

# Learn more about Solarpunk

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# What is Solarpunk?

From the perspective of the early 21st century, things look pretty grim. A deadly cocktail of crises engulf the people of planet Earth and all other forms of biotic life which share it: a geopolitical crisis, an economic crisis, and a worsening ecological crisis due to global warming, which stems from a political-economic system that requires fossil fuels to power its technostructure.

Culture, having as it does a symbiotic relationship with material conditions, reflects a lot of these crises in fiction and the arts. The 2000s and 2010s were replete with apocalyptic imagery of a future ravaged by war, totalitarianism, runaway weapons technology, killer viruses, zombies, and environmental collapse. Not that such narratives are unneeded. At best, they can serve as a wake-up call for those caught up in the myth that we had reached the “end of history” with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the triumph of capitalism on a planetary scale. But if they remain the primary vision our globalised culture has of the potential future, they can end up reproducing the pervasive cynicism and despair which makes all crises seem inescapable.

This is why solarpunk is of value.

## Solarpunk is a Revolt of Hope Against Despair

Solarpunk is a rebellion against the structural pessimism in our late visions of how the future will be. Not to say it replaces pessimism with Pollyanna-ish optimism, but with a cautious hopefulness and a daring to tease out the positive potentials in bad situations. Hope that perhaps the grounds of an apocalypse (revelation) might also contain the seeds of something better; something more ecological, liberatory, egalitarian, and vibrant than what came before, if we work hard at cultivating those seeds.

Any tour of the geeky parts of the Internet will reveal an assortment of different traditions ending in the suffix “punk”: steampunk, dieselpunk, clockpunk, biopunk, cyberpunk, post-cyberpunk, and so on. All the many different punk science-fiction movements imagine how things could turn out if society and technology took a different turn. While steampunk imagines a past that might have been, based on Victorian-age technology, solarpunk imagines a future that could be, based on current-age technology. It anticipates the type alternative history science-fiction the people of the future might write about us if things turn out horribly. But more than just a new science-fiction or fantasy subgenre, it’s also practical vision for (maybe) bringing the things it imagines into being in the real world.

You may ask what exactly is meant to be “punk” about what a cynic might see as the lovechild of hippies and futurists. After all, isn’t punk meant to denote anger and rage at the “the system”, as well as black leather and spikey hair? Punk is more of an ethos than a specific set of signifiers, implying rebellion against, and negation of, the dominant paradigm and everything repressive about it. So in that sense, in a world being torn apart by a planetary system based on avarice and power-lust and ecocide, solarpunk might be the most “punk” movement of all.

# Solarpunk is Eco-Speculation, in Both Fiction and Reality

Solarpunk is a (mostly) aesthetic-cultural and (sometimes) ethical-political tendency which attempts to negate the dominant idea which grips popular consciousness: that the future must be grim, or at least grim for the mass of people and nonhuman forms of life on the planet. Looking at the millennia-old rift between human society and the natural world, it sets as its ethical foundation the necessity of mending this rift, transforming our relation to the planet by transcending those social structures which lead to systemic ecocide.

It draws a lot from the philosophy of social ecology, which also focused on mending this rift by restructuring society to function more like ecology: non-hierarchical, cooperative, diverse, and seeking balance.

Solarpunk's vision is of an ecological society beyond war, domination, and artificial scarcity; where everything is powered by green energy and a culture of hierarchy and exclusion has been replaced by a culture founded on radical inclusiveness, unity-in-diversity, free cooperation, participatory democracy, and personal self-realisation.

This would be a world of decentralised eco-cities, 3D printing, vertical farms, solar glass windows, wild or inventive forms of dress and design, and a vibrant cosmopolitan aesthetic; where technology is no longer used to exploit the natural world, but to automate away needless human labour and to help restore the damage the Oil Age has already done. Solarpunk desires societies of polycultural ethnic diversity and gender liberation, where each person is able to actualise themselves in societal environment of free experimentation and communal caring; and driven by an overriding ethos of compassionate rationalism, where science and reason are not seen as antithetical to imagination and spirituality, but as concepts which bring out the best in each other.

It attempts to bring such values in being in the here-and-now, prefiguring the world to be created, through science-fiction and fantasy literature, arts, fashion, filmmaking, music, games, and a set of ideas which inform political, economic, and ecological activism.

Solarpunk stories are likely to feature characters from (currently) oppressed or marginalised groups living more freely, equally, and inclusively than they are able to now; exploring an exotic world of body modification, gender and sexual discovery, new forms of technology – and dealing with conflicts from the remnants of the old world as well as the unique problems which are sure to arise in a very different social scene. Solarpunk arts are driven by mixtures of multimedia technology and more traditional handcrafts, blending such disparate things as anime, Art Nouveau, Afrofuturism, indigenous American designs, and Edwardian fashion into a stew of artistic cross-pollination. And all of the above try to take the existing aspects of our current world and repurpose them into something more liberatory, specialising in reframing, pastiche, and reimagining of existing characters, styles, and trends in a very different context. Blending the diverse aesthetic styles of several different cultures, solarpunk engenders a celebration of hybridity while still being sensitive to the problems of cultural appropriation – “taking” instead of “partaking” – from subordinate cultures by dominant cultures

## Solarpunk is the Positive Articulation of a Better World

Not content to accept the dictates of a tomorrow ruled by authoritarian states, rapacious corporations, and a despoiled biosphere, solarpunk is an eco-futurist movement which tries to think our way out of catastrophe by imagining a future most people would actually like to live in, instead of ones we should be trying to avoid; a future characterised by a reconciliation between humanity and nature, where technology is utilised for human-centric and eco-centric ends, and where a society driven by hierarchy and competition has given way to one organised on the basis of freedom, equality, and cooperation. It's purpose is to serve as a compelling counter-narrative to the material and ideational conditions which keep us trapped in an authoritarian and ecocidal world where, as Margaret Thatcher put it, "there is no alternative".

There already exist bits and pieces of just such an alternative right now, if only their potentials were drawn out. Worker cooperatives, self-sufficient eco-communities, directly-democratic popular assemblies, voluntary federations of small polities, mutual aid networks, community land trusts; all of these could form, if utilised, a very different kind of political-economic structure than the one being pushed by neoliberal globalisation. Likewise, technologies such as solar and wind and wave energy, 3D printing, vertical farming, micro-manufacturing, free software, open-source hardware, and robotic machinery which can automate away human labour all serve to illustrate the possibilities of an ecological and decentralised technostructure where the means of production are under popular control, rather than used to enhance the profit and power of a ruling elite.

In politics, solarpunk belongs to the wider tradition of the decentralist left, associated with such thinkers and activists as Peter Kropotkin, William Morris, Emma Goldman, Lewis Mumford, Paul Goodman, E.F. Schumacher, and Murray Bookchin. It rejects the false choice between the Scylla of market capitalism and the Charybdis of state socialism, between rugged individualism and smothering collectivism, instead opting for a society which reconciles a healthy individuality with communal solidarity.

A solarpunk polity would replace centralised forms of state government with decentralised confederations of self-governing communities, each administering themselves through many forms of direct and participatory democracy, with countless kinds of horizontally-structured voluntary associations taking care of judicial, environmental, and societal issues in ways which seek to maximise both personal autonomy and social solidarity.

A solarpunk "economy of the commons" would dispense with both profiteering corporations and statist central planning in favour of worker-run cooperatives, collaborative exchange networks, common pool resources, and control of investment by local communities. The aim of the economy would be reoriented from production-for-exchange and industrial "growth" to production-for-use and increasing the bio-psycho-social well-being of people and planet. Production would be moved as close as is possible to the point of consumption, with the long term aim being a relative self-sufficiency in goods and manufacturing. Decentralist forms of eco-technology would be used to help make work more participatory and enjoyable - "artisan-ising" the productive process itself - as well as automate away dull, dirty, and dangerous forms of work wherever possible. After realising an appropriate degree of post-scarcity, local self-sufficiency, and labour automation, it may even be feasible to abolish money as an unneeded nuisance in the allocation of resources.

A solarpunk culture would strive to dissolve every form of social hierarchy and domination – whether based on class, race, gender, sexuality, ability, or species – dispersing the power some individuals or groups wield over others and thus increasing the aggregate freedom of all; empowering the disempowered and including the excluded. It is rooted in the legacy of such liberatory movements as anti-authoritarian socialism, feminism, racial justice, queer and trans liberation, disability struggles, animal liberation, and digital freedom projects.

## Solarpunk is Practical Utopianism

As you can see, there have always been alternatives, conventional wisdom just dismisses them out of hand as “utopian”. But is utopianism really such a bad thing? In one way, yes. The word itself, coined by Thomas More, is a Latin pun which means both “no-place” (ou-topia) but also “good-place” (eu-topia); implying a place so good it couldn’t exist. Before and after More, there were attempts by utopian dreamers to craft perfect worlds in which no real problems existed, such projects also tended to be totalitarian and centrally planned societies with little personal freedom.

Yet there have also been attempts to craft future societies which weren’t flawless “end of history” scenarios, but that tried to eliminate the structural conditions which limited personal autonomy and enforced inequality upon people. Such eutopian visionaries mixed a spirit of hopefulness with an attitude of practicality, with one tempering the other. It is this latter tradition that solarpunk tries to take its cues from. So it is not utopian in the negative sense of wanting to design a “perfect” world without any problems – a outopia (no-place) – but it is utopian in imagining a better world which will inspire people to create it in reality – a eutopia (good-place).

So solarpunk is not utopian in the negative sense of wanting to design a “perfect” world without any problems – a outopia (no-place) – but it is utopian in imagining a better world which will inspire people to create it in reality – a eutopia (good-place). It sees utopia as a constant process of approximating an ideal, not reaching a light at the end of a tunnel. Solarpunk acknowledges that our utopia of social liberation and ecological stewardship may never be achieved 100%, but if we at least keep that vision in mind, throwing our efforts into making the world a bit better wherever we can, then at least every step we take towards achieving that utopia will be a step in the right direction. It will be progress, and, for those it positively impacts, liberation.

As Oscar Wilde once said, “A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of utopias.”

[Original source of this text here.](#)

[See also our main Solarpunk community.](#)

# A Solarpunk Manifesto

Solarpunk is a movement in speculative fiction, art, fashion, and activism that seeks to answer and embody the question “what does a sustainable civilization look like, and how can we get there?”

The aesthetics of solarpunk merge the practical with the beautiful, the well-designed with the green and lush, the bright and colorful with the earthy and solid.

Solarpunk can be utopian, just optimistic, or concerned with the struggles en route to a better world, but never dystopian. As our world roils with calamity, we need solutions, not only warnings.

Solutions to thrive without fossil fuels, to equitably manage real scarcity and share in abundance instead of supporting false scarcity and false abundance, to be kinder to each other and to the planet we share.

Solarpunk is at once a vision of the future, a thoughtful provocation, a way of living and a set of achievable proposals to get there.

1. We are solarpunks because optimism has been taken away from us and we are trying to take it back.
2. We are solarpunks because the only other options are denial or despair.
3. At its core, Solarpunk is a vision of a future that embodies the best of what humanity can achieve: a post-scarcity, post-hierarchy, post-capitalistic world where humanity sees itself as part of nature and clean energy replaces fossil fuels.
4. The “punk” in Solarpunk is about rebellion, counterculture, post-capitalism, decolonialism and enthusiasm. It is about going in a different direction than the mainstream, which is increasingly going in a scary direction.
5. Solarpunk is a movement as much as it is a genre: it is not just about the stories, it is also about how we can get there.
6. Solarpunk embraces a diversity of tactics: there is no single right way to do solarpunk. Instead, diverse communities from around the world adopt the name and the ideas, and build little nests of self-sustaining revolution.
7. Solarpunk provides a valuable new perspective, a paradigm and a vocabulary through which to describe one possible future. Instead of embracing retrofuturism, solarpunk looks completely to the future. Not an alternative future, but a possible future.
8. Our futurism is not nihilistic like cyberpunk and it avoids steampunk’s potentially quasi-reactionary tendencies: it is about ingenuity, generativity, independence, and community.
9. Solarpunk emphasizes environmental sustainability and social justice.
10. Solarpunk is about finding ways to make life more wonderful for us right now, and also for the generations that follow us.
11. Our future must involve repurposing and creating new things from what we already have. Imagine “smart cities” being junked in favor of smart citizenry.

12. Solarpunk recognizes the historical influence politics and science fiction have had on each other.
13. Solarpunk recognizes science fiction as not just entertainment but as a form of activism.
14. Solarpunk wants to counter the scenarios of a dying earth, an insuperable gap between rich and poor, and a society controlled by corporations. Not in hundreds of years, but within reach.
15. Solarpunk is about youth maker culture, local solutions, local energy grids, ways of creating autonomous functioning systems. It is about loving the world.
16. Solarpunk culture includes all cultures, religions, abilities, sexes, genders and sexual identities.
17. Solarpunk is the idea of humanity achieving a social evolution that embraces not just mere tolerance, but a more expansive compassion and acceptance.
18. The visual aesthetics of Solarpunk are open and evolving. As it stands, it is a mash-up of the following:
  - 1800s age-of-sail/frontier living (but with more bicycles)
  - Creative reuse of existing infrastructure (sometimes post-apocalyptic, sometimes present-weird)
  - Appropriate technology
  - Art Nouveau
  - Hayao Miyazaki
  - Jugaad-style innovation from the non-Western world
  - High-tech backends with simple, elegant outputs
19. Solarpunk is set in a future built according to principles of New Urbanism or New Pedestrianism and environmental sustainability.
20. Solarpunk envisions a built environment creatively adapted for solar gain, amongst other things, using different technologies. The objective is to promote self sufficiency and living within natural limits.
21. In Solarpunk we've pulled back just in time to stop the slow destruction of our planet. We've learned to use science wisely, for the betterment of our life conditions as part of our planet. We're no longer overlords. We're caretakers. We're gardeners.
22. Solarpunk:
  - is diverse
  - has room for spirituality and science to coexist
  - is beautiful
  - can happen. **Now!**

*The Solarpunk Community*

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# Solarpunk as Anarchist Infrapolitics

Social transformation never happens through economic or legal changes alone. Those changes are always accompanied by alterations in the more informally transformative spheres of culture and ideology, shaping the nuts and bolts of how people think and act. Anarchists have always acknowledged this. Indeed, if there's one thing anarchists are known for among the general public, it's having a leg in several artistic, musical, and philosophical subcultures. This goes way back. Kropotkin and Goldman weren't just exquisite theorists of class struggle and anarchisation, they also wrote entire books on Russian literature and modern theatre respectively.

However, I've noticed a tragic tendency as of late (i.e. the last couple of decades) to view anarchist activity in the cultural and ideological fronts as separate and apart from activity on the political and economic fronts. At worst, I've seen some involved in the latter dismiss most of those involved in the former as "apolitical" or as mere "lifestylists", holding themselves up as exemplars of "real" anarchist action - which, from what I can see, seems to consist of writing articles for newspapers no one reads and occasionally waving a few red-and-black flags around at strikes and protests. If that's what "real" political activity looks like, it doesn't do much in terms of accomplishing libertarian political goals.

To be fair, such Libcom types aren't wrong when they claim that so much of cultural anarchism is rife with people who have no commitment to social struggle or system change, viewing anarchy as a mere means of personal rebellion and self-expression. That's always been a problem. The bohemians, the hippies, the punks, and the techies have thus far given us lots of nice artworks, though they've failed to deliver the dissolution of the state and worker self-management of the economy.

But given that the prophesied proletarian revolution of the workerist anarchists is a good century or more overdue, one could say the achievements of cultural anarchism and class struggle anarchism - when considered as separate entities - are about equal. They've delivered many small and cumulative victories as part of larger movements (e.g. in arts, education, civil liberties, and workers' campaigns), but the long-term ideal of social anarchy remains as far off beyond the horizon as ever.

One of the main sources of this relative distrust between those involved in cultural-ideological struggle and those involved in political-economic struggle - and perhaps the absence of more significant gains we might get from better cooperation between the two fronts - lies, I believe, in the lack of an adequate means of conceptualising how they interrelate. On this issue, and despite the dismissals of much cultural-ideological activity as apolitical, I'd like to propose that both forms of activity are political, but political in different ways. One is *infrapolitical* ("infra-" meaning

underneath), while the other is *megapolitical* (“mega-” meaning grand or overarching).

By infrapolitics, I mean the forms of cultural and ideological action people engage in which aren't formally political, but nevertheless form the basis of social-political reality at both the interpersonal and systemic levels of society, as they shape the way we conceive of, relate to, and interact with the social reality. Things like making art, creating counter-cultural scenes, injecting political ideas into various cultural milieus, philosophising, and creating alternative forms of education.

By megapolitics, I mean most of what's considered “political” in the traditional sense: trying to effect change in the functioning of the social system as a whole, in particular its governance and jurisprudence with regard to the people. Things like municipalism, syndicalism, and activism in the most familiar sense.

Infrapolitics should always be of interest to anarchist activism because it's in infrapolitical spaces that the seeds of practical (megapolitical) change are sewed within the social imaginary. We can cultivate the values of individual autonomy, voluntary cooperation, and anti-hierarchical organising in popular consciousness and behaviour through means which aren't recognised as “political” in the formal sense, but nonetheless have demonstrable effects on how people act in formal political contexts.

Which brings me to what I'd like highlight as one of the most promising potential infrapolitical spaces social anarchists would be wise to explore and become active in: a subculture called solarpunk.

Born in the early 2010s online, and picking up momentum around the middle of the decade, it's a form of ecological futurism which has found expression in science-fiction, drawings and crafts, and now, to a growing extent, in radical utopian politics. You may be familiar with the more famous suffixed -punk subcultures of cyberpunk and steampunk, and solarpunk is, in a way, a natural synthesis of the lessons gleaned from both.

Cyberpunk imagines a future gone wrong, taking as its premise the evolution of current society and technology down a dark path, full of pollution, corporate domination, and killer robots. Steampunk imagines a past gone right, taking as its premise the evolution of Victorian society and technology down a bright path, full of adventure, anti-imperialism, and sky pirates. Finally, solarpunk takes the same reimagining approach as steampunk, attempting to demonstrate a set of “what if?” scenarios and bright alternative paths society and technology could take – instead of the industrialist and imperialist wreck we got at the tail end of the 1800s – but like cyberpunk, it focuses on a theoretical future instead of the past.

Looking at our contemporary circumstances, what seems most probable, given the expected course of social and technical development, is something closer to the depressing gloom of a cyberpunk future. Maybe not as bad as *Blade Runner* or a William Gibson novel, though still not something to look forward to. But what if the possibilities are more open and mutable than that? What if we still had the option to choose something brighter and steer the course of socio-technical development toward it? For solarpunk, the historical path not taken is one that's available to us right now.

Solarpunk imagines a future gone right, taking as its premise the evolution of society and technology down a bright path, full of green tech, nonhierarchical cultures, and gorgeous art nouveau architecture (that last one is subjective, but I thought I'd throw it in there). Automation of toil is widespread, 3D-printing and micro-manufacturing replaces alienating mass production, and labour as a practice is artisan-ised, emulating William Morris's dream of work being made into play. It's a world of decentralised and confederated eco-communities, using technology for human-centric and eco-centric ends rather than for accumulating power and profit – mending the metabolic rift between first nature (the natural world) and second nature (human culture) – and where social hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality, and disability are considered horror stories from the past “oil age”.

Solarpunk is futurist, but it's a futurism of a rooted and practical kind. It finds its visions of alternative life-verses on technologies, customs, and modes of being which already exist in the present, drawing out what's liberatory and ecological right now and moving it from the circumference of the world's ordering to its centre. It's remarkably similar to the method of social anarchism: educing the liberatory within the already-existing.

As of right now, solarpunk is a pretty small scene. For the most part, interest in it is confined to a small few Facebook groups, Tumblr and WordPress blogs, Pinterest folders, and a handful of tech hobbyists. In arts and fiction, it's had a smattering of comics and short story collections, such as last year's anthology Sunvault, most of which explore fictional eco-utopias.

What should make it of interest to anarchists is how similar the underlying values of solarpunk are to those of social anarchism, in particular to the post-scarcity anarchism of Murray Bookchin: decentralism, the blending of the ecological with the technological, the fusion of the functional with the ornamental, local autonomy, participatory decision-making, and unity-in-diversity. Almost by accident, solarpunks ended up coming to most of the same conclusions as anarchists by means of art. Aesthetically, it's a celebration of egalitarianism on the basis of freedom, of which political anarchism is the natural complement.

So while it's small at the moment, both anarchists and solarpunks could have much to gain from collaborating and from getting immersed in each other's worlds. For anarchists, solarpunk could become a fecund playground for elaborating upon libertarian ideas and practices through the mediums of aesthetics and fiction. For solarpunks, the visions of free and ecological societies glimpsed at through its eco-utopias and experiments in eco-technology can act as a gateway to Kropotkinian theories of how to remake the culture, economy, and polity on freer and ecological lines.

Social anarchism of course is no stranger to the worlds of arts and (sub)culture. Though for the most part this has been in the form of individual anarchists using a given medium or work to explore anarchistic ideas at the level of personal liberation. What's rarer is using culture as a whole to grow libertarian consciousness on a mass scale. That is what we need to try to do more of in the future, and that's what solarpunk may have the potential to catalyse.

We need artworks which instil a consciously anti-authoritarian way of looking at the world, and a libertarian ethos of autonomy, mutual aid, and ecological interrelationism. Solarpunk is one of the

best available cultural hotbeds for generating artworks of those kinds. Its unique format of eco-speculation gives artists the freedom to imagine wild and alternative ways of ordering the world, but with enough of a connection to the nitty-gritty reality of the conditions we now exist in to draw a practical trajectory from what we're stuck with now to what we want to create. To quote social anarchist aesthetic theorist Jesse Cohn, it draws out "the ideal from within the real", actualising what's already there in potential.

There's no way to tell how long solarpunk will remain popular, or if it'll ever take off and become more than a small group of eco-geeks online. But given its obvious richness as a site for anarchist infrapolitics, it's well worth trying to make that happen.

[Original source of the article here.](#)

[See also our Infrapolitics community.](#)