

# **Placing Fandom**

## **Film Tourism in Contemporary Fan Culture**

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# **Placing Fandom Film Tourism in Contemporary Fan Culture**

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Abby Sophia Waysdorf

born in Washington, DC., United States of America

**Erasmus University Rotterdam**



## **Doctoral Committee:**

**Promotor:** Prof. dr. S.L. Reijnders  
Prof. dr. E.A. van Zoonen

**Other members:** Prof. dr. K. van Eijck  
Prof. dr. E. Müller  
Prof. dr. M.J. Hills

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## 1. Introduction: Why Are We Here?

When explaining my research, I tend to get one of two responses. The first is excitement – people have stories about film tourism trips they’ve been on, or ones they want to go on, which they relay to me with enthusiasm or a little bit of envy. The second is confusion – why would anyone want to go see some field where they filmed a TV show? Isn’t that a bit weird? Wouldn’t it ruin the magic?

While exact numbers are hard to come by, film tourism is seen as an important, and growing, niche in the tourist industry (Beeton, 2016; Connell, 2012; Croy & Heitmann, 2011; Karpovich, 2010; Roesch, 2009,) with films and television shows serving to provide valuable advertising for destinations in an increasingly competitive tourist market. Having a popular film or television show showcasing an area’s landmarks and landscapes is seen as not only a way to stand out from the crowd, but to draw tourists in directly to see where a favorite “took place.” Stories about places that show increases in numbers after their appearance on screen pop up regularly, from the remote Irish island of Skellig Michael, which appears at the end of the most recent *Star Wars* film (Bramhill, 2017), to Taekbaek in South Korea, which plans to rebuild the torn-down film set of the hit drama *Descendants of the Sun* to satisfy the tourists who have already come looking (Ah-young, 2016). Film tourism is a successful business, and only looks to become more so.

In some ways, the reasons for this practice are clear. From viewing great works of art and architecture to experiencing the customs and foods of faraway lands, the rhetoric of tourism tells us that there is no substitute for really “being there.” It has long served to make the exotic and

fantastic real, bringing what was previously only told about into the physical world of the tourist. Photography, film, and television have been integral to this process for over a century (Urry and Larsen, 2011), familiarizing us with what is worth experiencing in person. We feel like we know places based on seeing them in the movies or on television. Fictional texts can impact this as much as non-fictional ones, giving us a sense of how people live in other lands in a more affective manner than non-fiction does, bringing us to *Sex and the City*'s New York City cocktail bars or *Amelie*'s Paris streets. This is not a new phenomenon – literature has inspired tourism for centuries (Watson, 2006), becoming part of the official heritage discourse of many places. Tourism connected to film is therefore carrying on in the long traditions of organized tourism (Adler, 1989; MacCannell, 1999), updated for an age in which film and television viewing are primary leisure activities.

There is even a growing body of research on film tourism, in line with its increasing profile in the tourism and media worlds. It has addressed several main thematic concerns: questions of authenticity (Bolan, Boy, & Bell, 2011; Buchmann, Moore, & Fisher, 2010; Peaslee 2011), interpretive activity and performance (Aden, Rahoy, & Beck, 1995; Aden, 1999; Brooker, 2007, Buchmann, 2010; Hills, 2002; Kim, 2010; Mordue, 2001; Reijnders, 2011; Roesch, 2009; Tzanelli & Yar 2016), motivations and expectations of film tourists (Beeton, 2016; Carl, Kindon, & Smith, 2007; Connell & Meyer, 2009; di Cesare, D'Angelo, & Rech, 2009; Kim, 2012a, 2012b; Macionis & Sparks, 2009; Riley & van Doren, 1992; Riley, Baker, & van Doren, 1998; Roesch, 2009), issues of media influence and power (Beattie, 2013; Booth, 2015; Couldry, 2000; Garner, 2016; Peaslee, 2011), and the understanding of places through media narratives (Alderman, Benjamin, & Schneider, 2012; Brooker, 2005, 2007; Hills, 2002; Iwashita, 2006; Lee, 2012; Mills, 2008; Mordue, 2009; Norris, 2013; Reijnders, 2011; Torchin, 2002; Tzanelli,

2004). Indeed, Beeton (2010), Karpovich (2010), and Connell (2012) have detailed the ways in which the field has developed, showing how “research has progressed from speculation through to justification, developing knowledge of the implications of the activity, and, finally, to refinement of methodological and theoretical approaches.” (Connell, 2012, p. 1009).

At the same time, there are still significant questions about the practice, especially when it comes to the film tourist experience (Connell, 2012; O’Connor and Kim, 2013). While there have been steps in this direction (Buchmann et al, 2010; Couldry, 2000; Hills, 2002; Garner, 2016; Kim, 2010; Lee, 2012; Reijnders, 2011; Roesch, 2009; Torchin, 2002), there is still much to understand about the tourist experience of these locations, which, after all, is what drives it in the first place. What research there is has been done in a somewhat piecemeal fashion, focusing on a single case and its specificities, and/or isolated to the experience of the location in question rather than seeing it as part of a larger engagement with the narrative world it represents. As film tourism continues to grow, it is time to take a broader view, one that looks at multiple examples of the practice in the contemporary age and connects them to wider trends in contemporary media culture.

That is what this dissertation aims to accomplish. I argue that film tourism can best be understood as related explicitly to fandom as well as tourist practice, merging the two perspectives. While researchers from media and fan studies have begun to approach film tourism (Brooker, 2005, 2007; Booth, 2015; Garner, 2016; Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005), this has been largely done without the consideration of the specificities of tourism and tourist practice as well as from an auto-ethnographic perspective, relying on their own understanding of the place in question rather than the comparative approach I take here. They have also been relatively smaller studies, used as part of a larger argument about fandom or as single research papers. I therefore

build on this turn by taking multiple fandoms, locations, and tourists into account for a deeper investigation of film tourism as a contemporary practice.

I do this via three related case studies, each with different historical, technological, and audience profiles. These cases are all examples of fantastic film tourism, as in, tourism connected to places that don't exist in the real world. That these places "don't exist" raises specific questions about what tourists are looking for. As fans, they have spent time contemplating these environments, coming to know them very well despite their unreality, but they can't compare them to the "real world" in the same way. Fantastic film tourism therefore highlights the tensions between reality, imagination, and fan practice that makes film tourism so intriguing, as I will discuss. I take an ethnographic, grounded approach to these studies, utilizing online content analysis, participant observation, and interviews with fan-tourists in order to paint a broader picture of film tourism and its underlying process of meaning-making in the contemporary media environment.

### **What is Film Tourism?**

Simply put, film tourism "is tourist activity induced by the viewing of a moving image, and is accepted as encompassing film, television, pre-recorded products (e.g. video/DVD/Blu-Ray), and now extends to digital media." (Connell, 2012, p.1009) This is a bit of an unruly definition, as much of what comes under the title of "film tourism" is not, strictly, film. Others have preferred the term "screen tourism" (Connell & Meyer, 2009; Fernandez-Young & Young, 2008; Kim, 2010), as it focuses on the way in which audiences view audiovisual material, rather than focusing on the medium specificities of television, cinema, online video, and so forth.

Alternatively, some have preferred the term “film-induced tourism,” (Beeton, 2016; Macionis & Sparks, 2009), which focuses more on the way in which film can act as a “pull factor” for tourism practices. Both of these alternative terminologies have their merits. I will, however, be using “film tourism” throughout this dissertation, following Connell (2012), who notes that film tourism is the term most adopted in the literature and industry. For the sake of clarity, connection to earlier research, and as befitting the more emic perspective of this research in general, it makes sense for me to use it.

However, this project also fits into a broader framework of “media tourism,” (Reijnders, 2011), tourism connected to any form of media, such as literature, music, or even video games. This project is, in fact, done as part of a larger project on media tourism entitled *Locating Imagination*, and done in tandem with projects on literary (van Es, 2017) and music tourism (Bolderman, 2017). Film tourism has its origins in the earlier forms of literary tourism (Watson, 2006) and has considerable similarities with music tourism as well (Rodman, 1996; Sandvoss, 2014). Media are increasingly interrelated in the contemporary era, especially when it comes to their fan practices, and tourism is part of this. However, as a visual medium, as well as arguably the dominant form of media today, film and television have specificities that shape their related tourist practices. My project attempts to address the issues specific to film tourism, but, as I will discuss, in an age of “transmedia” it is important to not draw the lines too sharply.

Connell’s overview of the existing research on film tourism (2012, see also Beeton, 2010 and Karpovich, 2010) shows that the term has been used to cover a variety of related activities, from visiting film festivals to film-related theme parks to places that inspire famous films (such as *Braveheart*’s Scotland, which was actually shot in Ireland) to actual filming locations, whether they be “out in the world” or in a controlled studio setting. The linking factor is the

association with audiovisual texts, whether it be in a more general or a more specific sense. This does mean that the idea of “film tourism” is very broad, and it is necessary to be specific within each study about what the main focus will be.

Here, I focus on specific narratives, rather than on film/television as a whole. More specifically, I deal with “fantastic” film tourism, tourism connected to locations/story-worlds that do not exist in our own. What this does is focus the research on representations of imagined space, and how tourists interact with them, rather than on how “real” spaces are represented in film and to tourists. This is a subtle but crucial difference. I am less concerned with how “real” places are understood through the combination of film and tourist practice, and more concerned with how and why tourists seek out what they have come to know from the screen. That these places are fictional puts this at the forefront: why do people seek out what doesn’t exist, and what does this suggest about the way in which media audiences relate fantasy, reality, and the media today? I feel that this goes beyond a simple reaction that audiences are confused as to what is “real” and what isn’t, or even that they want to entirely disappear into a fantasy world. Rather, it is a complicated balance of imagination, the value of “the real,” and social practice. Looking at how these tensions are actually explored is integral in understanding the way in which we make sense of our media-saturated world.

Each of the three case studies presented here – *Game of Thrones*, the *Harry Potter* series, and *The Prisoner* – deal with tourists who came to these locations for their association with a specific fantastic narrative, rather than a more general association with film(s). This puts the tourists I study here within a subset of more general film tourism practice (Croy, 2010, 2011; di Cesaere et al, 2009; Torchin, 2002), as they are not just “influenced” by films, or interested in the media world more generally, but they make space out of their holiday (or, in some cases,

design their holiday) to deliberately visit film-associated locations. This means that the tourist has a specific – fanish – connection to the narrative world, one that they further develop through tourism.

I specify “narrative world” because, in an age of “transmedia” storytelling (Harvey, 2015; Jenkins, 2006; Ryan & Thon, 2014), the same story-world can be accessed via a range of media. This is, as Harvey (2015) discusses, particularly the case for the “fantastic” media that I will be focusing my analysis on. The idea of “transmedia storytelling” has spread across the media industry, seen as a way to keep the (fan) audience engaged with a story beyond the screen, providing different entry points (such as websites or comic books) that keep the audience engaged for longer. Jenkins’ original and highly influential definition of a “transmedia story” is one that “unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole” (2006, p.95). The difference between this and “adaptation” as traditionally understood is that each medium tells a new story, rather than the same story translated to different mediums. Yet, as Harvey (2015) argues, adaptation, particularly for fantastic worlds, has always involved adding new material to the story, whether it be visual details, new characters, or so forth. More importantly, I suggest that, following Klasturp and Tosca (2014), contemporary adaptation in an age in which transmedia texts are widely present means that fans are accustomed to the story-world “existing” in many forms. It is not just a film, television show, or book series – it is a world in and of itself, one that is not beholden to a specific medium.

The cases here are such story-worlds. Two of them – *Game of Thrones* and the *Harry Potter* series – began life as books, and therefore could also be considered as literary tourism. The third case, *The Prisoner*, has been revisited in radio form. All have been expanded and built

upon by their fans through their own creative works. Their tourism here, however, is focused on the television and film versions, from the filming locations of *Game of Thrones* to the visual recreation of the *Harry Potter* world from the films in a theme park to the specificities of *The Prisoner's* filming in Portmeirion. Audiovisual media is therefore the guide and the accessible form (at least here) of the story-world, for reasons that I will detail in the theoretical framework, but it is far from the only way that fans access it. We can even suggest that tourism is ultimately just another way of accessing a story-world. There are anecdotal accounts of people becoming a fan of something through first encountering it spatially, suggesting that a compelling environment can engage fans as much as a text can. Place tells something about the story-world that audiovisual media does not, giving the fan new perspectives on how it feels and functions. Exploring that will be one of the main points of this dissertation.

### **What This Dissertation Is (And Isn't)**

As Gibson (2006) and Bruno (2002) argue, echoing some of the earliest criticisms of “mass” tourism by Boorstin (1962), cinema and tourism are linked forms. Cinema creates a way of looking that is echoed in the forms of tourism – of moving through landscapes, of framing them as spectacular “scenes”, of encouraging the idea of looking at places as an enjoyable activity in and of itself. This was true in the early days of cinema, when “travel films” made up a significant genre, and is still true today, as Tzanelli's (2004) discussion of the *Lord of the Rings* films shows. Cinema creates spectacular views that suggest and enforce tourist practices, creating a “tourist gaze” even if the viewer has no intention to go anywhere. Landscape is also increasingly seen as significant to cinema (Lukinbeal, 2005), an important aspect of its spectacle, narrative, and symbolism. Film is a visual medium, and the way it explores and represents places



is integral to the artwork. There is still fruitful and interesting research to be done in investigating these linkages.

However, this dissertation is not that. Nor is it a guide for tourism practitioners who wish to manage film tourism destinations (although they might find it interesting). Rather, it is an exploration of the practices of film tourism – the way that the tourists themselves experience, use, and make sense of the physical places that represent favorite narrative worlds. It is a study of audiences and fans, rather than of films and television shows themselves. While this is not to say that the representation on screen plays no role in the way that audiences and fans experience these locations, the focus of this dissertation is less about representation of places and more about the underlying reasons and motivation for the practice of film tourism itself.

This research began with this question: what makes film tourism a meaningful experience for tourists? By this, I mean an experience that tourists seek out as valuable, and that, while there, find significant – emotionally, intellectually, or so forth. Being at these places clearly has some kind of value for those who go to them, a draw that not only sustains, but grows the practice. I started this project wanting to know what it was. This starting question was split into two research questions. As fitting the grounded-theory approach taken here, they have undergone evolution as the research has matured, but they have both been at the heart of this project from the beginning, and reappear throughout the three cases.

The first is: how, and in what different ways, do film-tourists experience places related to their object of fandom? This builds on previous research on the film tourist experience (Buchmann et al, 2011; Kim, 2010; Lee, 2012; Reijnders, 2011; Roesch, 2009), but focuses more specifically on the relationship that they have with the fan object and how that shapes the way in which they experience and make meaning of the place. However, it also expands on previous

research on the fan experience at such locations (Aden, 1999; Brooker, 2005, 2007; Booth, 2015; Garner, 2016; Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005) by considering how the structures of tourism and place function in creating this experience as well. I believe that both discourses are necessary in order to not only fully explain how film tourism is experienced, but why fans seek out these kind of experiences today. That “being there” is considered important for many fans, and that the practice is seen to be growing in the contemporary age, means that it is necessary to understand the different ways this is experienced today – and what it means for the fans who go.

This leads into the second, although equally important, research question: what role do film-related places play in contemporary fandom? That fans can visit and experience these places entrenches their fandom in the “real world” in a particular way. It gives it a place. This is intriguing because, for the past several decades, fandom and fan practice have been seen as a digital phenomenon, built on the structures and affordances of online communication. In the digital age, physical place is often considered as unimportant. However, the so-called “spatial turn” of media studies (Ek, 2006; Falkheimer & Jansson, 2006; Moores 2012) suggests that place and physicality are crucial to the way we experience and use media. I bring this insight to contemporary fan studies by investigating what these places mean to fans in the digital era, and how they are (still) incorporated into contemporary fan practice. This builds on work on fan conventions (Booth & Kelly, 2013; Geraghty, 2014; Porter, 2004), which discusses the importance of fans meeting in physical space but tend to take place in less emotionally resonant surroundings. They do not physicalize and represent the textual world in the same way as these locations do. I therefore present a multi-faceted look at film tourism today, considering both experience and use of these locations in a way that breaks new ground in the field.

This dissertation is built on three case studies of “fantastic” film tourism, places that do not exist in our world (as compared to film tourism to mimetic locations, such as *Borgen’s* Copenhagen or *Amelie’s* Paris). This focus on the fantastic allows me to go deeper into the interrelations of physicality, imagination, and “the real” that lie at the heart of contemporary film tourism. In focusing this research on fantastic film tourism, which is touched upon but not highlighted in previous studies, I highlight the way in which fans see the relationship between imagination and reality in the contemporary media age. This relationship is at the heart of film tourism more generally, but is put into sharper relief when exploring fantasy examples. Here, I focus less on representation of places, and more on why fans seek these places out despite their fictionality. These places do not exist – but they can be visited. This is not to say that fantasy fans have no understanding of the difference between fantasy and reality, but that it is played with, and eventually enforced, in particular ways that suggest something about the wider relationship between fantasy, reality, and the media. By focusing on this genre this dissertation goes into more depth about how this relationship works today, while still providing insights that are relevant to the phenomenon of film tourism in general.

The three case studies presented here, while all dealing with the fantastic, are otherwise differing in their contexts, histories, and fan relationships. They were selected for their complementarity to each other from the selection of the first case onward.

The first case study, presented in Chapter 4, is film tourism connected to *Game of Thrones* in Dubrovnik and Northern Ireland. Both prestigious and popular, *Game of Thrones* has been an unqualified success since its debut in 2011. Its mix of political drama, high-fantasy setting, and high production values have earned it a significant fanbase, encompassing both “participatory” and less organized fans. The high budget provided by HBO means that it can do

significant on-location filming in historical European landscapes, in keeping with its promise of being an “authentic” take on the pseudo-medieval high-fantasy genre (Attebery, 1992; Sullivan, 2004; Young, 2010). It is this tourism, on location in Dubrovnik and Northern Ireland, which is the focus of the first case. Conducted in between the airing of the third and fourth seasons of the show, when Dubrovnik and Northern Ireland were the focal points of its tourism, it is a glimpse at fantastic film tourism “in the moment,” with a popular audience that is drawn to the “real” locations of filming as the show is airing. The newness of the series and its popularity meant that, in some ways, this can be considered as “typical” film tourism, following the pattern of a successful film or television show that suddenly draws people to an area they might not have otherwise visited. This chapter investigates these fan’s experiences at these places and the ways in which their imagination is engaged as they encounter the “real version” of what they have come to know on screen.

In the second case, which is the focus of Chapter 5, I analyze a different kind of film tourist experience. Film tourism research has focused on sites of filming (although see Beeton, 2016), drawing much of its findings based on the idea of connecting to the “authenticity” of these locations. However, it is not only filming locations that draw fans. Recreations of film and television environments are increasingly popular, from small bars like Chicago’s *Saved by the Bell*-themed pop-up restaurant (Selvam, 2016) to large attractions like Comedy Central UK’s touring “Friendsfest.” The second case deals with one such simulated environment, the Wizarding World of Harry Potter area of the Universal Studios Orlando theme parks. Built as a recreation of several locations from the *Harry Potter* series as they appear in the films, this site promises fans immersion into the narrative world. The locations depicted – the village of Hogsmeade, home of the wizarding school Hogwarts, and the London neighborhood of Diagon

Alley – are impossible to otherwise visit, in both a real sense (they are fictional) and narrative sense (while set in Britain, they are forbidden to the non-magical), but fans have long dreamed of the possibility of visiting them anyway. This case therefore looks at the way in which fans engage with simulated environments, and the way in which they respond to and make sense of such “unreality.” I argue that the theme park, and perhaps themed environments in general, can be considered as a medium themselves – and therefore the Wizarding World of Harry Potter is seen as an adaptation of the series into this medium, in line with the ideology of transmedia storytelling I discuss above. How this is understood, engaged with, and utilized by fans is the focus of this case.

The third case directly addresses the issue of longevity in film tourism. One of the concerns about film tourism as a tourism driver has been questions about its sustainability (Connell, 2012; Croy 2011). It seems to appear very quickly, and vanish almost as fast. Most studies, including the ones here, are focused on the present experience, rather than on a longer-term engagement with the place in question. *Game of Thrones* was visited “in the moment,” and while many fans grew up with the *Harry Potter* series, the Wizarding World of Harry Potter as an attraction was fairly new at the time of research. However, it had been open long enough for some fans to develop a history with it, with some fans returning regularly and gaining familiarity with the space. As work in cultural geography suggests (Seamon, 1979; Tuan 1977), repetition and return creates a different sense of, and attachment to, place than a single visit. That fans return suggests a very different use and role of place in their fandom than if they were only visiting once.

This is developed further in Chapter 6, which analyzes *The Prisoner* and its fans’ relationship with its main filming location of Portmeirion. Fans have been visiting Portmeirion

since it was revealed as the show's filming location in 1968, with a fan convention taking place there near-continuously since 1977. This makes it an ideal case to investigate how a longer-term relationship with a place affects fandom, compared to the newness of *Game of Thrones* as both a fandom and a destination and the relatively recent creation of WWOHP. A holiday village designed by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis and currently run by his family, Portmeirion itself is somewhat of a fantasy place, with an Italianate design, a hodgepodge of architectural elements painted in pastel colors, and rescued buildings and landmarks from throughout Britain contributing to its otherworldly character. *The Prisoner* utilized its uniqueness for its surreal story of a man confined by unknown forces, and the striking images of Portmeirion contributed to the show's iconicity and cult following. That fans have been not only visiting, but returning to this location for decades means that we require a new way of understanding the way that fans experience places and the role visiting plays in their fandom. This case therefore introduces the concept of the "fan homecoming," showing how the relationship with a film tourism location can develop over time.

These three case studies each relate to the overall research questions, exploring them in different ways due to their different situations and affordances. The first research question, *how do fan-tourists experience places related to their object of fandom*, has a different focal point for each case, reflecting the different ways that film-related places can be experienced. In the first study, the immediacy of the experience is addressed, fostered by the newness of both the fandom (the show had been airing for only three seasons at that point) and the locations, as the tours were also fairly new, and by the use of on-site interviewing. In the second, having already spent time understanding the experience of the "real" thing, I wished to see how this changed – or didn't – when fans were confronted with a recreation, one that is undeniably a physical place but without

the aura and authenticity of being where it actually happened. With the first two cases dealing with more immediate experiences, the third focused on the longer-term experience, and how the feeling that fans have when confronted with “being there” shifts to a more familiar and comfortable sensation.

In regards to the second question, *what role do film-related places play in contemporary fandom*, we can perhaps best see these case studies chronologically. In the first case, the newest fandom, the role of the place is much more about the ability to experience it – to see the places in “real life” and to tell your friends that you had. In the second case, which was still new but slightly more established, this was still highly present, but this was joined by a sense that the fandom now “had a place,” in the cultural geography sense (Morley, 2000; Tuan, 1977; Seamon, 1979), one that was separated from the “real” world and was (mostly) populated by other fans and could be revisited with them. Finally, in the third case, this process has been completed – Portmeirion serves as the “home” of *The Prisoner* fandom (Morley, 2000), the specific place of their fandom. Presenting the cases in this order, we move through some of the ways in which place plays a role in fan practice, showing how it can be used as an exploration of the diegetic world and how it meets up with our own, an immersion in the fictional, and as a “home” of fandom. This results in a fuller picture of film tourism, and its relation to fandom, than has been done previously.

This dissertation begins with a theoretical framework, presented in Chapter 2, detailing the overarching theoretical approach and concerns that are developed in more detail in the case studies. This framework, as befitting the grounded approach taken here (Charmaz, 2006), was written after the cases, and builds upon the insights gathered from four years of studying film tourism in different situations. I also include a methodological overview, Chapter 3, showing

how I went about doing this research, my reasoning behind my choices, and what this says about the state of researching fandom today. Finally, I reflect on my research and its implications in Chapter 7.

In this dissertation, I hope to produce a richer portrait of film tourism for the contemporary media age. I show how fans play with the borders between fandom, fantasy, and “real world,” and how they negotiate and utilize affective power of place. As these practices gain acceptance, the way in which these “places of the imagination” (Reijnders, 2011) are created and controlled becomes ever more pressing. We are increasingly aware of how much place matters, even in a digital age, and film tourism is an important part of that meaning. This dissertation provides a first step into understanding what makes this is possible, by looking at how fans experience these locations – what sense they make out of them, what meaning they put into them – and how these locations become part of their fandom in turn. In doing so, it contributes to a further understanding of this complex relationship.





## 2. The (Meaningful) Experience of Film Tourism

### Introduction

The actual act of visiting places because of their connection to a film or television show touches upon many intriguing debates. For tourism researchers, film tourism points to new directions in destination marketing research – what draws tourists to particular locations – as well as both challenging and enforcing long-held theories about how and why tourism, especially the practice of sightseeing, functions in contemporary society. For media researchers, it presents a glimpse into the way in which the borders between imagination, fantasy, and reality shift in the contemporary media environment, and showcases ways in which the media industry utilizes physical space in its power negotiations with the audience. It is its interdisciplinary nature that makes film tourism such an intriguing subject of study, but also a somewhat difficult one. The fields of tourism and media research do not always converge, and do not frequently consider the other when investigating the phenomenon of film tourism.

As a media researcher with a particular interest in the study of fans and fandom, it is from that perspective that I have personally approached the topic. Those who make a point to visit places associated with a film or television show are, in some way, a fan of the text – they make an effort, whether it be large or small, to make a connection to it, and therefore tourism clearly falls into the category of fan practices. It is one that is increasingly visible within academic circles as well as within fan circles themselves, seen as a counterpoint to the digitized nature of contemporary fandom. However, understanding tourism itself is also integral to understanding film tourism and what kind of experience it is. Tourism research provides particular insight into

the ways in which visiting places, particularly famous locations and sites, has become part of our standard repertoire of practices.

In this chapter, I will explore film tourism theoretically, looking at how it can be conceptualized and framed, and consider different ways that this has been done in the past. I begin with an exploration of film tourism as a form of tourist practice, as this is how film tourism first rose to academic prominence, showing its connections to other tourist practices and particularly highlighting the importance of “co-presence” (Urry & Larsen, 2011) and “embodiment” (Crouch, 2000) to the experience of touristic locations. This will also discuss the way in which film tourism both works with and complicates traditional concerns of tourism research, such as authenticity (MacCannell, 1999; Wang, 1999) and the nature of sightseeing (Jenkins 2003; Urry 2002.).

Following this, I will explore film tourism as a media, and particularly a fan, practice, following on the work of Hills (2002), Sandvoss (2005), and Reijnders (2011) on how film tourism links the fantasy world of the text to the physical world, and show how concepts from tourism studies can deepen this understanding. Of particular importance here is the role that the idea of “reality” continues to play in contemporary life, and the way this idea is constructed, valued, and ultimately made sense of by media audiences. This aligns fan studies with the so-called “spatial turn” in media and communication studies (Ek, 2006; Falkheimer & Jansson, 2006; Moores, 2012), in showing how issues of space and spatiality matter in a mediated, heavily digital environment. I will also consider the implications of the growth of the practice for fandom, particularly with emerging questions of power relations between the media industry and fans (Booth, 2015; Couldry, 2000) as the potential economic value of such visits – as well-documented by tourism researchers – becomes clear to the media industry.

In doing so, this chapter develops a theoretical understanding of film tourism as a practice, and points to the issues that will be explored in more depth in the case studies that make up the rest of this dissertation.

### **Film Tourism as Tourism**

As Connell states in her excellent overview of film tourism research, “[a]s a research community, we are now aware that film tourism occurs, that it is part of a range of motivators in the tourism destination decision-making process, that it creates a range of impacts, and has been adopted by savvy tourism marketers and businesses seeking uniqueness and novelty.” (2012, p. 1025). In essence, this means that film tourism is an accepted and well-recognized form of tourism, one that is increasingly prominent in tourism marketing as destinations attempt to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive market. There is clear acknowledgement within the field of tourism research, both sociologically and from an economic perspective, that film tourism is a practice worth considering. What is less clear is how, or even why, this is experienced by tourists. Connell herself calls the tourist experience “an emerging field of study” (2012, p. 1025) within the broader research field, and a similar point is made in a more recent study by Kim and O’Connor (2013).

This is not to say that there is no consideration of the tourist experience in existing literature. As Karpovich (2010) discusses, researching the tourist experience has been approached differently by tourism researchers and media researchers. Tourism researchers are largely concerned with understanding this as a tourist experience, either tying it more directly to industry concerns of motivations, expectations, and satisfaction levels of tourists and what they do at locations (Beeton, 2005; 2016; Carl et al, 2007; Kim, 2010, 2012a, 2012b; Roesch 2009) or

more theoretical concerns of how place is represented and understood through these trips (Lee, 2012; Mordue, 2001; Torchin, 2002,) and what this means in terms of the “authentic experience” that tourists are thought to seek out (Beeton, 2005, 2016; Bolan et al, 2011; Buchmann, et al 2010; Peaslee, 2011; Rojek, 1997; Roesch, 2009). Media researchers, similarly, approach film tourism in order to consider its relation to media practices, investigating issues of media influence and power at these places (Booth, 2015; Couldry, 2000; Garner, 2016; Peaslee 2011), and the interaction between reality and mediated fiction that these visits represent (Brooker, 2005, 2007; Hills, 2002; Norris, 2013; Reijnders 2011).

These studies show that film tourism is a multifaceted phenomenon, one that touches upon many aspects of contemporary culture and can be explored in a range of different ways. However, what is common amongst them is that, for tourists, being at these locations is “a point of access to something ‘special’” (Peaslee, 2011, p.42): a meaningful experience. By this, I mean that it is an experience that the tourist finds valuable and significant to them (emotionally, intellectually, or so forth), one that is worth the effort to have or even repeat. “Being there” at a filming location, while still niche compared to established tourist sites or even broader concepts of “film-induced tourism” (Croy, 2010, 2011; di Caesare et al, 2009), is clearly something worthwhile for many. But what makes this so?

Part of the explanation can be found in the concept of tourism itself. Generally, tourism and travel are seen as an important part of contemporary life, a “secular ritual” (Graburn, 1983, 2001) that is necessary to undertake for health, relaxation, and education (Urry & Larsen, 2011). It is most frequently built around the practice of sightseeing (MacCannell 1999, 2011; Urry, 2002; Urry & Larsen, 2011), looking at notable things and places. When we go somewhere, we make a point of seeing its landmarks, its cultural works, and “look at the environment with

interest and curiosity.” (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p.1) For many, sightseeing is what tourism is all about, in both a positive and negative sense – it is “tourism’s default [...] the only thing tourists are supposed to be good at.” (MacCannell, 2011, p.42) It is a basic building block of leisure travel as a cultural practice, a subject of parody and scorn (see Boorstin, 1962) but also of acceptance and desire. To be a tourist is to want to see things outside of one’s home.

Adler (1989) traces the evolution of this visual focus of travel among Europe’s elite, showing how the value given to travelling moved away from learning from and conversing with experts abroad as the fashion for “scientific” visual observation took hold. This was part of a general focus on the visual in Western society. The first “sightseers” thought of themselves as scientists, objectively observing and recording the landscapes and lives of others for an audience back home. As this market became saturated and the ideal of the neutral scientist was challenged by that of the Romantic aesthete, sightseeing became an emotional experience, “simultaneously a more effusively passionate activity and a more private one,” (Adler, 1989, p.22) that focused on the pleasure and enlightenment of the tourist as they gazed upon the extraordinary, alongside an increasing sense that it was “important” to see certain places and objects. The Romantic ideal also stressed the importance of “getting away” from everyday surroundings, particularly urban environments. Building on this, Urry (2002) and Urry and Larsen (2011) show how a combination of technological and social developments – railroads, workers-rights movements, educational norms, and so forth – moved sightseeing from exclusive to mass practice, becoming “one of the characteristics of the ‘modern’ experience” (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p.5). If it was valuable for the elites to sightsee, in both a moral and pleasurable sense, it was also so for the masses. As it became possible for “everyone” to travel, it became assumed that everyone should

– and that an important part of doing so was seeing the sights of elsewhere. In contemporary times, the practice of sightseeing is so unremarkable as to seem natural.

This, of course, does not mean that it is. As Urry discusses in his landmark concept of “the tourist gaze,” looking – gazing – at places and people is a constructed practice, “conditioned by personal experiences and memories and framed by rules and styles, as well as by circulating images and texts of this and other places.” (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p.2) It is not a ‘natural’ reaction to a site, but rather one that we learn how to do, that can be enacted differently in different circumstances. The “privileging of the eye” (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p.18) in Western society meant that tourism became organized by the sense of sight, of looking, and what is worth looking at is determined by specific cultural values of the extraordinary, something “distinguish[ed] it from what is conventionally encountered in everyday life.” (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p.15) Ideas of beauty, strangeness, otherness, uniqueness, and so forth are enacted in the determining of what should be seen when we travel. MacCannell (1999) refers to this process as “sight sacralisation,” the marking-off of certain attractions as important to view through labelling and promotion. This process traditionally appealed to the universal – the established great works of art and architecture, the spectacular natural views, the site of major historic events. In visiting them, we commemorate their importance. As tourism has proliferated, however, more “niche” sites – such as filming locations – have also become worthy of the gaze.

The importance of promotion indicates the importance of the media to sightseeing. MacCannell called the “mechanical reproduction” of a site via postcards or newspaper articles “the most responsible for setting the tourist in motion on his journey” (1999, p.45), while Urry and Larsen state that the “anticipation of pleasures” that makes travel appealing “is constructed and sustained through a variety of non-tourist technologies, such as film, TV, literature,

magazines, CDs, DVDs and videos, constructing and reinforcing the gaze.” (2011, p.4) Images of places, important landmarks, and travel are prevalent in contemporary media culture, promoting both specific locations and the idea of travel and tourism itself. This is not a new phenomenon, as media have played important roles throughout the different historical stages of tourism (Adler, 1989; Crouch, Jackson, & Thompson, 2005; Jansson, 2007; Lester & Scarles, 2013; Rojek 1997; Urry & Larsen, 2011), showcasing previously unknown destinations and creating appealing impressions of the experience of visiting.

These images then circulate widely, in advertisements, newspapers, magazines, television, film, and so forth, creating a shared cultural imaginary around what is worth seeing when one travels, and the value, both personal and social, of doing so. The role of media images in creating sights has led to some talk of a “hermeneutic circle” (Crang, 1999; Urry, 2002) or “circle of representation” (Jenkins, 2003) of tourism where “[w]hat is sought for in a holiday is a set of photographic images, which have already been seen in tour company brochures or on TV programmes” (Urry, 2002, p.129) as viewing and photographing these sites for oneself “proves” they have been to the location. Photography and film are considered important elements in creating and sustaining the tourist gaze by determining what is worth viewing and stimulating the desire to see it, and then bring back proof that one has done so in the form of more media.

In recent years, touristic imagery is considered to have greatly proliferated, in line with the general proliferation of media in contemporary life (Crouch et al, 2005; Jansson 2007; Lester and Scarles, 2013; Månsson, 2011; Urry & Larsen, 2011). There has been an increase in travel programming on television and coverage in magazines and newspapers, which exists alongside the “on-demand” media access of home video and the Internet. As this first entered the culture, some predicted that this would lead to a decrease in the desire for corporeal travel as ‘seeing the



sights' could now "be experienced in one's living room, at the flick of a switch; and it can be repeated time and time again." (Urry, 2002, p.91; see also Rojek, 1997) Instead, "on-demand" tourist imagery ended up functioning in much the same way as older forms, increasing the demand for corporeal travel. As Jansson (2007) and Månsson (2011) show, the major change has instead been in who determines what important sites are and how to view them, as tourists themselves join media professionals in showcasing their visits to the public. Instead of a decrease in travel because of media, we instead see phenomena like film tourism – where the desire is to go to a place that has been vividly, and often frequently, seen.

If "seeing the sights" is so important, why is seeing them through photographs and films not enough? To answer this, we begin at another important aspect of Urry's analysis of tourism practice. He stresses that co-presence, "to be there oneself," (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p.21) is a crucial element of tourism. It is not enough to see pictures of a site – one must see it with one's own eyes for it to truly 'count' as having seen it. It is only through physical presence that an important site is truly experienced, despite the potential of technology to recreate the visual encounter with increasing clarity. Tourism is a corporeal practice as much as it is a visual one.

Indeed, it is the importance of this corporeal element that is the most sustained critique of Urry's work (Crouch, 2000; Crouch & Desforges, 2003; Edensor, 2001; Everett, 2008; Haldrup & Larsen, 2006; Larsen, 2005; Obrador Pons, 2003; Perkins & Thorns, 2001; Rakić & Chambers, 2012; Rodaway 1994; Veijola & Jokinen, 1994). Tourism, after all, is not only sightseeing, even if that is arguably its most emblematic practice – it is also a wide range of physical activities, from the exertions of 'adventure tourism' to dancing at nightclubs to lying on the beach, and involves the movement and concerns of bodies at all points. Even sightseeing involves the presence of the body, and is understood through bodily action as much as the

‘meaning’ of the site in question (Edensor, 2001; Larsen, 2005; Rakić & Chambers, 2012).

Tourism cannot be separated from the physical and temporal experience of being in a place – it is what defines it as a practice.

The concept of “embodiment” is particularly useful in exploring the necessary physicality of tourism. As Crouch (2000) argues, building on earlier work on “non-representational” geography (Thrift, 1996) we understand our environment through physically interacting with it. He argues that it is through embodiment – the “process of experiencing, making sense, knowing through practice as a sensual human subject in the world” (2000, p.68; see also Crouch, 2001) that we understand a place. This is based on practices of movement through space and engagement of all the senses, including but not limited to sight, and it is this physical encounter that ultimately gives a feeling of comprehension. As Rodaway (1994) argues, sight might be the dominant sense in Western thought, but it is also the most commonly “tricked” through illusions and technology. Therefore, we must call upon other senses, which are (so far) less easily duplicated, to confirm the “reality” of something. This is not to say that there is no cultural or representational dimension to the meanings we give places, but that this is only partial. Without the sensuous understanding gained through physical presence, it is felt that the knowledge of any location is incomplete.

If we take “embodiment” as a crucial factor of “knowing” a place, then we can see why “co-presence” with a sight is integral. To feel as if we have actually experienced it, we need to gain the embodied understanding that can only come with co-presence. Or at least, there is cultural belief in this idea. As Auslander (1999) discusses in terms of theatrical and musical performance, there is considerable cultural and symbolic capital gained through being physically present at an event, even if technology can make a “better” experience (in the sense of comfort,

visibility of the performers, cost, and so forth). This concept can be moved from live performance to live sightseeing easily. Even if the Internet or television show offers a better view of a particular sight, in terms of clarity and access, it is not culturally the same as “being there” with all its physicality and even flaws. Without embodied knowledge, it is seen as an incomplete experience. It is less “real.”

With the ideals of co-presence and embodiment, film tourism as a practice comes more into focus. Being at a filming location is different than seeing it on screen, in terms of both how it looks and how it is experienced. For some, they are places that should be “seen for oneself” in the same way as more established tourist sites. Visiting them can be integrated into existing patterns of travel, both in terms of where filming locations are and the touristic practices involved. Film-related sightseeing involves much the same practices of gazing and performance as any other example of the form (Beeton, 2016; Buchmann et al, 2010; Edensor, 2001; Kim 2010; Roesch, 2009), and is increasingly part of industry practice as well, with tours regularly being offered and locations being marked out as sights.

Film-related sites become tourist sites because of much the same reasons that other locations become tourist sites – they are seen to be something out of the ordinary. In this case, what makes them extraordinary is what happened there, or what can be linked to this location. For some, film-related sites offer advantages compared to established tourist sites. While these are places that have long been culturally valued, this is often a general value rather than a personal one. Tourists might feel obligated to see the Eiffel Tower or a battlefield, while not necessarily feeling the sort of personal connection that makes gazing on it a meaningful, emotional experience in the Romantic tradition. Sites connected to a favorite film or television show do have this personal value – and often a strong social value as well, especially for others

“in the know.” Having been there is a potential source of “fan cultural capital” (Fiske 1992) that positions oneself as a knowledgeable and privileged member of the fan community.

However, in comparison to other tourism sites, film tourism sites are not only about understanding the location, but also understanding the film or television show. Traditional issues of tourism representation and the tourist experience are experienced differently with film tourism, particularly the issue of authenticity (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; MacCannell, 1999; Olsen, 2002; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999) The location represents not only itself, but a fictional narrative, and it is experiencing the fictional narrative, rather than having an ‘authentic’ experience with another place and culture, that is desired. While this is not to say that the identity of the “real” location plays no role, it is the fictional narrative that takes precedence. Therefore, in understanding what makes film tourism a meaningful experience, we must understand the relationship that people have with these favorite narratives.

### **Film Tourism as Fan Practice**

Why are film-related locations tourist sites? Beeton (2016) ultimately links this to a discourse of celebrity – that these places are famous because of their involvement in film and television, and therefore worth seeing. This continues from an earlier sightseeing tradition of “famous sites” but incorporates contemporary interest in the media and in celebrity culture. Because these sites have celebrity put upon them, they become of interest and incorporated into the culture of sightseeing. This echoes the point made by Couldry (2000) in his landmark study of the *Coronation Street* set and Granada television studio: that ultimately, these sites confirm the power of the media – that by showing a television studio or filming location as an extraordinary place, it signifies that the world of the media is indeed more special than one’s

“ordinary” life. The boundary between “real life” and “media life” is destabilized but confirmed to exist, with “ordinary people” and places on one side, and celebrities and the world of the media on the other. Ultimately, this also means that it is the importance of media itself, and the fame that it gives certain places and people, that is the draw for these visits.

I do not want to suggest that these analyses are incorrect. Ultimately, fame and celebrity culture are of great importance in making film tourism exist, and it is crucial that we as scholars take a critical approach to the power structures that support these practices. However, I would also like to suggest that for many film tourists, it is not just proximity to fame, status, and the media that makes film tourism an appealing prospect – it is fandom.

Fandom is not something that has been widely addressed within the literature on film tourism as a tourist practice (although see Lee, 2012 and Reijnders, 2011). While there have been connections made between the experience of film tourists at locations and their emotional connections to the text (Kim 2010, 2012a, 2012b; Peaslee, 2011), this is rarely addressed in terms of fandom, at least not explicitly. This is curious because, while not every visitor to a film-related location is a fan (Carl et al, 2007; Macionis, 2004; Macionis & Sparks, 2006), it is likely that fandom is, for many, at least part of the draw to such a place.

By this, I mean fandom as defined by Sandvoss – “the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text.” (2005, p.8) This is, as he discusses, a very broad, “lowest common denominator” definition of fandom, one that encompasses many who might not self-identify as “fans,” but it is precisely this broadness that makes it useful. Other definitions of fandom in academic use since the first wave of “fan studies” in the early 1990s (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Busse, 2013 Busse & Gray, 2011; Fiske 1992, Jenkins 1992) focus more on the classification of different types of fans, or define fandom more narrowly,

which often creates a normative, hierarchical sense of what “real fans” do (such as form communities and produce their own media works) or are (resistant to dominant norms of society) compared to the less admirable “consumer.” This comes out of fan studies’ early base in cultural studies and its desire to “de-pathologize” the figure of the obsessive and deviant “loner” fan common in psychology and communication studies, as I will discuss in Chapter 3. Fan studies has shown how fandom can be an “indicator species” of the media ecology, pioneering practices and demonstrating certain relationships with the media industry that highlight trends and capabilities (see also Chapter 6). In popular discourse, however, the “fan” is still frequently seen as deviant, someone whose devotion to a favorite text or object is excessive (Jenson, 1992; Geraghty, 2014; Stanfill, 2013) or, in a more positive light, part of the “subculture(s)” of fan communities.

As Sandvoss (2005) as well as Hills (2002) discusses, while a definition of fandom that focuses on its productive and resistant subcultures has been useful in the project of studying fandom, it is fairly limiting as a defining factor of what fandom, in the sense of being a fan, is. By focusing on fandom’s affective qualities instead (Grossberg, 1992), we can use the term in a way that cuts across different fan subcultures while also allowing for those who are not ‘participatory’ to be involved (Hills, 2010; Sandvoss & Kearns, 2014). This is not to say that the ‘exemplary’ practices of organized fan communities (Busse & Gray, 2011) are not of interest (and indeed, the role of the organized and/or named fan community in film tourism reoccurs in each of the case studies present here), but that they are one facet of a broader cultural phenomenon – that of the regular, emotional engagement with texts. While there are certainly differences between fans in terms of emotional involvement and type of activity, the broader

definition is useful in determining commonalities. All fans are emotionally involved with their object of fandom.

Arguably, not every example of film tourism is fannish. General film location tours, whether of a particular city (Torchin, 2002) or of a production space (Beeton, 2016) are less fan-oriented, as their focus is to show many filming sites for many texts rather than one specifically. However, when tourists deliberately visit a particular place because of a film or television show, as they do here, it is usually (although not exclusively, see Carl et al, 2007) because of a fannish attachment to a particular text. It is this attachment and emotional connection that drives them to make the effort to visit places connected to it. As with many fannish pursuits, this can be arranged on a spectrum of effort, labor, and motivation, but the core element – the emotional connection to the text – is the common element, whether the fan is stopping by an easily-accessible attraction on a family holiday or traveling to a faraway land with the intent of finding an obscure location.

This is because objects of fandom matter to fans. They have an affective power (Grossberg, 1992) that not only gives pleasure, but in some way shapes one's identity (Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005; Williams, 2015). They speak to something within the fan that can then be used to construct a sense of who they are as a person – what they value, what emotionally affects them, what helps them understand the world and their place in it. Hills suggests that fan objects function as a “transitional object,” (Winnicott, 1971) something that is both external and internal to the self. It is part of the fan's thoughts, helping to make up their sense of self, but also understood as originating and existing outside of them. There is some sense of ownership over it – this is my special thing that I care about and feel possessive over – while still being able to share it with others. These objects help fans to “manage tensions between inner and outer

worlds,” (Hills, 2002, p.105) stimulating the sense of imagination that gives a vibrant inner life while still maintaining and understanding the difference between this and the real world.

This mixture of internal and external in the way in which fans interact with fan objects also speaks to the “reality” of fictional texts. As Jenkins (1992) and Saler (2012) argue, favorite fictional texts are in some way “real” to fans. Their places and people are ones that fans find themselves thinking about, or even “gossiping” about, in a way that they might discuss “actual” people and places. Whether to themselves or others, fans talk about their favorite texts as if they were real, populated by characters that they can speculate about just like someone they know, taking place in worlds that can be wondered about in the same way as a far-away place. As both Jenkins and Saler are both keen to stress, this is not that fans believe that the fictional worlds of their texts are actually real, only that they feel “as if” they are – that they can occupy the same kind of mental space as “real” things.

There is, though, a clear understanding that fictional places are, in fact, fictional and wholly imagined. Yet, as Reijnders (2011) discusses, imagination and reality are not entirely separate – rather, they influence and play off each other. Imagination becomes more vivid when it intersects with reality, while reality becomes more meaningful as it touches upon important imaginaries. As he states, as “imagination and realities are interwoven, people feel the need to unravel them” (2011, p.15) by probing at the areas where they connect. Fans especially often enjoy playing with and testing these boundaries, by bringing fictional worlds into ours through practices such as cosplay and collecting (Geraghty, 2014; Lammerichs, 2014) or by searching out places where the fictional and real worlds meet. As has been aptly demonstrated (Brooker 2005, 2007; Buchmann et al, 2010; Couldry, 2000; Hills 2002; Peaslee, 2011; Reijnders 2011;



Sandvoss, 2005), fans come to locations looking for the “reality” of what is otherwise entirely imagined.

As discussed in the previous section, tourism is a recognized way of confirming the reality of a place or object. Sandvoss states that visiting such places “creat[es] a relationship between an object of fandom and the self that goes beyond mere consumption and fantasy.” (Sandvoss 2005, p.61) By going beyond “mere” consumption and fantasy, Sandvoss stresses the way in which physicality adds substance to what is otherwise ephemeral. While a text might be real in an emotional sense, and vividly imagined, it is still somewhat incomplete, as what we understand as ultimately “real” comes out of a multi-sensory encounter. In creating one, fans further push the boundaries between real and imagined.

It is this relationship between the imagined world and the physical world that has been at the heart of much previous analysis on film tourism. As places where the world of the text and our world meet, encountering the textual world itself is frequently put forward as the prevailing force of film tourism. Hills conceptualizes these encounters as “sustain[ing] cult fans’ fantasies of ‘entering’ into the cult text,” (2002, p.150) a point that Roesch (2009) echoes by referring to a “place insiderness” where the tourist “takes on the personality of the film characters and simulates what they must feel and experience in the scene,” (2009, p.114) what he considered the highest level of the film tourist experience. Immersing oneself in the text is, in this viewpoint, considered to be the ultimate goal of film tourism, suggesting that meaning is created by the closer that the tourist can get to this experience. A similar perspective is taken in studies that explain film tourism through the textual elements of film and television, such as Reijnders’ linking of James Bond tourism practices to the series’ performances of masculinity (2011), or Tzanelli and Yar’s reading of *Breaking Bad* tourism as a chance for the “normal” tourist to

“transgress” through imaginary encounters with the drug trade (2016). Here, as with Hills and Roesch, it is through entering or reenacting the text that the practice is ultimately given meaning.

While I do not want to suggest that the text itself, and the desire to “enter into” it, plays no role in the motivations and experiences of film tourists, I would like to add to this textual focus. Film tourism is, after all, connected to a wide range of texts with a wide range of stories, and the *Breaking Bad* tourist might find himself doing fairly similar things as a *Lord of the Rings* one, despite their strikingly different narrative themes and landscapes. An alternative perspective can be found in the work of Couldry. He argues that the *Coronation Street* set “functions as a material form for commemorating the practice of viewing television” (2000, p.75); that, essentially, going there commemorates the long existence of *Coronation Street*, and of the practice of watching television, which has undoubtedly been an important part of the tourist’s life. A similar point is made by Reijnders in his concept of “places of the imagination” (2011, p.14), which provide “reference points” to imaginary worlds much as historical landmarks do for historical events, and Hills’ noting that “cult geography” shifts the audience-text relationship “towards the monumentality and groundedness of physical locations.” (2002, p.149) These places are not just sites of entering into the text – they are places of commemorating the text.

To this, I would also like to suggest that these places commemorate not only the text, but its fandom. It is not simply that a text happened that makes it worthy of commemoration, but that watching it meant something to its fans. Williams (2015, p.21) refers to the relationship between fan and text as a “pure relationship” (Giddens, 1991), a form of relationship that is entered into only for what satisfaction it can deliver, and continued only so long as it continues to deliver this satisfaction. This relationship does not have to be reciprocated, as the fan enters into for what they personally get out of the text or other fans as it exists. For fans, being a fan of a certain

object grants a sense of comfort, pleasure, self, and/or ontological security, and can therefore be very important in the fan's life and identity.

Commemorating this relationship is therefore also an important part of what makes film and television tourism (and perhaps other types of media tourism as well) a meaningful experience. As Hills discusses, one of the main functions of cult geography is that it “extend[s] the productivity of [the fan's] affective relationship with the original text, reinscribing this attachment within a different domain (that of physical space).” (2002, p.149) In being at the place where “it happened” or somewhere that is otherwise designed to commemorate the text, the fan can celebrate his or her “pure relationship” with it. They can memorialize what happened there, as it was meaningful to them, and potentially even celebrate it with others. It makes the relationship physically real as much as it makes the text so. Therefore, even if a place is portrayed negatively or is not particularly beautiful, such as the meth-riddled suburban Albuquerque of *Breaking Bad*, it can still attract film tourists. The desire to commemorate the enjoyable relationship of watching *Breaking Bad* is still present, alongside the desire to probe at the boundaries of reality, media, and imagination. They are both part of the affective power and ultimate meaning of film tourism.

It is this affective relationship that leads to many of these trips being referred to, colloquially, as “pilgrimages.” As Beeton (2016) and Buchman et al (2010) suggest, there are significant similarities in form between the film tourist trip and the traditional religious pilgrimage, in that the film tourists makes an effort to visit sites that are connected to “sacred” values, such as fame or the values given to the text, and desire the proximity to “what happened” there much as religious pilgrims went to be in the presence of a miracle site. Yet, as discussed by Sandvoss (2005) and Reijnders (2011), as well as myself in Chapter 4, referring uncritically to

these trips as “pilgrimages” confers a solemnity and otherworldliness to these visits that is not necessarily present. Sandvoss suggests that “[r]ather than a communal search for a future place in another world, they are individual journeys seeking a sense of place in *this* world (2005, 63), while Reijnders stresses the “suspension of disbelief” inherent to the media tourist compared to the religious one – that it is about playing with what is real and what isn’t, which is fundamentally against the nature of religious experience. They are about the past and present of the individual, rather than the hope for a better afterlife, and the curiosity of the imaginative. Therefore, while pilgrimage can be a useful metaphor, we must be careful, as with any other attempt to map religion onto fandom, of using it simply because we recognize the similarities.

Rather, film tourism is tourism. It is akin to pilgrimage as much as all tourism is akin to pilgrimage (Badone & Roseman, 2004; Urry & Larsen, 2011), which is to say, similar in some ways and different in others. At its core it is about confirmation and commemoration, which is what tourism (and especially sightseeing) has long excelled at. The film tourist gets a sense of the “reality” of the otherwise “unreal” screen landscape through the practice of tourism, having an embodied and co-present encounter with the screen-depicted space, which has long been recognized in our society as was of establishing the “reality” of something otherwise existing only in media. Traditionally, in visiting important sites of history or culture, these sites’ value is confirmed and commemorated. Film tourism does this for sites of popular culture and fandom. This dissertation contributes three new case studies to the field, ones that explore different aspects of the film tourist experience as it relates to “fantastic” destinations, which offer their own questions about the contemporary idea of reality.

## **Reality, Fantasy, and Film Tourism**

As shown, previous studies on film tourism have highlighted the importance of the tension between reality and unreality in making the experience meaningful. Film tourism affords a unique way of playing with the borders between reality and unreality, one that draws upon multiple discourses about what is “real” that highlights particular aspects of its use in the contemporary media environment. What I aim to do with this dissertation is explore the different ways in which “reality” is constructed via place and popular culture today. I do this through an exploration of not just film tourism, but fantastic film tourism. By this, I mean texts involving places that do not exist in the “real world,” but that fans nonetheless seek a connection to through tourism. The popularity of fantastic film tourism raises interesting questions about the way we construct and make sense of the real/unreal divide today.

To understand this, we must first look at what is meant by “real.” “Reality” and “real” are tricky, fluid terms, with many definitions and many antitheses. It is perhaps best understood as a discursive concept, rather than one with a definitive definition, an emic approach to the term which illustrates the different ways in which it is used by both media audiences and tourists. Using “reality” and “the real” this way means that there is no “true” real to betray or overshadow (Baudrillard, 1994), but rather that the idea of what is real, and why is it important, is situationally and culturally determined. While reality’s changing nature might be of concern for various reasons, it is not the place of this research to argue what those are. Rather, I attempt to reflect the complex way in which the term is used in contemporary society, and from there suggest why it is important, especially for film tourism. Reality can be understood in three main, albeit related categories: the real as physically present and opposed to the imagined, the real as true and opposed to the false or fictional, and the real as opposed to fantasy or the fantastic. The

juxtaposition and combination of these different kinds of “real” is part of what gives film tourism its appeal.

The first way of using “real” is in terms of physicality – something that can be touched and grasped in a multi-sensory manner. It is through our senses that we determine what is or feels real, and what isn’t or doesn’t. In contemporary society, as Rodaway (1994) discusses, this is frequently ultimately confirmed through our haptic senses, as they are not only less simulated through technology (compared to the visual or auditory senses), but they are also considered the most intimate. Feeling something physically is perceptually difficult to disregard in the way that visual or audio stimuli might be, which are associated with the simulative and unreal practices of the media – we are used to the eye and ear being tricked, and therefore audiovisual media doesn’t seem entirely real. Yet even if an object is created or otherwise fictional, if we can touch it, it physically exists in the world. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this idea of physicality as the ultimate arbiter of reality connects to the importance of embodiment in tourism – to be physically present with something gives it a particular meaning, because it feels more “real.” This is compared to the object or place as imagined, existing only in the mind (or perhaps the eye) rather than perceived through all the senses (McGinn, 2004). Potentially anything can be imagined, but only what is physically perceived is real. Yet, as Reijnders (2011) discusses, imagination and perceived reality are not entirely separate – rather, they influence and play off each other. Imagination becomes more vivid when it intersects with reality, while reality becomes more meaningful as it touches upon important imaginaries.

This brings us to the next use of the term – the real as true, in opposition to false or fictional. Something might be “real” if it “really happened,” in the sense that it is verifiable. Touch, as mentioned, is a major way of verifying that something exists, but of course, not the

only one. In this use of the term, real essentially means “not fake,” not made by or for some external presence, and can also work as an analogue to “authentic” (Cohen, 1988; Wang, 1999) – a “real” battlefield where it can be confirmed an historic event took place, a “real” native craft as opposed to one machine-produced or made for tourists. If something is not real it can be seen as a sort of deception, a deliberate fake in order to defraud or manipulate an unsuspecting public.

Alternatively, we can also see this as an integral part of artistic expression and appreciation (Ryan, 2001). The counterpart to “real” then is not so much fake as fictional – as something imagined, created, and presented with the awareness that it is not real. Audiences know this going in, and therefore it is enjoyable rather than deceptive. As Ryan (2001) suggests, appreciating the work that goes into making this “feel real” – an actor successfully depicting grief, a story that absorbs you into its world – is an important part of appreciating art to most audiences. Indeed, a great deal of Western art has been built around the idea of creating a believable illusion of reality, with considerable technological development going into the goal of making ever-more-convincing representations of it (Bolter & Grusin, 1999; Grau, 2003). Returning to Jenkins (1992) and Saler (2012), that fiction often “feels real” makes it also feel meaningful. Emphasizing this is not without controversy, particularly from the more “highbrow” cultural critics who connect fictionality to fakery and warn about the “dangers” of getting too absorbed in fiction or technology and forgetting what is real. However, fictionality and illusion, in their playful but ultimately reciprocal relationship with reality, are undoubtedly a major part of Western cultural life.

The third use of “reality” is built on this one – namely, around the idea of it as opposed to fantasy or the fantastic. In this use, “real” is thought about more in terms of “realistic,” in whether a piece of fiction or use of the imagination corresponds to reality as we know it. As with

“real” itself, “fantasy” can be difficult to define, even if we just confine it to created works. As Attebery (1992) discusses, in his attempt to define fantasy literature, it potentially encompasses a great deal – everything that does not exist in our reality can be put under the “mode” of the fantastic. Fowkes, dealing with fantasy film, defines the genre as one in which “the audience must at the very least perceive an “ontological rupture” – a break between what the audience agrees is “reality” and the fantastic phenomena that define the narrative world.” (2010, p.5)

Essentially, fantasy is “unreal” even beyond its core fictionality – it is something that does not or could not happen, such as magic, talking animals, interstellar starships, and so forth. It is something that is tied even more directly to the imagination, as it relies on the mind’s power to come up with what cannot be perceived at all, and requires a great deal of creativity to produce. In literary theory, this is opposed to “mimesis” (Attebery, 1992; Hume, 1984), literature that supposedly depicts the world as it is, in a realistic fashion. Yet, as Attebery (1992) discusses, even here the relationship between reality and fantasy can be seen more of a continuum rather than an absolute separation. Mimesis without fantasy is dull, while fantasy without mimesis is nonsensical. Both must be related to the other in order to work properly, at least in a narrative context.

Within film and television, “the fantastic” is usually broken down into three main categories, science-fiction, horror, and fantasy (Fowkes, 2010; Furby & Hines, 2012; Johnson 2005), of which the borders are somewhat blurry. Fowkes, for example, excludes science fiction and horror from her definition of fantasy, as they are said to be explorations of things that could exist, lacking the complete “ontological rupture” of fantasy (2010, p.5). Johnson (2005), on the other hand, includes science-fiction and horror in her discussion of “telefantasy,” fantasy on television, because fans of such programs do so, which creates a genre by default. She links the



programs of this genre together by their “non-verisimilitude,” emphasizing that they share the same issues of “how to represent what ‘doesn’t exist.’” (2005, p.7) In keeping with the more emic approach of this research, I am following Johnson’s definition. Here, fantasy is what does not and could not exist in the “real” world, but is nonetheless depicted on screen, compared to a more mimetic fiction that theoretically could exist.

Film and television have a particular relationship to the fantastic. Compared to fantasy literature, which relies on the imagination of the author and reader, these places must be portrayed in a way that seems plausible to the eye and ear despite the viewer knowing that they are fantasies. Audiovisual verisimilitude is integral to cinema and television (Rodaway, 1994), with their appeal largely built on how accurately they can reproduce the looks and sounds of “real life.” Fantasy manipulates this understanding of film (Furby & Hines 2012; Johnson 2005), bringing what can’t be to “life” in the sense of successfully convincing the viewer that they could exist.

For “live-action” (as in, not animated) film and television, this means that there are physical practices involved in creating the fantastic world that is visible on screen (Furby & Hines 2012; Johnson, 2005). Practices of filmmaking, set design, costuming, acting, and so forth are used to create the illusion of the fantastic, and give these narratives a connection to the “real” world through their very physicality. While the world is still unreal – as in fictional, as in fantastic – the actual creation of it leaves physical traces. In this, too, fantastic film and television is different from fantasy literature, in that literature does not leave such traces behind. While there might be places and objects involved, they are not so directly tied to what “happened” there, in terms of content production.

Compared to more mimetic audiovisual media, however, fantastic film and television has a different relationship between reality and unreality, especially in terms of place. Fans of a mimetic show or film gain a “sense” of the place it is set via the way it is depicted on screen, and might visit it in order to see how closely it does or does not match up (, Beeton, 2016; Reijnders, 2011; Torchin, 2002). A fantastic place, however, only exists on the screen (or possibly the page). The fan-tourist can only ever visit the representation, not the “real thing.” Therefore, those visiting these places have, potentially, a different sense of what is important about the relationship between real and unreal, one that is worth investigating in its own right rather than as a part of a broader view of film tourism. As such fantastic environments proliferate, becoming part of the transmedia strategy of the media industries that market such texts (Harvey, 2015; Jenkins, 2006), understanding how fans interpret and make meaning of them is integral to understanding the way in which place, fantasy, and the media industry interact in the contemporary age.

The cases in this dissertation therefore deal with such fantastic audiovisual places: ones that do not and cannot exist in our reality, but are portrayed in film or television. Visited here are the high-fantasy Westeros of *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-), the wizard-only London neighborhood of Diagon Alley and town of Hogsmeade from the *Harry Potter* series (Warner Brothers, 2001-2011), and the mysterious Village of *The Prisoner* (ITV, 1967-1968). They are differing in their sub-genre of fantasy, histories, and fan relationships. As I will explain, this works to explore the range of issues associated with (fantastic) film and television tourism and, ultimately, the meaning-making processes of the fans who take part in it.

The first case, *Game of Thrones*, which is covered in Chapter 4, is a television show based on a popular novel series in the “high fantasy” category (Sullivan, 2004), which is to say

that it takes place entirely in a secondary world separate from our own. As with much of the genre, this world is based on the culture and aesthetics of medieval Europe (Young 2010), featuring kings, queens, castles, swordfighting, and so forth, combined with magic and mythic-magical creatures like dragons. Medieval high fantasy has been a popular literary genre since J.R. R. Tolkien popularized it in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Selling, 2004; Young, 2010), and *Game of Thrones* builds on this popularity and cultural familiarity. However, as I will discuss, it also positions itself as a “realistic” version of the genre, one that is closer to how medieval life “really was” compared to others. Part of its rhetoric of realism is based around its use of locations. The show is largely filmed “on location,” utilizing historic landmarks throughout Europe in order to promote this sense of historical verisimilitude. Therefore, tourism connected to the show interacts with these locations and their ‘real’ stories, theoretically unconnected to the televisual narrative imposed on top of them.

Comparatively, the *Harry Potter* series, the subject of Chapter 5, is what is termed “low” fantasy, meaning that it takes place in “our” world. The lead character, Harry Potter himself, is raised in an ordinary English suburb until his eleventh year, at which point his heritage as a wizard, and an entire parallel wizard culture, is revealed to him. The wizarding world exists in our own reality, hidden from those without magical talents or heritage – but can be revealed given proper permission. Many of its primary locations are part of “real” Great Britain, from the main setting of the Hogwarts school in Scotland to the London neighborhood of Diagon Alley. Rather than a completely other world, the *Harry Potter* series plays with the boundaries between reality and fantasy by suggesting that its environments could exist without any of us knowing it. Yet of course, they don’t. However, they can be visited not only at filming locations, but also at the Universal Studios theme parks, which have recreated several locations as they look in the

eight *Harry Potter* films. It is therefore in some ways a place of multiple unrealities – a recreation of what does not exist, utilizing none of the “real world” locations that the series draws upon. In other ways, it is very real, physically existing in a way that most fantastic fiction does not. It therefore has very different answers about the nature and purpose of the relationship between fantasy and reality.

The third location, Portmeirion, focused on in Chapter 6, is also somewhat of a recreation, but in a very different way. A hotel complex and “home for fallen buildings” designed by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis, its jumble of architectural elements and brightly-painted Italianate features set it apart from everything else in North Wales, and certainly far removed from an “authentic” Welsh village. Its fantastical appearance and isolated setting also made it an ideal filming location for *The Prisoner*, a television show about a spy (we think) who is kidnapped from his London home after his resignation and taken to a mysterious place known only as The Village. In the Village, he attempts to escape while being interrogated by a rotating cast of prisoners as to the reason for his resignation. Drawing on a range of genres, from spy intrigue to science-fiction, the viewer is never quite clear as to what is going on in the narrative – including exactly where the Village is, and what purpose it holds for whom. It blurs the lines between our reality and the show’s fantasy even further by questioning what reality even is. What fans can hold onto is the equally fantastic Portmeirion, which they have been visiting for over 50 years now. It is not necessarily the Village, but compared to the historic locations used in *Game of Thrones*, it is not quite “real” either.

Of these three cases, it is the *Harry Potter* fandom that has had the most previous research on fan use of its places. Lee (2012) explores a guided tour through the United Kingdom filming locations of the series, but not the London film studio or WWOHP, utilizing

participatory observation, interviews, and questionnaires to determine how the *Harry Potter* fans on these tours interpret these spaces. She discusses how the multiple identities of the places visited in this kind of tourism, which have both *Harry Potter* meanings and existing historical and/or folkloric meanings, expands the *Harry Potter* series. In visiting them, the fans can imaginatively expand the text beyond what they have already read or seen. More recent studies by Gilbert (2015) and Larsen (2015) address WWOHP and the Warner Brothers Studio Tour in London (where the movies were largely filmed) and Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  experience at Kings' Cross Station, both primarily using a framework of "authenticity" to analyze the experience. Gilbert's auto-ethnographic analysis of the WWOHP experience ends with her decision that it is not authentic, due to its use of technology in order to create the experience and its commercial nature, compared to what she felt a "real" immersion in the *Harry Potter* experience should be. Larsen also utilizes a model of authentic/inauthentic to discuss the Warner Brothers Studio Tour and Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$ , but her assumption that fans would find both these experiences disappointing for their staginess, lack of "true" immersion into the story-world, and commerciality was subverted by the fan responses she found online being largely positive.

These studies show that place is a well-recognized aspect of *Harry Potter* fandom, but disagree with how it is experienced and used. While Gilbert and Larsen assume that fans will only feel these experiences as authentic if there is absolutely no interruption to the fantasy (although this is contradicted by Larsen's data), and that authenticity is the most important aspect of meaning-making, Lee suggests that the fan experience at these places is more complicated than that. However, her research was conducted at exterior, historic locations that suggest rather than promise immersion into the story-world, which she suggests might make tourists more forgiving of discrepancies and contradictions. In Chapter 5, I therefore investigate WWOHP in

more detail, drawing on the experience of multiple tourists to see how this environment is experienced and interpreted.

Comparatively, research on the fandoms of *Game of Thrones* and *The Prisoner* have spent little time on place. Analysis of *The Prisoner* has largely been textual, with its fandom referenced in order to situate it in the legacies and traditions of “cult” television (Hanna, 2014; Morreale, 2010; Short, 2011; Woodman, 2005). Research into *Game of Thrones* fandom has developed only recently, within the course of writing this dissertation, and follows mostly in the tradition of looking at fans’ creative and/or textual practices that I will discuss in the next chapter (Finn, 2017). Researching their places is therefore fairly new ground for the research of these fandoms.

Fantastic film tourism is a growing business, as well as one with a surprisingly long history. I suggest that it is the value of “reality,” in each of the three forms that I discussed above that is at the heart of this practice. Fans visit these places to access some form of “reality,” in terms of real as physically present, real as non-fictional and/or authentic, or real as corresponding to reality as we know it (mimetically), for something that would otherwise be almost entirely unreal. What form of reality varies, as well as the ways in which this search is enacted. This dissertation investigates different ways in which the reality of fantasy is sought out and experienced, from filming locations to theme parks, from ‘new’ destinations to those that have been at the heart of fan practice for decades. It is a multifaceted investigation of fantasy film tourism at this point in media and cultural history, and the meaning that fans make out of encounters with “reality” today. Ultimately, I demonstrate that even in a heavily mediated age, experiencing something physically real has value.

It is to exploring how that works that we now turn.

### **3. Methodology: Studying Fans**

If I had to pick one single discipline that has been foundational for this particularly interdisciplinary research project, it would be fan studies. While not a discipline in the traditional sense (Ford 2014), in the past two and a half decades, it has become a research field of remarkable complexity and depth. Roughly, it is the study of fans and fandom – but it is the study of fans and fandom from a particular perspective, drawing strongly on cultural and media studies, built around understanding fandom and the role it plays in contemporary cultural life. This perspective has shaped this research project from its inception to its completion. Without the knowledge and insights of fan studies, this might have been a very different research project, with very different questions and conclusions about film tourism today. Having fan studies as the background has also shaped the methodological choices that I made, and what I did after I made those choices.

This chapter discusses the way in which my research project came to be. First, I discuss my background and perspectives as a researcher, particularly how I relate to “fan studies” as a research field. Following this, I detail the specific methodological choices that I made throughout this research, discussing my perspective and practices of online content analysis, participant observation, and interviews. Finally, I discuss the way in which this research progressed, and how it was shaped by the emergent, “grounded” (Charmaz, 2006) approach taken throughout the course of the project. In doing so, I account for this research, showing the steps I took and how that impacted the eventual results and interpretations that I made.

## **Aca-Fandom and the Fan Academic**

The earliest examples of what would become “fan studies” as a research field came out of cultural studies and/or ethnography (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992; Jenson, 1992), setting itself against earlier research in communication studies and psychology that portrayed fans as deviant or deluded. Drawing on the Birmingham School tradition of looking at the ways in which audiences actually interpret and use media products (Hall, 1973 (reprinted 2006); Hebdige, 1979; Morley, 1980), these early explorations of fandom as a cultural practice recast fans as creative producers resistant to dominant social norms, refashioning the texts of popular culture in order to better reflect their own concerns and critique the world they live in. They wished to understand fandom not as a pathological obsession with figures from popular culture, but an admirable way of interacting with and using popular culture in the media-rich world of late capitalism – and increasingly, a source of identity.

Fan studies is also, following Jenkins (1992, 2006), often, although certainly not entirely, done by those who are fans themselves, and who acknowledge their own fandom when doing their research. The “aca-fan” or “fan scholar” (Hellekson & Busse, 2006; Hills 2002; Jenkins, 1992; Philips, 2010; Stein et al, 2011<sup>1</sup>) foregrounds his or her own perspective as a fan in doing research, not only drawing on their history of fandom in discussing it but being very clear that they are fans themselves. This provides a particular color to the textual analyses of fan works, whether creative or discursive (or both), as the researcher can draw on his or her own understanding of what is being discussed and why it is significant. In researching fan communities, this can result in an auto-ethnographic perspective, one that utilizes the researcher’s perspective as part of the community in order to explain its norms and practices to

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<sup>1</sup> see also the series discussing the term on Jenkins’ blog beginning here: [http://henryjenkins.org/2011/06/acafandom\\_and\\_beyond\\_week\\_one.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2011/06/acafandom_and_beyond_week_one.html)



fellow researchers. This auto-ethnographic approach is also frequently utilized in studying ‘offline’ fan practices such as cosplay, convention attendance, and tourism (Booth, 2015; Garner, 2016; Geraghty, 2014; Gilbert, 2015; Hills, 2002; Lamerichs, 2014).

There are significant benefits to an auto-ethnographic approach. In acknowledging the researcher’s own position as a fan, the traditional relationship between the researcher and the researched is destabilized – rather than an elite outsider representing the strange customs of an Other, the community is explained by someone who is part of it. The researcher does not hold him or herself above the group being studied, but rather feels part of it, and works to explain and analyze it in collaboration with other members. The insider knowledge gained from being part of this community contributes to a fuller picture of it, one that comes closer to the lived experience of its members. While not completely mitigating the “crisis of representation” that has gripped ethnography and the social sciences (Gubrium and Holstein, 2012a; Rosenau, 1992), it presents one response to it by foregrounding the subjectivity of the researcher, self-reflexively noting that it is their reality as a fan and community member that is discussed, and that they have inhabited this reality means that they can represent it accurately. It also, potentially, grants the access that is crucial to a successful ethnographic project, as the researcher has already developed the connections and trust that are needed. As outsiders have not always depicted fandom respectfully, both academically and in the popular press, having an existing rapport with the fan community can be crucial in terms of the quality of the data gathered. The researcher does not have to gain access in the way an anthropologist usually would – they already have access to the community and its members, being part of it themselves.

In general, this approach has been of benefit to fan studies, particularly in its desire to “de-pathologize” fandom. The researcher can also go more in-depth about certain aspects of

fandom that are difficult to gather data on, such as the emotions involved with fandom or its connection to personal identity, especially over time. In showing fandom from closer to the fan's perspective, the more positive aspects of fandom – its creativity, its critical nature, its sociality – can be highlighted, showing what fandom offers and the way in which being a fan represents a critical as well as loving relationship with popular culture that draws it closer to “high” culture. And in ‘admitting’ to one’s own fandom, it is demonstrated that fans aren’t just some “other” that needs to be objectively dissected and studied – they are part of “us.”

However, that does not mean there aren’t drawbacks. As Evans and Stasi (2014) discuss, the reliance on auto-ethnography runs the risk that fans-as-researchers uncritically reproduce the power structures of fandom, failing to consider issues of racism, misogyny, or homophobia as they appear in fan communities, and the focus on individual feelings runs the risk of failing to acknowledge or recognize larger cultural structures. Indeed, it is the difficulty of criticizing a group that you are a part of – or yourself – that is one of the main problems of the auto-ethnographic “aca-fan” model. In foregrounding the fans and their feelings, and proclaiming oneself as part of this, the researcher runs the risk of being unwilling to look at some of the more neutral or even negative aspects of contemporary fandom. Fandom is fascinating because of its contradictions, and the “aca-fan” approach risks not addressing them.

In my experience, I have also seen that the reliance on the researcher’s lived experience of fandom limits which fan practices and fandoms are researched. Fans are eager to showcase why their own fandoms are particularly interesting, and to demonstrate the sort of fan activities that prove fandom is worth taking seriously. The fans drawn to research have largely come out of what was once known as “media fandom,” the organized fandom around (often, but not exclusively, science-fiction and fantasy) films and television shows. This has led to certain

activities, like fanfiction, being continually covered while more “ordinary” fan activities are neglected (Hills, 2010; Sandvoss & Kearns, 2014), and to certain fandoms appearing a great deal in the literature while others appear not at all. I have also noticed that while aca-fans are admirably reflexive about the way their fandom has informed their scholarship, they are less concerned about how their scholarship has affected their fandom. A fan with many years of training in critical media theory behind them will undoubtedly experience certain situations differently than a fan who hasn’t. A fan who claims to speak for others should be aware of this, even if their ultimate conclusions are valid. In short, while the auto-ethnographic “aca-fan” approach has many positives, it also can end up being too focused on the researcher’s experience of fandom rather than the broader community.

Keeping all this in mind, I have opted for what I call a “modified aca-fan” approach to my research. I have a personal history with fandom and fan practice, having been involved in it, in some form or another, for most of my life. I have written and read fanfiction, been to conventions (although not many), and have been an enthusiastic fan of many texts throughout my life. It has shaped who I am as a person and a researcher. I would certainly consider myself a fan in general, and by the definition of fandom towards texts that I use in this dissertation, I have also been a fan of both *Game of Thrones* and the *Harry Potter* series, with a recently-developed fondness for *The Prisoner*. However, I would not consider myself “in” those fandoms in the way that people who actively participate in them would – and I know enough to make such a distinction. They are not part of my life in the same way that other objects of fandom are.

Despite this, I approached each study as a fan. I might not have always been a fan of this particular case, but I am a fan in general. This positioning has shaped all aspects of this research, from its primary theoretical concerns to my methodological approaches. As a fan myself, I

sought to explain film tourism as an aspect of fandom – a perspective I felt was neglected in prior research – and in the methodological choices I made. In researching film tourism, I was forced to utilize more traditional social science and ethnographic methods, despite having a background in textual cultural and media studies, as I would be primarily dealing with others, rather than strictly my own perspectives on the fandom and its practices. I therefore utilized a combination of participatory observation, online content analysis, and most importantly, interviews with fans in order to develop my argument. In trying to gain an understanding of film tourism, it was necessary to move away from the textual or auto-ethnographic focus of fan studies as I knew it and consider my methodological choices in a different way, especially as I would be investigating a particularly “extra-textual” practice.

In this, I join an increasing number of fan scholars who have looked towards the social sciences for methodological guidance as the field matures (Evans and Stasi 2014, Ford 2014, Jensen 2016). Fan studies has largely had a textual focus, developing out of cultural studies and its strong tradition of textual analysis in order to discuss what fans do with popular culture and why it is significant (Jenkins 2014). This meant it did not have the stricter concerns about methodology that are found in the social sciences (Evans and Stasi 2014), and instead focused more on developing theoretical insights based on close reading of the texts produced by fans. The rise of the Internet, and the significant role it would play in expanding fan communication and practices, greatly facilitated this approach by providing access to a large amount of textual material for fandom researchers to work with. Fans were among the first adopters of the Internet, utilizing its affordances in order to expand upon what they were already doing and to connect with fans in other locales. As the Internet’s reach expanded, fan culture came along with it (Jenkins 2006, Coppa 2006).

From creative works like fanfiction and fan film to the discussions between fans that increasingly took place in online writing, not to mention the works of popular culture that fandoms coalesced around, fandom researchers could draw on a significant corpus of texts. This approach has been fruitful, developing concepts such as “transmedia storytelling” and “convergence culture” that have become key terms of media and cultural studies (Evans & Stasi, 2014), clearly demonstrating fans’ role as an “indicator species” of the media ecology (see also chapter 6). But as the field matures, we must ask what we are working with here – texts or people? (Jensen, 2016; Reid ,2016) These data sources are not “texts” in the same way that published works of literature are. They are part of how a community communicates with itself, and are about people’s lives in the same way as offline activities.

At the same time, there is an acknowledgement that the textual focus of fan studies has privileged certain kinds of fan over others (Hills, 2010; Jenkins, 2014; Sandvoss & Kearns 2014), with the ones that do “participate” in media through textual production becoming the standard-bearers of fandom in general. Fan studies needs to expand both in terms of methodology and the fans studied. This is not to say that textual analysis of fandom, even of “media fandom,” should be abandoned, but that it can no longer be the only, or even the main, way in which fans are studied. We as a field must draw on the traditions of the social sciences in order to study “others,” while still maintaining the insight and creativity that has made the field so vital and productive in a relatively short period of time.

This is what I attempt to do here. In the rest of this chapter, I will detail my approach to my research, discussing my methodological and analytical choices throughout its process. In this, I hope to contribute to the overall conversation about methods within fandom research, and show how they can be utilized towards the overall goals of the field.

## **Methodological Choices in This Research**

As someone who trained in the humanities at a time when the idea of an objective truth about society came under heavy attack from those working in this tradition, I cannot claim that this argument is “the” truth about film tourism. I feel that the sort of objective explanation about social phenomena that a positivist approach to social science espouses is impossible. Yet, I do not feel that there are no valid claims about experiencing the world to be made by researchers. The researcher can provide insights that the participant might not have considered, drawing on their differing knowledge of the subject and its theoretical perspectives to present a new understanding of the topic. The role of the researcher is to gather and interpret data in a way that provides such new insights, while still being true to the data, in the sense of depicting it accurately.

It is that guiding ethos that has shaped my research. While not so much a traditional ethnography, being concerned with a particular question instead of a broader portrait of the community, I have utilized an ethnographic approach. By this, I mean that my goal was to represent my respondent’s perspectives on their practices, while knowing that this is ultimately impossible (Rosenau, 1992). This work is grounded in empirical data, and I have strived to be truthful and accurate towards it. However, it is still data that is filtered through my own experiences, interpretations, and the process of collecting data itself. It is necessarily situational and partial, but I feel that it captures something about the experience and use of film tourism and why it is meaningful for participants. In the words of Rosenblatt, who discussed a similar conundrum, “I hope to write truth, not *the* truth, but certainly a truth.” (2012, p.17) Alongside my history as a fan and fandom researcher, this has shaped the way in which I conducted my research and the methodologies I used. The specifics of each case – number and demographic

information of respondents, recruiting, and so forth – can be found in their respective chapters. Here, I will discuss in more general terms the way I conducted my research.

### *Netnography*

My research process began with the Internet. As a fandom researcher, this made the most sense as a starting point. “Netnography” (Kozinets, 2010) and other forms of online content analysis are one of the backbones of fandom research, playing an important role from its earliest days. As mentioned, the increased profile and accessibility of fan communities online provided a great deal of data for researchers on fandom to draw upon, and the studies of such communities and their practices are far too numerous to list here. Indeed, there is a sense that to study fandom is to study these online communities and their works – that is, after all, where fandom is thought to be primarily located today. When beginning this project, I also assumed that much of my data would be found online. However, I soon found that there was often less actually written by film tourists than I expected, and as I went into my fieldwork and interviews, I found that it often appealed to so-called “momentary” (Hills, 2010) or “ordinary” (Sandvoss & Kearns, 2014) fans that, while emotionally involved in their object of fandom, did not find it necessary to communicate with other fans online about it.

This is not to say that material gathered online plays no role in my research. It is an integral initial stage, important both in identifying places to go to and in understanding the active concerns of the fandom – what they considered, generally, to be important to the community, its tensions, and its relationships with locations. While not all fans would find the issues expressed in the online community relevant, it did provide me with a starting point for developing my participatory observation and interviews. In the third case, online discussion became important as

a rich data source in and of itself, as the *Prisoner* fan community has a long history and active presence online, and many fans enjoy sharing their memories of the show and Portmeirion online with other fans. In this case, online data provided not only an important backgrounding for the interviews and participatory observation, but a confirmation of certain issues raised in them. By looking at what is posted in public fan communities, both now and in the past, and looking at the way fans write about Portmeirion on fan websites and magazines, I could confirm much of what my interviewees (many whom participate in these communities) said about their relationship with Portmeirion and its importance to the fandom as a whole.

### *Participant Observation*

From my initial observations of the fan communities through online ethnography, I moved to participatory observation. The goal with this part of the research was to participate as a (new) fan, to bodily experience the site, its practices, and its group dynamics (Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland, 1998; Spradley, 1980.). This was done either in “public” places, such as at Wizarding World of Harry Potter or during the commercial *Game of Thrones* tours in Dubrovnik and Northern Ireland, or in fan settings such as the two fan conventions (TitanCon and PortmeiriCon) that I participated in. In the former, my goal was first to explore and get to know the site and how it was presented to tourists, and then to observe other participants’ actions in the place. As public places without expectations of privacy, I feel that these unobtrusive observations did not require my disclosure as a researcher. For the fan conventions, where the expectation is that participants will be around fellow fans (and only fellow fans), I received permission from the organizers to attend as a researcher and announced myself as one to whomever I talked to. I felt this was ethically necessary due to these gatherings being seen as



functions for the private fan community, rather than the general public, and in receiving permission to attend as a researcher and announcing my presence I respected the fans' right to control their own space.

In all cases, the fieldwork was done in short trips, rather than the more long-term fieldwork common in anthropology. My fieldwork took the shape and structure, roughly, of the holidays that they were observing – a week or so in Belfast, Dubrovnik, and Portmeirion, return weekend trips for the conventions in Belfast and Portmeirion, and a three-day Universal Studios package in Orlando. While a longer process of embedding myself would be necessary for a deeper ethnography of these fan cultures, this time was considered suitable for understanding these places as holiday destinations. These are transitory places with transitory populations, and it was that transitory nature that generally interested me. I felt that my time spent on location was suitable for observing how fans interacted with these locations and each other that, while comparatively superficial, provided a good grounding for the kinds of questions that I would ask in my interviews.

More importantly, it gave me a sense of how these locations felt, in a physical sense, and the affordances that they engendered. I approached this part of the research as an “active participant” one who “seeks to do what other people are doing.” (Spradley 1980, p.60). At the fan conventions, I participated as an enthusiastic newcomer (albeit one that announced her presence as a researcher), eager to put on costumes, answer trivia questions, and at one point even participate in an archery contest. I also participated in social events at both conventions, such as dances and social drinks. While it might not be the most scientific way to put it, I had fun with this part of the fieldwork, enjoying the presence of fans and the way in which they celebrated their object of fandom through and in place, and used this enthusiasm in order to

make the personal connections that are crucial to ethnographic practice (Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland 1998). By being willing to participate, and participating actively, I showed that I was not the sort of snobbish academic who would treat them poorly in my text.

In the public locations, I wandered “as” a fan-tourist, buying souvenirs, walking the streets, drinking Butterbeer, and, essentially, people-watching with a purpose. In both forms, I took fieldnotes in the moment (Dewalt, Dewalt, & Wayland, 1998), handwriting in a small notebook or, especially at PortmeiriCon, on my phone, as it seemed far less obtrusive than writing in a notebook in such a close social setting would be. These observations contained descriptions of what I did where, what other people were doing, and other details, but also my thoughts on what was happening and what I felt to be important issues to follow up with during the interviews. I reread them in the evening and when I returned, adding where necessary, and used them to prepare the interviews as well as consulting them when I went to write the eventual report.

This approach allowed me to feel, in some way, what the experience was like for fans, while also demonstrating an ability to appreciate fandom that made potential respondents willing to help in my research. Also, and perhaps most importantly considering the difficulty of finding online accounts of the practice, it brought me in contact with the fan-tourists themselves.

### *Interviews*

While I utilize participatory observation and online content analysis, the primary method of this research was interviews. As Kvale and Brinkmann state, “the qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations.”

(2009, p1) My research questions are about the meaning of the experience of film tourism, and to answer these questions, I must ask those for whom it has meaning. Participant observation can only take me so far (Atkinson & Coffey, 2012), and the online content analysis, while useful, is somewhat limited and less focused towards my exact questions. Therefore, focusing on interviews was determined to be the best tactic. The first step in this is to establish some kind of rapport with those being interviewed – to ensure that I would treat them, their stories, and their lives with respect (Hermanowicz, 2002). In dealing with fans, this is particularly important. As discussed, fans are still frequently seen as deviant and weird, and are often reluctant to talk about their fandom with outsiders for fear of being mocked. However, with those that are seen as sympathetic, they can be quite loquacious, eager to discuss their favorite fan objects and the impact this has had on their lives. Fandom is therefore a different sort of subject than many of the more sensitive topics that social science research has focused on. Fans generally consider their fandom, fan objects, and the role it has played in their lives a positive and enjoyable thing to discuss, but are aware of others' negative reactions to it and sensitive to having this important part of themselves denigrated.

As befitting my more postmodernist and social constructivist background, my approach to interviews can be considered “active” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2012b), in that I understand the interview process to be an active construction of meaning, both by myself and the respondents. I had a specific research question and/or problem in mind, and designed the interviews in order to investigate this problem. The interviews I conducted were semi-structured, utilizing an interview guide developed before the interviews but allowing for changes during the interviews themselves as necessary (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Questions varied between experiential/phenomenologically focused – what was done when and why – and emotionally

focused – how experiences felt and were recalled – and were workshopped with my supervisor before the interviews were conducted. The respondents themselves, too, were active creators of meaning, in that they were not “vessels of answers” (Gubrium & Holstein 2012b, p.14) for me to mine for objective truths, but that they present stories and narratives about their world that construct meaning in a certain way. I trust that this is truthful information, in the sense that they are not lying to me about their experiences, memories, or feelings, but they are stories that I have elicited for a purpose. They are not neutral – nor can they be.

As befitting the grounded approach that I will discuss later in this chapter, initial interviews impacted the later ones, with the guides shifting and changing slightly as the process went on. My approach was much like Kvale and Brinkmann’s conceptualization of the “traveler” style of interviewing, in which the researcher wanders the landscape of the data seeking out stories about it and the “potentialities of meanings in the original stories are differentiated and unfolded through the traveler’s interpretations of the narratives he or she brings back to home audiences.” (2009, pp.48-49) In keeping with this, I considered data collection and analysis as part of the same process, developing my ideas about the meaning of the data as I collected it and altering the interview guides as necessary to further develop these ideas. This was facilitated by two of the cases – *Game of Thrones* and *The Prisoner* – requiring a multi-sited approach in which different groups of fans were interviewed in different places over a space of several months, which meant I had time to think about the interviews in the interim. However, this was also facilitated by me making use of several case studies in general – as I discuss later in this chapter, the cases built on each other in particular ways, impacting the way in which I thought about not only their specificities, but the phenomenon of film tourism more generally.

Interviews were conducted in English, my native language, and also the native language of the majority of my interviewees. Many, although not all, were conducted via Skype or the telephone. While this has disadvantages in terms of not being physically present with the interviewees, and therefore unable to always get the important physical nuances of a conversation (Hermanowicz, 2002; Shuy, 2011), for this study it has several advantages. Indeed, I switched to a Skype and/or telephone approach after attempting on-site interviews for my first study, only to find that they are difficult to do well in a holiday setting. Those who are willing to participate in the interviews are unwilling to spend much time out of their holiday in participating, delivering shorter answers and wishing to get quickly back to their leisure activities. Financial and logistical concerns meant that following up in person was nearly impossible. By interviewing later via Skype or telephone, however, this is mitigated – interviewees can decide when they wish to be interviewed, and ensure that there is enough time in which to complete the interview. That they could control where it happened also meant that they were in a more relaxed and contemplative state (compared to the chaos and noise of the location), and in a place that they felt comfortable and secure. It also meant that they were enthusiastic about participating, and more aware of what it meant and what it would entail, as they had time to think about it due to the lag in being asked and the interview process commencing. The third case, on *The Prisoner* fans in Portmeirion, also involved some on-site interviewing, but due to the nature of the holiday (a fan convention over several days, with down time for socializing and relaxing), the interviews conducted there were also solicited ahead of time and conducted at the time and place of the interviewee's choosing. Therefore, conducting interviews in this fashion made the most sense for this research (helped by the visibility of

Skype, which meant I could still see the majority of my respondents and they could see me), and offered several advantages that overshadowed its drawbacks.

Once conducted, the interviews were transcribed verbatim, either by myself or a research assistant, depending on time and funding. I am a humanities scholar, trained in analyzing texts and concepts, and therefore I took a hermeneutic approach to the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). By this I mean that I understood these interview transcripts as texts, as narratives and stories that my respondents told about their lives and practices, and treated them as such. This also extends to the goals of this research. I use the interview transcripts to develop my conceptual understanding of what film tourism can do for to the fans that participate in it. It is not my aim to present a complete sociological survey of film tourism, but rather to analyze these stories and narratives in order to develop a conceptual and theoretical understanding of what film tourism as a practice can be. Therefore, I spend less time here discussing the profiles of film tourists and the relative volume of each reaction, in order to find the definitive way that film tourism is experienced, than I do on focussing on what these experiences can potentially be and the conceptual and theoretical issues raised in my reading of the transcripts.

Reading through the transcripts as full texts was therefore quite important to me, to understand them as narratives that could then be connected to other narratives (Riessmann, 2011). In these initial readings my first thoughts about the cases came to the forefront, helped by a process of memo-writing as I read. At this point I utilized the program Atlas.ti in order to do a finer, line-by-line coding of the interviews (Charmaz, 2006, 2011), which allowed me to both go deeper into the interviews and take a step back from their full text, identifying commonalities and differences on the level of specific words and statements. I could also use this program to compile larger groupings of similar statements across the interviews, allowing me to look for

trends in a more systematic way. I continued my memo-writing, adding insights from the coding process to those that I had previously made. At this point, I began to focus on the thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2006) of my cases, identifying the major thematic and theoretical issues raised by my understanding of the data and its story. I also returned to the full texts of the interviews, particularly in the third case, as I wanted to make sure I wasn't losing the overall story of the data by focusing too heavily on the codes. During the writing process, I continued to consult the interviews and the codes in order to ensure that I was representing the data fairly and accurately.

These reports are, however, still interpretations of the data, and it is possible that someone else with a different background and interests would make different sense of even the same data, not to mention the process of collecting it. Yet, I do not feel that this is a flaw in the process. Rather, it exemplifies what makes qualitative research so vital today, and what researchers from the humanities such as myself can offer. In an age when we are aware of the different ways in which social life and phenomena are constructed and experienced, qualitative research with a humanities approach can reveal different aspects of these experiences. It allows us to consider new possibilities and new ways of understanding the society we live in. However, we must still be accurate to our data and our ways of collecting it. It is in combining the interpretive ethos of the humanities with the rigor and concern for accuracy of the social sciences that I feel is the strength of this research.

I feel that this lets me make use of the strengths of the aca-fan position – its respect for those being studied, its insiderness, and the awareness of the position of the researcher – while keeping the focus on the experience of others. I am, after all, only one person, and I feel that different perspectives are necessary in order to explain a practice as complicated as film tourism.

However, the interpretation of these different perspectives is mine, which I feel is what the researcher offers to the process. While I sent respondents copies of their interview transcripts when possible, I did not solicit their feedback on the interpretations I made (although I did send the final published article of two cases to several respondents who wished to read it). I felt this was necessary in order to maintain my critical perspective, despite the connections I made with my respondents and my desire to be truthful to the data.

Despite this, I still consider this audience-focused research. It is primarily about the experience of others. This is filtered through my own interpretation, which draws upon my theoretical grounding in media and cultural studies, but it begins with the fans who have been so kind as to share their experiences with me.

### **The Progression of This Project**

That I consider this work to have begun with the fans who share their experiences with me also points to the final aspect of my methodological approach to this dissertation. Namely, that this is an inductive and emergent research, one that has changed and grew throughout the course of the research project. In this, I have been greatly indebted to the definition of grounded theory as described by Charmaz (2006), an approach that I feel dovetails nicely with the concerns and methodologies of fan research that I have outlined above. Charmaz portrays grounded theory as a “fluid, interactive, and open-ended” (2006, 178) process, one that is constantly evolving as the research goes on but is informed by what the researcher brings to the situation. It is a flexible approach, with guidelines rather than proscriptions, which allows different explorations of the data and the results that come from it. And ultimately, it begins with the data.



This is the approach that I used when writing this dissertation, both for the case studies and for the dissertation itself. I began with fairly open-ended questions about the experience of these places, and went into the field with the intent of exploring where these questions would go. I built the interviews around this beginning question, but left them open in order to follow up on different themes as they emerged, with each interview building on the last in some fashion. The themes that I discerned from my reading and coding of the interview data, my participatory observations, and online data are organized through a process of memo-writing, which eventually became theoretical concepts. It is at this point that I began the writing process, which brought all these observations and ideas together into a more coherent whole, connecting them to relevant prior research. The entirety of the resulting chapters and papers are therefore built around the ideas from the data analysis, with theoretical developments coming out of what I understand from the data rather than starting with a theory-based hypothesis and basing the data analysis around proving or disproving it. Ultimately, it is a personal interpretation, but I feel that it reflects the data and the tourists' perspectives in an accurate way.

This grounded, emergent approach is also reflected in the way I designed my research. Each case study built on aspects of the one before it, drawing from its conclusions and process in order to push the entire project forward. The first case, centered around *Game of Thrones* tourism, focused on the immediate imaginative experience of tourists, and allowed me to explore and gain an understanding of "on-site" film location tourism. It was here that I established some of the questions around the relationships between reality, fantasy, and physical experience that would guide the research as a whole.

Armed with this grounding, I turned my attention to a recreated location, of the sort that had been dismissed by both some of the respondents of my previous case and the literature that I

read to support it. With a sense of how fan-tourists responded to the actual locations of filming, and the cultural values put on the “real thing,” I wanted to investigate the opposite – a recreated environment that I had encountered during a trip to Orlando, The Wizarding World of Harry Potter. The enthusiasm of many *Harry Potter* fans towards this environment raised different questions about authenticity and realism than had been addressed in prior research on film tourism, including my own. In researching these, I also encountered theoretical issues that hadn’t come to the fore in my analysis of *Game of Thrones* tourism – namely, the ability to re-visit the location (sometimes, in the case of Florida residents, on a very frequent basis) and the inherent sociality of being in an environment with so many other fans.

It was these questions that ended up being at the forefront of my final case, investigating the relationship that fans of *The Prisoner* had with its main filming location of Portmeirion. As a long-established filming location and gathering place for fans of the show, it was a good opportunity to expand on the themes of the previous case while also looking at issues of longevity and sustainability in film tourism that had not been addressed in the previous cases. In its current form, however, it would have been impossible to do without the experience of the other cases in the background. It is through having the understanding of contemporary *Game of Thrones* tourism and the experience at The Wizarding World of Harry Potter that I approached *The Prisoner* with the concerns I did, which then enabled me to draw particular conclusions from the data I gathered.

This emergent approach also meant that it was not until I completed the cases that I developed a theoretical framework, which I have presented in the previous chapter in lieu of a traditional literature review. I was able to construct a broader theoretical exploration of film tourism by drawing on the issues and concerns raised in the case studies, using their similarities

and differences in order to explore the ways in which film tourism becomes a meaningful experience. It looks very different than the attempt I made to do this at the very beginning of my project, which I feel shows the value of this kind of inductive, emergent research. In taking this grounded approach, I have come closer to my initial interest in the topic – to understand why film tourism is a meaningful experience for those who do it.

To sum up, my methodological approach to this research was an inductive, emergent approach, built around an ethnographic perspective and drawing on the research paradigms and concerns of fan studies. It was from this point that I began my research, and the spirit in which I conducted it. The results of this are presented in the following chapters.



## 4. Game of Thrones: The Role of Imagination in the Film Tourist Experience

### Introduction

Perched atop a hillside, overlooking the medieval walled city and the brilliant blue water below, Fort Lovrjeniac was originally built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century to protect the city of Dubrovnik from seaside attack. Our guide tells us the story of its thick limestone walls and of the cannons that once stood there, but we are primarily here for another reason: Fort Lovrjeniac was the filming location for many scenes of the Red Keep – castle of the royal family in the hit HBO television series *Game of Thrones* (2011-). Our tour visits the place where King Joffrey's name-day tournament was held and Cersei Lannister had her dramatic conversation with Petyr Baelish in season 2.

It is not surprising that we are here for that reason. As I discussed in the introduction, the idea of 'film tourism' is now mainstream, with regions making filming sites a cornerstone of tourism marketing campaigns and newspapers and magazines offering guides to filming locations. In this chapter, I argue that considering the imagination is imperative to deepening our understanding of the film tourist experience. Strictly speaking, all travel is an imaginative act (Henning, 2002, Lean, Staiff, & Waterton, 2014; Rojek 1997), but the role of the imagination becomes particularly prominent when looking at film tourism. As I argue in the next section, the imagination plays a crucial role before, during and after the concrete film tourist experience. Being there 'in person' can enhance the imagining the fan already does, confront it with a sense of 'reality', and stimulate the tourist's imagination once he or she returns home. Imagination

should therefore be a core concept in studying film tourism. In this chapter I ask how, and in what ways, film tourists involve their imagination in practice when experiencing film locations.

This chapter is a case study of *Game of Thrones* film location tourists, and examines their imaginative interest in *Game of Thrones* locations in Dubrovnik, Croatia and Northern Ireland. What follows develops in two sections. First, I look at the role of imagination in tourism and fan practice more generally, developing the argument I built in Chapter 2. I then examine the specifics of *Game of Thrones* tourism, focusing on my field interviews, in order to investigate how film tourists' imaginative experiences occur in practice and what specific modes of imagining they pursue.

### **Imagination and Film Tourism**

Tourism in general is conceived of as imaginative. Rojek argues that “myth and fantasy play an unusually large role in the social construction of all travel and tourist sights” (1997, p.53). We have already imagined a version of them before visiting. Since our perception is based on their existing presence in our culture, tourist sites are socially constructed as “extraordinary” places (1997, p.53). Henning discusses how tourist activity is therefore based on widely held ‘myths’ concerning themes such as freedom, nature, or paradise. It is through these myths that tourism gains meaning; as a practice it “takes place simultaneously in the realm of the imagination and that of the physical world” (2002, p.185).

Film tourism goes beyond the general tourist imagination in that it connects place to specific fictions. Existing studies offer several starting points for conceptualizing this central role of imagination in the film tourist experience. Brooker draws upon the science-fiction concept of parallel universes to discuss how fans of the *X-Files* and *Smallville* interpret their visits to

filming locations in Vancouver's city streets and office buildings, "treating them as fictional locations and gateways into alternative worlds" (2007, p.443). *Lord of the Rings* tourists in New Zealand are seen as "eager to test the connection between imagination and geographical places by physically travelling to the film location(s)" (Buchmann, 2010, p.79) and demonstrate "a playful attempt to touch something untouchable" (Peaslee, 2011, p.42). Examining tourism at filming locations for the Korean drama series *Winter Sonata*, Kim shows how acts of photographing and re-enactment allow people to connect their personal experiences with that of the show's characters and "consciously plunge themselves in/between representation and reality." (2010, p.71) Going further, Lee claims that *Harry Potter* tourists in the United Kingdom find meaning in these visits through imagination, as they "may not only see what is physically before them but also insert into the landscape elements of a fictional narrative and historical accounts" (2012, p.61) that expand the possibilities of both the text and the landscape. Roesch's study of several different groups of film tourists similarly found that the act of tourism brings the 'imaginary' and 'real' worlds together, and that the imaginative element is key to finding meaning in the experience. Tourists have "the longing to connect with the imaginary world through visiting the real places, which, in turn, serve as the symbolic link between the real and the imaginary" (2009, p.209).

Reijnders' concept of "places of the imagination" elaborates on this by suggesting "material reference points like objects or places, which for certain groups within society serve as material-symbolic references to a common imaginary world" (2011, p.14). For Reijnders, such locations allow a play with the boundaries between the real and the imagined, becoming spaces "where the symbolic difference between these two concepts is being (re-)constructed by those involved, based on what is considered 'factual' evidence" (2011, p.16). Thus, visiting a film

location is almost like visiting one's own imagination. At the same time, the imagination is confronted with the physical reality of the specific environments, creating a powerful dialectic between imagination and perception, between symbolic landscapes and physical reality (Reijnders, 2011).

The dialectic between imagination and perception builds on a longstanding philosophical tradition, dating back to, amongst others, the seminal work of Immanuel Kant, who considered these dialectics to be one of the prime characteristics of the human consciousness. More recently, the American philosopher Colin McGinn returned to the topic of imagination, and stressed the deliberate, generated nature of imagination, which separates it from mere perception. According to McGinn, imagination requires human activity: “[f]orming an image is something I do, while seeing is something that happens to me; in short, imagining is a mental action” (2004, p.13). For McGinn, it is through this action that the world is made sense of, and given meaning, allowing us to contemplate what is possible outside of direct sensory input, offering an idea of what “could” be (whether it is physically possible or not). Imagination is therefore the mental activity of thinking about what is not directly perceived and envisioning what is possible.

The separation of imagination from perception seems to disconnect imagination from experience. Yet for tourism, and especially for film tourism, imagination and experience are highly connected. It is imagination that makes the tourist want to “see” and therefore experience the place in question. McGinn’s notion of “imaginative seeing” (“seeing-as”) is useful in resolving this: “the image comes to permeate the percept, to inhabit it, reach out to it, clothe it” (2004: 49). Essentially, in imaginative seeing, perception is given new meaning through imagination. It is “seen as” something beyond what is directly sensed. McGinn’s definition, however, ignores how perception can also influence the imagination. Within film tourism,



“seeing” each new place involves a process in which *both* parts influence each other. Imagining what “happened” in the fictional narrative when visiting a site gives it meaning, but physical experience of the actual place also influences imagination. This process is not necessarily visual, but can involve other sensory input. Rather than just “imaginative seeing,” we can therefore describe film tourism as an “imaginative experience”, pre-shaped by a mental process of imagination and followed by a process of reshaping our fantasy lives.

This is complemented by the way in which fans are said to perceive favorite texts. According to Hills, most fan texts feature a form of “hyperdiegesis: the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text” (2002, p.137). Their narrative worlds feel complex, inhabitable and able to be explored. While watching *Game of Thrones* a viewer will see only a portion of its geography; fans often desire to complete this missing space. Tourism theoretically offers a way to experience and explore hyperdiegetic spaces in a physical, embodied manner. Hills therefore refers to fans visiting filming locations as utilizing “cult geography,” “extend[ing] the productivity of his or her affective relationship with the original text” (2002, p.149) into physical space.

It is in this way that the relationship between fan and filming location has generally been theorized, as I discuss in Chapter 2. Roesch builds the concept of “mental simulation”: the tourist at a location disconnects from what is actually in front of him/her and instead “takes on the personality of the film characters and simulates what they must feel and experience in the scene” (2009, p.114). This is a fundamental component of a “place insiderness” where the tourist is “able to consume the imaginary beyond the filmic gaze” (2009, p.160) and connect to it on what he considers the highest level. In other words, location is theorized as helping fans imagine, explore, and insert oneself into a cult text’s hyperdiegetic space, as tourists connect the physical

space to cult media such as *The X-Files* (Brooker, 2007; Hills, 2002), *Star Wars* (Roesch, 2009), *Dracula* (Reijnders, 2011), *Harry Potter* (Lee, 2012), or *The Lord of the Rings* (Buchmann et al, 2010; Peaslee 2011; Roesch, 2009). As film and television fans are believed to spend much time imagining what the world of their favorite narrative is like, visiting the “actual” place is thought of as a way to make this imagining more concrete. Visiting their story’s real location potentially gives them “embodied” knowledge (Crouch, 2000), moving their encounter beyond something merely cerebral and leading to a deeper experience of the hyperdiegetic realm. Therefore, fan tourists are seen as “actively [seeking] to re-vision the landscape and see beyond the physical geography” (Lee, 2012, p.61) into the hyperdiegetic space, which, as Lee (2012) discusses, expands the possibilities of the text and gives the tourist a sense that they can expand their knowledge of the narrative and its setting.

Yet, is this the only way in which imagination plays a role in the fan experience of filming locations? The grounding of these narratives in physical space also connects them to reality in a more prosaic sense – it is not only that fictional locations gain physical presence, but there are real locations involved, with their own stories, and real work involved in creating what is seen on screen. Not every fan focuses their attention on the diegetic world of a narrative – there are many potential ways to be a fan, and contemporary media texts have many elements to focus fandom on. For example, in Chapter 2 I discuss the importance of the physical practices of fantasy film and television – that in making these environments convincingly “trick” the eye into being perceived as real, they leave physical traces, which fans then might seek out for their own sake. There has been much less attention paid to how different aspects of the intermixing of reality and fantasy affect the imaginative experience of fans. In the following sections, I will therefore investigate the different ways in which fans imaginatively experience filming locations,

by focusing in particular on fans of *Game of Thrones* as they explore the different landscapes and environments that form its stage.

## **Methods**

The HBO television show *Game of Thrones* is a popular high-fantasy series based on George R. R. Martin's book series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The series' sprawling storylines focus on several families and individuals vying for the Iron Throne of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros; the major conflict is between the Lannisters in the capital city of King's Landing and the Starks of the North. As is typical of the genre, the show takes place in a world entirely outside of our own, but draws on the cultures, activities, and visual presentation of medieval Europe alongside recognizable fantastic elements (Selling, 2004; Young, 2010). Therefore, there is no "real" version of King's Landing, but it clearly has historical referents. The production of the series is based in Northern Ireland, which provides many locations for different parts of the Seven Kingdoms, especially the North, while Dubrovnik stands in for King's Landing and assorted locations in the outer lands of Essos. The show is highly successful, with record-high viewership for HBO, an active fanbase, and a prominent place in contemporary popular culture. These factors, along with the use of existing heritage locations, make *Game of Thrones* an ideal case study for examining the interaction of fandom, imagination and the experience of place in film tourism.

In the summer and fall of 2013, between the airing of the third and fourth season of the show, fieldwork was conducted around four *Game of Thrones*-related sites and activities. While the show had also at the time filmed in Iceland and Morocco, tourism had concentrated on Dubrovnik and Northern Ireland due to the number and accessibility of their filming locations.

Interviewees were selected from tourists attending a commercial walking tour in Dubrovnik sold through a popular travel website, a recently-launched commercial coach tour in Northern Ireland, a fan-run coach tour that was part of an annual nonprofit Northern Ireland fantasy convention called TitanCon, and individual tourists at Fort Lovrjeniac in Dubrovnik – a location prominently featured in guides to the show and easily accessible from the city center. This resulted in a broad range of tourists with a variety of connections to *Game of Thrones* and the *A Song of Ice and Fire* book series, as well as capturing tourist activity as it was beginning to coalesce. I interviewed tourists who were specifically at the location or taking the tour because of *Game of Thrones*, in order to focus on the ‘fan’ audience rather than the general tourist audience. Different perspectives on *Game of Thrones* and its locations could be considered, from those that had been involved with the book series before the television show debuted to those who had recently begun watching, those that frequently participate in activities with other fans and those that preferred to watch on their own. I do, however, consider all of them fans, following Sandvoss’ definition of fandom as “the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given narrative or text.” (2005, p.8) There were rough differences between the different groups, with the fans at TitanCon being more likely to be part of “participatory” fandom culture (Jenkins, 1992), doing activities such as discussing the show regularly with other fans online and creating fanworks, and those interviewed in Dubrovnik being less likely to do such things. However, this does not mean that the fans in Dubrovnik cared less about the program than the ones found at TitanCon, only that they expressed their fandom in different ways.

In all, 48 film tourists, aged nineteen to sixty-three, were questioned alone or in small groups. 30 of these were between the ages of 24-35, with 12 older and six younger, which is fairly consistent with the known demographics of the *Game of Thrones* viewership. (Bark, 2015)

23 were female and 25 were male. 17 were from North America, 21 from the United Kingdom, and the remaining were European, which can possibly be explained by TitanCon having a largely British attendance base. If people had the time and willingness to talk in the moment, they were interviewed on site; a practice that had the benefit of gauging immediate reactions. Others were questioned nearby, shortly afterwards. A minority of volunteers also participated in follow-up interviews via Skype; these tended to offer a more measured reflection on the experience. Two visitors who participated in both the TitanCon tour and a later trip to Dubrovnik with friends from the convention were interviewed after each trip. In all there were thirty-one interviews, lasting from seven to forty minutes. Those questioned have been given pseudonyms in order to maintain their anonymity.

Participant observation was used as way to complement the interviews. The Dubrovnik tours were daily walking tours of a few hours in and around the UNESCO-protected “Old Town” with local guides who had also been extras on the show; the commercial Northern Ireland tour was a coach tour along the coastal route outside of Belfast lasting the entire day; the fan-convention tour was considered the second day of an annual convention dedicated to discussing the show and its genre, and was also an opportunity to be social with a large group of other fans, thereby gaining their confidence prior to the interviews. Finally, Fort Lovrjeniac was an easily-accessible spot for interested tourists who might not have been willing or able to spend the money on the tour or who wanted to experience it on their own time.

Analyzing the data revealed the central role of the imagination in the film tourist experience. More particularly, the interviews showed that there are three main modes of imagination at work: hyperdiegetic, production, and historical. I refer to these as “modes” because, as I will explain, they are different mindsets that tourists can move between, rather than

distinct types of tourists. They have been presented in this order to first engage with previous research on film tourism, which has often focused on what I have termed the “hyperdiegetic” mode, and then to move from it into the other ways that fans utilize their imagination to experience these places.

### **MEET THE TOURIST: GAME OF THRONES**

Julie is 63 and from Toronto, Canada, where she works as a team leader and project manager for a financial planning office. She got into *Game of Thrones* by starting the first book of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, only to have a co-worker start downloading the television show, which she passed on to Julie. The series hooked her in and she never returned to the books. At the time of the interview she’d watched the entire series and was eagerly awaiting the fourth season, which was filming at the time she visited Northern Ireland (which meant she couldn’t see some of the places that were normally included on the tour).

She became interested in the series because of her interest in history and historical fiction. She enjoyed reading about World War I and II and the works of Ken Follett, citing his medieval historical novel *Pillars of the Earth* as a particular favorite. The similarities of *Game of Thrones* to “our own history” was what she found particularly compelling about the series, noting the political intricacies, the excitement of living in this more extreme environment, and the effects that the power struggles of Westeros have on its ruling families. The fantastical elements of the series – the White Walkers, the dragons – were something she overcame because she enjoyed the historical-esque political intrigue so much, rather than their own draw.

Her interest in history was also what brought her to Northern Ireland. Her father had traced their family genealogy back to the country, and she found it important to go and retrace the steps of her ancestors. Her father was also a geologist, so seeing the Giant’s Causeway – a unique volcanic rock formation and a UNESCO World Heritage Site – was important to her. She was excited to discover that there was a tour that allowed her to see both the Giant’s Causeway and *Game of Thrones* locations on the same trip. Visiting *Game of Thrones* locations on a long day of sightseeing kept her interest throughout the day. She also enjoyed that she could take time out of the more obligatory parts of her family heritage trip and see things connected to her favorite TV show – in her words, it made visiting Northern Ireland even more exciting.

It also made her feel more connected to the show. That she had been there, stood on the same ground, in a place with a link to her own family, gave her a more personal connection to it. She had been to other filming locations in a similar opportunistic fashion – naming *The Witches of Eastwick* and *A League of Their Own*, both of which she’d managed to incorporate into family holidays – and found that being there was a way to connect to these favorite narratives and make them part of her own life experience.

While *Game of Thrones* is one of Julie's favorite shows, she didn't participate in the fandom around it – no other fan activities other than the tourism, and she didn't read about it online or in print, which she credited to her long hours at work. However, the show is something that she shared with her daughters, who are in their 20s. They all watched the show and discussed it together (and are particular fans of the character Jon Snow). After the interview, she was planning on meeting with them, as they didn't join her on her trip, and showing them all the photographs she took in a more organized fashion. Her one complaint was that Northern Ireland didn't have nearly enough Game of Thrones souvenirs – there was nothing to bring home for them.

## The On-Site Imagination

### *Imagining Westeros*

When standing at filming locations of *Game of Thrones*, many tourists do imagine the narrative world of the TV-series:

We went swimming down by the city walls the other day, and just thinking, 'oh my God, that's King's Landing! We swam right next to it! That's fantastic!' (Dan, 22, English, Dubrovnik)

Such a "hyperdiegetic" mode of imagining has been noted before in other studies. Being at a place related to famous story lines allows the play of narrative imagination. These locations, as Hills discusses, "sustain cult fans' fantasies of 'entering' into the cult text, as well as allowing the 'text' to leak out into spatial and cultural practices" (2002, 151). They evoke an embodied sense of the narrative:

I just take everything. But really, the city walls, the landscapes, trying to picture in my head what King's Landing would have been like. (Josh, 27, American)

Not only can fans imagine that they are swimming in the water outside of King's Landing, as if they were a character on the show; they can also refine their mental image of this location.

Physical sensations not transmitted over television can be experienced. Narrow streets of

Dubrovnik's Old Town can prompt ideas about what else there is in the city that has yet to be shown on screen.

This imagining of the narrative space of the show is also sometimes performed, either through the repetition of lines from the show or re-enacting its scenes on-site. Visitor performance is, however, constrained by “communal conventions about “appropriate” ways of acting as tourists” (Edensor, 2000, p.327). In Dubrovnik, where the fans mingled with casual tourists in city-center locations, re-enactments or recitations were seldom seen; they were, nevertheless, expected either where film tourists were isolated or formed large enough groups to dominate an area. At the locations visited as part of the TitanCon tour, re-enacting scenes was a fundamental part of the experience. This is something that was encouraged by the convention's leaders: previous years also featured similar re-enactments and such a repetition can provide the event with a ritual character. The organizer of TitanCon is a dedicated *Game of Thrones* fan and feels that reenactments are important to the day and tour experience:

It sort of...links people to that location. It's like, 'I was there.' When you rewatch the scenes, you go 'oh yeah, that! I recognize that! I was there!' That's a special feeling for a lot of people. (Thomas, 37, English, TitanCon)

In re-enacting, the tourist gets to connect him or herself to the location, and become part of the show and its world. It heightens their imaginative experience by incorporating an embodied, physical action, one that suggests a “feeling-as” part of the narrative. It also strengthens the memory of the visit by connecting it to such a special performance.

Hills sees such re-enactments and “cult geography” in general as functioning in a near-religious sense, “offer[ing] a physical focus for the cult's sacredness” (2002, p.150). The religious terminology is also invoked by frequent use of the word “pilgrimage” when discussing fans visiting filming locations (Aden, 1999; Brooker, 2007; Buchmann et al, 2010; Couldry,



2000; Hills, 2002; Norris, 2013), suggesting a certain solemnity towards the location, the travel to it, and the experience there. As Beeton (2005, 2016) and Buchmann et al (2010) describe, there are certainly some similarities in form. But, as I discussed in Chapter 2, I am skeptical of this metaphor. One of the reasons for this is because the “sacred” aspect of being at the space seemed to be absent among the *Game of Thrones* tourists. In some cases, it was even directly rejected:

It’s not really a religious experience. It’s more...it’s more pleasant location and you are there with friends... (Fredrik, 31, Swedish, TitanCon / Dubrovnik individual)

This suggests that while the pilgrimage *can* be a useful metaphor for film tourism, it is not necessarily the most fitting. The connection of pilgrimage with sacredness and solemnity overshadows the other ways in which tourists engage with filming locations, even for films and programs of which they are fans. Rather than a religious moment, the experience for *Game of Thrones* tourists at the sites was usually playful. Re-enactments, especially, were described as fun:

But yeah, we did the re-enactment of the Hound, sorry not the Hound, the Mountain, doing the jousting. That was something to do. We’ve done the crowning of the King in the North, and other bits... it just adds to the fun of the day. (Lisa, English, 35, TitanCon)

Tourists involved in the re-enactments tended to laugh and joke with other fans while doing so, exaggerating their movements and making humorous references to the narrative. While some might argue this represents a self-conscious distancing from the connotations of fandom as ‘religious’ pursuit, it could equally be said that fans do not need solemnity to feel bonded together. The *Game of Thrones* audience is also largely made up of younger, well-educated people that are likely to be “post-tourists” (Urry & Larsen, 2011) to some degree, aware of the constructed nature of tourist experiences but finding value in them anyway, often through the treatment of tourism as a “series of games” that allows the site to be interpreted in a range of

ways. A playful approach is no less meaningful here as it offers ways of recalling and imagining the world of *Game of Thrones* that allows them to feel part of the narrative. Visits also allow them to imagine what the world feels like in an embodied manner.

Tourism therefore differs from text-based explorations of hyperdiegesis. As Crouch (2000) suggests, physical encounters produce a different knowledge, a “multi-sensual” understanding of place, and in this case, of narrative. Sensual and emotional experience can be as important to the tourist’s sense of connection with the narrative as the locations themselves. Reijnders (2011) found that connecting with the *Dracula* story on-site was not only about visiting exact locations. It also meant participating in activities that matched the emotional state of the novel. Experiencing something “like” the story while being in its environment is part of what makes the experience meaningful. Buchmann et al (2010), in their investigation of *The Lord of the Rings* tourists, found that connecting to the themes of the text, identified as “fellowship, adventure, and sacrifice,” (Buchmann et al 2010, p.240) was as important as being at the actual place. In finding “fellowship” with other tourists at the location, the text “happened” and experiencing an adventurous landscape they are more authentically experiencing the text by participating in something emotionally like it.

*Game of Thrones* fans were no different. Many of the TitanCon tour participants especially enjoyed the concluding activities: group workshops on archery and sword-fighting, as well as feasting in a large stone hall in a forested estate. These activities allowed tourists to experience what being in the show’s narrative world would be like but in a way that also involved having fun with other fans. They got to play with the general narrative space of *Game of Thrones* alongside others who were equally happy to be part of the moment. As Roesch (2009), Kim (2010), and Buchmann et al (2010) discuss, being with others who “get it” can be an

important part of the film tourist experience – perhaps just as much as visiting the locations themselves. The presence of others potentially enhances the experience by reinforcing the importance of the location to each other and encouraging deeper participation in the activities that occur around it. The tourists are not only immersed in the location, but within the community. Interestingly, within the TitanCon group, the larger collective of fans present encouraged a more playful attitude towards the text and attendant activities than reported in other studies on film tours. As discussed above, the reenactments were particularly playful. This matches with the somewhat ironic and post-modern tone of *Game of Thrones* towards other medieval-styled fantasy texts (such as *The Lord of the Rings*). As will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, *Game of Thrones* presents itself as a more “realistic” take on the genre, without the mythologizing of the past and its society that is often seen to characterize it. Within a group of fans, this presented itself as a less reverent stance in general. Instead of solemnity, they were encouraged to feel how the past “really” was and have fun with the text – which includes jokes, songs, and drinking.

While there are moments of slippage for tourists between our world and Westeros, these were mostly constructed playfully and were somewhat fleeting. A tourist might feel for a moment that he or she is swimming next to King’s Landing, but this is not the total experience with Dubrovnik. Rather than complete immersion in fantasy, the key places instead functioned as ways to grasp the narrative in greater detail and precision. It is not that Westeros really exists, but rather that it *could* exist; tourists therefore used these locations to have an embodied idea of how it might feel.

## *Imagining the Technological Details of the Production*

Narrative space is not the only thing imagined by *Game of Thrones* fans that visit the key sites. As I discuss in Chapter 2, fantasy films and television shows are put together, with considerable effort put into the construction of believable fantastic worlds. This production process is known to be interesting for fans, featuring in the discussions at fan conventions and offered as an enticement to buy DVD sets and other such paratexts (Evans, 2010; Hight, 2005). For some, imagining this technical production process is more prominent:

Certainly [I enjoyed] looking at the surroundings, and seeing how they turned that into King's Landing. It's not so hard appreciating that when you're in a medieval town like Dubrovnik in the old town, but certainly when you're at this modern hotel that was also just covered in graffiti and windows smashed because it was derelict, and we were walking down and finally found where they'd filmed and I was just thinking, gosh, they brought actors here and everything, and how did they get in, how did they do it, and how did they find this place in the first place? It's quite impressive. (Jane, 41, Scottish, TitanCon/Dubrovnik individual)

Well, you can imagine that you were in the production. [...] That would be...yeah, it's a sort of dream to be. (Fredrik, 31, Swedish, TitanCon/Dubrovnik individual)

For such tourists, experience at the location is not centered around imagining how the fictional world "is" or how the characters interact with it, but how the show itself is actually made. During their visit they found not only locations that were already shown onscreen, but also ones that were going to be part of the upcoming season. This meant that fans could imagine the work that the production staff had put in to make the scenes they had already appreciated and how the site they were standing on would be transformed in the future. They could, as Fredrik did, imagine themselves as part of the team that created the show they love, a production mode of imagination.

On one level, tourists like Jane and Fredrik exhibit the fascination with the 'media world' that Couldry (2000) credited with the appeal of the *Coronation Street* set and the Granada studio

tour. They were intrigued by the work of the television production team and wanted to see how they function:

I've always enjoyed television and been interested in television, and all aspects of it, so I think that's what I'm liking about [Game of Thrones], it's just appreciating, from all the people who work on it, from the people who are stitching up the costumes to the lighting guys to everything, it's quite impressive. (Jane, 41, Scottish, TitanCon/Dubrovnik individual)

Jane is an interesting example of this kind of tourism. As a long-term reader of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* books, she has been interested in the television adaptation from when it was first announced, even visiting the filming of the pilot, which was nearby her home in Scotland. She already had knowledge of the show's storylines (at the point in time of interview) and a sense of the narrative locations involved. This gave her a different perspective on the show compared to other television programs that she had been interested in, and she found herself wanting to know how the show was made – the work and effort that went into bringing the Westeros she had always imagined into real life. While she had always been interested in television production, with other series she did not want to lose the tension as to what would come next by finding out the behind-the-scenes stories. With this concern lessened for *Game of Thrones*, she could focus more on production practices. For Jane, as well as attending fan conventions like TitanCon, visiting *Game of Thrones* filming locations was a chance to see the way in which the “special,” usually concealed world of the media operates. In doing so, Jane experienced hints of the “deep backstage” of actual film production (Beeton 2005) that is rare and therefore exciting. This gives her a deeper understanding of the actual world that surrounds the show's making, rather than its fantasy world, one that helps her to appreciate the show in a new way:

How do I feel about it? Satisfying, I suppose, to sort of figure out that gosh, look at the lengths they've gone to, etcetera. Another situation was a surprise location that we found was when we were on the island of Lokrum, one of our group asked the barman has there been any filming around here for Game of Thrones? And he said, oh they used our

storeroom. And we got taken into the storeroom, very kindly, and we were clambering over bits of polystyrene and plastic on the floor and there's broken umbrellas and chairs and things, and we suddenly realized we were in this beautifully painted hall which was used in one of the scenes. And we could only see that when we set the flash off on our cameras, because it was so dimly lit, and it was amazing, the artwork and things on the wall. And how the Game of Thrones production team discovered about that place, I have no idea. (Jane, 41, Scottish, TitanCon/Dubrovnik individual)

Couldry sees the audience's interest in television production as a way of reifying the "specialness" of the media world, one that is potentially more interesting, creative, and fulfilling than their own. Yet, any concept locating the "media world" as a single entity obscures something significant: fans are interested in the making of *Game of Thrones*, not necessarily a more generalized television production process:

Well ... to get inside information, to maybe ... I have an eye for detail so I could maybe spot some errors before they get to the screen. (Fredrik, 31, Swedish, TitanCon/Dubrovnik individual)

Fredrik, a friend of Jane's, does not want to work on just any television show; he wants to work on *Game of Thrones*. Like Jane, he is a long-term reader of the book series, as well as a fan of the television show, and his interest in working on the production is because of this fandom. Rather than an interest in television production generally, he wants to either learn things about the program before it airs, or suggest ways of "fixing" poor episodes. By imagining himself as part of the production staff, he explores the idea of assisting the show he wants to be part of. While it might also be exciting to be part of the "media world," it is most exciting because that media world makes *Game of Thrones*. This is consistent with Kim's (2012a, 2012b) study of tourists at the filming location of the popular Korean television drama *Daejanggeum*, where involvement with the narrative was credited to higher interest in "behind-the-scenes" experiences there. Media production in itself might be interesting, but emotional involvement in the narrative makes it more meaningful and imaginative.

Jane and Fredrik were among a group of friends who met at the TitanCon convention and subsequently took a trip to Dubrovnik together to see filming locations there. Since *Game of Thrones* is an ongoing series, over the course of their trip to Dubrovnik they also found remnants of filming locations for episodes that had yet to air. They are therefore assisted in imagining what would happen in future episodes. They had some idea of what would take place and were excited to see how key ideas would be transferred to the screen. The nature of the ongoing adaptation – both knowing and not knowing what would come next in the series – gave the production elements not just the sense of relics, but of the future. It also gave the group a sense of exclusivity, compared to other fans: they had seen something special and new about the production.

Additionally, fantasy fictions like *Game of Thrones* are sometimes “considered [as] not “serious” or “mature”” (Cecire, 2009, p.398) – the preserve of children, teenagers, or adults who have not grown past what they enjoyed at early stages of their life. Fantasy fans are often equated with “geek” or “nerd” stereotypes (Jenkins, 1992, p.11), an unappealing image. Some *Game of Thrones* fans are therefore keen to stress that their show is of high quality:

[Game of Thrones is] just a really well-written character drama that happens to be swords and dragons and...as I said again, dead geeky, but similar to how I feel about Battlestar [Galactica]. (Wayne, 32, English, TitanCon)

Every once in a while you come to a show that really takes the time to create engagement and a plotline that really fits in with the story and it, you feel more connected with the characters. (Afra, 28, American, Dubrovnik tour)

Calling attention to high production values, represented by the creative work put into finding and transforming locations, is a way to stress quality. It is not something that was cheaply put together or lazily executed. Rather, it is something that HBO (itself a self-proclaimed arbiter of a certain taste level) deemed worthy of a large budget to hire high-quality set designers, location

scouts, and state-of-the-art CGI. In admiring and envisioning this effort and skill, film tourists show that the program has rewarded the time and effort they have put into being its fans. By visiting its locations, they can better imagine the skill involved in its production, and how that might maintain its future appeal.

### *Imagining History*

A third type of imagination pursued by film tourists visiting sites connected to *Game of Thrones* can be described as historical. For certain visitors, experience of a filming location is only partially, and in some cases not at all, connected to the narrative or production world of *Game of Thrones*:

I think in terms of, uh, some of the older buildings and so on, it's more just a sense of wonder as how these things could be constructed and so on. I didn't really associate it as much with the show, more just with the buildings themselves. It was kind of ... I was almost divorced from it. (Duncan, 28, Scottish, TitanCon)

For these tourists, *Game of Thrones* is only a portion of the imaginative experience of the locations they visit. Although it is what brings them to the filming location, while there, and while thinking about it afterwards, they imagine other aspects, in particular the historical narratives on which the respective place identities are built. As discussed in research on the impact of film on tourism (Croy 2010, 2011; di Cesaere et al, 2009; Iwashita, 2006; Macionis and Sparks, 2009), film is usually more of an incidental driver for tourists rather than a direct one, with filmic destinations primarily functioning as an image enhancer, or even changer, for regions rather than a primary motivation to visit. Those who actually visit the filming locations are still seen as a more niche audience within the general tourist market, as most tourists might become interested in visiting a region because of its depiction on screen and its resulting emotional resonance but will not necessarily seek out the exact spot of filming.



The tourists interviewed here, however, while having a range of reasons for visiting Dubrovnik or Northern Ireland itself, did all make a point to visit the specific locations used in *Game of Thrones* while there, making them part of this niche. Intriguingly, we can see in many visitors to filming locations a companion to the situation described by Croy (2010, 2011) and others, in that *Game of Thrones* creates a frame to begin experiencing the place, both in terms of the exact location of filming and general region around it. Once at the location, their sense of it as being part of the show is less important than a feeling that it is a space worthy of investigation on its own terms. Facilitating this approach, in both Dubrovnik and Northern Ireland, many *Game of Thrones* locations are altered through decoration and CGI. The real places contain elements that are on the show, but not everything that was on screen. This makes a direct comparison impossible and forces the tourists to understand differently:

It's just ... because most of these places, they don't really look like how they look on the screen anyway, they're not really that recognizable, so you just sort of enjoy them through what they are, for the spectacular view, rather than for the fact that they're in a show. (Melanie, 31, English, TitanCon)

The locations are not what Melanie (who, like Duncan above, came to Northern Ireland for the *Game of Thrones*-focused TitanCon experience) imagined them to be, so, alongside fellow tourists, she has to make other meanings to enjoy the day: either consider the fine production work used in spotting and creating the locations, or appreciate these sites as part of the beautiful, previously unknown Irish landscape.

Of course, however, some locations do resemble their on-screen appearance. The arching beech trees in Northern Ireland known locally as the “Dark Hedges” were, in *Game of Thrones*, a striking element of the “King’s Road” that connected two regions of the Seven Kingdoms, travelled by one of the leading characters at an integral point in her storyline. Such iconic

locations make up an important part of the commercial *Game of Thrones* tour in Northern Ireland. The trees, however, have existed longer than the show, and they come with their own narratives:

The only thing I've done since I've got home is look up the Dark Hedges. [...] That hedge was built as a spectacular entrance to their home, and probably in 1750 or something? I mean, I'm just fascinated by those hedges! (Julie, 63, Canadian, Northern Ireland commercial tour)

*Game of Thrones* sparked Julie's initial interest in the hedges, but for her, it was used as an impetus to learn the "real story" and imagine the lives of the historical Stuart family. Her interest in history is what had brought her to Northern Ireland in the first place = she went in order to encounter her family heritage, which her father had traced back to Northern Ireland. That *Game of Thrones*, one of her favorite TV shows, was filmed there was a happy coincidence, and she made a point of taking the day-long tour of *Game of Thrones* locations which provided some emotional relief from the more serious obligations of her trip. Yet it was still history that ended up occupying her thoughts after she went home. Filmed in locations that are embedded in the historical structures and landscapes of their respective countries, the show therefore acts as an entry point to the exercise of historical imagination. The possibility that such places might be interesting beyond their connection to the series means that many tourists pursue their visits as a way to understand not only *Game of Thrones*, but "real" places as well. Tourists can use what they already know about the show as a starting point to find out what they do not yet know about the existing place-narratives of Northern Ireland and Dubrovnik.

That *Game of Thrones* tourism can occur like this is perhaps because of the specific way that fans like Julie feel about the show. She, and many of the other interviewed tourists, were particularly interested in their show's connection to history and its sense of "historical realism."

Unlike Jane and Fredrik, who had a longer-term interest in fantasy fiction, Julie's primary interest in the series was in the way it depicts history. *Game of Thrones* appeals because:

It's mainly history. That's what I liked about...you know, it took me a while to get into the book. When you have White Walkers and, it's kind of the equivalent of our zombies, you know, or maybe that's the appeal for the younger generation? That would not be my main draw for that series. I think it's more the struggle, I mean it's the story of, it's our history. It could be anywhere, struggling for power, right? [...] Is this the way these people lived? You never knew if you were going to live or die or live to see the next day, and ... you just can't imagine, what it was like. (Julie, 63, Canadian, Northern Ireland commercial tour)

While a sense of the medieval is common in high fantasy, part of *Game of Thrones*' claim to distinction as a "quality" program is that it has successfully created a sense of historical authenticity. Despite its fantastical elements, the show prompts audiences to imagine what the historical past was "really" like, and presents itself as a fictionalized but not inauthentic version. Learning about the "real" history of the place in which it is filmed for many tourists affirms the imagining of the past through the show as valid. Tourists across the age groups and fan types expressed an interest in history, making it one of the most common linkages between fans, although older fans were more likely to pursue this interest outside of *Game of Thrones*. Tour guides knew this and pleased their audiences by discussing the real history of key locations. Historical structures both shown and not shown in the show were explained, as tour guides discussed how they were built and used. In describing Dubrovnik's past as the Roman Catholic Republic of Ragusa, one guide also pointed out where the characters of *Game of Thrones* would have lived and worked, if they had lived there. Through such framings, tourists can imagine what historical Dubrovnik (and potentially King's Landing) was like.

The appearance of historical imagination among film tourists is not uncommon. New Zealand, one of the most well-known locations of film tourism, deliberately drew on its existing branding as a place of "raw nature" to enhance its suitability to not only be the filming location,

but tourist destination, for the epic fantasy landscape of *Lord of the Rings*' Middle-Earth (Barker and Mathijs, 2007). Buchmann et al. (2010) show that many fans on the *Lord of the Rings* tours wanted to “see New Zealand” in addition to the filming sites, but “most if not all participants continued to interpret New Zealand as a green and friendly place without any significant problems” (Buchmann et al, 2010, p.239). They viewed the country and their experience of touring in a manner that aligned with the myths of the ‘timeless’ rural nature of Middle-Earth, despite also visiting urban environments. Focusing on science-fiction fans in Vancouver, Hills (2002) and Brooker (2007) found that film tourist versions of the city go beyond the “regular” tourist spots, in search of any location that ‘replays the “hiddenness” of *The X-Files*’ own tropes and secrets” (Hills 2002, p.148). By focusing on the “secrets” behind the every-city façade of Vancouver, it becomes a mysterious place waiting to be revealed by the traveler. Similarly, the *Harry Potter* tourists studied by Lee (2012) interpreted Britain by conceiving a magical world alongside, but hidden from, everyday reality. Their tour stopped not only at *Harry Potter* locations but also at ones associated with local legends and mystic sites to create a pseudo-historical, “magical” picture of the United Kingdom.

In this sense, historical imagination is never neutral. It takes a particular form depending on the text being de-mediated. This separates film tourists from “regular” tourists, insofar that even if they are interested in aspects of the location that are not strictly part of filming process, the contours of their imaginative experience are shaped by a notion of history provided by popular culture. Just as *Lord of the Rings* fans see New Zealand as timelessly pastoral and spectacular, so *Game of Thrones* fans frame Dubrovnik and Northern Ireland as part of a mythic-medieval world. In Dubrovnik, this sense is reinforced by the city’s well-preserved historic status:

It's everything we thought it would be. [...] It's as beautiful as people said it was. The history, the culture, the preservation of everything. It's all there. (Josh, 27, American, Dubrovnik individual)

In this way, visiting filming locations confirmed the association of Dubrovnik with a sense of beauty and the long-ago past. In Northern Ireland, however, impressions of the country were often challenged through the visit:

I was a little nervous at first, of coming, wasn't I? [...] I imagined it to be more of towns [...] and this is going to sound bad, but less...taken care of? But it's not. It's actually a lot of greenery and it's very beautiful. (Liz, 34, English, TitanCon)

Many tourists generally associated Northern Ireland particularly with the Troubles: the sectarian violence that gripped the country in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which has been the focus of most of its media representation (Donnelly, 2005). *Game of Thrones* heritage locations offer an alternative, more positive image of Northern Ireland, as a green and aesthetically pleasing land – one filled with forests, castles, and stunning wild views. The use of *Game of Thrones* as a jumping board therefore facilitates a specific imaginative experience that connects to the show as a kind of ur-text.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has suggested that the concept of the imaginative experience may provide a valuable framework for analyzing the film tourist experience. Using the idea of the imaginative experience opens up our understanding of how fans / tourists can pursue multiple readings of a site and its relation to its associated text. Based on a series of interviews with *The Game of Thrones*-fans in Dubrovnik and Northern Ireland, I aimed at showing how this imaginative experience takes place in practice and which varieties can be distinguished. As the interviews showed, fans of *Game of Thrones* involve their imagination in three distinct ways.

In the hyperdiegetic mode of imagination, fans primarily draw on the show's narrative, imagining places in which the show happens and envisioning themselves as part of its story. Being there not only offers these fans the possibility to explore the space where it 'all took place', but also to walk outside the set and discover the surrounding 'hyperdiegetic space' of *Game of Thrones* that has not (yet) been used as backdrop for the filming. Wandering through the streets of the old city center of Dubrovnik, for example, the *Game of Thrones*-fan is able to imagine a possibly endless stream of new storylines and future episodes.

Film tourists also use their imagination to create a mental reconstruction of the filming process. As it turned out, this can be somewhat of a challenge in the current CGI era. But in most cases, the locations did offer the tourists enough markers to let them form an image of the technical challenges as well as the creative performances of the production team. In addition to admiring the work that was done to the location, some film tourists also liked to envision themselves as part of the team that put it all together. Whereas the hyperdiegetic imagination focused on the whereabouts of the fictive characters, the technical imagination was aimed more at retracing the steps of the production team.

Additionally, the *Game of Thrones* narrative can be utilized as a frame to understand the 'real' history of the places that fans visit. The association with *Game of Thrones* can be a jumping-off point to explore the rich history of the respective places. That said, the frame of *Game of Thrones* did leave its stamp on the kind of histories people were interested in. For example, in line with the pseudo-medieval profile of *Game of Thrones*, film tourists in Northern Ireland expressed an outspoken interest in the medieval history of this region. The more notorious association with the recent history of the Troubles stayed in the shadows, a side-effect

which will probably be welcomed by the local tourist boards, in their search for a more positive image of this part of the United Kingdom.

Fans are fluid in their imaginations as tourists, and therefore, I do not intend this to function as a typology of film tourists. While any one individual might favor one mode over the other, as I show, what was evident from fieldwork was that on location the modes tend to blend into and influence each other. Indeed, the same tourist might find him or herself experiencing them all at different times or even simultaneously; they are not so much distinct types of tourists as ways of imagining that any fan might slip in and out of during their visit. I also found each mode occurring among the different groups of tourists, with some of the highly-organized and traditionally active TitanCon fans interested in the history of Northern Ireland, and fans in Dubrovnik who had never interacted with other fans dreaming of what it would be like to live in King's Landing while walking in the city. There is, moreover, no clear formula that can predict when a certain mode will dominate. We might expect places that strongly resemble those from the show to inspire hyperdiegetic imaginings, but this is not necessarily the case.

Although made memorable because of one narrative, any 'place of the imagination' can provide links to others. Each narrative shapes others. *Game of Thrones* makes the places where it is filmed seem more vibrant and exciting, but those places also lend the show a renewed sense of meaningfulness because tourists become aware of their physicality and 'real' historicity. A fan who has been to Dubrovnik in the summer may think of King's Landing as hotter than he or she did before. In a similar vein, while the 'real worlds' of Northern Ireland and Dubrovnik are not completely obscured by the notion of Westeros, they are not left unaltered. Rather, fans start to experience them more like their televised counterpart and they acquire a mythic-medieval

glamour. Even if a tourist is more interested in one or the other, they all work together to create the experience of the location.

Tourists also adapted these modes to fit with *Game of Thrones* specifically, in that the way in which they were experienced is influenced by *Game of Thrones* as a text and the way they feel about it. Its “realistic” take on the medieval fantasy genre shaped the way in which tourists interacted with the actual history, while also encouraging a less reverent stance towards hyperdiegetic imaginings. This is consistent with other studies on film tourism, such as *The Lord of the Rings* fans finding New Zealand a land of epic adventure and fellowship (Buchmann & Frost, 2011) and *X-Files* fans in Vancouver delighting in “discovering” the more hidden parts of the city (Hills, 2002). It suggests that, while the different modes are likely applicable across different examples, the way they are experienced by tourists will be shaped by the text.

While this chapter has primarily focused on the immediate (imaginative) experience of film tourism, there is also some indication of what role these places play in *Game of Thrones* fandom. As a fairly new and ongoing series, there is much that the fans, even those who have read the book series it is based on, do not know about it. Visiting these places is used to explore the show and its potential. Tourism fills in the developing picture of both the story-world of *Game of Thrones* and its creation. Compared to the cases I analyze in Chapter 5 and 6, which are more established fandoms for completed series, *Game of Thrones* tourism at this stage is very much about this kind of exploration and knowledge-gathering. It is a unique and enjoyable way for fans to learn more about a show they are coming to love, and to bring this knowledge back home to friends and family (providing a bit of bragging rights along the way). The role of these places for fans is therefore primarily as a site of learning.



As the analysis showed, tourists have different imaginative experiences as they visit filming locations and each opens up a multiplicity of potential readings. Future research might provide more in-depth insight into the individual modes and their functioning, particularly in terms of their demographic specificities. *Game of Thrones* viewers are, as the ones here, largely younger and well-educated, which is worth taking into account in discussing how they experience locations. This might be different for a program with an older demographic. It would also be worthwhile to analyze these modes in terms of the gendered and racialized specificities of this kind of tourism. Reijnders (2011), for example, notes that what I am referring to here as the “production mode” of imagination is more prevalent among the male *James Bond* fans he interviewed. Exploring how these modes work in terms of gender, ethnicity, and other demographic factors would be worth further investigation. This would expand the field’s understanding of the imaginative experience and delve deeper into the ways in which the tourist engages with filming locations.

What this chapter primarily argues is that the study of the experience of film tourism needs to not only take into account the affective nature of the text being visited, but also the different ways this affective relationship can be played out in the tourist imagination. Imaginative experience is not uniform, even among tourists focusing on the same text. More generally, this chapter has shown how fandom has become an important factor in imagining other lands, other times, and other people. It has become a way of exploring the world.



## 5. The Wizarding World of Harry Potter: Immersion, Authenticity and the Theme Park as Social Space

### Introduction

*“That’s what WWOHP is about. Living it. Being transported to that world and living a day, or a night, there. And that will be completely and truly MAGICAL,”* reads a Tumblr post by user ‘niallgirlalmighty’, as part of her description of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter (henceforth WWOHP) in Universal Studios Orlando and Universal Studios Islands of Adventure. This post joins many similar ones by fans of the *Harry Potter* series, who have been flooding to the parks since the first WWOHP opened in 2010. The parks feature not only rides, some in immersive 3-D, but complete recreations of fictional locations from the *Harry Potter* series – the village of Hogsmeade, site of the central location of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and the London wizard-only shopping district of Diagon Alley, each with architecture, shops, and restaurants featuring products and imagery from the series. Its success has lead Universal Studios to open WWOHP areas in both its Osaka and Hollywood parks. WWOHP exemplifies a push in the industry towards more immersive theming around known narrative worlds, going beyond rides and souvenirs into full, complete environments promising immersion into a favorite text.

Visiting theme parks has been a popular pastime since they started appearing in the mid 1950s, yet there is still little understanding of what makes them so. Research has largely focused on a critique of their form, particularly from a postmodern perspective that focuses on the role of simulation in an image-focused society (Baudrillard, 1994; Bryman, 2004; Eco, 1986; Gottdiener, 2001; Rodaway, 1994; Sorkin 1992), overlooking the visitors themselves and how

they make meaning out of such simulated environments. This means there is only a limited understanding of why theme parks actually appeal to the millions who enjoy them. There is also little understanding of how these parks, and the experience at them, connects to other places associated with films or television shows. As Davis (1996) and Koren-Kuik (2014) suggest, theme parks are built on an understanding of outside narratives – they are a way to connect with them on a spatial level. This means, essentially, that they are places of film tourism. It is from this perspective that I began this research.

However, compared to the cases profiled in Chapters 4 and 6, WWOHP is a very different kind of environment. It is not a site of filming, but rather, of recreating the environment of filming. Such recreated spaces have been dismissed in other studies of film tourism (Aden, 1999; Couldry, 2000) as inauthentic, as they lack the aura granted by filming, but the success of WWOHP, and the way it has been embraced by fans, suggests that it is time to reconsider this perspective. Therefore, in this chapter, I investigate how visitors interpret this simulated environment, and what leads them to embrace it in the way that niallgirlalmighty and others have embraced WWOHP. By doing so, I explore the complex interactions of fandom, commerce, and physical space in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and investigate how a sense of “being there” can be created from the ground up.

I suggest that the success of WWOHP can be credited to its understanding as an authentic adaptation of the *Harry Potter* story-world, a place where *Harry Potter* fans can employ their ironic imagination (Saler, 2012) and experience the story-world in an embodied manner. The implications of these findings will be explored by first discussing the nature of theme parks as a form or medium (Clavé, 2007), one that potentially enhances the immersive aspect of contemporary storytelling (Ryan, 2001; Saler, 2012). Following this, I analyze the interviews in

the context of my observations in the park, presenting a new understanding of how simulated places are understood, experienced, and appreciated today.

### **Understanding the Wizarding World**

In most intellectual traditions, the theme park is seen negatively. Eco is discomfited by the idea that “Disneyland tells us that technology can give us more reality than nature can” (1986, p.44), while Sorkin suggests that “a trip to Disneyland substitutes for a trip to Norway or Japan” and in choosing Disney over these locations the tourist “has preferred the simulation to the reality” (1992, p.216). The theme park from this perspective dangerously destabilizes the separation between reality and unreality, especially for unsophisticated tourists who seemingly “prefer” the fake. They are also seen as generic, lowest-common-denominator entertainments that fail to fully represent what they are recreating in order to have mass appeal. Their success points to a postmodern preference for simulation, safety, and entertainment over the “real” experience of landscapes and environments, and the flattening of everything in post-modern life to mass-produced images.

Even those who take a positive view towards popular culture frequently dismiss theme parks. Aden (1999) contrasted the experience at the filming location for the film *Field of Dreams* to that of being at an amusement or theme park, stating that “fans treat the field as something special rather than as an ordinary amusement park-type site.” (p.228) The lack of entrance fee and ability to wander create, to Aden, “a special place full of *communitas* not found anywhere in the mundane, consumerist *habitas*.” (1999, p.234) Theme parks, with their boundaries and explicit commercial purpose, are contrasted with this purer, non-commoditized location. Similarly, Hills’ concept of “cult geography” is defined as “fan attachment to non-commodified

space, or at the very least, to space/place which has been indirectly or unintentionally commodified so that the fan's experience of this space is not commercially constructed." (2002, p.151) The commodified space of the theme park is compared to the non-commercial, individual tour of *X-Files* filming locations in Vancouver, considered a true space of cult geography as the experience is constructed through the fan's meaning-making processes rather than the media or tourist industry. It is this line of criticism that Gilbert's auto-ethnographic critique of WWOHP internalizes, as she determines that her previous, self-directed fan practices were more "authentic" than WWOHP, which was only for "leisure and tourist consumption." (2015, p.35) Both Aden's *Field of Dreams* site and Hills' Vancouver also point to a valorizing of "real" locations connected to popular culture. As is discussed in regard to film tourism (Beeton, 2005; Brooker, 2007; Couldry, 2000; Reijnders, 2011), the actual place of filming is thought to have a powerful aura that fans seek out in order to truly connect with a favorite narrative.

At the heart of all these critiques is the idea that theme parks are inauthentic spaces – either in that, as artificial landscapes, they substitute for "real" experiences of place or, because of their lack of connection to actual filming and/or their commercial purpose and design, they are unsuitable for authentic engagement with favorite texts or fandoms.

It is possible, however, to think of theme parks differently. Lukas (2007) argues that themed environments have their own form of authenticity – one based on their multisensory aspects. A themed environment becomes authentic when it "is sensory available" (2007, p.82). Those visiting know it is a simulation, but it becomes an authentic one when it feels correct on all sensory levels. Similarly, Clavé stresses that theme parks should be thought of as "cultural creations equivalent to a painting, a photograph or a film." (2007, p.178) This is not to say that they aren't commercial, corporate, and geared towards consumption – but that they should also

be evaluated as creative productions. Theme parks are “a place of fiction that bases its existence on the materialization of a fantastic narration through shapes, volumes and performances.” (2007, p.178) Rather than examples of society’s preference for sanitized versions of reality, they are specific places in which fantasies, mythologies, and cultural icons can be enacted and played with. This engagement is heavily visual, but by no means exclusively so, as theme parks and rides also present a multisensory experience not utilized in other media. As with other art forms, they are meant to be an interpretation of a story, and are no more or less challenging to the idea of reality.

Physical separation is a key characteristic that makes them effective as a cultural form: “[t]he 'vocation' of parks is to be worlds apart.” (Clavé 2007, p.193) Combined with the fantastic narration of theming, the visitor is encouraged to experience them as not the same place as outside. The park functions as an artwork, and “as a real object inscribed in space and time, the work of art is in the world, but as a virtual object that creates its own space and time, it is not of the world” (Ryan, 2001, p.41). Within the enclosed space, the visitor is encouraged to engage with the fictionality of the theme(s), to pretend and imagine on a bodily level while inside.

The majority of used narratives are, however, known from outside the park. Davis (1996) explains theme parks as a version of “media convergence” before this term was in vogue: a place to provide new interpretations and promotions of the same media text, utilizing different senses in order to provoke interest. As Mitrasinovic (2006) discusses, this is the model pioneered by the Disney parks, which utilize familiar landscape archetypes such as “small-town America” and combine them with the familiar brands of the Disney media empire. Koren-Kuik (2014) describes them as “spatial narratives” that present a different form of engagement with the familiar characters and worlds of Disney, requiring physical presence and corporeal senses. What

the park offers is the chance to physically interact with characters and narratives that are well-loved, made all the more powerful for the long history of Disney media, its existing cultural meanings, and the interaction of different Disney texts with each other. The Disney model of design and cross-marketing is the archetype on which cotemporary theme parks are based (Mitrasinovic, 2006), including Universal Studios, which utilizes popular “blockbuster” narratives like *Jurassic Park* and Marvel superheroes in its rides and environments.

Beeton (2016) makes a more explicit connection between theme parks and film tourism, noting that Disneyland, and later parks such as Universal Studios, Warner Brothers Movie World, and Fox Studios Australia, were specifically built around film itself as a theme. They originally originally focused on offering a form of “backstage access” to film production, drawing on what I in Chapter 4 refer to as the “production mode” of imagination, showing how films were made through either viewing actual production spaces or simulated versions. As her example of the failure of Fox Studios Australia shows, however, just showing production in some fashion isn’t enough to sustain a park’s profitability. It must be linked to something more exciting, either in terms of thrill rides or a direct connection to widely popular narratives. As she discusses, Disney has recognized this and began to create films based on its rides, the most successful of which being the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series, which in turn has the potential to draw in fans of the series who want to see where it all “began.” Similarly, the more successful “movie parks” like Universal Studios have moved away from the “backstage” model towards a more hyperdiegetic connection to filmic texts. It is this tradition that WWOHP follows in.

Compared to other theme parks, including other areas within Universal Studios, WWOHP takes a more holistic approach to its theming. It is presented as a complete reconstruction of locations from the *Harry Potter* series, rather than an environment that uses



elements from it in order to create a general sense of fantasy. Specifically, it reproduces these locations, the village of Hogsmeade and the urban neighborhood of Diagon Alley, as they appear in the *Harry Potter* film series, with a sense of scale that matches the proportions of an English urban environment. In doing so, WWOHP comes closer to the idea of simulation as utilized in media and game studies, where it is seen as a key aspect of new media storytelling and artistic technologies. A simulation creates a sense of immersion: feeling, through the medium, that the audience member is part of the artistic or narrative world (Darley, 2000; Grau, 2003; Huhtamo, 1995; Ryan, 2001). According to Huhtamo, “the quest for immersive experience is a cultural topos, which has been activated—and even fabricated—now and again in culturally and ideologically specific circumstances.” (1995, p.160) As I mentioned in Chapter 2, this is part of a long tradition in Western art and technology, which frequently seeks to create a believable illusion of reality.

This search for immersive experience is most often applied in theme parks to the simulation ride (Balides, 2003; Darley, 2000; Huhtamo, 1995), but we can also think of the entirety of the theme park experience in this fashion. They are enclosed spaces in which the visitor enters to feel immersed in fiction. Ryan argues that “the Disneyland tourist, beloved scapegoat of cultural critics, deserves credit for the ability to appreciate the art that goes into the production of the fake.” (2001, p.41). By this, Ryan refers to enjoying the sense of immersion in a fictional story-world and the appreciation of the skill that makes it believable. She argues that this is one of the great pleasures of narrative, a “fundamental and timeless dimension of aesthetic experience” (ibid.). It is what gives fiction its enduring place: the framework to imagine potentialities and alternatives, to explore what could be.

Ryan's concept of involvement and immersion in narrative worlds is further elaborated by Saler (2012). Rather than immersion through technology, Saler stresses immersion through imagination. He investigates the broader cultural construction of what he terms "virtual worlds," "acknowledged imaginary spaces that are communally inhabited for prolonged periods of time by rational individuals" (2012, p.7). To Saler, a story-world becomes virtual when it is adopted and discussed by many individuals, who group together in order to explore and fill in its details and make it more 'real'. The story-world becomes immersive because it feels inhabitable – as detailed as the 'real world' and shared with others as a sort of imaginary habitus.

It is this experience that Universal Studios reproduces at WWOHP through the medium of the theme park, utilizing its characteristics in order to make physical a process that Saler depicted as cerebral. I argue that in drawing on the parks' separation from "everyday life" and its promise of physical interaction with a story-world that is already a "virtual world" in Saler's terms, Universal Studios sets up a situation where experiencing the created, simulated space can potentially have the kind of meaning that has been previously assigned to more auratic film tourism locations. It is how this works in practice that I now focus on.

## **Methods**

Initial fieldwork and participatory observation was conducted at WWOHP Orlando in late December 2014, the first winter holiday since the opening of Diagon Alley, as this is a peak time for theme park visitation and the highly-anticipated expansion attracted many fans, even if they had already been. Participatory observation was over three days, where I spent approximately 10 hours per day in the *Harry Potter* areas of the two Universal Studios parks, and consisted primarily of experiencing the park as a visitor, but also observing other visitors and

their interactions with the park. While privately owned, theme parks are largely treated as public space (Gottdiener, 2001; Mitrasinovic, 2006), and observations were made in an unobtrusive manner without references that could identify individuals or specific social groups. I did not approach the park's management with my plans, as I wanted to maintain my independence from the organization in terms of how I operated and my findings.

I met the majority of interviewees in WWOHP at the time of fieldwork, and approached them based on visible fan behavior in the park such as attire, reactions to certain attractions, or reciting book or film dialogue. While subjective, such cues serve as a way to identify oneself publicly as a fan to other fans, which is frequently desired at WWOHP. After the initial introduction in the park they were contacted via email to further explain the research and set up an interview, after which thirteen agreed to be interviewed. Two interviewees were recruited via social networking site Tumblr, where fans share posts about the *Harry Potter* series and visits to the parks, in order to both reach saturation and to ensure perspectives from fans involved in the online participatory communities that are emblematic of contemporary fandom. The interviews were conducted via Skype several weeks after the initial trip. As I found in conducting my fieldwork for Chapter 4 and discuss in Chapter 3, conducting on-site interviews has serious drawbacks while on holiday, particularly in a place that is as loud and crowded as WWOHP. While interviewing via Skype sacrificed the immediacy and physical presence of an on-site or face-to-face interview, it allowed for greater comfort for the interviewees as they could set their own time and place to be interviewed, away from the crowds and noise of the park itself and without sacrificing any time out of their holiday. This also led to a more reflective attitude, as they had time to process their experience at the park and to put it into the narrative they wished to share.

Interviews lasted approximately 30 to 75 minutes and were semi-structured and open-ended. This allowed for a comparison between interviewees on specific aspects of the WWOHP experience, but also permitted following up on particular themes as they emerged. Questions addressed the existing relationship to the *Harry Potter* series, the reasons for wanting to visit WWOHP, expectations for the visit, activities and emotions while there, standout memories from the park, purchases made while there, and finally, their feelings about the park at the time of the interview. In total, fifteen visitors were interviewed, three from Canada, one from China, and the rest from the United States, with ages ranging from 17 to 44, with the majority in their twenties and early thirties. Thirteen interviewees were female and two were male. This is somewhat representative of the park experience, although not entirely. I did not seek to interview children, who make up a noticeable portion of the park attendees, and while I did interview one park visitor from China, the proportion of visitors from Southeast Asia was higher than I could find willing participants. All interviewees were informed of the purpose of the research before their interview, and have been given pseudonyms to further protect their anonymity.

#### **MEET THE TOURIST: THE WIZARDING WORLD OF HARRY POTTER**

Maggie is 21 and from Kansas, where she's a student at the College of Education. She has been a fan of the *Harry Potter* series since second grade. She is involved in online and offline *Harry Potter* fandom, writing and reading fanfiction, running some *Harry Potter* discussion groups on Facebook, from which she has met *Harry Potter* fans from around the world, and attending Wizard Rock concerts and other *Harry Potter* events around her home in Kansas. Via these activities, she had heard about WWOHP and that it was a great experience for fans, but didn't think that she would get the opportunity due to the cost. Then her friend invited her as part of her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday celebrations, and Maggie got to go to Orlando.

Once there, she felt that WWOHP surpassed her expectations. She had only been to local amusement parks, and not the full theme park experience, and so the deep level of theming in its rides and attractions impressed her. More importantly, the attention to detail and the accuracy of those details, based on her knowledge of the series, was more than she expected. It looked and felt like the place she had come to know over many years of caring about the story-world, and she could walk around in it and experience it for herself in the way that she had dreamed about since she was a little girl. She even felt that it was better as a *Harry Potter* experience than the films were – it was more accurate to the books.

In going with her friend, she also had someone to share this experience with. They could go into the shops and sing fan songs with each other without feeling that they were being particularly weird, playing off each other's enthusiasm for the place. They spent three days at Universal Studios, most of which they spent at the WWOHP sections – taking pictures, riding the rides, and shopping. Maggie bought several souvenirs of her trip, and was impressed overall by the breadth of the merchandise available – much more than in her local stores, well-made and well-priced, and with the accuracy that impressed her throughout her trip.

She recalled her visit to WWOHP very fondly, joking that she would hole up in Hogwarts and become a squatter in order to never leave. She described her childhood as rough, but she found hope in the series – hope that love would win out, that she could get over loss, that there was hope for her to succeed in her life despite everything that had happened, just as Harry had succeeded in his. Visiting was an emotional experience, as it felt that her favorite series had truly come to life and that she could be part of it.

## **Experiencing the Wizarding World**

### *Locating Authenticity in the Theme Park*

No movie filming has taken place at WWOHP. It is also far away from the setting of the books, which has its own tourist industry based around the “original” landscapes of the series (Lee, 2012). Nor does it boast relics from production, as is the case with popular culture exhibits in museums and elsewhere (Booth, 2015). However, most of the interviewees still found visiting to be a powerful experience that connected them with the *Harry Potter* narrative world:

It's so fantastic there and it's just, it's like my favorite book come to life, and...like, I love this. Like, this is awesome, this is home, like I, I felt like, I had come home to some part

of like, the small part of me that wishes more than anything that I could've entered that world, and that part of me feels more at peace now. (Maggie, 21, American)

Maggie was not alone in discussing the park in terms of “finally” entering the story-world or even being in some way “home”. Despite being a theme park in Orlando, it can still invoke an authentic sense of ‘being there.’ If we think of the park as a cultural creation or medium, it opens up the potential for a legitimate encounter with the story-world. The park is accepted as a valid adaptation.

This acceptance of WWOHP was credited to a few main factors. For several interviewees, the (perceived) involvement of *Harry Potter* series author J.K. Rowling was important:

I heard J.K. Rowling actually had say in everything, saying yes, that can be done, and no, that can't. So I think...the fact that she had a hand in bringing her creation to life, and has such high standards, I think that helped. (Circe, 29, American)

Authenticity for these fans is based on the figure of Rowling and her approval of the park. As the series’ “brand guardian” (Gunelius, 2008), her approval gives the park a sense of legitimacy. If something is there, then it is approved, and the experience is likely to be a good one if she signed off on it.

Most mentioned, however, was the amount of detail from the series present in the park:

Everything is perfect, it's really like you are there, it's exactly how it is described in the books, and it looks even cooler than it does in the movies, because in the movies – you know what I'm talking about: “Wait, that, what was that back there behind him?” and now you really can look at it, and having been to the actual set in London and then to the Wizarding World in Florida I can say it is so much more detailed, like they really went all out. (Jen, 30, American)

As Jen discusses, the amount and specificity of the details in WWOHP were considered crucial to its sense of realism. That it is ‘exactly described’ as it is in the books, visually matches the films, and provides more details than watching said films or even touring the set makes it feel

that she is ‘really’ there. Interviewees regularly mentioned the level of detail as one of the things they most enjoyed about WWOHP, especially the “smaller” details that they felt might have been easily overlooked. They coalesced into a sense that this was a realistic depiction of the narrative world, one that held true to the image they had formed from years of familiarity. It therefore lived up to the ideal of the theme park – an environment where a cultural fantasy can be engaged with in a multi-sensory way.

For many, it does this so well that other theme parks are seen as inferior:

The little details [...] make it feel like a real experience, not like a theme park. (Dan, 33, American)

The other theme parks are like watching TV about Europe, where the Wizarding World is being in Europe. It's just two different planes of comparison. (James, 44, American)

For Dan and James, WWOHP feels more sensorily authentic than other theme parks. WWOHP’s detail – from the signs in shops to the British-style food and drink – creates a sense of specificity that in turn fosters a sense of immersion in and authenticity of the story-world, especially when compared to the caricatured theming of other parks (Mitrasinovic, 2006). For these fans, it is no longer just a theme park, with all its negative connotations. Instead, it is an accurate adaptation of the *Harry Potter* story-world.

That the film series is an adaptation as well also provides an interesting comparison to other locations of film tourism. While the film set, a tourist attraction outside of London, can boast props and the real place of filming, it has no more claim on being the real Diagon Alley or Hogsmeade than WWOHP. They are both interpretations of a space that first existed in the imagination, and can therefore both serve as “places of the imagination” (Reijnders, 2011) that link the imaginary world and landscape to ours. The reproduction of imagined details into physical space gives it a convincing presence:

They were exactly like they were in the movies. So, you just felt like you were actually there and you're like 'oh Harry and Hermione and Ron were here but they're not here now.' (Melissa, 21, Canadian)

This sense of being at the right place at a different time is the ultimate expression of what I in Chapter 4 call the “hyperdiegetic” mode of the film tourist imagination – the feeling for the tourist that they are in the narrative space and able to explore it. As it is “exactly” like it is in the movies, this fantasy is realized for Melissa – it is as if she is in the same space as Harry and his friends have been.

The existence of the story-world across multiple media means that the theme park is seen as simply another depiction. Its authenticity is judged on its own character as a medium – its ability to represent the story-world in physical space. Because it is accurate, whether the fan has the books or the films in mind, it feels not only valid, but good art.

### *Embodiment and Immersion*

If, as Crouch argues, it is through embodiment – “a process of experiencing, making sense, knowing through practice as a sensual human subject in the world” (2000, p.68) – that we gain a real sense of a place, then the visitor on some level gains a sense of Diagon Alley or Hogsmeade through visiting WWOHP. As an interviewee recalls:

My daughter said, “I just wanted to bottle the air.” Because it smelled of sugar, and not the sickly carnival sugars, but, sugar! And, you know, and this place, you could hear as you passed the shop with the cauldrons you could hear kind of the bubbling and the mandrakes were having a screaming... (Daphne, 44, American)

In the multisensory aspects of the theme park the story-world is engaged with in an embodied and immersive manner. While theme parks are often dismissed as strictly visual (Rodaway, 1994), Daphne and her daughter show, echoing Lukas (2007), this is not the case. Tastes, smells,



sounds, and physical movements that are part of the narrative world are experienced through the park. This gives them an embodied sense of a story-world that, while familiar, was previously only cerebral or audiovisual. Once the park's simulation is accepted as authentic, the visitor feels as if they are having a genuine encounter with the narrative world.

The layout of WWOHP encourages this. If the theme park is understood as a set-aside place in which to engage with the imagination instead of everyday life, WWOHP extends this further by separating the *Harry Potter* sections from the rest of Universal Studios. It is entered through either a gate (Hogsmeade) or a "London" building façade that hides the "magical" part from view (the newer Diagon Alley), with a dramatic reveal as the visitor fully enters. This physical separation from the rest of the park is similar to the series' separation of "muggle" and "magical" societies and adds another layer of encouragement for the visitors to feel as if they have entered another world. This is an emotional experience for many:

You just walk in and you see the Alley, it's just ... it made me want to cry. I was so excited, and so happy. It was just so overwhelming. (Elle, 17, American)

There are many such reports of amazement and tears at stepping into Diagon Alley for the first time. It is as if their dream, that they have received the letter of admission to Hogwarts that allows them to enter magical society, has come true. Visitors are encouraged to think of themselves as leaving their mundane existence behind them, just as Harry did.

The series means a great deal to its fans. They have long wanted to inhabit the narrative world, in some cases for much of their lives. This existing desire shapes the way they interact with the park and its attractions:

I just wanted to ride the train. I would have been happy if it was just like, you could see Orlando through the window, but they have, like, a scene that goes by, and that's so cool. But it was just cool just to sit in the compartment and have that experience like going to Hogwarts and then coming back. (Hanna, 26, American)

The series has been important for much of Hanna's life and she has long dreamed of riding the Hogwarts Express, the train that takes magical students from London's Kings Cross Station to Hogsmeade. WWOHP uses a version of this train to connect the two WWOHP parks, entered through replicas of the two train stations and featuring short films outside the train's "windows" depicting the journey that the rider is imaginatively embarking on. While the ride version differs from how the train is described in the books and films, it is enough like its description that, combined with her existing wish to travel to Hogwarts and the immersive environment of the park, she felt "like" she was having the experience. Saler (2012) refers to this as "ironic imagination," a "double consciousness" that allows the (modern) subject to be emotionally invested in and contemplative about a fictional world, while maintaining the knowledge that it is fictional. While Saler applied this to imagining and discussing a story-world, without the physical component, it is equally applicable here. Those who participate gain a sense of how it would feel if the story-world was not fiction, but they never lose sight of the fact that it is. Rather, they play with the idea that for a brief moment the lines between fiction and reality blur, a pleasurable pretense made all the more so by the effort they feel the park puts into the illusion. That WWOHP recreates story locations that don't otherwise exist also contributes to this exercise of the ironic imagination. The visitor knows that they are not actually in Diagon Alley or Hogsmeade, but there is no more "real" version, and it is a physical experience with all the cultural markers of reality. This makes it a convincing pretense, one that matches the existing imagination with physical sensation.

The train is not the only ride found in WWOHP. In addition to the child-friendly roller coaster Flight of the Hippogriff and the thrilling Dragon Challenge, both found in the Hogsmeade section and re-themed from the area's prior incarnation as Merlinwood, each

WWOHP area boasts a modern a simulation ride. In Hogsmeade it is themed around the Hogwarts school, the one in Diagon Alley is themed around the Gringotts bank. Both utilize a combination of screens, 3-D projections, props, and movement to create a sense of kinetic immersion in the rides' story, and feature heavily decorated and narrativized areas for waiting in line. Both were praised by the interviewees. However, when discussing their favorite parts of the park, the actual experience of riding was rarely mentioned. Instead, it was the experience of the environment – both the detailed queues of Hogwarts and Gringotts and outer areas of Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade – that were brought up.

It is in these areas that WWOHP most matches the “virtual world” of the *Harry Potter* series that fans already mentally inhabit. While the rides are appreciated, they are too controlled to feel inhabitable. Within the broader environment, however, there is a much stronger sense of agency. Laid out as curving, intersecting city streets, with several potential directions for movement, WWOHP is a scripted space rather than a set one (Klein, 1999). The visitors can take as much time as they want within it and, once past the entrance, wander in whichever direction they choose, actually quite similar to how Aden (1999) described the utopian, non-commercial *Field of Dreams* site. Scripted spaces create a sense of narrative centered around the walker, a narrative with the illusion of agency (Klein 1999). Compared to how narrative agency is theorized within computer simulations (Murray 1997, Ryan 2001), however, it is minor, confined to activities like walking, eating, and shopping. Rather than controlling the narrative direction, the visitor to WWOHP is cast as an “ordinary” witch or wizard visiting the location. As the narrative world already has meaning and presence, this is enough.

WWOHP is a frequent site of cosplay, dressing up and embodying characters from the story-world, and some create a character for themselves while there:

So, we actually took a few minutes, my daughter and I, and we figured it out. My husband is Teddy, that is why she has the blue hair. And I am the daughter of Bill and Fleur, that is why [son] Ben has the red Weasley hair. (Daphne, 44, American)

At the park I'm usually a Death Eater or a Slytherin student. (Circe, 29, American)

The idea of the park as a place to pretend encourages this use of cosplay – of fully embracing the idea that you are part of the world. A sense of agency in the narrative world encourages the idea of “as if.” If the magical world was real, they would do these kind of things in it. They can (ironically) imagine that they are witches and wizards themselves, and the embodied physical sensations like movement, taste, and smell create an even stronger knowledge of the world.

Much of this embodied experience is built around consumption, but consumption filtered through the idea of “as if.” The shops and products available frequently play important roles in the series. Being “able” to shop in WWOHP therefore also contributes to the illusion of “actually being there”:

It literally is like you are in that shop. [...] It was just really cool, like I can't even believe I'm shopping in Honeydukes right now. (Hanna, 26, American)

Shopping is an immersive, imaginative act, one that connects Hanna to the story-world. She can visit the same candy shop that Harry and his friends visited throughout their time at Hogwarts, and purchase what she would if she was a witch. The stores are distinct, with different specialties that are frequently “diegetic expansions” as described by Mittell (2014): products from the series, or products that could be from the series (like shirts advertising in-universe sports teams).

This creates a more realistic, but also more touristic, sense of place:

Like you are just vacationing in Diagon Alley, and then occasionally popping over to Hogsmeade, like it really did, because there is so much going on, there is so much to do, and it's just so cool, and it was really like vacationing... in... the Wizarding World. (Jen, 30, American)

When at WWOHP, visitors do what they would if they were visiting any other urban tourist destination: they buy things, they wander the streets, get something to eat or drink, perhaps see a

performance or people-watch. These can all be done convincingly, including “local delicacies” like butterbeer and exclusive souvenirs, in a way that adheres to the narrative memories and details of the *Harry Potter* series.

WWOHP is a massive success for Universal Studios. This popularity means that there are always many other people in attendance, which is something that visitors must navigate. It is interesting, however, that not every interviewee considered the crowds or lines a negative part of their experience:

A lot of times we’ll just go and sit on a stairwell or something and you just watched people going around, or witches and wizards going and doing their things. And just kind of pretending, that “Oh, maybe I am just hanging out in Diagon Alley and having an ice cream right now.” It’s just fun, it’s total wish fulfillment. (Dan, 33, American)

Other people create the sense that WWOHP is a lively and living space, much as the locations are in the series. It becomes a place to “hang out” rather than a place to pass through. Many interviewees spent entire days in the WWOHP section. The visitor takes on the role not only of a witch or wizard, but of an urban flâneur – strolling the streets and observing the other inhabitants of the city (who are also fellow characters in the story). To complete the sense of immersion, the space must be occupied.

### *The Social (and Fan) Space of Harry Potter*

As testified by the interviews, another significance of others occupying the space derives from the sense that they were also there for *Harry Potter*:

For the most part a lot of people that were there, they really enjoyed and loved the Harry Potter series. And so it was kind of like this, all time, 24/7 nerd convention inside there. And so you could sit there and freak out about a T-shirt because it was awesome and it was your house, and nobody would be like ‘oh my god that person is really weird.’ (Maggie, 21, American)

Maggie sees the space as a *Harry Potter* environment in which she can “geek out” about the series without feeling self-conscious. Rather than simply connecting to one’s individual fandom, visiting became a way of performing it publicly and connecting to others who felt the same way. Research on fan conventions (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Booth and Kelly, 2013; Geraghty, 2014; Jenkins, 1992) discusses a similar sense of connection to fandom at large. In these spaces, fans feel they can “be themselves” and embrace the “nerdy” interests that they feel they must hide elsewhere. Similarly, at WWOHP fans felt as if they could indulge their fandom in a way they couldn’t in everyday life.

For some interviewees, being able to do this was also a bonding experience with the other fans in their lives. They came to WWOHP deliberately with others who were also fans of the series, and experiencing the space and the environment together enhanced their experience. As Hanna describes:

[Going with friends is] probably the best experience you can have, because they are as into it as you are. I haven’t gone with my family yet, but I hope to one day. Just because, like my older brothers are really into it too. I don’t know if they’d be as “Oh my God” as we were, but it’s just you feed off each other, that enthusiasm just stays constant [...] you just feed off each other. I would definitely recommend the first time you are going: go with people who are as into it as you are, because you’ll have such a better experience. (Hanna, 26, American)

For Hanna, experiencing WWOHP with her childhood best friends, the ones that she had grown up sharing the series with, made it even more special. Their enthusiasm about being there and being in that environment after all the years they’d spent with the series enhanced hers, and she could recall their history with the series as they moved through and interacted with the space. Her fandom always had this social element, and visiting WWOHP with her friends made the sociality of their shared fandom part of this place as well. It was a time they could experience together.

The affective power and temporal element of being in the place with these important others also creates positive memories:

It's one of those warm family memories that you remember over the time [the children] were goofing around and broke something, you know, or the time they spilled the milk all over the floor or whatever. It's going to be one of those that carries forward. And it's going to carry forward for all of us. (Daphne, 44, American)

Daphne visited WWOHP with her husband, young son, and teenage daughter. The *Harry Potter* series had long been a point of bonding between her and her daughter, one that they were starting to share with her son as well. Sharing their fandom gave them something in common, an emotional connection to each other's inner lives that Daphne valued deeply as her daughter aged. Being together in the space of WWOHP and fully embracing its "as-if" pretense together was another level of this shared connection, one that wasn't possible in their normal lives. Removing themselves from normality and into the enclosure of the park allowed them all to indulge their fandom without reservation, and provided Daphne a memory to go back to when everyday life returned.

The assumed shared interest in the series can also create a sense of fellowship among visitors that don't know each other, at least among those exhibiting fannish appearance and behavior:

It was just really cool to have that kind of camaraderie throughout all spans of life. 'cause I mean, you could live across the world and we could both be in the same house, and we're like "Slytherin, what's up?" and you have that connection now with somebody that you had no idea who they were five seconds before. So it's really cool, it's like a giant family. (Circe, 29, American)

For Circe, a Florida resident who regularly visits WWOHP, the other visitors to the park are not anonymous strangers – they are other *Harry Potter* fans that identify with the series as she does, indicated by fan behavior like dressing up or showing knowledge of the series. The connection she has with the park's other inhabitants makes it feel welcoming and special. Being in the park

not only means being surrounded by the narrative world, but being surrounded by this community. Contrary to Aden, what this suggests is that WWOHP is felt as a place of *communitas* as Turner (1977) would describe it. Entering the WWOHP area means that a fan becomes part of the “giant family” of fellow *Harry Potter* fans occupying the space, no matter their status outside the park, with the accompanying freedom to ‘geek out’ and act like a fan in a way that transgresses society’s normal proscriptions against such behavior.

There is also a sense among the fans interviewed that this was their space, one that was created with them in mind:

It’s definitely a place where if you aren’t a fan you can enjoy it, but the people who get the most out of it are the people who know what they’re looking at. And I think that they really had that in mind. (Violet, 21, American)

While non-fans might visit, and even enjoy the park for the unique craft of the simulation, Violet suggests that those who truly appreciate it are the fans of *Harry Potter*. This is not so much an appropriation of space by fans, as is discussed in relation to other sites of film tourism or “fan pilgrimage” (Brooker, 2007; Geraghty, 2014; Hills, 2002), but a sense that they are in a place made for them. This works with the broader sense of *communitas* present among fans in the park. It is a space to perform fandom, made for fans, and therefore welcoming.

## **Conclusion**

How do visitors interpret and experience simulated environments, and what leads them to embrace WWOHP? These are the questions that I investigated in this chapter. As media-themed environments prosper, it is important to understand what visitors make of such spaces and why they continue to appeal, as well as how they fit into the broader landscape of film tourism, compared to the experience of filming locations in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6. In previous



literature, there has been regular discussion of why these places might be unappealing for fans (Aden, 1999; Gilbert, 2015; Hills, 2002), but this chapter suggests why they might be enjoyable as well. It also points to what kind of role these recreations can play in contemporary fan culture. Through participatory observation and interviews, I have identified several key themes in the WWOHP fan experience, and show how it has become an important place for *Harry Potter* fandom.

First, I have shown how the theme park can be seen as a medium. Considering theme parks in this way moves beyond discussion of whether they are positive or negative for society and towards a consideration of what they are as a form. As a medium, the theme park has its own specificity – most notably separation from the ‘outer’ world and physical interaction with a narrative. In theory, it should be sensorily authentic (Lukas, 2007) and provide a spatial and embodied connection to a narrative world (Koren-Kuik, 2014; Mitrasinovic, 2006). This makes the theme park similar to ideas of immersion as found in media studies, where it is seen as a way to make a fictional environment feel “real,” whether through technology (Huhtamo, 1995) or through the mental process of imagining the world as inhabitable (Ryan, 2000; Saler, 2012).

It is this concept that WWOHP builds on, and that the fans responded to. For the fans interviewed here, WWOHP was interpreted as an adaptation of the *Harry Potter* series in its own right, one that uses the medium specificities of the theme park to present a new interpretation of the book series. The fans have already mentally inhabited this narrative world through their ironic imagination (Saler, 2012), which is extended into the park. The approval of series author J.K. Rowling and the amount and quality of detail from the series found in the park gave it a sense of sensory authenticity. Through being there, visitors gained an embodied understanding of what it would be like if they could actually visit these locations. In doing so, they felt connected

not only to the narrative itself, but to their fandom and the other fans inhabiting the space – they are all there for, and in, *Harry Potter*.

This study also shows that the idea of the ‘ironic imagination’ is useful when discussing the theme park experience. While Saler speculated that “ironic self-reflexivity may be powerless against physical reflexivity,” (2012, p.55) we can see from the example of WWOHP that even though the physicality makes the environment more real, there are still limits. It is “as if” Diagon Alley is visited, and for all the emotionality of “being there,” there is appreciation for, and awareness of, the work put in to making the experience. It is this double consciousness that makes the simulated environment work. The structure and nature of the theme park – that it is a set-aside place of pretending – means that is interacted with and experienced as a fiction. Not every theme park will embrace this to the same extent as WWOHP, and not every visitor will accept the illusion as believable, but as the industry moves towards more immersive environments, it is important to understand the way that many visitors relate to such spaces.

The immersive experience of the park and its status as an official transmedia expansion of the *Harry Potter* universe has proven to be a substantial draw for fans. It has come to function as a space of fandom, one that fans can come to in order to see and connect with other fans. This can be a connection with fans they already know, such as family or friends, or simply with the general fan community of the series. It is seen as a place in which fans can be themselves – they can geek out over a T-shirt or fully embrace the pretense of being a witch or wizard without feeling self-conscious. They are, after all, in a sealed-away place of pretending, deliberately designed to encourage a disconnect from everyday life. The role the park plays for *Harry Potter* fans is not only as a place to physically experience the story-world, but a place to act as a fan more fully than they feel they can outside of the park.

That WWOHP can play this role for at least some fans is an indication that it also exemplifies a new relationship between media producers and fandom that needs further attention. By encapsulating the fan in an official version of the *Harry Potter* world, it also absorbs practices that had previously been the domain of fans and brings them back under control. This is most clearly visible in the purchasable merchandise at WWOHP, which draw upon traditions of cosplay and fan creation, but also in the way in which WWOHP has positioned itself as part of fan culture. It hosts a yearly Celebration of Harry Potter event, featuring actors and other creative professionals from the film series, and has worked with fan convention GeekyCon (formerly LeakyCon, a *Harry Potter*-themed convention) to host a special event that allows convention attendees, for an extra fee, to be admitted to the park after closing time. These events are extremely popular and suggest that, in some way, Universal and Warner Brothers have successfully harnessed fandom.

The fans involved in this study (and it must be noted that these are fans who were already inclined towards appreciating WWOHP) suggest how this relationship works. They were pleased that Universal had put the resources into building the park in a way that meant they could have the desired embodied – and official – connection to the story-world. That Universal had done so was a sign that their fandom was valuable and valued. They were happy to pay for the experience, which they found meaningful, and reluctant to critique it too heavily. If Henry Jenkins could see fans in 1992 as rebellious poachers, working at a counterpoint to the media industry, fans in the contemporary media environment might better be seen as the game. They are carefully cultivated, valued, and used for resources. This is not to say that ‘poaching’ as Jenkins described it has disappeared, as it was always focused on the mental processes and imaginative work of fans in interpreting industry products, but that the relationship has changed,

at least for highly successful media franchises like *Harry Potter*. More research is required to understand what this means for the future of fandom and, indeed, of audience practices more generally, and how both fans and the media industry adapt to the poacher's domestication.



## 6. The Prisoner: Fan Homecoming and Placemaking in Fandom

### Introduction

As I have shown throughout this dissertation, film tourism is a field of significant, and growing, interest. However, research on it has largely been focused on then-popular contemporary films such as *Field of Dreams* (Aden, 1999), *The Lord of the Rings* (Buchmann et al, 2010; Carl et al, 2007; Jones & Smith, 2005; Peaslee 2011; Roesch, 2009,), or the *Harry Potter* series (Lee, 2012), or fan-favorite television shows around the time of their airing such as *Heartbeat* (Mordue 2001, 2008), *Sea Change* (Beeton 2016), *The X-Files* (Brooker, 2007; Hills 2002), *Breaking Bad* (Tzanelli & Yar, 2016), *Dr. Who* and its spinoff *Torchwood* (Beattie, 2013; Booth, 2015; Garner, 2016), or *Coronation Street* (Couldry, 2000). These studies focus on the “here and now” of film tourism, such as the conflicts between tourists and residents, the ways in which the tourist industry deals with a place’s newfound popularity, or the immediate experiences of tourists as the film or television show is fresh in the public consciousness. The previous two chapters have contributed to this body of knowledge by focusing on an ongoing TV show in Chapter 4 and a new attraction in Chapter 5.

There is less attention paid towards filming locations that have endured over time, with notable exceptions coming from studies on *The Sound of Music* and its locations in Austria (Graml, 2004; Roesch, 2009), tourism connected to the James Bond series (Reijnders, 2011), and the *Blade Runner* locations in Los Angeles (Brooker, 2005). However, even in these cases, the focus is on one-off touristic encounters with these places – while they might have endured in the public consciousness, there is little consideration of how the relationships that individual tourists have with these places have developed over time.

This continues as we move out of strictly film or television tourism into media-related tourism more generally, particularly for those media objects that have considerable fan followings. Many locations, such as filming locations, author's houses, recording studios, and the like have been theorized in terms of "fan pilgrimage," in that fans visit these "sacred" locations associated with their objects of fandom much in the way that more traditional pilgrims visit locations affiliated with religion. In seeking out the locations "for themselves," they are able to move beyond the mediated understanding of the object of fandom into the physical (Aden, 1999; Brooker, 2007; Couldry, 2000; Hills, 2002; Reijnders, 2011; Rodman 1996). The term has become popular among both scholars and the fan-tourists themselves, and visits to fan-related places are frequently described in this fashion. As I discuss in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, I do not generally prefer using the term "pilgrimage" for film tourism. I feel that it overshadows other ways in which fans might interact with places (see also Reijnders, 2011; Sandvoss, 2005), and limits our understanding of film tourism as a fan practice to one that reproduces religious structures.

However, it is no doubt a useful metaphor for some film tourism, and one that has considerable currency in many circles. It also exemplifies the way in which film tourism is usually discussed, focusing on brief, albeit powerful, moments of interaction between fans and places. The fan-pilgrim goes to the location, experiences the desired connection, and returns home, enriched by the experience but without a need or desire to return. It is therefore both an individual and temporary state. Focusing on "pilgrimages" thus overlooks the longer-term experiences that fans, and fan groups, can have with these important places.

One example of a longer-term relationship is that of the fandom around the television show *The Prisoner* (1967-1968). For nearly fifty years, fans of the program have been visiting its

primary filming location of Portmeirion, a holiday village in North Wales. Their visits support a *Prisoner*-themed shop and fan-run yearly convention. Some fans visit Portmeirion regularly, incorporating it into both their fan practices and lives. Being able to not only visit Portmeirion, but to continually return, has had an influence on not only individual fans but also the forms and practices of *Prisoner* fandom as a whole.

It is that influence that I investigate here. In this chapter, I ask what the potential long-term role and significance of place is in fandom, through a case study of *The Prisoner* and Portmeirion. This builds upon the previous two chapters by looking at the long-term effects of film tourism on fan practices, and how these places are experienced in multiple visits over a longer period of time. Here, I investigate the way in which the relationship between *The Prisoner* fandom and Portmeirion has been built over the years and what Portmeirion's role in the fandom is today, expanding the way in which the role of film-related places in fandom are understood.

## **Place and Fandom**

Fandom occupies an increasingly important place in contemporary life. In many ways, fans are the “indicator species” of our media ecology, marking out and defining the way in which we relate to media texts and objects. As early adopters of technologies, they indicate ways in which these new media can be used that give the broader audiences a path to go down. As the most visible and vocal members of the audience, their relationships with the media industries show how they understand audiences in general. And as those who are particularly passionate about an object or text, the fans' actions towards them indicate, in some ways, the way that we all relate to the stories and texts that have made up our media lives.



As I discuss in Chapter 2, and return to here, objects of fandom matter to fans – as Sandvoss suggests: “the object of fandom, whether it be a sports team, a television programme, a film or pop star, is intrinsically interwoven with our sense of self, with who we are, would like to be, and think we are.” (2005, p.96) In essence, this means that we identify who we are through our objects of fandom – they possess traits we consider important, and in being a fan of them, we identify ourselves with those traits. Williams (2015) builds on this, discussing how being a fan can give a sense of “ontological security” (Giddens, 1991) by providing a stable sense of self-identity not only through the object of fandom itself, but through the community of other fans as well. The object and the community make up a part of the fan’s life and provide tools to create a self-narrative and a stable sense of who they are. While this, like other examples of identity formation, is often talked about as part of childhood, adolescence, and/or early adulthood, as Harrington and Bielby (2010a, 2010b) and Harrington, Bielby, and Bardo (2011) explain, it can also be an important resource to draw on as fans age. Fandom can provide a continuing structure throughout the fan’s life, providing a framework to navigate different life stages while maintaining a stable sense of self.

Visiting locations associated with the object of fandom can therefore be a powerful emotional experience, frequently compared in both academic and popular discourse to a pilgrimage. As explained above, while I am not fond of this metaphor for all film tourism, here, it can be useful to describe a certain archetypal form of film tourism, that of the longed-for visit to a fandom-related place. When a place and an object of fandom have a solid, and especially a long-term, affiliation, the place provides the fandom with a “stable, highly visible, *physical* anchor in the real world.” (Rodman 1996, p.99) It is somewhere that a fan can visit to clearly and

specifically honor their fandom. Structures and locations provide a tangible, enduring stability to something that would otherwise be potentially disposable.

Despite this, most investigations of even long-term fan-affiliated places look at these visits as single trips. Yet as fandom is a life-long pursuit, it is likely that many fans visit these locations more often. This creates a different sort of relationship between the fans and the place than that of a single visit. As Tuan (1977) discusses, a 'sense' of a place is made up of repetition – of revisiting enough to know and understand it, and to imbue it with meaning built over time. Tuan discusses this in terms of the familiar paths taken in the home, stating that “[a]s a result of habitual use the path itself acquires a density of meaning and a stability that are characteristic traits of place.” (1977, p.182) This idea is further elaborated by Seamon (1979) in his concept of the “place ballet,” the interaction of multiple people’s habitual, frequently non-cognitive movements in time and space, which creates a “climate of familiarity which grows and to which they become attached.” (1979, p.57)

For Tuan and Seamon, the sense of a place, of understanding it as a distinct area with meaning, is based in repetition, in doing things over and over again in the space and becoming familiar with it and the others who do the same. While Tuan does note that some seemingly fleeting experiences with place can make an as large or even larger impression on a person’s life as a long-term residency (1977, p.185), deep knowledge of a place requires repetition and reoccurrence. The importance of such repetition and its resulting familiarity returns in most discussions of place attachment (Low & Altman, 1992; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Therefore, while a single pilgrimage might be powerful, a repeated engagement with a media-related location would give the fan a different emotional experience. Fans of *The Prisoner* who are

regular and long-term visitors to Portmeirion are therefore likely to have a different sense of it than those who visit only once.

For this reason, I propose the concept of the “fan homecoming” to describe such visits, as an alternative to the more frequently studied “pilgrimage.” A “fan homecoming” is here defined as a return visit to a familiar fandom-related place. Compared to a single visit, a homecoming involves visiting a place that the fan has come to know, where they have made pathways and place ballets that give it a climate of familiarity and comfort. Through continued visitation, a special location is made into a true place – an area with deeply felt meaning, one that the fan can feel truly attached to. As Sandvoss suggests, the object of fandom itself already functions as a sort of *Heimat* or emotional home for many fans (2005, p.64), and via the fan homecoming, this emotional home gains a physical counterpart.

Like the “second home” of a rural cabin or beach house (Garvey, 2008; Halfacree, 2011), this fandom home operates as a familiar retreat from “everyday life,” a way to “disengage” from the mainstream and connect to a more genuine self while still being in a comfortable and familiar environment. Much of the discourse around second homes is built around a dichotomy of urban and rural, with the urban representing the stressful and inauthentic “everyday life” and the rural as the more emotionally authentic “escape.” We can map this onto the concept of fandom as an “alternative social community” (Jenkins, 1992), built around interests, attachments, and enthusiasms that those in the fan’s “mainstream” life don’t share or understand. The fan homecoming gives this alternative community a specific place, one that they can travel to bodily in order to feel both included and free. Given a regular return, the place potentially takes on significant memories for this community, becoming an integral part of its sense of cohesion.

It is this experience that I believe is at the heart of the relationship that fans of *The Prisoner* have with Portmeirion. This is not to say that every *Prisoner* fan who visits Portmeirion does so as a homecoming, but that the potential for such a relationship is there.

Following an overview of *The Prisoner* itself, Portmeirion, and the study's methodology, I show how this works in practice, illustrating how fans of *The Prisoner* become attached to Portmeirion, and what the significance of its role as "home" of the fandom is for the fans and fan community that has created it. In doing so, I further develop the ways in which the relationship between fandom and place can be conceptualized.

### **The Prisoner and Portmeirion**

*The Prisoner* is considered one of the quintessential "cult" television shows (Hanna, 2014; Hills, 2004; Johnson, 2005; Short, 2011), maintaining a dedicated fanbase and critical acclaim in the nearly 50 years since its original airing. Originally airing on the British commercial channel ITV in 1967, the show centers around the titular character, played by series creator Patrick McGoochan, a spy who resigns from his post and returns to his London home only to be drugged, kidnapped and taken to a mysterious place known as "The Village." There, he is assigned a new name – Number 6 – and interrogated by a rotating cast of Number 2s as to the cause of his resignation, in increasingly bizarre ways, while trying (and failing) to escape his confinement. As discussed by Short (2011) and Hanna (2014), its high production values, allegorical themes, and surreal narrative and structure helped to define cult television, enshrining *The Prisoner* as an important part of the medium's history and creating the sort of modest in size but active and vocal fan culture that would define television fandom. Well-received re-screenings in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, in both the United Kingdom and United States, as

well as elsewhere in Europe, both created fresh interest in the program and cemented its place as an important countercultural touchstone (Hanna, 2014). An Appreciation Society, *Six of One*, was founded in 1977 and continues to this day, producing fan-written magazines and organizing a yearly convention, PortmeiriCon<sup>2</sup>.

Textually, its “endlessly deferred narrative” (Hills 2002, p.134), a feature of cult television texts that is said to encourage the more fannish practices of its audience by opening it up to multiple interpretations (Gwenllian-Jones & Pearson, 2004; Hills, 2002), is built on a great number of questions, from Number 6’s original name and position to the ownership and purpose of the Village, none of which are answered by the conclusion of its 17-episode run. Indeed, the only question definitively answered by *The Prisoner*’s final episode was that of the filming location of The Village – Portmeirion, on the coastline of North Wales. A holiday village and hotel designed by Anglo-Welsh architect Sir Clough Williams-Ellis, first established in 1925, Portmeirion had been used as a filming location for McGoohan’s prior series, the more straightforward spy program *Danger Man*, where it had stood in for Italy and other “exotic” European destinations. According to fan lore, it was this visit that inspired McGoohan to set the vague idea he’d had for a show about “a man in isolation” there, shaping the tone of the eventual program and the future of Portmeirion itself.

Described by Williams-Ellis as a “home for fallen buildings” (2014), Portmeirion’s jumble of architectural elements, Italianate design, colorful paint scheme, and bucolic coastal setting gave *The Prisoner* an instantly iconic look, especially when it was re-broadcast in color. The last episode of the series revealed Portmeirion as the Village’s primary filming location, and the connection has endured to this day, with the two frequently connected in popular culture and

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<sup>2</sup> While *Six of One* spells the convention as Portmeiricon, I refer to it here as PortmeiriCon in order to better visually differentiate it from Portmeirion itself.

references to the show appearing in much of the media coverage of Portmeirion (Langley, 2011). Currently, it features a *Prisoner*-themed shop in the building that had been Number 6's house, a recently-opened Number 6 Café, and hosts not only PortmeiriCon but also Festival Number 6, a popular music and arts festival that makes use of *Prisoner* iconography. While Portmeirion's draw as a tourist destination is not entirely built on its connection to *The Prisoner*, for those familiar with the program, the association is strong.

## **Methods**

This study, as with the other chapters, is primarily based on sixteen semi-structured interviews with fans of *The Prisoner* who have visited Portmeirion multiple times. While undoubtedly many fans of *The Prisoner* who visit Portmeirion do so as a one-off visit, I wanted to focus here on the more long-term visitors as a contrast to prior film tourism research, including the studies presented in Chapters 4 and 5. The majority of these interviewees are either current or former members of Six of One, with one interviewee having never participated in the group. Interviewees were recruited from "The Prisoner and Portmeirion" Facebook group, the Prisoner fansite "The Unmutual," and the 2016 edition of PortmeiriCon, which resulted in a mix of volunteered and solicited interviews with long-term fans who have a range of relationships to Portmeirion and the broader fandom. Six women and ten men were interviewed. The youngest interviewee was 33 and the oldest 71. Interviews lasted from 30 to 80 minutes and were conducted either on-site in Portmeirion, via telephone, via Skype, and in one case over Facebook Messenger as per the request of the interviewee. This range of settings was based on the availability and desires of the interviewees, with the goal of making the process as comfortable for the interviewees as possible and to make sure that there was time available to fully explore

the topic. The interviews proceeded in roughly the same fashion and their transcripts were treated the same, as befitting the textual approach to my interviews that I explain in Chapter 3, although the on-site interviews tended to be shorter than the Skype or phone interviews. Interviewees were asked about their fandom of *The Prisoner* and how it has developed, their experiences, past and present, in Portmeirion, their feelings about Portmeirion, and the role they feel Portmeirion plays in both their fandom and *Prisoner* fandom as a whole. Interviews were transcribed and read several times before coding in Atlas.ti, and were then re-read in light of this coding to develop the thematic analysis. All names have been changed in order to respect the respondents' privacy.

The interviews were supplemented by three other sources of data. One, participatory observation at Portmeirion over two visits, including one during the 2016 PortmeiriCon. During this visit I participated in the PortmeiriCon activities, including attending discussion sessions, a tour of Portmeirion, social events, and participating in the larger-scale reenactments on site. I disclosed my status as a researcher and received permission to attend in that role from the convention organizers, due to this being a private fan event that I wished to approach respectfully. Two, several bodies of fan-produced and targeted writing were analyzed thematically via a close reading, including both contemporary and archival material. This consisted of recent editions of the *Six of One* magazine *Six 4 Two*, four issues of the fanzine *The Green Dome*, published in 1980, issues 1-22 of the fanzine *Free For All*, published by first the Liverpool and then Shrewsbury chapters of *Six of One* in the 1990s, and the regularly-updated fan website *The Unmutual* ([theunmutual.co.uk](http://theunmutual.co.uk)). Three, fan discussion on the public Facebook groups “*The Prisoner*” and “*The Prisoner and Portmeirion*” and the alt.tv.the-prisoner newsgroup (active in the 1990s-2000s and accessed through Google Groups) was reviewed, with

approximately 100 posts in the former and 116 in the latter relating specifically to Portmeirion pulled for further close reading. This data was used to supplement and contextualize the data gathered from the interviews, providing important background information as well as confirming certain points brought out in its analysis.

Through these methods, I have developed the following picture of the role that Portmeirion plays for the fandom of *The Prisoner*, and the way in which these long-term visitors experience the place today.

### **MEET THE TOURIST: *THE PRISONER***

Michael is 52 and works as the director of press for an English university. Originally from Belfast, Northern Ireland, he got into the Prisoner via his friends in the science-fiction community there in his early 20s.

Belfast in the 1970s and 1980s was a heavily divided place, and in the science-fiction community Michael found a refuge from the conflicts and a group of like-minded people, many of whom remain friends to this day. At the time, he considered himself more of a literary science-fiction fan, rather than a television or “media” fan, but he trusted his friends’ recommendation. *The Prisoner*, with its allegorical themes, anti-authority messages, and general uniqueness, drew him in, and he became a dedicated fan of the series as it re-aired in the early 1980s. As someone already involved with organized science-fiction fandom, who had been going to local events, it made sense to go to the *Prisoner* conventions in Portmeirion, and he went with his friends starting in the mid-80s. There, he was impressed by the varied nature of the fandom, consisting of not just the kinds of science-fiction fans he knew in Northern Ireland but people from many different walks of life, and Portmeirion itself. Being able to discuss and play with *The Prisoner* in its original setting was something that Peter greatly enjoyed (he and several of his *Prisoner* friends even did a *Prisoner*-themed roleplaying game in Portmeirion at several conventions), and he kept going to PortmeiriCons, as well as other *Prisoner* events, into the early 2000s. Within this society, he made good friends and even met his now-wife. Like many fans of *The Prisoner* who visited Portmeirion, he also got interested in Sir Clough Williams-Ellis’ life and work, collecting old Portmeirion guidebooks and reading Williams-Ellis’ books.

During the schism of Six of One in the early 2000s he left the society and no longer attends PortmeiriCon, but he still keeps in contact with the friends he made while part of the group. He sees them as what connects him to both his fandom of *The Prisoner*, which he is no longer as involved with as he was when he was younger, and Portmeirion itself, which he visits about once a year for the “non-convention” of friends who left Six of One but still want to meet up yearly.



He also keeps up with information and news about *The Prisoner* and Portmeirion through Facebook, where he is a member of some *Prisoner*-focused groups. Today, he considers *The Prisoner* as one of his many hobbies and interests, which includes Neolithic history and the book *The Owl Service*. It is, however, one that has meant a lot to him over the years, even if it doesn't have the same prominence that it did when he was younger. He has even showed it to his son, who at least seemed to enjoy it.

## **The Experience and Role of Portmeirion for *Prisoner* Fans**

### *Village Activities: Ritual and Repetition in Portmeirion*

Portmeirion is not the most accessible place. Located in the small community of Penrhyndeudraeth in North Wales and nestled on the cliffs of the estuary of the River Dwyrdd, it is a 4.5-hour drive from London, 2.5 from Manchester, and 3.5 from Cardiff. From abroad, the most direct route entails a 4.5-hour train ride from the Birmingham airport to the Minffordd station approximately a mile away from Portmeirion, and then a wander or courtesy car through a residential area before entering the estate's woodlands and descending to the Village proper. Separated from the more populated areas of Great Britain and the small Welsh towns surrounding it, it is a place that must be known about to be found. Once it is entered, it feels like another world entirely.

Despite its isolation, fans of *The Prisoner* have been visiting Portmeirion since its first reveal as the filming location of The Village in 1968. That it is well known as the main filming location means that it is considered an important place for fans of the show to visit. Previous research has shown that filming locations such as Portmeirion have a particular importance as sites of "fan pilgrimage" – they are the place where the text actually happened, where the actors

stood and the scenes objectively took place, and therefore provide a strong physical link between the world of the text and our own (Beeton, 2016; Brooker, 2005; Buchmann et al, 2010; Couldry, 2000; Hills, 2002; Peaslee, 2011; Reijnders, 2011; Roesch, 2009). Many fans wish to experience the place that was both the setting and part of the inspiration for *The Prisoner* for themselves. For the fans interviewed here, this experience – to see Portmeirion for themselves and have a physical encounter with this environment – was what brought them to Portmeirion in the first place. However, after the first visit, they ended up returning, often on a regular basis. It is a place that many have grown to love quite deeply:

[I feel towards Portmeirion] just a great sense of love and gratitude. I find it...it was exactly what I needed at all different times I needed it in my life. So it was sort of quite magical and inspirational and exciting to me as a young teenager, when I was in my mid-20s and kind of unhappy and sort of stressed it was a very cozy place to escape to, it gave me somewhere to write and to think and to be and to feel like I could completely be myself. You know, it's...yeah, it's been extremely important to me. And I do feel that I do have this very, very strong relationship with the Village, you know, I have sat on every bench, I've walked in every bit of it, I've stayed in most of the buildings...I know it really well. Yeah. It's really important. (Katy, 33, English)

That fans like Katy visit Portmeirion fairly frequently means that they have developed familiar routines within and around it. In returning to see these familiar faces and places, fans also establish practices around Portmeirion that create the sort of pathways that Tuan (1977) and Seamon (1979) see as the foundation of a sense of place. These practices can be both quite formal and ritualized, such as many of the practices involved in the yearly fan convention PortmeiriCon that I will describe, and more informal practices through the village and its affiliated landscape. They create a sense of familiarity and attachment to Portmeirion beyond, but not entirely apart from, its depiction on screen, giving it continuity as a site of *Prisoner* fandom and a meaningful location in the fans' lives.

For most of the fans interviewed PortmeiriCon has been important for this relationship, either currently or in the past. Fan conventions are one of the oldest of fan traditions (Jenkins 1992, Bacon-Smith 1992, Porter 2004, Coppa 2006, Booth and Kelly 2013, Lamerichs 2014, Geraghty 2014), drawing fans to specific locations to congregate and celebrate their objects of fandom. Ranging from large, multi-fandom events like San Diego Comic-Con to smaller, more focused events like PortmeiriCon, they have long supplied a way for fans to meet others interested in the same things and to provide a physicality to what would otherwise be a more ephemeral relationship, either with the objects of fandom themselves or other fans.

As places, however, fan conventions are seen somewhat differently than more auratic “pilgrimage” locations. Conventions are typically held in what Augé (1998) refers to as “non-places,” hotel rooms or convention centers that can accommodate the crowds but without distinctiveness on their own as, generally, places that have a stronger association with particular fan texts do not also have the capacity or desire to host conventions. Rodman stresses the difference between Graceland and convention spaces in terms of the way in which the community feels a sense of belonging to the space, stating that a “*Star Trek* convention, for instance, may afford an otherwise diffuse population of fans the opportunity to congregate as a community, but the lifespan of that community is brief (a few days at most) and the site in question isn’t likely to be one that has any pre-existing (or lasting) association with either *Trek* or Trekkies [...] the space occupied by that community isn’t theirs in any sense other than that they’ve rented it for the occasion.” (Rodman, 1996, p.124) Graceland, and other auratic pilgrimage sites, have an enduring connection to the object of fandom that can’t be displaced, which makes their resulting fandoms special. This assertion is challenged by Hills, who stresses that “over time, specific hotels may come to take on their own histories of convention-hosting

such that the contingency and alien-ness of the hotel space may actually become a necessary part of a given convention's identity." (2002, p.155) This can be clearly seen in Geraghty's (2014) exploration of the San Diego Comic-Con, which has grown to a massive event in which the "non-place" of the San Diego Convention Center has become a very specific place indeed, with significance given to each aspect of its seemingly generic architecture. Additionally, as Porter (2004) discusses, the "non-place" quality of the convention site also promotes a focus on the text(s) themselves, and what they are said to represent for fans, rather than on the space. The very genericness of a hotel or convention center means that it is not the place itself that holds the most meaning, but those in it, and this community can be reproduced seemingly anywhere.

Portmeirion, however, does have both a lasting association with *The Prisoner* and the capacity to host groups. To its organizers, having a convention anywhere but Portmeirion did not make sense:

It was a logical thing to do. You know. If you start a Society for anything, you want to have a meeting. We had a film set! We could come to the film set! Where else do you want to go? You know. If you're a fan of *Star Trek* or *Dr. Who*, you don't do anything. (Roy, 69, English)

Despite being less accessible than the hotels and convention centers that are common spaces for fan conventions, its symbolic power as "the place" of the show meant that other locations were not options. While *Star Trek* is placeless, set in outer space in the far future and filmed in inaccessible studios, *The Prisoner* is distinctly placed in Portmeirion. Therefore, the fandom must be placed there as well. This is as true for the convention organizers today as it was in 1977:

There was one year when, I remember now, we couldn't do a convention in Portmeirion for some reason. And there were talks about perhaps in the future we should have them somewhere else, and everybody said, well no! You can't do that! Portmeirion is *The Prisoner*. If you're going to have a convention, it's got to be in Portmeirion. And that's that, really. You know. A proper convention, I mean you can have another event, but an

actual convention, a full weekend affair, it's got to be Portmeirion, isn't it? (Angie, 55, English)

Having the convention elsewhere was never a serious option, even as different groups of fans took over the organization of the convention and the relationship with the Portmeirion management fluctuated. Portmeirion therefore combines both of the main ways in which fandom relates to place – it is where the show “actually” happened, where fans can momentarily bridge the gap between imagination and reality, and where they can gather to discuss *The Prisoner* and meet friends who are also enthusiastic about the series.

As a long-running fan convention, the activities and practices of PortmeiriCon are particularly visible as ritualized and repeated practices within Portmeirion. Quizzes about the series, discussions, interviews and talks with special guests involved with the production of the show, episode screenings, and social events are well-established and expected parts of the schedule. These type of events, which adapt well to any type of enclosed space, are part of the makeup of most fan conventions, providing a focal point and structure for the weekend and the discussion of the text(s) that the fans have gathered to celebrate.

In addition, PortmeiriCon also features a number of reenactments from *The Prisoner*. Reenactments and dressing in media-related costumes are standard practices at both filming locations and conventions (Booth & Kelly, 2013; Kim, 2010; Lamerichs, 2010; Reijnders, 2011), as I discuss in Chapter 4, but performing scenes from *The Prisoner* in Portmeirion with the accompaniment of fellow fans has a particular resonance that has made them cornerstones of the PortmeiriCon experience. Each convention features a number of smaller scene reenactments, as well as large, public reenactments of two iconic scenes – the “human chess game” from the episode “Checkmate” and the “election parade” from the episode “Free for All.” These are performed at the spot of their filming at least once every convention since the 1980s, with the

2016 PortmeiriCon holding each twice. Unlike the other convention activities, which require payment and membership of Six of One, these large reenactments are open to day visitors to Portmeirion. Attendees are also encouraged to participate as part of the crowd, with costumes and props handed out to whomever wishes to utilize them. They are often quite playful, joyous experiences:

You can just join in, and be as if you are taking part of the Prisoner, the filming of the Prisoner, but you know. It's almost like you're there and you're part of it and you can have fun. They're fun things. (Angie, 55, English)

For Angie, the ability to join in as a non-actor from her very first convention not only made her feel that she was taking part in the series, but added a sense of joy and fun to the event and immersed her into the fandom, where she is now one of the convention organizers. Participants frequently make jokes as they go through the scenes, and there is a sense of comfortable familiarity and playfulness to the proceedings. They are seen as a way to celebrate the show and the convention through participation, rather than solemnity, similar to the reenactments done at *Game of Thrones* sites by the fans I profiled in Chapter 4.

That they are playful does not, however, mean that they are not taken seriously. This is clear both in the amount of effort put into their organization, compared to the more impromptu reenactments discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, with speaking roles assigned well ahead of time, scripts sent out and rehearsals done, and in the feelings of those who are trusted to carry out these roles. Liza was proud of how she worked herself into a position at a previous edition of PortmeiriCon in which she could fulfill a dream – performing in the election parade as Number 6:

But then as Number 6 I got onto the Stone Boat and I thought 'here I am where Patrick McGoohan stood' with this... and looked out at all these people, this sea of people and was like 'vote for me!' and they were calling back to me. They acknowledged me, they were like 'Number 6! You're Number 6!' And it was just like this whole feeling of, of all

of us together felt this synergy. This whole kind of ‘here we are creating it, recreating it, respecting it!’ We are walking in their footsteps and kind of, not in a way to say...just to say ‘this is a moment that we are acknowledging it and doing it together.’ (Liza, 40, English)

Performing the role in its setting and having it acknowledged by her fellow fans gave her a sense of powerful connection with a character she had long identified with. While it was certainly fun to do, the real joy came out of experiencing this moment. Doing these reenactments in the environment of their filming, in a clearly organized way, sets the reenactments at Portmeirion apart from others. That fans have been doing these reenactments for a long time also gives them a sense of continuity. Liza not only got to experience ‘being’ McGoohan, but she did so in the footsteps of fans who came before. Maintaining this connection with the past is important for the fans who continue to go to PortmeiriCon.

This is not to say that every fan wishes to be involved with the reenactments. Some fans, particularly those that no longer attend PortmeiriCon, find the reenactments to be uninteresting or even a bit ludicrous and much prefer other activities, such as discussion of the show’s themes and spending time with friends, alongside enjoying Portmeirion’s qualities as visual reminder of *The Prisoner* and a holiday destination in its own right. Even fans who do appreciate the reenactments frequently do other things while in Portmeirion, particularly if they also visit outside of the convention. While these activities are less formalized than the reenactments, that they are done on a regular basis still contributes to the sense of continuity with their fandom and with Portmeirion itself. As Geoff, who no longer attends PortmeiriCon but now lives in the area and visits frequently, describes his visits:

I normally go for a wander through the woods because of the beautiful woodlands they have there. At some point we'll go to the hotel and have something to eat or have a drink or whatever. [...] Me and my wife go there just the two of us a few times a year, there are little places we like to go and sit down and have a think and just sit and chat or whatever. We have our favorite little spots in the village. (Geoff, 42, English)

As a frequent visitor to Portmeirion, he has established his own activities and pathways through it, ones that are repeated as he continues to visit and think about it. Seamon states that “regularity and variety mark the place ballet,” (Seamon, 1979, p.151) and this is what Jeff demonstrates in his interactions with Portmeirion – he has established regular rhythms within Portmeirion, while still treating it as something special. Other fans who visit outside of the convention express similar habits. Wandering, seeing familiar but spectacular views, and meeting with friends at places they have long met with friends creates a strong relationship with Portmeirion.

Regular visitors like Geoff show considerable familiarity with Portmeirion. They know and discuss the names of each building and area amongst themselves and debate changes, both actual and potential, with considerable investment, as well as showing interest in Williams-Ellis’ other works. Some check the webcams that the Portmeirion administration has set up daily, in order to virtually return to Portmeirion and see their favorite places when they are physically unable to. It is a place that matters to them. As Michael notes:

To us, I can't speak for everybody, but to the people I associate with in Prisoner fandom, almost to a man and woman, they are as obsessed or as interested in Portmeirion as they are in *The Prisoner*. (Michael, 52, Northern Irish)

Many *Prisoner* fans interviewed confirmed Michael’s observation. Portmeirion is a place that is deeply beloved, and frequent visitors like Peter often find themselves as drawn into its story and history as they were into the show that brought them there. Through the activities of frequent visitation, whether they are formal or informal, directly connected to *The Prisoner* or not, their affective involvement with Portmeirion deepens. As Roy, one of Six of One’s founders and a frequent visitor to Portmeirion, states:

I’m walking around, and constantly in my mind going “yeah, that happened. That scene happened there.” I...in my ideal world, when I die, I would like to be buried in a shallow



grave in the flowerbed just below Number 6's house. That is where I would like to spend eternity. Gazing across the amphitheater. (Roy, 69, English)

Roy demonstrates a clear love of both Portmeirion and the program that brought him there, both of which are an important part of his life. His wish would be to dwell there permanently, both in this life and after.

Both Tuan and Seamon saw place-making through repetitive movement as occurring through everyday activity, but as these fans show, it can also be accomplished through more extraordinary movement – that of continually returning to a special place, removed from everyday activity. Indeed, the isolation of Portmeirion was often brought up as a positive factor. Visiting, either during or outside of the convention, is seen as a time to get away from ordinary concerns and reconnect to the fantasy space. The fan removes themselves from everyday life, but into a familiar and welcoming environment, one that allows them rest, contemplation, and meaningful connections.

Moving in familiar ways is therefore an important part of the relationship that *Prisoner* fans have with Portmeirion, and an important aspect of the homecoming. Through reenacting scenes at the place of their filming, fans not only immerse themselves in and pay tribute to the show that has mattered so much to them, but do the same to the fandom. Informally, continually revisiting and moving around in familiar locations in Portmeirion creates a sense of attachment, adding a personal connection to the symbolic power of being in “the place” that *The Prisoner* happened.

*‘Welcome to Your Home from Home’: Portmeirion as Meeting Place*

Returns to Portmeirion are not only frequent, but also usually scheduled. This creates a sense of stability for *Prisoner* fans that provides a strong basis for a community. The importance of Portmeirion as the filming location for *The Prisoner* and as a part of the show's mythology means that it has long been a draw for fans. This idea of a "gathering place" for a fandom around a particular site is not unique to *The Prisoner*. Rodman (1996), Aden (1999), and Sandvoss (2014) stress the importance of a form of "communitas" (Turner, 1977) around Graceland, the *Field of Dreams* filming site, and Ibiza respectively, as these locations will always have at least some other fans present, and I recognized a similar phenomenon at WWOHP in Chapter 5. Rodman suggests that the constant critical mass of Elvis fans at Graceland "provides enough continuity to foster a lasting, tangible sense of an Elvis-centered community," (1996, p.124) and reminds the fan that they are not alone in their interest. This is seen as a feature of pilgrimages more generally, which create a "temporary fellowship" (Digance 2006, p.40) of those who are attracted to the site. For fans, particularly those who have interests that are not shared by those around them, being at this important site, with others around for that reason, creates a sense of belonging – that the individual is part of something bigger, and that their interest is not so strange and isolating as it may seem at home.

For returning fan-visitors to Portmeirion, it is not only the general sense of a broader community that is important, however, but the relationships with specific other fans. The friendships made via *Prisoner* fandom were considered very important by nearly every interviewee. Compared to the looser communitas described by Aden, Rodman, Sandvoss, and myself, the goal is not to be around an abstract sense of community, but to talk with people who share an interest in *The Prisoner*. Meeting other fans was a frequently-given response as to why

*Prisoner* fans not only visited, but returned to Portmeirion. Liza, who has attended several PortmeiriCons, discussed her decision to first visit Portmeirion as such:

I'd never been to a place quite like Portmeirion, and I just really wanted to come and see the place where, for me, the program had such an impact. It was so beautiful and I thought 'I really must come and see this place' and specifically, see other people who enjoy the program. (Liza, 40, English)

A fan of the program since the early 1990s, Liza had found it difficult to find others in her everyday life to discuss the show with. In visiting Portmeirion and the convention, she addressed this lack:

To be there, years after, and there I was, and the sun was shining, with people who were friendly, people who got me. They got me! When I said to them 'I don't... I've got all these questions and there's all these symbols and meanings that I can read into it and I want to disagree with you...' And it's that whole, to have that fellow feeling of arriving, in a place. It transformed the place for me. (Liza, 40, English)

In entering this isolated location, Liza not only encountered the 'real' places of *The Prisoner*, but other fans who understood where she was coming from. Compared to other media "cults," the fandom around *The Prisoner* was and is smaller. While it might be possible to find other fans of Elvis, *Star Trek*, or the *Harry Potter* series in one's general vicinity, it was rarer to find a fan of *The Prisoner*, especially before the Internet was commonplace. Portmeirion was one of the few places it was likely to find one.

Going to Portmeirion to meet fellow fans is expressed as less of a desire to know that other fans exist, as Rodman suggested with regard to Elvis fans, but as a desire to have deeper engagement with the program than they could find in their everyday lives. *The Prisoner* is seen by its fans as a particularly innovative, quality program, one that challenges viewers and requires a higher level of intellectual engagement to appreciate:

Well, I'm fascinated by television that leaves questions unanswered. And I like television that stimulates the mind and makes you think. And I also was taken an awful lot as a

child by the idea of the individual against sort of convention, normality. In fact, all the ideas that *The Prisoner* invokes, I was interested in. (Harry, 54, English)

To its fans, the show not only asks questions in terms of plot – who is Number 6, what is The Village – but also about society, culture, and life in general, ones that continue to have resonance throughout their life course. Many fans wanted to find others who felt the same way about it. This was not only to discuss *The Prisoner* itself, although that was important, but because they felt that other fans were likely to be interesting people worth meeting. As discussed earlier, fans often identify their object of fandom with important parts of themselves. This can then be extended to others – that similar interest in *The Prisoner* means that they are likely to be compatible in other ways. While Sandvoss insisted that most fan texts are polysemic, allowing “not only for a multiplicity of meaning, but for any meaning,” (2005, p.126), within the interviews and the fan-produced texts there is a reasonably clear sense of what traits *The Prisoner* represents – intelligence, a questioning of authority and power structures, individualism, an interest in strange and challenging media – which fans expect to see reflected in themselves as well as others.

For many, this led to both Portmeirion and the Prisoner Appreciation Society, Six of One. The establishment of groups such as Six of One was not uncommon in the media culture of the 1970s and 1980s (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992), and it found its footing among fans wishing to devote more attention to the program and its ideas. As with other fandoms, this was fostered through the aforementioned convention PortmeiriCon, first held in 1977 and repeating nearly every year since (conventions were not held in 1980, 1999, 2000, 2002, and 2004). This scheduled reason to revisit meant that Portmeirion provided a stable platform to construct a community out of what might have otherwise been a more fluid *communitas*. Fans of *The Prisoner* that got involved with Six of One and the convention knew that the people they met

there would be likely to return. As time has passed, many of these friendships have become quite close:

I've still got friends from that very first convention [in 1982] that I'm still friends with now. And as I said, I think that's one thing that links all of us, we've got this love of Portmeirion, *The Prisoner*, Patrick, etc., but we've also got great friendships out of it as well. And it's like, some people you just see that once a year, at the convention, and it just feels as though you've only left them about 10 or 15 minutes or so, and you've only gone for a coffee or something, and you know, there is other ones like my dear friend, who I speak to throughout the year. (Anabel, 54, Hertfordshire)

Anabel is far from the only fan to have made important friendships through the society and the convention, and several have met partners through their attendance. Fans expect to see specific others at Portmeirion that they consider good friends. Returning is therefore important on two levels: it reconnects the fan with their fandom of *The Prisoner* and with the relationships made through this fandom.

Relationships with fellow fans can be built and maintained in other ways, particularly as communication technology has improved. Smaller, local groups of *Prisoner* fans have also always been a factor in its fandom. However, meeting locally is considered as not the same as meeting in Portmeirion:

No comparison! All we did was sort of sit there and talk about, they would reminisce about conventions they had been to, they'd be telling me all about it, and then we'd be sitting there swapping Prisoner in-jokes and just drinking and having fun, really. Having a few beers and saying a few silly things. Which doesn't at all compare to a convention of course, which is a completely different thing. (Angie, 55, English)

While Angie enjoyed the monthly get-togethers with her local group in the late 1990s, both she and the other fans thought of them differently than the meetings in Portmeirion. Being in Portmeirion added a specialness and uniqueness to the occasion, being the site of *The Prisoner*, the site of the fandom's history, and physically removed from 'everyday' life, even if they were simply chatting and sharing a drink or meal as they might elsewhere.

This double significance means that even if fans are no longer willing to attend the convention, they still wish to visit Portmeirion with other fans. A serious schism in Six of One in the early 2000s led to many leaving it, and therefore no longer attending the convention.

However, this did not mean that they were willing to give up regular visits to Portmeirion or the relationships engendered there:

There is not another place like it, so if you want to spend some time with your friends, which is a great thing to do anyway, I don't know anyone who doesn't like spending time with their friends, what better place to spend it at then Portmeirion? (Geoff, 42, English)

Friends. I would rarely go back there if it wasn't for the people there who I was going to meet up with. [...] But then I do take time to walk around Portmeirion itself. We have this almost called NonCon, non convention, there's a group of friends who go every August. (Michael, 52, Northern Irish)

While neither Michael nor Geoff want anything to do with Six of One, they still wish to visit Portmeirion and spend time there with friends they've made on previous visits. Both men were fairly young when they started attending *Prisoner* events, and being a fan, while not their only interest, as they were both keen to stress, is nonetheless a key part of their self-conception that they do not wish to lose. In continuing to visit Portmeirion with their friends, and in continuing to think of Portmeirion as a special place, this connection is maintained even without the structures of organized fandom. Without the formatting of the convention, they can also tailor their *Prisoner* experience the way they want (neither enjoy reenactments, for example). Continuing to make time to do this on a regular basis maintains their identity as *Prisoner* fans and keeps the friendships secure as well.

For those that have continued to visit Portmeirion over the decades, this sense of fan community is maintained as much in the relationships with others as it is in continuing to watch and discuss *The Prisoner* (and for some, more so). As Massey suggests, places can be “conceptualized in terms of the social interactions they tie together.” (1994, p.155) Portmeirion

is therefore conceptualized for fans as the tying-together of their own personal interactions with the text, described by Williams (2015) as a ‘pure relationship’ (Giddens, 1991) that the fan builds out of the satisfaction the text gives them, and their interactions with fellow fans, both of which combine to make Portmeirion the special place that it is. Through continually returning over long periods of time, friendships are built and deepened, which cement the importance of Portmeirion to their lives.

### *Many Happy Returns: Portmeirion as Permanence*

That fans can expect to be able to return to Portmeirion on a yearly – or more – basis also points to the importance of the longevity of Portmeirion itself. One of the more striking features of *The Prisoner* fandom is that it has almost always been what Williams (2015) refers to as “post-object”: a fandom that exists after the object (the television show) has ended. Williams discusses how being a fan can give a sense of “ontological security” (Giddens, 1991) by providing a stable sense of self-identity through both the text itself and the fan community. The text and the fandom make up a part of the fan’s life, providing tools in order to create a self-narrative and a stable sense of who they are. However, “individuals may experience threats to their ontological security through the demise of, or loss of interest in, a fan object or through the failure of fan community.” (2015, p.26) As the fan object stops airing, and the fan communities drift away due to the lack of new material, fans might feel a considerable loss as this part of their self-identity ceases to be.

While some of the interviewees watched *The Prisoner* in its first run in the late 1960s, most of them came to the show when it was already a finished, completed work, either through

re-screenings or through home media consumption. The structures of its organized fandom, such as Six of One and PortmeiriCon, all came to be in *The Prisoner*'s post-object phase. While spurred by the re-screenings that gave it the rhythms of a current show, *Prisoner* fandom has mostly existed as a fandom without new texts. After the failure of the 2009 remake, fans of the series tend to see the potential of more *Prisoner* texts as a threat to the ontological security of their fandom than a promise of the continuation of it, as it would challenge their conception of themselves as fans of a truly great television show. This puts it in contrast to other prominent cult texts, which have frequent injections of new material that keeps it from fading away from public and fan consciousness.

What it does have is Portmeirion. The ability to gather there on a regular basis gives continuity to meeting up and discussing the program in a way that many other post-object fandoms do not have. Some even suggest that without Portmeirion, the fandom would not still exist:

I think it's essential. Absolutely essential. It's really essential for the Prisoner group. I think it keeps it all together, because it's a meeting point where we come to, and it's beautiful in its own right. There's plenty of time to talk and go off, so everyone enjoys it. It's better than meeting in some place totally devoid of it. (Lily, 71, English)

If it weren't for Portmeirion, I think it would be very hard for the fandom to continue now. Because ... there isn't the screening anymore. The last time I think it was screened was like 10, 20 years or something like that. So, I think, it would be very hard, especially now, for people to be able to gather in an anonymous place like Birmingham or anything like that. (Liza, 40, English)

For some fans, without the ability to visit Portmeirion and reconnect with their fandom by doing so, they would undoubtedly drift away from it in favor of more visible fandoms and activities. Additionally, the schism in Six of One was very personal and continues to be painful, and could have destroyed the organized fandom of *The Prisoner*. Yet the appeal of Portmeirion itself, the regular cycle of conventions or other gatherings, and the enjoyment that fans have in attending



these, keeps some form of the fandom, and the identity of being a *Prisoner* fan, secure despite serious disagreements and the passage of time.

There is also, however, another important factor regarding Portmeirion:

But of course, the thing about *The Prisoner* is that so much of it was filmed in Portmeirion, which is a real place. So it is a living film set, if you like. Not unique in that respect, there's a lot of films and TV shows where you can visit the locations, but Portmeirion, that *The Prisoner* is fairly unique in that where it was filmed is pretty much exactly the same now as it was then. (Geoff, 42, English)

As Geoff notes, Portmeirion is much the same as it was during the filming of *The Prisoner*.

While there have certainly been changes in the 50 years since the program's filming, they are not considered especially significant to the overall look and atmosphere of the village. The important buildings and other locations used in *The Prisoner*'s filming are all still there, and, for the most part, still look as they did, with no significant alterations or additions. It is still run by members of the Williams-Ellis family, all buildings have historical listed status, and it is set in a conservation area and owned by a charitable trust that ensures it cannot be bought or sold. These markers of stability create a sense that it will always exist in the way it always has, and indeed, did when *The Prisoner* was filmed.

Portmeirion's own stability and sense of permanence contributes an important sense of ontological security to *Prisoner* fans. It is, after all, seen as an incredibly important part of the series:

[Portmeirion is] a character in *The Prisoner*. It is one of the central characters of *The Prisoner*, I'd describe it as that. (Michael, 52, Northern Irish)

*The Prisoner* and Portmeirion, you can't really separate them. They are bound together. [...] And [*The Prisoner*] was obviously born of Portmeirion, because Patrick McGoohan visiting Portmeirion and did some filming there when he was doing *Danger Man*. And he thought at the time, this is the place, I'm going to come back here, we're going to use this place. (Angie, 55, English)

Portmeirion is important to *Prisoner* fandom on several levels – that of the inspiration for McGoohan to create the series, its filming location, and the gathering point of the fandom throughout its history. The fans interviewed saw Portmeirion as an integral part of *The Prisoner*, without which it would be a very different (and potentially less interesting) show. The link between the two is very strong.

That this connection, and Portmeirion itself, has endured over the years lends a sense of stability to *Prisoner* fans, as summarized well by Paul:

As long as Portmeirion exists, in a sense *The Prisoner* will exist. So you know in that respect everybody [who] is a close fan, wants Portmeirion to sort of remain. In a sense if you lost Portmeirion you'd lose *The Prisoner*. So I think in that respect, you know it's a...how do you say that...it's a much-loved relative. (Paul, 54, English)

Because the association is so strong for fans of *The Prisoner*, the continuing existence of Portmeirion means that, on some level, *The Prisoner* endures. While the general public may or may not be interested in *The Prisoner*, and new material is not forthcoming, that Portmeirion still exists means that there is still some level of ontological security to their fandom. As Creswell states, “the very materiality of a place means that memory is not abandoned to the vagaries of mental processes and is instead inscribed in the landscape.” (2014, loc 2816) In its permanence, Portmeirion remains as a sort of “safe vault” of their memories of *The Prisoner* and its fandom. This is an important element in the fans’ place attachment to Portmeirion. Through revisiting, fans have gained a deep attachment to Portmeirion that is informed by, although not always strictly part of, *The Prisoner* itself. However, that it is such an important site of *The Prisoner* does mean that it is also special for that reason – it is a constant and permanent memory of the show.

In recent years, Portmeirion itself is seen to have a renewed interest in *The Prisoner*, offering a *Prisoner*-themed high tea during PortmeiriCon, running *Prisoner* tours, and

increasingly using the Number 6 branding within the village. For some fans, this is a welcome acknowledgement of the importance that *The Prisoner* has always had to Portmeirion and their own role in maintaining this link:

I think if they searched their hearts, they'd probably think actually, you know, *The Prisoner* put Portmeirion on the globe, on the map. And it certainly created a global attraction. [...] I'd think as a very low estimate, that 50% of people who go to Portmeirion go there for the *Prisoner* connection. (Mark, 62, English)

That PortmeiriCon, which Mark helps to run alongside his partner Angie (who he met through Six of One), and its attendees have kept this connection running throughout the years, is a source of pride. They appreciate the good relationship that they now have with the Portmeirion management, and enjoy seeing their once-maligned fandom valued.

For others, though, this renewed interest is less welcome:

I think it's too obvious. I think there is a subtlety about Portmeirion. And that subtlety is sort of diluted by actually making a crude reference to *The Prisoner*. Where I think they should be saying, yes, okay, *The Prisoner* was filmed here for one month, but eh, you know Portmeirion and Clough's dream of the village was way long before that and way after. And you know, it's just one atom of the village's celebrity. And the people will make this association anyway, with *The Prisoner*. (Paul, 54, English)

For Paul, too many clear references to *The Prisoner* risks overshadowing other aspects of Portmeirion. There is a security to having Portmeirion exist before and outside of *The Prisoner* that is threatened by Portmeirion stressing the bond too heavily, as it would mean that Portmeirion might rely too heavily on the vagaries of popular culture for its survival. He would rather that Portmeirion focuses on its other qualities, as they better fit the image of Portmeirion as a special place worth preserving in which the filming of *The Prisoner* is one of its many attributes. He would not like to see them crowded out by "tributes" that fail to match the quality and taste level that *The Prisoner* has for him. Portmeirion's uniqueness is already enough of a fitting reminder of *The Prisoner*.

Essentially, what Portmeirion ultimately provides for many fans of *The Prisoner* is the permanence of place. In its physicality, monumentality, and lack of change, Portmeirion can function as “safe vault” for *The Prisoner* and its fandom. Rather than existing only as ephemeral media or personal memories, it is instead tied to an enduring physical place – Portmeirion.

## **Conclusion**

What is the potential long-term role and significance of place in fandom? In this chapter I have answered this question by examining long-term fans of *The Prisoner* and their relationship with its filming location of Portmeirion. Many of these fans have been visiting Portmeirion regularly for decades, returning at least once a year in order to reconnect with their friends and their fandom. Compared to the single trips that have been the focus of much of the discussion of fandom and place, these return visits show a different role for both individual fans and wider fan communities. I suggest that these more frequent trips should be called a ‘fan homecoming’ – a return to a familiar and beloved place associated with the object of fandom, one that they have gained a strong attachment to over their years of visiting. By exploring how this has been built, this paper broadens the current discussion on film and fan tourism by highlighting its long-term potential and implications.

Through continual movement to and through Portmeirion, sustained through the yearly PortmeiriCon convention as well as personal visits, Portmeirion has become a deeply-felt place. It is important for both the individual fans and the fandom as a collective, sustaining their attachment to *The Prisoner* and their fellow fans as the years have gone on. By continually gathering and repeating certain actions, such as scene reenactments and fan discussions, fans pay tribute not only to the show, but to the fans that have come before and their own past selves. This

repetition also creates an attachment to Portmeirion itself as the site of not only *The Prisoner*'s filming, but a place that they feel 'at home' in – one where they can escape from everyday concerns, reaffirm the importance that *The Prisoner* has for them, and reconnect with their friends and their memories.

As much of the visits to Portmeirion are scheduled, Portmeirion becomes a place in which a fan community can be constructed and maintained. The yearly schedule of conventions and other gatherings provides a stable basis to build a more intimate fan community, as it is expected that other fans of *The Prisoner* will be there at the same time. It has become the center of the fandom – to truly connect to it, one must visit Portmeirion, and preferably in the company of other fans. It could also be argued that the focus on Portmeirion as the “only” place of the fandom has limited *Prisoner* fandom to those who can access it, and those who have been going there long enough to understand the way in which the fandom operates in the space. Compared to a more “placeless” fandom that can be reproduced everywhere (Porter, 2004), fandom of *The Prisoner* is considered to be most authentically experienced in Portmeirion. That many of the returnees have been going there for decades also creates a somewhat insular community, as much focused on itself and its history as *The Prisoner*. However, it is one that undoubtedly means a great deal to its participants, and one that has kept itself and its vision of the show alive and relevant over the decades.

Portmeirion also provides an important sense of ontological security to fans of *The Prisoner*. In its physicality and relative stasis it provides a tangible connection to the show that is expected to endure well into the future. That both the show and the fandom are tied so heavily to Portmeirion means that, for fans, they feel that both will endure as well. Compared to other post-

object fandoms without such a physical link, it is thus felt that *The Prisoner* will never “really” die. It will always have a permanent memorial in Portmeirion.

What is particularly interesting is the continued strength of the relationship between fans of *The Prisoner* and Portmeirion. It is unsurprising that Portmeirion still attracts some fans of *The Prisoner*. The show continues to be a major touchstone in television history, and with both nostalgia for the past and new television distribution technologies prominent factors in contemporary cultural life, that its filming location would continue to attract tourists is to be expected. That many of the same fans have been visiting and re-visiting Portmeirion for decades, however, is intriguing. They were drawn to it because of both *The Prisoner* itself and the PortmeiriCon conventions, but it is clear that the connection goes deeper. This deep bond between some of the fans and the filming location has been one of the more surprising, and interesting, aspects of this case, evident to me from my earliest interviews and continuing throughout. It stood out compared to the cases analyzed in Chapters 4 and 5 as well as previous literature. While some fans interviewed were less attached than others, that enough of the bonds were so strong, and that all fans expressed a clear fondness for Portmeirion the place, was something that I have sought to explore throughout this research process.

The tight link between Portmeirion and *The Prisoner* fandom is perhaps a unique one. Few locations provide the same combination of filming location, convention space, and longevity of Portmeirion. However, this more extreme example illustrates the potential of how place and long-term fandom can interact. The idea of the homecoming developed here draws attention to important aspects of the relationship between fandom and place that have been previously overlooked, particularly the impact of longevity and frequent rather than single visits. As media texts increasingly live on in cultural memory via new distribution technologies and

fandom is considered part of long-term identity formation, these issues of longevity and sustainability of film tourism are even more pressing. What I do here is show a potential way in which they can be understood.





## 7. General Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have explored different examples of “fantastic” film tourism, looking to understand not only how fans experience film-related places, but what role these places play in their fandom and fan practices. The three cases presented here focus on different kinds of fantastic film tourism, from the historical settings of *Game of Thrones* to the recreated environment of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter to the unique familiarity of *The Prisoner’s* Portmeirion. They reflect on different aspects of the film tourist experience in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and in combination showcase how place matters in contemporary fandom.

This concluding chapter reflects on this research and the issues raised by it. I begin with an overview of this dissertation as a whole and how it relates to prior research on film tourism. Following this, I outline my theoretical approach to film tourism, sketching the fields of tourism and fandom and showing how they relate, and then reflecting on what happens when this theoretical approach is confronted with different empirical contexts. In drawing the disparate threads of this project together here, I not only answer my research questions, but also show how these results matter for the study of film and media tourism as well as for the study of fandom as a whole.

### **This Dissertation**

Prior research on film tourism has, as Beeton (2010), Karpovich (2010), and Connell (2012) discuss, been divided roughly into two camps: that coming from tourism management and

studies, largely (although by no means exclusively) drawing on quantitative methodology and concerned with understanding the motivations of film tourists-as-consumers and how to manage, or even create, the demand, and that from media, cultural, and fandom studies, which largely uses qualitative research and is more concerned with the construction of meaning around these sites. It is in this latter camp that this dissertation is ultimately situated (although, as I discuss, it is important for us studying film tourism as part of media culture to also understand it as part of tourism).

As Karpovich (2010) discusses, the focus on meaning-making and representation in much of the qualitative studies of film tourism has led to a focus on trying to understand what it is the tourist is “experiencing” – the media or the reality. As with film tourism research more generally, this can be roughly divided between a tourism studies approach and a media studies approach. The disjuncture between what is on screen and what actually is, and how this difference is interpreted, has proven to be an intriguing way to investigate what authenticity, a key issue in tourism studies, means for tourists today (Beeton, 2016; Buchmann et al, 2010; Brooker, 2007; Edensor, 2001; Månsson, 2011; Rojek, 1997; Torchin, 2002). If, as the seminal work of MacCannell (1999) argues, we become tourists in order to seek out “authentic” experiences denied to us in our everyday lives, what does it mean for tourists to increasingly seek out experiences that are entirely inspired by the media (and therefore potentially not “authentic” at all)? There has also been a focus on motivations of tourists – what brings them to these sites, and what they look for while there (Carl et al, 2007; Macionis & Sparks, 2009), where the question of experience is based around what the wished-for experience with a place is, and what the implications of it being met or not are. For media researchers, film tourism provides a way to investigate concerns about how we as audiences interact with and make sense of a

pervasive media culture. This has been discussed in terms of power relations between audiences and industry, in terms of enforcing the industry's power through the construction and control of these spaces (Booth 2015; Couldry, 2000; Garner 2016; Peaslee, 2011), or in terms of the experience of "entering into" the textual world through tourism and challenging the lines between imagination, the media, and reality (Aden, 1999; Brooker, 2005; Hills, 2002; Lee, 2012; , Reijnders, 2011; Roesch, 2009).

What has been missing from both these perspectives is how these places are actually experienced, beyond the issue of whether they are authentic or not, and how, once experienced, they are incorporated into the practices and lives of their visitors. It is this lack that is addressed in this dissertation. The use of three different case studies means that I was able to consider different examples of film tourism as part of one overarching research problem, using their similarities and differences in order to answer my two main questions. In doing so, I have moved the discussion on film tourism forward, by addressing conceptual issues beyond representation and authenticity into questions of embodiment, practice, and place attachment.

The first question asked here was: how, and in what different ways, do film tourists experience places related to their object of fandom? This builds on prior research on the film tourist experience (Buchmann et al 2010; Kim, 2010; Lee, 2012; Reijnders, 2011; Roesch, 2009) as well as on fan tourism (Aden, 1999; Booth, 2015; Brooker 2005, 2007; Garner, 2016; Hills 2002; Sandvoss, 2005), with a larger focus on how fandom impacts the tourist experience. I also move from the auto-ethnographic approach common in fan studies to a wider perspective, utilizing interviews from many tourists to create a broader view of how fans experience these locations.

This then moves into the second main research question: what role do film-related places play in contemporary fan practices? Since the beginnings of the Internet, fans have made use of its capacities to bring people into conversation with each other, using its affordances to build strong communities (Baym, 2000; Hellekson & Busse 2006; Jenkins 1992, 2006). In the digital age, fandom is largely seen as centered around these spaces. However, following the wider spatial turn in media studies (Ek, 2006; Falkheimer & Jansson 2006; Moores, 2012), I was interested in seeing how the existence and increasing relevance of film tourism effects fan practice today. What uses do fans find for these places, and how does having them available to visit affect their practices?

These questions were investigated and eventually answered by three case studies. These cases are all examples of “fantastic” film tourism, essentially, film tourism for places that don’t exist in the real world. Focusing on fantasy highlights the tensions between reality, imagination, and the media that are at the heart of film tourism, allowing me to focus on them specifically. Prior research has acknowledged the importance of the play between reality and imagination in film tourism (Beeton, 2016; Kim, 2010; Reijnders, 2011; Rojek, 1997; Torchin 2002 ), but here I have focused on cases where this tension is highly concentrated. Fantasy worlds, as I discuss in Chapter 2, are “unreal” on multiple levels, being not only fictional, but departing from our own world at multiple levels. In most fantasy story-worlds, understanding place is particularly crucial (Attebery, 1992; Ekman, 2013), and storytelling techniques and/or paratextual material like maps and guides have often been utilized to give a sort of “place-ness” to these fictional locales (Ekman, 2013; Wolf, 2014). However, they ultimately only exist on screen and in the imagination of fans. Therefore, reality and fiction can’t be compared directly, as might be the case for more mimetic screen fictions (Torchin, 2002). That fans wish to visit these places at all

raises important questions about the way in which we as contemporary media audiences see the borders between fantasy and reality. Understanding how these places are experienced, and what role they serve for fans, also allows us to actually see how these borders function today.

These are all high-potential cases that contrast and relate to each other in order to examine a different kind of fantastic film tourism experience today. Following the first case, tourism around *Game of Thrones* in Dubrovnik and Northern Ireland, the cases were chosen to complement each other and build upon issues raised in the previous case. This begins on the level of their respective types or sub-genres of fantasy. *Game of Thrones* is a pseudo-medieval “high fantasy” geared explicitly towards adults, one that takes place in an entirely fictional world that nonetheless draws heavily on historical discourses. The *Harry Potter* series is a “low fantasy,” taking place in a magical society that exists alongside, but hidden from, contemporary Great Britain, following its lead characters throughout their adolescence as they navigate this world. Finally, *The Prisoner* questions what reality even is, blurring the lines between our “own” reality and the world of the show with a surrealistic allegory of a man kidnapped after resigning his London government job, where the audience is never quite sure what is going on and how much of it really “exists.” While different in tone and subgenre, they all highlight fantasy’s core focus on place and spatiality, making them ideal for exploring how fans experience and make use of film-related places.

There is also a specific temporal structure to the fandom of these texts that is explored throughout this dissertation, which gives it a chronological narrative of fantastic film tourism. *Game of Thrones* is in the moment, a currently popular text that the majority of its fans first encountered fairly contemporaneously (within a few years) with their trip. It was new and exciting to them, and as the show was still ongoing, visiting places became part of trying to

understand what would happen in it. Comparatively, most fans profiled in Chapter 5 had grown up with the *Harry Potter* series. It was an important part of their childhood and adolescence that they brought with them into adulthood, and the theme park environment of The Wizarding World of Harry Potter was a new way of engaging with this beloved place. *The Prisoner* is the oldest text represented, as well as the one with the longest-term relationship between the fans and the place. Fans have been returning to Portmeirion regularly for decades and are very familiar with it, while *The Prisoner* itself has been canonized as a classic “cult” television show due to its continued relevance and strong fanbase over 50 years. Portmeirion management has begun to pick up on both of these as part of a broader heritage strategy, which has implications for film tourism as a whole. In presenting the cases in this chronological fashion, I showcase the potential role that place can play throughout different stages of a fandom.

### *Theoretical Background and Approach*

I began this dissertation by laying out my theoretical approach and argument in Chapter 2. I argued here that film tourism can only be understood by understanding the discourses of both tourism and fandom studies. Contemporary tourism, as argued by Urry (2002, and with Larsen, 2011) and MacCannell (1999, 2011) is constructed around seeing important sights of elsewhere – the great works of art, spectacular landscapes, and so forth. This has a long history in Western practice (Adler 1989), beginning as a way in which to learn about other cultures and shifting to a Romantic conception of being emotionally moved by exposure to important places and objects. This moved from being only an integral elite practice to a just-as-important mass practice in the late 1800s and early 1900s with the rise of the railroads, steamships, and workers-rights movements that granted holiday time (Urry and Larsen, 2011). The practice of gazing, as well as

what is worth gazing upon, is based in culturally-formed ideas of what is proper practice and what is important to look at. The practice and the objects of the gaze are constantly circulated through different media, creating and reinforcing the idea that it is important to see and experience certain sites “for oneself.” Visiting confirms their importance to us.

The “for oneself” is an integral part of this. As Urry and Larsen (2011) argue, tourism is built not only on gazing, but on co-presence with a site. It is not enough to see a picture, the tourist must be present with it, see it with their own eyes, to truly experience it. Our understanding of places is embodied (Crouch 2000, 2001), and to truly know one, we must be physically present with it, experience it with our bodies in a multi-sensory fashion. In a time when we have become accustomed to audiovisual media, it is through the other senses that we confirm reality (Rodaway, 1994). Tourism, and “really experiencing” a place, therefore needs to be done in a multi-sensory fashion. Film tourism builds on this – “being there” is different than seeing it on screen, and can be incorporated into existing patterns and practices of tourism (Beeton, 2016; Buchmann et al, 2010; Edensor, 2001; Kim, 2010; Roesch, 2009). It is also, potentially, more important on a personal and social level than “traditional” tourist locations, connecting more strongly to the Romantic ideal of sightseeing.

This is because of fandom. Here, I use Sandvoss’ definition of the term, “the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text.” (2005, p.8) These narratives and texts matter to fans – they not only give pleasure, but shape the fans’ identity by connecting to important aspects of themselves (Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005; Williams, 2015). Fandom is a way of finding ones’ place in the world in the contemporary age, both internally and, increasingly, externally through the formation of fan groups. The contemporary age has

made this process almost synonymous with digital media, but as this research shows, physical place matters as well. They provide a mode of connection.

On one level, these places are sought out to give a sense of “reality” to what is only, if vividly, imagined. Objects of fandom matter to fans, and often “feel real” (Jenkins, 1992; Saler, 2012), occupying space in the fans’ head in the way that “real” people and places might. There is a clear understanding that these places are fictional, yet, as Reijnders notes (2011), reality and imagination are interwoven in a way that fans especially wish to pick apart. Visiting physical places tests and plays with the boundaries of what is real and what isn’t, showing the differences between the two while allowing the pretense, even if just for a moment, that it has collapsed.

As I argued in Chapter 2, however, the idea of “entering into” another world is only part of a larger issue of how we as film tourists and fans relate to the multiple worlds we regularly inhabit. This idea of using tourism to encounter the fictional and fantastic is now a standard practice, one that is recognized across fandoms. That it is so well-recognized suggests that it is enacted not only for its own sake, but because of what participating in it represents to the fan. Visiting these spaces not only plays with the interrelation between our world and that of the text, but provides a way to reflect on ones’ fandom, as I have argued. It becomes a ritual practice that acknowledges the role it has played in shaping the fans’ life and identity.

Therefore, it is also important to look to another aspect of tourism in order to understand film tourism to the full: that of commemoration. Reijnders’ concept of “places of the imagination” makes the link between sites connected to popular landmarks and historical monuments, while Couldry (2000) suggests that visiting the *Coronation Street* set served as a way to commemorate the act of watching television. To this, I suggest that visiting film-related locations serves to commemorate not just the text, but being a fan of it – physicalizing the



relationship that fans have with their fandom, memorializing what happened there and why it was important to them.

This research therefore shows that both fandom and tourism need to be considered when making sense of film tourism as a phenomenon. This has implications for the tourism industry – which might want to capitalize on the rise of film tourism – but also for the way in which we understand the relationship between (fan) audiences and the media industry in the contemporary age. Place, while not new itself, is a new opportunity for a media industry increasingly interested in creating and controlling fandoms, one that they have begun to make use of. Through this research, I have aimed to explain why this is, and what is at stake here today.

### **The Experience of Film Tourism and its Role in Fandom**

My exploration of film tourism was based in two main research questions. They were based in a desire to understand the experience of film tourism for the tourists, and from there, what this experience can tell us about the ways in which media, popular culture, and place interrelate today. Here, I present my answers to these questions.

#### *The Experience of Fantasy Film Tourism*

The first question I asked was: how, and in what different ways, do film tourists experience places related to their object of fandom? In their respective chapters, I discuss the specifics of the tourist experience of each place. The fans involved in each case have their own way of experiencing and making sense of the places involved, utilizing their history with the text, their own interests, and their relationship with the fan community.

However, we can still see important commonalities. In Chapter 4, I define film tourism as an “imaginative experience,” building on Reijnders’ (2011) centering of imagination in the media tourist experience and McGinn’s (2004) concept of “imaginative seeing.” An imaginative experience is an experience shaped by the imagination (in that it is an experience tied as much to the fictional narrative as what is actually perceived), which in turn influences the imagination as well. It is this reciprocity that is crucial here, in that the experience of film tourism has as much potential to influence the imagination as the imagination does the experience.

I further divided this into three main “modes” of imaginative experience – hyperdiegetic, production, and historical. The hyperdiegetic mode, based around Hills’ (2002) concept of hyperdiegesis, was about experiencing the locations as their fantasy counterparts, performing actions like the characters or imagining themselves in their world. The experience of tourism not only let them feel like they were part of the story, but allowed them to imagine the narrative world beyond the screen – what King’s Landing would physically feel like, what it would be to joust. This mode was joined by the production mode, which was based around imagining the production of the show – how they found locations, got actors there, built the sets, and so forth. Fans were not only interested in imagining how the show came to be, but appreciated the work and effort that went into the process as a symbol of how much HBO had invested in making it a quality production (especially compared to the negative way that fantasy is usually considered). Finally, fans were interested in the history of the places they visited for *Game of Thrones*, a historic mode of imaginative experience. *Game of Thrones* created a frame for understanding the “real” histories of Dubrovnik and Northern Ireland, making this history more interesting while also confirming some of the “historical accuracy” of *Game of Thrones*.

These can be seen, in some fashion, in each of the three cases, but shifting in a way that indicates the differences between these locations and their fandoms. In Chapter 6, the hyperdiegetic mode is seen in not only the reenactments, but in the way that fans still often draw on the show to describe the locations, such as Number 6's house. It can also be seen in the way that fans use terminology when in or discussing the Village: common phrases like "be seeing you" or "many happy returns" make a frequent appearance. However, with Portmeirion being so well established to these fans, it is slightly more in the background, compared to the production and historic modes. Here, understanding Portmeirion and its impact on Patrick McGoohan is seen as a crucial part of understanding *The Prisoner*. The diegetic world of *The Prisoner* is less coherent than that of *Game of Thrones* or *Harry Potter*, while its fans consider the thematic and philosophical questions it raises to be of high importance. Therefore, understanding and commemorating McGoohan, as the "auteur" of *The Prisoner*, is just as important as its story-world.

At the same time, and particularly among the most long-term fans, the historic mode of imagination is very important. Many fans are equally passionate about Portmeirion itself and its creation by Clough Williams-Ellis as they are about *The Prisoner*. They have put a great deal of effort into learning more about Williams-Ellis and his vision, and value this kind of knowledge highly. As with the *Game of Thrones* fans in Chapter 4, this is often put into a framework that works with *The Prisoner* and its production. Williams-Ellis becomes a fearless iconoclast, much like both McGoohan and his character Number 6, and Portmeirion an example of a (cultishly) successful yet uncompromising artistic vision, much like *The Prisoner* itself. As with *Game of Thrones* tourism, the three modes work with each other, rather than against each other. That the

place can be imagined in multiple ways doesn't confuse the fantasy fan, but instead enhances the experience.

In Chapter 5, which analyzes the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, a recreation rather than a filming location, the imaginative experience is a bit different. Here, I build around Saler's (2012) concept of the "ironic imagination," in which fans treat an imaginary world "as if" it was real, while knowing it isn't. It is this that allows fans to be emotionally invested in a fictional world, and to work at filling in the spaces that the author does not. I moved this concept to the space of the theme park, showing how its affordances as a medium work as a physicalization of the ironic imagination: this is how Diagon Alley would feel to walk around in, this is what butterbeer would taste like, while still knowing that Diagon Alley is a fictional place and butterbeer isn't real. It is this physical experience of the ironic imagination that is at the heart of WWOHP – a concentrated version of the "hyperdiegetic" mode of imagining – and one of the reasons that it has become so beloved by fans of the *Harry Potter* series. However, fans are very aware that WWOHP is a construction, and therefore also use the production mode of imagination while experiencing it. Imagining and contemplating the production of WWOHP makes them think that their fandom is valued as Universal put so much effort into making it right, similar to how *Game of Thrones* fans discussed what its high production values meant.

However, the historical mode is almost entirely absent. This can perhaps be explained by WWOHP being a section of a theme park. As I discuss in Chapter 5, theme parks are considered to be "set-apart" spaces, outside of normal life. Constructed away from their host cities, on isolated and previously unused land, this set-apart character is both part of their appeal and part of why they are critiqued so heavily. They are considered artificial, without the weight and history of "real" places, but also places where outside the park doesn't matter so much, so that it

is the park experience that is the focus. As a result, fans at WWOHP are less likely to be interested in and discuss the non-text-related history of their surroundings. What matters when visiting WWOHP is how credibly it fulfills the medium potential of the theme park – whether it successfully simulates being in the *Harry Potter* story-world – which means that it is the hyperdiegetic and production modes that dominate.

The imaginative experience at a filming location is therefore built upon a sense of what “happened” in a location, where the imagination imparts a meaning onto an archway or rock that would otherwise be any other archway or rock, a meaning that can be interpreted in different ways. By contrast, the (ironic) imaginative experience of a place like WWOHP is more clearly about deepening the connection to the fictional world, based around strengthening the sense of how the imaginative world would feel if it wasn’t fictional. It is an official transmedia expansion that adds to the story-world, deepening the fans’ knowledge of it in a way that was intended by the series’ creators, rather than the unofficial understanding of it showed in Chapter 4.

Dubrovnik was used to depict King’s Landing but is not supposed to “be” it in a textual sense, while the Diagon Alley of WWOHP “is” the textual Diagon Alley.

What is most important in any imaginative experience, however, is that the fan is having the experience in their own body. The physical experience of being at the location enhances and shapes the fan’s understanding of the text when they return to it, either via watching it again or even just thinking about it. It is this physicality that I ultimately come back to as my final answer to how film tourism is experienced. As I show in my elaboration of the imaginative modes above, and that I needed to come up with multiple modes even at one set of locations, it is impossible to come up with one totalizing answer to how these places are experienced

imaginatively. However, there is one commonality to all parts of the imaginative experience: the importance of the embodied experience of the location – of physically being there.

In Chapter 4, this embodiment is discussed in terms of getting a “sense” of and gaining knowledge about *Game of Thrones*. Having an embodied experience with the locations involved in creating the show is the crucial part of the exploratory nature of its tourism, a way to learn more about the show as it unfurls. By swimming in “Blackwater Bay” in Croatia, reenacting scenes in Northern Ireland, and generally feeling the environment of the filming locations, the fan gains the sort of knowledge that can’t be transmitted via screen. They learn more about a show that is still shrouded in mystery, supplementing what they know from the screen with this physical knowledge – how hot it might be for the actors, the remoteness of the different locations, and so forth. At WWOHP in Chapter 5, where many fans are already very familiar with the finished narrative, embodiment is expressed in terms of a long-wished-for immersion within it through the affordances of the theme park. Here, they can eat, drink, smell, and move as if they were part of it, their imagination enhanced by the fully embodied experience of the environment. It is this feeling that underpins the other relationships that fans develop with WWOHP. For the *Prisoner* fans interviewed in Chapter 6, the embodied experience of being in Portmeirion cements their understanding of its importance to *The Prisoner* and supports their fandom of it. They feel that they more fully understand the mindset of the show’s creator by being where he was, and feel that they are closer to the text and fellow fans by visiting it as they have. In moving to and through Portmeirion on a regular basis, re-enacting scenes of *The Prisoner* at their exact place of filming and walking through familiar pathways, it becomes a beloved place and the “home” of their fandom.

This kind of co-presence and embodiment is, as I discuss in Chapter 2, considered crucial parts of the tourist experience. The multi-sensory, embodied experience of tourism is how we confirm the reality of a place. Film tourism serves to do this for films and television shows. In visiting places associated with them, as we visit other types of landmarks and locations, these films and television shows become more than screen fantasies – they become real (Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005). This has often been discussed in terms of an immersion fantasy (Brooker, 2005; Hills, 2002; Roesch, 2009), of putting oneself into the textual world, with embodiment as part of this fantasy. The textual world “leaks” into our own, becoming something that can be touched and moving beyond “mere” fantasy into our own reality.

As these cases show, however, immersion in the textual/filmic world itself is only part of the way in which fans, even the most devoted fans, experience film-related locations. The experience can be as much extra-textual as it is textual. But all parts of the film tourism experience are embodied. Visiting these locations not only creates new knowledge about the text and its spaces, but connects the fan personally to it. That they have been in the same place as the text, or in a place that allows them to be physically immersed in the text, creates a different connection to it than watching does. It is often one that fans find difficult to put into words, as it is entirely contained within the body. As it is a bodily experience, utilizing all the senses as well as the feeling of being in a place more generally, it is intensely personal, as nothing is more personal than one’s own body. It is this embodied experience that allows the imaginative modes to function. The necessary physicality of tourism makes the imaginative work, connecting to the show or film in a way that the more detached experience of watching does not afford. They experience their object of fandom at the most personal – the bodily - level.

What this suggests is that embodiment is as crucial to film tourism as it is to other forms of tourism, even if film tourists are visiting a place that doesn't actually exist. They experience the location as a personal connection to the film or television show they visit it for. It is not just the world of the show or film in the sense of its diegesis that they connect to, but the entirety of it – its production, background, the emotions of watching, and so forth. This separates them from non-film tourists, as the place is never entirely “itself”, but experienced in relation to this external presence. It also means that the question of authenticity and the search for an “authentic experience,” which is so prominent in tourism studies, is different here. Film tourists are less concerned with whether these locations are an “authentic” representation of the cultures they are hosted in, or even if they are entirely like they are on screen. What matters is whether they can have this personal connection with the text, which can be established even if the place doesn't entirely look or feel like it does in the text (although, of course, being close helps this process considerably). Film tourism can even be seen as sort of non-representational geography (Thrift 1996), but a different sort than is commonly meant by the term, as it is based in connecting to a particular form of representation rather than the everyday experience of place. However, in that film tourism is essentially embodied, and that the experience is based in the practices and performances of physicality, gives it more common ground than one might think. Explicitly foregrounding the embodied nature of film tourism is therefore necessary. It is not an incidental part of film tourism off less importance than the mental processes of imagining and meaning making, but it forms the heart of the experience.

### *The Role of Film Places*



Following this first question, I asked: *what role do film-related places play in contemporary fandom?* Fandom, both in terms of the community of other fans and the experience of being a fan, is not an isolated moment. It is something that the fan brings with them to the location they visit, and something they carry with them once they leave. As I discuss in Chapter 2, fandom is an increasingly important part of people's lives, a way to form identity and make sense of the world around us. As film tourism has grown, becoming an established practice in tourism and fandom circles, it is worth asking how these places affect the practices of fandom today. The existence of places that fans can visit in order to connect to their fandom, and the visits that tourists make to them, undoubtedly play a role in how their fandoms operate. It is that role that I consider here.

First and foremost, what film-related places do is locate the fandom. They give the fandom presence in the physical world, as much as they do for the film and television show itself. Fandom is largely thought of as free-floating, particularly in the contemporary era where much of its practices take place online, but film-related places tie it to a specific place. This is not unique to film and television fandom – as Rodman (1996), Hills (2002), and Sandvoss (2005) discuss, places like Graceland and stadiums play similar roles for music and sports fans respectively, providing an anchor in the physical world for these fandoms. They “provide a form of permanence to what would otherwise be a potentially fleeting pre-verbal experience.” (Hills 2002, p.153) Film-related places, whether they are filming locations or created and adopted locations like WWOHP, do this for fans of films and television shows. In this, the fandom, in addition to the text, becomes more real, because it is given form in our world. It has a specific place, and therefore the stability and groundedness that place provides.

Consequently, that the fandom has a place engenders specific effects. There is the experience of physical connection to the object of fandom, as I discuss above. In Chapter 2, I also discuss these places as sites of commemoration – as places that the fandom and the experience of being a fan, and not just the object of fandom, can be paid tribute to. This is something that is particularly visible in the long-developed fan culture at Portmeirion discussed in Chapter 6, but it is also seen at the other locations. Fans visiting WWOHP in Chapter 5 frequently spoke of their visits as a culmination of their long-term fandom, especially when they could share it with other fans, while the *Game of Thrones* fans in Chapter 4 saw visiting as recognition of a new interest in their lives and the lives of their friends and family back home who also watched the show. For some, as I will discuss in more detail shortly, visiting also provided their first experience of “being” a fan, in the sense of participating in fan practices with others.

Being at a place of fandom means that fans can experience their fandom, as well as the text, at the embodied level. As I discuss in Chapter 6, being at a filming location that is frequently visited by fans links the fan to this history. The fans that perform in the reenactments at the site of filming connect themselves not only to *The Prisoner*, but also to the fans that have performed these reenactments over the decades. They personally connect to their fellow fans, and in many cases, to their own memories. In Chapter 5, the sheer volume of other fans at WWOHP meant that the *Harry Potter* fans interviewed felt that they were physically surrounded by their fandom – they could feel the weight of its worldwide popularity. While this made the park crowded and the lines for attractions long, it also made them feel that they were not alone in their passion. The series clearly mattered to others, and standing there with these others gave an embodied sense of this. Because of this established presence, a place of fandom provides a place

to be a fan – to perform fandom and fan practices in a way that the fan might not feel able to do elsewhere.

Throughout this dissertation, and particularly in the cases discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, I have encountered many fans who do not act as a fan when outside of these locations. While they might discuss their favorite show or film with family members and friends, they rarely venture into the online (and offline) spaces of discussion and community that are considered emblematic of contemporary fandom. They are not “participatory” in the same way that these more frequently studied fans are. There were many reasons given for this – lack of time in their regular lives, fear that these more “obsessive” fans will be less accepting, not wishing to be put in with the “obsessives” themselves. However, it was clear that when in these places, and while on holiday, they were more willing to perform fandom than they would be otherwise. The structures and rhetoric of being “on holiday” supports acting as a fan in a way that “everyday life” does not. The tourist has time to spend on more frivolous pursuits, such as fandom, and has the freedom to act as they might not do at home (Henning 2002). While in everyday life they might be afraid of being considered “dorky,” or perhaps not “dorky” enough, while on holiday they can fully act like fans.

This is enforced by the places they visit. If they are places of fandom, they are the correct place to act as fans. Within these spaces, fans can do what would be inappropriate or strange elsewhere, such as recite dialogue or even reenact full scenes, wear fan-related clothing or accessories, take particular photographs, and so forth. These kinds of performances are perfectly appropriate, even expected, at places of fandom. At WWOHP, for example, fans felt that they should wear *Harry Potter*-related clothing, while fans at *Game of Thrones*-related sites were more willing to proclaim their fandom – and perform it with others – while there than they

admitted to doing in their daily lives. Even the fans of *The Prisoner* I interviewed, who were often archetypal “participatory” fans, felt that some activities were far more appropriate in Portmeirion than elsewhere. This not only includes the full-scale reenactments, which some felt would be “silly” elsewhere even if they enjoyed doing them in Portmeirion, but the general activities of their fandom. While they might be able to gather, talk about *The Prisoner* and its themes, and make references to it outside of Portmeirion, it was in Portmeirion that this felt the most natural. Additionally, in visiting Portmeirion, they could devote their time and attention fully to their fandom in a way that they could not while surrounded by the concerns of everyday life. This is similar to how *Harry Potter* fans felt about WWOHP – they could “geek out” with impunity, shutting out the stresses that they experienced while at home and focuss on this part of themselves, while also avoiding the censure that acting in this way might engender elsewhere. These film-related places therefore become the place to be fans most fully, whether the fan participates in fandom on a regular basis or only when at these places.

That they are the places of fandom also means that they gather fans to them. I discussed this aspect of these places as “gathering points” of fandom most explicitly in Chapters 5 and 6, as it is here – at the created environment of WWOHP and the long-established *Prisoner* gatherings in Portmeirion – that these places’ role as gathering place of fandom most come to the fore. However, we do see this in its early stages at *Game of Thrones* related places as well. That these places attract fans to them means that they are a place to encounter other fans. This can be in a diffuse way, such as *Harry Potter* fans enjoying the feeling of being around so many other fans within the space of WWOHP, or in a more concrete way, such as *Prisoner* fans building deep bonds with the other *Prisoner* fans they have come to know through visiting Portmeirion regularly over the years.

It must be noted that these places are not the only gathering points of contemporary film and television fandom, or even the only place where fans can “be fans.” The fan convention, one of the oldest fan traditions, continues to provide this role to fans as it has done throughout the decades of organized fandom (Jenkins 1992, Bacon-Smith 1992, Porter 2004, Booth and Kelly 2013, Geraghty 2014, Lamerichs 2014). At the convention, fans can meet with each other in person and perform their fandom, hence their continued popularity even as they cease to be the only way in which to participate in the fan community. Their free-floating nature, as they are often held in the generic spaces of hotels and convention centers can, as Porter (2004) discusses, put the focus on the community and the text, as well as allowing it to be reproduced and encountered seemingly everywhere.

However, as my interviewees, particularly in Chapters 5 and 6, discuss, meeting in these places is not “the same” as meeting in a place of fandom. Being at a place of fandom, where they feel like the space is theirs and where they can act fully as fans, is considered to be more special than meeting elsewhere. Being in this specific place enhances and strengthens the relationships that can be created and fostered elsewhere. It also surrounds them with this particular fandom specifically, rather than the increasingly multi-fandom spaces of fan conventions. For “non-participatory” fans, the space of the fan convention is also confusing and sometimes threatening in a way that places of fandom are not. They have their own social norms and modes of behavior that non-participatory fans are unfamiliar and uncomfortable with. They require participation rather than encourage it, and the genericness of the environment does not make them feel that they are in a unique enough situation to perform fandom. While they overlap, particularly for very popular fandoms, there is a difference in the role that they play in contemporary fandom.

The specificity of places of fandom, compared to convention spaces, also creates a sense of permanence. As I show in Chapter 6, that fans of *The Prisoner* can return to Portmeirion, which has not changed significantly since its filming in the 1960s, and connect to both *The Prisoner* and their fandom of it there gives these fans a sense of ontological security (Giddens 1991, Williams 2015). The perceived timelessness of Portmeirion and its sustained connection with *The Prisoner* makes it feel like a “safe vault” of the show and its fandom, something that will sustain even if *The Prisoner* fades out of the general consciousness. As long as Portmeirion stands, *The Prisoner* will exist, and the fans can visit it and recall both the show and the times they have spent there with fellow fans. A specific place gives a sense of permanence. While it is too early to definitively state that fans of *Game of Thrones* will make use of the locations in Dubrovnik and Northern Ireland the same way, these places will always carry the memory for fans of what happened there, and that these are largely historical structures and locations means that they will also endure long after the show ends. The situation of WWOHP is more precarious, as it is a created location controlled by an external corporation and could be demolished in a way that Portmeirion and the historic locations of *Game of Thrones* can't be. However, it is a place that fans return to, which gives it some amount of this sense of stability, even if it is more tenuous.

All these differences also speak to the way that the role of these places of fandom for fans changes over time. For the *Game of Thrones* fans in Chapter 4, while they did serve as a gathering point and place to perform fandom, they primarily served as a way to gain knowledge about the show, knowledge that they could not get elsewhere. They could explore different aspects of it by being there, and come home with different perspectives and new information. Visiting filming locations was a way for them to enhance and build up their fandom of this

newer, but quite popular, show. In Chapter 5, where the story-world is something that many of the fans have carried with them since childhood, there is still this sense of a new kind of experience with it (as the way of interacting with the *Harry Potter* universe at WWOHP is quite different from reading the books or watching the films), but being at the place is more about committing themselves again to their fandom, which had not had new content in a while, rather than building it up. Additionally, in establishing a dedicated, and at least semi-permanent, place for *Harry Potter* fandom, a specific gathering point for the fandom is also created, meaning that fans have a dedicated place to continually meet. At Portmeirion in Chapter 6, most fans' engagement with *The Prisoner* and Portmeirion itself is long-term and sustained, but would perhaps drift away without the rhythms of the regular visits. In returning to Portmeirion, they re-immense themselves in their lives as fans, keeping the fandom alive over the years and recalling what it has meant to them over time. These visits are thus a "homecoming" – a return to this long-established and familiar home of fandom, the focal point of *The Prisoner*. Place can therefore serve different roles throughout the life course of both an individual fan and a fan community.

What this all suggests is that specific places are an important, but frequently overlooked, part of how fandoms operate. While not every fandom has a place – as the *Prisoner* fans were keen to point out – that some fandoms have one, and that it can be created as WWOHP is, is significant. The increase in film tourism and special events, particularly for objects of fandom that don't always fit into the fan convention space like the popular sitcom *Friends*, now represented by Friendsfest (<http://friendsfest.co.uk/>), indicates that there is a desire among fans to have a place and to have that place fill this role, or at least that this desire can be created. There is every indication that in the future a specific place, and the roles it fulfills for fans, will

be an important part of most fandoms. As Beattie (2013), Booth (2015), and Garner (2016) indicate in their studies of the Dr. Who Experience in Cardiff, it is equally likely that these spaces will be explicitly part of the media industry's management of fans – as a way to attempt to control them and the way in which they enact their fandom. Both of these developments mean that fandom researchers need to take place into consideration when studying a contemporary media fandom. The way in which place is used and controlled is an important aspect of how audiences and the media industry relate to each other today.

I think of this dissertation as not the end of the discussion on fandom and film tourism, but a beginning. What I have shown here is how fantastic film places can be experienced by some fans, and what role being there at these places can play in their fandom. They are examples of the potential relationships that can be built between individual fans, fan groups, and specific places, and worth taking into consideration in the future as we look to understand shifting fan practices and experiences today. Ultimately, what I have shown here is that place is important even, or maybe even more, in a digital and transmedial age, as the physical, “real” experience is still one that can't be duplicated. Being there, however we define “there”, even if “there” doesn't truly exist, matters.





## 8. References

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## 9. Appendix A: Chapter 4

Overview of interviewees:

Name	Age	Nationality	Place of interview
Jessica	30	American	Dubrovnik
Aaron	31	American	Dubrovnik
Alina	25	German	Dubrovnik
Stefan	25	German	Dubrovnik
Antti	24	Finnish	Dubrovnik
Celine	40	French	Dubrovnik
Dan	22	English	Dubrovnik
Ryan	19	English	Dubrovnik
Chelsea	23	American	Dubrovnik
Mia	25	American	Dubrovnik
Kevin	25	American	Dubrovnik
Sara	25	English	Dubrovnik
Thomas	25	English	Dubrovnik
Jari	25	Finnish	Dubrovnik
Stephanie	24	Canadian	Dubrovnik
Josh	27	American	Dubrovnik
Karl	24-29	American	Dubrovnik
Chet	24-29	American	Dubrovnik
Brad	24-29	American	Dubrovnik
Afra	28	American	Dubrovnik, Skype follow-up
Bethan	48	Welsh	Dubrovnik
Owen	55	Welsh	Dubrovnik
Neil	19	American	Dubrovnik
Sandi	n/a (mother of Neil)	American	Dubrovnik
Anya	23	Russian-Canadian	Skype (met in Dubrovnik)
Fredrik	31	Swedish	TitanCon, Skype follow-up
Bojan	30	Slovenian	TitanCon
Isla	24	Northern Irish	TitanCon
Kathrin	44	German	TitanCon
Thomas	37	English	TitanCon
David	32	English	TitanCon
Matt	37	Scottish	TitanCon
Leanne	n/a	Scottish	TitanCon
Robert	44	Scottish	TitanCon
Wayne	32	English	TitanCon

Liz	34	English	TitanCon
Liam	44	English	TitanCon
Kylie	n/a	Australian	TitanCon
Danielle	n/a	American	TitanCon
Grace	n/a	American	TitanCon
Inga	n/a	German	TitanCon
Lisa	35	English	TitanCon
Melanie	31	English	TitanCon
Theo	32	English	TitanCon
Alexander	29	English	TitanCon
Samuel	35	English	TitanCon
Jane	41	Scottish	Skype (met at TitanCon, interviewed twice)
Julie	63	Canadian	Skype (met in Northern Ireland)

**Visits Made:**

Dubrovnik:

July 31, 2013 to August 6, 2013

Tours attended: Viator Exclusive: 'Game of Thrones' Walking Tour of Dubrovnik, 2x (August 1 and August 5)

Northern Ireland:

September 2-10, 2013

Attended TitanCon, September 7-9, 2013

October 11-14, 2013

Attended the "Stones and Thrones" coach tour, October 12, 2013

## 10. Appendix B: Chapter 5

Overview of interviewees:

Name	Age	Nationality	Profession	Place of interview
Maggie	21	American	Student	Skype
Circe	29	American	Quality control designer	Skype
Jen	30	American	Social media consultant	Skype
Dan	33	American	Digital nomad	Skype
James	44	American	Military	Skype
Melissa	21	Canadian	Student	Skype
Daphne	44	American	Online university instructor/government contractor	Skype
Elle	17	American	Student	Skype
Hanna	26	American	Travel agent	Skype
Violet	21	American	Student	Skype
Yaël	27	Canadian	Graduate student	Skype
Brigid	31	American	Teacher	Telephone
Eve	25	Chinese	Designer	Skype
Katie	27	American	Teacher	Telephone
Emma	24	Canadian	Engineer	Skype

### Trip to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter:

December 21-25, 2014

## 11. Appendix C: Chapter 6

Overview of interviewees:

Name	Age	Nationality	Profession	Place of interview
Liza	40	English	Community librarian	Portmeirion
Tim	45	American	n/a	Telephone
Geoff	42	English	n/a	Telephone (but also met in Portmeirion with Stuart)
Paul	54	English	Journalist	Telephone
Lily	71	English	Retired (Teacher)	Telephone
Harry	54	English	Retired (IT)	Portmeirion
Angie	55	English	Semi-retired (biomedical scientist)	Skype
Michael	52	Northern Irish	Director of Press at a UK university	Skype
Stuart	n/a	English	n/a	Portmeirion
Roy	69	English	Retired (wine taster)	Portmeirion
Kit	57	American	n/a	Facebook Messenger
Mark	62	English	Semi-retired (highway engineer)	Skype
Katy	33	English	Owens and operates an online boutique	Skype
Anabel	54	English	Carer	Telephone
Lawrence	60	English	Shop owner/sales	Portmeirion
Fred	64	American	Semi-retired (carer and sales)	Portmeirion

### Trips made to Portmeirion:

January 19-21, 2016, individual trip (also met with Stuart and Geoff)

April 15-18, 2016, PortmeiriCon 2016

### Websites:

The Prisoner & Portmeirion Facebook Group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/prisonerandportmeirion/>

The Prisoner Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2200730713/>

Free for All Archives: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1819981921566077>

The Unmutual: The Prisoner News Website: <http://theunmutual.co.uk/>

Alt.tv.theprisoner: <http://alt.tv.prisoner.narkive.com/>,  
<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/alt.tv.prisoner> (archives, group no longer active)

**Fanzines:**

The Green Dome 1, 2, 3, and 4 (accessed from  
<http://www.bookmice.net/darkchilde/prisoner/fanzines.html> )

The Prisoner Newsletter 6.6, 12, and Specials (accessed from  
<http://www.bookmice.net/darkchilde/prisoner/fanzines.html> )

Once Upon a Time 13 (accessed from  
<http://www.bookmice.net/darkchilde/prisoner/fanzines.html> )

Rover 3, 5 (accessed from <http://www.bookmice.net/darkchilde/prisoner/fanzines.html> )

Universal Understanding 6 (accessed from  
<http://www.bookmice.net/darkchilde/prisoner/fanzines.html>)

## 12. Summary

While anecdotally recognized since the 1930s (Roesch, 2009), in recent decades, film tourism – the act of visiting somewhere because of its association with a film or television show – has significantly grown in prominence in recent years. Regions compete to have their landscapes and landmarks featured in Hollywood films, and articles on “following in the footsteps” of favorite television characters fill up major newspapers. Expensive tours fill up quickly with fans wanting to see the “real” version of what they’ve come to know on screen. From a niche curiosity, it has become mainstream. Scientific research has followed suit, and there is now a growing body of research on the topic, with a range of approaches and practical concerns (Connell, 2012).

Despite this boom, there is a considerable lack of theoretical and conceptual exploration of film tourism. Research has been done mostly in a piecemeal fashion, based around single case studies and/or with a managerial approach, looking to understand how this form of tourist practice can affect the tourism industry. There is less known about the tourist experience of these locations, and we are especially lacking knowledge of how visiting places tie into the tourist’s broader engagement with media culture (Beeton, 2016; Connell, 2012; O’Connor and Kim 2013; Roesch, 2009). After all, these places are visited because of an already-existing emotional attachment to the filmed world, which already sets up a different relationship with the place than a non-fan tourist would have. However, fan and media studies approaches to film tourism (Aden 1999; Brooker, 2007; Hills, 2002;) have largely focused on auto-ethnographic concerns and are less concerned with how these trips relate to tourist practices. There is therefore an incomplete

understanding of what drives this practice and how it is experienced and used in the contemporary media environment.

It is this lack that is addressed in this dissertation. I draw on the discourses of both tourism and fandom in order to present a new conceptual understanding of the film tourist experience. I asked two related questions about film tourism in the contemporary age, both based on my original interest in what made film tourism meaningful and worthwhile for those who participate in it.

The first question asked here was: how, and in what different ways, do film tourists experience places related to their object of fandom? This built on prior research on the film tourist experience (Buchmann et al, 2010; Kim, 2010; Lee 2012; Peaslee, 2011; Reijnders 2011; Roesch, 2009) as well as on fan tourism (Aden 1999; Booth, 2015; Brooker 2005, 2007; Garner, 2016; Hills 2002, Sandvoss 2005), looking to combine insights from both tourism and fandom studies to explore how these film-related places are experienced by the fans who seek them out.

In relation to this, I also asked: what role do film-related places play in contemporary fan practices? Following the wider spatial turn in media studies (Ek, 2006; Falkheimer & Jansson 2006; Moores, 2012), I was interested in seeing how the existence and increasing relevance of film tourism affects fan practice today. What uses do fans find for these places, and how does having them available to visit affect their practices?

I began answering these questions through a theoretical exploration of film tourism, which I laid out in chapter 2. In this chapter, I show that it is the combination of both tourism practice and fandom that makes film tourism a meaningful and valuable experience for film tourists. As argued by MacCannell (1999, 2011) and Urry (2002, and with Larsen, 2011), tourism is built around sightseeing – gazing upon what is considered to be important,



extraordinary, or beautiful. More importantly, however, it is gazing on it with one's own eyes. It is through experiencing a place with all our senses that we come to know it, and without such embodied experience, it doesn't feel as if we are truly experiencing it (Crouch 2000, 2001). While we might be able to "see" almost anything through increasingly lifelike and accessible media, it is not considered the same as being co-present with it (Rodaway, 1994; Urry and Larsen, 2011).

For film tourists, co-presence is desired with something that really matters to them – a favorite film or television show. These objects of fandom matter to fans, not only giving pleasure, but shaping the fans' identity in some way (Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005; Williams 2005). Places that represent them are sought out in order to have a genuine experience with the text, one that feels more physically real than what they've seen on screen. While fans are very aware that the diegetic world is fictional, there is an interest in unraveling the ways in which the fictional and real worlds connect (Reijnders, 2011). Visiting physical places tests and plays with the boundaries of what is real and what isn't, showing the differences between the two while allowing the pretense, even if just for a moment, that it has collapsed.

However, encountering or "entering into" the diegetic world is only one aspect of the film tourist experience. This idea of using tourism to encounter the fictional and fantastic is now a standard practice. That it is so well-recognized suggests that it is enacted not only for its own sake, but because of what participating in it represents to the fan. It has become a ritual practice that acknowledges the role a film or television show has played in shaping the fans' life and identity. Visiting these places commemorates that the text existed and mattered to the fan, as well as commemorating their experience of fandom itself. It physicalizes and "makes real" this important part of their life.

I investigated how this functions in practice through three empirical case studies. They are all examples of “fantastic” film tourism: film tourism for places that don’t exist in the real world. Focusing on fantasy highlighted the tensions between reality, imagination, and the media that are at the heart of film tourism, allowing me to focus on them specifically within the cases. I utilized a range of qualitative research methods within these cases, which I explain in chapter 3 – content analysis of fan-produced works, participant observation, and primarily, interviews. I therefore moved beyond the textual and auto-ethnographic methodologies common in fan studies, which allowed me to investigate a range of fans and fan perspectives.

The first case, presented in Chapter 4, centered around tourism for the hit HBO drama series *Game of Thrones* at two of its main filming locations, Northern Ireland and Dubrovnik, Croatia. An epic story of war, political intrigue, and dragons, based on the popular high-fantasy book series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, its lush medieval style is built on several real-world locations. The show’s popularity attracted a range of fan-tourists to these locations, with different levels of attachment to the series, the books that preceded it, and the fan community itself. This case asked how fans engage their imagination while at these locations and was built around the idea of the “imaginative experience” – where a physical, multi-sensory experience shaped by the process of imagination re-shapes the fantasy.

I identified three main modes of imaginative experience and engagement at *Game of Thrones* locations: hyperdiegetic, production, and historic. The hyperdiegetic mode, based around Hills’ (2002) concept of hyperdiegesis, was about experiencing the locations as their fantasy counterparts, performing actions like the characters or imagining themselves in their world. The experience of tourism not only let them feel like they were part of the story, but allowed them to imagine the narrative world beyond the screen – what King’s Landing would

physically feel like, what it would be to joust. This mode was joined by the production mode, which was based around imagining the production of the show – how they found locations, got actors there, built the sets, and so forth. Fans were not only interested in imagining how the show came to be, but appreciated the work and effort that went into the process as a symbol of how much HBO had invested in making it a quality production (especially compared to the negative way that fantasy is usually considered). Finally, fans were interested in the history of the places they visited for *Game of Thrones*, a historic mode of imaginative experience. *Game of Thrones* created a frame for understanding the “real” histories of Dubrovnik and Northern Ireland, making this history more interesting while also confirming some of the “historical accuracy” of *Game of Thrones*.

Chapter 5 moved from an actual filming location to a recreated one, investigating the Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme park, part of Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida. Prior research on film tourism had largely focused on the experience of “real” filming locations, where the film or television show in question had been shot, with considerable power put into “being there” where the story had happened and the actors stood. The authenticity, and therefore the meaning, of the experience is based in this connection to what “really happened.” This chapter states something else – that the theme park, long considered to be the most inauthentic form of place, can be an equally valid way to connect with the text. I asked how fans make meaning out of “unreal” locations, ones that, in theory, don’t have the affective power of “being there” as a filming location does. I argue that WWOHP is seen by fans of the *Harry Potter* series as an adaptation of the series into physical space, much as the films are audiovisual adaptations. The theme park functions as a medium, and WWOHP is judged on its fulfillment of its medium specificities – its multisensory physicality, visual accuracy to the filmed series, and its

immersiveness into the narrative world. Fans greatly appreciated the opportunity to act “as if” (Saler 2012) they were part of the narrative world of *Harry Potter*, a place that had meant a great deal to them throughout their lives, but also, as with the *Game of Thrones* fans, appreciated the skill and craft that went into building WWOHP. They also appreciated the presence of other fans at the park, as it suggested that they were in a space with others who also cared about the series as they did, in a place that had been created (with care) for them. It was therefore experienced not just as an immersion into the fantasy world, but into their fandom of it, and a place where this aspect of their lives could be most fully expressed.

Chapter 6 focused on the role longevity plays in film tourism, investigating the relationship that fans of *The Prisoner* have with its main filming location of Portmeirion, a hotel and holiday village complex in North Wales. Here, I analyzed what “having a place” means for fans and the fan community. Fans have been traveling to visit Portmeirion since it was revealed as the filming location of Patrick McGoochan’s surreal spy drama almost 50 years ago. The fans interviewed here are ones who have visited Portmeirion multiple times, most returning on a regular basis over decades. I show how that over the years, it has become an important place in their fandom and their lives, somewhere that they know very well and love deeply. It is the home of their fandom, and where they can regularly go to reconnect with it and their fellow fans. The perceived timelessness of Portmeirion and its sustained connection with *The Prisoner* makes it feel like a “safe vault” of the show and its fandom, something that will sustain even if *The Prisoner* fades out of the general consciousness. As long as Portmeirion stands, *The Prisoner* will exist.

Finally, in chapter 7, I draw the conclusions of my dissertation. What I have shown here is that, ultimately, “being there” is important, even when “there” doesn’t really exist. This

doesn't mean that fans are confused about what is real and what is fictional – they are very clear about the difference – but that there is still something valuable and meaningful about encountering the fictional in physical space. These experiences give the text a weight lacking in their onscreen version, a weight made up of the physical and embodied encounter with the places depicted on screen. This physicality – smelling the air, reciting the dialogue, touching the ground – gives the tourist a personal connection to the narrative. It is this change in status, from something that is only visual and imagined to something physical, real, and personal, that is sought out and ideally experienced by film tourism.

However, these places also matter beyond the text itself. The social aspect of place is also an important part of the film tourism experience. These locations bring fans together that might not otherwise meet, creating places where they can fully embrace their fandom away from everyday life and concerns. They can “geek out” without fear of being judged, and spend time with others who feel the same way as they do. Being in a space that is explicitly connected to the text (compared to a more generic convention space) enhances these relationships, whether they are ones that the fan comes in with or ones they build through their visits. Given time, these places become important to the fans not just because of what was filmed there, but because of how they have experienced these places with others, holding the memories of the fandom as well as the text. They play an important role in fan practice as the place where fans of all kinds can gather and their fandom can be most authentically expressed. The diegetic world might only exist in their mind, but the experience of their physical representation is powerfully, and multifacetedly, real.

### 13. Samenvatting

Hoewel anekdotisch erkend sinds de jaren '30 (Roesch, 2009), heeft filmtoerisme — het bezoeken van een plek vanwege diens associatie met een film of televisieserie — de afgelopen decennia een aanzienlijke groei in bekendheid doorgemaakt. Regio's concurreren met elkaar om hun landschappen en monumenten in Hollywood-films gebruikt te zien worden en artikelen over het “volgen in de voetsporen” van favoriete televisiepersonages vullen grote kranten. Dure excursies worden snel uitverkocht door fans die de "echte" versie willen zien van hetgeen zij hebben leren kennen via hun scherm. Het is uitgegroeid van een niche-interesse tot een algemene trend. Wetenschappelijk onderzoek heeft doen volgen en er bestaat nu een groeiend aantal onderzoeken over dit onderwerp, met een verscheidenheid aan benaderingen en praktische overwegingen (Connell, 2012).

Ondanks deze groei is er een aanzienlijk gebrek aan theoretische en conceptuele verkenning van filmtoerisme. Reeds uitgevoerd onderzoek is vaak versnipperd, op basis van een enkele casestudy en/of met een managementbenadering, gefocust op de vraag hoe deze vorm van toerisme invloed zou kunnen hebben op de toerismesector. Er is minder bekend over de toeristenervaring van deze locaties en er ontbreekt vooral kennis over hoe het bezoeken van plaatsen gerelateerd is aan de bredere betrokkenheid van de toerist met mediacultuur (Beeton 2016; Connell, 2012; O'Connor and Kim, 2013; Roesch; 2009). Deze plekken worden immers bezocht vanwege een reeds bestaande emotionele band met de gefilmde wereld, wat in zichzelf al een andere relatie met de plek bewerkstelligt ten opzichte van de relatie die een niet-fan-toerist

zou hebben. De benaderingen tot filmtoerisme van *fan and media studies* (Aden, 1999; Brooker 2007; Hills, 2002) hebben zich daarentegen voornamelijk gefocust op auto-etnografische vraagstukken en zijn minder betrokken met hoe deze reizen betrekking hebben op toeristengewoonten. Er bestaat daarom een onvolledig begrip van wat deze gewoonten aanstuurt en hoe deze worden ervaren en gebruikt binnen de hedendaagse mediaomgeving.

Het is dit gebrek dat in dit proefschrift wordt behandeld. Ik maak gebruik van het discours van zowel toerisme en *fandom* om een nieuw conceptueel begrip van filmtoerisme-ervaring te presenteren. Ik stelde twee gerelateerde vragen omtrent filmtoerisme in het hedendaagse tijdperk, beide gebaseerd op mijn oorspronkelijke belangstelling voor wat filmtoerisme zinvol en nuttig maakt voor hen die hieraan deelnemen.

De eerste vraag die hier werd gesteld was: hoe ervaren filmtoeristen plaatsen die gerelateerd zijn aan het onderwerp van hun *fandom*? Dit bouwde voort op eerder onderzoek over de filmtoerisme-ervaring (Buchmann et al, 2010; Lee, 2012; Kim, 2010; Peaslee, 2011, Reijnders, 2011; Roesch, 2009), alsook fantoerisme (Aden, 1999; Booth 2015; Brooker 2005, 2007; Garner, 2016; Hills, 2002, Sandvoss 2005), met het oog op het combineren van inzichten van zowel *tourism studies* en *fandom studies* om te onderzoeken hoe deze filmgerelateerde plaatsen worden ervaren door fans die deze plaatsen opzoeken.

In dit verband vroeg ik ook: welke rol spelen filmgerelateerde plaatsen in huidige fanpraktijken? Op basis van de bredere 'spatial turn' in mediastudies (Ek, 2006; Falkheimer & Jansson, 2006; Moores 2012) was ik geïnteresseerd in het onderzoeken hoe het bestaan van filmtoerisme, en de groeiende relevantie daarvan, effect heeft op de fanpraktijken van vandaag. Welk nut vinden fans voor deze plaatsen en wat is het effect van diens beschikbaarheid op hun fanpraktijken?

Ik begon deze vragen te beantwoorden door middel van een theoretische verkenning van filmtoerisme, die ik uiteenzette in hoofdstuk 2. In dit hoofdstuk laat ik zien dat het de combinatie van toerismepraktijken en *fandom* is, die filmtoerisme een zinvolle en waardevolle ervaring maakt voor filmtoeristen. Zoals uiteengezet door MacCannell (1999, 2011) en Urry (2002, en met Larsen, 2011), bestaat toerisme uit het bezoeken van bezienswaardigheden — het aanschouwen van wat belangrijk, buitengewoon of prachtig wordt gezien. Wat nog belangrijker is, echter, is dit alles aanschouwd wordt met de eigen ogen. We leren een plaats kennen door deze te ervaren met al onze zintuigen, en zonder een dergelijke belichaamde ervaring voelt het niet alsof we het werkelijk ervaren (Crouch 2000, 2001). Hoewel we steeds vaker nagenoeg alles kunnen "zien" door steeds levensechtere en toegankelijker media, wordt het niet gelijkwaardig beschouwd als het daadwerkelijk aanwezig zijn (Rodaway, 1994, Urry & Larsen 2011).

Filmtoeristen wensen mede-aanwezigheid bij iets dat werkelijk belangrijk voor hen is: een favoriete film of televisieserie. Deze onderwerpen van *fandom* zijn belangrijk voor fans, welke hen niet alleen plezier geven, maar ook hun identiteiten op bepaalde manieren doen ontwikkelen (Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005; Williams 2005). Plaatsen die deze onderwerpen vertegenwoordigen worden bezocht om een authentiekere ervaring met de tekst krijgen, een die fysiek getrouwer voelt dan wat ze op het scherm hebben gezien. Hoewel fans zich ervan bewust zijn dat de verhaalwereld fictief is, bestaat er een interesse om de manieren waarop de fictieve en echte wereld verbonden zijn, te ontrafelen (Reijnders, 2011). Het bezoeken van fysieke plaatsen speelt met de grenzen van wat werkelijk is en wat niet, en stelt deze op de proef, waarbij de verschillen tussen die twee worden getoond, terwijl de indruk wordt gewekt dat, zelfs voor een enkel ogenblik, deze is ingestort.



Het tegenkomen of "aangaan" van de verhaalwereld is daarentegen slechts één aspect van de filmtoerisme-ervaring. Dit idee om toerisme te gebruiken om het fictionele en fantastische te ontmoeten is nu een standaard praktijk. Het feit dat het zo duidelijk erkend wordt, suggereert dat het niet alleen wordt uitgeoefend vanwege het belang ervan in zichzelf, maar vanwege hetgeen de deelname eraan vertegenwoordigt voor de fan. Het is uitgegroeid tot een rituele praktijk die de rol erkent die een film of televisieserie heeft gespeeld in het vormen van het leven en de identiteit van fans. Het bezoeken van deze plaatsen herdenkt het feit dat de tekst zowel bestond als belangrijk was voor de fan, evenals de herdenking van de ervaring van het *fandom* zelf. Het maakt dit belangrijke onderdeel van hun leven fysiek en "echt."

Ik heb onderzocht hoe dit in de praktijk functioneert door middel van drie empirische casestudies. Ze zijn alle voorbeelden van "fantastisch" filmtoerisme: filmtoerisme voor plaatsen die niet in de werkelijke wereld bestaan. De focus op *fantasy* doet de spanningen tussen realiteit, verbeelding en de media, die de kern van filmtoerisme vormen, uitkomen, wat mij toeliet om hier specifiek op te concentreren binnen de casussen. Ik maakte gebruik van een aantal kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden binnen deze casussen, die ik uitleg in hoofdstuk 3 — inhoudsanalyse van door fans geproduceerde werken, participerende observatie en, voornamelijk, interviews. Daardoor kon ik verdergaan dan de tekstuele en auto-etnografische methodologieën die gebruikelijk zijn in *fan studies*, wat mij toestond om een verscheidenheid aan fans en fan-perspectieven te onderzoeken.

De eerste casus, gepresenteerd in hoofdstuk 4, focust op toerisme omtrent de succesvolle HBO-dramaserie *Game of Thrones* bij twee van diens hoofdzakelijke filmlocaties: Noord-Ierland en Dubrovnik, Kroatië. Een episch verhaal over oorlog, politieke intriges en draken, gebaseerd op de populaire *high-fantasy* boekenreeks *A Song of Ice and Fire*, met een weelderige,

middeleeuwse stijl die wordt voortgeborduurd op enkele locaties in de echte wereld. De populariteit van de serie trok een verscheidenheid aan fantoeristen naar deze locaties, met verschillende maten van betrokkenheid bij de serie, de boeken die de serie voorgingen en de gemeenschap van fans zelf. Deze casus vroeg hoe fans hun verbeelding toepassen wanneer ze bij deze locaties aanwezig zijn en was gebaseerd op het idee van de "verbeelde ervaring" — waarbij een fysieke, meervoudig zintuiglijke ervaring gevormd door het proces van verbeelding de fantasie hervormt.

Ik identificeerde de drie voornaamste vormen van verbeelde ervaring en betrokkenheid bij de locaties van *Game of Thrones*: hyperdiëgetisch, productie en historisch. De hyperdiëgetische vorm, gebaseerd op Hills' (2002) concept van *hyperdiegesis*, draaide om het ervaren van de locaties als hun *fantasy*-tegenhangers, het uitvoeren van acties zoals de personages of het verbeelden van zichzelf in hun wereld. De toerisme-ervaring laat hen niet alleen voelen alsof ze een deel van het verhaal waren, maar liet hen ook de narratieve wereld buiten het scherm verbeelden — hoe *King's Landing* fysiek gevoeld zou hebben, hoe een steekspel zou zijn. Deze vorm werd bijgesloten door de productievorm, die was gebaseerd op de productie van de serie: hoe ze locaties vonden, hoe ze de acteurs daar kregen, hoe ze de sets bouwden, enzovoort. Fans waren niet alleen geïnteresseerd in het verbeelden van hoe de show ontstond, maar waardeerden ook het werk en de inspanning die gepaard gingen bij het proces als een symbool van hoeveel HBO had geïnvesteerd om het een kwaliteitsproductie te maken (vooral in vergelijking met de negatieve manier waarop *fantasy* vaak wordt beschouwd). Uiteindelijk waren fans geïnteresseerd in de geschiedenis van de plaatsen die zij bezochten voor *Game of Thrones*, een historische modus van de verbeeldingservaring. *Game of Thrones* creëerde een raamwerk voor het begrijpen van de "echte" geschiedenis van Dubrovnik en Noord-Ierland,

waardoor deze geschiedenis interessanter werd en ook een deel van de "historische nauwkeurigheid" van *Game of Thrones* bevestigde.

Hoofdstuk 5 ging van een werkelijke filmlocatie naar een gereproduceerde versie en onderzocht *the Wizarding World of Harry Potter*-attractiepark, onderdeel van Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida. Eerder onderzoek naar filmtoerisme focuste voornamelijk op de ervaring van "echte" filmlocaties, waar de film of televisieserie in kwestie daadwerkelijk was gefilmd, met aanzienlijke aandacht voor "het aanwezig zijn" bij de plek waar het verhaal zich had afgespeeld en waar de acteurs stonden. De authenticiteit, en daarbij de betekenis, van de ervaring is gebaseerd op deze verbinding met wat "er echt gebeurde." Dit hoofdstuk stelt iets anders: dat het attractiepark, dat lang werd gezien als de meest on-authentieke realisatie van een plaats, een evenwaardige manier kan zijn om een verbinding te maken met de tekst. Ik vroeg hoe fans betekenis halen uit "onechte" locaties; locaties die, in theorie, niet de affectieve kracht hebben van "het aanwezig zijn" zoals een filmlocatie die heeft. Ik beweer dat WWOHP door fans van de *Harry Potter*-serie wordt gezien als een bewerking van de serie tot een fysieke plek, in de zin van dat de films audiovisuele bewerkingen zijn. Het attractiepark fungeert als een medium, en WWOHP wordt beoordeeld op diens vervulling van de kenmerken van het medium: de meervoudig zintuiglijke fysicaliteit, de visuele nauwkeurigheid in relatie tot de gefilmde serie en in hoeverre er compleet kan worden opgegaan in de narratieve wereld. Fans waardeerden zeer de mogelijkheid om te doen "alsof" (Saler 2012) ze onderdeel waren van de narratieve wereld van *Harry Potter*, een plaats die veel voor hen betekend had gedurende hun leven, maar ook, net als bij de fans van *Game of Thrones*, waardeerden ze de vaardigheid en ambacht die de bouw van WWOHP had gekost. Ze waardeerden ook de aanwezigheid van andere fans in het park, omdat dit suggereerde dat ze op een plek waren met anderen die evenveel om de serie gaven als zij, op

een plek die (met zorg) voor hen was gecreëerd. Het werd daarom ervaren als niet alleen een mogelijkheid om compleet op te gaan in de fantasiewereld, maar ook om compleet op te gaan in hun *fandom*, een plek waar dit aspect van hun leven het meest volledig uitgesproken kon worden.

Hoofdstuk 6 focuste op de rol die langdurigheid speelt in filmtoerisme, waarbij de relatie die fans van *The Prisoner* hebben met diens voornaamste filmlocatie van Portmeirion, een hotel en vakantiehuiscomplex in Noord Wales wordt onderzocht. In dit gedeelte analyseerde ik wat "een plek hebben" betekent voor fans en de *fan community*. Fans zijn al naar Portmeirion gereisd sinds het vijftig jaar geleden bekend werd gemaakt als de filmlocatie van Patrick McGoochans surrealistische spionnedrama. De fans die hier werden geïnterviewd zijn fans die Portmeirion meerdere keren hebben bezocht, waarvan de meeste regelmatig zijn teruggegaan gedurende meerdere decennia. Ik laat zien hoe, met de jaren, het een belangrijke plaats in hun *fandom* en hun leven is geworden, een plaats die ze goed kennen en waar ze veel van houden. Het is de thuisplaats van hun *fandom* waar ze regelmatig heen kunnen om opnieuw aansluiting te zoeken met de serie en hun medefans. De vermeende tijdloosheid van Portmeirion en diens voortgezette verbinding met *The Prisoner* doen het voelen als een "veilige bewaarplaats" voor de show en de *fandom*, iets dat zelfs zal voortbestaan wanneer *The Prisoner* uit het collectieve geheugen vervaagt. Zolang Portmeirion staat, zal *The Prisoner* niet verdwijnen.

Tenslotte, in hoofdstuk 7, trek ik de conclusies van mijn proefschrift. Wat ik hier heb laten zien is dat, uiteindelijk, "aanwezig zijn" belangrijk is, zelfs wanneer de plek om "aanwezig" te zien niet echt bestaat. Dit betekent niet dat fans verward zijn over wat echt en wat fictief is; ze zijn zeer bewust van het verschil, maar dat er immer iets waardevols en zinvol komt uit het ontmoeten van het fictieve in een fysieke ruimte. Deze ervaringen geven de tekst een belang dat ze missen in hun schermversies, een belang dat wordt opgemaakt uit de fysieke en lichamelijke

ontmoeting met de plaatsen die op het scherm worden weergegeven. Deze fysicaliteit — de geur van de lucht, het opvoeren van dialoog, het aanraken van de grond — geven de toerist een persoonlijke verbintenis tot het narratief. Het is deze verandering van status, van iets dat slechts visueel en verbeeld is, tot iets fysieks, echts en persoonlijks, dat door filmtoerisme wordt opgezocht en ideaal wordt ervaren.

Deze plaatsen doen er buiten de tekst zelf echter ook toe. Het sociale aspect van de plek is ook een belangrijk onderdeel binnen de ervaring van filmtoerisme. Deze locaties brengen fans samen die elkaar anders wellicht nooit hadden ontmoet en creëren plekken waar ze hun *fandom* volledig kunnen omarmen buiten de zorgen van het alledaagse leven om. Ze kunnen "de nerd uithangen" zonder bang te zijn om veroordeeld te worden en ze kunnen tijd doorbrengen met anderen die hetzelfde voelen als zij. Aanwezig zijn op een plek die expliciet gelinkt is aan de tekst (vergeleken met een algemene verzamelplek) versterkt deze relaties, zowel relaties die een fan zelf meeneemt of juist opbouwt door de bezoeken. Met de tijd zullen deze plaatsen belangrijk worden voor fans, niet alleen om wat daar toevallig gefilmd werd, maar door de manier waarop zij deze plekken hebben ervaren met anderen, de manier waarop deze plaatsen de herinneringen aan zowel de *fandom* als de tekst behouden. Ze spelen een belangrijke rol in fanpraktijken als de plek waar allerlei soorten fans samen kunnen komen en waar hun *fandom* het meest oprecht kan worden uitgedragen. De verhaalwereld bestaat wellicht alleen in hun hoofd, maar de ervaring van diens fysieke vertegenwoordiging is, op een krachtige en veelzijdige manier, werkelijkheid.

## 14. Portfolio

### Courses followed during the PhD trajectory:

2013 – RMeS (Research School for Media Studies) Summer School “Audiences and Users” (2 ECTS)

RMeS Master Class “Quality, Reality, Interactivity: Strategies of Post-Network Television” with Jane Feuer

2014 - PhD course module “Qualitative Research,” Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities (5 ECTS), consisting of the courses:

- Atlas.ti for beginners. Using QDA software from the design phase onwards
- To participate or not to participate? Participant observation in practice
- Qualitative data analysis: an introduction. Triangulation of analysis strategies.
- Qualitative interviewing. Learning the art and skill of interviewing in practice.

RMeS Master Class “Theorizing media as practice” with Nick Couldry

Dean’s Master Class, research theme “Families”

2015 – RMeS Summer School “Transmedia Storytelling” (2 ECTS)

Master Class “Academic Integrity Day”, Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities

2016 – RMeS Winter School and Graduate Symposium (2 ECTS)

### Conferences and academic meetings during the PhD trajectory:

“The (Meaningful) Experience of Film Tourism.” Locating Imagination: Popular Culture, Tourism, and Belonging: Erasmus University Rotterdam. (5-7 April, 2017)

“Place and *The Prisoner*.” The Fan Studies Network Conference: Norwich, UK. (25-25 June, 2016)

“Immersion, authenticity and the theme park as social space: Experiencing the Wizarding World of Harry Potter.” International Communication Association: Fukuoka, Japan. (9-13 June, 2016)

“Immersion, authenticity and the theme park as social space: Experiencing the Wizarding World of Harry Potter.” European Fan Cultures 2015: Rotterdam, NL. (12-13 November 2015)

“Riding the Hogwarts Express: Simulation, Place, and the Wizarding World of Harry Potter.” The Fan Studies Network Conference: Norwich, UK. (27-28 June, 2015)

“I’m Really In Hogwarts!: Simulation, Consumption, and The Wizarding World of Harry Potter.” Play/Perform/Participate: International Society of Intermedial Studies #2: Utrecht, NL (16-18 April, 2015)

“My Trip to King's Landing: Fan Tourism as Fan Practice.” Second Global Conference Fan Communities and Fandom: Prague, CZ (7-10 November, 2014).

“My Trip to King's Landing: Fan Tourism as Fan Practice.” Fan Studies Network Symposium 2014: London, UK (August 27 - 2014, August 27).

“My Trip to King's Landing: Ways of Imagining in Contemporary Television Tourism.” Media and Place Conference: Leeds, UK. (11-12 July, 2014)

“My Trip to King’s Landing: Fantasy, Fandom, and Contemporary Television Tourism.” Etmaal van de Communicatiewetenschap 2014: Wageningen, NL.

“My Trip to King’s Landing: Fantasy, Fandom, and Contemporary Television Tourism.” International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts 35: Orlando, FL.

“My Trip to King’s Landing: Ways of Imagining in Contemporary Television Tourism.” Travel and Tourism Research International Conference, International Tourism and Media Track: Bruges, BE. (19-21 June, 2014)

“After the Match and Beyond: Football Fanfiction and the Mediatization of Football.” European Fandom and Fan Studies Conference: Amsterdam, NL. (9 November 2013)

“TV Tourism: Game of Thrones.” International Conference “Locating Imagination: Media, Tourism, Rituals”: Rotterdam, NL. (17-18 October, 2014)

### **Invited lectures/talks during the PhD trajectory:**

Public talk “Places of the Imagination,” Studium Generale Utrecht, NL. (9 March 2017)

“I’m ‘Really’ in Hogwarts: Fan Experience in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter.” Challenges of Participatory Culture: Methodologies and Perspectives of Research: Moscow, RU. (12-13 May, 2016)

Invited guest lecture, “Fan Studies: An Introduction.” Guest lecture BA 3, International Bachelor of Arts and Culture Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands November 2016.

Invited guest lecture, “Franchise Tourism: Fandom, Place, and Being There,” University of Baltimore, Baltimore USA, October 2016.

Invited guest lectures, “Ethnography, Netnography and Interviews” and “Thematic Analysis and Coding”, Utrecht Data School, Utrecht University, the Netherlands, December 2015.

**Teaching during the PhD Trajectory:**

2017: Research Workshop Media Tourism (two seminar groups, content design)

2016-2017: Sociology of Arts and Culture (one tutorial group)

2014-2016: Arts Marketing (two tutorial groups per year)

2014-17: Bachelor’s Thesis supervision and course (approximately 10 theses per year)



## 15. List of publications related to the PhD project

### JOURNAL ARTICLES

Waysdorf, A.S. and Reijnders, S.L. 2017. "The role of imagination in the film tourist experience: The case of Game of Thrones." *Participations* 14(1), pp 170-191.

<http://www.participations.org/Volume%2014/Issue%201/10.pdf>

Waysdorf, A.S. and Reijnders, S.L. 2016. "Immersion, authenticity and the theme park as social space: Experiencing the Wizarding World of Harry Potter." *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. (DOI: 10.1177/1367877916674751, published online before print 9 November 2016)

Reijnders, S.L., Bolderman, S.L., Van Es, N & Waysdorf, A.S. 2015. Research note: locating imagination. *Tourism Analysis*, 20 (3), pp. 333-339

Waysdorf, A.S. 2015. "My Football Fandoms, Performance, and Place." In "Performance and Performativity in Fandom," edited by Lucy Bennett and Paul J. Booth, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 18. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2015.0636>.

Hoebink, Dorus, Stijn Reijnders, and Abby Waysdorf. 2014. "Exhibiting Fandom: A Museological Perspective." In "Material Fan Culture," edited by Bob Rehak, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 16. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2014.0529>.

### BOOK CHAPTERS

Reijnders, Stijn, Koos Zwaan, Linda Duits, and Abby Waysdorf. 2017. "Fandom and Fan Fiction." *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects*, pp 1-12.

## 16. Curriculum Vitae

Abby Sophia Waysdorf (1985) holds a Research Master's degree (cum laude) in Media and Performance Studies from Utrecht University and a Bachelor's degree (with distinction) in Comparative History of Ideas from the University of Washington, Seattle. During her master's degree, she focused her research on television, sports and media, and fandom, which culminated in her thesis on football (soccer) fanfiction and what it suggests about changing practices of both sports and fandom.

In 2013, she began her research as part of the NWO-funded project "Locating Imagination: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on Literary, Film, and Music Tourism" at Erasmus University Rotterdam. In addition to her research, she taught various classes as part of the International Bachelor of Arts and Culture Studies (IBACS), including leading a Research Workshop on media tourism and supervising bachelors' theses.

Alongside her research and teaching, she has participated in summer schools, international conferences, and been an invited speaker to events in the Netherlands and elsewhere. She also was on the organizing committee of the European Fan Cultures conference at Erasmus University Rotterdam in 2015 and the international conference *Locating Imagination: Popular Culture, Tourism, and Belonging* in 2017.