

Solarpunk

Solarpunk is a <u>literary</u> and <u>artistic</u> movement, close to the <u>hopepunk</u> movement, solar that envisions and works toward actualizing a <u>sustainable future</u> interconnected with nature and community. Solar solar represents solar energy as a <u>renewable energy</u> source and an <u>optimistic</u> vision of the future that rejects <u>climate doomerism</u>, while the "punk" refers to <u>do it yourself</u> and the <u>countercultural</u>, <u>post-capitalist</u>, and sometimes <u>decolonial</u> aspects of creating such a future.

As a science fiction <u>literary subgenre</u> and <u>art movement</u>, solarpunk works to address how the future might look if humanity succeeded in solving major contemporary challenges with an emphasis on sustainability, human



Solarpunk may take practical inspiration from <u>Earthships</u>, which are an example of sustainable architecture. [1][2]

<u>impact on the environment</u>, and addressing <u>climate change</u> and <u>pollution</u>. Especially as a subgenre, it is aligned with <u>cyberpunk derivatives</u>, and may borrow elements from <u>utopian</u> and <u>fantasy</u> genres. [7]

Solarpunk serves as a foil to the cyberpunk genre, particularly within the fashion industry. [9] Both genres create and consolidate post-industrial countercultures; Solarpunk incites rebellion through its depiction of protoenvironmental socioecological relationships, whereas Cyberpunk advances the theme of rebellion through detached secondary environments, which often takes place in tangible dataspheres, virtual landscapes, and dystopian urban environments. Solarpunk draws inspiration from Bohemian style. The convergence of environmentalism and art serve as a framework for both subgenres. Solarpunk's interpretation of social collectivism strongly contrasts the individuality of Bohemian counterculture; Solarpunk recognizes individuality as an integral component of progressivism and identifies sociocultural distinctions as an impetus for change, though solarpunk encompasses these elements within the greater socioecological scaffolding in a manner that contrasts the Bohemian assertion that individuality alone acts as the sole impetus for change. [10]

Background

The term *solarpunk* was coined in 2008 in a blog post titled "From Steampunk to Solarpunk", in which the anonymous author, taking the design of the MS *Beluga Skysails* (the world's first ship partially powered by a computer-controlled <u>kite rig</u>) as inspiration, conceptualizes a new speculative fiction subgenre with <u>steampunk</u>'s focal point on specific technologies but guided by practicality and modern economics. Along a similar vein, in 2009, literary publicist Matt Stags posted a "GreenPunk Manifesto" on his blog describing his vision of a technophilic genre focused on knowable, <u>do it yourself</u> technologies and with emphasis on positive ecological and social

change.[13][14]

After visual artist Olivia Louise posted concept art on <u>Tumblr</u> of a solarpunk aesthetic in 2014, researcher Adam Flynn contributed to the science fiction forum <u>Project Hieroglyph</u> with further definition of the emerging genre. Based on Flynn's notes and contributions on the website solarpunks.net, *A Solarpunk Manifesto* was published in 2019. It describes solarpunk as "a movement in speculative fiction, art, fashion, and activism that seeks to answer and embody the questions 'what does a sustainable civilization look like, and how can we get there?' ". In 2024, solarpunk entered <u>The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction</u>. Here, James Machell points to <u>Songs from the Stars</u> by <u>Norman Spinrad</u> as the subgenre's first text, and goes on to contrast solarpunk with cyberpunk, stating, "It is a rebellion against a rebellion, born out of dystopia fatigue."

Themes and philosophy

Renewable energy

While solarpunk has no specific political ideation, it does by default embrace the need for a collective movement away from polluting forms of energy. [20] It practices prefigurative politics, creating spaces where the principles of a movement can be explored and demonstrated by enacting them in real life. Solarpunks practice the movement in various ways, including creating and living in communities (such as ecovillages), growing their own food, and a DIY ethic of working with what is available, including the thoughtful application of technology. [21][22]

Refusing pessimism

Stories set in the far future or in fantasy worlds often portray societal failures recognizable to contemporary audiences. These failures may include oppressive imbalances of wealth or power, degradation of natural habitat or processes, and impacts of climate change. Evidence of injustices, like social exclusion and environmental racism, may be present. Disastrous consequences are not necessarily averted but solarpunk tends to present a counter-dystopian perspective. Their worlds are not necessarily utopian but rather solarpunk seeks to present an alternative to a pessimistic, consequential dystopian outcome. To achieve this, themes of do it yourself ethics, convivial conservation, self-sustainability, social inclusiveness and positive psychology are often present. This perspective also more closely embeds the ideals of punk ideologies, such as anti-consumerism, egalitarianism and decentralization, than cyberpunk which typically includes protagonists with punk beliefs but in settings that are used more as a warning of a potential future. [25][26]

Sustainable technology

The integration of technologies into society in a manner that improves <u>social</u>, economic and environmental <u>sustainability</u> is central to solarpunk.^[25] It is starkly contrasted to cyberpunk which portrays highly advanced technologies that have little influence on, or otherwise exacerbate social, economic, and environmental problems. Whereas cyberpunk envisions humanity becoming more

alienated from its natural environment and subsumed by technology, solarpunk envisions settings where technology enables humanity to better co-exist with itself and its environment.

Solarpunk is more similar to steampunk than cyberpunk. Both steampunk and solarpunk imagine new worlds but with different primary sources of energy; respectively, the steam engines, and renewable energy. [27] Though, whereas steampunk focuses more on history and uses Victorian era aesthetics, solarpunk uses more Art Nouveau style and looks to the future. Solarpunk also shares some elements with retrofuturism, Afrofuturism, Bionics and Arts and Crafts. The retrofuturist reevaluation of technology, its desire for understandable mechanics, and rejection of mysterious black box technology, and in favor of appropriate technology, [28] are found in solarpunk works. As is the Afrofuturist's counter to mass-cultural homogeneity, the reckoning of injustices, and use of architecture and technology to correct power imbalances and problems in accessibility.[25]



Solarpunk works often include visions of positive social change, like the above illustration of a respecialization center for former miners who lost their profession as the world abandoned fossil fuels. [23]

Do-it-yourself ethos

Although solarpunk is concerned with technology, it also embraces low-tech ways of living sustainably such as gardening, permaculture, regenerative design, tool libraries, maker spaces, open-source, positive psychology, metacognition, and do-it-yourself ethics. Its themes may reflect on environmental philosophy such as bright green environmentalism and social ecology, as well as punk ideologies such as anarchism, socialism, anti-consumerism, anti-authoritarianism, anti-capitalism, civil rights, commoning, and decentralization. [29][30]

Racial and gender equality

Solarpunk often includes elements of racial and gender equality, drawing this theme from earlier utopian works. [31] Marge Piercy's 1976 classic Woman on the Edge of Time, explored family roles and introduced the pronoun 'per'. Ursula K. Le Guin's 1969 book The Left Hand of Darkness included gender fluidity. [32] Her book The Dispossessed eliminated compulsory monogamy. [31] Becky Chambers' 2021 solarpunk novel A Psalm for the Wild-Built included a main character who is non-binary.

Art movement and aesthetics

As an art movement, solarpunk emerged in the 2010s as a reaction to the prevalence of bleak postapocalyptic and dystopian media alongside an increased awareness of social injustices, impacts of

climate change, and inextricable <u>economic inequality</u>. As <u>post-apocalyptic</u> and <u>dystopian</u> was ubiquitous in media, solarpunk became an attractive alternative. [26] Solarpunk is optimistic yet realistic in confronting contemporary problems. [33]

The solarpunk visual identity, as expressed by Olivia Louise and subsequent artists, is compared to Art Nouveau with its depictions of plants, use of sinuous lines like whiplash, and integration of applied arts into fine arts. The ornamental Arts and Crafts movement, an influence on Art Nouveau, is present [34][35] and its built forms reflect Frank Lloyd Wright's organic architecture. [24] The solarpunk aesthetic typically utilizes natural colors, bright greens and blues, and allusions to diverse cultural origins. Examples of this aesthetic include Boeri Studio's Bosco Verticale in Milan, the depiction of Wakanda in Marvel Studios' Black Panther and Auroa in Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Breakpoint, Cities: Skylines's Green Cities expansion, and some Studio Ghibli movies, particularly Castle in the Sky and Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind. [36][37]

In contrast to cyberpunk, which is portrayed as having a dark, grim aesthetic surrounded by an artificial and domineering built environment reflective of alienation and subjugation, solarpunk is bright, with light often used as a motif and in imagery to convey feelings of cleanliness, abundance, and equability. However, light could



An image of a former oil platform at sea, repurposed as a greenhouse and powered by wind turbines

alternatively be used to symbolize something that "subsumes everything beneath it, [an] emblem of tyranny [and] surveillance". [12]

Fiction

Literature

In literature, solarpunk is a subgenre within science fiction, though it may also include elements of other types of speculative fiction such as fantasy and utopian fiction. It is a cyberpunk derivative, contrasted to cyberpunk for its particular extrapolation of technology's impact on society and progress. Cyberpunk characters are typically those marginalized by rapid technological change or subsumed by technology, while the solarpunk archetype has been described as a "maker-hero" who has witnessed environmental disaster or failures by central authorities to adapt to crises or injustice, often in defense of nature and in ways that allow the story to illustrate optimistic outcomes. Its fictions illustrate feasible worlds that do not ignore the mechanics or ingredients of how it was arrived at.

Previously published novels that fit into this new genre included Ursula K. Le Guin's Always

Coming Home (1985)[39] and The Dispossessed (1974), Ernest Callenbach's Ecotopia (1975), Robinson's Pacific Edge (1990), and Starhawk's The Fifth Sacred Thing (1993), largely for their depictions of contemporary worlds transitioning to more sustainable societies. [25] However, the first explicit entries published into the genre were the short stories in anthologies Solarpunk: Ecological and Fantastical Stories in a Sustainable World (2012) (which was the third part of the publisher's trilogy of short story collections preceded by Vaporpunk and Dieselpunk), [40] Wings of Renewal: A Solarpunk Dragons Anthology (2015), Sunvault: Stories of Solarpunk and Eco-Speculation (2017) and Glass and Gardens (2018).[41] In 2018, author Becky Chambers agreed to write two solarpunk novellas for Tor Books and published A Psalm for the Wild-Built (2021) and A Prayer for the Crown-Shy (2022).[42]



An aerial view of a futuristic, sustainable Berlin—with lots of solar power, trees and greenery, airships, walkable streets, clean water. By Aerroscape & Lino Zeddies.

In a 2019 *Slate* article, author <u>Lee Konstantinou</u> stated that solarpunk authors "...proclaim their commitment to "ingenuity, generativity, independence, and community", while going against the "nihilistic tendencies of cyberpunk and the reactionary tendencies of steampunk." He argues that solarpunk is aspirational, as it aims to provide "suggestions for the kind of science fiction or fantasy we ought to be writing". Solarpunk can include elements of <u>mundane science fiction</u>. In a *Solarpunk Futures* interview with <u>Nina Munteanu</u> about her solarpunk novel *A Diary in the Age of Water*, Munteanu said she incorporated elements of mundane science fiction to add "the gritty realism of the mundane" to the story. [44]

Film

As in written fiction, solarpunk themes in film predate the recognition of solarpunk as a genre and the aesthetics and themes of the genre are increasingly present in contemporary works. Many of the works of <u>Hayao Miyazaki</u> are recognized in hindsight as examples of early solarpunk cinema. Additionally, the intersection of ecological stewardship and science fiction have also appeared in numerous western animated films such as <u>Treasure Planet</u> (2002), <u>WALL-E</u> (2008), and <u>Strange</u> <u>World</u> (2022).

Examples of live action solarpunk cinema include James Cameron's <u>Avatar</u> films and Benh Zeitlin's *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012).

In a study of the 44 most popular American science fiction films, nature was found to be ignored in visions of the future, depicted in cities with monoculture lawns and ornamental gardens. Nature is never portrayed in these films in an innovative or integrated way with future human civilization. At best, nature is simply portrayed as a background motif. The study suggested for artists to "collaborate to imagine how to integrate nature and biodiversity into the depictions of future cities". [45]

Tabletop RPGs

Alongside literature and visual art, solarpunk explorations within tabletop games have become increasingly visible.

<u>Numenera</u> is post-apocalyptic, but does include punk elements by having authoritarian medieval European-style governments and a reliance on sustainable technology.

Solarpunk 2050 Is a Solarpunk setting for *Fate* (role-playing game system) published in 2023. Set in the near future, society is being rebuilt after a climate catastrophe. Three factions struggle to agree on the right way to do this.

Fully Automated! is an open-source tabletop RPG set in the 22nd century in a post-scarcity post-capitalist society.

Criticism

Some, like solarpunk researcher Adam Flynn, worry that solarpunk can risk being greenwashed through aesthetics that give the appearance of sustainability without addressing the root causes of actual environmental issues. [46] Flynn notes how depictions such as "luxury condos with a green roof that price out existing communities and might end up doing more environmental damage" is "fake solarpunk urbanism". [47]

Architecture

Solarpunk architecture is characterized by combining natural elements with those of human society. It can be exemplified in small abodes that feature windmills or other green, diy off-grid technologies, as well as highly populated urban environments. [48]

Real-life examples of solarpunk architecture include the <u>Singapore Botanic Gardens</u>, which are one of only three gardens to be a UNESCO World Heritage Site; <u>[49]</u> Italy's <u>Bosco Verticale</u>, which, in 2014, became the world's first oxygen-positive skyscraper; and Bolivia's <u>Neo-Andean</u> architecture by <u>Freddy Mamani</u>, which has successfully reclaimed traditional designs used by colonized peoples in a forward-thinking, sustainable way.

See also

- Anarcho-primitivism
- Back-to-the-land movement
- Climate fiction
- Cottagecore
- Degrowth

- Ecocriticism
- Ecofiction
- Environmental art
- Environmental justice
- Green anarchism
- Noor by Nnedi Okorafor
- Open Source Ecology
- Rewilding (conservation biology)
- Social ecology
- Technogaianism
- Wakanda



<u>Bosco Verticale</u> building by Stefano Boeri, an example of Solarpunk-like architecture

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External links

- Almanac for the Anthropocene: A Compendium of Solarpunk Futures (https://wvupressonline.c om/almanac-for-the-anthropocene)
- Solarpunk: A Reference Guide (https://medium.com/solarpunks/solarpunk-a-reference-guide-8 bcf18871965)
- Solarpunks.net (https://solarpunks.net/)
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