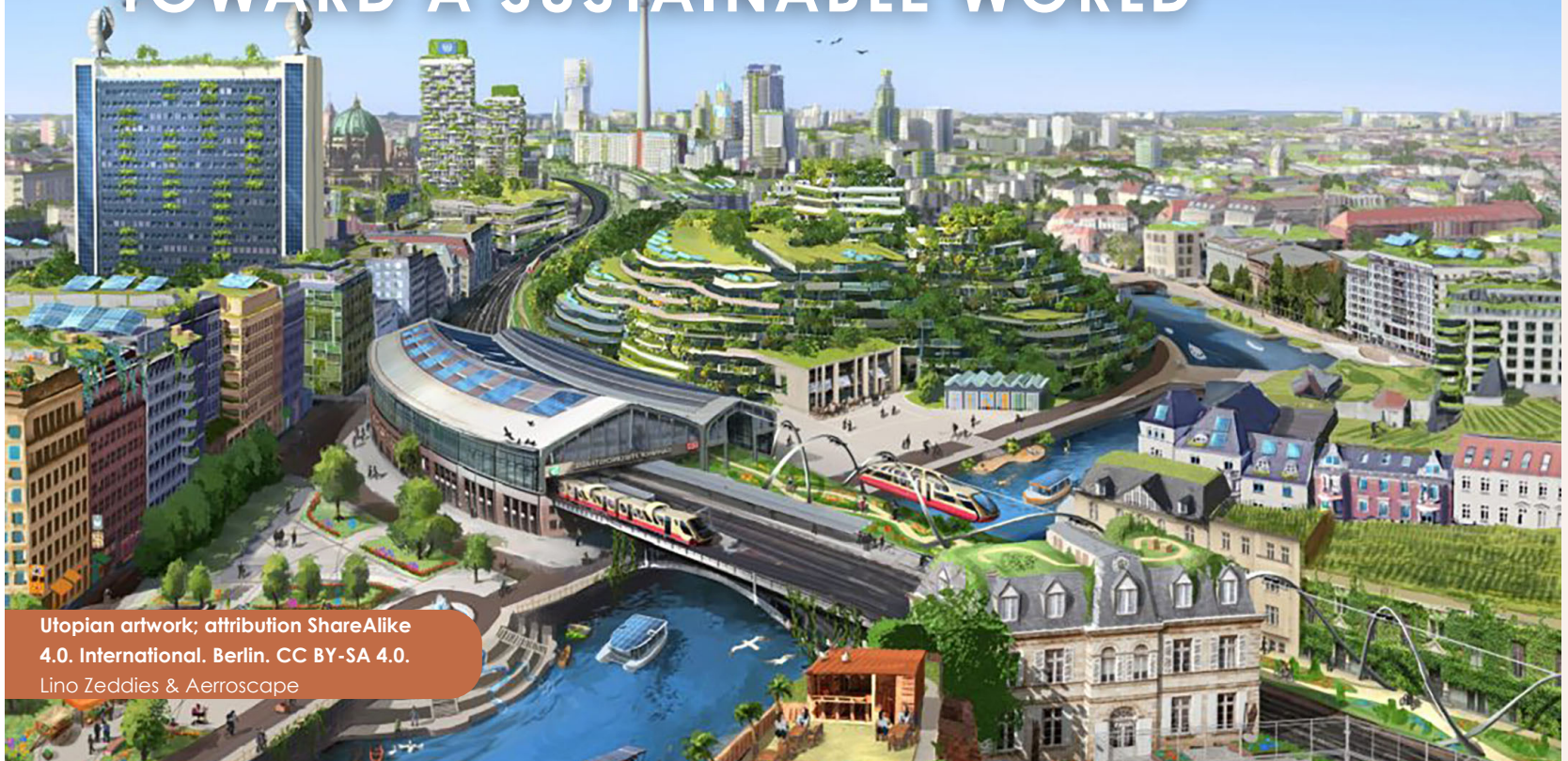


Solarpunk:

AN EGALITARIAN, ARTISTIC MOVEMENT TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE WORLD



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by **MARY WOODBURY** /// EAC Volunteer

In May 2008, an anonymous author made a blog post titled “From Steampunk to Solarpunk¹,” suggesting a new literary genre inspired by steampunk. The difference between the two genres is that steampunk imagined alternative worlds based on Victorian oil-based technologies, whereas solarpunk moved past fossil fuels and blazed the trail towards a more pragmatic, cheaper and cleaner economy.

In the 2010s, the concept of solarpunk exploded, thanks in part to visual artist Olivia Louise, who posted solarpunk art on Tumblr in 2014.² She had created Art Nouveau themes in fashion, architecture and urban settings that integrated green ideas and a bright aesthetic. Researcher Adam Flynn further helped define the movement for a science fiction initiative called Project Hieroglyph, founded by author Neal Stephenson. Flynn wrote *Solarpunk: Notes toward a manifesto* that same year.³

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It was during the mid-2010s when I first heard the term “solarpunk,” but my introduction came by way of a Portuguese anthology titled “Solarpunk: Histórias ecológicas e fantásticas em um mundo sustentável”, edited by Gerson Lodi-Ribeiro and originally published in 2012 by Editora Draco in São Paulo, Brazil. I’d been curating a website (Dragonfly.eco), which explores world ecofiction, always looking for intriguing interviews. At that time, the anthology was in the process of being translated to English by World Weaver Press, at which one of my literary colleagues, Sarena Ulibarri, was editor-in-chief. She put me in touch with the translator, Fábio Fernandes, and we chatted about solarpunk.

I’d also interviewed Adam Flynn, who said, “If cyberpunk was ‘Here is this future that we see coming and we don’t like it,’ and steampunk is ‘Here’s yesterday’s future that we wish we had,’ then solarpunk might be ‘Here’s a future that we want and we might actually be able to get.’”⁴

Solarpunk evolves

Throughout the past decade, solarpunk emerged as a popular movement and ideology. I’m most familiar with literary solarpunk, but

the genre's concept involves egalitarian, diverse, holistic perspectives, which include technology, fashion, art, architecture, games, renewable energy, urban planning and more. In the past several years, I've had the opportunity to interview many solarpunk authors.

Publishers, authors and editors such as Sarena Ulibarri, Sheree Renée Thomas, Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki, Zelda Knight, Marissa van Uden, Susan Kaye Quinn, BrightFlame, Nina Munteanu, Lynn Hutchinson Lee, Tory Stephens (Creative Manager at Grist), Renan Bernardo, Solarpunk Magazine editor Justine Norton-Kertson, E.G. Condé, and Aleksandar Nedeljkovic, are just some artists whom I've chatted with – but that's just the tip of the iceberg. Now, a decade or more after its origins, here's what some of these artists are saying about solarpunk:

"Solarpunk is a political form of speculative art and activism that imagines survivable futures grounded in resilience and the role of communities instead of states or companies to define progress. It focuses on collective action and encompasses material realities like food, healthcare, housing, and migration as some of its central axes. It is a way of imagining better forms of coexistence, be they human or non-human, where hope is inseparable from action and technology inextricable from responsible use and communal control. Global South perspectives and voices are of extreme importance when defining the genre, as it is the part of the world most affected by the consequences of harsh climate and mass migration. Hence, Global South narratives and stories must be central rather than merely representational." -Renan Bernardo, author of *Different Kinds of Defiance*

"Solarpunk stories give us a glimpse of the world we'd have if we quit corporations and stopped isolating humans from nature – an Earth where life is cherished more than logos. For me, the best solarpunk doesn't make me feel hopeful; it makes me feel angry. It reminds me we're in the middle of the greatest heist in Earth's history, watching this other future being stolen, and we don't have to let them get away with it." - Marissa van Uden, editor-in-chief of *Violet Lichen Books* and series editor of the *Eco: The Year's Best Speculative Ecofiction* annual anthology

I asked Justine Norton-Kerston, co-editor-in-chief of *Solarpunk Magazine*, "What is solarpunk?" They answered, "A good user-friendly definition that I really like to use, which is taken from one of solarpunk's founding authors and strategists – Jay Springett – is that solarpunk is a movement in art, literature, fashion, architecture, and activism that seeks to embody and answer the question, 'What does a sustainable world look like, and can we get there?'"

I talked with the editors of *Africa Risen*, and when I asked about a rise in fiction about biodiversity and the environment, as more African writers find the avenues to address ecofiction topics, Zelda Knight replied that there is a movement towards branding climate and science fiction with something new and "writing more positive futurism like solarpunk."⁵

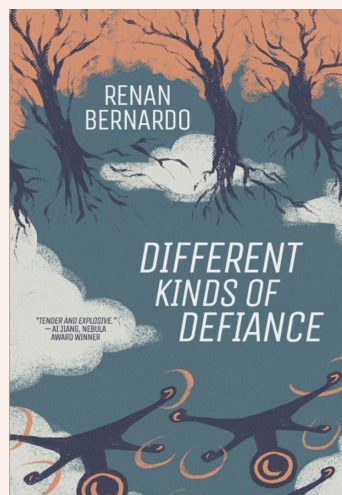
"Solarpunk is a movement, a genre, and a vibe to create futures where all beings thrive. Yet this pert answer doesn't do justice to solarpunk. Solarpunk is a verb. It is the act of creating futures where all beings thrive. Writing (fiction or nonfiction) expands our notion of what is possible and documents solarpunk in action. This inspires the act

TAKE ACTION

Find a solarpunk niche, such as energy, art, literature, gaming or fashion: join up, learn and grow. The DIY options are: compost, recycle, rewild your yard, repurpose things and more. Bigger steps: go solar, even partially; make an EV your next car purchase; and vote for leaders who are part of the clean energy movement.

of creating those futures: to solarpunk." - BrightFlame, author of *The Working* and contributor to solarpunk articles and anthologies

Jay Springett, mentioned above, quoted Kendra Pierre-Louis at *Yes! Magazine*, who said, "Once upon a time, some humans told a story about their relationship to the Earth, and they used it to build a world that was beautiful but flawed. Over time, people realized that was the wrong story, and they constructed a new one, one that said they could live in harmony with their environment. And they used the pieces of their old story to help construct their new one."⁶



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