'I Don't Think the Two Would Be the Same Without Each Other': Portmeirion as Unintentional Paratext

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Abstract

This article looks at media tourism through the concept of the paratext. The term paratext, originally developed by literary theorist Gérard Genette to discuss the 'extra-textual' elements of a book that gives the reader context about it (such as book covers or the author's biographical information). It has become important to media scholars seeking to understand how audiences understand films and television shows in a media-rich environment. This paper expands on the concept, arguing that place can be used and understood as an 'unintentional' paratext – a paratext that was not created as one, but that functions as one for audiences. I do this through an analysis of the relationship between 1960s cult television show *The Prisoner* (ITV 1967-8) and its filming location of Portmeirion, a holiday village in North Wales, where fans have been visiting since *The Prisoner* first aired. Through analysis of 16 interviews with *The Prisoner* fans, participant observation at Portmeirion, and analysis of fan-produced writing, I show how fans have established and use Portmeirion as a paratext. Fans not only visit Portmeirion to better understand how it was used in the genesis and creation of *The Prisoner*, but establish parallels between Portmeirion itself and the program, putting *The Prisoner* into a particular British artistic tradition and further confirming it as a worthy object of fandom. In doing so, I not only expand the use of paratexts to 'unintentional' paratexts, but provide a new way of understanding why fans might want to participate in media tourism.

Contributor Note

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Citation

Introduction

One of the most popular websites about 1960s cult classic television show *The Prisoner* (ITV 1967-8), *The Unmutual*,[1] bills itself as not only dedicated to the show itself, but to its main filming location – the North Wales holiday village of Portmeirion. Scrolling through the website, the visitor encounters galleries of Portmeirion, fan-written articles about Portmeirion, regular updates on changes, and other content relating to the place, even without any explicit mention of *The Prisoner*. In talking with fans of *The Prisoner*, it becomes clear that this is not an anomaly. Rather, Portmeirion is considered to be an integral part of *The Prisoner* fandom – something that fans of the show need to be aware of, a crucial way of understanding and contextualizing *The Prisoner*. For many fans, Portmeirion functions as a paratext of *The Prisoner*.

The concept of 'paratexts', originally developed by Gérard Genette (1997) as a way to theorize the 'extra' material around literary works (such as book covers, interviews with authors, and so forth), has become an important touchstone for media studies in recent years. Paratexts are a way to make sense of the wide range of 'extra-textual' material in the contemporary media landscape and how it affects audience responses. As Jonathan Gray (2010) argues, '[i]f we imagine the triumvirate of Text, Audience, and Industry as the Big Three of media practice, then paratexts fill the space between them, conditioning passages and trajectories that criss-cross the mediascape, and variously negotiating or determining interactions among the three' (Gray 2010, 23).

It is through paratexts like advertisements, movie trailers, and so forth that we decide to engage with a text to begin with, and it is through further paratexts such as reviews, merchandise, and spinoff products that we develop our understanding and contextualization of them. The trend towards wider transmedia franchises (Jenkins 2006) continues, with textual worlds developing across film, television, video games, and the Internet. Paratexts are increasingly important to the way in which we encounter and make sense of texts, building interest in these worlds, providing a range of entry points to them, and continuing engagement with them after the 'main' text ends.

However, most discussions of paratexts situate them as intentional, i.e. as works created to support a main text, whether it be a film, television show, book, or so forth. In this article, it is argued that paratexts can also be created 'after the fact', rather than deliberately developed for this purpose, through the recontextualization of existing material. These 'unintentional paratexts', while not designed to support a text, still shape the way in which audiences engage with, conceptualize, and appreciate certain texts. It is also suggested that making use of 'unintentional' paratexts is a crucial aspect of fan tourism – traveling to a place associated with an object of fandom – adding another dimension to discussions of place as paratext (Garner 2016) and the role of place in the transmedia environment.

The use of Portmeirion as a paratext of *The Prisoner* by long-term fans is used as a case study in order to explore this concept in more detail. This article is

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[1] www.theunmutual.co.uk

based on 16 in-depth interviews with *The Prisoner* fans who have visited Portmeirion on multiple occasions, supplemented by participatory observation and analysis of fan-produced paratexts (including websites, fanzines, and social media posts). This approach centers on the long-term fan community of *The Prisoner* and how they have reclaimed Portmeirion as an unintentional, after-the-fact paratext, developed on two levels: that of Portmeirion's role as part of the text and the discourses of authorship around both *The Prisoner* and Portmeirion. This serves to both better understand *The Prisoner* and to valorize it, both roles that contemporary paratexts frequently play (Gray 2010). This case therefore demonstrates the potential of place as a source of meaning for fans, and a way in which unintentional paratexts can be created. It connects the discussions around media tourism to the discussions around contemporary trans-media, therefore situating media tourism more clearly in the broader media environment and showing what role space and spatial discourse can play in these debates.

Paratexts in Contemporary Media Culture

As mentioned, the concept of 'paratexts' has become influential in contemporary media research. Drawing on the connotations of the 'para' prefix to highlight the paratext's distinction from, but relation to, another text – think of paralegal or paramilitary – it was originally developed by Genette (1997) in order to better understand the role that objects such as book covers, titles, biographical information of authors, and the like played in the reading experience.

Genette argued that paratexts function as a 'threshold' (1997, 2) between the text and the reader, a way to move into the text but also to prepare the reader for what they might encounter there, 'at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it' (Genette 1997, 2). It is this concept of the paratext-as-threshold that Gray (2010) developed into his influential expansion of the term for the contemporary media age, opening it up from a strictly literary definition to one that encompasses much of today's media landscape. This article expands on his conceptualization of contemporary paratexts and their role in media to encompass 'unintended' paratexts (paratexts not originally designed as paratexts), and how places can fall into this role in fandom.

Gray's main argument regarding paratexts is twofold. In the first place, paratexts are an essential part of how all media texts are understood. They are not bonus material, to be considered only as accessories, 'but rather as valuable a source of information about a text, and as important a site for the generation of text, as is the work itself' (Gray 2010, 230). No text exists without paratexts, according to Gray, and paratexts are as crucial in understanding a text as anything contained within the text.

For many audiences, it is through paratexts, rather than the text, that meaning is actually constituted, and therefore understanding them is as important as understanding the text. This takes place at every stage of encounter with the text: they provide reasons to watch a particular text in the first place, but can also shape the way a viewer feels about it after viewing (for example, by highlighting aspects they may have

missed), potentially for a long period of time.

Secondly, in the contemporary media environment, paratexts are everywhere and can take a very wide range of forms. Few texts are confined to a single moment of engagement. Rather, they are encountered at multiple points, and in a range of ways, including some that might not be strictly 'textual' but contributing to the greater understanding of the original text. Theorizing these encounters as paratexts – as ways of contextualizing and making sense of the text – opens up new ways of understanding the ubiquity of contemporary media.

Many stories operate what Henry Jenkins (2006) called 'transmedia storytelling', where a common narrative is told across a range of media, with potentially a wide range of access points. While Jenkins' ideal form of transmedia storytelling had each medium given the same weight in the overall narrative, as Jason Mittell (2012-3) and Colin Harvey (2015) discuss, industrial necessities mean that most examples of transmedia content are seen as expansions or supplements to a 'main' text and are therefore essentially paratexts. However, that transmedia content is so widely available and known means that audiences are aware that story worlds can be encountered across media. Indeed, most texts are not limited to the first screen, and thus paratexts are valuable in understanding them.

This broader understanding of paratexts has proven to be a fruitful way of theorizing the multiple points of engagement with texts within today's media environment. Ross Garner (2016) uses the concept to analyze the *Doctor Who* Experience Walking Tour in Cardiff. This is a BBC-produced encounter with the 'authentic' filming locations of *Doctor Who* (BBC 1963-89, 1996, 2005-), showing how the physical proximity and authentic objects from filming are framed in order to encourage a particular sort of engagement with *Doctor Who* that reinforces *BBC* brand values. The walking tour engenders a sense of immersing oneself in the show's diegesis, and also that its creation is of a high artistic quality, which is best ascertained through encountering the 'real' spaces of its filming and seeing how they are transformed.

Matt Hills (2015) applies the framework of paratexts in order to analyze the concept of the media anniversary – the celebration of a franchise existing for a significant amount of time. Hills suggests here that these events are best understood paratextually, and that paratexts interact not only with texts, but other paratexts, to create meaning around the text. In a media landscape filled with paratexts, they will have an impact on each other as well as the text. A particularly privileged paratext can function to organize and make sense of these different paratexts – or at least be positioned to.

Underlying Garner's and Hills' work is the importance that paratexts have for fan audiences. In particular, what Gray terms 'in media res' paratexts (2010, 40), meaning paratexts that are encountered during and after engaging with a text. It is fans who are most likely to seek out more about the text and encounter such paratextual material, and most likely to pay attention when they are encountered. They are the ones who most wish to explore and learn more about the text, in both a diegetic and non-diegetic fashion, due to their attachment to the text and

the meaning it has for them (Hills 2002; Sandvoss 2005).

Paratexts are not necessarily designed for fans, particularly those from the *BBC*. With its public service mandate, the *BBC* pitches its paratexts towards a wide audience. However, many of the paratexts designed to be encountered after (or during) consuming the text are especially welcomed by those who have some kind of emotional attachment to the text. Thus, the *Doctor Who* anniversary has more meaning for those who are already engaged with *Doctor Who* and are likely to care about the range of paratexts that it structures. Visiting locations associated with a text is similarly appealing to those who want more of a connection with it (Waysdorf and Reijnders 2017). This type of paratext is used to deepen the fan's understanding of the text, to further contextualize and make meaning of it, extending their connection.

Fans also create their own paratexts, which is where Genette and Gray most differ in their conceptualization. While Genette connects paratexts explicitly to the author, stating that 'something is not a paratext unless the author or one of his associates accepts responsibility for it' (Genette 1997, 9), Gray expands the definition of paratext to anything that the reader/viewer uses to make sense of the text, which includes fan-produced material. While these texts do not bear the stamp of the author, or at least the industry, they are nonetheless part of how fans make meaning out of the text. Fan-created paratexts frequently 'value the text's various elements differently from industry-created paratexts, […] opening up new paths of understanding' (Gray 2010, 146-47).

As Garner and Hills suggest, industry created paratexts present a certain

understanding of the texts aligned with its values. In contrast, fan created paratexts instead focus on what the fan community finds important or interesting about the text (Finn 2017; Leavenworth 2015). These meanings may or may not be entirely separate, as Gray discusses, but the potential is there. For many fans, the paratexts created by other fans (or by themselves) are as integral to the ultimate meaning of the text as industry-created paratexts are (Hellekson and Busse 2006; Jenkins 1992).

However, Jonathan Hardy (2011) also notes that these increasingly share an 'intertextual' space of communication, with corporate controlled and non-corporate controlled paratexts existing alongside and interacting with each other. Indeed, rather than being strictly different, Hardy stresses that the corporate and the non-corporate operate on an axis, with the borders frequently blurred.

As discussed previously, paratexts interact with other paratexts in order to produce meaning, and this can't be entirely separated into 'official' and 'unofficial'. Within the intertextual space of paratexts, from advertisements to fan fiction, they are increasingly forced to enter into dialogue, and can often end up supporting as much as contesting each other. In this intertextual space, paratexts, no matter what the source, have the capacity to build on each other in the construction of meaning around a text. Successfully creating new paratexts relies on the meanings that are already present in this sphere.

Yet both corporate controlled and non-corporate controlled paratexts are thought of as intentional, as they are designed for the purpose of serving the text. Whether it be a trailer designed to get

people into a movie, a toy made to depict a character, or a fan-run television review site, paratexts are made intentionally. However, if we understand a paratext as anything that helps to contextualize and make meaning out of a given text, we can't limit paratexts to what has been deliberately created for this purpose.

Places are a key example. Previous research on film tourism shows how visiting places associated with movies or television programs works in much the same way as utilizing created paratexts do. It is a way to further understand and contextualize the text (Buchmann et al. 2010; Hills 2002; Peaslee 2011; Reijnders 2011; Torchin 2002; Waysdorf and Reijnders 2017). As Reijnders' (2011) model of 'places of the imagination' conceptualizes, fans go off in search of the places that are seen to inspire favorite texts, whether it be the author's house, a filming location, or another location where the imaginary and real worlds interact. These places often have an existence of their own prior to their connection with the text, which is also seen as contributing to it. The place is part of what created the text in the first place, and therefore interesting for fans.

Once there the experience often takes on aspects of the text serving to reinforce particular discourses and themes that fans find important. For example, Anne Buchmann et. al's (2010) exploration of *Lord of the Rings* (Jackson, 2001, 2002, 2003) tours in New Zealand highlighted that fans on the tours sought out moments of fellowship and struggle, while Hills' exploration of the 'cult geography' of Vancouver focused on unravelling its hidden places, just like the characters on *The X-Files* (FOX 1993-2018). Abby Waysdorf and Stijin Reijnders (2017) identify a multiplicity of ways that fans

experience filming locations as a way to connect to story worlds. This includes the filming process and the broader place history, all of which have paratextual aspects. While not specifically designed for the purpose, and therefore less specific in their messaging than created paratexts, places are used by fans in order to make sense of a text in complementary ways.

However, just because a paratext is unintentional, it does not follow that its meaning has not been shaped. Rather its meaning must be defined in other ways. As Hardy (2011) argues, place and its meaning to a text exist along the same axis of corporate and non-corporate control as intentional paratexts, while also communicating in the same intertextual sphere. Garner's (2016) discussion of the *Doctor Who* Experience Walking Tour, for example, indicates how the BBC, in showcasing certain aspects of Cardiff and narrating it in a particular manner, highlights the ways that they want fans to interpret the program. In contrast, the way in which fans of *The Prisoner* relate to Portmeirion has been guided less by 'official' shaping practices and more so by the practices of the (organized) fandom. This has developed over the fifty years of their affiliation, becoming meaningful by drawing on and reinforcing the shared values that they have constructed around *The Prisoner* in this time

For many fans of *The Prisoner*, Portmeirion has become as important to their conception of *The Prisoner* as any other paratext. This long relationship and its intensity may be unique. However, investigating the way it is constructed, and why Portmeirion matters so much to *Prisoner* fans, highlights the different ways in which place can become paratext, and

why fans might want to construct such an understanding.

Methodology

This paper originated as part of a larger study of film tourism (Waysdorf, 2017), of which the relationship between fans of *The Prisoner* and Portmeirion made up the third of three cases. This study is primarily an interview study, based on sixteen semi-structured interviews with fans of *The Prisoner* who have visited Portmeirion multiple times. This was part of the original focus of the study, which was to investigate the relationship that the fans had developed with the place over the years. It was an emergent research project, drawing on Kathy Charmaz's (2006) grounded theory approach and Steinmar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann's 'traveler' style of interview study (2009, 48-49), in that it was built on an initial research question but the eventual analysis and theoretical focus was drawn from the interview data and the process of research itself. In the analysis of the interviews, it became clear that one crucial aspect of the relationship that fans had with Portmeirion was the use of Portmeirion as a paratext, an aspect which was then developed into this paper.

Interviewees were recruited from '*The Prisoner* and Portmeirion' Facebook group, the Prisoner fansite 'The Unmutual', and the 2016 edition of fan convention Portmeiricon, held yearly in Portmeirion, 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 32 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.

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. Interviewees were asked about their fandom of *The Prisoner* and how it has developed, about their experiences, past and present, in Portmeirion, as well as their feelings about Portmeirion, and the role they feel Portmeirion plays in both their fandom and *The Prisoner* fandom as a whole. Interviews were deemed the most appropriate methodological choice in order to better access these narratives, I as the researcher could solicit particular memories and stories while still keeping the focus on the words and experiences of the respondent.

The interviews were supplemented by three other sources of data. The first of which was participatory observation at Portmeirion over two visits, including one during the 2016 Portmeiricon. This is a long-running (fan convention, established in 1977, run by the fan group Six of One that is held yearly in Portmeirion. 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. This was because smaller, fan-run conventions like Portmeiricon are seen as a time to interact with other fans in a fan-controlled

space (Booth and Kelly 2013; Zubernis and Larsen 2018), and Portmeiricon, taking place over a weekend in Portmeirion itself, is particularly intimate. It was therefore felt acknowledging my presence and intent was the most ethical way to conduct the research (DeWalt, DeWalt, and Wayland 1998), as well as showing this community that she respected their space.

The second source of data was provided by several bodies of fan-produced and targeted writing which was analyzed thematically, including both contemporary and archival material. This consisted of recent editions of Six of One, the official *Prisoner* appreciation society, 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 (www.theunmutual.co.uk). These works are created narratives of the fandom and its practices, designed for other fans, and are therefore useful in determining the stories that the fandom tells itself, alongside the stories told to the researcher.

The third supplementary source of data was fan discussion on the public Facebook groups 'The Prisoner' and 'The Prisoner and Portmeirion'. Additionally, 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 thematic analysis. This information, along with the fanzines, 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 the analysis, particularly in terms of the general attitudes around *The Prisoner* fandom and its use of Portmeirion. They were therefore used to increase the validity of the interview data, by matching narratives and thematic concerns that the interviews had brought up, straightening out timelines, and observing how Portmeirion has been discussed by fans over the years. Through this combination of data, the following analysis of Portmeirion's use as a paratext was developed.

Portmeirion as Paratext:
Portmeirion as Part of *The Prisoner*

The Prisoner takes place almost entirely in one location: The Village, a mysterious seaside community where the lead character, played by series creator Patrick McGoohan and referred to only as Number 6, wakes up after resigning from his government job and being kidnapped from his home. Whereas other programs might travel across landscapes (Reijnders 2011), *The Prisoner* is tied to this place. To be *The Prisoner*, Number 6 must be imprisoned. Portmeirion set the tone of The Village, providing its exteriors, geography, and its most memorable visuals (although many of the actual episodes were filmed in the MGM studios in Borehamwood, near London).

With the connection between the story and the setting so strong, it is perhaps not surprising that fans link Portmeirion and the show so tightly. As participant Michael says:

> How would I describe Portmeirion? In relation to *The Prisoner*, it's 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]

Referring to a setting as a 'character' is not a new metaphor, and is frequently used for television and film (McNutt 2017, 74). However, compared to the common use of the term as a form of 'spatial capital', a way to give the text some of the authenticity of place, *Prisoner* fans refer to Portmeirion as 'a character' of the show in a slightly different way. The most crucial difference is that, while Portmeirion serves as the setting for The Village, *The Prisoner* is not set in Portmeirion in the way that, for example, *Breaking Bad* (AMC 2008-13) takes place in Albuquerque. The Village is never clearly placed in our world, with contradictory answers given throughout, but it is clear that it is not supposed to be Portmeirion on a mimetic level. Not only is the geography different, but, as a hotel and tourist attraction, the actual operation of Portmeirion is quite different than that of the Village.

However, the use of Portmeirion also sets it apart from other genre television with unclear or fictional settings. Compared to the recreations of a studio used by contemporaries such as *Star Trek* (NBC 1966-9) and *Doctor Who,* or the myriad shows that make use of Vancouver's famed 'placelessness' (Brooker 2007, 247-8) to simulate a city, fans pick up on a specificity to the setting of *The Prisoner* and the role that it plays in the story of the show. It has a very distinct visual character despite being nowhere recognizable, a contradiction that fans found intriguing. As Angie discusses, when asked about her favorite parts of *The Prisoner*:

> I loved the idea of this beautiful, brightly-coloured place, with this enormous dark underbelly. Which you didn't see, but hinted at, and sometimes you did see

glimpses of and think 'ooo, that's a nasty place! It's not nice at all! It looks nice, but it isn't nice!' [Angie, 55, English]

The setting of the show is often mentioned as one of its appealing qualities. The Village did not look like a prison, although Number 6 was confined there, boasting various recreational amenities, cafes, greenery and beaches. Yet it didn't resemble a 'normal' British village. The Village looked unique from the outset, not only by 1960s standards but the standards of those who would see it later in rescreenings, drawing on Portmeirion's jumble of colours and architectural elements to create a surreal atmosphere. The Village was a disconcerting place, which made the show interesting.

Interviewees credited Portmeirion itself with setting that atmosphere:

> I think if they'd tried to construct a place to fit the tale they wanted to tell, I don't think it would have been as effective. I don't think it would have looked like that. I don't think it would have had that confluence of style and influences that make it so interesting. [Katy, 32, English]

The look and feel of Portmeirion is thought of as a brilliant serendipity which creates the Village's overall feeling. There is a clear sense that without the existing style of Portmeirion, *The Prisoner* would have been a different, and possibly lesser, show:

> I cannot imagine, and you try and picture what the series would've looked like in some other place, just a regular looking village or whatever. Would it have been the same? I am not sure it would. I think you could not have made the Prisoner without Portmeirion. Portmeirion obviously existed before the Prisoner, it was there for years. But, I

don't think the two would be the same without the other. Especially I don't think the Prisoner would have worked nearly as well without. […] I'm not even sure it would have been made without. [Geoff, 42, English]

For fans like Geoff and Katy, Portmeirion is what makes *The Prisoner, The Prisoner*. If it had been primarily set in a studio, or even an 'ordinary' British village, it would not be the same show that they fell in love with. Portmeirion's distinct visual character becomes an interpretive frame for the show – it is somewhere that is real but also strange and mystifying, without the straightforward character of a 'typical' village, setting up the show to be interpreted in a similar way. Indeed, that the 2009 remake did not make use of Portmeirion, filming its Village in Namibia, is one of the reasons that the fans interviewed consider it to be a failure.

Portmeirion is not only seen as integral to the text of *The Prisoner*, but to its creation. McGoohan, in his pre-*Prisoner* role as the star of the hit show *Danger Man* (ITV 1960-8), came to Portmeirion in order to film a stand-in for Italy. Impressed with the location, he returned to it for an idea he had for a show about 'a man in isolation', which would become *The Prisoner*, and utilized it as the main setting (Gregory, 1997). This history is well-known among fans of *The Prisoner*. As Angie recounts:

> 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)

Variations of this story appear regularly among the fans interviewed, and they seem to enjoy linking the two together. In recalling the role that Portmeirion plays in the origin of *The Prisoner*, it is shown that the use of it is not simply chance, or a decision made for financial or logistical reasons, but a deliberate creative choice. This makes *The Prisoner* seem more like a work of art than a commercial product, contributing to a narrative of *The Prisoner*'s uniqueness and quality.

Some take it further, crediting McGoohan's experience of being in Portmeirion for the existence of *The Prisoner* in its entirety:

> I'm not even sure it would have been made without. I think Portmeirion was one of those things that a light bulb went off in Patrick McGoohan's head when he went there for *Danger Man*, but I think if he not went there for *Danger Man* and seen the place, I'm not sure if *The Prisoner* might have even gotten off the ground. I think Portmeirion was one of the things that pushed McGoohan into making the show in the first place. (Geoff, 42, English)

While Geoff knows that McGoohan had the idea for a series about 'a man in isolation' before coming to Portmeirion, he feels that it was the experience of being in Portmeirion that turned it from an idea to a reality. Being there, and inspired by the place, was the last piece of the puzzle that would become *The Prisoner*. For Geoff, and for many fans, Portmeirion is therefore crucial to understanding the mindset of McGoohan.

This is important to fans because, as discussed by Gregory (1997) and Johnson (2005, 51-3), *The Prisoner* is seen as McGoohan's brainchild. Given unprecedented control over the program, and a substantial budget to realize his vision, the show has been marketed as a product

of his singular genius. He is not only the show's lead actor, but also its executive producer and the writer and director of many of its episodes. Everything about *The Prisoner* is credited, generally, to him. As Johnson (2005) discusses, this served to legitimize *The Prisoner* at a time when television was seen as particularly lowbrow, linking it to a single author with a serious, artistic mindset. Filming on location in Portmeirion contributed as well. Instead of the easier and cheaper option of filming entirely in a studio, *The Prisoner* used a specific physical location, one that was selected by McGoohan himself.

Linking Portmeirion to his creative process also helps to better contextualize McGoohan and his mindset. That he has a creative process to discuss, one with flashes of pure inspiration, gives more evidence to the perception that *The Prisoner* is a special show and McGoohan is a creative genius. The interviewees were quick to praise McGoohan, discussing his creativity, his skills as an actor in non-*Prisoner* projects, and his moral character as well as his creative vision in executing *The Prisoner* in the way that he did. While some refer disparagingly to a 'cult' of McGoohan among fans (Gregory 1997), particularly when it comes to reenactments and other fan activities around Portmeirion, this mostly serves to illustrate how central the idea of McGoohan and his vision is to fan appreciation of *The Prisoner*. It is not simply a television show, it is a single-authored creative work.

The story McGoohan being inspired by Portmeirion serves to reinforce this authorial role, and therefore Portmeirion plays a role in legitimizing *The Prisoner* in general, as paratexts, such as DVD commentaries, are said to do (Gray 2010).

This is further enhanced by tourist practice. Visiting Portmeirion to understand McGoohan connects him to the legitimized heritage discourses of literary tourism (Watson 2006), suggesting that, on some level, McGoohan is a similar figure. This is stressed throughout the intertextual space of *The Prisoner* discussion.

While The Village is not meant to be Portmeirion in *The Prisoner*, its physical location does play a role in the contextualizing and understanding the programme. Namely, having Portmeirion as the main filming location situates the show as specifically British and part of a British national identity. This was appreciated by both American and British interviewees, albeit in different ways:

> The credits made it clear it really was somewhere. That it was in the UK, a wonderland for someone in love with the British Invasion, made it all the more glorious. (Kit, 57, American)

For Kit, that *The Prisoner* was clearly filmed somewhere British enhanced her appreciation of the program. A fan of British culture more generally, *The Prisoner*'s clear placing in Britain confirmed, even more than the accents, that *The Prisoner* was part of this legacy - the cerebral and exotic British tradition of popular culture that she already found appealing.

For British fans, the placing of Portmeirion didn't enhance its exoticism, but its familiarity:

> And it's somewhere in Britain. And it's like, I could find as much, I know […] with humanity and the common humanity you can understand that, you can understand, you can relate to it, but for me it just had that particular thing

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that it just felt like it was going on in my back yard. (Liza, 40, English)

For Liza, who discovered the show in reruns in the 1990's, that *The Prisoner* was so clearly British made it particularly meaningful to her. Compared to *Star Trek*, which she was also a fan of but which felt very American, *The Prisoner* was part of her culture – not only in tone but as somewhere she could visit. Portmeirion reinforced that *The Prisoner* was something from her country, and helped her to understand it as part of a British television history that was as worthwhile as the American shows she was familiar with. Portmeirion's distinct place put *The Prisoner* into a particular tradition – that of British quality television (Caughie, 2000; Johnson, 2005) – thus providing a way of understanding the series. It has a specific history and culture that can be used to interpret it, compared to a more 'disposable' program.

By enforcing the connection between the text of *The Prisoner* and Portmeirion, it becomes a crucial way to make sense of the show. It is part of what makes it an appealing series to watch, part of how the series creator made the series in the first place, and puts it into its proper national context. However, it is not just through direct connection to the text that this relationship is built and maintained, but also through parallels that fans make between the two, a process that is explained next.

Building Parallels

In discussing *The Prisoner* and Portmeirion, it is remarkable how the fans interviewed make links between the two, even when they are not specifically talking about the role that Portmeirion plays in

The Prisoner. Through drawing links between their creation and speaking of them in similar terms, Portmeirion is enforced as an important part of understanding *The Prisoner*, extending their fandom of the show to the place. It becomes, if not the main, then one of the main structuring paratexts of *The Prisoner*.

As with the connection to the text, this is done both in making links to *The Prisoner* as a text and the way in which it was made through highlighting the iconoclastic authorship narratives of both. As *The Prisoner* is associated with the artistic vision of Patrick McGoohan, Portmeirion itself is seen as the product of Sir Clough Williams-Ellis, an Anglo-Welsh architect. Portmeirion was his dream project, an entire village done to his design, an unashamedly exuberant and Romantic mix of colours and architectural styles. It was conceived originally in the style of an Italian fishing village, but also became something of a 'home for fallen buildings', incorporating structures that Clough Williams-Ellis (2014) found and brought to Portmeirion as a way to preserve and reinvent them and designed and constructed with the idea of enhancing, rather than drowning out, the natural landscape of the North Wales coastline it is built on. The figure of Williams-Ellis holds strong in Portmeirion, with considerable importance given to the idea of 'his vision' in both official and unofficial writings on it.

It is this idea, that Portmeirion is the work of a particular brilliant artist, which *Prisoner* fans tended to pick up on:

It looks fantastic but, it's just […] the guy that put it together, Clough Williams-Ellis, he was a genius. And you don't get many things, you get some music, […]

there are groups where you can listen to their music and think, that's genius, no one's ever done anything like that. There are films or TV programs that you can think, well that's genius, no one's done a film like that before. There are very few places which are created and built. Most places, you know, evolve over time, simply grow […] for a town to be designed it has to be a building or a place. And for a building and a place to have magic, it needs a genius behind it. [Geoff, 42, English]

Portmeirion is not a coincidence, but an artistic vision and a piece of art in and of itself, found in a form that is not normally associated with great art. What's more, it is Williams-Ellis himself who can be credited with it. He is the genius behind Portmeirion, responsible for the unique environment that participant, Geoff, finds so special and magical. It is not simply that it looks pretty, but that there is something behind it – a level of thought and design that makes it stand out.

In addition to Williams-Ellis being a genius, he is also seen as something of an iconoclast, both outside and ahead of his time. While well-respected, both in his time and currently, he was not formally trained in architecture and is not generally associated with a particular school or style. Rather, he is thought of as more of an eccentric in the British tradition, working in his own manner and with his own concerns about what architecture should be and do. As Roy discusses:

What you've got is an architect who was ahead of his time, who set out to do something that was human, individual, friendly. We all know what cities are like. Awful. So he creates something that is designed to enhance and allow the individual to flourish. Which is what *The Prisoner* was all about. [Roy, 69, English]

For Roy, it is not simply that Williams-Ellis was a genius, but that he was different than his contemporaries. He had a different vision for how people should live and interact with the landscape and the built environment. A frequent refrain among the interviewees is that there is 'nothing like' Portmeirion, and that is here ascribed to Williams-Ellis himself as being different. He was a unique and individual artist.

It is the uniqueness and individuality of Williams-Ellis that is most frequently linked to *The Prisoner.* As discussed in the previous section, Patrick McGoohan is seen as the unique individual behind *The Prisoner,* therefore situating it as a great work by an individual visionary. This sense of an individual vision behind both *The Prisoner* and Portmeirion is something that is picked up on by many fans:

I began to acquire, as many other fans do, stuff by Clough Williams-Ellis. *The Prisoner* is uniquely about individuals, it's about McGoohan, who McGoohan shaped, [and] Portmeirion and the man who shaped Portmeirion is Clough Williams-Ellis […] a remarkable character in himself. [Michael, 54, Northern Irish]

Drawing parallels between Williams-Ellis and McGoohan is another way of understanding and legitimizing *The Prisoner* as an artwork. It places McGoohan in a particular artistic tradition, that of the individualistic, eccentric artist, working against the trends of the time to get his particular artistic vision realized. McGoohan and Williams-Ellis are both 'remarkable characters' in their respective fields, and the show and the place bear the marks of this singular genius. They are also primarily associated with one 'great work' that underscores their vision – while

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Williams-Ellis had other commissions, he is most associated with Portmeirion, and while McGoohan would go on to appear in other films and television shows, he never undertook anything like *The Prisoner* again. Understanding how Portmeirion came to be and the man behind it is a way to further understand how *The Prisoner* and McGoohan work as part of an artistic legacy. It also serves to legitimize McGoohan further by connecting him explicitly to this legacy and to the high culture discourses of art and architecture. Learning about Williams-Ellis and his vision confirms what *Prisoner* fans already thought about the show.

Learning about Portmeirion also links thematically to *The Prisoner* as a text. This is important because, compared to other 'cult' favorites (particularly of the era), fandom of *The Prisoner* is largely centered around thematic, rather than story-world or plot, elements. While there are considerable mysteries around the story-world of *The Prisoner*, these questions – aside from whether or not Number 6 is supposed to be John Drake, McGoohan's character in *Danger Man* – are not frequently discussed in the fandom. Rather, *The Prisoner* is discussed in terms of its allegorical and thematic concerns, which are seen as what it is really all 'about'. This perspective on the fandom resonates quite strongly with the story of Williams-Ellis:

> Though [fans I met] liked the program, they weren't the sort of people who wanted to walk around and say 'that's where they did the parade'. It was more about Clough Williams-Ellis and his ideas, and that's what I like about coming to this place as the convention, because […] with the idea that *The Prisoner* is all about the individual and someone who stays true to his ideals. I

found that resonated quite strongly with what Clough Williams-Ellis decided. [Liza, 40, English]

Focusing on Williams-Ellis, and by extension, McGoohan, centers this idea that *The Prisoner* is about more than the average television show. It is a more cerebral, intellectual sort of program, and crucially, one that centers around the idea of individualism in a technocratic society. Coming to Portmeirion, seeing what was done there, and learning about Williams-Ellis reinforces this thematic concern to Liza and other fans. Seeing the main theme of *The Prisoner* in a real life, physical form enforces its importance.

In addition to the thematic resonance, the idea of uniqueness is an important part of the way that they discuss both *The Prisoner* and Portmeirion. Cult fans are often keen to discuss how their object of fandom is particularly unique, and for *Prisoner* fans, that often relates in some way to Portmeirion. Compared to other fandoms, it 'has' a place, and the place is a 'special' one. As Hills (2002, 154) discusses, being able to spatialize fandom through place gives a fandom a sense of legitimacy – it is anchored to reality and given a sense of permanence because of it. With Portmeirion, this spatial anchoring can also be tied to an explicit author-function that, as is frequently the case with 'cult' television, helps to make *The Prisoner* seem legitimate and unique (Hills 2002, 132). Both the program and the place are both seen as singular achievements. As Anabel says:

> I don't think I'd ever seen anything like [*The Prisoner*] before. I don't think I've ever seen anything like it since. [Anabel, 54, English]

To those fans interviewed here, *The Prisoner* is unique on television, both at

the time and today. While they might be fans of other things, there is something about *The Prisoner* that they still consider unique in the pop-cultural landscape, even 50 years after its original airing. Fans speak of how it stuck with them after their initial viewing and how it continued to be important for them over the years, in a way that other texts rarely did. For them, there is nothing like *The Prisoner*. Similarly, there is nothing like Portmeirion:

> I think there is nothing like Portmeirion anywhere in the world! […] I can't even think that there's anything akin to it, anywhere. [Anabel, 54, English]

For Anabel, both are, still, incredibly unique. That *The Prisoner* was set in this environment enhances its uniqueness, and that Portmeirion has this layer of *The Prisoner* over it draws out Portmeirion's artistic qualities. They are both spaces to be appreciated for many of the same reasons, and it makes sense for fans of one to appreciate the other.

In this, there is a sense that Williams-Ellis and McGoohan provided a path to follow that few were able to. Compare these statements from Roy and Geoff regarding Portmeirion and *The Prisoner*:

> You need megaphones to the rest of the world saying 'stop building those monolithic structures! Every building should be like Portmeirion!' It should be broadcasting. But, the human race, the bottom line is how much it costs, so that's what we'll get. We'll all get to live in postage-sized houses and flats. Ugh, terrible. [Roy, 69, English]

> I think Patrick McGoohan found that bit frustrating because he kind of showed the way how you can make interesting television. And I think he sat there up until he died thinking, no one else has done it. Why has no one else made

television that can actually make you think? Why is no one doing that? Why do we have to live on a diet of *Dynasty* and *Dallas* and *American Idol*? Why is that the case? [Geoff, 42, English]

There is a sense here that both Portmeirion and *The Prisoner* provided a challenging way forward for their respective media that those who came after could not or would not continue, despite their considerable artistic merits compared to the rest of the field. They still point towards the future after many decades, and still say something more about the world we live in than their peers or what came after. They are works that their fans can be proud to be fans of, further underlining the 'deserved' cult reputation of the show.

Therefore, understanding, and preferably visiting, Portmeirion is seen as something important for *The Prisoner* fans to do, necessary in order to fully appreciate the show. It puts *The Prisoner* into the proper context, enhancing its thematic concerns and drawing it into an artistic tradition while also showcasing how it was made. As Geoff states:

> You'll never forget *The Prisoner* if you've seen *The Prisoner*, and the same is true for Portmeirion. So I think anyone that has enjoyed *The Prisoner*, should go to Portmeirion. For two levels. One, because they are obviously intelligent so they'll appreciate Portmeirion for what it is. Secondly, there's nothing quite better than walking around a film set that you recognize, even though Portmeirion wasn't built as the film set. [Geoff, 42, English]

Portmeirion is used to appreciate what McGoohan did – to demonstrate how the show was made and to better understand his mindset while making it. However,

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experience with *The Prisoner* is also seen as helpful in understanding Portmeirion:

> But I don't know if I would have been in the right mindset to appreciate [Williams-Ellis'] way of thinking if I hadn't been primed by having seen the program. [Liza, 40, English]

Without understanding the messages of *The Prisoner* and of McGoohan, Liza feels that she wouldn't have been able to appreciate Portmeirion in the way that she does. The two works – Portmeirion and *The Prisoner* – therefore have a mutually beneficial relationship.

In summary, it is not just that Portmeirion was crucial to the production of *The Prisoner* that makes it an important paratext, but that it reinforces certain aspects of it that fans consider important. In the centering of an artistic genius, its thematic concerns (particularly around the idea of individualism), and its uniqueness, those qualities of *The Prisoner* are enhanced and contextualized by the fans. Portmeirion's existence and story becomes part of how they understand *The Prisoner*.

Conclusions

This paper shows that place can be used as a paratext, even if it wasn't designed to be so. Spaces and places can be reclaimed by fans (and, potentially, industry), and put into shared frames that promote particular understandings of the text, which connect to existing discourses reinforced across media platforms. In the fifty years since *The Prisoner* first aired, Portmeirion has become, for the fans interviewed here, a crucial part of the way that they make sense of, contextualize, and appreciate the programme. It is an

important part of their fandom, and a place that they have come to love deeply. For many, Portmeirion is as much a part of their fandom as watching *The Prisoner* is, and it structures the way in which they understand the show.

The paratextual use of Portmeirion operates on two main levels. The first is the connection that fans make to the text of *The Prisoner* itself. It is seen as an important aspect of the program as screened, the setting that not only gives the title its context but sets the tone for the entire series. Its mixture of architectural elements, colours, and landscapes create an unsettling atmosphere for its title character. It is at once pleasant and sinister, with a surreality that would become the show's hallmarks. Fans credit the use of Portmeirion itself for this tone, suggesting that without it, *The Prisoner* would be a different, potentially lesser, show.

Portmeirion is also seen as one of the important factors in the creation of *The Prisoner*, the inspiration that the show's creator and star, Patrick McGoohan, needed to make the show in the way he did. This serves to reinforce the narrative of McGoohan as a creative genius, situating the use of Portmeirion as a deliberate choice on his part, necessary for the story he wished to tell, and therefore making an understanding of Portmeirion part of understanding his mindset in making the program. Finally, that Portmeirion is an accessible part of the United Kingdom enforces the national context of *The Prisoner* to both British and non-British fans. That it is a real place that can be visited puts it into the correct national context, confirming it as part of a British (quality) television tradition.

However, it is not just the direct connections that the fans make use of. Portmeirion is also used as a paratext by making parallels between the place and the program. As *The Prisoner* is seen as the work of an auteur figure, so is Portmeirion itself, in the form of its designer Sir Clough Williams-Ellis. Fans who visit Portmeirion often become quite interested in the figure of Williams-Ellis, and draw parallels between him and McGoohan in terms of artistic ability and mentality. They are both seen as men with a particular, unique vision of how their chosen media should be, and in learning about Williams-Ellis, McGoohan makes more sense.

Portmeirion and *The Prisoner* are both idiosyncratic artworks, considered as both out and ahead of their time. The themes of *The Prisoner* also resonate with this reading of Portmeirion, as the work of the individual against a technocratic society, and in visiting and learning about Portmeirion, the fan can better understand these themes. This is particularly important to *The Prisoner* fandom, which is built on thematic, rather than diegetic, questions around the program. In this, Portmeirion's uniqueness to the fans aligns with *The Prisoner*'s unique-ness. They are kindred works, with a mutually beneficial relationship, and the shared paratextual framing adds support to the place's meaning for fans.

Using Portmeirion in this way has interesting implications. It means that paratexts can be made 'after the fact'. Portmeirion was built long before *The Prisoner* was even an idea, and therefore was not intended as a 'support' for the show. Nonetheless, Portmeirion can be seen as a way of understanding and contextualizing *The Prisoner*, as useful as

any of the intentional paratexts that Gray (2010) discusses. *The Prisoner*, may have a smaller amount of 'extended universe' works compared to its peers, but Portmeirion has served as a way for many fans to make up this lack. In learning about and visiting Portmeirion, they gain a new perspective on the show that many fans find important. As I have discussed elsewhere (Waysdorf, 2017), fans of *The Prisoner* see Portmeirion as the 'home' of their fandom, and a crucial part of creating this sense is exploring and understanding how the place and show work together.

However, compared to paratexts created for the purpose, there are differences in unintentional paratexts. Essentially, while created paratexts are made to explain something, after-the-fact or unintentional paratexts are drawn on in order to create an explanation. They require a different sort of mental activity. The creativity is in the use of it, in making it fit with the text, rather than in creating it in the first place. Their messaging is not specific, and therefore must be created and shaped to resonate with what in the text is considered important by whoever is shaping it. Here, as done by the fan community, it centers on what they consider important i.e. McGoohan, individualism, and uniqueness. While it can be argued that the basic understanding of place as a paratext is simply factual – the acknowledgement that something is filmed somewhere – what Portmeirion and *The Prisoner* shows is that it can go deeper. This fact becomes a starting point, something to be adapted and used in order to say something else about the text.

That Portmeirion is used in this way can also be useful in explaining film and media tourism more generally. While

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there is a growing body of literature on the phenomenon (see Connell 2012; Reijnders 2011; Waysdorf 2017), there is often a gap in understanding the connections between these visits and fandom of the film or television show in question, particularly in terms of how this relates to the motivation of the tourists. Why is it so appealing for fans to visit, or even be interested in, these places?

This study suggests that the idea of place as an unintentional paratext can fill this gap. The experience and knowledge of a place can be a new way of understanding a well-loved text, by understanding how it was created and by exploring its thematic and diegetic elements in a different way. It can also serve to emphasize particular shared meanings of the text, as fans (or industry) map values onto the text through its use of space and use of the place's existing narratives. In linking these values to the meaning the place is already said to have, they are further legitimized.

The Prisoner fans interviewed here are a good example of how this works. By drawing on Portmeirion's narratives of artistry and individuality, these aspects of *The Prisoner* are highlighted. They are also circulated through the intertextual space of paratexts, many of which reference Portmeirion, and are further enshrined by continuing to visit Portmeirion. Through these visits, the connection is refreshed and celebrated, confirming that their fandom is worthwhile.

While the close relationship that *The Prisoner* fandom has with Portmeirion is somewhat unique, it is possible that fans of other texts can also use place in this fashion. This can be seen in studies of *Lord of the Rings* tourism in New Zealand (Buchmann et al. 2010; Peaslee 2011), where connection to the heroic themes of the text are emphasized, although the specific term 'paratext' is not used. In calling this process paratextual, this research brings a new way of understanding the importance of these places to tourists, while also connecting media tourism more firmly to audience practices. It is also necessary to look at the way fans make use of space and spatial discourses in their fan practices, as they draw out particular values that fans wish to highlight and potentially connect with through physical experience. This provides a more nuanced understanding of why media tourism endures, and what it as a practice offers to fans.

In looking at how place can be used this way, it is also shown how place can function as an unintended paratext – a paratext not designed as a paratext. This draws the discussion on media tourism into the debate around transmedia. In this context, media tourism can be seen as another way to access and understand a textual world, one that already exists across different media and in different contexts. Indeed, what the example of Portmeirion shows is that place might be more important than previously theorized. It can be an important structuring aspect of engagement with a text, one that, in its potential permanence, can endure for a long period of time. In analysing how narratives move across screens, it is therefore worthwhile to also consider how they transcend the screen.

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