



LITERARY URBAN STUDIES

Literatures of Urban Possibility

Edited by

Markku Salmela · Lieven Ameel · Jason Finch

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Literary Urban Studies

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PREFACE

It would be fair to say that the inception of this book took place almost a decade ago, when the Helsinki Literature and the City Network (HLCN) was founded—an organisation that has since been transformed into the Association for Literary Urban Studies (ALUS). HLCN/ALUS aims to connect scholars working in the field of literary urban studies (broadly defined) and wants to establish this field in a discipline in its own right. In part, the activities of HLCN/ALUS have been structured around regular symposia and biannual conferences. Starting in 2013, three biannual conferences have been organised in Finland: *City Peripheries/Peripheral Cities* in Helsinki (2013), *Literary Second Cities* in Turku (2015), *(Im)Possible Cities* in Tampere (2017). On the basis of the first two conferences, two edited volumes were developed, *Literature and the Peripheral City* (2015) and *Literary Second Cities* (2017) respectively, both published by Palgrave Macmillan. The present volume can be considered a continuation of these previous books—a closing of sorts, to a trilogy that we have seen developing over these years of close collaboration.

The *(Im)Possible Cities* conference was in many ways an unusual—and unusually inspiring—event. The conference theme straddled a variety of fields, including literary urban studies, urban planning theory, cultural geography, and future studies. The two keynote speakers, Ayona Datta (then at King’s College London) and Eric Prieto (University of California, Santa Barbara) represented this variety of perspectives. The conference

was set up back-to-back with another urban studies conference, Re-City, which focused on urban studies and urban planning and shared the focus on urban possibility. The two conferences took place on the same campus and the conference programmes partly overlapped, with one joint panel session. Re-City's keynote speaker for 25 August was David Pinder (Roskilde University), and the collaboration between these two conferences and different approaches to (im)possible cities continues into this volume, for which David Pinder has written the afterword. We would like to thank the University of Tampere, our colleagues who organised the Re-City Conference, and the City of Tampere for the excellent collaboration that enabled discussions and dialogue to thrive, with this volume as one of the concrete outcomes.

Indeed, the city of Tampere is an apt vantage point for the conclusion of our book trilogy. Despite being undoubtedly peripheral from a global perspective, and a rather typical second city, as a hub along Finland's northward artery, it has recently seen several developments that mirror the concerns of this book. Some of these are large-scale construction projects, such as the 2.3-kilometre road tunnel now bypassing the city centre, the tramway scheduled to open in 2021, or the grandiose Deck and Arena complex being built atop the railway tracks. One of the editors of this book has observed the daily progress of the last of these through his office window (except during the period of remote work in 2020), an experience that has powerfully illustrated the openness of cityscapes to rapid change. Such development projects aim to maintain and improve the vitality of the city as a whole, a concern prominent in the first part of this volume. But Tampere also evidently appeals to individuals as a site of possibility (the main theme of the second part of this book), consistently topping the polls as the most attractive residential destination in Finland.

As students continue to flock to Tampere, one of the biggest structural changes has been seen in academic life. During the 2017 sister conferences on possible cities, the city's two universities, which collaborated in organising the events, were preparing to merge. Although the decisive motives for the change may have little to do with city image, the language employed in branding the merger was highly familiar from smart-city visions. Potentials were unleashed, creative synergies tapped, and old-school academics occasionally found themselves thrust into the role of cutting-edge innovators whether they liked it or not. By now, this fiercely contested process has been mostly completed, and the phoenix emerging from the ashes is called Tampere University. Both the utopian

rhetoric from the new university's leadership and the dystopian registers of the most vocal critics have become somewhat more muted. One lesson to be drawn from the merger is just how profoundly *literary* administrative procedures can be, both in terms of the defamiliarising language driving them and the gallery of characters they bring into the spotlight. In this case, the narrative unfolded within a setting that combines the urban and the academic, with plenty of local colour added. Perhaps observations like this can serve as further evidence of the ever-expanding possibilities of literary urban studies as a field.

The activities of the Association for Literary Urban Studies have considerably expanded during these past years and have led to the establishment of the Palgrave Macmillan series in Literary Urban Studies, which has seen the publication of two volumes at the moment of writing, with several other books already accepted for publication. We are grateful to Palgrave for their commitment to the series as an active shaper of the burgeoning field of literary urban studies. In many ways, we think it is fitting that the present book should be able to be published within the series. Many thanks to everyone at Palgrave for their work on this volume, and to the external reviewers for their encouraging feedback.

The most recent ALUS conference, *(Un)Fair Cities*, took place in Limerick in December 2019; several publications are planned on the basis of the conference. Future conferences and symposia are in preparation. We would like to thank all members of ALUS, and all participants in the events, for their contribution, and look forward to future developments.

Tampere, Finland
 Turku, Finland
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 Jason Finch

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The Possible in Literature and Urban Life: Clearing the Field

Markku Salmela, Lieven Ameel, and Jason Finch

A long continuum of cities that envision what might be possible—for the cities themselves, on the one hand, and the people living in them, on the other—runs through literary history, connecting early-modern utopian texts to modernist visions of urbanism and contemporary speculative fiction. These literatures of urban possibility are one of the central ways in which imaginative literature expresses the concerns of urban history and urban studies, from the late Medieval adage that ‘city air makes free’ (Park 12) to the more broadly felt sense that the density, diversity, specialisation, anonymity, and scale of city life could provide newcomers with the means

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for social or educational advancement, or at the very least a new identity and a possible fresh start. If the city appears on the individual scale as a site for personal or communal possibility, it has also become a symbol for possible societal change. From the time of Plato's *Republic*, cities in writing have been the 'symbol of conscious design in society', with a vivid utopian and dystopian tradition of city writing as result (Frye 27).

Literature of the city has been an important site where such engagements with possibility have been acted out. Some literary cities stage alternative futures conceivable at a specific moment in time, or stories that test the limits of egalitarian progress. Others depict individual discoveries and upward social trajectories made possible by the urban system. Yet others experiment directly with previously non-existent forms of urban community or the built environment, emphasising the capability of cities to foster powerful visions. All these patterns of city literature engage with the notion of the possible, and many of the narratives in which they manifest themselves indicate, specifically, how existing horizons of possibility might be expanded, either for individuals or for the city as blueprint of ordered society. In doing so, imaginative literature does not only document experiments with what is possible in the city, or envision speculative urban futures; it may provide the reader with an expanded 'sense of the possible' (Meretoja 90–97). It is this act of expansion of urban possibility through the literary imagination that *Literatures of Urban Possibility* seeks to address.

A TWO-PRONGED APPROACH

Literatures of Urban Possibility examines literary texts that engage with urban possibility from two distinct but intermingled perspectives. The first of these focuses on *the imagined possibilities for the city, especially for the city as an imagined community or as an imagined polity*. In their most explicit form, these possibilities may be expressed in large-scale city visions that can be found in utopian literature (as in Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* [1888]) or science fiction (such as Asimov's *Foundation Trilogy* [1951–53]). But engagements with the city that are more realistic—and more mundane—can also be approached from this perspective of the 'possible city'. Perhaps this is particularly true in the case of literature that focuses on a clearly outlined city district and its social or ethnic makeup, often with some indication of what the urban environment could be at best: the 'ecological city novel', in the terms of

Blanche Gelfant (11). More recent examples, which refer to urban social housing estates as zones of fragile urban possibility, include Jonathan Lethem's *Dissident Gardens* (2013) and Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012). Yet it only takes a change in perspective—from the city to the protagonist in city literature—to see these two texts not so much as expressing the city's potential, but rather that of its inhabitants. Such an observation, of course, is in tune with an understanding of the city novel as a genre in which the city reveals, facilitates or thwarts the potential of the character, while simultaneously, the protagonist enables the city to reveal and fulfil part of its potential (see Ameel, 'City Novel' 234; Acke 245–46).

This sense of reciprocity connects with a second, closely related, way of understanding urban possibility: *the urban environment as a site of possibility for individuals and groups*. Especially in literary fiction from the nineteenth century onwards (see Moretti), the city appears as a potential enabler and social elevator—but it is important also to bear in mind that many potent counter-narratives exist: many literary narratives with relevance for literary urban studies are 'novels of disillusionment' (Lukács 151). Especially from Balzac's *Lost Illusions* (1837–43) onwards, hardship is what shapes characters in many urban stories. Yet often before the adversity there is the initial sense of the possible, the incentive that takes characters to the city in the first place, and moments of adversity also enable new discoveries, new sites of the possible.

This book aims to bring into focus literature's affordances as a medium for questioning urban possibility in ways that communicate with mundane, everyday, highly personal experiences, as well as with high-flown artistic visions of the possible city, and policy and planning of future cities. The ten chapters brought together here were selected to provide a diverse range of geographical and cultural contexts, and to enable an examination of literatures of urban possibility in their many aspects, from imagined urban lives to imagined alternative future cities and urban communities. The material includes different literary genres and periods, from young adult literature to climate fiction, autobiography and the postmodernist short story. Specific locations have an equally wide range from Helsinki to Haifa and Istanbul, from Russian provincial cities to imagined Edinburgh, from the UK council estate to gentrified Berlin, and more.

PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

Any viable examination of possibility, as a concept, must acknowledge that the idea of the possible is built upon the past as much as imagined with the future in mind. Any such analysis will also benefit from the basic realisation, strongly present in literary urban studies, that to study cities is also to study specific forms, and stages, of modernity. Richard Lehan, for example, structures his historical examination of city literature by following what he sees as the three main functional stages of capitalist urban modernity in the West: the commercial city, the industrial city, and the postindustrial city (289). Bart Keunen, meanwhile, has proposed four states of urbanity, respectively moving from solid, liquid and gas-like, to plasmatic. Whichever of these typologies one draws upon, consecutive historical urban types have been associated with specific textual paradigms, which have mediated, exposed and evaluated the inherent potentialities of these versions of urbanism. The Industrial Revolution commented upon by writers such as Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell set some fundamental parameters for nineteenth-century urban fantasies in England, whereas the spatial and economic futurism in cities of the digital age is largely defined by the sense of technological simultaneity that Manuel Castells' influential concept of the 'space of flows' captures. Each age creates its own sense of the possible.

Somewhat counter-intuitively, one good starting point for thinking about notions of possibility is to acknowledge their common indebtedness to the past. The concept of nostalgia helps illustrate how visions drawing on retrospection can also have potential for the future. Urban possibility is also a case of what could have been, of past subjunctives and competing possible worlds visible in the layered urban realm. Future possibilities are complemented by past aspirations, hopes and failures. Svetlana Boym has pointed out that nostalgia 'is not always retrospective; it can be prospective as well. The fantasies of the past determined by the needs of the present have a direct impact on the realities of the future' (xvi). Nostalgia is a form of imagination that focuses on what is immaterial in the present, thus engaging directly with notions of possibility. Boym employs a basic division into two very different types of nostalgia, restorative and reflective, arguing that '[r]estorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time' (41). The distinction is

informative as we contemplate urban possibilities. Restorative nostalgia, of which Boym is suspicious, develops from an ultimately destructive insistence on traditions and origins which may or may not have ever existed. Zygmunt Bauman's concept of retrotopia, employed by Chen Bar-Itzhak in this volume, builds upon such fantasies of the past and their relationship with utopian thinking. The imagined future counterpart for restorative nostalgia would be an ideological utopia (which to many might appear as dystopia) that ignores alternative viewpoints, cross-cultural realities and contradictory experiences. Such a closed view understands the past, which is transposable to a possible future, as a monolithic formation dominated by a single narrative (of the nation, the economy, or technology). Boym contends that these kinds of nostalgic narratives have an affinity with invented traditions and a simplistic, 'conspiratorial worldview' that entails 'the inevitable scapegoating of the mythical enemy' (43).

In contrast, the notion of possibility when understood as a counterpart of reflective nostalgia allows ambivalence, silence and openness. It can embrace both playfulness and determination, both fragmentation and coherence, as well as 'ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones' (Boym xviii). Such conceived possibilities can be complex, organic and meditative, occasionally expressing themselves 'in riddles and puzzles' (Boym xvii). Similarly, in his meditation on the widespread twenty-first century longing for ruins, Andreas Huyssen has commented on the status of nostalgia as 'utopia in reverse' (7). Nostalgia informs the ways people look at the 'shrinking cities' of 'industrial heartlands', representing a disappearing form of modernity, 'because they still seem to hold a promise that has vanished from our own age: the promise of an alternative future' (Huyssen 8). Regaining that promise seems difficult if one observes cities merely through the lens of unquestioned continuous progress. City literature that concerns itself with drawing up possible urban forms tends to be associated with utopia, with all the associated ideological ballast which that term has acquired over the last half-century. But Boym's and Huyssen's reflections on nostalgia point in other directions, towards a complex literature of (unachieved) possibility informed by history's weight. They serve to counteract utopian blind faith and visions of a clear-cut future, reminding us that literatures of urban possibility are never simplistic rhetorical exercises.

THE POSSIBLE IN LITERATURE

While this is not the place to make far-reaching claims about what texts read as literary are able to do or not able to do, some reflections on the possibilities of literature, and on literature as site for the possible, may be helpful to contextualise the ideas on literature and urban possibility that run through this book, especially for readers interested in urban studies and positioned outside of literary studies. One starting point for thinking about the affordances of imaginative literature is provided by the Formalist school, in particular their concept of ‘estrangement’—the ability of poetic language to make the familiar appear strange, a notion with particular political undercurrents (see Shklovsky). For the Formalists, this ability of literature lies not in the thematics of narratives (in *what* is described), but is bound up with formal features and the poetical language typical of literature. By its very language and narrative structure, a literary text forces the reader to see the world anew, they argue. To a considerable extent, such a view still holds within contemporary paradigms in literary theory. In her recent book on form, for example, Caroline Levine argues that she does not understand ‘literary texts [...] as reflections or expressions of prior social forms, but rather as sites, like social situations, where multiple forms cross and collide, inviting us to think in new ways about power’ (122). Thinking about literature in terms of possibility entails seeing literature not merely as a reflection on but as an intervention into the world. Essential for how this intervention is acted out is literary form: genres, plot tropes, literary language.

The notion of estrangement is particular to discussions of imaginative literature, but another important question for this volume is related to the affordances of literary texts as opposed to other texts within urban studies, such as historical documents and policy texts. This question is addressed at more length in another volume, *The Materiality of Literary Narratives in Urban History* (Ameel et al.). Among these affordances is the fact that literature (prose, poetry, drama, as well as types of non-fiction) tends to work on multiple urban planes, reflecting and re-enacting urban complexity in its scalar dimensions. Literature’s abilities to enact translocality, complex connectedness, and an imaginative intertwining of scales make it a particularly well-suited complement to non-fictional texts that imagine urban possibility, such as policy or planning texts. Second, literature tends to embrace a human and experiential scale, as exemplified by (but by no means limited to) first-person narrators and

stream-of-consciousness techniques. And thirdly, literature is particularly concerned with counterfactuality (Dannenberg), often structuring plots around notions of what might be or could have been, which makes it an ideal ground to test possible worlds, from the individual to the communal to the planetary.

In the context of the interaction between literary storyworlds and their impact on real-world spaces, Bertrand Westphal, in *Geocriticism*, considers literature as an ‘experimental field of alternative realities’, and a ‘laboratory of the possible’ (59, 63). Similar assertions have been made by some of the most prominent twentieth-century novelists, from the ruminations on a sense of the possible in chapter 4 of Robert Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities* (1943) to Milan Kundera’s thoughts in *The Art of the Novel* (1986). In the most comprehensive recent study of literature and the possible, *The Ethics of Storytelling*, Hanna Meretoja examines literature as a site for the reflection of the possible and what this means for ethical questions and literature’s role within ethics, arguing ‘that the power of narratives to cultivate and expand our sense of the possible is ethically crucial’ (34–35).

A key theoretical paradigm connecting literature and the possible is possible worlds theory, an approach rooted in the work of Gottfried Leibniz and Nelson Goodman that examines questions of modal logic, and the working of storyworlds, from the perspective that any given world (including the one we experience) is but one of a potentially infinite number of possible worlds. Possible worlds theory, as developed within narrative studies by Lubomír Doležel, Marie-Laure Ryan and others, provides a model with which to consider the key modalities: What is possible, impossible, or necessary? What is permitted, prohibited, or obligatory? What is good, bad, or indifferent? What is known, unknown, or believed? (Doležel 113–32, esp. 114). In this volume, some of the consequences of literary possible worlds are explored in Eric Prieto’s chapter, which argues that ‘the “indirect referentiality” of metaphor and fiction enables literature to explore hypothetical situations and “possible worlds” in ways that often generate more powerful insights into real-world phenomena than directly referential accounts of factual situations’ (23).

POSSIBLE CITIES

Literature of urban possibility, in terms of the possibilities for a city as an imagined community and/or an imagined polity, brings this volume close to existing research within utopian studies and urban studies of future urban visions (see Ameen, 'Cities Utopian'; Pinder, *Visions*). Within urban and planning studies, recent research has repeatedly foregrounded the potential importance of fictional cities for envisioning city futures. In a recent article that echoes the Formalist concept of estrangement, for example, Amy Butt argues that architects should read science fiction, which is able to 'make the familiar strange, to reveal fears about the future, to confront us with ourselves, and to shape the world we inhabit' (151). Similarly, in a 2001 article, Rob Kitchin and James Kneale suggest that cyberfiction provides 'planners with a cognitive space for the contemplation of future cities' (25). Activating literary cities' potential for use in urban planning or policy should not lead to neglect of literature's formal characteristics—the language and narrative form that enables it to act as a 'laboratory of the possible', in the words of Westphal. It is important to frame these investigations in a way that takes into account the *literariness* as well as the *citiness* of the material at hand, an approach that is at the heart of the developing discipline of literary urban studies (see Finch et al.).

To frame the topic of literary cities positively, as textually constructed horizons of possibility, is obviously to encroach into the rhetorical territory of visionaries, politicians, consultants and entrepreneurs, who have long employed the vocabulary of limitless possibility in describing the smart, green, and sustainable futures of their urban constituencies. The urban plans of today have as their inevitable precursors the utopian cities conceived in the previous centuries. The material (and often profoundly textual and symbolic) consequences of the rhetoric of optimistic urbanism today include made-from-scratch cities built to promote business investment as well as smart urban design, many of which have the status of Special Economic Zones (SEZs).

Two prominent examples among numerous recent projects can be mentioned. Dholera Industrial City, a work-in-progress in Gujarat, India, is a Special Investment Region of huge projected size and manifest utopian undertones. 'The future is Dholera', the development's website declares, proceeding to claim that 'there's no better place to leap forward into the future' (*DholeraSIR*), statements that neatly capture both the

collective, futuristic significance of such large-scale envisioning and the potential empowering effect it may have, if realised, on aspiring individuals. At the same time, as Ayona Datta has demonstrated, the corporate-driven enterprise city created from scratch can hardly become a miracle cure for societal problems—if it ever fully materialises. Even while existing only as a rhetorical construct in consultants' and politicians' speeches, with no material counterpart on the ground, Dholera smart city has been 'bifurcated by conflicting demands of economic growth and social justice' (Datta 17). For a second example, New Songdo, a green seafront business city built on reclaimed land in South Korea, was constructed upon equally utopian promises. According to one observer, it aimed 'to do nothing less than banish the problems created by modern urban life' (McNeill).

And yet it should be noted that all the unrealistically optimistic overtones in urban planning visions for future cities run counter to a predominantly pessimistic view of urban possibility in much of contemporary urban studies, a view which led Guy Baeten, as early as 2002, to declare that '[u]topian thinking, both as a literary and political genre has been rendered marginal in contemporary political practices. Urban dystopia, or "Stadtschmerz", is now prevalent in critical Western thinking about city and society' (143). This volume wants to go against the grain of such approaches to literary cities that have seen possible cities predominantly in terms of dystopia. The chapters brought together in this volume are sceptical of an imagined 'end of utopia' as a starting point for thinking of the (future) city (see e.g. Kumar). Instead, they are broadly aligned with David Harvey's call for a renewed investigation of the city as a 'space of hope', a stance that still avoids translating the idea of urban possibility into an unequivocal panegyric to the city. The literary cities explored here are considered as evoking, questioning and critiquing urban possibility, and as negotiating, in their plot developments and spatial dynamics, between the possibility of renewal and redemption on the one hand, and failure and fall on the other.

Several of this volume's chapters have affinities with thinking in utopian studies and engage with the idea that the concept of utopia provides ways for urban researchers to 'open up to the possible and what could be' (Pinder, 'Reconstituting' 31). Yet we would like to emphasise that the outlook of this volume is not to present a book on literary utopias or on the urban geographies of science fiction, questions that have been examined extensively elsewhere (see, e.g., Frye; Jameson; Kitchin and Kneale, *Lost*; Pinder, *Visions*). Rather, the aims of this book are more closely

rooted in real-world material cities, including the everyday practices of living in them, even when the texts examined depart from realist conventions. The objectives are also explicitly interdisciplinary: the book aims to provide urban studies scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds with new insights into how literary cities can inform their practice and research.

POSSIBLE URBAN LIVES

Literary accounts of lives led in cities contain a range of recurrent means of talking about the multiple possibilities such lives necessarily contain. One approach to this multiplicity of possibility is to see the city as a ‘user city’, in a well-established mode perhaps best-known to literary and cultural researchers through the prism of Certeau’s ‘Walking in the City’ but equally alive in urban planners’ contemporary efforts to put into practice user-centred design (see, e.g., Fors et al.; Laatikainen et al.). The literature of cities can evoke the full implications and potentialities of everyday urban routes, which as easily can turn out to be possible roads in life—morally or socially. Walking, in particular, involves a vast multiplicity of possibilities that are repeatedly considered, activated, ignored and passed over. The decision to take a particular route contains near-limitless numbers of occasions on which a change of plan could be effected, or the walker could improvise a route through areas partially known. In the ‘young man/woman from the provinces’ pattern familiar from numerous novels (see Chanda), the first and the most important route is the one that leads into the city, enabling (or suggesting the possibility of) social rise. Central in a range of city novels is the implied opportunity to remake oneself upon moving to the city, for example by changing one’s name.

Urban lives develop in dialogue with specific urban locations and the possibilities these hold. Some of this urban possibility is site-specific, such as that embodied in cities which are built around particular forms of leisure, Las Vegas being a prime example (see, e.g., Salmela), or in cities which are massively culturally over-determined thanks to the recorded imagination of them by previous visitors (e.g. Venice and Rome). Thus the city space itself generates for the user the possibility to fulfil particular functions and take on certain roles within society. Often this involves acquiring intimate knowledge of particular urban locations and their codes—city novels tend to include the pairing of the protagonist with a guide—and the ability to cross meaningful distances (spatial, social, moral

as well as metaphorical) during the negotiation of competing possible lives (Ameel, 'City Novel').

At the heart of literary urban studies as a developing field is its inseparability from questions concerning the actual city and its inhabitants: questions of planning, mobility and social policy; questions of visions for the future and the 'makeability' and malleability of urban society. As a concept, possibility brings together the necessarily provisional and imagined quality of what happens in literature—the fact that anything can be made to happen in fiction, simply put—with the efforts of policy-makers, municipal governments, activists and others to shape the city in specific images. The subject of urban possibility emphasises the interdependency of the literary and material world in a move away from paradigms in literary studies that tended to see literary worlds as stuck in a prison-house of language, towards engaging more deeply with literature's material entanglements (see also Ameel et al.). The toponymical referentiality in much city literature, combined with the position of several contemporary notable city authors as vocal public intellectuals (from Zadie Smith to Orhan Pamuk), lends further urgency to a reading of the literature of urban possibility in view of the referential world, and in conjunction with non-literary texts of the city, from historical and sociological sources to planning and policy documents.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

Literatures of Urban Possibility showcases several methodological avenues of enquiry for literary urban studies conceived on this model of constant interaction with other disciplines and activities of the city. These include examinations which aim to explore specific urban phenomena such as gentrification, social housing, squatter settlements, the future visions proposed by urban planners, and the translocal lives of migrants. The volume is structured to reflect the two-pronged approach to possibility presented above, in which individuals' possibilities in life exist in dialogue with possible futures for cities and their individual districts.

The two sections of this book are preceded by the present introduction and a separate chapter intended to engage with both aspects of urban possibility outlined in this book: Eric Prieto's 'The Possibilities of Urban Informality: Two Views from Istanbul'. Prieto approaches the phenomenon of urban informality in the developing world through the problematics of representation, rhetoric, and ideology. Organised around a comparative analysis of two well-known novels set in Istanbul's

‘gecekondu’ districts of informal housing—Orhan Pamuk’s *A Strangeness in My Mind* and Latife Tekin’s *Berji Kristin*—his essay emphasises the performative ability of literary texts to generate new ways of seeing. These are texts that suggest correctives to a number of established sociological and urban categories that have made it difficult to see informal settlements as more than symbols of economic injustice or symptoms of social dysfunction. Despite their differences, both novels approach informal urbanisation as a promising reservoir of possibilities, in the human and geographical senses foregrounded throughout this volume. As such, these texts are emblematic of literature’s ability to contribute in meaningful ways to the development of more adequate conceptions of city life, urban planning, and social justice.

Possible Cities

The book’s first section proper opens with Lieven Ameel’s chapter ‘Rising Towers, Rising Tides: Competing Visions of the Helsinki Waterfront in Planning and Fiction.’ As a site of the possible, this examines the Helsinki waterfront, an area onto which future visions of the city and the good society have been projected. Ameel starts out from the first Finnish novel to critique urban planning developments at the waterfront, Maila Talvio’s *Niniven lapset* (‘Children of Nineveh’, 1915). Several comparisons are drawn between the rhetorical features outlined in the defence of the high-rise described in the novel, and elements highlighted in the competition for a Guggenheim museum in the early decades of the twenty-first century. This introductory part sets the stage for an examination of competing visions for the Helsinki waterfront, within which utopian and apocalyptic visions in literature have participated from the early twentieth century onward. The most substantial part of this chapter focuses on the complex interaction between Antti Tuomainen’s dystopian novel *The Healer* (*Parantaja*, 2010) and various future visions of the Helsinki City Planning Department. What sets Tuomainen’s novel apart from the majority of other future-invested novels is that its future city provides a commentary on the Helsinki city planning department’s future visions at the time of publication.

Chen Bar-Itzhak’s chapter ‘From Utopia to Retrotopia: The Cosmopolitan City in the Aftermath of Modernity’ focuses on the idea of the city as a cosmopolitan utopia and examines the changes it has undergone in the shift from Modernity to, on Zygmunt Bauman’s terms,

Liquid Modernity. By examining a particularly revealing case study—the literary depictions of the Mediterranean city of Haifa—she argues that these changes in the imaginings of the cosmopolitan utopian city can be explained by the shift from utopia to what Bauman termed Retrotopia. This is a move from the ability to project an imagined ideal social order onto a possible future, to the possibility of locating such ideal social orders only in an unattainable, lost past. The examination of the hopes and longings put into the literary creation of possible and no-longer-possible cities, Bar-Itzhak argues, can shed new light on contemporary societies’ ability to reimagine themselves and their possible futures.

Markku Salmela’s chapter ‘Donald Barthelme’s Impossible Cities’ investigates the improbable city visions of Barthelme’s short stories from the viewpoint of literary urban studies, taking into account the cultural moment of the stories’ composition. Barthelme’s cities are often constructed in ways reminiscent of architectural models, and they point towards several theories of postmodernity and urbanism formulated much later, including Edward Soja’s notion of ‘Simcities’ and Fredric Jameson’s ideas concerning postmodern disorientation. These prophetic but absurdist urban stories are thoroughly permeated by forms of media, principles of storytelling, and various manipulations of perception. Salmela argues, however, that an image of the city as a meaningful community is discernible in these texts. As such, showing some appreciation for the materiality and corporeality of everyday urbanism, Barthelme’s outlandish creations maintain their connections with the possible.

In the final chapter of this section, “‘Cartographic Ecstasy’: Mapping, Provinciality and Possible Spaces in Dmitrii Danilov’s City Prose’, Anni Lappela examines the idea of creating the perfect city text, or an alternative map of urban Russia, in Dmitrii Danilov’s prose. Danilov has dedicated many of his works to smaller, non-metropolitan Russian cities, which are otherwise rarely depicted in literature. Theoretical frameworks are drawn from Jason Finch’s *Deep Locational Criticism* and Lyudmila Parts’ explorations on the image of Russian provinces in the cultural imagination. Lappela pays special attention to Danilov’s texts about the Arctic city of Norilsk, in which the influence of geographical location on the imagined urban space is particularly strong.

Possible Urban Lives

This second section, which is structured around possible urban lives, starts out with Lena Mattheis's chapter 'Possibilities of Translocal Mapping in Tendai Huchu's *The Maestro, the Magistrate & the Mathematician*.' In her chapter, Mattheis employs a literal mapping of urban performance, movement and trajectories, in order to explore the different functions of translocal urban space in Huchu's 2015 novel. This approach questions the metaphorical mapping lexicon used extensively in urban, postcolonial, gender and queer studies. The physical locations and trajectories referenced by a text—and thus, as it were, the text's implied mental map—can provide further insight into how translocally perceived urban spaces and places are layered over memories and immediate walking experiences. Mattheis's analysis is informed by Ayona Datta and Katherine Brickell's use of the term 'translocal', Tania Rossetto's thoughts on maps and literature and Franco Moretti's approaches to abstraction.

In 'Tipping Points: Gentrification and Urban Possibility', Hanna Henryson discusses representations of gentrification in three Berlin novels published between 2009 and 2015: *Fire Doesn't Burn* (*Feuer brennt nicht*) by Ralf Rothmann, *Kress* by Aljoscha Brell and *Der amerikanische Investor* ('The American investor') by Jan Peter Bremer. Acknowledging that gentrification recasts social and spatial relations in fundamental ways, Henryson's analysis targets questions about characters' perceptions of their situation within that process, their views of their own possibilities, as well as imaginations of possible visions of an alternative Berlin. The sharp differences in characters' experiences are coupled with the complexity of the depicted gentrification processes, and the result is an ambiguity reflected in the novels' open endings.

Equally strong tensions and ambiguities emerge in Lydia Wistisen's chapter 'Concrete Possibilities: The High-Rise Suburb in Swedish Children's and Young Adult Literature', which examines representations of the high-rise suburb from the 1970s. With an emphasis on young-adult (YA) novels and children's picture books set in the Swedish Million Programme, it investigates the potential of an urban society where inhabitants are becoming increasingly disenfranchised, especially regarding the control they have over city planning. Wistisen argues that images of the suburban environment are marked by a constant tension between dystopic and encouraging representations, despair and possibilities. Her chapter demonstrates how YA and picture books participate in the creation of the

image of the high-rise suburb by reinforcing, as well as challenging and deconstructing, the representation provided by mass media.

Joshua Parker's "Double Vision": Viennese Refugees in New York and Back Home Again', is another chapter focusing on the translocal imagination. With an emphasis on poetry, Parker examines several texts by Austrian authors who fled Europe before or during the Second World War, highlighting a sort of 'double vision', the combination of a 'lost' Vienna and a contemporary Manhattan, in these writers' works. Stefan Zweig, Max Roden, Ernst Waldinger, and Greta Hartwig-Manschinger all embodied a lost generation for whom the prospects and possibilities offered by the bewildering American city were far from obvious. Yet, as these authors' memories of Vienna are transposed onto Manhattan's cityscape, they discover uncanny traces relevant to their own identities, and such discoveries allow them, in Parker's words, 'to project and concretise their notions of home, with all the unconscious cultural baggage the term carries' (229).

In the final chapter of this section, 'Utopian Thinking and the (Im)Possible UK Council Estate: The Birmingham Region in Literature, Image and Experience', Jason Finch develops a new account of the UK mass housing zones known colloquially as 'council estates' in discourse from the mid-twentieth century onwards. As case studies, Finch examines representations of two peripheral estates built between 1960 and 1980 in the West Midlands, a multipolar English urban region with Birmingham as its largest city. One is Lynsey Hanley's *Estates*, first published in 2007, a polemical literary memoir about 'estate' lives and the politics of class. The other is a set of photographs originally taken in 1991 on the Lion Farm estate just beyond the western edge of Birmingham in Oldbury, West Midlands. These visual images, by Rob Clayton, have in the 2010s been reassessed and given symbolic value as an encapsulation of the estate as itself as a representative site of the post-war era in British history. Combining David Pinder's thinking with the author's own methodology of Deep Locational Criticism, the chapter experiments with the interaction of techniques originating in cultural geography and literary studies in urban and post-urban considerations, assessing what each can learn from the other. Avoiding dystopian modes, the essay combines readings of Hanley, Clayton and a promotional film about Clayton's book *Estate* narrated by Jonathan Meades, with an account of a walk Finch took from Lion Farm to Birmingham's city centre in October 2018. In the twenty-first century, Finch argues, there are multitudinous possibilities