

[Source: Ameel, Lieven: “Rising Towers, Rising Tides: Competing Visions of the Helsinki Waterfront in Planning and Fiction.” In Markku Salmela, Lieven Ameel & Jason Finch (eds.): *Literatures of Urban Possibility*. London: Palgrave, 2021, 45-64.]

[Note: page numbers are aligned with the page numbers as they appear in the published chapter.]

Rising Tides, Rising Towers: Competing Visions of the Helsinki Waterfront in Planning and Fiction

Lieven Ameel

Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

This chapter examines the Helsinki waterfront as a site of the possible, a space onto which possible futures of the city are projected and where competing visions of future urban possibility interact. It sets out with an examination of the first Finnish novel to critique urban planning development at the waterfront, the largely forgotten Maila Talia’s *Niniven lapset* (‘Children of Nineveh’, 1915). The key waterfront in twentieth-century Helsinki literature and planning, and to more recent developments at the waterfront, such as the plans for a Helsinki Guggenheim. This is followed by an examination of visions for the Helsinki waterfront in literature of the twenty-first century, including novels such as Anders Vacklin and Aki Parhamaa’s *Beta: Sensored Reality* (2018), Annika Luther’s *De hemlösas stad* (‘City of the Homeless’, 2011), Esa Mäkinen’s *Totuuskuutio* (‘Truth Square’, 2015) and Antti Tuomainen’s *The Healer (Parantaja)*, 2010).

In this second part, the focus is on the interaction between the distinctly pessimistic vision of a possible future Helsinki in fictional texts, on the one hand, and the optimistic visions as presented by the Helsinki City Planning Department, on the other hand, for the city and for urban community.

One of the questions this article engages with is how literary fiction can add to our understanding of possible urban futures: What are the specific affordances of fiction for envisioning possible or future cities? I have elsewhere (Ameel, ‘Future Fair City’) presented a tentative outline of some of these affordances, which can be summarised as follows: (1) the ability to provide a sense of (infra)structural possibility, material, social or political (from descriptions of flying cars to particular forms of societal organisation); (2) qualia, or the ‘how it feels’ to inhabit a particular future city; (3) situated choice, or the embodied and embedded ways in which particular moral, political, or environmental turning points, individually or collectively are contextualised by situating a literary character at a moral crossroads; (4) emplotted identification, and the ways in which the reader is drawn to identify with the embodied perspectives of particular character or focaliser; (5) suggestive framing, or the development of narrative frames, tropes, and modes of emplotment used to suggest the natural causality or rationality of particular turning points or courses of action. A brief consideration of these affordances, in the light of the examined literary texts, is given in each subchapter.

The urban waterfront appears in the analysis below as a site where future possibilities for individuals as well as for urban society are at stake. The rich symbolic meanings associated with the Helsinki waterfront in the corpus discussed below are no coincidence. From the literature of Antiquity, shores have appeared in literature as profoundly transformative spaces. According to Margaret Doody in her seminal *The True Story of the Novel*, ‘the place between water and land functions most obviously and overtly as a threshold’; it is ‘a site of restlessness, just as it is a place of promise for the future’ (Doody 321, 324). Doody approaches the shores as a liminal space, but in her use of the word, ‘liminal’ does not only refer to the Latin root *limen* (threshold). For her, the ‘muddy margins’ of literary worlds are liminal also in other ways, drawing for its meaning on the Greek words *limne* and *limen*—swamp and harbour, respectively (320). ‘Liminal’, for Doody, means a space of indeterminacy and change, of arrival and departure. While there has been some interest recently in what has been tentatively called ‘littoral studies’—the study of shores in

literary and cultural representations (see Kluwick and Richter), the particularities of the urban waterfront have remained largely underdeveloped. Recent decades have brought an added urgency to experiences of the urban waterfront, with global cities at the water facing a range of challenges, from the demands of post-industrial redevelopment to increasingly disruptive and dislocating process of globalisation (see, e.g., Sassen), and the spectre of radical climate change and sea-level rise.

Children of Nineveh: Speculation and End-Times at the Waterfront

Helsinki is one of the few European capitals located at the open sea, and it is equipped with a shoreline of some 120 kilometres and 300 islands. It has several active harbours; the passenger harbour is currently Europe's busiest. The history of Helsinki's shoreline runs parallel with waterfront development in harbour cities around the globe, with parts of the waterfront going through a period of increasing industrialisation, followed by a state of relative dereliction and abandonment, and from the end of the twentieth century onward, reinvention of the urban waterfront as upscale urban housing and services. Helsinki has a rich literature of its shores and archipelago, which remains curiously understudied (see, however, Ameal, 'Mahdollisuksien maisema'; Ameal and Kankkunen). The first novel that stands out for how it imagines the Helsinki waterfront, also in terms of possible urban development, is Maila Talvio's *Niniven lapset* ('Children of Nineveh', 1915), a novel which covers the First World War.¹ Maila Talvio is now a relatively marginal figure in the canon of Finnish literary history, but at the time of writing she was a well-recognised author, the first female writer in Finnish able to live off her pen, and the publication of the novel was widely anticipated. As the title of

¹ The name used for Helsinki in this novel is 'Metropolis' (in Finnish, 'Suur-Kaupunki,' literally, 'grand city'), a reference which must be understood ironically, since the city is also described repeatedly as a peripheral and small-scale city.

The novel appeared at a time of intense interest in the development of Helsinki: the year of publication also saw the publication of Eliel Saarinen's famous Munkkiniemi-Haaga plan, the most ambitious urban plan of a Helsinki area of its time, and part of the influential Pro Helsingfors plan published in 1918 by Saarinen and Bertel Jung.

Some of the analysis of *Niniven lapset* and its links to the Helsinki Guggenheim appeared earlier in a short article written for the general public and published in the Finnish journal *Kritiikin uutiset* (Ameal, 'Kerrassaan').

the novel indicates, *Niniven lapset* is a literary text which draws strongly on the pessimistic discourse in turn-of-the-century Decadent literature, which saw the city as a diseased and degenerating centre: Helsinki is read as a present-day version of the Biblical city of pride Nineveh, a city that awaits its imminent destruction. Against the background of cultural decay, there is a sense of a coming Biblical reckoning, made tangible in the vision of threatening clouds on the horizon at the end of the novel, taking the ominous shape of coffins—signs of the war to come (Talvio 303).

The novel tells a tale of speculation and fraud set in the worlds of publishing, finance, industry and urban development, structured around the fates of the various members of a parvenu family. One of the protagonists caught up in the web of deceit and corruption is Leo Teräs, the degenerating eldest son of the family. At the end of *Niniven lapset*, Leo is financially ruined and becomes drawn into one last scheme, a project in which the fates of all the different characters become intertwined, sealing the fate of the city as well as that of the novel's protagonists. Together with some of the city's most prominent speculators, Leo plans the construction of a gigantic cultural temple close to the city's harbour. The building is intended to transform the city and to make the developers rich, but in its tower of Babel-like properties, it also gestures towards narratives of impending doom and pride before the fall. While the Biblical undercurrents are evident, the development of this cultural temple is also a tale of modernisation and dislocation. Several wooden houses have to make way to allow for the construction of this new and massive building. The obsolete houses and their inhabitants become the symbol for a world that is overtaken by the Faustian energies that transform the city (see Ameel, 164–65).

The narrator of the novel is not sympathetic to the plans of Teräs and his associates: it is clear from the start that the main reasons for the grand scheme are the promises of personal gain, and the view offered by the narrator is clearly ironic. This is especially evident in how the narrator presents the arguments of the developers for why the city needs this new, grand development—arguments that, taken together, provide a set that is still relevant to persuasive storytelling in urban planning and development. The plan is to construct a giant 'Palace of Light' in the historical centre of the city; a building which will become a decisive part of the Helsinki skyline as seen by an imagined future traveller approaching the city from the sea. In the following quote, Leo defends the plans in his thoughts to imaginary adversaries:

An absolutely grand scheme! Well, it meant that Metropolis, by putting this plan into practice, would rise to the level of European million-cities. After all, what had Metropolis been until now but a shoddy burrow? But if they could carry out this plan, then Metropolis would at once become a *real* metropolis.

And when a boat would approach Metropolis, then every foreigner would be compelled to ask, with eyes wide open: ‘What castle is glimmering there?’ None of the earlier buildings of Metropolis was anything in comparison. During autumn evenings, the palace could in fact be used as a lighthouse, in exactly the same way as back there in America, with the Statue of Liberty. Because it would be lighted by absolutely special lamps. The lighting in the city would actually become unnecessary because of this ‘Palace of Light.’ (Talvio 330–31)²

In the quote above, a number of reasons are given for why this plan is necessary for the development of the city. Reference is made to a prestigious architectural landmark which has become famous across the ocean, in New York, and which could be transferred in a modified form to Helsinki. There is the argument that the planned scheme will benefit the general public: city lighting will supposedly become unnecessary. This beneficial aspect turns out to be no more than a façade hiding considerable personal and corporate profit. The planned building, which carries at first the working Palace’ (Talvio 331), is renamed into ‘Crystal Palace’ (333), and eventually its name is decided to be ‘Nineveh’, and its function will not be to serve the general benefit, but to be a ‘concert and entertainment palace’ (333). Summarising Leo’s soliloquy, four arguments stand out in the case made for grandiose construction at the waterfront. First, there is the argument of an example abroad, and the implication that the city has to follow standards set by what are purportedly true international metropolises in order to reach a sense of maturity that is as yet out of reach (drawing on an image of Helsinki as perpetually under-age; see Ameel, *Moved* 12–15). Second, there is the argument that the development will bring communal good to offset inevitable suspicions of personal gain as a driver of development. Third, there is a lack of interest in how local tropes, stories and histories could inform the search for meaningful futures at the waterfront. Fourth, and concomitant

² All translations are by the author unless stated otherwise.

with this lack of local perspective, there is a strong focus on the visual perspective of an imaginary visitor from abroad.

All of these elements have remained relevant in planning at the Helsinki waterfront. One recent case bears a particular resemblance to the development project described so ironically in *Niniven lapset*: the proposals for a Helsinki Guggenheim Museum, a building which was planned in the immediate surroundings of the ‘Palace of Light’ in *Niniven lapset*, the Kruunuhaka district and the Helsinki South Harbour. To give a full overview of the various planning phases and controversies surrounding this project, which surfaced intermittently in the course of the 2010s, would be outside of the scope of this article (see, for more information, Ruoppila and Lehtovuori). But a brief look at the museum’s feasibility study, which summarised many of the arguments made elsewhere by the proponents of a Helsinki Guggenheim, will go some way in establishing links.³

The first argument—that of an international architectural example that one is urged to follow —permeates the Guggenheim proposal: the idea that something that has worked successfully abroad, in New York (and also, in a waterfront development context, in Bilbao), will also function in Helsinki (Drury et al. 22, 35). Second, there is a strong argument that this project will be beneficial: in the case of Guggenheim Helsinki, this will be achieved by generating new tourist streams, but also by virtue of making some of the existing city museum activities redundant, saving money and pooling resources. Conspicuous absences are also one of the features of the argumentation: the feasibility study does not offer justifications that reside in local narratives, local needs or local exigencies (these would have pointed in quite different directions than the development of a Guggenheim franchise). Instead, the argument is grounded in a perceived underperformance by Helsinki in comparison with other metropolises of a perceived more mature status. Helsinki is presented as a city defined by a measure of lack (the feasibility study argues, among others, that ‘Helsinki’s art scene lacks a center of gravity’ [Drury et al. 6]), as a city that is smaller and of less consequence than its near-neighbors in terms of existing museums and in terms of international visitors (105). One of the most striking points—from a local perspective—is how the study presents Helsinki’s cultural landscape as ‘a natural extension’ for a

³ The study cost two million Euros, paid by the Helsinki taxpayer.

‘burgeoning audience’ constituted of Russian art lovers in St Petersburg (70), with the viability of a Helsinki Guggenheim largely dependent on future visitors from St Petersburg thronging this new museum (68–71). Similar to the rhetoric found in *Niniven lapset*, it is the appreciative gaze of the tourist coming from outside Finland which will give the decisive verdict on the new building rising up in the South Harbour skyline, not that of the local resident walking by on everyday errands.

Even the symbolic imagery of Maila Talvio’s ‘Palace of Light’, the amusement temple dressed up as a lighthouse, makes an appearance in the Guggenheim museum design competition. The outline of the first round of the design competition explicitly conceptualised the new building as ‘a lighthouse of art’, emphasising the view it would offer to visitors arriving from outside the city: ‘When you are landing from the seaside, you will see first this sign’ (Guggenheim Helsinki 1). Several of the competition entries had ‘lighthouse’ or the Finnish equivalent (*majakka*) in their title. One proposal, called ‘Lighthouse of Helsinki’, proposed a tower that was argued to enable ‘lengthening the daytime’ by the ‘reflection of natural light’ (Lighthouse 1). Another competing entry, ‘Museo Majakka’ (‘Museum Lighthouse’) was similarly structured around the concept of a lighthouse, arguing that ‘Guggenheim Helsinki becomes the 21st century cultural symbol of Helsinki at Eteläsatama entry point much the same way as the traditional Majakat (lighthouses)’ (Majakka 4). These entries did not make it through the first round, but the winning entry, designed by Moreau Kusunoki architects, included a lighthouse.⁴

The plans for a Helsinki Guggenheim were eventually shelved. But several of the arguments for high-rise development at the waterfront that were used to frame urban possibility in *Niniven lapset* can be found in other contemporary plans, most recently in the Kalasatama (East Harbour) development, a former container harbour being redeveloped into a waterfront district which has become structured around an outsized shopping mall and eight unusually tall tower blocks. The rhetoric used in the development emphasised the image of Helsinki as catching up with other international cities. And again, the symbol of the lighthouse dominates: Kalasatama’s highest tower, which is also the highest residential tower in Finland, is called Majakka (‘lighthouse’); a second tower is called Loiste (‘beacon’).

⁴ Intriguingly, in the winning entry, the imagined perspective was reversed, the tower offering ‘a new perspective over the city’ (Winner).

Maila Talvio's *Niniven lapset* exemplifies some of the affordances of literary fiction—as outlined in the introduction to this chapter—for imagining urban possibility. In its most basic properties, it gives a suggestion of (infra)structural possibility—in this case, the vision of a possible, lighthouse-like high-rise near the Helsinki waterfront. It also provides the reader with a context of situated choice, with some of the motivations, as well as the societal, personal and economic contexts that make it possible for the plan to take shape. Some of that context is found in the form of the soliloquy of young Leo Teräs quoted above. The text also gives insights into the 'qualia' of what it feels like to live in a city that is being transformed to make such a vision true: one perspective (including embodied sensations) the reader gets privileged access to is that of 'old man Säfstrand', whose house is one of the buildings dispossessed to make way for the new construction (Talvio 334–38). In such instances, the reader is invited to take part in emplotted identification, and to adopt a particular point of view within the conflicting plot dynamics. In *Niniven lapset*, the point of view is one profoundly suspicious of urbanisation and modernisation.⁵ Finally, and especially when set against later storylines of development at the water in Helsinki, the novel shows how literary fiction engages in developing narrative frames, tropes and modes of emplotment vis-a-vis visions of urban possibility. The symbol of the lighthouse and the perspective of the outsider arriving at the harbour stand out as imaginative frames of meaning that have continued to be used in thinking of urban possibility at the waterfront.

The Helsinki Waterfront As Symbolic Landscape

In the century between the publication of *Niniven lapset* and the final rejection of the Guggenheim Helsinki plan by the Helsinki city council in 2016, a rich literature of the Helsinki waterfront has come into being, often interacting closely with contemporary visions of urban possibility (Ameel 'Narrative Mapping', 'Mahdollisuuksien maisema'; Ameel and Kankkunen). The key characteristics of this tradition can be summarised

⁵ The prose novel is, of course, a dialogic literary form, which tends to incorporate a range of different perspectives—in *Niniven lapset*, the reader also gains access to views more sympathetic to modernisation and urbanisation, in particular those of the young women of the family.

as follows. First, the urban waterfront features often as a site for imagining and enacting personal possible lives, especially with respect to roles that move across social or gendered conventions.⁶ In such instances, the urban shores appear as the site of ‘utopian moments’ (Edwards 19), in which a sense of community or transcendence becomes possible outside of the everyday social and moral structures. Second, the waterfront repeatedly appears as the site of a vision or evocation of an alternative form of society; the place where the possibility of redemption or re- enchantment is suggested, or where hallucinatory visions of urban end-times are conjectured, often with considerable overlap between personal distress and socio-political anxiety.⁷

Occasionally, the waterfront is the site where it becomes possible not only to imagine, but also to realise radically different urban communities. This happens in Anja Kauranen’s *Pelon maantiede* (‘The Geography of Fear’, 1995), in which the Helsinki island Lammassaari acts as the site for the headquarters of a radical feminist movement. The actual island of Lammassaari had been developed in the course of the twentieth century as a recreational site for working-class families, with one specific building, the ‘house of the tired women’, specifically for working-class women. In the novel, this building becomes the headquarters from which vengeful women set out to bring violent retribution to the sex shops and degenerate men of Helsinki (Kauranen 395; see Ameel and Kankkunen).

In sum, the twentieth-century literature of the Helsinki waterfront describes this symbolic environment as a space set apart from the normal order and urban fabric. From this liminal position, it also draws its transformative potential. At the waterfront, visions for a possible society can be imagined, and new perspectives proposed for possible urban lives as well as for possible cities and alternatives societal forms. These properties and associations of the Helsinki waterfront in literature are closely associated with the historical development of the Helsinki shores and islands, considerable parts of which were formerly cut off margin of the Finnish capital (see also Lehtovuori 24).

⁶ See, e.g., Iris Uurto’s 1935 novel *Kypsyminen* (‘Maturing’) and Pentti Holappa’s 1954 novel *Yksinäiset* (‘The Lonely Ones’).

⁷ From Arvid Järnefelt’s *Veneh’ojalaiset* (‘The Family Veneh’oja,’ 1909) to Joel Lehtonen’s *Henkien taistelu* (‘Battle of Pirkko Saisio’s

Near-Future Helsinki in Contemporary Dystopias

In Finnish literature, the thinking of possible cities and possible urban lives gains a further impetus around the turn of the twenty-first century, when a range of novels appear that engage explicitly with possible futures for the city of Helsinki, with a remarkable number of texts set in the near future of the country's capital. Such novels include, among many others, the following: Teemu Kaskinen's *Sinulle, yö* ('To You, Night', 2008; see Laakso) in which Helsinki is on the front line of a future war between Finnish and NATO troops; Elina Hirvonen's *When Time Runs Out* (*Kun aika loppuu*, 2015), in which the capital becomes the scene for a far-right terror attack; and Piia Leino's *Taiivas* ('Heaven', 2018), set in 2058, when social cohesion and material infrastructure have collapsed. The novels are part of a dystopian boom in Finnish literature (see Isomaa and Lahtinen), extrapolating adverse societal and environmental developments into the near future, and considering personal and communal possibilities for agency within the constraints of distinctly gloomy environmental and societal developments. In these novels, literature is quite explicitly foregrounded as an arena of the possible, where different trajectories towards possible futures can be tried out by interfering with the modalities of the actual world (see Dolezel).

In these novels, the potentialities of the Finnish capital are examined from a range of perspectives: urban possibilities in terms of environmental and ecological developments; in terms of the urban material environment, energy and transportation; in terms of socio-economic changes; in terms of class, gender and race relationships, among others. To a degree, all of these novels also contemplate the role of literature and language in envisioning and critiquing the city's possible futures, in the very least in how they utilise earlier literary genres, tropes and conventions, or in how they project a possible future language.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, risen sea levels provide an important factor in how the future Helsinki is envisioned in early twenty-first-century dystopian literature.⁸

Young adult novels set in a near-future Helsinki, such as Anders Vacklin and Aki Parhamaa's *Beta: Sensored Reality* (2018)

⁸ Helsinki is less at an acute risk, however, of rising sea levels, when compared to cities such as London, New York or Mumbai. The ground is slightly rising, as elsewhere in Northern Europe; Helsinki is not located on a tidal estuary; and a larger part of the population lives on relatively high ground.

and Annika Luther's *De hemlösas stad* (2011) give detailed descriptions of a partly submerged city in the wake of sea level rise. In both novels, environmental change and the need for an energy shift have also had their effect on forms of energy production and transportation: in *De hemlösas stad*, 'Algoil, oil made from algae' is produced at the seashore on the basis of a new technological process, and exported to nearby farms (72–73). In *Beta*, the protagonist, sitting on the pier of her home, is struck by the 'strong waft of green fuel' blowing in from the centre (21).

Transportation by boat has become more common with the Helsinki Regional Transportation (the actual HSL) transformed into the Helsinki Region Water Transportation (HSLV) in *Beta* (20). In Esa Mäkinen's *Totuuskuutio* ('Truth Square', 2015), carbon credit is an integral part of all transactions in the city.

But the gruesome rituals of radical societal and political change are also carried out at the water. In *Taivas*, one of the protagonists, Akseli, feels repulsed by the thicket at the Tokoinranta bay, where 'migrants and lefties were lynched during the Purge' (71). The oblique reference to a past pogrom in this future present is a typical example of the extent to which many of these novels are interested in the possibilities of societal breakdown. Often—and as is characteristic for dystopia as genre—a general sense of breakdown of the moral order in society is tangible from the first pages onward. The opening pages of *Totuuskuutio*, for example, describe the aftermath of a traffic accident and the lack of intervention from citizens. In the same novel, societal collapse is vividly present in the omnipresent gates and fences that structure the everyday commute of the protagonist, in descriptions of stark segregation and electronic control of movement through public space.

While most of these near-future novels draw predominantly on dystopian or post-apocalyptic conventions in the way they depict a possible urban future, there are also signs of hopefulness and unexpectedly vibrant communities. In *Beta*, in a hyperbolic projection of the development of the current state of the Finnish gaming industry, future Helsinki has become the 'mecca of the gaming industry' and the seat of a gaming academy of global status, located in the old fortress island Suomenlinna (47). In *De hemlösas stad*, the Finnish population has for the most part deserted the submerged city, but a lively community from the Indian subcontinent thrives along the water and has built a temple to Ganesh right on the shorelines, on the site of the observatory that was originally constructed during the time of Finland's autonomy within the Russian

Empire, and overlooking the plot that had been reserved in real-life, early twenty-first-century Helsinki for a possible Guggenheim. New festivities and communal practices flourish: in *Beta*, the yearly Celebration of the Great Flood (76–79), in *De Hemlösas stad*, the Hindu Holi Festival (164). In the latter novel, the city is also defined by new linguistic realities, and is no longer called Helsinki but Halsingih. For the Finnish (but Swedish-speaking) protagonist, learning to use this name is part of her process of acculturation.

The manner in which these novels foreground future possibilities is conducted in part through description of external features of the landscape and people's habits. But there are also, as one would expect in literary accounts of possible futures, insights into how the changes that have led up to these futures have their impact on the *qualia*, the what-it-feels-like of being within a particular moment. The smell of green fuel experienced by the protagonist in *Beta* is one concrete example of such experientiality (20–21; see above).

In all of these novels, the meanings attached to urban possibility are largely structured along powerful genre patterns. The experiences of the protagonist in *De hemlösas stad* are structured around a coming-of-age plot, in which the protagonist moves out in the world to learn about herself, to be eventually reunited with her family in the final scene. In *Beta*, a similar coming-of-age-plot is combined with a narrative framework from computer games, in which different levels have to be completed before advancement to a further stage is possible. In several novels, there are features of the whodunit, with a search for missing information that will shed light on the personal life of the protagonist, but also on the moral condition of the city's population, and, by extension, that of a future mankind. In *De hemlösas stad*, the quest takes the form of a search for the lost mother; in *Totuuskuutio*, it is the search for the culprits behind misinformation that has led to the death of the protagonist's loved one.

While several of the features of society in these novels are not specific to real-world Helsinki (sea level rise; societal breakdown), some novels go to considerable lengths in how they draw on the characteristics of the real-life Finnish capital. Using a term from future studies, the authors of these 'weak signals' of possible future development—'current oddities, strange issues that are thought to be in key position in anticipating future changes' (Hiltunen 247)—and have extrapolated these into visions of possible futures. The role of the gaming industry in *Beta* is one example; early twenty-first-century 'weak signals'

of rising inequality and of increasing social segregation have become full future reality in novels such as *Taivas*. In some novels, actual urban development at the turn of the twenty-first century functions as a reference point for the future city: in *Totuuskuutio*, far from favourable visions of the development of Pasila and of the Olympic Stadium (13, 42ff.) invite comparison with actual early twenty-first-century plans to change these areas into glossy urban hubs. The novel ends with an oblique reference to one of the most megalomaniacal infrastructure plans for Helsinki: the idea for a tunnel connecting Helsinki and Tallinn, across the Gulf of Finland. In the novel, the tunnel has been constructed, but its function within the plot, significantly, is not to contribute to the socio-economic vitality of the capital, but to enable the escape of the protagonist from Helsinki (221). The imaginative use of urban planning visions at the time of publication is taken furthest in *Parantaja*, and the subject of the next and final section of this chapter.

Future Urban Possibility and *The Healer*

Of the range of near-future novels that have appeared in recent decades, one stands out for how it builds its storyworld of a near-future Helsinki in close dialogue with the planning visions of the Helsinki city planning department: Antti Tuomainen's *The Healer* (*Parantaja*, 2010). The novel is set in a near-future Helsinki disrupted by radical climate change, with catastrophic flooding and incessant rain, and against a backdrop of large-scale climate migration, global pandemics and water wars (see Ameel, 'Antti Tuomainen'). Amidst these upheavals, a serial killer, the eponymous 'Healer', is killing people he holds accountable for catastrophic climate change. The plot revolves around the endeavours of the protagonist, the Finnish poet Tapani Lehtinen, to find his lost wife Johanna, who is a journalist investigating the murders. In his journey through flooded Helsinki, Tapani guides the reader on a tour of how different areas in the city, as well as different affected citizens, are coping with the dramatic changes.

One of the most fascinating features of *The Healer* is how the future city it imagines is in dialogue not with the city at the moment of writing, but rather with the possible future city as envisioned in the planning of the turn of the twenty-first century. The conventional ontological dialectic, in utopian, dystopian and speculative fiction, is arguably the relationship between the narrated world on the one hand, and the actual world at the time of writing on the other hand. Edward Bellamy's classical

utopia *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (1888), for example, spells out this dialectic relationship in its very title, drawing the attention to how a vision of 2000 Boston will have repercussions for how the actual Boston of 1887 can be critically approached. The storyworld in Tuomainen's *The Healer* similarly draws on a dialogue between a possible future Helsinki in the 2030s and the actual Helsinki at the time of writing, in the early twenty-first century. But even more productive is the relationship, forged in the novel, between the narrated storyworld and the future visions of the Helsinki city planning department at the time of publication. Several of the city districts (Jätkäsaari, Kalasatama) described in the novel were only in a planning phase at the time of publication. In the time depicted in *The Healer* they have already become obsolete.

The opening paragraphs of the novel alert the reader to this particular relationship between two possible futures. The protagonist finds himself on a bus going into the city centre because the metro does not run: the metro tunnels are flooded all the way to Keilaniemi. At the time of writing, the western extension of the metro network (to Keilaniemi and beyond) was not yet finished, although it was widely anticipated. One of the consequences of this particular kind of ontological dialectic in the novel is that the anticipatory effect wears off as time progresses onward from the year of publication. The extent to which the novel is built around experiences of the ruins of not-yet existing infrastructure at the time of publication becomes gradually lost to readers as the century progresses and more of the plans become reality.

In 2010, the idea of the western metro extension was a future development whose consequences for everyday life for inhabitants of the greater Helsinki area were hotly debated but which was located essentially still in the realm of the possible, the not-yet. As the century progresses, this effect is rapidly lost. And for the many readers who read the novel in translation—in English, Spanish, French, Dutch, among others—this dissonance remained largely missing from the start.⁹

The Helsinki waterfront, which was under radical redevelopment in the decade running up to the publication of the novel (see Ameal, 'Narrative

⁹ Covers of *The Healer* in translation more often than not miss the point about Helsinki's urban environment and its function in the novel, either showing a generic urban wasteland, or a view incorporating iconic elements of Helsinki's landscape (such as the Uspensky cathedral or the St. Nicolas Church) with a generic added touch of gloom or rain.

Mapping’), has a particular role in *The Healer*. The very first descriptions of the city in the novel’s opening paragraphs describe a world in which the glossy developments have succumbed to the forces of nature:

I turned my gaze back to the rain that had been falling for months, a continuous flow of water that had started in September and paused only momentarily since. At least five seaside neighborhoods—Jätkäsaari, Kalasatama, Ruoholahti, Herttoniemenranta, and Marjaniemi—had been continuously flooded, and many residents had finally given up and abandoned their homes. (10)¹⁰

Ruoholahti, Herttoniemenranta and Marjaniemi were areas that had already been largely constructed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, and areas that would have been known to contemporary readers. But Kalasatama and Jätkäsaari did not yet exist as fully developed neighborhoods, since construction of these areas had only begun a year prior to publication. Kalasatama is the first setting the reader gains first-hand access to in the novel, as the protagonist, shivering in his rain-drenched coat, looks out of the window at a car-crash in which no-one comes to the assistance of the victims.¹¹ Jätkäsaari takes on a particular place of importance in the novel, since it is described as being located at the crossroads of a ‘murder map’ in the form of a cross with all the locations of the ‘Healer’ attacks. When disaster strikes, the novel argues, the fancy waterfront developments planned by the Helsinki city planning department in the early twenty-first century will be the first to go under.

Several of the other central locations in the novel are of considerable symbolic importance, settings of various historical stages in how Helsinki has imagined its future development. One such place is ‘Baana’,¹² which is obliquely referred to in the novel as the location of a temporary settlement for climate refugees, an area that has informally ‘grown into its very own city district’ (103). ‘Baana’ is Helsinki’s ‘Low Line’ (as compared to New York’s iconic ‘High Line’); a 1.3-kilometre-long bicycle and pedestrian road constructed in a chasm, along what used to be railway lines tracks connecting the Helsinki West Harbour (in Jätkäsaari) with the

¹⁰ page numbers refer to the Finnish original; the translation is by Lola Rogers (Vintage, 2014).

¹¹ The similarity with the opening of *Totuuskuutio* is striking.

¹² The word is Helsinki slang, with etymology in Swedish *bana*.

central railway station. Like the Kalasatama and Jätkäsaari development projects, it was a centrepiece of Helsinki's vision for reimagining its post-industrial spaces along a new urbanist agenda, and was not yet constructed at the time of *The Healer's* publication. 'Baana' was inaugurated in 2012, an icon of Helsinki's World Design Capital year, and it remains in real-life Helsinki one of the few material reminders of the successful Design Capital bid. In Tuomainen's near future, such design-led, orderly urban transformation, catering to international urban tastes, has run its course, with the site instead acting as the ground for temporary and informal settlements of refugees.

A second site with a particular symbolical resonance within broader visions of Helsinki's future is Kivinokka, a land area jutting out into the Old Town Bay which, in the novel, is the site of the eco-village where the protagonist's wife Johanna lived with the man who would become the Healer. The reader learns of the area through a newspaper article that was published thirteen years before the events described in the novel. The article describes the first occupants moving into 'environmentally efficient Lilliput houses' (82–83), Johanna and the future 'Healer' among them. The location's role within the plot is one rich with suggestions for life's potential and the possibilities of forking paths towards different futures. It invites meditations on how a romantic tale of a young couple living happily together in a near-utopian community could turn into distinctly grimmer futures. The mention of 'Lilliput houses' draws the reader's attention to the novel's literary antecedents, with the reference Jonathan Swift's novel *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) establishing a link between *The Healer* and early modern satirical utopia. For the protagonist, Tapani, the story of the eco-village questions his own recollections of the relationship to his wife, and his hopes for a possible future with her, since he realises that he has been largely kept in the dark about this aspect of the past life of his wife. For readers aware of the history of Helsinki or of urban planning projects underway at the time of publication, the location of Kivinokka resonates with a number of broader visions of the possible city. The real-world area, located due east from the city centre and close to Herttoniemi, has been the site of several idealistic re-fashionings of urban society in the course of more than a century. Kivinokka was in the early twentieth-century a traditional working-class recreational area, and the setting for one of the oldest Helsinki allotment gardens. Around the time of publication of *The Healer*, the area was up for radical redevelopment (see, e.g., Helsinki City 122), although

the highly controversial plans to develop the area were eventually shelved. But for one vote going the other way, the future past in *The Healer* could have existed in actual present-day (2021) Helsinki: ‘A former allotment garden had been converted to housing in the same miniature spirit as garden cottages, with the goal of demonstrating the housing construction of the future’ (Tuomainen 82).

The remnants of the deserted eco-village are visible from the house of the protagonist, located high up on the rocky hills of the Helsinki suburb Herttoniemi. The novel ends with a view from the city from this location on the morning of Good Friday, with a sense of optimism against all odds. Tapani is reunited with his wife; they have decided to stay in Helsinki, rather than flee the city as some of their friends have done, although it remains profoundly unclear how they will sustain life as journalist and poet in the utterly run-down society depicted in the novel. In the final pages of the novel, spring announces itself after a rainy and desperate winter. Bearing in mind how the novel envisions the possible fate of a range of urban projects in Helsinki, from Baana to Jätkäsaari and the Pasila towers, this ending of the novel in a 1950s concrete suburb provides a sense of closure that also reflects on the possible resilience of particular city models. Herttoniemi is one of the many concrete suburbs constructed in forest surroundings in the decades after the Second World War. Defined by modest high-rise blocks and by closeness to nature, inhabited by relatively self-contained communities some distance from the centre, suburbs such as these were designed to be modern and appealing environments for the aspiring (lower) middle-class. These environments provide one important storyline of where urbanity in Helsinki (and, more broadly, in the Nordic countries) had been heading at some point in the twentieth century. In *The Healer*, the new fashionable waterfront districts have become uninhabitable; in the dire circumstances caused by radical climate change, automated lights and electric key cards cease to function, making life in the most modern housing blocks the most difficult to sustain. The 1950s concrete suburb flat, by contrast, continues to provide shelter.

The Healer provides some insights into the affordances of literature—including that of genre literature such as crime fiction—to think of urban possibility. The most immediately striking feature of the novel, especially for someone acquainted with Helsinki’s built environment, is how the novel provides a tangible sense of possible infrastructure and imagines vivid downward trajectories for the most prestigious development

projects of the city. Insights in the ‘qualia’, in how it feels to inhabit a city subject to unrelenting rainfall, are provided in the numerous descriptions of bodily experiences (the protagonist’s face wet with rain; numb fingers; Tuomainen 9). Situated choice and emplotted identification can be found on the very first page, with the protagonist one of the people passing by the scene of a traffic accident without stopping to help, thus setting a scene of helplessness and gradual societal collapse. Finally, the way the novel is structured around an almost liturgic progression from Christmas to Easter provides one example of how it draws on long-existing frames of references to develop its general plotlines, setting the fate of the nuclear family within an almost allegoric framework of the hope for mankind’s redemption.

The ending of *The Healer* ties in with the broader and highly complex sense of nostalgia found in a range of climate novels. It has been argued that one of the dominant temporal dispositions of twenty first-century environmentally themed literature is the future perfect (or future anterior), the ‘what- will-have-happened’ (Currie 76), moving the reader into anticipation of causal events leading up to particular futures. At the same time, however, contemporary future-oriented literature tends to be also permeated with nostalgic past-future subjunctives: the futures that could have been. Zygmunt Bauman describes such nostalgic modes in terms of *retrotopia*, ‘visions located in the lost/stolen/abandoned but undead past’ (Bauman 5; see Bar-Itzhak in this volume). In the twenty-first-century literature of Helsinki, possible urban lives as well as possibilities for the city take shape in a way that oscillates between glimpses of nostalgic retrotopia and proleptic visions of gloomy futures. While the strong dystopian undercurrent in many of the contemporary novels set in a near-future Helsinki are particular to the present century, the way in which literature enables imaginative renderings of urban possibility are grounded in a much longer history. The oscillation between urban past and future possibility at the waterfront is part and parcel of the literary imagination of the Finnish capital, in waterfront appears as the privileged setting where personal and communal possibilities are weighed, and where it also becomes possible to take stock of urban planning projects of the actual city of Helsinki, from the imagined ‘Palace of Light’ of *Niniven lapset* to the railroad tunnel to Tallinn in *Totuuskuutio*, to the flooded post-industrial waterfront districts of Kalasatama and Jätkäsaari in *The Healer*.

Works Cited

- Ameel, Lieven. 'Antti Tuomainen: *The Healer*.' *Cli-Fi: A Companion*, edited by Adeline Johns-Putra and Axel Goodbody, Peter Lang, 2018, pp. 165–70.
- . 'Kerrassaan suurenmoinen suunnitelma.' *Kritiikin uutiset*, vol. 3, 2012, pp. 11–12.
- . 'Mahdollisuuksien maisema: Helsingin rantaviiva liminaalitulana.' *Veteen kirjoitettu — Veden merkitykset kirjallisuudessa*, edited by Arja Rosenholm et al., SKS, 2018, pp. 73–92.
- . *Moved by the City: Experiences of Helsinki in Finnish Prose Fiction 1889–1941*. Unigrafia, 2013.
- . 'Narrative Mapping and Polyphony in Urban Planning.' *Finnish Journal for Urban Studies*, vol. 54, no. 2, 2016, pp. 20–40.
- . 'Peopling the Future Fair City: Affordances of Literary Fiction, Planning and Policy.' (Un)Fair Cities Conference, 12 December 2019, University of Limerick, Ireland. Conference Presentation.
- . 'Towards a Narrative Typology of Urban Planning Narratives *for, in and of* Planning in Jätkäsaari, Helsinki.' *URBAN DESIGN International*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2016, pp. 318–30.
- Ameel, Lieven, and Sarianna Kankkunen. 'Saaristo kaupungissa. Helsingin saaret kirjallisuudessa.' *Lintukodon rannoilta. Saarikertomukset suomalaisessa kirjallisuudessa*, edited by Maria Laakso et al., SKS, 2017, pp. 357–74.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Retrotopia*. Polity Press, 2017.
- Bellamy, Edward. *Looking Backward 2000–1887*. 1888. Houghton Mifflin, 1941.
- Currie, Mark. *The Unexpected: Narrative Temporality and the Philosophy of Surprise*. Edinburgh UP, 2013.
- Dolezel, Lubomir. *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1998.
- Doody, Margaret Anne. *The True Story of the Novel*. Fontana Press, 1998.
- Drury, Tom, Hannah Byers, Lauren Law Kingsley, and Ari Wiseman, editors. *Concept and Development Study for a Guggenheim Helsinki*. Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2011. designguggenheimhelsinki.org/stageonegallery/pdfs/GH-2234271498-partB.pdf. Accessed 15 January 2020.
- Edwards, Caroline. *Utopia and the Contemporary British Novel*. Cambridge UP, 2019.
- Hiltunen, Elina. 'The Future Sign and Its Three Dimensions.' *Futures*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2008, pp. 247–60.
- Isomaa, Saija, and Toni Lahtinen. 'Kotimaisen nykydystopian monet muodot.' *Pakkovaltiosta ekodystopiaan: Kotimainen nykydystopia*, edited by Saija Isomaa and Toni Lahtinen. *Joutsen/Svanen Special Studies*, no. 2, 2017, pp. 7–16.
- Helsinki City. 'Helsingin Yleiskaava 2002, ehdotus.' Helsingin kaupunkisuunnitteluvirasto, 2002.
- Holappa, Pentti. *Yksinäiset*. WSOY, 1954.

Kauranen Anja. *Pelon maantiede*. WSOY, 1995.

Kluwick, Ursula, and Virginia Richter, editors. *The Beach in Anglophone Literature and Cultures: Reading Littoral Space*. Ashgate, 2015.

Laakso, Maria. 'Suomen tulevat sodat. Dystopia suomalaisen sotakirjallisuuden uutena muotona Mikko-Pekka Heikkisen ja Teemu Kaskisen sotaromaaneissa.' *Pakkovaltiosta ekodystopiaan: Kotimainen nykydystopia*, edited by Saija Isomaa and Toni Lahtinen. *Joutsen/Svanen*, Special Studies no. 2, 2017, pp. 106–24.

Lehtovuori, Panu. 'Rannat Helsingin seudun dynamoina.' *Rantaviivoja. Asuinalueita veden äärellä*, edited by Juhana Lahti et al., Suomen arkkitehtuurimuseo, 2012, pp. 20–31.

Leino, Piia. *Taivas*. S&S, 2018.

The Lighthouse. *DesignGuggenheimHelsinki*, 2015.

[designguggenheimhelsinki.org/stageonegallery/pdfs/ GH-5760237713-partB.pdf](https://designguggenheimhelsinki.org/stageonegallery/pdfs/GH-5760237713-partB.pdf). Accessed 4 March 2020.

Luther, Annika. *De hemlösas stad*. Söderstroms, 2011.

Mäkinen, Esa. *Totuuskuutio*. Otava, 2015.

Museo Majakka. *DesignGuggenheimHelsinki*, 2015.

[designguggenheimhelsinki.org/stageonegallery/pdfs/ GH-3350346100-partB.pdf](https://designguggenheimhelsinki.org/stageonegallery/pdfs/GH-3350346100-partB.pdf). Accessed 4 March 2020.

Ruoppila, Sampo, and Panu Lehtovuori. 'Guggenheim Helsinki: Landing-Site for Franchised Culture.' *Domusweb*, 7 March 2012. www.domusweb.it/en/op-ed/guggenheim-helsinki-landing-site-for-franchised-culture/. Accessed 4 March 2020.

Sassen, Saskia. *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*. Belknap Press, 2014.

Talvio, Maila. *Niniven Lapset*. 1915. *Kootut teokset*, vol. 6, Werner Söderström, 1953, pp. 145–340.

Tuomainen, Antti. *Parantaja*. 2010. Like, 2011.

Uurto, Iris. *Kypsyminen*. Otava, 1935.

Vacklin, Anders, and Aki Parhamaa. *BETA: Sensored Reality*. Tammi, 2018.

DesignGuggenheimHelsinki, 2015. designguggenheimhelsinki.org/en/finalists/winner. Accessed 4 March 2020