

“FREE FOR ALL” MAGAZINE (2001-2007) examined various aspects of the “Prisoner” series in a periodical feature **“WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT?”**. Here is a combined collection from some issues.

As is known, the penultimate story, "Once Upon A Time", was made several months before "Fall Out" and at a time when nobody knew how the series was going to end. When "Once" was produced, the strange goings-on in "Fall Out" had not been envisaged. It is said that "Once" was to be the 'cliffhanger' ending of a first series of 13 episodes. However, as the months passed, and McGoohan went to Hollywood to film the movie "Ice Station Zebra", a final 4 “Prisoner” stories were devised. So let's look at "Once" in situ, with no peek over the horizon at the series' finale. It was of course a clever feat to match up the ending of the penultimate story with the beginning of the last one, but that's for discussion another day.

The episode is loosely based on the "Seven Ages of Man", from Shakespeare's "As You Like It", Act 2, Scene 7. No doubt Patrick McGoohan, who wrote and directed the episode, intended to stir into the script aspects of his days on stage with repertory and other theatre companies, as well as the autobiographical references which can be found within the plot.

At times, the set is lit with an overhead spotlight, into which McGoohan stares. He always declared in his early acting days how the stage lights would present him with an invisible barrier between himself and the audience. Perhaps he felt this (either for himself or for his character No. 6) in relation to the world at large i.e. having a secret 'world' inside his own head and indeed the 'secret' domain which is one's inner self. That is the main allegory when “The Prisoner” is minutely examined. The captors want to find out why the prisoner resigned. As for ourselves, if we were being interrogated, we would be hesitant to give away our inner feelings or private elements of our character.

The creating of “The Prisoner” was itself multi-layered as McGoohan was resigning from Danger Man, using apparently the same character, John Drake, whose shoes he had worn for several years, and wanting to make a 'statement' about either his own life or the world at large, or both. He was very vocal at the time about the Vietnamese war, technology, progress, liberalism and disappearing morals, as well as supporting religious beliefs. It is no wonder then that many of these facets can be found within "Once Upon A Time".



Perhaps the main aspect of being a prisoner comes from our own surroundings and mortality. We cannot (as yet) really leave the planet and we cannot live beyond our expected lifespan. Thus with the “Seven Ages of Man”, McGoohan penned the on-screen events which we would witness during the "Degree Absolute" session, in a chamber underneath the Village. No. 2 could represent the alter ego, or counterpart to our own personality, or mirror image, or contrary figure, however one wishes to regard the premise. Although the two main characters change places at the end of the story, the captor becoming the prisoner and the latter becoming the victor, it is primarily McGoohan and his role which we examine. The actor wove in aspects of his Ratcliffe College education, he being good at boxing and mathematics. He included heavily improvised scenes of war and peppered the "Once" script with theatrical devices and dialogue.

During "Once" we see the childhood and school scenes, followed by those involving the young man, adult and eventually senior citizen. McGoohan had been at his happiest on stage in the Orson Welles production of "Moby Dick". In that theatrical extravaganza, Welles created a play

within a play so that the antics on stage could be explained as actors merely playing the part of other actors who were trying to put on a performance of "Moby Dick". Thus, a giant cardboard whale would be part of the fun and would not be an object of ridicule. Similarly, in "Once Upon A Time", a baby's cot, rattle, blackboard and chalk, swing, buggy and plenty of verbal gibberish do not undermine the impact of the performance.

One approach to the episode is to go back and view each short scene, analysing what was in the writer's mind and what was his basic idea. The script was originally entitled "Degree Absolute". Seemingly McGoohan wanted to use such a device - as sometimes described by prisoners of war, relating tales of brainwashing methods - a topic he often referred to in interviews. However, he also turned instead inwards, examining himself. Such was the trend in the swinging era of that time, with self-examination, gurus and transcendental meditation being in vogue at the time. More about "Once" appears at places below.

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Another fertile topic is the Village itself. What is the place, its regime and band of occupants and 'civil servants'? Like the "Prisoner" series, the Village has various characteristics and there is no single answer. From an obvious angle, the establishment exists as an open prison, physically to retain and restrain inmates. Whether physical obstructions such as mountains and sea prevent escape, or detection by radar, or pursuit by Rover, there is no way out of the place. What happens, throughout the 17 episodes, is that the Village changes its substance: at first, a real place with people kept against their will and in the end, an imaginary place which is symbolic; the prisoner is escaping, the Village is crumbling around him and he is a free man.

George Markstein wanted to base the Village on a real place (probably Inverlair Lodge in Scotland) where captives of war and beyond were kept as they either knew too much or were too dangerous to be allowed their freedom. They were held in relative comfort and apparently saw out their days as guests of the government, although being kept a secret and not really knowing why or by whom they were being held, or for how long.

Thus it was that the Village was initially conceived as a place where neither the prisoners nor the viewers would know which side was running the regime. It was even possible that No. 6's 'own side' was running it, keeping people with sensitive information away from the public and the media. No. 2 in "The Chimes of Big Ben" referred to the Village as being the ideal model for the future, the whole earth becoming run along Village lines. The Orwellian nature of the Village comes through in sequences like the aversion therapy room, the propaganda in papers like the Tally Ho and the slogans on signs dotted throughout the grounds. There are other obvious influences: Kafka, Lewis Carroll and Aldous Huxley (the education system in The General not unlike the one in "Brave New World").



During the run of episodes, No. 6 becomes very confused as to who is an agent of the Village and who is a true ally. In the opening episode, Arrival, the former colleague of No. 6, Cobb, is now working for No. 2. In "The Chimes of Big Ben" his former associates even appear to be situated in the Village. In "Many Happy Returns", it would seem that the Colonel and Thorpe are instrumental in having No. 6 return to the Village. The clear message here is that their man is too dangerous to be allowed to roam free and must be sent back. This begs the question as to why he was permitted to escape in the first place, but let's not get too deeply into what is just TV

entertainment.

By the middle of the series, No. 6 has found that the Village has cruel methods when it comes to brainwashing (people like Dutton in "Dance Of The Dead" and the Rook in "Checkmate"), peculiar pastimes, like human chess, as well as weaknesses which can be exploited (as No. 6 causes the downfall of No. 2 in "Hammer Into Anvil"). However, as the last few episodes are reached, the Village is using extreme methods (fake lobotomy, or "Degree Absolute"), to extract No. 6's secrets.

These show that time is running out for the Village and risks are even being taken that the mind which contains the secrets might be damaged permanently and be unable to reveal them. Throughout the episodes, the paramount question is who is No. 1? Several of the No. 2 characters are seen to speak to the anonymous entity via the red phone. By "Fall Out" the identity of No. 1 is exposed, but the episode itself has become allegorical and it is not really appropriate to take the explanation as to No. 1's identity as a literal one.

In the end, the Village is seen as one's own prison, the baggage which we carry around with us. Even George Markstein was prepared to accede to this interpretation, as he described how we are all prisoners of our looks, our physical abilities, our finances and so on. We cannot move home or change jobs as easily as we might wish to do so. We cannot divest ourselves of responsibilities and therefore, in a way, we all have our own Village.

The fact that Markstein was prepared to allow this notion to coexist with his vision of Invelair Lodge is a little surprising. After all, Markstein left the series when McGoohan, in the script editor's view, was taking the episodes into territory far too surreal. Thus in "Living In Harmony" the Village becomes an imaginary wild west landscape; in "The Girl Who Was Death" the Village is merely a subject for a bedtime story. Finally, in "Fall Out", the place is evacuated by everyone, TV audiences included.

There is no doubt that the Village itself contributed to the longevity of "The Prisoner" series. It was not just McGoohan's appeal, clever scripting and editing, exciting filming, impressive acting and original artistic direction which made the series what it was. Primarily it is the Village which is remembered and in the end it defines our own views of freedom. If we given luxurious surroundings, but are told that we cannot leave, the place becomes a prison.

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"Fall Out" was, some say, simply the result of a sudden ending being brought to "The Prisoner" series. There were reports at the time that the programme had either exceeded its budget, or was not gaining the audiences which had been anticipated at the start of the run. Therefore, as no better theory has emerged, it is assumed for this study that the curtain was brought down, cancelling any second series. The first 13 episodes had been filmed and it was intended that "Once Upon A Time" would be the end of the first season. Audiences would be left with a cliff-hanger, not knowing if No. 6 would meet No. 1 or not.

McGoohan took a leave of absence to go to Hollywood and film the movie "Ice Station Zebra". The production team had to make "Do Not Forsake Me..." mainly without him and this was the first problem. The second arose from the fact that most of the crew's contracts had come to an end and many of the technical people had gone to work on new programmes.



Although script editor George Markstein had made his exit, producer David Tomblin stayed with the series and upon McGoohan's return two more episodes were completed: "Living In Harmony" and "The Girl", as well as "Forsake". As there were not going to be another 13 episodes, it is rumoured that McGoohan worked feverishly on completing the final episode and that this was created not long before it was due to be shown on TV.

"Fall Out" in many ways stands separately from the rest of the series, although it was tagged onto the end of "Once Upon A Time". The action depends on much symbolism and the main message is clearly that the world needs love and peace rather than war (something which has not become stale during the subsequent 50 years). However, the original theme of the series was about freedom of the individual and so McGoohan stirred into "Fall Out" the No. 48 character, a Hippie youth who wanted no responsibilities. Additionally, McGoohan brought back Leo McKern, as a popular face in the series, having him 're-born' to be free of the No. 2 mantle. He also brought back Kenneth Griffith who had only just been recently involved in the "Girl" episode.



Therefore with the same sets used for "Fall Out" as in "The Girl" and some of the same people, it may be that McGoohan needed to make the best he could out of a sudden requirement to bring it all to a close. Alexis Kanner had appeared in the "Harmony" and "Girl" episodes and so "Fall Out" took on the appearance of a 'last night party', not unlike the celebrations which occur at the end of a long theatrical run. With McGoohan's repertory roots, he might well have wanted to have a finale with some curtain calls and a closing chapter that was more action-packed than the sombre earlier episodes.

Thus the Hippie is the symbol of modern youth, and the use of The Beatles' track "All You Need Is Love" resulted from the song having been a hit record during the recent summer of 1967. Emphasis has been put upon the religious elements inherent in "Fall Out", the "Dem Bones" gospel song and the meeting with No. 1 being likened to one meeting one's Maker, or the Creator.

The message McGoohan wanted to convey was that we all carry our prison around with us and it is possible to escape by becoming free and overcoming whatever ordeal we are experiencing at any particular time in our lives. The brief ape scene was meant to show what we are descended from and that we are, in the actor's view' the most dangerous species on the planet.

George Markstein scoffed at "Fall Out" and thought that the original premise of the series had been lost. A writer in the press claimed that the secret behind "Fall Out" was that No. 6 had been captured by The Village to test whether he was capable of standing as Prime Minister of the country (England) in any future time of national crisis. The launching of the rocket at the end of the episode reflected the world's preoccupation with going to the moon and also with facing a nuclear threat.

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This time we spread our net across all of the episodes and consider the establishment responsible for holding No. 6 against his will. Who is behind the regime, what is the nature of the place and how do things differ from story to story? We place under scrutiny the mysterious setting we see on our TV sets, sharing the same initials, "The Village".

Even before any episodes were screened, the ITC advance publicity was describing how

the Village is a mysterious place, how it could be anywhere and how nobody seems to know who runs the place. Therefore it is no good looking for any 'official' help and we can only consider what is placed before us on our screens.

In "Arrival", No. 6 wakes up in what appears to be his own home, but soon sees, through the window, that his surroundings are certainly not London. He learns the 'name' of the place, but its title has no more use than do the places shown on a map, such as "Mountains", "Beach" or "Sea". In "The Chimes Of Big Ben" he is told that his prison is 30 miles from the Polish border. He certainly does leave by sea and this is a true physical journey, although the rest of his trip is concealed from him while he is packed into a crate. Of course, he learns finally that he is back in the Village and it is not clear whether he ever got far away from the place.

In "Free For All" the prisoner is told that the Village has its own electoral system and therefore we assume that it is a self-governing community. The one thing which distinguishes it from other towns or hamlets is that there is no escape. No. 2 told No. 6 in "Chimes" that he was a "lifer". This was an odd statement, bearing in mind that the No. 2 figure changes in each story. In "The General" we learn that the Village is out to brainwash its citizens, by pumping educational facts into them and gradually becoming able to 'educate' them into 'learning' whatever propaganda is fed to them. This would make for a very obedient electorate.

By the time of "Many Happy Returns" No. 6 once again manages to get away from the Village. In a relatively few days he reaches England and we viewers are told that the Village is now located somewhere off the Moroccan coast. Whether this is true or not, we never find out, as No. 6 is unceremoniously dropped back into the Village, by parachute, after being ejected from his reconnaissance plane. Certainly the No. 2 character is present and so the place must only be a short hop from London, where she was last seen.



In "Checkmate" we learn that the old man with a stick has been in the Village for a long time. He does not seem to have capitulated, but perhaps whatever information he held has been extracted from him and he has just been left to live out the rest of his days in the captive community. However, in the preceding episode "Dance Of The Dead" the condemned man Roland Walter Dutton was having his secrets extracted in a fairly invasive fashion, rendering him an imbecile in a short space of time. Whether this was just for No. 6's benefit, to shock him into complying, or whether certain No. 2 characters use more extreme methods, we do not know. No. 6 said in the same Dutton story that he was "new here" and so shock tactics might have been in No. 2's mind (or her sinister doctor friend).

"Hammer Into Anvil" tells us that by this point, No. 6 has concluded that No. 2 characters can be replaced and he looks for their vulnerability. In the following story It's Your Funeral, we hear that there can be an outgoing No. 2 and an incoming new one. The retiring No. 2 has either outlived his usefulness, or the younger leader is over-ambitious.

Things get rather technical by the time of "Do Not Forsake Me Oh My Darling" and the mind of No. 6 is allowed to wander free, in the body of a Village agent. Similarly, in "Living In Harmony" a hallucinatory experiment takes No. 6 mentally to the old Wild West. After "The Girl Who Was Death" we are suddenly back in the Village for "Once Upon A Time", filmed months before the last few episodes, and a week long struggle to break No. 6 is taking place, with the No. 2 from "Chimes" being returned to the Village. Only he and the leader from "A. B. and C." and "The General" enjoy this two-term privilege.

In "Fall Out" the escaping Prisoners leave the Village in a truck, which is driven along a

tunnel and crashes out through some metal bars. Now we find that the Village is not far from London at all and on a single tank of petrol the three men return to the nation's capital. This is the last we see of the Village and for all we know it is blown up completely and evacuated forever by its wardens and inmates. One matter which is never cleared up is what happened to the rocket which was fired as the prisoners escaped. Of course, the launch of the missile was figurative and the symbolic departure from the Village was another metaphoric slice of action.

Thus The Village is presented as a real place in some stories. It is unlikely that it could be recreated perfectly in other locations, without No. 6 spotting some differences (although they did create a replica of him quite successfully in "The Schizoid Man"). Therefore assuming that the Village stays in one place and is a physical location, we need only examine the powers which run the place and what is its purpose. Mention is made of No. 1 a few times and in "Fall Out" there is a 'meeting' with this fantasy figure.



However, it is hard not to believe that the series' ending was dreamed up later and grafted onto the earlier episodes. If while - during what might be called the Markstein 13 - No. 6 is visibly in The Village, there was actually a changing succession of No. 2s, we have a more simple scenario i.e. person from secret job gets abducted and held in an attempt to wrest from him his secrets. However, theories have been put forward about the Village being in the prisoner's imagination or even, taking conceptual conjecture to its limit, that it is a representation of what we viewers imagine in our daily lives i.e. our own 'prison walls', put there as restrictions we all face during daily life.

The doctrine of existentialism has the individual as a free and responsible person, determining his or her own fate. It could therefore be argued that the Village is the opposite of this, being whatever prevents us from enjoying that freedom. The ordinary human being is - perhaps to avoid mere anonymity - sometimes given the name Everyman. Perhaps Patrick McGoohan was influenced by this notion, even though his eponymous film production company had been formed a half a dozen years before The Prisoner project began.

Clearly, the different descriptions of the Village and its location in various episodes cannot be resolved, nor can the puzzle as to who runs the place (in "Many Happy Returns" we suspect that it is the prisoner's own side.) What it is therefore, if anything, or what it represents, is a matter for each viewer's own interpretation.

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In this final edition of our studies in "Prisoner" psychology, we consider the way in which The Village and its leaders try to break No. 6. This is not just a simple account of the methods they use, but more a case of considering why they go to such lengths and whether easier approaches might have been taken. Of course, it's all meant to make us find "The Prisoner" puzzling and unusual - or quirky, as the series is often described - but we need to look deeper into the goings-on, to appreciate what No. 6's captors were about. So let's take a trip through the Village handbook of interrogations techniques and try to discover what was the purpose of it all.

In "Arrival" No. 6 is left alone, physically and mentally speaking. Apart from a dose of summary punishment, meted out by a giant white sphere on the beach, he is not drugged or beaten, his only unwanted physical experiences are negative ones, inasmuch as he is not allowed to escape. This is demonstrated to him by means of not only a remote control helicopter, but also

implanting suspicion that even people he thinks he knows or who have befriended him, might not be trustworthy. In "The Chimes Of Big Ben" the same course is taken and No. 6 is tricked into believing that he has escaped.

It is not until "A. B. and C." that the first drugs invade No. 6 and his psyche is probed. Through dreams - on the assumption that we do not hide our feelings or even our 'soul' while asleep - No. 2 hopes to find out why No. 6 resigned and whether he was selling out. Similarly, in "Free For All" he is drugged to make him believe that he is running in a Village election and that he even wins and is going to become the leader. More brainwashing and this time physical 'makeover' moves occur in "The Schizoid Man". No. 6 has to endure not only doubting whether he is 'himself', but also experiences some roughing up.

In "The General" No. 6 is partially brainwashed, along with the rest of the community, but it is more a case of indoctrination. McGoochan had a pet hate with TV commercials and how things that were happening on TV sets in homes across the world were making people behave in inappropriate ways. What he would have thought if 'reality TV' shows had existed then is probably unprintable. In "Many Happy Returns" he had an experience similar to that in the "Chimes" story, being made to think that he had escaped but then finding himself back in the Village. "Dance of the Dead" is another 'mental cruelty' plot, with No. 6 fearing the same fate that befell his former colleague Dutton.

"Checkmate" shows No. 6 how brainwashing can be used to ensure compliance in a subject. The Rook is dehydrated and given electric shocks, before he will obey commands given to him. "Hammer Into Anvil" is a case of the tables being turned, with No. 6 using the same kind of psychological torment on No. 2 as he has experienced himself on occasions.



In "It's Your Funeral" there is still no drugging or physical abuse, but some fake film footage is meant to convince No. 6 that he has lost his short-term memory and was seen making false bomb hoax reports to interim No. 2 characters. This is all fairly mild stuff until "A Change Of Mind" raises the stakes. No. 6 is not only fed drugs but is made to believe that he has undergone a lobotomy operation. Probably any one of us would rather, in enemy hands, have a limb removed than to have our brains partially deactivated. This is a cruel programme devised by No. 2 to break No. 6 and to make him compliant. If that were not enough, in "Do Not Forsake Me Oh My Darling" No. 6 has his whole mind removed from his head (but not his brain physically) and implanted into a Village agent.

Thus he is able to have an out-of-body experience, with the agent travelling back to London and across Europe, seeing the world through No. 6's eyes. Despite such a drastic assault on the central nervous system, No. 6 seems no worse for wear when at the end of the story he sits up and boasts that the person departing has the mind of Professor Seltzman, that he and the old Prof have tricked No. 2 and the agent now has a lot less time to live, in the body of an ageing scientist.

The mental assaults continue in "Living In Harmony ". No. 6 is allowed to keep his own body but is given some hallucinogenic treatment which makes him believe that he is in the Wild West, now a cowboy. The shock he obviously undergoes at the end of the story comes from realising that he is now back in the 'future' and that people he thought he knew never existed. It would be understandable if he completely broke down at this point, but we seem him adjust quite quickly and he rushes to let No. 2 know that No. 6 regards the Village leader as a bad lot.

Pause for "The Girl Who Was Death", a story which makes it clear that the recent attacks on No. 6's mind have rendered him temporarily not in control of his senses. He dreams up a story which he relays to No. 2 and it is every bit as real as the "Harmony" fantasy. At least the excursion allows him to become himself again, but only for a short while before "Once Upon A Time" finds him subjected once more to a regime of mental torture. In the "Once" story, he is given hypnotherapy to regress him back to childhood and throughout the seven day ordeal he is gradually taken through stages of his life. The Village hopes to find out what in his make-up was responsible for his rebelliousness. At the same, No. 2 hopes to find out why No. 6 resigned and yells this question at him. With a few knocks around the head (hardly conducive to making him reveal his innermost self) and deprivation of light and society, No. 6 emerged from near solitary confinement having overpowered his captor and mentally swapped places with him.



Is this story the precursor to "Fall Out"? Are we being shown here that we are our own gaolers and that we have the power within us to be in control or a victim of our own sense of failure? Moving on to the final story, No. 6 this time is hailed as a hero, freed and given back his life. He managed to survive without cracking up and without giving The Village the information they sought. Why they suddenly decided that this secret material was no longer wanted is an unresolved question. The episode certainly fuels the hypothesis that the past seventeen weeks' (in our time) events had been imaginary ones as far as the central character was concerned. There is an impossibility here, like the theoretical problem of travelling faster than the speed of light. What we can't do, if we 'lose our mind', is later, if we regain our mental health, describe or even remember accurately what we were thinking or imagining. In the film "A Matter Of Life And Death" (1946) the main figure is close to dying, lying in a hospital bed. He has a number of encounters with strange people and is placed in several surreal settings. A similar plot was followed earlier in the famous "The Wizard of Oz" (1939) movie when Dorothy, a child later seen to be ill in bed, visits the land of Oz. Was The Prisoner influenced by these previous screen appearances?

There was certainly no other TV series like "The Prisoner" around the time it was made or for quite a while before or after the series first aired. Thus, given the changing times of the Sixties and the new-found freedom to break away from earlier TV formats, it was McGoohan's opportunity to express himself and show a man constantly being attacked physically and mentally. He spoke at the time of prisoners of war, made to endure dreadful and lengthy conditions, coming back brainwashed. The movie "The Manchurian Candidate" (1962) influenced writer Roger Parkes who scripted "A Change Of Mind". It is therefore concluded here that the attempts to break No. 6's spirit (sometimes dressed up as an exercise in extracting his resignation secret) were what the writers and producers wanted to place before us.

The rest of the series - beautiful village, colourful costumes, strange goings-on - were the 'window-dressing' while the core of the series was the resistance, rebellion and strong will of the prisoner. This central thread ran through stories, whether they are to be likened to a mythical legend, an odyssey or even a reworking of a Shakespearean play. We all like to think of ourselves as being strong, dominant and as capable of emerging victorious in any conflict or difficult situation. By having numerous attempts to overcome No. 6 with drugs, violence or deprivation, he was shown winning through. That's how we like our heroes and that's how we want to be too. And that was what it was all about.

Over the years "The Prisoner" has developed an identity of its own. It remains unchanged insofar as people interpret it in different ways. With other long-running series - especially sitcoms that go through many seasons - the product changes gradually over time. In the case of "The Prisoner" the relatively short life of the series meant that it was fixed in time and in a very particular era. As the decade in question has long since passed, the surrounding trends or environment or circumstances are not likely to recur. Thus we have "The Prisoner" being in some ways an inert object, being brought to life only by the people upon whom it has an effect or within whom it causes a reaction.

This simplistic view just expressed is not the entirety of the focus of our study. Anything, whether book, painting or song, could have an effect and yet be said to be unchanged in itself. What makes "The Prisoner" different is that for the purposes of this present argument it is being advanced that the series was not about anything at all and yet gave the appearance, most definitely, of being about something. The content of each story can be analysed, but probably most people would feel that the exercise is not as valuable as one which takes in all 17 episodes and views the series as a whole. The development of the episodes came about to some extent by chance but the unexpected and surprise 'killer ending' was in the fact that the last shot in "Fall Out" was effectively the first from "Arrival". All at once, the viewer began to see that the episodes were linked, even though they had separate storylines and each was self-contained.



With the addition of a surreal finale or allegorical exposition, the effect "The Prisoner" has was to make viewers start looking backwards, to review the series and try and piece it all back together. For students of "The Prisoner" in its original decade or the following one, during repeat screenings, there were few aids other than one's own memory. It was not until the '80s that books and videos began to appear en masse and there followed a proliferation of magazine articles. Before this, however, frustrated viewers would need to recall events from episodes which had been screened up to 4 months earlier. Therefore that first catalytical viewing would only occur the once, and after that, in more modern times, people would look at the series with the benefit of video tapes or now DVDs. Already the medium of appreciating "The Prisoner" has changed. The initial content may be pristine but already reactions to it are causing subtitles to be added, commentaries by involved persons, captions on menus and compilations. It is as though people are wanting to cut up the living body to find out how works, ending up only with a corpse in pieces. It is soon seen that the series cannot be meddled with, episodes cannot be mixed up or interchanged and the 17 stories have an integrity like no other series.

So much for the nature of "The Prisoner", the media through which it is presented and the different peoples and countries who enjoy viewings or transmissions. Let's put aside all of the books, new fiction, poring over the original scripts and instead look at what came out of our screens and what reaction it caused. George Markstein used to say that questions like asking whether No. 6's furniture was literally taken to the other cottage in the Village were pointless and it was up to each individual to decide whether the question had any importance. Similarly, some characters appear in both London and The Village, suggesting that they physically travel between the places (we do see No. 6 in a jet plane going back to the place). This would be ridiculous and clearly the mystery element of "The Prisoner", its quirkiness or its puzzles are presented on screen in an actual filmed manner. However, the way we see the events is subject to whatever reaction we have had to the particular scene or story or series.

"The Prisoner" might not have been about anything at all. It is often stated in articles and by those connected with the series that it was a look at the right to be an individual, or an allegory about a number of different facets of life, or a straightforward spy story, inspired by actual wartime practices. There have been more theories about "The Prisoner" and its 'meaning' than could be contained within just this one issue of a magazine. However, none of these theories are borne out visually or as a result of any actual content of the various stories. The theories emanate from the reactions people have to the episodes as a whole. Interestingly, forty years on, "The Prisoner" is still having its same effect on viewers today. Its role as a catalyst continues and yet the content of the stories and the series as a whole remains unchanged.

So, let's introduce apparently for the first time - at least in any circles in which this writer has entered - another theory, the concept of nihilism. Initially this can be the rejection of religious or moral principles, but in a more abstract fashion a nihilist will assert that nothing really exists at all. Let's look at the facts: No. 6 did not exist (he had no name as far as we know); the Village did not exist (once the man had broken free, the place blew up and never returned); the notion of freedom never existed either. The last of those statements might draw an objection from people who do believe in the notion of freedom. The elusive state is no easier to obtain today than it ever was. Also, "The Prisoner" did not preach morals or follow any particular cause or religion. Its universality may have succeeded by virtue of the fact that the series was about nothing at all.



Draw a circle or a square on a white wall in an art gallery, place a bench in front of it and people will sit down, appreciate the image and find plenty to say about it. Put a dot or a cross somewhere inside the circle or square and there will be twice as much discussion and appreciation. In "The Prisoner", the abundance of different events and visual occurrences through the stories made for a massive amount of interpretation. This is not to say that The Prisoner was fraudulent or that its supposed premise was false. We simply cannot put our finger on the central part or theme of the series and this might be because there was none. Anyway, we've had plenty of articles printed throughout Six of One's history which have attempted to unravel the meaning behind "The Prisoner".

Has anybody ever succeeded? Apparently not, as the discussion remains ongoing, but perhaps the true reason for this is that the series was about nothing at all. The episodes existed (as did, in a real sense, those who took part, the equipment and the celluloid film stock) but the content of the series, its essence and raison may not have existed at all. The beliefs and visions of the series which people around the world have developed within themselves may be as imaginary as the events which were experienced by No. 6.

A favourite quote of this writer from the series comes from "Dance Of The Dead" when No. 6 declares that "Everything is elsewhere. By the time you think you have the answers, the series has gone, the episodes are no longer being viewed and the only images remaining are in one's own head. Of course the episodes can be switched on again, but they are then back in their original state, unchanged and merely waiting to become a catalyst again. How long the process takes depends upon the viewer and sometimes the catalyst that is "The Prisoner" causes different reactions and different results, whether in different people or simply the same person at different times. Even McGoohan claimed that his creation was an abstract look at life. There you have it, the man responsible for the show claims that it didn't really exist.

Even architect Clough Williams-Ellis used to exhibit signs and publish notices that "Portmeirion Does Not Really Exist". All the people who worked on "The Prisoner" claimed that they did not know what it was really all about. Only latter-day scholars who have studied the series claim to know what was its meaning. Perhaps the series was just a hook upon which we hang our own feelings or beliefs. You put your imaginary coat onto the hook, walk away and then turn round to find your coat on the floor; the hook was imaginary too.

Roger Langley