

Liminal Spaces

Liminal spaces came to my attention during the quarantine of the covid-19 pandemic. Online forums hosted conversations surrounding liminal spaces that spawned games, stories, and digital renderings. Usually, busy places that are eerily empty were the setting for urban legends that increased in popularity due to fan stories known as “creepypastas”. While Liminal spaces certainly touch on the unsettling and horror-inducing they have also been a concept used as a narrative tool in many classic and modern tales.

My interest was piqued by the feelings evoked by “The Backrooms” so I looked into the phenomena of liminal spaces. Touching on the historical significance of liminal spaces, author Julia Doroszewska points out their reoccurrence in ancient Greek and Roman literature. Narratively these liminal spaces are used as settings for a character’s journey as well as places of tension and suspense. Doroszeska writes “Noticeably, such in-between places are regarded as dangerous since they imply exclusion from the safe, clearly defined, and organized areas, and hence the suspension of order and safety (3)”. The in-between and unsettling nature of the liminal spaces have become a staple tool in fictional literature and have not lost their importance or popularity in recent years.

Many authors have used liminal spaces as a tool for character growth or a place of important change. Published in the Peer-reviewed journal *Mallorn: The Journal of the Tolkien Society*, this article compares two stories written for children that feature the concept of liminal space and how it is a tool used for character growth. The Stories chosen for comparison were *Coraline*, written by Neil Gaiman, and *The Hobbit* by J.R.R Tolkien. Author Kristen Mcquinn highlights the importance of the threshold and how through these liminal spaces the characters are faced with life-changing decisions. The notion of liminal space as physical and theoretical spaces is an interesting concept to study, how a transitional space can create a feeling of change not just physically but mentally as well.

Liminal spaces are places we encounter in our everyday lives even though they may go unnoticed. Presented as a master's thesis to the University of Tennessee for consideration for his master's in architecture, Patrick Zimmerman defines liminal space in architecture as “transitional thresholds between two fixed states”. Passing through a doorway or under a bridge may be something that we don’t really think about but the liminal spaces continue to surround us. Furthering the discussion of architectural liminality Zimmerman states “In cultural contexts, the liminal entity is a person while in architectural contexts it is the space itself (5)”. With this statement, it is easier to

understand the scope of the liminal and how it is not just a space but can also be applied to people.

In closing, liminal spaces have existed for as long as humans have been around to perceive them. They have become important tools for authors and other storytellers as well as places of transition in our everyday lives. My experience with the liminal has been all-encompassing, finding even small insignificant places that may seem even a little bit liminal.

Bibliography

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