

Tér-iszony. Szörnyűséges terek a populáris kultúrában, edited by Ildikó Limpár, Tortoma, Barót, 2024.

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The volume entitled *Tér-iszony. Szörnyűséges terek a populáris kultúrában* (Space-Phobia – Horrific Spaces in Popular Culture), edited by Ildikó Limpár, published by Tortoma in Barót (Romania) in 2024, offers an exciting and multifaceted analysis of the role of fictional spaces in popular culture. The volume's authors highlight that fictional spaces are not merely backdrops but actively contribute to the unfolding of narrative and the psychological and social dimensions of characters. These spaces can express fear, alienation, power structures, or even fundamental questions about the nature of reality.

In the introduction, Limpár points out that human thought has always tended to populate unknown spaces with monsters. The studies in the volume examine types of spaces that evoke anxiety in pop culture and demonstrate how these spaces reflect social tensions, cultural traumas, or collective fears. One of the book's greatest strengths is that it does not limit itself to spaces in traditional horror or sci-fi literature but takes a broader perspective on the relationship between space and fiction.

Monika Rusvai's study of Naomi Novik's novel *Uprooted*, seamlessly aligning with contemporary posthumanist thought, approaches the text from an eco-gothic perspective, exploring the duality that characterizes humanity's relationship with nature. Rusvai's sensitive reading reveals how, in this novel, nature emerges not only as a spatial but also an ethical and ontological challenge for modern humans.

Annamária Hódosy discusses the moral dilemmas present in pandemic films, with particular emphasis on quarantine narratives and their metaphorical significance. She highlights as central the dilemma where individuals must choose between the self-preserving instinct for survival and responsibility toward others. According to her analysis, most quarantine narratives underscore humanity's inclination toward solidarity, even when offering help entails significant personal risks.

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Vera Benczik's study investigates the representation of posthuman landscapes in various post-apocalyptic texts, showing how these spaces evoke complex emotional responses, especially when tensions arise between human and posthuman perspectives. The works analyzed – *The Girl with All the Gifts*, Paolo Bacigalupi's writings, and Sara Genge's short story *Shoes to Run* – each activate this dynamic in distinct ways. A particularly striking example is Genge's text, where the reader's empathy shifts toward the posthuman perspective, while the human characters no longer find a home in the radically transformed world.

Áron Domokos offers a particularly compelling outlook through his examination of the Third Reich's spatial practices and memory politics. His study vividly illustrates that terrifying spaces are not merely fictional constructs but take on concrete forms in history. These sites are not only symbols of specific historical periods but also deeply embedded imprints in collective memory, fundamentally shaping how we perceive and interpret space in the present.

András Fodor examines spatial representation in Scandinavian new weird fiction, focusing especially on the liminality of these spaces. His study reveals that these narratives often create blurred, continuously transforming environments where the relationship between human and non-human worlds is unstable and unpredictable. Fodor vividly shows how Scandinavian weird fiction combines folkloric motifs with contemporary horror and speculative fiction elements, producing atmospheres that are simultaneously familiar and alien, homely and threatening.

Kinga Földvály's analysis centres on China Miéville's novel *The City & the City*, where space functions as a metaphor for political and social divisions. Her study demonstrates how spatial arrangements become metaphors for power structures and social fragmentation. In Miéville's novel, the inhabitants of two intertwined cities are forbidden from perceiving each other's worlds. Földvály interprets this separation as one of the most compelling narrative representations of political ideologies and social control in contemporary speculative fiction, examining the novel's fictional spaces through the lens of real-world urban and geopolitical issues.

Anikó Sohár analyzes the maps of Terry Pratchett's Discworld series, offering a fascinating perspective on how mythology, humour, and social commentary are interwoven in this imaginative universe. Pratchett's cartography serves not only as a tool for world-building but also as a parodic commentary on geographical and political maps that attempt to define the real world. Sohár's study highlights that maps are always narrative constructions and explores how humour can function as a means to mock ideological boundaries.

Éva Vancsó's research on urban spaces in popular culture offers fresh perspectives on how metropolises become sources of collective fear and anxiety. Beginning with the biblical motif of the "sinful city" exemplified by Sodom and Gomorrah, she traces the evolution of this theme to contemporary mass culture visions such as the dystopian Los Angeles of *Blade Runner* and Gotham City's morally fractured world. Her study also explores how urban spatial imaginaries intersect with questions of moral order, asking whether the evil embodied by the city can be overcome through an internal ethical force.

Building on this theme, Orsolya Szujer's study, which follows directly after Vancsó's text in the volume, investigates the unique spatial constructions of "suburban gothic." The suburb, as a spatial metaphor for the American Dream, simultaneously promises idyll and harbours menace. Szujer's sensitive analysis reveals that this liminal space is particularly suited as a site for the disruption of social norms, identities, and family structures. Her study is valuable not only from a genre perspective but also offers opportunities for sociological and psychoanalytic readings.

Anna Kérchy's research focuses on Neil Gaiman's children's literature, with special attention to *Coraline* and *The Graveyard Book*. These works frequently play with the idea that everyday spaces can take on grotesque and frightening dimensions from a child's perspective. Kérchy highlights how Gaiman's spaces function both as psychological symbols and as narrative devices for coming-of-age stories.

Norbert Gyuris discusses the spatial experience of labyrinths and mazes, extending his analysis into virtual and simulated worlds. He argues that in modern digital and simulated spaces, even the fundamental conditions of existence become questionable, blurring the boundaries between illusion and reality. Consequently, spatial experience becomes not only an intellectual challenge but also a site of ontological dilemmas.

The volume is concluded by Ildikó Limpár's insightful essay, which analyzes spatial construction in *Westworld* and *The Hunger Games*. Limpár considers the spatial representations in both works as crucial storytelling elements, emphasizing how the horrors depicted reflect modern society's social and cultural difficulties as well as the profound divide between imagined futures and idealized pasts. Limpár points out that empathy gradually shifts from human characters to machine or hybrid figures, indicating the emergence of a new kind of ethical sensitivity.

One of the volume's greatest strengths lies in its balance between scholarly rigor and accessibility. The language and structure of the essays allow both specialists and

readers interested in popular culture to benefit from the insights presented. The book encourages reflection on how fictional spaces influence our understanding of reality and help us comprehend our fears and anxieties. Moreover, the interdisciplinary nature of the volume, examining space as a symbolic and psychological construct makes it relevant not only in literary and film studies but also in fields such as cultural studies, philosophy, history, and even urban studies, sociology and political science, psychoanalysis and narrative theory as well. Through its interdisciplinary approach, *Space-Phobia* demonstrates how the study of fictional spaces can contribute to our understanding of broader cultural and historical processes. This multifaceted approach deepens textual understanding and opens new avenues for research, making the volume simultaneously a handbook, a theoretical foundation, and an inspiring conceptual map for analyzing cultural spatial experience. Overall, *Space-Phobia* provides a thought-provoking and comprehensive overview of horrific spaces in popular culture. It is recommended for anyone interested in the spatial dimensions of fictional worlds – whether they are literary scholars, film enthusiasts, or simply readers intrigued by the fascinating phenomena of pop culture.