

17 Placing fandom

Reflections on film tourism

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Introduction

From 2013–2017, I was lucky enough to research film tourism as part of the *Locating Imagination* project. Over those four years, I conducted three case studies around tourism associated with film and television shows – *Game of Thrones*–related tourism in Belfast, Northern Ireland and Dubrovnik, Croatia; The Wizarding World of *Harry Potter* theme park in Orlando, Florida; and *The Prisoner* and its main filming location, Portmeirion in North Wales. In this chapter, I review the results of this project, reflecting on what these three cases, in combination, suggest about film tourism and its future.

As Karpovich (2010) discusses, the focus on meaning-making and representation in many of the qualitative studies of film tourism means that they dwell on whether the tourist is experiencing the “media” or the “reality”. 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? 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 is and the implications of it being met or not. 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 was missing from both these perspectives is how these places are actually experienced, beyond the issue of whether they are authentic, and how, once experienced, they are incorporated into the practices and lives of their visitors. It was this niche that I focused on in my research. The use of three case studies means that I was able to consider different examples of film tourism against each other using their similarities and differences.

This involved two main research questions. The first 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; 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.

This then moved 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; Jenkins, 1992, 2006). In the digital age, fandom is largely seen as centred 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 affects 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. Fantasy worlds are “unreal” on multiple levels, being not only fictional but departing from our own world. In these cases, reality and fiction can’t be compared directly, as might be the case for more mimetic screen fictions (Torchin, 2002; see also Chapters 6, 8, and 12 in this volume). That fans wish to visit these places at all raises important questions about the way in which we as 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.

Understanding film tourism

I believe that film tourism can only be understood by understanding the discourses of both tourism and fandom studies. Contemporary tourism, as argued by Urry (2002; 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 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 & 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. 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 multisensory 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 multisensory 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 to the Romantic ideal of sightseeing.

This is because of *fandom*. Here, I use Sandvoss’ (2005: 8) definition of the term, “the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text”. 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, 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 fan’s head in the way that “real” people and places might. There is a clear understanding that these places are fictional, yet, as Reijnders (2011) notes, 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 pretence, even if just for a moment, that it has collapsed.

However, the idea of “entering into” another world is only part of a larger issue of how film tourists and fans relate to the multiple worlds we inhabit. This idea of using tourism to encounter the fictional and fantastic is now a

standard practice, recognized across fandoms. This suggests that it is enacted not only for its own sake but because of what participating in it represents. Visiting these spaces not only plays with the interrelation between our world and the text's but provides a way to reflect on ones' fandom. 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 in full: that of commemoration. Reijnders' (2011) 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.

Therefore, 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. 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.

The experience of film tourism and its role in fandom

My exploration of film tourism was based on two main research questions. They were based on 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? The fans involved in each case I investigated 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. I defined film tourism as an "imaginative experience", (Waysdorf, 2017) building on Reijnders' (2011) centring 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. This mode was joined by the production mode, which was based around imagining the production of the show. 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. For fans of *The Prisoner*, the hyperdiegetic mode is seen not only in the re-enactments but in the way that fans still often draw on the show to describe the locations or in use of specific terminology. 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 series creator and star 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 architect 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 *Game of Thrones* fans, 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 looking at the Wizarding World of Harry Potter (WWOHP), 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 were 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. It is this physical experience 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 aware that WWOHP is a construction and therefore also use the production mode of imagination. 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.

Yet the historical mode is almost entirely absent. This can perhaps be explained by WWOHP being a section of a theme park. As I have discussed (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018), theme parks are considered "set-apart" spaces, outside of normal life. Constructed away from their host cities, on isolated land, this set-apart character is both part of their appeal and 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. 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 fulfils 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 to an archway or rock that would otherwise be any other, 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 trans-media 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 for *Game of Thrones* fans. 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.

Despite these differences, what is most important in any imaginative experience 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 shown in the

imaginative modes previously, it is impossible to come up with one totalizing answer to how these places are imaginatively experienced. However, there is one commonality to all parts: the importance of the embodied experience of the location – of physically being there.

For *Game of Thrones* fans, this embodiment is discussed in terms of getting a “sense” of and gaining knowledge about the show. Having an embodied experience with the locations involved in creating the show is the crucial part of the exploratory nature of its tourism. They learned more about a show that is still shrouded in mystery, supplementing what they know from the screen with this physical knowledge. At WWOHP, 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 park’s affordances. Here, they can eat, drink, smell, and move as if they were part of it, their imagination enhanced by the fully embodied experience. It is this feeling that underpins the other relationships that fans develop with WWOHP. For the *Prisoner* fans interviewed, 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 are considered crucial parts of the tourist experience. The multisensory, 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.

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. It is this embodied experience that allows the imaginative modes to function. 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. 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. 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, 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 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.

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. They "provide a form of permanence to what would otherwise be a potentially fleeting pre-verbal experience" (Hills, 2002: 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. 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

previously. It is also useful, however, to consider 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, but it is also seen at the other locations. Fans visiting WWOHP 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 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, 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. Being at a filming location that is frequently visited by fans links the fan to this history. The fans that perform in re-enactments at the site of filming connect themselves not only to *The Prisoner* but also to the fans that have performed these re-enactments over the decades. They personally connect to their fellow fans and, in many cases, to their own memories. At WWOHP, the sheer volume of other fans 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. 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.

In my research, I also encountered many fans who do not act as fans when outside of these locations. While they might discuss their favourite show or film with family members and friends, they rarely ventured 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, but 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” support 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 (Hennig, 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. 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 re-enactments, 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 focus 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 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; Porter, 2004; Geraghty, 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 centres, 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 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 more special than meeting elsewhere. For “non-participatory” fans, the space of the fan convention is also confusing in a way that places of fandom are not. They have their own social norms and modes of behaviour 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. 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). 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.

This potential also speaks to the way that the role of these places of fandom for fans changes over time. For *Game of Thrones* fans, 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. For *Harry Potter* fans, 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, 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. 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 was, 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, 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 fulfils 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. 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.

Conclusion

I think of this research 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.

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