

Two Solarpunks — A Deep Dive

Reading notes on Dariusz Piechota, “Solarpunk – w stronę świetlanej przyszłości” (2022), prepared by Głos Statku

2026

Reading notes on Dariusz Piechota, “Solarpunk – w stronę świetlanej przyszłości” [“Solarpunk – Towards a Bright Future”] (*Annales UMCS*, vol. XL, sectio FF, 2022)

This is the extended companion to our short introductory piece, “Two Solarpunks: Why American Optimism and Brazilian Skepticism Tell Different Stories About the Future.” If you haven’t read the short version, you may want to start there — this document assumes the basic shape of the argument and goes further into each part of it.

These are our own reading notes, not a translation or authorized summary. We’ve tried to represent the argument accurately, but any distortion is ours, not the author’s. Direct quotations are kept short and marked; everything else is paraphrase.

What kind of text this is

This is a work of literary criticism and ecocriticism — a comparative-literature essay analyzing solarpunk as a literary genre, published in a Polish academic journal. It is not itself a work of solarpunk fiction, and doesn’t offer an original narrative; its contribution is analytical, mapping the genre’s lineage, internal variation, and stylistic techniques.

Genre placement and etymology

Piechota situates solarpunk within a specific literary-historical sequence: cyberpunk, then steampunk, then solarpunk, each a “-punk” genre defined partly by a stance of defiance against dominant power structures, applied to a different technological register. He unpacks the compound name directly: “solar” carries connotations of energy, warmth, and hope; “punk” signals rebellion against corporate and state power specifically. What distinguishes solarpunk from adjacent, more pessimistic genres — post-apocalyptic fiction and climate fiction (cli-fi) — is a specific, deliberately non-naive optimism: the working premise that wisely applied technology can genuinely help overcome ecological crisis, rather than technology functioning as an automatic savior independent of the social arrangements surrounding it.

Genealogy: precursors before the genre had a name

Piechota traces solarpunk’s literary ancestors well before the term itself existed. Ursula Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* (1974) and Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (1975) are treated as direct precursors, alongside Kim Stanley Robinson’s Orange County trilogy. He goes back further still to identify a nineteenth-century prefiguration in William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1891) — a utopian novel depicting a society without private property, in harmony with nature, with dramatically reduced working hours, anticipating solarpunk’s core commitments more than a century before the genre acquired its name.

Ecotopia: a close reading as reservoir of concrete imagery

Piechota devotes substantial, close attention to Callenbach’s *Ecotopia*, analyzing its imagined world in specific detail. The novel depicts a secessionist state — Washington, Oregon, and northern California — built around a completed energy transition, and Piechota catalogues its texture in detail: bicycles as the primary mode of transportation; near-total material recycling; a twenty-hour standard work week; households organized as multi-generational or thematically bonded family units of up to twenty people, not necessarily related by blood; mandatory forest service as a civic institution; education organized around project-based, hands-on learning rather than abstract theory; a ban on unnecessary electronic devices; biodegradable

plastics as standard material; and power drawn from a mix of hydroelectric dams, solar panels, and water mills. Notably, the state itself plays a secondary structural role in the novel — narrative and social weight falls on the immediate neighborhood and community rather than on formal governance.

Piechota’s analytical point in dwelling on this level of detail: this is material that works through a specific literary technique — showing rather than explaining. *Ecotopia* offers concrete, sensory images of daily life on the far side of a completed transition, rather than an abstract policy argument for why that transition ought to happen. This is a technique with direct relevance to anyone trying to write introductory or persuasive material about a transformed future: concrete, textured images of ordinary life do work that abstract argument alone can’t.

The central analytical contribution: two divergent regional traditions

This is, in our reading, the essay’s most valuable and durable contribution — a genuine geographic and political fault line within the solarpunk genre, not a stylistic quirk but a substantive difference in what kind of story solarpunk tells about power.

American solarpunk — represented primarily by Callenbach, and by the Morris lineage standing behind him — tends, in Piechota’s analysis, toward genuine utopianism. The energy transition is presented as essentially accomplished and largely free of ongoing conflict; the narrative position is one already located on the far side of “having won,” describing the resulting world rather than the struggle to reach it.

Brazilian solarpunk — represented specifically by Gerson Lodi-Ribeiro’s 2018 anthology *Solarpunk: Ecological and Fantastical Stories in a Sustainable World* — is considerably less optimistic in Piechota’s reading, and blends freely with the poetics of horror, thriller, and crime fiction. Renewable energy in these stories is politicized and often actively corrupted; “green” corporations and governments are not exempt from violence or coercive power. Recurring motifs Piechota identifies include biotechnological experimentation, biological weapons developed under the cover of energy-transition programs, and corporations seizing control of post-conflict urban reconstruction after struggles over dwindling fossil-fuel reserves. The common thread across these stories, as Piechota reads them: completing an energy transition doesn’t end the underlying struggle for power — it simply relocates that struggle onto new terrain.

Assessment against our own project’s needs

Piechota’s own analytical framing surfaces a genuine tension worth naming directly rather than glossing over. The purely American, Callenbach-style register risks a real naivety about the durability and adaptability of concentrated power — corporate and state — that sits uncomfortably alongside any political framework genuinely critical of centralized power, including the “dual power” tradition (see our companion piece on Bookchin). The Brazilian register preserves a sharper, more realistic political edge, but its default tonal register — biological weapons, human experimentation, sustained violent conflict — runs considerably darker than what serves a text meant to function as a *gentle* cognitive introduction, as opposed to a fully-developed work of dystopian or thriller fiction.

Our working synthesis, developed through direct engagement with both registers rather than adopting either wholesale: draw on *Ecotopia*’s concrete, warm images of everyday post-transition life — transportation, labor, education, community structure — as genuine stylistic material and technique, while retaining the critical vigilance toward power, capital, and institutional capture that characterizes the Brazilian tradition specifically, without importing that tradition’s darker plot machinery (biological weapons, systemic violence, human experimentation) into material explicitly intended to invite readers in gently rather than unsettle or alarm them from the outset.

What this essay doesn’t provide

Piechota’s contribution is literary-critical and comparative, not creative — a close reading and taxonomy of existing solarpunk fiction across two national traditions, not a ready-made narrative text of our own or a how-to guide for writing one. The actual work of composing an introductory narrative — applying the lessons

drawn here about concrete imagery, tonal calibration, and the risks of both the purely optimistic and purely dystopian registers — remains a distinct task this essay usefully informs but doesn't accomplish.

A note on dates and evidence

This is a 2022 academic essay in comparative literature and ecocriticism, published in a peer-reviewed Polish academic journal (*Annales UMCS*). Its claims are literary-analytical rather than empirical — close readings of published fiction (Callenbach's 1975 novel, the 2018 Lodi-Ribeiro anthology, and the broader genealogy back to Morris) rather than data-driven findings. The American-versus-Brazilian distinction is Piechota's own comparative analytical framework, built from close reading of a specific, named set of texts rather than a comprehensive survey of either national tradition in its entirety — readers should treat it as a well-argued critical interpretation rather than an exhaustive taxonomy of either country's solarpunk output.

This document is a companion to a short introductory piece on the same essay. Comments, corrections, and suggestions for what to read next belong there: [introductory piece](#).

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