

Solarpunk, Art, and Social Ecological Aesthetics

TBD 2023

Instructors: Solarpunk Surf Club, artist collective

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Institute for Social Ecology

Course Schedule

Ten-week course beginning TBD with sessions every Wednesday at 7 pm Eastern

All meetings will take place on Zoom at [LINK]

Please note that content listed under **Read/Watch/Listen** should be completed *before* each course meeting

Final class TBD

Final project due TBD

Course Description

Solarpunk is an emerging visionary utopian aesthetic that critically engages the reality of capitalist catastrophe while maintaining a radical optimism about humanity's potential for a communal, ecological future. Solarpunk conjures visions of beauty and harmony in both formal and social senses—scenes of vibrant neighborhood life, biophilic architecture, and liberatory uses of jugaad-style technologies. The worlds depicted within broad currents of the solarpunk milieu are utopian yet realist, post-scarcity but not post-conflict, and uncompromisingly ecological without lapsing into primitivism or misanthropy. In other words, solarpunk worlds appear to be holistically articulated visions of social ecology; or, what Bookchin called “the image of a fecund interaction between humanity's craft and nature's potentialities.”






Social ecology is a comparably mature radical political theory that posits the ecological crisis as a social crisis, and visa-versa, in which the domination of nature is inextricably linked to the domination of human beings. Through the oppositional struggle to overcome all forms of hierarchy and domination, the theory envisions a free, caring, and ecological society in which humans have successfully reharmonized the interrelationships between ourselves, technology, and the rest of the living world. Drawing on the best of Marxism, anarchism, and traditional ecological knowledge, social ecology synthesizes a systematic understanding of socialism and critique of capitalism with a commitment to anti-statism, feminism, direct democracy, and confederal strategies of prefiguration. Social ecology, therefore, offers a comprehensive integration of philosophy, politics, ethics, and epistemology. As a living tradition, social ecology continues to develop through theory and practice. A philosophy of art and a theory of beauty—or, the realm of *aesthetics*—remains one notable opportunity for further inquiry.

This course investigates the potential of solarpunk as an aesthetic complement to social ecology and of social ecology as a political-philosophical ground for solarpunk. Students will explore the intersections of art, solarpunk, and social ecology alongside Solarpunk Surf Club through texts, images, objects, discussion, and project-based making. We will begin by evaluating art historical antecedents to solarpunk such as Proletkult and the theories of Aleksandr Bogdanov, William Morris and the Arts & Crafts








movement, and the animated films of Hayao Miyazaki. Next, we will examine political tensions within solarpunk surrounding greenwashing, recuperation, and the competing tendencies of ecomodernism and cottagecore. In the final weeks, we will share and analyze examples of relevant contemporary art in a variety of forms, culminating in the attempt to elaborate upon social ecological aesthetics through the production of original creative work.

Course Objectives




Through this course, students will:

-  Connect artistic practice to political praxis
-  Critically engage relevant historical antecedents as well as personal and peer artworks
-  Develop materialist, dialectical, and naturalist understandings of art
-  Create new narratives and images of freedom, desire, and abundance
-  Contribute to solarpunk and a social ecological theory of aesthetics








Course Format (90 min)

-  Read /  Watch /  Listen (completed *before* course meeting)
-  Icebreaker (5 min)
-  Offering (multimedia presentation) (30 min)
-  Discussion (30 min)
-  Project worktime/critique (25 min)

Evaluation





-  40% Final project
-  30% In-class participation
-  30% Online participation via Discord

Final Project



-  Produce a creative work that engages with and builds upon the heuristics, principles, and methodologies of solarpunk.
-  This work may be in any medium or combine multiple forms of practice.
-  Collaborations and affinity groups, within or outside the course, are encouraged. This may range from group planning and review sessions to collective authorship and collaborative making throughout the project's duration.
-  The project may be an elaboration on an existing work or a wholly new endeavor.
-  Projects may be ongoing and do not have to be “completed” by the end of the course, but should indicate demonstrable progress with shareable documentation thereof.
-  Projects will be presented at our 10th-week showcase celebration.
-  Final Project evaluation criteria:
 - + Conceptually rigorous
 - + Inventive & compelling
 - + Competent use of craft and technique
 - + Fluent in formal elements and principles

Week 1 - Introduction to Solarpunk and Social Ecology

Read/Watch/Listen:

-  [What is Social Ecology?](#), Murray Bookchin
-  [What is Solarpunk?](#), Andrewism (Andrew Sage)
-  [1. Introduction: the Nature of Art](#), from [Artpolitik](#), Neala Schleuning
-  [Cerata of the Leaf Sheep](#), Solarpunk Surf Club

Supplementary content:





-  [Your Island is a Commune pt. 1](#), Nowhere Grotesk
-  [The Shape of Punk to Come](#), CrimethInc.

Week 2 - Towards an Aesthetic Critique of Capitalism

Read/Watch/Listen:



-  Selections from [The Ecology of Freedom](#), Murray Bookchin
 - 9. *Two Images of Technology*
 - 10. *The Social Matrix of Technology*
-  [Art Under Plutocracy](#), William Morris
-  [Stealing the Common from the Goose](#), folk poem
-  [Apple Harvest](#), Camille Pissarro
-  [Carbon Form](#), Elisa Iturbe interviewed by Sean Lally

Supplementary content:

-  [Reconsidering John Dewey's Art as Experience](#), Alexis Clements
-  [Ecology of Freedom Reading Group Session 6](#) (Ch. 9 & 10), facilitated by Brian Tokar
-  [Manifesto](#) of the Federation of Artists of the Paris Commune 1871
-  [On Beauty](#), Zozan Sîma, member of the Jineoloji Committee

Week 3 - Proletkult

Read/Watch/Listen:



-  [Art in the Revolution and the Revolution in Art](#), Sergei Tretyakov
-  [Another Art World, Part 3: Policing and Symbolic Order](#), Nika Dubrovsky & David Graeber

Supplementary content:

-  [Another Art World, Part 1: Art Communism and Artificial Scarcity](#), Dubrovsky & Graeber
-  [Another Art World, Part 2: Utopia of Freedom as a Market Value](#), Dubrovsky & Graeber
-  [Marxism, art and the Soviet debate over "proletarian culture"](#), David Walsh
-  [Proletarian Poetry](#), Aleksandr Bogdanov
-  [The Workers' Artistic Inheritance](#), Aleksandr Bogdanov
-  [Religion, Art, and Marxism](#), Aleksandr Bogdanov
-  [Communist Policy Toward Art](#), Leon Trotsky
-  [The Social Roots and the Social Function of Literature](#), Leon Trotsky
-  [What Is Proletarian Culture, and Is It Possible?](#), Leon Trotsky

Week 4 - Arts & Crafts Movement and Studio Ghibli

Read/Watch/Listen:




-  Selections from [Art & Labor](#), Eileen Boris
 - 1. *The English Example: John Ruskin, William Morris, and the Craftsman Ideal*
 - 9. *The Communal Impulse: Back to the Land with Arts and Crafts*
 - 10. *Towards the Cooperative Commonwealth: Moral Aesthetics for Radicals*
-  [Miyazaki's Marxism](#), Zeria

Week 5 - The Limits of Critique (Postmodernism & The Situationist International)

Read/Watch/Listen:










-  [Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism](#), Fredric Jameson
-  5. *The Situationist International*, from [Artpolitik](#), Neala Schleuning
-  [Social Ecology and Aesthetic Criticism](#), Conner Owen
-  [Anarchism, Representation, and Culture](#), Jesse Cohn
-  [Thisisours.us](#)
-  [La Police S'Affiche Aux Beaux Arts 1968](#), Atelier Populaire
-  [Und Macht Euch Die Erde Untertan](#), Klaus Staeck
-  [Give me your tired...and I will exploit them](#), Ruth Stenstrom

Supplementary content:






-  [9.5 Theses on Art and Class](#), Ben Davis
-  [Why has critique run out of steam?](#), Bruno Latour
-  [Hypernormalization](#), d. Adam Curtis

Week 6 The Emergence of Solarpunk & Attempts at Recuperation

Read/Watch/Listen:

-  [Solarpunk: A Container for More Fertile Futures](#), Jay Springett
-  [Is Ornamenting Solar Panels a Crime?](#), Elvia Wilk
-  [Dear Alice](#), Chobani advertisement (d. Bjørn-Erik Aschim)
-  ['Dear Alice' Decommodified Edition](#), Waffle to the Left
-  [Listen, Solarpunk!](#), Ospare
-  [Solarpunk Is Not Enough](#), Andrewism (Andrew Sage)
-  [What if We Cancel the Apocalypse?](#), Joey Ayoub
-  [Occupy. Liberate. Decolonize](#), Slingshot Media, Occupy Berkeley
-  [Daddy, what did YOU do in the Climate War?](#), John MacPhee, Justseeds

Supplementary content:

-  [On The Political Dimensions of Solarpunk](#), Andrew Dana Hudson
-  [What is solarpunk and can it help save the planet?](#), Nicola K. Smith
-  [THE LINE](#), NEOM (Saudi Arabia)
-  [The Earth is Now Our Only Shareholder](#), Yvon Chouinard (Patagonia CEO)
-  [Apple Park](#), Foster + Partners

Week 7 - Worlding Solarpunk

Read/Watch/Listen:












-  [The Boston Hearth Project](#) from *Sunvault*, T.X. Watson
-  Selections from *A prayer for the crown shy; A psalm for the wild built; Semiosis; the Mars Trilogy; New York 2140; Walkaway; Afterglow; Ecopunk!*
-  [Utopianism](#), Kim Stanley Robinson interviewed by *Solarpunk Magazine*
-  [13. Reflecting on Our Post-Virus World](#), Brian Eno & Yanis Varoufakis
-  [Making Gardens out of Silence](#) from *FOREVERANDEVERNOMORE*, Brian Eno
-  [FOREVERANDEVERNOMORE](#) album statement, Brian Eno
-  [Sonic description of Brian Eno's In a Garden](#), Elif Shafak
-  [Back to Earth Day](#), Brian Eno & Torkwase Dyson interviewed by Hans Ulrich Obrist (relevant portion 3:02:22–3:14:18)
-  [play.half.earth](#), Francis Tseng & Son La Pham
-  [Proteus](#), Ed Key & David Kanaga
-  [What an Anarchist City Could Look Like \(Social Ecology\)](#), RE-EDUCATION









Supplementary content:

-  [Interview: Kim Stanley Robinson](#), Klaus Æ. Mogensen
-  [Ubik: Deconstruction of Bourgeois SF](#), Peter Fitting
-  [The Weight of Light: A Collection of Solar Futures](#), ed. Joey Eschrich & Clark A. Miller
-  [Glass and Gardens: Solarpunk Summers](#), ed. Sarena Ulibarri
-  [Glass and Gardens: Solarpunk Winters](#), ed. Sarena Ulibarri
-  [Ecopunk!](#), ed. Liz Grzyb and Cat Sparks
-  [Solarpunk: Ecological and Fantastical Stories in a Sustainable World](#), ed. Lodi-Ribeiro
-  [Multispecies Cities](#), ed. Rupprecht, Cleland, Tamura, Chaudhuri & Ulibarri
-  [Sunvault: Stories of Solarpunk and Eco-Speculation](#), ed. Wagner & Wieland
-  [Almanac for the Anthropocene: A Compendium of Solarpunk Futures](#), ed. Wagner & Wieland
-  [NOTHING IS GOING BACK TO NORMAL](#), Inhabit

Week 8 - Visualizing Solarpunk



Read/Watch/Listen:

-  [Ritualistic Action Cells](#), Jay Jordan
-  [Cornfield drone chase scene](#) from *Interstellar* (d. Christopher Nolan)
-  [No One's Rose](#), Vault Comics
-  [Trailer](#) from *Remote* (d. Mika Rottenberg and Mahyad Tousi)
-  [Trailer](#) from *The Last Forest* (d. Luiz Bolognesi)
-  [Trailer](#) from *Bacurau* (d. Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles)
-  [Lifecycle of Flowers](#) (d. Azuma Makoto)
-  [Parts Bagani](#)
-  [Intelligent Mischief](#)
-  [Phonofolium](#), Scenocosme (Grégory Lasserre & Anaïs met den Ancxt)
-  [The Institute of Queer Ecology](#)

-  [Karrabing Film Collective](#)
-  [Regan Rosburg](#)
-  [João Queiroz](#)
-  [Luc Schuiten](#)
-  [Dustin Jacobus](#)
-  [Optopia](#), ed. Albrecht, Baker, Datiya, Handelman & Washington
-  [Nobyl](#), Marisca Pichette
-  [Legacy](#), Gabriela Avelino
-  [Brighter Than the Last](#), J.D. Harlock







Week 9 - Embodying Solarpunk

Read/Watch/Listen:

-  [Part 2: Wishes](#) from *The Hologram*, Cassie Thornton
-  [Solarpunk Futures](#), Solarpunk Surf Club
-  [Y Basta Ya!](#) + [Bailout!](#), NAKA Dance Theatre
-  [Mikiwan: Solarpunk Herbalism](#), Studio Ekosi
-  [Kai Unearthed](#), Matthew Coopilton, Olivia Peace, and Claire Hu
-  [It's Not a Revolution If We Can't Dance!](#), Chaia Heller interviewed by Luka Dowel
-  [Making Jewelry From E-waste](#), Hydroponic Trash
-  [Recipes For An Off-Grid 'Internet'](#), Hydroponic Trash
-  [Collaborative Storytelling & Tabletop RPGs](#), Greeted Than Games

Week 10 - Solarpunk as Social Ecological Aesthetics

Read/Watch/Listen:

-  8. *Social Anarchist Aesthetics in an Age of Fragmentation*, from [Artpolitik](#), Neala Schleuning
-  [The Build and Fight Formula](#), Kali Akuno
-  [The Art That Is Neither Seen Nor Heard](#), Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés
-  [John Jordan on Creative Activism](#), Fossil Free Culture NL, Jay (formerly, John) Jordan
-  [So you want to be an Eco-artist? Lessons in Grief and Gratitude](#), Beverly Naidus
-  [Utopia, not Futurism](#), Murray Bookchin

Further Reading

140 Artists' Ideas for Planet Earth, ed. Hans Ulrich Obrist & Kostas Stasinopoulos
A Prayer for the Crown Shy, Becky Chambers
A Psalm for the Wild Built, Becky Chambers
[*A Solarpunk Manifesto*](#), The Solarpunk Community
[*Absolutely Small: Sketch of an Anarchist Aesthetic*](#), Roger Rothman
[*Anarchism and the Crisis of Representation*](#), Jesse Cohn
[*Anarchist Aesthetics: A Few Notes Towards a Libertarian View of the Arts*](#), Kingsley Widmer
[*Anarchist Film Doesn't Exist*](#), The Trash Dimension
[*Anarchy, Neo-Impressionism, and Utopia*](#), Allan Antliff
Aphro-ism, Aph Ko & Syl Ko
Art Has No History!, ed. John Roberts
Art as Experience, John Dewey
Art as Social Action, ed. Greg Sholette & Chloe Bass
Art as Social Practice, ed. Judith Walgren & Xtine Burroughs
[*Art, Energy, and Technology: the Solarpunk Movement*](#), Juan David Reina-Rozo
[*Atemporality for the Creative Artist*](#), Bruce Sterling
Beautiful Trouble, Andrew Boyd
Castle in the Sky, d. Hayao Miyazaki
Cultural Democracy, James Bau Graves
Ecoart in Action, ed. Aviva Rahmani, Amara Geffen, & Ann Rosenthal
Ecological Aesthetics, Nathaniel Stern
Emergent Strategy, adrienne maree brown
[*Evolution Takes Love: Tracing Some Themes of the Solarpunk Genre*](#), William Kees Schuller
[*Extinction Symbol*](#), Goldfrog ESP
FernGully: The Last Rainforest, d. Bill Kroyer
[*For still possible cities: a politics of failure for the politically depressed*](#), Natalie Osborne
Imagining Action in/Against the Anthropocene, Ariel Kroon
Investigating the societies and environments of the solarpunk genre, Kristian Lund Stokka
[*Is Utopianism Dead?*](#), Simon Critchley
[*Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art*](#), André Breton & Leon Trotsky
Ministry for the Future, Kim Stanley Robinson
Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind, d. Hayao Miyazaki
Notes Towards Prefigurative Epistemologies, Sara C. Motta
Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias, Michel Foucault
Our Shared Storm, Andrew Dana Hudson
Palliative Design Meets Palliative Medicine, Rana Sagha Zadeh & Paul Eshelman
Parable of the Sower, Octavia Butler
Paths Toward Utopia: Graphic Explorations of Everyday Anarchism, Cindy Milstein & Erik Ruin
Pleasure Activism, adrienne maree brown
Semiosis, Sue Burke
[*Solarpunk & the Pedagogical Value of Utopia*](#), Isaijah Johnson
[*Solarpunk Flag*](#), StarwallOfRadical.town

[Solarpunk as Narrative Strategy](#), Jay Springett
Solarpunk: Against a Shitty Future, Rhys Williams
Solarpunk: Notes Toward a Manifesto, Adam Flynn
[Solarpunk: Post-Industrial Design and Aesthetics](#), Eric Hunting
Techniques of futuring, Jeroen Oomen, Jesse Hoffman & Maarten Hajer
[The Anarchist Aesthetic](#), Michael Scrivener
The Anxiety- and Pain-Reducing Effects of Music Interventions: A Systematic Review, Ulrica Nilsson
The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction, Ursula K. Le Guin
[The Concept of Realistic Utopia: Ideal Theory as Critique](#), Marit Böker
The Dispossessed, Ursula K. Le Guin
[The Evolution of Human Artistic Creativity](#), Gillian M Morriss-Kay
The Fifth Sacred Thing, Starhawk
The Mars Trilogy, Kim Stanley Robinson
[The Politics of Utopia](#), Frederic Jameson
Toward a Communitarian Theory of Aesthetic Value, Nick Riggle
Towards Proletarian Art, Mike Gold
[Towards Solarpunk Futures](#), BrightFlame
Utopian Thinking Under the Sign of Neoliberalism, Henry Giroux
Wages Against Artwork, Leigh Claire La Berge
Walkaway, Cory Doctorow
[We Are 'Nature' Defending Itself](#), Jay Jordan & Isabelle Fremeaux
We Do This 'Til We Free Us, Mariame Kaba
[What Would a Solarpunk Government Look Like?](#), Christina De La Rocha
Where There Is No Vision, The People Perish, Ruth Levitas
William Morris: Decoration and Materialism, Caroline Arscott