uniform and unchanging identities, the itinerant does not remain confined to a fixed, unitary, conformist self.<sup>9</sup> The itinerant is free to establish a self definition beyond the proscription of presupposed cultural definition(s). In post-colonial terms, the itinerant rejects the centralizing features of power through travel; his/her transition unsettles the dominant power structure. Itinerancy anticipates a potential disunification; a subversion of the established order and the potential revision of status.<sup>10</sup> Often, the popular perception of the itinerant is one of madness, pathological inconsistency or criminal proclivity. The common rhetoric against the itinerant seeks to undermine his/her political agency through an appeal to insanity or criminal behaviour (see Mark 3.21). Eccentricity is redefined as the loss of intellectual fecundity—Kerouac

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<sup>8</sup>Kerouac. *On the Road—the Original Scroll*. 219. Note the prophetic connection between Marginalization and violence.

<sup>9</sup>Leed. *The Mind of the Traveller*. 279.

<sup>10</sup>Musgrove. “Travel and Unsettling”.39.

explains:

People are scared to look at me because I really look like an escaped mental patient with enough physical strength and innate dog-sense to manage outside an institution to feed myself and go from place to place in a world growing gradually narrower in it's views about eccentricity.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore the itinerant is often confused with the indigent, evidencing a (con)fusion of identity with all those types existing at the concentric edge of political authority.<sup>12</sup>

Generally, power seeks to consolidate itself in a literary relationship to sacred space. In his creative work entitled *To Take Place*, author Jonathan Z. Smith suggests that spatial dualities of Up/Down, Front/Back, Left/Right are never dualities of equivalence.<sup>13</sup> Spatial distinctions in literature are never neutral motifs. Rather, such basic spatial distinctions are determinative and functionally significant in order to establish hierarchical concentric relationships to the locus of divine activity.<sup>14</sup> Sacred space is the “organizational centre which supplies meaning and direction”<sup>15</sup>, and within religious literature is often associated with central places of worship including: staircases, ladders, trees, mountains, poles or temples. Through a particular grounding mythology, sacred space is manufactured and monopolized as it recreates a microcosm of divine reality.<sup>16</sup> Often, centralizing authority is aligned with centralizing spatial motif to create the illusion of social convention as “divine mandate”. While sacred space is manufactured temporally, its connection to mythology legitimizes it as an “eternal” space of order and presence. Cultural emphasis on centrality results in varying degrees of concentric relationship(s) to sacred space:

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<sup>11</sup>Holton. *On the Road: Kerouac's Ragged American Journey*.6.

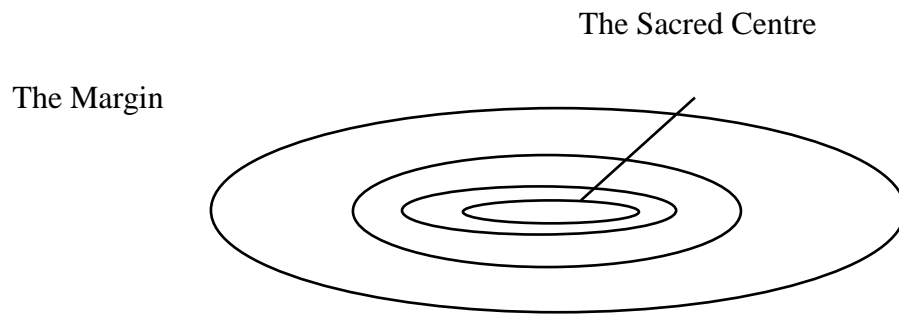
<sup>12</sup>This summer, at the 2010 G-8 Leadership summit in Toronto, police received new powers of arrest in order to “protect the diplomatic process”. Anyone, including citizens of Toronto, within six feet of the perimeter fencing were subject to search and possible arrest. Those without proper identification or address (itinerants) would be immediately arrested and sent to an off site detention centre to await trial. It seems the antagonistic relationship between itinerancy and authority is still quite prevalent.

<sup>13</sup>Smith. *To Take Place*. 43.

<sup>14</sup>Smith. *To Take Place*.41.

<sup>15</sup>Turner. *From Temple to Meeting House*.19.

<sup>16</sup>Eliade. *Images and Symbol*. 38.



Logically, those closer to the epicentre of concentric space are hierarchically superior, ordinate, more sacred, or royalty. Traditionally, cultural margins are reserved for those ritually impure, handicapped, foreigners, women or other social deviants. Hierarchies like this are concretized through the repetition of foundational rituals which emphasize the various degrees of social classifications. Often, the presiding deity is responsible for the evocation of social hierarchy; one's concentric relationship to the locus of divine activity is proscribed and predetermined based on preceding ritual heritage. Static religion is a key element to the manufacturing and maintenance of sacred space; dominant culture relies on the superficiality of spatial constructs to maintain social cohesion and punish dissent.<sup>17</sup> Often, poetic or prophetic imagination is the last option in which to challenge and confront the presiding dominant reality.<sup>18</sup>

As the logical anti-type to centralizing sacred space in religious literature, the desert (ἔρημος) or wilderness represents the conceptual margin of religious experience. Unlike the suburban sprawl of contemporary urban milieu, ancient literary reference to desert wilderness is meant to evoke a desacralized image of chaos and confusion (see Isaiah 34.9-15, Deuteronomy 32.10, Job 38.26).<sup>19</sup> If sacred space denotes fecundity, authority and creativity, then the juxtaposition of desert places underscores literary themes of alienation, failure, shame and death. Whoever passes from a sacred zone to the desert often finds themselves in a magically-religious ambiguity, stuck wavering between two

<sup>17</sup>Brueggemann. *Prophetic Imagination*.29.

<sup>18</sup>Brueggemann. *Prophetic Imagination*.40.

<sup>19</sup>Smith. *Map is not Territory*.111.

conceptual worlds<sup>20</sup> and spatial zones.<sup>21</sup>

Essentially, the desert motif is consistently portrayed in religious literature as wasted space or marginal zone. References to desert wilderness are never neutral distinctions, they serve to typify a great distance between sacred locales. Those who persist in desert spaces exist in an antagonistic relationship to centralized sacred space, and its subsequent human vicar. The politics of marginality is grounded in the mythological distinctions between sacred and profane spatial arrangements. Those existing in “desert places” often lack access to the presiding Deity through a steady program of divine monopolization and false concentric jurisdiction.

However, the desert is “home turf” for the itinerant. The antagonistic relationship between authority and itinerancy is manifest in the spatial motif of desert wandering. As such, itinerants exist on the cultural fringe—at home with the chaotic, fluid absurdities of life, and spatially equivalent to other marginalized peoples. Unlike the complex theophany of the monarch, the God of the itinerant is not bound to the particular socio-religious establishment, nor the theological ritualization of space. A truly free God is essential to marginalized peoples if they are going to reject the oppressive ritual mythologies of centralizing religious arrangements.<sup>22</sup> Therefore the itinerant prophet works within these dead spaces of desert existence to propagate a divine authenticity beyond the structured illusions of centralizing authority.

### Prophetic Itinerancy: Elijah the Troubler of Israel

The spatial location of dissent is integral to establishing and maintaining an oppositional voice to hegemonic authority. The prophetic tradition within the Hebrew bible values the antagonistic relationship between prophet and king, sacred space and the fringe. Within the brief narrative of 1

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<sup>20</sup>Musgrove. “Travel and Unsettling: Freud on Vacation” ..39.

<sup>21</sup> Within the rubric of sacred/profane geography, Israel's ascent into desert exile was equivalent to a regression into chaos and the categorical destruction of established order. Given their failed proximity to sacred space, the exilic Jew would naturally question the existence of the Deity that led them to the desert realm of chaos and confusion.

<sup>22</sup>Brueggemann. *Prophetic Imagination*.23.

Kings 17-19, the prophet Elijah the Tishbite evidences an antagonistic relationship with King Ahab, manifest in spatial allusions to Elijah's itinerancy (see 1 Kings 17.3-7; 18.1, 12; 19. 4, 8, 19-21b).<sup>23</sup> As “spatial dualities of Up/Down, Front/Back, Left/Right are never dualities of equivalence” so references to Elijah in itinerant transit are meant to contrast with the centralizing features of institutional static authority under Ahab. The antagonistic relationship between Ahab and Elijah is clear from their initial confrontation:

As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word. And the word of the the Lord came to him: Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith. (1 Kings 17.1-3a)

The confrontation and rejection of Ahab's efficacy as King is suggested by Elijah's (not Ahab's) control over the rain.<sup>24</sup> The antagonistic boundaries are established within their first conversation, Elijah's confrontational stance is manifest in an itinerant flight to the wadi “Cherith”, where he will live with ravens. This literary paradox is ironic and complex. While Ahab struggles to find water and authority in centralized sacred space, Elijah is eating meat and living well on the margins. Elijah's antagonistic position towards Ahab is manifest in spatial distinctions of flight, travel and wilderness living—an itinerancy rewarded through subversion of space and authority.

Within the narrative of 1 Kings 17-19, I find the character of Obadiah a particularly interesting literary contrast to Elijah. The author recognizes the prophetic office of Obadiah, that he “feared the Lord greatly” (1 Kings 18.3) and saved the lives of one hundred prophets (a story he will remind Elijah later). Obadiah feared the Lord, but he also feared Ahab. As chief over the household of Ahab, Obadiah exists in a strict concentric relationship to the authority of Ahab. His concentric relationship to Ahab is

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<sup>23</sup>Walsh. *1 Kings*. 243.

<sup>24</sup>In his commentary entitled *1<sup>st</sup> Kings*, Walter Brueggemann suggests the prophet Elijah's control over the rain is a sarcastic attempt to “unmask” the king. The King should have been the source of life and creative fecundity, instead Ahab is weeding through the grass searching for animals. This emphasis on the efficacy of the prophetic role in ironically located in a book supposed to be about Kings. The complex irony of the drought is compounded by King Ahab's relationship to Baal—the storm God. In their monograph *From Carmel to Horeb: Elijah in Crisis*, authors Hauser and Gregory suggest a helpful binary distinction of Elijah—Yahweh and Ahab—Baal. Whereas Ahab and “the storm God” Baal should have been able to manufacture a little precipitation, the control over rain remained in the hands of Yahweh and his Prophet Elijah.

meant to contradict the antagonistic spatial relationship between Ahab and Elijah. Obadiah's literary proximity to Ahab effects his actual prophetic confusion—who is lord? Elijah seems clear on the relationship between prophetic allegiances:

As Obadiah was on the way, behold, Elijah met him. And Obadiah recognized him and fell on his face and said “Is it you my lord Elijah?” and he answered him “It is I. Go tell your lord 'Behold, Elijah is here'. (1 Kings 18.7-8)

While Obadiah waffles between authorities, Elijah rejects the lordship of Ahab—“go tell *your* Lord, Elijah is here”.<sup>25</sup> While the itinerant prophet Elijah clearly has no lord other than Yahweh, Obadiah is bound to concentric “lordships” and hierarchical allegiance.<sup>26</sup> His spatial position as household administrator has clouded his prophetic vision. Obadiah recognizes the itinerancy of Elijah and its antagonistic implications:

And and soon as I have gone from you, the Spirit of the Lord will carry you I know not where. And so, when I come and tell Ahab *and he cannot find you*, he will kill me, although I your servant have feared the Lord from my youth. (1 Kings 18.12)

The reference to Obadiah as Ahab's administrator is not a casual one. In contrast to the itinerant Elijah, Obadiah is concentrically related to the maintenance of centralizing authority under Ahab; his prophetic disposition is weakened via spatial proximity to hegemonic power.<sup>27</sup> Simply put, Obadiah is a civil servant—a prophet of moderation. While Obadiah's spatial position is fundamentally static, the fluid movement of Elijah engenders an edgy disposition towards concentric authority. Ahab recognizes this antagonistic relationship between himself and Elijah in the following confrontation:

“Is it you, you *troubler* of Israel?” And he (Elijah) answered “I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your fathers house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals.” (1 Kings 18.17)

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<sup>25</sup>In an interesting subversion of authority, the narrator of 1 Kings portrays Ahab as the “servant” of Elijah, see 1 Kings 18.43.

<sup>26</sup>In his extensive review of the Elijah story, Jerome Walsh suggests the ambivalent status of Obadiah is meant to typify the ambivalence of Israel itself within the narrative of 1 Kings 17-19. His mutual service of Yahweh *and* Ahab typifies a nation “limping on two branches” simultaneously.

<sup>27</sup>One gets the idea of a prophet who has forgotten his vocation. It seems Obadiah valued his cushy administrative position, the comforts of centralized wealth and power, over the existential dread of counter-cultural existence. He cites the “good old days” of prophetic opposition to Jezebel (1 Kings 18.13), but those days seem long past. His prophetic clarity is exchanged for social/monetary security.

The prophet Elijah “brings to public expression the collapse of our self-madness”, suggesting the end of the royal fantasy is near.<sup>28</sup> As an itinerant Prophet, Elijah's spatial freedom informs his rejection of misplaced religious allegiance and false hierarchical constructs.

While Obadiah is responsible for the administration and maintenance of centralizing authority, Elijah is antagonistically related to the false purposes of Ahab and the Baals.<sup>29</sup> I suggest it is the itinerancy of Elijah, in contrast to a static Obadiah, which allows the Prophet to deviate from the Imperial project and re-establish the reign/rain of Yahweh in the region. Elijah's marginalized spatial references allow him to create an identity beyond the structures of hegemonic authority, an identity juxtaposed in the spatial (and functional) rejection of centralized cultural features. Ironically, Elijah is not the “troubler” of Israel, rather it's marginalized saviour—the eccentric harbinger of rain and creative fecundity.<sup>30</sup> Similar to Kerouac's travels, Elijah's itinerancy is a thoughtful political strategy meant to articulate a new creative imagination beyond the centralizing features of dominant culture.

### Alternative Itinerant Communities

In general, itinerant communities are conceived in antagonistic relationship(s) to the normative cultural values they seek to reject. The phenomenon of itinerant communities and itinerant philosophical schools is certainly paradoxical—how can subversive behaviour be codified and structured without losing its counter-cultural edge? Can the salt become salty again? Evidence from the post-Beatnik generation suggests that as subversive groups grow and centralize, they naturally lose

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<sup>28</sup>Brueggemann. *Prophetic Imagination*. 46.

<sup>29</sup>If given more time, one might analyze the confrontation of Elijah versus the Prophets of Baal as Yahweh's rejection of sacred space. If Mt. Carmel (and it might be) is pagan “sacred space”, the actions of Yahweh clearly reject their false notion of sacred space, and shows divine contempt towards centralizing spatial motifs. An interesting discussion of this can be found in Simon, Uriel. *Reading Prophetic Narrative*, note 66, page 315.

<sup>30</sup>The Hebrew etymology of “troubler” is directly related to someone who is “cast out” of the community. Ahab undermines the divine nature of Elijah's flight to the Brook Cherith. Elijah is not cast out, rather his itinerant strategy is at the impulse and direction of Yahweh. See Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*. 169.

their subversive efficacy in the interest of institutionalized conformity or moderation. Essentially, itinerant groups devolve into the types of centralized structures they were meant to reject, and so become irrelevant to the truly radical itinerant.<sup>31</sup>

For example, the failure of the Qumran community to establish an alternative social program resulted in a re-emphasis on centrality and sacred space. In selecting an alternative desert space, the community reveals its honest intent to manufacture a divergent eschatological experience from the Temple in Jerusalem. Qumran self-understanding included the marginalized titles of “exiles of the Desert”, and the “new Israel with new Covenant”.<sup>32</sup> However, the rejection of the centralizing features of Jewish culture resulted in a familiar reinvention of holy space, holy time, and subsequent priestly aristocracy. Members were subdivided into categories under the authority of the Teacher of Righteousness, yet these categories seem to lack any creative social re-arrangement.<sup>33</sup> Qumran evidences a reinvention of sacred space, a re-orientation of temple logic, with new spatial references.<sup>34</sup> However, the slow death of itinerant communities like Qumran begin with the re-establishment of sacred space and its hierarchical aristocracy. Qumran's itinerant strategies would quickly be replaced by centralizing concentric relationships and hierarchically fixed, binary social arrangements. Institutions like Qumran anticipate the itinerancy of Jesus, but as antecedents they fail to identify the novel social arrangements or spatial decentralization of Christ.

Possibly closer to our idyllic definition of itinerancy, the Cynic-Stoic evidences a counter-cultural disposition of movement via subversive appearance and antagonistic socio-political relationships within the context of honour/shame. Cynic philosophers generally emphasized the

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<sup>31</sup>Kerouac would lament the relative failure of the Beatnik generation to remain a counter-cultural effort. Media exposure only perpetuated the growing pop-culture “success” of the group, Kerouac would eventually be held responsible for all the self-indulgent excesses of the Beat Generation itself. This loss of subversive efficacy would be personally lamented by Kerouac, only perpetuating his abuse of alcohol as an escape from the “failure” of a movement. This lament is articulated in the biography *offbeat*, written by his friend David Amram.

<sup>32</sup>Mausser. *Christ in the Wilderness*.58.

<sup>33</sup>Mausser. *Christ in the Wilderness*.61.

<sup>34</sup>This type of re-orientation is similar to how moderate Christian scholarship interprets Jesus' actions regarding the Temple in Jerusalem in the Gospels. Re-orientation suggests a tweaking of the system, a restoration of its original purity.

appearance of marginality in order to draw attention to false cultural norms concerning wealth generally, and honour specifically:

The standard uniform of the Cynics was a cloak, a wallet, a staff. Typically, their life included bare-foot itinerancy viz. indigence, sleeping on the ground or in baths and other public buildings, a diet of water and vegetables.<sup>35</sup>

The Cynic-Stoic counter-cultural stance entailed deliberate vagrancy and itinerant strategy, symbolized by the walking staff as fundamental piece of symbolic itinerant appearance.<sup>36</sup> Cynic shamelessness served as an “implicit critique<sup>37</sup>” of Greco-Roman opulence, a categorical rejection of honour/shame dualities:

I have chosen a life of poverty...I willingly refuse gifts not only from living friends, but also from friends who have died and left gifts to me...I am satisfied to have the plainest food and the same garment summer and winter, and I do not wear shoes at all.<sup>38</sup>

As antisocial symbolism, Cynic philosophy sought self-sufficiency from the system of desires which they perceived to animate hierarchical structural arrangements.<sup>39</sup> This antagonistic rejection of centralizing cultural values was manifest in alternative spatial arrangements, itinerancy, and a healthy prophetic disposition. Cynics purposely offended Roman social elites, stirred the lower classes and openly opposed rulers who neglected to live up to the Cynic-Stoic ideal of kingship.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, Cynic relationship to marginality remained speculative and symbolic. It seems the individuality of Cynic philosophical ethics was internally driven by strict moral adherence, not a genuine appreciation of marginalized existence. Cynic philosophical systems succeeded as visible counter-cultural polemic, but not in its ability to provide political solutions to systematized inequalities and social marginalization.

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<sup>35</sup>Crossan. *The Historical Jesus*. 81.

<sup>36</sup>Crossan. *The Historical Jesus*. 83.

<sup>37</sup>Crossan. *The Historical Jesus*. 82.

<sup>38</sup>Pseudo-Socrates 6 in Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*. 83.

<sup>39</sup>For a developed understanding of Cynic-Stoic philosophy and its relationship to Jesus, consult also Fredrickson, *Jesus of Nazareth: King of the Jews*. 162-163. Fredrickson suggests that of all the types of popular teachers in antiquity, Jesus was most like the Cynics. Their dress, appearance, and aphoristic wisdom might have typified the type of counter-cultural teacher Jesus aimed to be. Other helpful resources include Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, and contra Meier, *A Marginal Jew*.

<sup>40</sup>Crossan. *The Historical Jesus*. 84.

### The Itinerant Christ: Travel and Margins in the Gospel of Mark

The gospel of Mark begins by placing Jesus in an antagonistic spatial relationship to centralized authority. As previously mentioned, literary references to desert (ἔρημος) represents the conceptual margin of cultural experience, evoking desacrilized imagery of chaos, confusion and alienation (see Mark 1. 3, 4, 12, 13, 35, 45 and Mark 6.31, 32, 35 respectively). These wilderness references are not meant to be taken casually, rather they reflect the antagonistic spatial relationship of Jesus to Temple in the Gospel of Mark. The initial imagery of Mark's Gospel intentionally places Jesus in marginal space in order to spatially juxtapose his prophetic disposition against centralizing authority. If “power is always embedded in the control and definition of space”, then what are the political dimensions of marginal desert space?<sup>41</sup>

In seeking to place Jesus in antagonistic spatial relationships, Mark 1.12-13 develops an intertextual literary bridge between Jesus and the itinerancy of Elijah in 1 Kings 19.1-8. Specifically, the similar appeal to ἔρημος, forty days of itinerant travel, and angelic visitors is meant to draw an intertextual “allusion” between the Markan Jesus and the itinerant Elijah.<sup>42</sup> This intertextual motif carefully develops a strict literary resonance between similar spatial and travel references. Like Elijah, Jesus exhibits itinerant behaviour, manifest in an acute familiarity to marginalized spaces, and antagonistic relationships towards illegitimate authority structures. The intertextual precision of Mark grounds Jesus in the prophetic tradition—a similar counter-cultural disposition of itinerant antagonism.

If literary references to travel are never casual, the story of Jesus and the feeding of the five thousand in Mark 6.30-44 represents a paradigmatic shift in spatial legitimization. The spatial reference ἔρημος τόπον or “desert place” is often pacified by the contemporary translation “lonely place”. In this brief narrative, Jesus draws his disciples (and the subsequent crowd) away from centralized space to the marginalized spatial reality of ἔρημος τόπον.

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<sup>41</sup>Sleeman. “Temple and Space in Mark: A Geographers Perspective” in *Biblical Interpretation*. 340.

<sup>42</sup>By “allusion”, I mean to refer to Stanley Porter's definition, found in Porter, “Further Comments,” 111.

## CENTRALIZED SPACE-----&gt;DESERT SPACE

Travel theory suggests the movement through territorial passages like desert spaces represents a “significant variant in the change of status...border crossing involves an inversion of value systems, a potential confusion of established order”.<sup>43</sup> The deliberate retreat to ἔρημος τόπον represents a significant moment of conversion and subversion in early discipleship.<sup>44</sup> When Jesus locates his movement on the margin, this is not without political effect. Drawing followers towards this margin rejects centralizing spatial motifs, and establishes an affinity between Jesus and other marginalized persons.<sup>45</sup> Mark underscores the relationship between alternative spatial imagery and subversive political arrangements by relocating Jesus (and his followers) in ἔρημος τόπον. Implicit in this movement towards marginality, Jesus undermines the centrality of those who would benefit from their concentric relationship to institutionalized, sacred space.

Within the gospel of Mark, Jesus exists in antagonistic spatial relationship to the temple in Jerusalem. In fact, the only references Jesus makes towards the centralizing institution violently articulates its imminent destruction (see Mark 11.15-19 and 13.1). His marginalized spatial relationship to the temple and to the Pharisees is one of unambiguous tension and conflict. As power seeks to consolidate itself in the monopolization of sacred space, the spatial construction of Herod's temple concretized social arrangements of racial and sexual inequality. Again, spatial distinctions are never neutral motifs, rather spatial arrangements are functionally significant in order to establish concentric

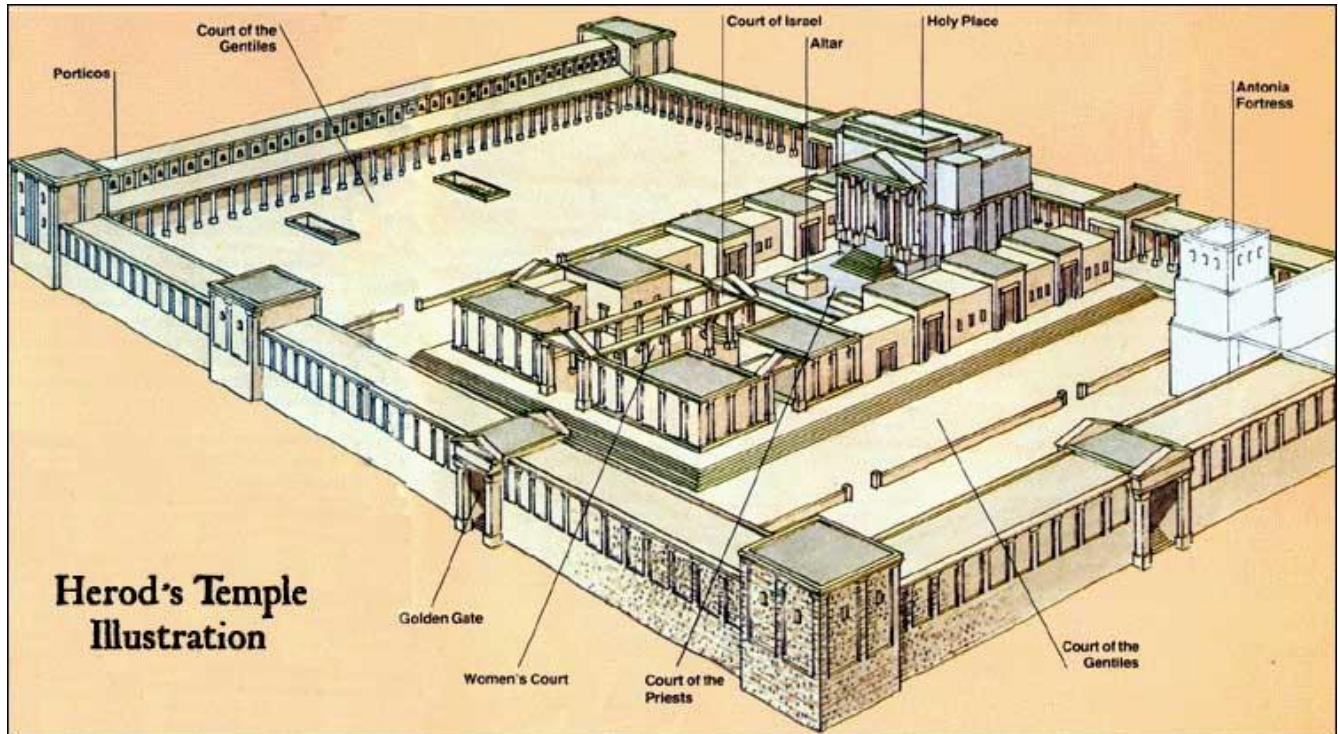
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<sup>43</sup>Musgrove.38.

<sup>44</sup>For a creative, playful analysis of desert wilderness in a semi-fictional narrative, consult Theissen, *The Shadow of the Galilean*. 37—44.

<sup>45</sup>Obviously, if you want to aid in the struggle of the marginalized, it helps if you exist on the margin yourself. Evangelical Christianity values the ministry of Jesus to the marginalized, but as a centralizing institution it fails to be intensely critical of how and why some are consistently marginalized in the first place. To exist on the margins is to be critical of the economic, political and social structures that reinforce harmful hierarchical social arrangements. The open commensality of Jesus in marginalized spaces provides an alternative framework for revolutionary Christian social interaction.

relationships to the locus of divine activity.<sup>46</sup> Hierarchies are concretized through the repetition of foundational rituals which emphasize the various degrees of social classifications. See a diagram of Herod's Temple below, noting the concentric use of sacred space.<sup>47</sup>



Those closer to the consolidation of holiness are hierarchically superior or socially “ordinate” males, while the margins are reserved for Gentiles, women, and the ritually impure. Structures like the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple reinforce the superficiality of spatial constructs to maintain social cohesion, and are antithetical to the chaotic social disruption of *ξημος τόπος*.

In the gospel of Mark, Jesus exhibits a marginalized relationship towards Jerusalem and the temple as “locus of divine activity”. His unambiguous characterization of the Temple as “a den of robbers” rejects its efficacy as sacred space. In suggesting a destruction of the Temple, Jesus inferentially mandates a destruction of the proscribed concentric hierarchies, reversing the harmful

<sup>46</sup>Smith. *To Take Place*. 41.

<sup>47</sup>No author given. See “[http://www.bible-history.com/jewishtemple/JEWISH\\_TEMPLEHerods\\_Temple\\_Illustration.htm](http://www.bible-history.com/jewishtemple/JEWISH_TEMPLEHerods_Temple_Illustration.htm)”

effects of religious and social marginalization through alternative spatial arrangements.<sup>48</sup> The egalitarian thrust of Jesus' ministry is related to his itinerancy—alternative spatial arrangements engender alternative social constructs. This type of geo-politics is both revolutionary and dangerous.

Jesus exists in a trajectory of itinerant prophets and communities. In particular, the political antagonism of Elijah, the sharp alternative vision of Qumran and the counter-cultural agenda of Cynic philosophy provide an antecedent heritage of dissent. His relationship to the prophetic disposition is intertextually relevant in the Gospel of Mark; prophetic travel manifests itself in the actual redefinition of alternative space on the margins of Jewish cultural identity.

### Thirdspace and the Kingdom of God

In conclusion, allow me to suggest an alternative perspective on the spatiality of religious experience. In his contemporary analysis of urban spatiality entitled *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Edward Soja offers “thirdspace” as the critical thirding of spatial imagination, an alternative to popular binary social forms (including sacred/profane, centre/periphery, ordinate/subordinate). Contemporary understanding of sacred space divides spatial categories on the basis of real or imaginary space. Firstspace is the “concrete materiality of spatial forms, on things that can be empirically mapped”<sup>49</sup>, or the Rand McNally perspective on spatial geography. Secondspace is the “thoughtful representations of human spatiality in mental and cognitive forms”<sup>50</sup>, or space as it exists in the brain and our imaginations. Thirdspace as “the thirding of spatial imagination” draws upon both the material aspects of space, and our conceptual/imaginative spatial

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<sup>48</sup>Ched Myers, in his analysis of the Temple motif in the Gospel of Mark suggests “Thus Jesus calls for an end to the entire cultic system—symbolized by his overturning of the stations used by these two groups (money changers, dove sellers). They represented the concrete mechanisms of oppression within a political economy that doubly exploited the poor and unclean. Not only were they second class citizens, but the cult obligated them to make reparations, through sacrifices, for their inferior status”. According to Myers, the simple explanation of Jesus' real-symbolic action against the Temple is its exploitation of the poor. Jesus' action is “fully consistent with his first direct action campaign to discredit the socio-symbolic apparatus that discriminated against the weak and the sinners”. See Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*. 301.

<sup>49</sup>Soja. *Thirdspace*.10.

<sup>50</sup>Soja, *Thirdspace*.10.

understandings in order to suggest that actual space is best understood as both real *and* imagined—a thirdspace.

Soja suggests hegemonic power seeks to maintain a binary structuring of space, particularly the hierarchical relationship of centre to margin:

Power is often simplified into hegemonic and counter-hegemonic categories. Hegemonic power wields, produces and reproduces difference as a key strategy to create and maintain modes of social and spatial division that are advantageous to its continued empowerment and authority...hegemonic power universalizes and contains difference in real and imagined spaces and places.<sup>51</sup>

Thirdspace takes seriously the ability of hegemonic power to create marginal space, but rejects the binary subordinate position of marginality as eternally fixed construct. For Soja, margins provide a critical space of radical openness—a real and imagined place of dissent where marginalized peoples push against oppressive boundaries of race, sex, or class domination. Resistance involves the re-appropriation of margins as the pivotal site of creative fecundity and power, subverting the binary categories of colonizer/colonized through real-and-imagined alternative spatial arrangements. In advocating for the authentic choosing of marginality, black feminist bell hooks suggests:

I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose, give up, but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes ones capacity to resist. It offers the possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create, imagine alternatives, new worlds.<sup>52</sup>

In reclaiming the margin, bell hooks, Edward Soja and others liberate hierarchical spatial arrangements through the production of Thirdspace, reinventing spatiality through subversive reappraisal of space.

The creation of Thirdspace is intensely relevant to those who still believe in the real-and-Imagined Kingdom of God. In propagating an “already not yet” Kingdom of God, Jesus establishes a Thirdspace understanding of ἔρημος τόπον, reinvigorating the margins at the expense of hegemonic religious aristocracy. The prophetic itinerancy of Elijah, Jesus and Jack Kerouac underscores the freedom of marginalized space to engender alternative social arrangements in real-and-imagined place.

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<sup>51</sup>Soja. *Thirdspace*. 87.

<sup>52</sup>Soja. *Thirdspace*. 98.

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