



“A Geo-ontological Thump”: Ontological Instability and the Folding City in Mikko Rimminen’s Early Prose

Lieven Ameel

In the Finnish author Mikko Rimminen’s novel *Pölkky* (2007; “Woodblock”),¹ set in present-day Helsinki, one of the most disturbing occurrences is the appearance of a gradually widening hole in the skating rink in Kaisaniemi Park. The skating rink is under the supervision of the protagonist of the novel, and the threat posed by the hole is not only directed at the skaters, or at the hypothetical sense of achievement of the protagonist. As is suggested throughout the novel, the expanding hole and the steam rising from it are potentially of much more far-reaching consequences, intimating the possibility that not only the skating rink, but perhaps fictional Helsinki itself is being subjected to a slow but world-threatening upheaval. This event, which threatens the storyworld’s spatial environment in Rimminen’s second novel, echoes similar events in a range of postmodern literary texts. One parallel is the giant tiger roaming New York’s underground in Jonathan Lethem’s *Chronic City* (2009), which causes the sudden appearance of gaping holes in the city—a refer-

L. Ameel (✉)
University of Turku, Turku, Finland

ence which is of particular interest for its disturbance in the referential relationship with an identifiable urban environment. Like the hole in *Pölkky*, it presents an unreal and ultimately inexplicable occurrence that contrasts the narrated space and the referential world, but that also threatens the stability of the storyworld itself. Such disturbing events in late modern literature will be examined in this chapter as instances of ontological instability, and approached in terms of *folds* in narrated space. I will focus on Mikko Rimminen's early prose texts. One of the aims of this chapter is to propose a new reading of the author's early prose from the perspective of the texts' apocalyptic undercurrents, which have remained largely unappreciated, and to take into account a little-studied extract from an unfinished novel by Rimminen.²

The focus in this chapter is on how the relationship between the fictional city and its referential counterpart is both foregrounded and undermined in a way that destabilizes the ontological status of the storyworlds in question. The texts under discussion here display intimations of apocalypse, inviting the reader to consider whether the ontological instability is located in the perception of the focalizer or narrator, in literary space, or both. The key concepts that will be explored in the analysis of the literary space and storyworld are Brian McHale's *flickering effect* (1987) and Bertrand Westphal's *heterotopic interference* (Westphal 2011, 101). Gilles Deleuze's *fold* (1993) will be proposed here as a heuristic concept to describe how ontological instability in postmodern storyworlds is shaped. I argue that one of the advantages of this concept is the way it defies binary opposites, moving instead toward an understanding of spatial environments in postmodern storyworlds as acting on a holistic, if often paradoxical, continuous plane of meaning.

CITIES AS FOLDS

I want to start with a reflection on the relationship between the literary city and its referential counterpart in the literature of late modernity, tracing the potential of the fold for an understanding of postmodern space with the help of Brian McHale's thoughts on postmodernist literature, and Bertrand Westphal's subsequent reading of McHale. McHale, in *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), has famously argued that postmodern literature is defined by ontological instability—by a profound uncertainty of what can be considered the knowable real in the storyworld. In terms of how space functions within postmodern literature, ontological instability

is a feature first of all of the imagined storyworld, but also a characteristic of the referential relationship between the storyworld and the actual world. Brian McHale's (2003, 34) approach toward literary storyworlds is thus essentially engaged in complicating and weakening fiction's "external boundary." In postmodern literary representations of space, it has become increasingly difficult or indeed impossible for the reader to decipher the ontological attributes of the described spatial environment, or the precise referential relationship between the imagined storyworld and the actual world.

Drawing on the work of Roman Ingarden, Brian McHale refers to the metaphors of "iridescence" and "opalescence," coining the term "flickering effect" to describe the irresolvably ambiguous nature of storyworlds in postmodern fiction:

Ambiguous sentences may project ambiguous objects, objects which are not temporarily but permanently and irresolvably ambiguous. This is not a matter, in other words, of *choosing* between alternative states of affairs, but rather of an ontological oscillation, a flickering effect, or, to use Ingarden's own metaphor, an effect of "iridescence" or "opalescence." And "opalescence" is not restricted to single objects; entire *worlds* may flicker. (McHale 2003, 32)

The visual metaphorizations of "flickering," "iridescence" or "opalescence" suggest that one reality is substituted for another, similar to lights going on or off, or as the angle of view changes. While McHale wants to move away from having to choose, the idea that worlds "flicker" continues to suggest an association with (electric) light, and of worlds subsequently being there and not being there, rather than a continuous and simultaneous state of affairs. In the present reading of postmodern spatialities and their ambiguous ontology, I would like, instead of these heuristic metaphors based on the realm of the visual, to draw on the work of Gilles Deleuze on Leibniz to propose the concept of the fold (Deleuze 1988).

In *Geocriticism* (2011), in the chapter on referentiality, Bertrand Westphal is to my knowledge the first to note the potential of the concept of the fold for analyzing questions of space in postmodern literature. Examining multiple worlds in postmodern literature, Westphal notes that "the representation of the referential world (...) in fiction engages in a process of interactivity between instances of heterogeneous nature brought together in the same world through an interface (...) which is also the means of connection between the elements of this world" and he adds that

“this approach is something like the concept of the *fold*, developed by Leibniz in his theory of monads, and taken up by Deleuze in his book on Leibniz” (Westphal 2011, 99). Westphal links the concept of the fold to similar concepts used by McHale and Ingarden, but does not further develop or apply the concept.

THE FOLD: A STUDY OF APPEARANCE AND SUBSTANCE

In his study *Le pli: Leibniz et le Baroque*, Gilles Deleuze (1993) approaches the philosophy of Leibniz and the cultural thinking of the Baroque from the perspective of the fold. The fold is found, according to Deleuze, in the music, architecture, and sculpture of the Baroque, but most explicitly in the philosophy of Leibniz, both in terms of understanding the simultaneous existence of multiple worlds and in terms of the relationship between body and soul. The theological background of Leibniz’s thinking, which may at first seem somewhat incompatible with early twenty-first-century literary storyworlds, is also crucial for understanding Deleuze’s reading of Leibniz, who posits not a separation, but a linkage and continuation between different possible worlds, between the body and the soul, between appearance and substance, connected by way of a continuous plane, in which the way the plane is folded conditions the relationship.

The fold is a way of describing a world, or worlds, which are connected. Rather than seeing the world in terms of separate, individual units that get smaller the harder one looks (as in an atomist model), in the concept of the fold, “[t]he division of the continuous ought not to be considered as that of sand into grains, but as that of a sheet of paper or of a tunic into folds, in such a way that there can be an infinite number of folds, one smaller than the next, without the body ever dissolving into points or minima” (Deleuze 1993, 231). Conceptualizing the universe in terms of the fold is to think of a fabric that, by the infinitely complex manner in which it is folded, connects everything material and immaterial. The concept of the fold means that it is not necessary to posit a door, window, mirror, or other such separate connection between two different things—what we have is in essence a continuation of the same sphere or structure, folded in different ways: “(...) what Leibniz will continually assert: a correspondence, even a communication between the two levels, between the two labyrinths, between the coils of matter and the folds in the soul” (Deleuze 1993, 229).

For Leibniz, and for Deleuze, the fold is fundamentally a concept that examines the relationship between the body and the soul, a relationship which is described in the metaphor of the spatial interior and exterior:

The infinite fold separates, or passes between matter and the soul, the facade and the sealed room, the interior and the exterior. For the line of inflection is a virtuality ceaselessly differentiating itself: actualized in the soul it is realized in its own way in matter. It is the Baroque characteristic: an exterior always on the exterior, an interior always on the interior. (Deleuze 1993, 242)

As a concept aimed at transgressing the distinction between interior and exterior, or superior (soul) and inferior (body), the fold as a necessary connection between two different levels provides a useful addition to the conceptual framework used for describing narrative worlds, their interrelations, and their relations to the actual world. In such a worldview, it is thus not necessary to posit a forced choice, or even a "flickering" between one possible world or another—ontological ambiguity is part of a storyworld "unfolding" as a reader moves along the lines of the text, as the film reel unfolds in the projector, or as a narrator or protagonist progresses in time and space.

Inevitably—and this has perhaps been underemphasized in research on postmodern literary ontological instability—the unstable relationship between literary space and its referent may have repercussions for the way in which readers view, in turn, the actual world. As Westphal points out, Brian McHale, in speaking of the interpretation between reality and its heterocosmic representation, "asks a fundamental question that literature formulates regularly. Where is the referent of fiction? What is it? What is its status?" (Westphal 2011, 88) And on the basis of fictional storyworlds, what status can be ascribed to the actual world as it is perceived? This implicit feedback-loop pointing back to the actual world is incidentally also one crucial repercussion of using the heuristic metaphor of the *fold*.

Before analyzing Mikko Rimminen's text, a few words should be said on the different kinds of referentiality Westphal discerns in literature, since the distinction between these different types will be of importance when looking at the ways in which Rimminen's three earliest prose texts posit an imagined Helsinki. In his examination of referentiality, Westphal distinguishes between three kinds of referential relationships, "three types of coupling": "homotopic consensus (knowing that pure conformity is a trick), heterotopic interference, and utopian excursus" (Westphal 2011,

88). “Homotopic consensus” describes a storyworld that would seem to conform closely to the referential world, as in the case of Dickens’ London. “Heterotopic interference” refers to a literary text in which a recognizably referential space is radically transformed, as in the case of Henrika Ringbom’s Helsinki novel *Martina Dagers Längtan* (1998; “The Longing of Martina Dager”), which adds a river to the center of the referential Helsinki (see Lappalainen 2016). “Utopian excursus,” finally, conceives of a referential relation in which the literary space has irreversibly severed the links to a referential, recognizable space. As I hope to show, and following the framework of the fold, Mikko Rimminen’s early prose moves gradually from a referential relationship that could be described in terms of a homotopic consensus, through a growing sense of heterotopic interference, toward utopian excursus. But between these different referential relationships, these “types of coupling,” there are no clear-cut gaps or incisions—no sense of “uncoupling”—but rather a continuous operation on the same plane, as in the drapery of the storyworld gradually unfolding.

CITY FOLDS IN *PÖLKKY*

The city in Mikko Rimminen’s second novel *Pölkky* would seem to conform in the closest details to the actual city of Helsinki around the turn of the twenty-first century. And similar to the spatial environment in Rimminen’s debut novel *Pussikaljaromaani* (2004; “The Tipplers’ Novel,” see below), urban space in the novel has an important role as a contextualizer and catalyzer of the plot developments. Part of the dynamics in *Pölkky* is constituted by the opposites composed by the narrator, who is clearly intimately acquainted with his part of Helsinki, and the protagonist, who seems to be utterly unfamiliar with the city on his arrival.³ The presence of the narrator himself, an almost god-like eye hovering over, but also confined to, the Kaisaniemi area, seems at first the only anomaly in the novel in referential terms.

In the course of the novel, however, the spatial environments are increasingly bent out of the ordinary. The appearance of the hole in the ice of the skating rink is the first indication that cracks in the ontological ordering of the novel are opening up. In the terms used by Westphal, the hole presents a small, but gradually expanding instance of “heterotopic interference” (Westphal 2011, 101). Significantly, the narrator describes the appearance in world-changing terms, referring explicitly to the ontological aspects of the event when describing the sound coming from the

hole as “a geo-ontological thump” (Rimminen 2007, 203). A strange thing is unfolding which threatens the normal order, and for which competing causes are given, none of which are ultimately convincing or conclusive. In the pages following the appearance, separate efforts are made to describe the enigmatic hole, and to find a reason for its appearance. It is interpreted alternatively as an “event of magical power,” a “natural event” (Rimminen 2007, 204), while one character suggests it is a man-made disaster, caused by “a broken pipe,” and notes that “the drainage network of the city is in an intolerably terrible state” (Rimminen 2007, 217). The cause or nature of the widening hole, however, remains unclear throughout the novel.

One way in which meaning is given to the event is by the use of personification. The sound accompanying the appearance is described as “swallowing” (“nielaisu”) (Rimminen 2007, 203), implying the sound made by an animal or-human like creature, with the insinuation of the city (or its underworld) as the body. This personification of the spatial environment should be seen in the context of Rimminen’s abundant use in the novel of body metaphors, often with violent and aggressive undertones—a metaphorization that has a long tradition in literature of the city (Mäkelä 2015, 12; see also Ameen 2014, 20–3). In the opening pages of the novel, which describe the arrival of the protagonist at the central railway station of Helsinki, the environment is introduced in threateningly personifying terms:

Sumussa ... bussit olivat möhköytyneet luisiksi ja uhkaavan kookkaiksi organismeiksi ja rakennukset torin ympärillä näyttivät kuin kumartuneen nähdäkseen kulkijan tarkemmin mainoksenpunaisina hehkuvilla silmillään. (Rimminen 2007, 15)

In the fog, the buses ... were chunkified into bony, threateningly bulky organisms and the buildings around the square looked as if they were crouching as if to better see the wanderer with their publicity-red smouldering eyes.

One particularly interesting feature of the personifying description of the environment in this opening scene is that it links the human-like attributes of the spatial environment not with the sentiments of the protagonist, but—rather uncannily—with the activities of the narrator, who stoops to better see the object of his scrutiny. The sense of threat (“smouldering eyes”) sits uneasily with the overly chatty tone of the narrator. The sense

added by these bodily metaphors is one of a threatening presence in the city, possibly identifiable with the narrator himself, which gradually, in the course of the novel, materializes in the form of the growing sink hole.

The fact that the hole is uncontrollably and incomprehensibly growing forms one of its world-threatening elements—what if it grows indefinitely? There is a second element of uncertainty, constituted by the steam rising from the watery hole, steam that is linked to the possible cause of the hole (a broken drainage or hot-water pipe?), but also to the possible effects of the hole. Throughout the rest of the novel, white steam is described as rising from the hole and folding into the fog that covers the city. (Rimminen 2007, 214) At the end of the novel, the fog—which the reader is entitled at this point to think is perhaps not unrelated to the hole—is again referred to, this time with explicit reference to the fog described in the opening pages of the novel:

... vallitsi kaikkialla jälleen riekaleinen sumu, jollainen kaupunkia tukahdutti jo kertomuksemme alussa ja joka tietysti, ikävä kyllä, vain vahvistaa käsitystämme siitä että loppu on nyt lähellä. (Rimminen 2007, 373)

... again, that ragged fog reigned everywhere, which stifled the city already in the beginning of our narration and which of course, unfortunately, only confirms our perception that the end is now near.

The end is near, because as competent readers, we can be expected to notice that, following the conventions of good storytelling, we are back where we began, in foggy Helsinki. But there is also another possible interpretation, in which the actual end of the storyworld is near. The narrator claims that it is the presence of the fog which confirms that the end is near, and the wording could also be read as a suggestion that there is in fact a causal relationship between the fog and the end of the world. The description of Helsinki that immediately follows seems at first to confirm that the actual end of the world is at hand, and shows a city uncannily devoid of human presence—and it is in this sense that it looks forward, as I will show in the next section, to Rimminen's subsequent post-apocalyptic manuscript:

Missään ei näkynyt ensimmäistäkään autoa, ihmistä, muutakaan nisäkästä eikä edes lintua, ja ainoat liikkuvat elementit maisemassa taisivatkin olla rata-pihalla sumun läpi tummana puikkona jostakin jonnekin siirtyvä yksinäinen veturi sekä juuri hiljaa sinne tänne huojahteleva sumu, johon edelleen vaisusti paikallaan ammottavasta lammikosta kohoava höyry sekoittui ja hävisi. (Rimminen 2007, 373)

There was nowhere even a car, or a human being, or another mammal or even a bird to be seen, and the only moving elements in the landscape were probably a lonely locomotive that moved from somewhere to somewhere in the railway yard through the fog like a dark stick and then that very fog that was swaying quietly here and there, and into which the steam, still rising lamely from the motionless gaping pond, mingled and disappeared.

Here, at the end of the novel, the reader is presented with a foggy Helsinki, but the referential relationship with actual Helsinki, which began in terms of a clear “homotopic consensus,” has become increasingly complicated. It is a world on the brink of a new ontological realization, in which the fog from the beginning may be interpreted as the first sign and emanation of the “geo-ontological thump” of the hole, a phenomenon which is announced only halfway in the novel. This process gains further meaning when considered in relation to the prose texts published by Rimminen immediately before and after *Pölkky*.

RIMMINEN’S UNWRITTEN APOCALYPTIC HELSINKI TRILOGY: “AN EXTRACT FROM A MANUSCRIPT”

In *Pölkky*, the way in which the spatial environment gradually unfolds from a recognizable Helsinki to a world in which fog does not only visually veil the surroundings but is a force “reigning” and “stifling” the city—an influence emanating from a threatening, gaping hole—gains importance when considering the novel within the context of Rimminen’s early prose, and more particularly, the prose texts written immediately prior to and after *Pölkky*. Upon close inspection, Rimminen’s debut novel *Pussikaljaromaani*, his second novel *Pölkky*, and a third unfinished novel, would have together constituted an apocalyptic Helsinki trilogy, in which intimations of threat gradually grow and eventually materialize. Rimminen’s third, unfinished novel has received little scholarly attention. Part of the manuscript was read by the author at the prose club “Prosak” in Helsinki (17 March 2009) and the same text was subsequently published in the literary periodical *Nuori Voima*, under the title “Katkelma romaanikäsitteistä” (“An Extract from a Manuscript”) and with the introduction that it is the fourth chapter of a novel with the working title “Dear Brother” (“Hyvä veli”). The story is set in a Helsinki with post-apocalyptic features; only a hovering narrative eye, one man called Jeremias, and a dog are left in an otherwise deserted city, and more specifically in Hakaniemi, Helsinki.

Helsinki in the “Extract” has been “suddenly, mysteriously, and underhandedly apparently emptied, apart from the gulls” (“yhtäkkiä ilmeisesti lokkeja lukuunottamatta salaperäisesti tai -kähmäisesti tyhjentynt”) (Rimminen 2009, 2, 42), with Jeremias the only human being left to represent Helsinki’s inhabitants, Finns, and possibly all of humankind (Rimminen 2009, 43). In this description, the possible emptying of the city as envisioned at the end of *Pölkky* seems to have become fact, and the narrator considers the possibility that Jeremias “might for example be something like ‘the last man in the world’” (“saattoi olla esimerkiksi jotakin sellaista kuin ‘maailman viimeinen ihminen’”) (Rimminen 2009, 43)—a possible reference to a prototypical post-apocalyptic text, Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826).⁴ The fragment is not long enough to be able to say much about what would have been the attributes of a fully narrated storyworld, and, from the point of view of possible ontological instability, it would seem that a post-apocalyptic world—as depicted in the “Extract”—is inherently less ambiguous than a more open narrative environment that suggests the possibility of end-times without fully actualizing them, as in *Pölkky*.⁵ What interests me here is how Rimminen’s early prose texts move toward this dramatic end-time, with suggestions and intimations that the spatial environments of a thoroughly familiar Helsinki keep in their folds the possibility of a more disconcerting and threatening environment—the Helsinki that, in the “Extract” has “clicked” into something “unhabitual” (Rimminen 2009, 45). Similar to what happens in *Pölkky* (and, as I argue below, in *Pussikaljaromaani*), the only possible indication of any cause of the upheaval is given by a reference to the city’s infrastructure in a manner that arguably transfers human attributes to the spatial environment, in a reference to a “fiery puff emanating from the Hanasaari power plant or somewhere” (“jostakin Hanasaaren voimalaitokselta kantautuvan ärhäkkään puuskahduksen”) (Rimminen 2009, 45). In the “Extract,” the referential relationship, in terms of the triad proposed by Westphal, has come close to one of “utopian excursus,” in which the “narrative *unfolds* at the margins of the referent or around a projected referent in a derealized future” (Westphal 2011, 122; emphasis added). To trace this journey from a seemingly uncomplicated “homotopic consensus” to a disturbed relationship (“heterotopic interference”) to an essentially otherworldly reality, it will be necessary to examine in closer detail Mikko Rimminen’s debut novel *Pussikaljaromaani*, in which an apocalyptic undercurrent is arguably visible, especially in its play on the literal and metaphorical meanings of language in describing urban space.

TO THE END OF THE WORLD: *PUSSIKALJAROMAANI*

In *Pussikaljaromaani*, a sense that all is not right in the city of Helsinki is repeatedly discernible in the spatial descriptions. The environment is recurrently read in phantasmagorical terms, suggesting that everyday environments provide points of entry into dream-like, otherworldly, highly eventful phenomena or environments, transformed by the visionary capacities of the main focalizer. This focalizer can be associated for most of the novel with one of the three young men, Marsalkka ("Marshall"). In one revealing example, during a tram journey from Kallio to Hakaniemi, a large office block with official agencies seems to the narrator to hide behind its walls a labyrinthine space where one could "wear down one's joints on spiral staircases drilling downward in the black mud of fundamental matter as if in a horror funfair DNA accelerator" ("kuluttaa nivelensä tomuksi perimmäisyksien mustaan multaan kairautuvissa kierreportaissa kuin jossain kauhuhuvipuistomaisessa DNA-höykyttimessä") (Rimminen 2004, 169). The Lilliputian position of everyday citizens vis-à-vis official institutions and agencies, and the imagined attempt to gain access to their decision-making processes is projected into a metaphor (the "drilling spiral staircases") and a simile (the "DNA accelerator") of hyperbolic proportions that is in tune with the narrator's sympathy for the common man's plight in late modern society. One way to interpret such metaphorizations is to see them as in tune with an age-old "correspondence method" in city literature pioneered by Baudelaire (see Ameal 2014, 117–31; Keunen 2001), or with the rhetorical technique of pathetic fallacy, which transfers the feelings of the lyrical observer to (natural) spatial environments (see Evernden 1996). Yet somewhat disconcertingly there is also, I would argue, a sense that some of these descriptions are not to be taken unequivocally as metaphorical—that it remains unclear to what extent there is the possibility, within this ontological world, that there are *real* uncanny, threatening forces hovering at the edge of the focalizer's sight—and that the stairs in the building do not lead to a mundane cellar floor, but in actuality into "the black mud of fundamental matter." Once the reader becomes attuned to such a possibility, references to such a reading begin to abound—a realization that around the folds and edges of a representational Helsinki, there are references to a world with entirely different ontological conditions.

A sense of ontological uncertainty is enforced, for example, by recurrent references to the course of the sun in the firmament, in which the sun does not refer back to a succession of time that frames the events of this

one-day novel in a logically developing and everyday experience, but in which, on the contrary, the trajectory of the sun is described as out of joint. Suggestions are made that the sun is stuck on its trajectory, or that its proximity threatens to ignite the earth (Rimminen 2004, 162, 154–5).⁶ And when, at the dawn of a new day at the end of the novel, the sun is seen—almost unexpectedly—to rise again “amongst men in order to keep its promise, as is its habit,” as if it were a heathen God, it looks to the narrator more like Armageddon than a new beginning: “[A]nd exactly there that disc caught some kind of cupola or bulge which made it look like a cheese spindle of Armageddon floating above the roofs” (“ihmisten ilmoille pitämään lupaustaan, tapansa mukaan, ja juuri siihen sen kiekon kohdalle osui joku kupoli tai pullistuma niin että se näytti joltain kattojen yllä leijuvalta harmagedonin juustosuikerolta”) (Rimminen 2004, 321). In *Pussikaljaromaani*, a concrete sense of urban infrastructure under pressure is linked to water management and the threat of a Biblical flood—one sense in which it arguably looks forward to *Pölkky*.⁷ The fairly uneventful events are punctuated, halfway through the novel, by a storm of considerable proportions that is followed by an electricity blackout, both of which are described as all-threatening and as incomprehensible in their causes and their effects. Typical of the hyperbolic language used to describe events in the novel, the exact arrival of the storm is described as “everything turning white for a moment,” immediately followed by “a completely unreasonable crack as if all the trees of the city had been cut to pieces on the same stroke of the clock” (“(...) kaikki meni vähäksi aikaa valkoiseksi (...) tyystin kohtuuton räjähdys niin kuin kaikki kaupungin puut olisi isketty samalla kellonlyömällä pirstaksi”) (Rimminen 2004, 210).⁸ The subsequent lightning is described in terms of “a lightning bolt of certainly the whole range of southern Finland” and as resembling an “incomprehensible cosmic cabaret” (“varmaan koko eteläisen Suomen mittainen salama”; “jotain käsittämätöntä kosmista kabareeta”) (Rimminen 2004, 236).

The storm is described literally as a “Biblical” event, “Biblical” too in the way in which it is experienced. For reasons that would take too long to describe, the main focalizer and protagonist Marsalkka suddenly starts running through the torrential rain, and the effect of the running, in combination with the rain, takes on quasi-physical proportions: “[T]ime and matter somehow began to curve around that running and despite the indisputable wormholiness, that quasi-physical phenomenon transformed itself quickly into something that somehow felt quite safe” (“aika ja aine

rupesivat ikään kuin kaartumaan juoksemisen ympärille ja siitä eittämättömästä madonreikämäisyydestään huolimatta se kvasifysikaalinen ilmiö siinä muodostui nopeasti jotenkin turvalliseksi”) (Rimminen 2004, 224). In a quasi-physical phenomenon with the “indisputable” characteristics of a worm hole, time and matter curve, which also has an effect on the experience of the environments: in a moment of epiphany, the nature of the city (or that part of the city) is revealed, with a sense of larger-than-life meaning imbued to everyday environments, which also, somewhat paradoxically, feels “safe”:

(...) koko se osa kaupunkia, koti, mäet ja harjut joiden rinteille suuret laatikkomaiset yksinelämisellä täyteenahdetut talot oli survaistu kuin väärin koloihin pakotetut palikkatestikapineet tai jotkin jättiläismäiset nopat, (...). (Rimminen 2004, 225)

(...) that part of the city, home, hills and ridges with on their slopes, large, box-like houses packed full with lonely living jabbed in their place as gizmos from a geometrical shape test forced into the wrong holes, or like giant dice, (...).

This depiction frames the everyday urban landscape as the result of a giant child at play, or as a monument to the power of blind fate (in the form of dice), reinforcing the feeling that the lives of the protagonists and the urban environments are subject to higher, unpredictable forces. Drawing on the work of Christopher Prendergast, the image of the city here as a set of toys for giants at play can be seen as an example of one of the two “most powerful narratives of the contemporary metropolitan condition: stories of end-time and stories of playtime.” According to Prendergast, in stories of playtime, “the emphasis on accelerated falling apart (...) is redirected from (...) nightmare to fun, apocalypse to *bricolage*, ruins to waste, to the view of the city as playground and its debris as the material for a kind of urban *fort/da* game (...)” (Prendergast 1992, 207). Crucially, the play is here also a play on language, with humor as the dominant overtone, although there are also darker undercurrents and intimations of world-threatening upheaval.

When not much later in the novel there is a large-scale electricity failure, it is described as the advent of utter darkness, juxtaposed with the earlier total lightness:

Se oli sellaista pimeää ettei kukaan osannut siihen mitään sanoa, sellaista joka vastaväitteittä nielee kaikki sanat jos siihen ryhtyy huutelemaan. (...) joka paikkaan tunkevaa pimeää, hyvin heikosti ymmärrettävää ja siten myös ver-raten kuohuttavaa (...). (Rimminen 2004, 269)

It was the kind of darkness that nobody was able to add any word to it, a darkness that without objections would swallow all your words if you started shouting into it (...) darkness intruding in all places, very weakly compre-hensible, and thus also relatively disturbing (...).

The only explanation that is offered for this sudden darkness is made by a man running past, emerging from and then returning to the darkness, who “shouted that a bomb had exploded in the center of the city” (“siinä pimeydessä juoksi joku mies ohi ja huusi että keskustassa on räjähtänyt pommi”) (Rimminen 2004, 271). Ultimately, no explanation of any sort is offered, even after the lights return, and the possibility of a bomb is not disproved. Instead, the sense of possible world-threatening disaster is further exacerbated by hyperbolic descriptions of the consequences of the storm. The flooded streets are described in words reminiscent of the Biblical Flood, and the narrator considers the possibility that the lightning has brought the mechanical attractions at the *Linnanmäki* amusement park back to life.⁹ A track cleaning tram looks “suspiciously” like “an infernal machine” (Rimminen 2004, 243), and violent and sudden noise leads the narrator to think that “the end of the world is nigh” (Rimminen 2004, 294). The city itself, or rather, the underground network of waste water drainage, is described in personified terms as uttering “gurgling” sounds “whenever a congested sewer tried to get a bit of breath”—again a fore-shadowing of events in *Pölkky*. The everyday environment is described as if it contained windows into large-scale catastrophes, as if containing fold-like mirages of other worlds contained in this one. A case in point is the flooded crossroads in the inner-city district of Kallio, which to the narrator suddenly present a submerged epiphany:

(...) siellä se häämötti, padonrakentamisen kuolettama kiinalaiskylä, rypäs kylmän veden täyttämiä huoneita joissa askareisiinsa jäykistyneet perheet lei-jailivat huonekalujen seassa hitaasti seinältä toiselle, lattiasta kattoon, ehkä myös ajasta iäisyteen. (Rimminen 2004, 298)

(...) there it loomed, a Chinese village put to death by dam building; a bunch of rooms filled with cold water, where families stiffened in their chores were drifting between their furniture slowly from wall to wall, from the floor to the ceiling, perhaps also from time to eternity.

The description is akin to the conceptualization, classical in city literature, of the city as *imago mundi* (see Ameal 2014, 22; Lilley 2009), containing all the diversity and splendor of the world. In this description, however, one corner of Helsinki contains within itself, as in a *mise-en-abyme*, a far-away corner of the world in miniature; not as a metaphor, but in a disturbingly literal sense.

The key source for a disturbing ontological instability, in *Pussikaljaromaani*, lies in the possibility of reading descriptions of the environment literally rather than metaphorically. Within the limited view of the focalizer, the world as it is seen and experienced from this highly localized and subjective position is indeed the world in its totality, and the novel makes repeated reference (often to comic effect) to the way in which, in popular usage, the “whole world” may hyperbolically refer to the limited world of the locutor. For example, when the focalizer sees his two friends disappearing behind a hill, he notes they “had managed to disappear behind the horizon a bit as if they had barged to the end of the world” (“ehtivät hävitä horisontin taakse vähän niin kuin ne olisivat tulleet rynnineeksi mailman laidalle”) (Rimminen 2004, 216). Such arguments draw attention to the possibility of a literal reading of the novel, in which the world is indeed fully and wholly present in the perception of the narrator and/or focalizer—and how the threats to this experienced world are of a fundamentally ontological nature. Such a literary understanding of the text is also commensurate with the humor of the novel, which relies on the capacity to read figurative language literally, with consequences that are as comical as they are revelatory of the storyworld’s possible ambiguous nature.

The conceptualization of a world as entirely dependent—even in ontological terms—on the focalizer’s capacities can be contextualized not only within narrative studies, but also more broadly within theories of knowledge. It is a position that in philosophy has been associated with idealism, and evoked among others by the philosopher George Berkeley (1685–1753), a contemporary of Leibniz, whose thesis *esse est percipi* argues that to exist is to be perceived (Muehlmann 1995). The consequences of this position in a narrative context is that the storyworld ceases to exist when its main focal point ceases to observe; or that its ontological attributes become radically deformed once the mode of perceiving is radically affected, such as in the case of an intoxicated Marshall, running frenziedly through a Biblical torrent of rain. In apocalyptic city literature, it is often unclear whether the end of a fictional world is taking place in actual-

ity, or whether it could stem from the focalizing or narrating center; as I have argued elsewhere, urban apocalypse tends to reside “in the perspective of the madman, or that of characters that are mentally incapacitated by distress, disease, or hunger. Confusion, despair, or illusion become projected upon the cityscape, and in such texts, the reader is guided to interpret the dystopian or apocalyptic cityscapes as a result of the protagonist’s cognitive restrictions” (Ameel 2016).

In *Pussikaljaromaani*, apocalypse remains an implicit possibility, contingent on the reader’s belief in the literal meaning of the narrator’s statement. In *Pussikaljaromaani*, then, there are hints at the cracks and fissures in the stable storyworld, while in *Pölkky*, the hole in the ice rink can be seen as a disconcerting new spatial reality folding out of the habitual world, and into the air and fog enveloping the city. A city emptied of human beings is hinted at at the end of the novel, and in a sense, a radical “end” is realized with the very ending of *Pölkky*, in which the storyworld ends quite abruptly when its main focal point (though not its focalizer) steps out of that storyworld’s boundaries and under a bus (Rimminen 2007, 384). In the “Extract from a Manuscript,” the catastrophe has already occurred, and a new kind of ontological world has clicked into place.

CONCLUSION

In a conversation with the author (27.1.2017), Rimminen agreed that there is some basis for interpreting his first three prose texts as an apocalyptic trilogy (or trilogy moving toward the apocalypse), centered on Helsinki: “If I had published a novel written on the basis of that PROSAK extract, there would have been this structure, in which in *Pussikaljaromaani* there are hints; in *Pölkky*, it is already feared, and in the next novel, it would have already happened.”

This narrative structure also sheds some light on the thematic understanding of these prose texts. Rimminen pointed out that in the three prose texts there is an important social context: *Pussikaljaromaani* posits the importance of a community, while *Pölkky* deals in part with human loneliness; in the last (unfinished) novel, with only one man left, it would not even have been possible to be lonely in company. The development in Rimminen’s early prose texts can be seen from the perspective of the author’s interest in the precariousness of community in late capitalist society, or in terms of his preoccupation with labor in its many forms (see

Mäkelä 2015; Ojajärvi 2013). What I have tried to suggest here is that the development in Rimminen's first three prose texts can also be read in terms of gradually escalating ontological tensions, which are also integral to the author's experiments with language and the role of the narrator. The spatial environments, although upon first encounter firmly referential to actual Helsinki, are presented as subject to incomprehensible forces that are hinted at, first, as a possibility in the linguistic realm—by taking metaphor literally—but that gradually appear as actual interferences in the ontological storyworld. In the course of the three texts, the spatial environment and its referential mode move, in the terms proposed by Westphal, from homotopic consensus—a close relationship to actual Helsinki—to a threatening sense of heterotopic interference, in the form of the hole in the ice rink, and eventually, in the "Extract," to a full-blown utopian excursus: a world in which the threatening intimations from the two novels seem to have become realized in a process of gradual unfolding.

Making sense of the changes in the referential relationship of the storyworlds in these three texts does not hinge on binary relations, on a choice between either a recognizable or a disconcertingly strange environment. Rather, the spatial environment appears as a continuous plane from which folds of different possible worlds gradually appear. Like spatial elements in the art of the Baroque—waves, curly hair moving out into the world—space is seen in *Pussikaljaromaani* and *Pölkky* to curve, as happens during the wild charge in the rain in *Pussikaljaromaani*, or in the steam curling from the ice hole into the fog enfolding all of Helsinki. The environment in the "Extract," by contrast, presents a more stable world, which has seemingly unequivocally "clicked" into something entirely unfamiliar.

The treatment of the urban spatial environment in Mikko Rimminen's early prose texts raises a number of issues that are of relevance for our understanding of space in postmodern literature in more general terms. An examination of Rimminen's prose texts confirms the notion, proposed by Brian McHale, that postmodern literature displays a conspicuous ontological instability: what at first appears to be a recognizable storyworld in the texts, with a firm referential relationship to actual Helsinki, turns out to be increasingly undermined by intimations of ontological disturbances. The distinction made by Bertrand Westphal between three types of "coupling"—"homotopic consensus," "heterotopic interference," and "utopian excursus"—is a helpful typology with which to examine the various kinds of referential relationships displayed by these texts. These relationships defy an understanding as being either true or not true—both in

the internal coherence of the storyworld and in their relationship to the actual world—but can be approached more productively through the concept of the fold, as proposed by Deleuze: a concept that challenges binary oppositions, and that emphasizes the simultaneous presence of possibly contradictory worlds evolving on the same plane of meaning. Crucially, such an understanding of literary space and its referential relationship to the actual world, which refuses to make a dramatic distinction between actualized (or the real) and potential (or the imaginary), also draws attention to how the ontological instability of postmodern literature may in turn feed into readers’ perspectives of their actual world, and may urge us to consider it in questions of simultaneously real and unreal, possible and actual.

NOTES

1. All translations by the author unless stated otherwise.
2. Mikko Rimminen (1975) is a Finnish novelist known, amongst other things, for the idiosyncratic and innovative language of his novels, which tend to focus on the everyday lives of marginalized characters, often with absurdist undertones. His debut novel *Pussikaljaromaani*, a one-day novel set in the Finnish capital, has been compared to Joyce’s *Ulysses* and the Finnish modernist classic *Alastalon salissa* (1933) by Volter Kilpi. Rimminen’s third novel *Nenäpäivä* (2010; literally “Red Nose Day”) was awarded the Finlandia Prize, the most prestigious Finnish literature prize. Rimminen has published four novels, none of which have been translated into English.
3. It is important to note that the narrator, although not a character in the story, has limited abilities in terms of perception and is unable to read the thoughts or inner emotions of the characters.
4. The figure of the “last man” is of course a pervasive one in the writing of the previous centuries, from Nietzsche to Fukuyama and beyond.
5. Marie-Laure Ryan is one of the theorists who has argued that a diversification of non-actualized possible worlds contributes to a narrative’s tellability; see Ryan 1992; Hägg 2008. A narrative that leaves open the ontological status of a world possibly on the verge of collapse, with a range of possible multiple ontologies in the storyworld, would thus be inherently more tellable than a story in a post-apocalyptic setting, where the possible avoidance of catastrophe has been eliminated.
6. The reference brings to mind the myth of Phaethon, the son of the sun god, who was unable to control his father’s chariot, and scorched the earth.
7. In *Pölkkö*, too, the watery hole is referred to in terms of a Biblical flood, as a “small-scale Flood” (“pienimuotoisen vedenpaisumuksen”) (Rimminen 2007, 216), and there are also references to drowning.

8. The lack of clarity about who or what is responsible for the dramatic events in the novel is enforced by the suggestion that time itself, or, literally, the striking of the clock, could have been responsible for cutting the trees in the simile.
9. The passage again draws on literal and figurative meanings of the same word—“life,” which can denote both “life” and “noise.”

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