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Visioning Tropical Cities of the Future: Case Studies Using the Literary Method of Urban Design

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Abstract

This essay applies the *Literary Method of Urban Design* to forecast the futures of three tropical urban spaces through scenario art inspired by novels set in these cities. Bangkok, Thailand, is envisioned through Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Wind-Up Girl* as a city grappling with rising seas, precarious governance, and environmental degradation. Aracataca, Colombia, inspired by Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, is envisioned as a fleetingly successful theme park—before succumbing to economic decline and environmental catastrophe. Bhopal, India, re-visioned via Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*, is portrayed as a slowly healing landscape where humans and animals coexist amid ongoing recovery from the gigantic industrial disaster. These case studies illustrate the Literary Method's power to synthesize literature and urbanism to yield insights into future social, ecological, and cultural challenges. While tailored to specific urban contexts in this article, the approach may hold broader applicability, enabling cities and citizens across the tropics and beyond to reimagine their futures through the unique creative and critical perspectives that their own local and regional literature may provide.

Keywords: scenario art, speculative urban literature, tropical climate change, tropical cities, urban futures design, tropical futurity

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Introduction: Critical Futures

This illustrated essay takes an emerging method that explores urban futurity, namely the Literary Method of Urban Design, and applies it to tropical cities. In doing so, the paper serves as a testing of the Literary Method, to see whether it enables the formation of cogent and critical alternative futures that may, to some degree, serve to forecast the challenges now looming for them.

Unlike traditional urban design methods, which typically emphasize functionality, the Literary Method of Urban Design focuses on imaginative or speculative forecasting by blending fictional stories with social narratives. This approach—which engages with well-known national literary works set in urban environments—not only provides an aesthetic experience for students of urbanism but also fosters a more profound reflection on the human obstacles and societal possibilities of future urban life.

As I have outlined previously (Marshall, 2023), the Literary Method of Urban Design involves three essential steps:

1. Select a literary work,
2. Choose a city,
3. Apply the themes from the selected literary work to create scenarios for the future of the chosen city (conveyed via textual and graphic narrative).

This method has previously been applied to various urban settings across Europe and Asia, involving active research and field visits (see Marshall 2018; Marshall, 2019; Marshall, 2023), with resulting scenario artworks exhibited at institutions such as the Museum of London (2019), the Bauhaus Museum (2023), and the Tartu University Art Museum (Tartu Ülikooli, 2024).

Of the more than one hundred works of scenario art produced for these exhibitions via the Literary Method of Urban Design, a substantial proportion dealt with cities in the tropics. For example, in a case study involving Singapore, the ‘Lion City’ is seen floating above the South China Sea. This scenario proffers a drastic solution if the international community fails to keep global warming under the 1.5-degree centigrade rise agreed to at the Paris Climate Conference. The initial inspiration for this Singapore scenario came from Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels,* which used the idea of floating cities rising over Asian seas to make fun of the technological obsessions of his boffin friends at the Royal Society of London (see Swift, 1724; Farrel, 2017; Pritchard, 2020).

Figure 1. ***The Future of Singapore*** [1]

Scenario art depicting the future of Singapore as interpreted through the Literary Method of Urban Design via Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (Image by author).

In other case studies, tropicality features as an intervention to explore climate changes in temperate urban settings. An example is the study of future Tartu inspired by Meelis Friedenthal's novel, *The Willow King* (2012). Under global climate change, the tropics are growing—spreading further into northern and southern latitudes. Some climate researchers speculate that after another hundred years, parts of Europe may attain tropical environments (see, for instance, Hechts, 2006)—although it's equally possible that disrupted ocean currents in the Atlantic might bring another Ice Age to Europe before

[1] For clarity, the images featured in this article were created by the author through the following process (or digital variations thereof): the author first produced a pencil sketch, which was scanned into the Paint Shop Pro software for editing and refinement. This intermediate image was then subjected to numerous iterations of picture prompts in the OpenArt software, exploring themes such as 'retro-future,' 'futuristic,' 'tropical city environs,' 'architectural,' and 'fantasy'. From the hundreds of generated color images, a selection of samples was made, which were subsequently re-integrated into Paint Shop Pro. These were then combined, modified, and fine-tuned in terms of content, composition, coloring, shading, and other elements to create the final graphic narratives presented in this article. For your information, the author experimented with AI-generated art using text prompts across various AI art programs. An example of such a prompt might be: "Design a future sustainable Thai city facing climate change and massive technological change" as inspired by some specific literary work. These experiments yielded unsatisfactory results, leading the author to then caution students and designers against relying on AI 'text-to-art' software for implementing the Literary Method of Urban Design (at present). While software developers claim that future versions will achieve better results, this remains uncertain. Even if advancements are made, the author maintains the perspective that AI art generators should be regarded as tools rather than as artists.

the tropics can reach so far north. The scenario presented in Figure 2 imagines the dreaded new Ice Age has been outpaced by the spread of the tropics.

The events in *The Willow King* occur in the darksome 'Little Ice Age' period of post-medieval Europe when the cultural forces of the Scientific Revolution—as well as wetter weather—are pushing into Estonia and clashing with the superstitions and values of earlier times. Into this miserable, cold, and rainy environment, a sad young German student arrives—sodden and depressed—to take up studies at the University of Tartu (Friedenthal, 2012). Alas, the student's settlement into Estonian life doesn't start well since his only friend, a tropical parakeet he takes with him everywhere, is poisoned by superstitious locals in a public house. From then on, things only get colder and darker. The locals accuse the young man of being a witch, as he is spied trying to scrape medicinal aspirin from the local trees. Within Friedenthal's novel, a single parakeet symbolizes the nexus between life and death, between the worldly and the parochial, and between hope and despair.

Figure 2. ***The Future of Tartu***

Scenario art depicting the future of Tartu as interpreted through the Literary Method of Urban Design via Friedenthal's *The Willow King* (Image by author).

The scenario presented artistically in Figure 2 is a converse reaction to these themes, displaying the crumbling remains of Tartu's renowned medieval abbey gleaming in tropicalesque sunshine. This scenario re-envisions the novel to suppose the parakeet having managed to survive poisoning, then escaped the clutches of human keepers to

join with other feral parakeets living in the city. Amongst the ruins, an alternative 'Willow Kingdom' emerges as the parakeets stake out an ecological niche in a land year by year growing warmer.

The two case studies, presented above, serve as just a taster to visually display and verbally describe some of the thought processes involved in the Literary Method of Urban Design. For this illustrated essay, I've chosen three new case studies of tropical urbanism set roughly a century into the future, all inspired by distinct literary works emerging from locations across select areas of the tropical world. These are:

1. A future scenario for Bangkok, Thailand, inspired by Paulo Bacigalupi's novel *The Wind-Up Girl,*
2. A future scenario for Aracataca, Colombia, inspired by the Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude,*
3. A future scenario for Bhopal, India, inspired by Indra Sinha's novel *Animal's People*.

However, before presenting these scenarios and their tropical futurity, let me outline the main scholarly implications of the Literary Method of Urban Design.

Literature Review: Disciplinary Implications

The intersections between future studies and urban studies, and between urbanism and literature, provide a backdrop for examining how the Literary Method of Urban Design can enhance all these disciplines. Future studies, also known as futurology, is a transdisciplinary field that examines potential, probable, and preferable futures. While some futurologists push the quantitative, statistical, data-driven side of forecasting—either to furnish their funders with actionable number sets or so as to gloss their discipline in a scientific veneer—others, such as Bell (2003), Slaughter (2004), and Inayatullah (2017), acknowledge the value of combining empirical studies with creative speculation to envision alternative futures. Scenario analysis, a key method within this field, often relies on data-driven models, but the likes of Bell, Slaughter, and Inayatullah suggest these models can benefit from more imaginative and narrative-driven companion approaches that dwell—in some way or another—on the context-dependent cultural and emotional facets of future peoples. The Literary Method of Urban Design offers this narrative input by utilizing literary storytelling to create speculative scenarios that lend a certain 'humanity' to the data.

Regarding the prior relationships forged between literature and urbanism, it may typically be observed in one of several standard ways (as identified by Crinson & Williams 2003; Pinder, 2005; and Quirk, 2013). Firstly, writers and poets have described—often in great

detail—the physical aspects of certain urban forms in specific cities, either as a backdrop or, indeed, as an intimate, characterful facet of their storytelling. Secondly, public agencies and private entities have sought to incorporate famous literary histories into the development of architectural landmarks or in the organization of cultural products, such as monuments, public sculptures, literary tours, and arts festivals. Thirdly, urban designers and city planners themselves possess a vast body of professional literature. From this body of literature, we might observe urban design traditionally focuses on the spatial and functional organization of urban spaces, as exemplified by significant writers in the fields like Jacobs (1961) and Gehl (2010). Additionally, recent trends in urbanism, such as biophilic design (Kellert, 2008) and resilient city planning (Newman et al., 2009), emphasize the need for sustainable and inclusive approaches. However, these methodologies often lack the narrative depth to fully engage non-experts (including student designers and actual citizens) in a meaningful or deep way. The Literary Method of Urban Design might possibly address this lack of engagement by using accessible literature to inspire visual and conceptual urban scenarios that tell comprehensive social stories. Integrating this method into urban design pedagogy could also foster greater creativity and critical thinking among students, encouraging them to envision cities not only as functional spaces but as dynamic socio-psychological and cultural landscapes.

Case Studies: and their Pedagogical Implications

Given the discussion in the section above, the incorporation of the Literary Method of Urban Design into academic curricula might well enhance the creative value and intellectual diversity of these disciplines across the tropics. Future studies could benefit from the Literary Method's ability to bridge the gap between data-driven models and human-centered narratives, fostering a more empathetic approach to scenario planning.

Educational priorities within the urban design field, as well as within urban studies to a lesser extent, means teaching within these disciplines is often constrained by a technical and empirical framework. Thus, students and teachers within these fields might usefully employ fictional literary narratives to inspire broader, more innovative, and inclusive urban planning solutions that explore a wider range of social barriers and possibilities and investigate the various social forces impacting upon individual actors across different sections of society.

Furthermore, literary studies courses could incorporate urban design principles to deepen students' understanding of the spatial and social dynamics within the texts and cultures they study. By integrating these perspectives, students in various disciplines throughout the tropics can develop a richer, more multi-faceted understanding of futurity. As well as

this, the Literary Method of Urban Design not only enhances individual disciplines but also serves as a bridge between them. Its application underscores the value of interdisciplinary approaches in addressing complex urban and environmental challenges.

Having declared the academic potential of the Literary Method of Urban Design, I now lay out the results of testing the exact manner it may do so via tropical case study cities.

1. Future Scenario for Bangkok, inspired by Bacigalupi's *The Wind-Up Girl*

In *The Windup Girl* (Bacigalupi, 2012), an impending city-wide flood serves as a powerful metaphor for looming environmental and societal collapse. Set in 23rd-century Bangkok, the city is under constant threat from rising sea levels due to climate change. Though things are not great in future Bangkok, they are much worse in other parts of the world where nations and governments have either collapsed or stagnated in the face of inundation and the depletion of various vital resources, especially fuel and food.

In Bangkok, the floodwaters are held back by massive crumbling seawalls. These seawalls symbolize the fragile barrier between the remnants of human civilization and the overwhelming forces of messed-up Nature. As the story progresses, the weakening of these defenses mirrors the unraveling of the already shaken social and political order, with tensions escalating between various organizations vying for control over dwindling resources. According to literary critics (see Hageman, 2012; Murphy, 2012; Idema, 2023) the impending deluge in *The Wind-Up Girl* represents the inescapable consequences of humanity's over-exploitation of the environment, serving as a specter highlighting the precarity of the tropical city's continued existence.

For readers, as well as focusing attention upon the threat of climate change, the novel critiques the damage done by multinational capitalism as well as by greedy local elites, both of which seem hell-bent on exploiting workers, citizens, and the natural environment for maximum gain. Some technological anxieties of today are amplified by Bacigalupi as he outlines a future where survival depends upon navigating a world shaped by sinister technologies, especially genetically modified organisms (GMOs), particularly genetically modified crops. These modified crops produce no seeds for farmers to replant and regrow for subsequent seasons, thus making them dependent year after year upon the companies that supply them. The modified crops can also be weaponized by malevolent agents with all manner of natural and novel diseases and poisons.

With fossil fuels all but gone, energy companies gradually lose their power and influence, and to survive and are forced to transform into agricultural companies. This

transformation is not as radical as it may seem, since food becomes the ultimate fuel source. The centralized management and production of the world's most important food crops by a small number of corporations gives them the power of life and death over just about all the world's consumers. Except, rather surprisingly, in Thailand, where people—or government ministries—still manage a grand array of unmodified (seed-producing) tropical food plants.

Figure 3. The Future of Bangkok

Scenario art as interpreted through the Literary Method of Urban Design via Bacigalupi's *The Wind-Up Girl* (Image by author).

This fictional immunity of Thailand against GMO invasion recasts the history of Thailand regarding its remarkable avoidance of colonial conquest in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Thailand (or Siam, as it was then) stood out amongst Southeast Asian countries in avoiding European conquest. Modern-day retellings of this history often highlight the supposedly essential role that the Royal Thai Army had in keeping foreign empires at bay (see, for example, Wyatt, 2003; Terwiel, 2011). This focus on the importance of the army in Thai history is hardly surprising given the increasing role of the army in Thai politics and culture since the 1930s and the army's great desire to position itself as a beneficent actor.

This brings us on to a lacuna in Bacigalupi's Bangkok of the future; the near absence of the army. While some modern-day Thais see the army as a savior of the nation (especially at times of trouble), other Thais see it as the cause of the trouble and as a barrier to democracy and social progress. Whatever the case, the army has had a dominant presence in Thailand for the best part of a century—readily evicting a civilian government if social or political distress erupts in the slightest form. Because of this it is hard to envision a crisis-ridden Bangkok where the army is not a major player. If distress or chaos of any kind was brewing in 23rd century Bangkok, the Thai Army would likely look to take the reins.

Given all this, we arrive at the future of Bangkok inspired by *The Wind-Up Girl* (Figure 3 above). To allow Bacigalupi's narrative to ring true, though, the scenario art is set a century before his novel, when the army can still muster a powerful presence in the city's environs. I'll leave it up to the viewer to imagine whether the army would have a positive impact upon the social situation. Whatever the case, this future Bangkok has been inundated by the sea a century earlier than Bacigalupi would have it. Such a scenario is not unreasonable, though, given the drastic rate of polar ice cap melting revealed since his novel was first published.

2. Future Aracataca, inspired by Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

Whilst the scenario above offers stark warnings about Bangkok's future, it did not emerge from a native Bangkokian. Bacigalupi is an American writer who was but a short-term visitor to Thailand's shores. A standard refrain to such a situation is that writers emerging from imperial or colonial powers, as much as they may understand or critique such powers, also usually benefit from them in some way. Because of this, their writing might not be trusted to give an entirely authentic account of living in the postcolonial tropics. Whether fair or not, such criticism would encourage us to seek out the citizens of tropical countries as we select literature to help us process the Literary Method of Urban Design. Indeed, as I have explicitly stated elsewhere (Marshall, 2019), this is why the Literary Method might be applicable right across the globe since its users can bring to bear their own local literary heritage for their own particular city. Taking on board this proposition, then, we enter into the world of Marquez's Aracataca.

One Hundred Years of Solitude by the Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1967) is set in the fictional town of Macondo, a remote and isolated place founded by José Arcadio Buendía, whose descendants the novel follows for a whole century. The town, surrounded by wild forest and rivers, is seemingly disconnected from the rest of the world

and acts as a Latin American microcosm, where the Buendía family's multi-generational saga unfolds.

Macondo itself is an evocation of Marquez's own Colombian hometown of Aracataca (as explored by McMurray, 1987; Bloom, 2002; Martin, 2008), and in the novel it evolves from a sleepy village into a chaotic, industrious, and industrial, war-torn place, reflecting the broader changes and developments in Colombia as a whole (see, for example, Simons, 1975; McMurray, 1987; Bell-Villada, 2010). Through many generations of successive rises and falls, the novel depicts a family that goes on to forever repeat the mistakes of its previous generations (according to Bell-Villada, 2002). Eventually though, the ultimate generation's demise is nigh-on total, so that the town itself slowly degrades then decays before finally being swept away by a violent windstorm.

Before Macondo's predestined downfall, though, the various Buendía figures cycle through a series of dramatic fortunes and misfortunes, plus some comic-tragic mistakes. An example of the latter involves the magical conjuring up of pure gold via fantastic alchemy experiments. Yet another involves the town's elite joining up and fighting with American agribusiness investors against the town's Colombian peasants and laborers. Sometimes the entire town becomes involved in battling against the National Army of Colombian, and at other times they are seen battling with it. Through boom and bust, the town survives but does not prosper. Nor does it allow the sequential Buendía patriarchs to ever grow wise—or kind (as suggested by Bell-Villada, 2002; Bloom, 2002; Martin, 2008).

So how might *One Hundred Years of Solitude* foretell the coming future of Aracataca? Well, if we run with the novel's idea that history is but a vicious cycle, then we come up with the scenario presented below in Figure 4. When Marquez's novel was published in 1967, it gradually became critically acclaimed globally and ended up selling some fifty million copies worldwide, helping Marquez win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982.

The worldwide popularity of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* eventually prompted the real-life mayor of Aracataca to seek to change the town's name to Macondo. Alas, the scheme failed because the town's residents objected to the idea. However, if this sort of band-wagoning is recycled in the future, it is likely future mayors of Aracataca will join foreign entertainment companies to sell the town as a touristic 'Macondo Theme Village,' complete with roving actors variously pretending to be alchemists, military officers, and gangster bosses. The image in Figure 4 displays this theme park version of Aracataca in full bloom—set some one hundred years from now.

In the novel, Macondo was originally dreamt up by its founding father, José Arcadio Buendía, as a utopic idyll floating like a pristine urban island in Colombia's wilderness. For a brief moment, future Aracataca might approach this ideal as tourists and day-trippers come a-traipsing along its riverbank to spy rustic architecture and a spectacular faux alchemy lab.

Figure 4. ***The Future of Aracataca***

Scenario art depicting Aracataca in the future as interpreted through the Literary Method of Urban Design via Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Image by author).

Alas, as with many theme parks, the commercial success of future Aracataca/Macondo is precarious and likely to wane rapidly according to changing fashions and economic trends. However, as Marquez suggests in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, it will take more than just commercial failure to lead to the towns' final demise; some form of environmental catastrophe must ensue as well.

Figure 4 captures Aracataca just at the moment when this environmental catastrophe begins, as—early one morning—an unprecedented ice floe suddenly streams serenely downriver through the town. Such a moment is a mindful inversion of the remarkable first line of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which reads:

> *Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.*

In this line, Marquez combines history with futurity to foretell that Makondo's demise began long ago with Aureliano's childhood discovery of man-made ice in a factory. This industrial ice did temporarily bring prosperity to Macondo by allowing the export of perishable produce to faraway lands. However, in the process, Macondo was swallowed up by forces beyond its control, including global capitalism, political unrest, and civil war.

The ice that appears in future Aracataca is also symbolic, for it is the very last remnant of the melted glaciers of the nearby Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. With the glaciers all gone, the water feeding many of Colombia's waterways will soon dry up. Aracataca, too, will likely be left waterless and barren, as predicted by scientific forecasts (see, for example, Rodriguez, 2011). As if that's not bad enough, with climate change, the melting of the Greenland and Antarctic glaciers is predicted to increase sea level rise more in the tropics (see Lundberg et al., 2021; Lundberg, 2021). Global warming also increases tropical storm intensities, even as tropical storms travel further into temperate zones (see Lundberg et al., 2021). The future climate is just as likely to whip up a grand catastrophic windstorm similar to the one that wiped Macondo clean away in Marquez's novel.

3. The Future of Bhopal, inspired by Sinha's *Animal's People*

The Bhopal disaster was a catastrophic Indian industrial accident that occurred late one night in 1984 in the city of Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh state. A gas leak from a pesticide plant, owned and operated by Union Carbide India Limited, released approximately forty tons of the highly toxic substance methyl isocyanate. The leak exposed over half a million people to the poisonous gas, causing immediate and severe health effects. Thousands of people died within hours, mostly in their sleep, and over the course of months and years the death toll rose to somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 (see Morehouse et al., 2005; Chambers, 2012; Patil, 2020). Many more suffered from temporary sicknesses, chronic illnesses, and various levels of disability.

The Bhopal disaster had devastating ecological impacts as well, including widespread contamination of soil, water, and air. This led to the death of thousands of animals, including livestock and wildlife, as they inhaled the toxic fumes or consumed contaminated water and vegetation. Additionally, the local ecosystem was severely disrupted, with long-term effects on biodiversity, as many species either died or were forced to migrate away from the area (see Morehouse et al., 2005; Jones & Frederick, 2019). The contaminated soil and water sources hindered the natural regeneration of

plant life, leading to reduced agricultural productivity in the immediate area and long-lasting damage to the environment further afield.

The disaster is considered one of the world's worst industrial accidents, and it highlighted huge lapses in Indian safety standards plus grave corporate irresponsibility. The lingering impacts of the Bhopal disaster continue to affect the community to this day. The site itself remains a toxic wasteland, with hazardous materials still present—and still being spread—due to inadequate cleanup efforts. Meanwhile, survivors and their families have faced ongoing challenges in obtaining adequate compensation and healthcare. The UCIL (Union Carbide India Limited) company, its American owners, as well as the state government of Madhya Pradesh and the Indian central government, all have continued to shift responsibility every year when plans are laid out to rehabilitate the still toxic site. Only recently, 40 years after the disaster, has the 337 tonnes of toxic stored waste been transported from the site to a disposal plant 230 km away. However, it remains to be seen if the disposal by incineration and the burying of the solid after-waste in a landfill is entirely successful, or if new environmental problems are set in motion (Aljazeera, 2025).

Animals' People by Indra Sinha (2007) sets the Bhopal disaster into a character-driven novel that delves into the aftermath of the industrial disaster. The story is narrated by a teen named Animal who was born with a toxin-induced spinal deformity just after the accident. This deformity forces him to walk on all fours as he moves around his poverty-stricken suburb. His physical condition—and the way society treats him—leads Animal to reject his humanity and he routinely tells inquisitive strangers he is not a human.

Apart from allowing Animal to avoid pity and escape his own victimhood, the celebration of his animality allows Animal to express raw disgust for humans; that terrible species that produced—then abandoned—the disaster (as posited by Chambers, 2012; Johnston, 2016, Patel, 2020). Animal's rejection of humanity also involves a concomitant rejection of its social mores and laws—especially in the way he coarsely expresses his sexual desires in front of various women. Yet it also affords him tolerance of and companionship with the somewhat scary feral animals of Bhopal, especially one particular street dog that he befriends.

Despite scorning pity, Animal does occasionally take refuge in the care of a number of women around him. This includes a senile old Nun working at a Christian orphanage, a visiting American physician who tends to his health, and a beautiful Indian social worker arriving from another city. All these characters offer practical care for Animal but they have to negotiate their way into his life by largely ignoring his disability and brashness. Incidentally, none of these three women are attached to any company or government, all

are employed as volunteers in the Third Sector (as pointed out by Chambers, 2012; Johnston, 2016; Balkan, 2018; Patil, 2020).

In the case of the visiting doctor, Animal is invited by her NGO to travel free to a U.S. hospital for surgery to 'fix' his spine—and then maybe also settle down in America. He decides not to go however, choosing to be with his human and animal community on the edge of a toxic wasteland. Apart from missing his friends, Animal is worried that the American doctors will botch the surgery leaving him even less mobile than the original accident.

With this decision made, the Indian social worker asks Animal if he wants help finding a local job. This surprises Animal since, although he's confident of his own abilities to take care of himself, he has never supposed he'd be useful enough to sell his labor to others for clean cash (a conclusion explored in Chambers, 2012). As part of these job-seeking efforts, the social worker gives Animal the chance to choose his own human name for new documents. However, he stoutly refuses to change his name. He cannot remember how he acquired it—for sure not chosen by him—but he's grown much attached to it as a beautiful and unique part of his identity.

Of course, a character defying their own humanity to identify with feral animals offers an enticing challenge to explore urban futures through the interests of non-human residents. Accepting this challenge, and acknowledging (as Batalla, 2018; Jones & Frederick, 2019, and Sharma, 2022, do) that the blurring of the animal-human divide in *Animal's People* offers readers the chance to reconsider valuing humans alongside beyond-human communities (Chao & Enari, 2021), I offer up the following scenario depicting Bhopal a hundred years in the future.

For me, it would be extremely rewarding to imagine a future Bhopal when animals and humans live together in a pollution-free, bio-egalitarian utopia. Yet such romantic optimism is nowhere to be found in *Animal's People* and Animal himself warns more pain is yet to be inflicted by the un-remediated chemical landscape still lurking in parts of the city (a point explored by Lapierre & Moro, 2002; Morehouse et al., 2005; Mukherjee, 2011; Muller, 2023).

Perhaps the best scenario one can realistically hope for, then, is that the industrial site is slowly cleaned up over the next one hundred years so that the worst polluted areas are somewhat neutralized. In this case, by the early 22nd century, humans and animals may raise their offspring free from unnatural deformities, and livestock and animal companions can openly graze across the city's fields as depicted in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5. ***The Future of Bhopal***

Scenario art of Bhopal in the future as interpreted through the Literary Method of Urban Design via Sinha's *Animal's People* (Image by author).

Discussion: Practical Implications

Within the design community, the Literary Method of Urban Design presents a promising tool for both professional urban planning and community-based participatory design. Its emphasis on narrative-driven speculation, combined with the interpretive power of literature, offers unique opportunities to tackle complex socio-environmental challenges that conventional methodologies might often fail to address. By engaging with culturally and historically significant literary texts, this approach facilitates the creation of urban scenarios that resonate deeply with local contexts.

Apart from being attuned to local contexts, the Literary Method is also attuned to long-term futures. Real-world urban planners are usually constrained by short-term political and economic cycles, despite many, like Wheeler (2013) for example, noting the importance of envisioning long-term futures. The Literary Method allows planners to enter into the world of the far future and it does this by injecting imaginative depth, complex social realism, and cultural specificity. Thus, it allows urban planners to design not only

spaces for long-term built objects, but simultaneously spaces for stories that accommodate or foster community rapport, engagement, and resilience. A city reimagined through its literary heritage might likewise inspire collective action by embedding familiar (and already accepted) cultural narratives into planning processes, creating a shared vision for the future.

This method can also enhance public participation in urban design. Traditional participatory approaches, as outlined by Arnstein (1969), often fall short in engaging diverse stakeholders due to technical language and abstract projections. The Literary Method, by contrast, employs the accessible and evocative media of art, narrative, and storytelling. In translating urban challenges into relatable narratives (inspired by local literature), it democratizes the planning process, enabling citizens to contribute to urban visions in meaningful ways. Workshops, where communities interpret literature and co-create urban scenarios, could emerge as innovative spaces for dialogue and empowerment.

Moreover, the Literary Method has the potential to shape policy-making by offering creative tools to anticipate and address future urban crises. For example, Sandercock (1989) and Pinder (2005) argued for speculative approaches that integrate equity and imagination as they forecast social futures. The Literary Method aligns with this agenda by presenting alternative urban futures that consider marginalized voices, as exemplified in case studies like Bhopal's recovery scenario drawn from Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*.

So, if I concede that the Literary Method of Urban Design may currently exist only as a conceptual idea at the intersection of art and academia, nevertheless its practical applications have the potential to transform urban planning practices. By intertwining the evocative power of literature with the strategic goals of urbanism, it offers a pathway towards more inclusive, imaginative, and sustainable cities. Future research and experimentation can expand its reach, ensuring that urban design evolves as a truly interdisciplinary and community-centered endeavor.

Summary and Conclusions

The Literary Method of Urban Design offers a unique approach to envisioning the future of cities by leveraging themes from literature to create graphic scenarios linked to social narrative. This essay explored three case studies from tropical settings, each inspired by a different literary work set in and imagining tropical urban settings. The first case study, based on Bacigalupi's *The Wind-Up Girl*, imagined a future Bangkok threatened not only by climate crisis but by repressive technology and social control. The second case study, inspired by Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, envisioned a Columbian town

transformed into a momentarily successful theme park that soon succumbs to economic collapse and environmental tragedy. The third case study, drawing from Sinha's *Animal's People*, presents a future Bhopal very gradually recovering from the aftermath of the giant industrial disaster and in which humans, animals, and plants coexist in a hesitantly healing environment.

For my part, I believe these resulting artworks convey compelling urban scenarios for the century ahead. If anyone else likewise believes this then perhaps the Literary Method of Urban Design might be a powerful tool in classrooms and studios across the tropics, both for those studying specific disciplines at advanced levels (like urban planning or cultural studies) or for those at more elementary levels needing to learn more about their own city whilst delving into their nation's literary heritage.

To implement the Literary Method of Urban Design in their work, teachers and students of future studies or design studies can begin by incorporating this method into classroom projects or studio assignments. Teachers might first introduce students to relevant national or regional literary works that resonate with the urban contexts under study. Following this, students can collaboratively select a city and identify the literary themes or narratives that align with its cultural, historical, and environmental characteristics. These themes can then be translated into speculative urban scenarios (including through creative mediums such as digital graphics), thereby fostering an interdisciplinary learning experience that combines urban studies, literature, and art.

For students, engaging with the Literary Method of Urban Design requires a systematic yet imaginative approach. They should critically analyze the selected literary texts to extract key social, political, and environmental themes before linking these themes to current or projected urban challenges. Practical implementation could involve group workshops where participants brainstorm how fictional narratives might forecast or influence real world urban transformations. University colleges can also encourage cross-disciplinary collaborations between liberal arts, fine arts, and urban planning departments, integrating methods such as role-playing, scenario planning, and digital storytelling. By utilizing these strategies, students can create vivid, future-oriented visions of cities that are not only informed by literature but also grounded in the socio-environmental realities of urban life.

Regarding the case studies explored in this particular article, the bad news is that none of the case studies presented above augurs well for future urban settings in the tropics. They tend to suggest that environmental problems are going to be more vexatious than we currently admit. And, indeed, that the process of solving them will be derailed by a

cascade of social and political mistakes, both familiar and novel. The good news is that if practitioners or students want the opportunity to paint a brighter future for tropical cities, there are probably some literary works they can draw upon that might push them more in that direction.

However, if a literary work is telling a good story, it is bound to lay out an array of social, political, or moral problems that must somehow be overcome. In my view, this introduces not weakness but strength into the Literary Method of Urban Design, since literary resources can offer us a roadmap to learn about looming problems—and how various reactions to these problems may make cities in the tropical world better or worse.

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