

Interrogating the Four Riders of Apocalypse: A Critical Analysis of Solarpunk's Ecological Utopianism

Assist. prof. Primož Mlačnik, PhD

Research Centre for Humanities (University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia)

primoz.mlacnik@ung.si

Primož Mlačnik presented an analysis of solarpunk's fundamental traits in the selected short stories of the short fiction and poetry collection *Sunvault: Stories of Solarpunk and eco-speculation* (2017). Building on the genre's supposed utopian substance as an affirmative rejection of cyberpunk and as a progressive branch of climate fiction, Mlačnik posed two sets of questions formed with the help of Slavoj Žižek's and Fredric Jameson's work: how are these stories interrogating the 'four riders of the apocalypse' (ecological crisis, the consequences of the biogenetic revolution, struggles over raw materials, and new forms of apartheid) in the twenty-first century, and is solar punk, a science fiction genre with a punk ethos, capable of imagining a utopian future. The author showed how solar punk seeks to transcend dominant sociopolitical (capitalist narratives of growth), literary (dystopian narratives), ecological (global warming) and affective antagonisms (ecological melancholy) belonging to the contemporary 'post-historical' period. By analyzing the structural character of the (apocalyptic) end and ecological alternatives in solar punk narratives, the author showed that the genre's affinity with ideas of degrowth and ecologically futuristic technology contributes to the utopistic exercises in science, politics and morality but also lacks the critical utopian imagination, necessary for changing the conservative politics of end without an ending. Compared with the original English punk movement, solarpunk shares the rebellious impetus but is not particularly attuned to social class, which is more in line with capitalist realism than with ecofuturist social realism, which seems to be on solarpunk's original agenda.

Keywords: solarpunk literature, utopistics, apocalypse, representations of the end, utopian imagination

Bibliography

Agamben, Giorgio. *Stanzas: A Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. Edited by Giulio Einaudi. Translated by Ronald Martinez, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

Andersen, Gregers. *Climate Fiction and Cultural Analysis: A New Perspective on Life in the Anthropocene*. New York and London: Routledge, 2020.

Anderson-Nathe, Ben and Grant Charles. "The Radical Potential of the Imaginary." *Child & Youth Services* 41, no. 2 (2020): 105-107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0145935X.2020.1789297>.

Cruz, Cynthia. *The Melancholia of Class: A Manifesto for the Working Class*. New York: Random House, 2021.

D'Alisa, Giacomo, Federico Demaria, and Giorgos Kallis. "Degrowth: An Introduction." In *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*, edited by Giacomo D'Alisa, Federico Demaria, and Giorgos Kallis, 1-18. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Dodds, Joseph. *Psychoanalysis and ecology at the edge of chaos: Complexity theory, Deleuze/Guattari and Psychoanalysis for a Climate in Crisis*. London and New York: Routledge, 2011.

Dodds, Joseph. "Otto Fenichel and Ecopsychanalysis in the Anthropocene." *Psychoanalytic Perspectives* 16, no. 2 (2019): 195-207. DOI: 10.1080/1551806X.2019.1601921.

Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist realism: is there no alternative?*. Winchester and Washington: Zero Books, 2009.

Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia". In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916) On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement. Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, 10th ed. Edited by James Strachney, 237-258. London: Vintage Publishing, 2001.

Gampel, Yolanda. "Reflections on countertransference in psychoanalytic work with child survivors of the shoah." *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 26, no. 3 (2015): 343-368. DOI:10.1521/jaap.1.1998.26.3.343.

Giblett, Rod. *Psychoanalytic ecology: The talking cure for environmental illness and health*. London and New York: Routledge, 2019.

Guattari, Felix. *The Three Ecologies*. Translated by Ian Pindar and Felix Sutton. London and New Brunswick: The Athlone Press, 2000.

Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, London and New York: Routledge, 1979.

Jameson, Frederic. "Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future?". *Science Fiction Studies* 9, no. 2 (1982): 147-158. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4239476>.

Johns-Putra, Adeleine. "Climate change in literature and literary Studies: From cli-fi, climate change theater and ecopoetry to ecocriticism and climate change criticism." *WIREs Clim Change* 7, no. 2 (2016): 266-282. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.385>.

Johnson, Isaijah. "Solarpunk & the Pedagogical Value of Utopia". *Journal of Sustainability Education*, May 1, 2020, http://www.susted.com/wordpress/content/solarpunk-the-pedagogical-value-of-utopia_2020_05.

Lertzman, Renee. *Environmental melancholia: Psychoanalytic dimension of engagement*. London and New York: Routledge, 2015.

Pfaller, Robert. *Zakaj se spleča živeti: elementi materialistične filozofije* [What life is worth living for: elements of materialist philosophy]. Ljubljana: Studia Humanitatis, 2020.

Reina-Rozo, Juan. "Art, energy, and technology: the Solarpunk movement." *International Journal of Engineering, Social Justice and Peace* 8, no. 1 (2021): 55-68. DOI: [10.24908/ijesjp.v8i1.14292](https://doi.org/10.24908/ijesjp.v8i1.14292).

Springett, Jay. "Solarpunk! The Vibe Dislocates the Present to Re-future the Future". In *Regeneration and its discontents*. Edited by Tautvydas Urbelis and Laurinaitis Dovydas, 20–61, Laurinaitis, Lithuania: Architektūros centras and Architektūros fonda, 2021.

Thunberg Greta. *No One Is Too Small to Make a Difference*. London: Penguin Books, 2019.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. *Utopistics: Or, Historical Choices of the Twenty-first Century*. New York, The New Press, 1998.

Wagner, Phoebe and B. C. Wieland (ed.). *Sunvault: Stories of Solarpunk and Eco-Speculation*. Nashville: Upper Rubber Boot, 2017.

Williams, Rhys. "»This Shining Confluence of Magic and Technology«: Solarpunk, Energy Imaginaries, and the Infrastructures of Solarity". *Open Library of Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2019): 1–35. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.329>.

Zupančič, Alenka. "The Apocalypse is (Still) Disappointing." *S: Journal of the Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique* 10&11 (2018): 16-30. URL: [https:// www. lineofbeauty. org/index.php/S/article/view/82/101](https://www.lineofbeauty.org/index.php/S/article/view/82/101).

Žižek, Slavoj. *Living in the End Times*. London and New York: Verso, 2010.

Primož Mlačnik, PhD is a writer and researcher at the University of Nova Gorica, focusing on form, content and social context of modernist and popular literature, informed by interdisciplinary cultural studies approaches.