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SOLARPUNK CONTRA CAPITALIST REALISM

Abstract: Mark Fisher expanded on the concept of capitalist realism as a socioeconomic order which stifles the imagination so deeply that we cannot imagine any alternative to it. To combat capitalist realism, Fisher believed we need an effective critique. If capitalist realism is an ideology, then an effective critique may come from a counter-ideology. I believe the speculative fiction and art movement known as *solarpunk* is the utopian premise we need to construct this counter-ideology. This essay will begin to construct a philosophy of solarpunk by primarily thinking of solarpunk as an ideology and showing its many advantages to past utopian conceptions of the future. Following Marx & Engels' treatment of ideology, Gramsci's cultural hegemony will also be considered in relation to Fisher's capitalist realism. Given the concurrent existential crises of climate collapse, economic inequality, depression, and alienation – all of which are exacerbated by the capitalist model – something beyond 'an effective critique' is necessary to overcome these challenges. This essay hopes to better understand whether or not solarpunk can meet this challenge to provide a vision of a better future beyond capitalism.

Keywords: ideology, solarpunk, capitalist realism, utopia

Introduction

"Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face the question whether a still higher 'standard of living' is worth its cost in things natural, wild, and free. For us of the minority, the opportunity to see geese is more important than television, and the chance to find a pasque-flower is a right as inalienable as free speech (Leopold 1949: vii)".

This essay will investigate the concepts of Capitalist Realism and Solarpunk with the aim to show how solarpunk can break the dystopian inertia that is capitalist realism. Due to both the uniqueness of its historical position and that it posits a diverse utopian future which has overcome racialized capitalism, solarpunk is a burgeoning movement with adherents from all over the world. As we as a global society are also now more connected than ever, the communities that are fighting for a better future can share and support similar eco-oriented movements.

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The idea of constructing a post-capitalist society is more than just critiquing the existing one; it also requires an engaging vision of the future. I have found that what is missing from most critiques of capitalism is the answer to the question: What happens after revolution? The question follows from Marx in that it may assume a revolution of some kind is inevitable (Marx 1848/1964), but unlike Marx, the positing of something better is not considered implicitly flawed. I would like to show the necessity of utopian thought and that a better future can come about without revolution, per se. If contemporary Marxian thought has awakened a class consciousness and made explicit the exploitation in social relations, revolution – generally thought of as a workers' revolt which aims to break the capitalist system of exploitation – naturally follows. In this regard, solarpunk operates in a completely different paradigm, building upon what exists and finding ways to make the foundation function more justly – in some cases, arguing on behalf of infrastructure as an inalienable human right; in others, arguing for a Universal Basic Income (UBI) (Hudson 2015). Here, revolution is one of refusal, a refusal to accept the future under the capitalist paradigm as inevitable, and the active and deliberate aim to overcome it by use of our collective imagination. The revolution happens off-screen, behind the scenes, and in the end, produces the kind of utopian landscape which creates hope in a very Havelian sense[2]: something you do because it is right, not because you know it will work.

In 2009's *Capitalist Realism*, Mark Fisher defined capitalist realism as a state of mind brought about by the capitalist paradigm in which it is no longer possible to imagine an alternative to capitalism (Fisher 2009). What he thought would save us from the existential crises of capitalism is an effective critique of capitalism. An effective critique would show capitalism to be self-destructive, and for Fisher, there were three main fault-lines: the environment, mental health, and bureaucracy. Fisher was convinced that educating on the environment had become so politicized that it would no longer be an effective tool for persuasion. He instead focused on mental health and bureaucracy for his critique.

However, I personally don't believe an effective critique will save the planet from the consequences of industrialized capitalism. Capitalist realism functions similarly to a cultural hegemony normalizing the status quo while denying the conceptual space to imagine alternatives. In other words, capitalist realism as cultural hegemony works similarly to how both Fisher and the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci envisioned; we cannot change the socioeconomic order for the better if we don't believe that there are any alternatives to it or if we do believe that this current system is the most aligned with the natural order of things and human nature itself.

Gramsci thought he had solved the question of why revolution didn't occur and he may have been right. Workers didn't revolt and instead only empowered the ruling classes by their consent, a consent which was grown through *cultural*

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[2] "Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out." - Vaclav Havel

hegemony, Gramsci's idea that the ruling classes contribute to the culture in such a way as to manufacture consent from their population, who harbour the mistaken belief that their struggles are part of the natural order of things. They accept the status quo and even politically act in favour of the ruling class (Gramsci 1971).

To push for solarpunk as utopian counter-ideology has the effect – I will argue – to make room for imagination and action to overcome this cultural hegemony of capitalist realism. And so, we should first ask what then is solarpunk?

Solarpunk and the role of imagination

Solarpunk originated in Brazil in 2012 with a short story collection, *Solarpunk: Histórias Ecológicas e Fantásticas em um Mundo Sustenavel* and this collection was later translated in 2018 to *Solarpunk: Ecological and Fantastical Stories in a Sustainable World* by Fabio Fernandes (Fernandes 2018). What began as speculative fiction quickly blossomed into an art movement along with journalists and academics contributing to its growth. The most commonly cited reference point for the introduction to solarpunk thought is Andrew Dana Hudson's 2015 essay "On the Political Dimensions of Solarpunk" (Hudson 2015). Hudson is a writer, editor of the anti-capitalist thought journal *Oasis,* and a research fellow at the Center for Science and the Imagination at the University of Arizona. A few of the many notable and historical figures who have become associated with the movement are American social theorist and political philosopher Murray Bookchin, who developed the theory of social ecology in the anarchist tradition; environmental ethicist Aldo Leopold; anarchist anthropologist David Graeber, the French psychologist and political philosopher Franz Fanon; revolutionary socialist and Marxist philosopher Rosa Luxemburg (who was a huge influence on Hannah Arendt). In addition, many science fiction writers are counted as well: Octavia Butler, Ursula K. LeGuin, and William Morris. Contemporary writers include Kim Stanley Robinson, Cory Doctorow, and the aforementioned Andrew Dana Hudson.

At first glance, solarpunk is "colorful, leafy metropolises, flowing neo-peasant fashions," Jennifer Hamilton writes in *The Conversation* "Explainer: 'solarpunk', or how to be an optimistic radical" (Hamilton 2017). In literature and artistic expression, solarpunk outright rejects any future dystopia and offers instead a diverse cast living in a technologically-green future, pushing back against the technological determinism of cyberpunk, while adding a transformation of social habits and the punk ethos, "punk in the sense that it insists on societal change at the highest levels" (ibid.)

It is important to note that solarpunk isn't a utopia, but a way of thinking, influenced by the solarpunk aesthetic, currently strongest in fiction and art, and utilises a human and nature harmony with help from (the largely already existing) green technologies. As I see it, solarpunk is deliberately hyper-diverse, relying not only on equal participation and representation from all walks of life, but actively seeking out discarded or marginalized knowledge in a post-colonialist sense. The future it presents is a good life in harmony

with nature and one which has overcome racialized capitalism.[3] I consider a harmony-driven conception of the good life as one which we consider our relationships to nature, to animals, to each other and to ourselves as *essential* to any valuable understanding of the good life – and, importantly – as a true measure of progress.

Arendt's *Human Condition* was largely an argument that the ancient Greek *polis*, though flawed in many ways, was fundamentally a political engagement with the good life, something made much more apparent as the current western political hegemony could be thought of more as an active investment in managing economies of scale. Not only then is solarpunk a return to the ambition of the political sphere as a place of equality where the good life could be contemplated, but it puts forward a more universal conception of the good life as one which necessarily values the role of the *ecosystem*.[4] Under the current paradigm, living human beings are structurally excluded from the full richness of possible human experience by oppressive systems which have perpetuated a singular – and mostly economic – concept of progress that promotes wealth creation above all else, even to the degree of creating a false narrative that we can have social justice or we can have great individual lives, but we can't have both. Solarpunk rejects this false binary.

Solarpunk runs counter to the ideological reach of capitalist realism and Gramsci's cultural hegemony. The importance of the solarpunk ideology can be thus made clear to the aims of this essay: It is a counter-ideology to capitalist realism and a way of outlining a more inclusive, harmonious, and sustainable future – important features which work in concert. Showing what is possible and advocating for it through activism breaks the ideological hold that our current paradigm works to keep in place, otherwise known as the status quo.

Here is a more thorough definition of solarpunk:

> [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 wild, the bright and colourful 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 warnings. Solutions to live comfortably without fossil fuels, to equitably manage scarcity and share abundance, to be kinder to each other and to the planet we share. At once a vision of the future, a thoughtful provocation, and an achievable lifestyle (Springett 2017).

To better outline whether solarpunk can be a counter-ideology to capitalist realism, it will help to learn more about the contemporary notion of ideology. But first, in further explaining solarpunk, it will be helpful to highlight the *advantages* it has which other past utopian conceptions may have been missing.

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[3] Although I won't argue for it here, industrial capitalism could be shown to also be inherently racist as well, where certain models – at least in the US – show that generational wealth can be traced back to the slave trade.

[4] This environmental side is a recent development because we can no longer ignore the effect we are having on the planet as a whole

One benefit to an ideological construction of solarpunk in the present is that we have an emerging theoretical framework to utilize in metamodernism. Metamodernism aims to integrate a plurality of views in the creation of a new meta-narrative. As a kind of post-postmodernism, metamodernism recognizes the contextual nature of knowledge creation: For example, feminist critiques and the lessons of the civil rights movements are all an essential part of this pluralism. If capitalism is the ideological underpinning (or by-product) of the so-called white, Christian, and patriarchal hegemony, then solarpunk is the ideological foundation for a genuine anti-capitalism, exactly because what is foundational about solarpunk is this integrated pluralism, diversity, and technological/ecological community.[5]

Another advantage to solarpunk is that we can now more clearly see the past failings of superficially similar movements. By analysing the original futurist movements in the 50s and 60s (now known in art circles as retrofuturism) through a solarpunk narrative, we recognize that past depictions of the future were hyper-individualistic (dome homes, self-driving cars, single-family homes) and overwhelmingly white and conservative status quo. Metamodernism actively works to incorporate marginalized knowledge, seeking to cement the role they should play in shaping the future, deliberately merging the aesthetic and the ethics into a politics which is supercharged towards insisting we can determine the future we want to inhabit. This is one way in which solarpunk and metamodernism inform each other. Seeing the past through this post-colonialist lens highlights that the lack of inclusivity and diversity actually undermined the realization of future conceptions – they simply weren't designed for the modern world; they weren't made for everyone. Though retrofuturism is big and vivid, there wasn't a space for cultural activism in the same way. It was merely the status quo in perpetuity with shiny new objects, as seen in the image below.
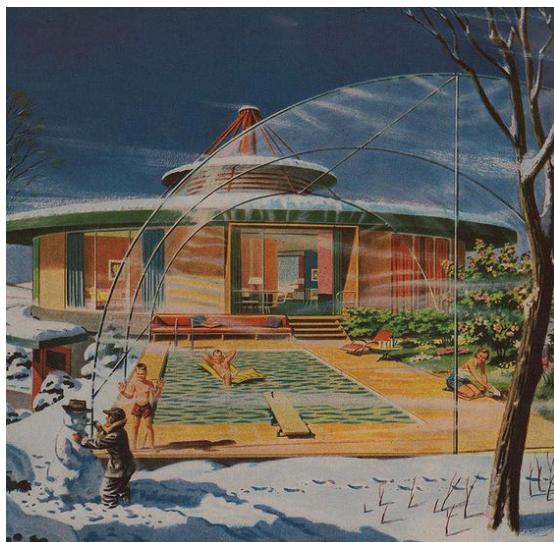

IMAGE 1: brought to you by America's Ind 1

[5] The solarpunk movement, for example, is actively incorporating afrofuturist themes as a way of preventing the blind spots which came from marginalized people being unconsidered in shaping the future, or even victims of past technological booms.

The authors of 2010's "Notes on Metamodernism," Vermeulen and van den Akker write that the "trends and tendencies [of the new generations of artists] … express a (often guarded) hopefulness and (at times feigned) sincerity that hint at another structure of feeling, intimating another discourse." (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010: 2). They quote from art critic Jerry Saltz, who began to notice a new trend among artists, writing in the *New Yorker:*

> At once knowingly self-conscious about art, unafraid, and unashamed, these young artists not only see the distinction between earnestness and detachment as artificial; they grasp that they can be ironic and sincere at the same time, and they are making art from this compound-complex state of mind (quoted in ibid.).

The above quote could be thought of as illustrating that there might also be a rejection of the new for newness' sake, which is another advantage to solarpunk as ideology. This is truly embedded in the 'philosophy' of solarpunk which, by actually considering "what happens after the revolution," thereby works to show that we aren't reliant on an unlimited supply of new technologies – a capitalist trope. It is in this sense conservation-oriented. There is an emphasis: We have the technology; we have the space. Utilizing *jugaad*[6] aesthetics, for example, solarpunk builds and adapts what already exists. It is therefore not revolutionary in the Marxist sense and operates in contradistinction to capitalism's dependence on the 'new' via the constant need for innovation. At the same time, the concept 'utopia' can be reclaimed from those definitions which, for example, treat it in a negative sense "to discredit ideas as too advanced, too optimistic, or unrealistic and impossible to realize" or literature which usually offers "detailed and practical descriptions of an ideal society, but usually include some fatal flaw that makes the establishment of such a society impossible" ('Utopia' New World Encyclopaedia). A fatal flaw is a blind spot that is – perhaps – deliberately ignored. It isn't utopia, but rather *capitalism* that carries with it, for example, a need for perpetual growth while existing in a finite space with finite resources. Many people have pointed this out, but yet for those perpetuating the capitalist ideology, this fatal flaw must be ignored.

The sincerity of metamodernism allows this theoretical framework to function quite well to the aims of this essay in that the metamodernist unabashedly recognizes the need for new ideological paradigms and the act of embracing hope over optimism. Andrew Dana Hudson's 2015 essay, "On the Political Dimensions of Solarpunk," stressed that we should be hopeful, not optimistic. He quotes Vaclav Havel as having said, "Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out" (Hudson 2015).

Metamodernism and, by extension, solarpunk emphasize our connectivity. The old world as defined by rigid borders and impossible-to-reach exoticism is largely gone. We are more connected than ever in this ever-expanding, developing world. This gives solarpunk another advantage over the retrofuturism of the past.

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[6] 'Jugaad' is defined as "a flexible approach to problem-solving that uses limited resources in an innovative way."

Solarpunk comes from all angles and all parts of the world. Hudson (2015) says that solarpunk is a "creature wholly of this decade – native to global network society." We have from solarpunk a collaborative movement, an "effort to imagine and design a world of prosperity, peace, sustainability and beauty, achievable with what we have from where we are" (Hudson 2015). The beauty of seeing what we could have expressed in the solarpunk context is seeing not the personal spaces of exorbitant living (think back to retrofuturist dome homes [image 1]), but rather communal spaces of ecological and societal balance. In these artistic expressions the political dimension emerges, the call to meaningful action on the grounds of what we could have, shared together.
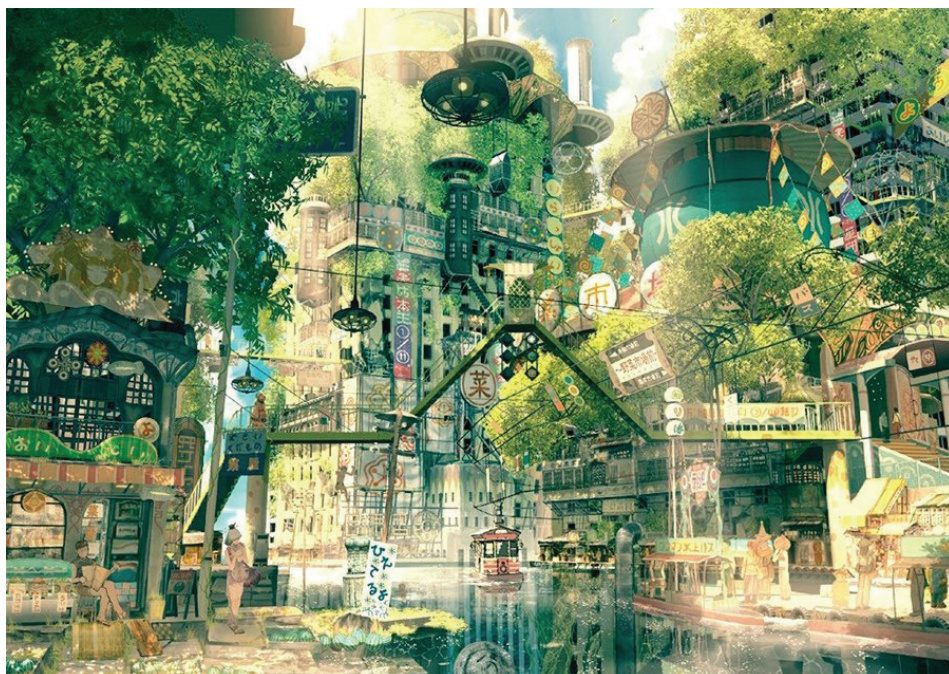

IMAGE 2: Art by Imperial Boy *1*

All of this leads to the role that artistic contribution could have on building a counter-hegemony or a counter-ideology.[7] If you stop to consider the images which populate solarpunk message boards or articles, you will recognize in the artworks several things: the metamodernist sincerity and the post-capitalist utopia, the jugaad spirit and the hyper-diversity, the community in harmony with the ecosystem. In image 2, we do see Chinese characters, but otherwise there isn't anything explicit in the solarpunk ethos which can't be universalized. This image is just as ideal to me as I imagine it would be to anyone else in the world. There are many advantages solarpunk may have towards becoming an ideology, but ultimately, I think that

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[7] In response to an earlier draft of this essay, Rastislav Dinić has written that "there is a clear Wittgensteinian point here - ideologies do not always have to be about explicit programs of change, they might be organized around detailed and paradigmatic images of a different future."

its natural desirability gives it much of its strength. Conversely, you can see the retrofuturist image of the two boys (image 1) – one in a pool and one in the snow – as a kind of lonely individualistic future. Certainly, there is power in the use of images to root the ethos of solarpunk in community.

Chantal Mouffe (2011) asks, "Can artistic practices still play a critical role in a society where the differences between art and advertising have become blurred and where artists and cultural workers have become a necessary part of capitalist production?" He points out that capitalism has a way of incorporating and devouring artistic expression, utilizing it for its own ends. Solarpunk is on one hand an easy commodity for this kind of consumption. One of the more popular solarpunk touchstones is exactly this. It is called 'Dear Alice' and it is a short, animated video depicting a solarpunk future.

IMAGE 3: Still from 'Dear Alice' 2021 Th 1

The production company for the video, The Line, describe it like so:

What if we created a future for ourselves that was full of optimism and positivity? "Dear Alice" is a love letter from a grandmother to a granddaughter and an optimistic vision of the future of farming. It's a nostalgic look towards a new era of agriculture, with beautifully crafted backgrounds, delicate animation and a completely unique score by long-time Ghibli composer (and absolute legend) Joe Hisaishi. (Yeah, we can't believe this happened either). It's not a perfect utopia, but a version of a future we can all reach if we just decide to put in the work (ibid.,)

Ironically – as seen in image 3 – the video was itself commissioned by the Greek yogurt company Chobani. Mouffe says that when looking at the 'new spirit of capitalism' it can be pointed to that demands for equality, autonomy, and the "search for authenticity" all eventually become part of the cultural hegemony, "now

used in order to promote the conditions required by the current mode of capitalist regulation" (Mouffe 2011). This is echoed by Slavoj Žižek when he says in 2014's *Trouble in Paradise* that "capitalism is the first socio-economic order which de-totalizes meaning" (Žižek 2014: 7). 'Detotalize' is to make something incomplete by addition. What this could mean is that the more capitalism consumes and expands – and we in turn consume more and more – the more incomplete our concept of meaning becomes, or the more difficult it becomes to derive meaning from our lives because the question of meaning becomes part and parcel of consumption. If something meaningful can be harnessed so quickly and easily by capitalism and utilized towards its ends (here, in image 3, selling Chobani yogurt), then surely the more we have of capitalism, the less meaningful our lives become.

What's more Žižek says, "Capitalism can accommodate itself to all civilizations, from Christian to Hindu or Buddhist, from West to East" (*Trouble in Paradise*). David Graeber notes the empty terms of corporate speak which aided this project of cultural transformation:

> Bureaucratic techniques developed in financial and corporate circles came to invade the rest of society – education, science, government – and eventually, to pervade almost every aspect of everyday life. One can best trace the process, perhaps by following its language. There is a peculiar idiom that first emerged in such circles, full of bright, empty terms like vision, quality, stakeholder, leadership, excellence, innovation, strategic goals, or best practices… We would be able to observe this new corporate bureaucratic culture spread like blue stains in a petri dish, starting in the financial districts, on to boardrooms, then government offices and universities, then, finally, engulfing any location where any number of people gather to discuss the allocation of resources of any kind at all (Graeber 2015: 21).

It is clear that artistic power and influence is a part of the battleground. Whether the solarpunk fiction or art inspires you or not, capitalism already recognizes its value. Capitalism's own adaptability brings the critical power of art under question, as Mouffe says, "because any form of *critique* is automatically recuperated and neutralized by capitalism" (Mouffe 2011, italics mine). Mouffe goes on to say that what is needed is

> a widening of the field of artistic intervention by intervening directly in a multiplicity of social spaces in order to oppose the program of total social mobilization of capitalism … The objective should be to undermine the imaginary environment necessary for its reproduction (Mouffe 2011).

Despite solarpunk's advantages over past socialist-adjacent movements, a post-capitalist society will be difficult to enact. However, the field of artistic intervention that Mouffe necessitates is something that solarpunk also does naturally. Its roots in fiction and art have grown freely, and therefore helped to nurture a community which all can become invested in, and which still thrives within the revolutionary context. Solarpunk carries within it the snapping of the false consciousness derived from meaningless consumption; solarpunk is already a step ahead in this regard.

This brings us to the role of imagination. In David Graeber's 2015 book *The Utopia of Rules*, he asked the question, "Why have we stopped imagining the future?" (Graeber 2015). Putting the question so plainly made me more aware of the general feeling of malaise towards what the future could be. Graeber pointed out that everywhere there is a "profound sense of disappointment about the nature of the world we live in" (Graeber 2015: 105) and this is made most apparent by the conspicuous absence of certain technological wonders which almost everyone from his generation (mid-to-late twentieth century) grew up believing would become reality in the present day.[8]

> All serious science shows designed for children in the fifties, sixties, seventies, and even the eighties – the *Scientific American*s, the educational TV programs, the planetarium shows in national museums – all the authoritative voices who told us what the universe was like and why the sky was blue, who explained the periodic table of elements, also assured us that the future was indeed going to involve colonies on other planets, robots, matter transformation devices, and a world much closer to *Star Trek* than to our own. (ibid., 107).

It is possible as Graeber points out that these generations were naïve and ambitious in ways which now help to explain this malaise, a generational shared sense of embarrassment. And that this could partially justify the lack of imagination in the present towards what the future might be. It is also helpful to show that it wasn't always the case that public imagination of the future was necessarily dystopian. Here, a good example is a show like *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, which aired from 1987 to 1994. This is a show known for its utopian premise – a future in which humanity explores the stars and Earth has arguably become a socialist utopia. According to Graeber,

> *Star Trek* characters live under a regime of explicit communism. Social classes have been eliminated. So too have divisions based on race, gender, or ethnic origin. The existence of money, in earlier periods, is considered a weird and somewhat amusing historical curiosity. Menial labor has been automated into nonexistence. Floors clean themselves. Food, clothing, tools, and weapons can be whisked into existence at will with a mere expenditure of energy, and even energy does not need to be rationed in any significant way (Graeber 2015: 125-126)

However, in the current series, *Star Trek: Discovery*, the United Federation of Planets is no more. And similarly for *Star Wars*, the once great Jedi warrior Luke Skywalker returned as a broken old hermit and the galaxy that the rebels fought so hard to save has fallen into an even-more-extreme totalitarianism, a mere 30 years after the events of the original trilogy.

It isn't that these symbols of peace and prosperity like *Star Trek's* Federation or the freedom-fighting rebels of *Star Wars* are necessary for the value of these franchises and their storytelling. No, dystopian premises make for perfectly fine stories. Yet, in the above current examples, there seems to be a deeper issue which is that no one

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[8] Graeber gives a short list of these wonders/expectations: forcefields, space travel, teleportation, immortality drugs, androids, colonies on mars, flying cars, hoverboards, jetpacks, and so on.

could imagine a future that wasn't in shock, falling apart, or slipping into fascism. It has become easier to imagine dystopia than utopia, even on the revolutionary artistic and cultural scale, because the former is simply more believable than the latter.

Graeber gave his reasons why he thought we had stopped trying to imagine the future, reflecting on retrofuturism and postmodernism as that nostalgia for the future which never happened. Graeber also discusses the technological shift of resources into information technologies and technologies of simulation or finance, brought about by the continued growth of capitalism as a socioeconomic order, and how this new allocation of resources has disrupted a sense of possibility – at least in the manifestations of objects in the physical world, which have been substituted for those of the virtual world. His thesis is that there was a huge shift "from investment in technologies associated with the possibilities of alternative futures to investment technologies that furthered labour discipline and social control" (Graeber 2015: 120).

One thesis won't explain it all, of course, but at least it can shed some light on the vital role of imagination in dealing with questions of the future and also expound on the relationship between capitalist realism and cultural hegemony. But there is still a certain stigma surrounding concepts of ideology and whether or not an ideology is explicitly a bad thing in itself. One aspect of ideology which is important here is the role it plays in imagining the future. And so, another set of questions from Graeber regarding utopian ideology becomes more important:

> For much of the last century, the great revolutionary question has thus been: how does one affect fundamental change in society without setting in train a process that will end with the creation of some new, violent bureaucracy? Is utopianism the problem – the very idea of imagining a better world and then trying to bring it into being? Or is it something in the very nature of social theory? Should we thus abandon social theory? Or is the notion of revolution itself fundamentally flawed? (Graeber 2015, 95)

As we begin to think in more utopian terms, we become faced with the question of whether "utopianism is the problem." This all depends of course, on your definition of utopia and the extent to which it could be thought of as implicitly naïve or even revolutionary. Regardless of those definitions, I think it is safe to say that a kind of utopianism is ubiquitous, whether it is conservative – in that the future should look more like the past, or liberal – in that the future should be about creative expression, freedom, and social justice. The point is that utopianism of a kind informs most things that we do (perhaps simply believing a better life is possible) and even more so when dealing with the realm of politics. And so, there is plenty of room for speculation as to what kind of future we really want to have, and this I believe is a vital and undoubtedly human task as well. Most importantly, utopianism is more than simple naivete or revolutionary aspirations.

To drive home a very simple Arendtian point here, we also cannot underestimate the power of an individual to create something magnificent through the miracle of action just by virtue of their birth. In 1958's *The Human Condition,* Arendt writes that one of the basic human conditions was 'natality' which she defined as "the fact that we have all come into the world by being born and that this world is constantly

renewed by birth" (Arendt 1958, 196). Though there is evidence to explain the shift in perception about the future, especially where it was in the past given so much more popular support, in reality, we haven't actually stopped imagining the future, it has just been relegated to the margins, desperately needing some amplification. We have in actuality a budding and bright conception of the future alive and well in the solarpunk. Due to the weight of ideological and cultural hegemony, these future conceptions don't have the popular support past contemporaries may have had. But their existence at all proves that the future is far from decided. A final advantage to solarpunk is that although it is concerned with the future, it is the present in which it acts. Unlike a utopian discourse of a far-distant future, solarpunk is concerned with transitioning the present into a salvageable future.

Solarpunk may actually prove to be a quite difficult conception of the future for capitalism to shake or consume and adapt to. There are many advantages that solarpunk has over previous utopian conceptions of the future: it is a way of thinking; progress is measured in harmony with nature, not as technological advancement; solarpunk stresses adapting existing infrastructure and technology and therefore rejects 'new for newness sake' or the growth paradigm; it actively contemplates the good life; it has a theoretical framework it can develop within (metamodernism); it highlights those qualities of past utopian conceptions that were short-sighted and prevented their realisation (the hyper-individualism, lack of diversity, unconcern for the planet, etc.,); explicitly rejects dystopia and insists on an active role of imagination; its speculative fiction and artistic roots celebrate diversity and empower the artist to play a role in utopian world-building; and finally, it focuses on the present to salvage the future.

With this understanding of solarpunk, we can now investigate the claims of capitalist realism in the following section along with the current understanding of ideology to see if solarpunk could still function as a counter-ideology or counterhegemony. For Chantal Mouffe, hegemony is key to addressing the question of the political and social dimensions. He states explicitly that every "hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counterhegemonic practices – i.e., practices which will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install another form of hegemony" (Mouffe 2011). Whether ideologies or cultural hegemonies can be good or bad is something which ultimately appears in their growth and practice, but according to Mouffe it is possible then for solarpunk as ideology to act as countercultural hegemony to the existing capitalist realism.

Capitalist realism & cultural hegemony

I see the value in working towards conceptualizing alternative futures as a way of thwarting the purview of 'capitalist realism,' the claim of Mark Fisher's that capitalism is ideologically so pervasive that we can no longer imagine any alternative system. Fisher says:

Capitalist realism as I understand it cannot be confined to art or to the quasi-propagandistic way in which advertising functions. It is more like a pervasive atmosphere, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action (Fisher 2009, 17).

Part of the power of capitalist realism is – as Fisher also points out – that defenders of the capitalist status quo claim that capitalism aligns so perfectly with some kind of essentialist understanding of human nature, i.e., that natural existence (survival) demands the accumulation of more and more wealth or resources. This natural claim implies some kind of growth imperative equally shared by both economies and bodies, as if it were the natural order of things and objectively true. Fisher's capitalist realism isn't a far cry from Antonio Gramsci, who developed the concept of cultural hegemony. Gramsci himself wrote that hegemony was

the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this 'consent' is historically caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production (Gramsci 1971).

Gramsci wondered why, throughout history, democracies devolved to the point where a tiny minority of people (the dominant social class) controlled the remaining majority (the subjugated classes) and actively worked against the latter's interests. He wanted to know how it comes to be that the majority consents to this, especially when their working conditions become harder and harder. Gramsci argued that political control is maintained by cultural control. He developed the Ancient Greek word 'hegemony', which loosely translates to 'domination'. Cultural hegemony was domination through more subversive means, by the creation of a culture which perpetuates the status quo.

Unknowingly, the citizenry reinforces the cultural standards in such a way that whatever doesn't comply is met with some degree of hostility. A culture is defined by its norms, rules, rituals, values and so on. These are constituted in little things like a handshake or a haircut to relatively bigger things like how a family is depicted on television.[9] The culture isn't acting alone; it supports the dictates of the state and, just as importantly, the opposite as well – the state supports the cultural manifestations which stay within the lines, whether in the privilege of public intellectuals, the shape of education, or the philosophy of the people.

But the reality is that all around the world, culture is wildly different. And societies hold together perfectly fine. But within a particular cultural hegemony, the belief that things can be different and still function is slowly sapped away. And it

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[9] There was a time when every family depicted on television was the white nuclear heterosexual family. And any variation on that was outside the norm and either not represented or not considered a family. And there were also legal and legislative ramifications to this narrow conception of family in society as well, for example, the rights of homosexuals to marry and start a family. Or how those same-sex couples were entitled to benefits of being a family, for example, whether or not a company provided health insurance for a same-sex spouse.

is here that Gramsci's cultural hegemony and Fisher's capitalist realism share their most important features. The current culture serves to reinforce itself and consent is derived from those citizens who mistake the workings of culture for those of nature. In other words, capitalist realism is the current cultural hegemonic paradigm and it works on the mind of its citizenry in such a way as to stifle the imagination from creating and considering possible alternatives. Those in power ultimately seek to control the narrative because if you can convince the citizenry that this is how the world is, they won't rebel against it, no matter the pain it causes in the same way that people don't rebel against acts of nature. Not to mention that being in power shields one from the collateral damage of the system to begin with, therefore holding onto and sustaining power becomes "the right thing to do" for one's family. Being unaware of this distinction between culture and nature is advantageous to those in power who treat the present state of affairs as 'common sense'. In this case, 'common sense' serves a particular class of people, thus existing within that system and displaying what is called 'common sense' becomes another means of reinforcing the cultural hegemony. The worldview is constructed in large part by public intellectuals who – in order to connect with the powers that be – support the current system. This creates blind spots and manufactures consent, whether person or institution, who have each gained their power simply because their ideas correspond with the ruling ideology.

Substituting 'socialism' for 'capitalism' won't solve the problem for Gramsci, either. Instead, what Gramsci argues is that we need an ideology where the public has a vested interest in self-critique. This is solarpunk, to me, especially as it deliberately embraces or actively seeks out those marginalized knowledges to grow in a way which thereby avoids the pitfalls of naïve utopianism or the blind spots of the status quo. The goal for anyone trying to bring any kind of social change is to provide alternatives, something which solarpunk does explicitly.

We need an active counterculture – just like Mouffe (2011) says we need artistic intervention in a variety of spaces. This active counterculture is the 'punk' of solarpunk. Solarpunk looks and feels like eco-infrastructure at times and is also proactively visual and literary, but the additional space it nurtures reconstitutes the roles for those Gramsci would call 'organic intellectuals'. First, Gramsci claimed that "all men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals" (Gramsci 1971, 9). The distinction in the public dialogue between an intellectual and non-intellectual is simply that some people's intellectual capacity has an immediate social function "towards intellectual elaboration" (ibid.)[10]:

> There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: *homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*. Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a "philosopher," an artist, a man of conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought. (Gramsci 1971, 9)

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[10] We could compare the skills of the mechanic to those of the academic, whereas only one is considered 'intellectual'

Solarpunk, similarly is "skeptical of the existing order, provide[s] alternatives means of education, and embolden[s] average citizens to take action by giving a philosophical outlook that changes the way they see themselves and how they fit in the world" (West 2019). It is especially fitting that they could be thought of within the solarpunk community as 'organic intellectuals.' Organic intellectuals emerge from a particular social class within the overarching economic paradigm. The principal reason we so desperately need alternatives is because of the way in which capitalism is destroying the planet, the living organism that is the collective of humanity.

Gramsci brought the notion of ideology into the realm of revolutionary Marxism by developing the "proper (i.e., dialectical) understanding of class rule and class power from which sound revolutionary practice can evolve" (Ramos Jr. 1982), that ideologies necessarily had a class character "so that there was an ideology of the capitalist class and an ideology of the working class" (ibid). In this sense, solarpunk can be seen as similarly revolutionary since the dominant and subjugated classes it implicitly acknowledges are present but distinctly apolitical; there are those with power whose every move is an act of cynicism, who act in some way to destabilize the ecosystem of the planet (humanity included), whether they are explicit capitalists, media, celebrities, politicians, etc. And the other side rejects the inertia of capitalist realism to the degree that it recognizes that the alternatives to inaction are "denial or despair" and this is not good enough (Hudson 2015). By refusing to accept this paradigm, the "solarpunk" class believes in the power of imagination and the lack of determinacy of the future. The post-colonial narrative is further supported by a return to studying discarded or marginalized knowledges which, for example, David Graeber and David Wengrow's (2021) *The Dawn of Everything* aims to institutionalize: the history of humanity is a near-infinite display of sociopolitical and cultural shapes. This shows the future can be anything we want it to be. Although the historical narrative tries to tell us otherwise, Graeber and Wengrow actively sought to critique this primitivism to civilization narrative (Graeber & Wengrow 2021).

How do defenders of capitalism reinforce the cultural hegemony? What do they claim on its behalf? Graeber says that defenders of capitalism point out the rapid scientific and technological growth, the increased prosperity for all (even though it predominantly favours a minority), and that capitalism supports democracy. However, he then goes on to say that,

> It is quite clear in the twenty-first century, capitalism is not doing any of these things. In fact, even its proponents are increasingly retreating from any claim that it is a particularly good system, falling back on the claim that it is the *only possible system* (Graeber 2015: 143 italics mine).

Mark Fisher says,

> If capitalist realism is so seamless, and if current forms of resistance are so hopeless and impotent, where can an effective challenge come from? … Capitalist realism can only be threatened if it is shown to be in some way inconsistent or untenable; if, that is to say, capitalism's ostensible 'realism' turns out to be nothing of the sort.[11]

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[11] Fisher 2009: 18

Fisher notes that environmental catastrophe has been politicized in such a way that it cannot function towards proving the untenability of capitalism, so he instead focuses more on mental health and bureaucracy. His aim is to give an account of capitalism which shows it to be untenable, and he believes that this will therefore motivate people to abandon it or at least try to construct some alternatives.

Fisher asks what an effective critique or challenge to capitalism would look like. Well, perhaps it comes from actively envisioning future spaces. This implicitly does several things: (1) it grants us more creative possibilities in the present in that we accept that a future will exist and it matters that it is good (For example, we can contrast a solarpunk utopian future with a cyberpunk dystopian one); (2) this, in turn, fosters a sense of future-belonging, a concept of home that builds community in the present around a welcoming future construct, for example, a solarpunk future which has overcome racialized capitalism (and to which everyone belongs and are granted equal rights); (3) it challenges other abstract ideological positions which have historically stifled our ability to realize certain goals, thus making them more explicit (and hence, exposing their assumptions), such as, for example, fundamental religious beliefs that the world is but a moral testing ground and cannot be changed.[12] This last point features very heavily in capitalist realism, as Fisher says "Poverty, famine and war can be presented as an inevitable part of reality, while the hope that these forms of suffering could be eliminated is easily painted as naïve utopianism" (Fisher 2009, 18). This particular idea is especially relevant for those who argue capitalism is tied inextricably to our human nature and the way things "really are," hence the 'realism'.

To the first two points, we can examine them through the phenomenon of mental health. The question of the relationship between a person's belief in creative possibilities for their life, their sense of future-belonging, and their mental health should be obvious. Under capitalism, we relate to each other in a web of hyper-competition and a manufactured belief in a lack of resources. This belief is connected to the role of capitalism to continually reproduce a conception of scarcity (thus driving up prices), while also creating real scarcity towards specific communities. For example, food deserts in urban communities are a prime example of racialized capitalism. In addition, this set of beliefs and their corresponding realities are further exacerbated by the 'superrich' who hoard resources and propagate the mythos of the system's meritocracy. This set of conditions is perfectly encapsulated in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s quote:

> Whenever the government provides opportunities in privileges for white people and rich people, they call it "subsidized" when they do it for Negro and poor people, they call it "welfare." The fact is that everybody in this country lives on welfare. Suburbia was built with federally subsidized credit. And highways that take our white brothers

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[12] I think this claim is apparent when looking at the stigma around social welfare programs. Opponents want to claim that individuals are entirely responsible for their situation, regardless of the systemic and institutional injustices which are nearly impossible to overcome. The lack of belief that there are bad systems in place gets support on religious grounds, that "all men have sinned and come short of the glory of god" or the Earth is a "fallen world."

out to the suburbs were built with federally subsidized money to the tune of 90 percent. Everybody is on welfare in this country. The problem is that we all too often have socialism for the rich and rugged free enterprise capitalism for the poor. That's the problem (King Jr. 1968).

Many people have scarce access to resources by design. These resources would otherwise grant them many more opportunities and greater freedom in their career choices. The fact is that these resources are being accumulated elsewhere thus creating a scarcity of resources. For many, there is no perceivable future from which they escape a cycle of working – of selling the mental and labour power of the body – to merely survive. Marginalized people everywhere have been systematically excluded from the ability to imagine themselves a future. For them, it is much easier to accept as 'realist' something like a cyberpunk dystopian vision of the future, since everything everywhere seems to indicate this inevitability of technology used in this way, as if we have no power over its use.

It is no wonder that Fisher points out that among young people, depression is the most common illness treated by the NHS in the UK. Fisher also references Oliver James' book *The Selfish Capitalist* which draws a direct line between "rising rates of mental distress and the neoliberal mode of capitalism practiced in countries like Britain, the USA, and Australia" (Fisher 2009, 19). The neoliberal model of capitalism places the individual as the highest sovereign; they bear all responsibility for their life, no matter the increasingly exploitative systemic and institutional inequalities. And so, we treat depression instead of preventing it by providing a world of possibilities.

> Instead of treating it as incumbent on individuals to resolve their own psychological distress, instead, that is, of accepting the vast privatisation of stress that has taken place over the last thirty years, we need to ask: how has it become acceptable that so many people, and especially so many young people, are ill? (Fisher 2009, 20).

This is because of capital's "need of a constantly expanding market" (ibid.). This 'growth fetish', as Fisher says, means that "capitalism is by its very nature opposed to any notion of sustainability" (ibid). Not only is capitalism destroying life on the planet as we know it, but it is also making our lives miserable.

Franco Berardi's example of South Korea which Žižek quotes at length in *Trouble in Paradise* uses the economic success of South Korea to highlight an even deeper dissonance within the capitalist model: it functions best under conditions of destruction and rebuilding. According to Berardi, South Korea was a country which, for many reasons, by the end of the 1900s had been completely devastated and because of this, so easily adapted to capitalism – the "transforming hand of the highest form of contemporary nihilism" – and therefore "entered the digital sphere with a lower degree of cultural resistance than virtually any other populations in the world" (Žižek 2014, 54). This was also the throughline in Naomi Klein's 2007 book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, that neoliberal policies exploited crises, such as war, economic collapse, natural disaster, etc. These policies brought great wealth to those in power who could maximize their profit off the

tragedy of others, but it also pre-empted an even more malevolent 'shock therapy' – the deliberate abuse of a country's safety or sovereignty to catalyse the need for economic 'therapy.' Though an astounding economic success, the people of South Korea suffered under a new kind of alienation: "isolation, competition, meaningless, compulsion, and failure… not surprisingly South Korea is number one in the world when it comes to the suicide rate" (Berardi, quoted in Zizek 2014, 55).

Unsustainability in the current neoliberal capitalist model, whether in mental health or the environment is – as I have tried to show – relatively uncontested and obvious. I vehemently agree with Fisher that capitalism is untenable and that capitalist realism pervades everything we do in this atmospheric sense, but I disagree that showing it is as untenable will do the work that perhaps Fisher hopes it will. There can be no question that the capitalist growth fetish is gradually toxifying the planet, killing off wildlife, and leading to depression, despair, and even suicide among humans. For this, we must find a way out, and it is why I propose to develop a solarpunk counter-ideology to capitalist realism.

It is worth noting too that a critique of capitalist realism that emerges from the crafting of an ideology of solarpunk futures doesn't insist we torch the capitalist system to the ground. We should assume that we can salvage the innovativeness of capitalism, or at least redefine the values of innovation: for example, rethinking what is meant by growth – a term which has been derailed from intrinsic values into economic ones.[13] In short, we are far more creative ourselves to accept without argument the premise that grand-scale innovation is impossible without unrestrained capitalism. A rethink of the metric which determines progress away from something like, for example, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – the perfect tool to justify cultural hegemony – is an important part of the solarpunk ideology. In her 2017 book *Doughnut Economics*, author Kate Raworth quotes from Amartya Sen on development. Sen says we should be focusing on "advancing the richness of human life, rather than the richness of the economy in which human beings live" (Raworth 2017, 43) and Raworth goes on to say that

> instead of prioritizing metrics like GDP, the aim should be to enlarge people's capabilities – such as to be healthy, empowered, and creative – so that they can choose to be and do things in life that they value. And realizing those capabilities depends upon people having access to the basics of life – adapted to the context of each society – ranging from nutritious food, healthcare and education to personal security and political voice… What enables human beings to thrive? A world in which every person can lead their life with dignity, opportunity and community – and where we can all do so within the means of our life-giving planet. (ibid., 43)

GDP is a tool for measuring a socioeconomic order which itself "de-totalizes meaning." In a meaningless world, it is the exact metric to further meaninglessness. In the final section, a look at the contemporary concept of ideology will help us to

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[13] For example, a contested concept such as GDP measures every metric of economic progress except that which gives life meaning. In that respect, a GDP metric is the opposite of growth, unless you limit the understanding of growth to strictly one of capital.

understand if there is any meaning in the claim that an ideology can be defeated by a counter-ideology.

What is the ideology we are treating?

The term 'ideology' was originally coined by Antoine Destutt de Tracy in 1796 and referred to a new science of ideas, an 'idea-ology', or a history of ideas and their origins to be scrutinized objectively. With Marx and Engels writing in *The German Ideology* (1846), ideology was revealed to be a sense-making export of the ruling class, constructed with the intention of perpetuating the exploitation of the intellectual and physical labour of the proletariat. The aim of the ruling class ideology was to devise a system of beliefs which garnered the least amount of resistance from the proletariat/oppressed. These beliefs reflected the interests of the ruling class, which Marx and Engels would begin to describe as the oppressor. Not only does the oppressor's ideology resign the oppressed to their lot in life, but it seeks to justify to those in power that their status is earned, the results being a system where both 'oppressed' and 'oppressor' believe to some degree that the system is just: a false consciousness.

In 1848's *Communist Manifesto,* Marx and Engels developed the theories of class consciousness in which individuals begin to see themselves as members of a class based on their position within it socially or economically. In contrast to this, false consciousness is how an individual perceives their relationship to the economic order and social system when they fail to see themselves as part of a class, thus being unaware – or at least accepting of – the inequality, oppression, and exploitation prevalent within capitalist society. Marx and Engels therefore connected ideology inseparably to class consciousness and made it their work to demystify the ideology of capitalism, which had created this false consciousness. Within the narrative of false consciousness, those who are oppressed lack the means of material and mental production to advance any political viewpoint. Ideology isn't after the truth explicitly, but rather is considered action-oriented because its aims are usually to motivate people to do certain things, namely to maintain the status quo. Andrew Heywood says that "In concealing the contradictions on which capitalism is based, ideology serves to hide from the exploited proletariat the fact of their own exploitation, and thereby upholds a system of unequal class power" (Heywood 1992/2017, 33).

Gramsci had introduced the idea of ideological or cultural hegemony, which "refers to the capacity of bourgeois ideas to displace rival views and become, in effect, the common sense of the age" (ibid., 34). What Mark Fisher referred to earlier in the text as capitalist realism is an extension of the ideas of Gramsci and Marx, that the ideological/cultural hegemony threads its way into everything, e.g., culture, art, education, media, and in doing so, limits the scope of what is thought to be possible. The bourgeois hegemony, Gramsci insisted, "could only be challenged at the political and intellectual level, which means through the establishment of a rival 'proletarian hegemony', based on socialist principles, values and theories" (ibid.).

This is exactly what I'm hoping to further with an ideology of solarpunk futures, to break the ideological domination, break the spell of capitalist realism, by presenting Fisher's 'effective critique' of capitalism in solarpunk while also moving beyond it. And if solarpunk is realized by overcoming racialized capitalism, then a solarpunk future must be based on socialist principles after all.

Solarpunk is utopian-oriented thinking, but we can avoid the initial reaction to the charge of utopia as empty idealizations by thinking of Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* (Mannheim 1979) in which he says that idealized representations of the future work for oppressed groups by making space for radical change through the creation of actionable conditions for change. In other words, the work of utopia emerges with the responsibility of imagining – as Žižek says – "what happens after revolution." Though these older utopian ideologies (futurism) are necessarily distorted through self-interest, a solarpunk ideology actively seeks cooperation with marginalized groups, with discarded knowledges, to provide their hyper-diverse future with a real sense of community. The only way to overcome racialized capitalism is through inclusion, representation, and a new metric of growth which considers a harmony-driven good life as essential to the political community.

There is still a tension with solarpunk as an ideology overcoming its potential blind spots, and this comes from the likelihood that any ideological construction can be at the same time creatively stifling. Kavanagh (1990) writes that ideology is a limiting space, the "unfortunate irruption of opinions and doctrine within what should be a fully 'creative' or 'imaginative' work" (Kavanagh 1990: 306). But this doesn't mean we must break ourselves away from any ideological social work. It may be impossible to do so anyways, as Kavanagh explains, there is no 'nonideological', rather

> the 'nonideological' insistence does not mark one's freedom from ideology, but one's involvement in a specific, quite narrow ideology which has the exact social function of obscuring – even to the individual who inhabits it – the specificity and peculiarity of one's social and political position, and of preventing any knowledge of the real processes that found one's social life (ibid., 312)

According to Andrew Heywood, we "produce, disseminate, and consume ideologies all our lives" (Heywood 1992/2017: 2) For Heywood, ideology is a much more neutral concept, being the filter through which we can understand the world around us. As with his predecessors, ideology is a limiting concept, but this is ok – the same could be argued for a body with five senses. Every space we find ourselves in is thereby culturally and evolutionarily a mix of ideologies shaping the parameters from which we work to interpret the world. Heywood says that "ideology is inevitable because our imaginations cannot avoid such distortions" (ibid., 27). He does emphasize that ideology should remain a political concept and when the concept of ideology begins to be applied to other domains, such as the ideology of Tarantino films or the works of Shakespeare, the word starts to lose its meaning. Within specific definitions, ideology – thought of as political – creates actionable conditions. But perhaps Heywood is wrong on this count. The works of Shakespeare

alone might not resonate well-enough for it to be considered an ideology, but when those works inspire political action or become a part of the political dialogue, an ideology emerges.

In its inception, solarpunk is a bit different. The visual art of solarpunk is very deliberately utopian and not simply free-form expression; it calls us to action. It can be contrasted with the contemporary lunarpunk style which typically shows crystal palaces and soft purple lakes on moons or exoplanets. Lunarpunk is very much purely aesthetic, whereas solarpunk seems to imply political action because what tends to qualify it as solarpunk is the utopian dimension at play on a mostly contemporary Earth. If you revisit image 2 above, you can easily imagine this as a combination of a walkable European city and something like Seoul, South Korea. Image 2 doesn't require any space colonization and there isn't necessarily any far-fetched technology pictured (like those kinds referenced earlier from Graeber when he lamented the lack of present social imagination towards the future).

And so, ideology is best thought of as existing within the political; it interprets the world and calls people to action. Given all this, Heywood gives his definition of ideology as such:

> An ideology is a more or less coherent set of ideas that provides the basis for organized political action, whether this is intended to preserve, modify or overthrow the existing system of power. All ideologies therefore have the following features. They:
>
> (a) Offer an account of the existing order, usually in the form of a 'worldview'
> (b) Advance a model of a desired future, a vision of the 'good society'
> (c) Explain how political change can and should be brought about – how to get from (a) to (b) (Heywood 1992, 38).

A similar set of conditions is given by Michael Freeden who says that a political ideology is "a set of ideas, beliefs, opinions, and values" that

> (1) Exhibit a recurring pattern
> (2) Are held by significant groups
> (3) Compete over providing and controlling plans for public policy
> (4) Do so with the aim of justifying, contesting or changing the social and political arrangements and processes of a political community (Freeden 2003, 32).

Of course, this brief section can only scratch the surface of understanding the concept of ideology. But given that we have a better understanding of the concept, and a set of conditions with which we can compare both 'capitalist realism' and 'solarpunk', how then do they each fare?

Capitalist realism meets Freeden's conditions one through four, but it is a bit harder to think of capitalist realism as meeting Heywood's conditions, especially (b), where it is meant to "advance a model of a desired future, a vision of the 'good society'". Capitalism itself is about the moment; the future is disposable. In this sense, there is no real vision of a desired future that doesn't preserve the status quo, i.e., capitalism cannot posit a future without capitalism. We could say that capitalism knows a different future is possible, but as capitalist realism, there is a denial of the

possibility of ideological struggle beforehand that grants it its 'realism' in the present. Perhaps then, capitalist realism meets all of the above conditions of an ideology with the challenge that Heywood presents in (b) being ideologically negated by outright denial of any alternative future. The future it posits is the present in perpetuity.

Solarpunk does seem to easily meet all the conditions given above. From an interpretation of Heywood, the 'worldview' that solarpunk presents is one in which our cultural history is primed for revision and socioeconomic orders could take many different forms, via my example earlier from *The Dawn of Everything* (Graeber & Wengrow 2021). Thinking back to Arendt, human beings are capable of miracles by virtue of their individuality and their birth; there is no reason to think things must continue the way they are; there is every reason to think the opposite. My understanding of solarpunk shows a vision of a good society, as I have described it, a hyper-diverse and harmonious future supported by green technologies and one in which we have overcome racialized capitalism. In the previous sections, I have given the advantages solarpunk has over past utopian conceptions. Regarding Heywood's claim that an ideology would explain how political change can and should be brought about, I think that solarpunk meets this criterion easily. While the aesthetic is visually utopian, the interior of the movement is rooted in universal environmental activism coupled with a refusal to accept the status quo. There is also a common enemy: those who perpetuate the status quo at the expense of those most vulnerable, whether in individuals or the planet's ecosystem.

Freeden's qualifiers of exhibiting a recurring pattern and being held by significant groups are easy enough to meet. Solarpunk is a relatively new movement, only emerging in the past ten years. But from the start, the pattern was apparent: Solarpunk rejects dystopia. It refuses the 'realism' of capitalist realism, relying on the previously mentioned Arendtian 'miracle of action' and the historical realities of vastly different socioeconomic orders to give this pattern its shape. Its actionable conditions aim to change public policy for the better, proposing a new metric for growth which recognizes the profit-motive core of capitalism as an existential crisis and perfectly aligns with environmental activism in this regard.

Conclusion

Growing an ideology or making distinct an ideology within solarpunk as we have it now is itself a long-term project, far beyond the capabilities of this paper. But what I hope I have shown is that we have a potential challenge to capitalist realism, one which Fisher may have appreciated. Moving forward, Hudson says that solarpunk's strategy should be to "create pockets of progress and imagination within a larger political landscape of decay, deadlock and long emergency" (Hudson 2015). The long emergency is very real. And it should be stated more explicitly: none of the past utopian naivety is here. The climate crisis, the issues with mental health, the economic inequalities are completely acknowledged. But the solarpunk ideal isn't one of explicit and violent revolution. Rather, to change our course we can follow

the trajectory laid out by the solarpunk aesthetic, that (paraphrasing Bruce Sterling, the originator of the cyberpunk movement) the "wreckage of the unsustainable is our frontier" (quoted in Hudson 2015). Instead of reliance on the new, on new technologies or new pristine spaces, we can build upon what already exists. This can be seen in actions which are at their core explicitly political: jugaad, water-hacking, guerrilla gardening, seed bombing – to name just a few given by Hudson.

In summary, this newly emerging movement called solarpunk has all the potential to function as an effective challenge to capitalist realism. And this is coming at such an inflection point in history; we simply cannot continue the way things are. The thinking of solarpunk in the context of progress is the very sincere way in which it works to construct the future, built on the foundations of what we have, and offers an alternative to the idea of the new for newness' sake (a capitalist mantra). Ideologies are political by nature, and the ideology of solarpunk is therefore a counter-ideology to that of neoliberal/industrial/racialized capitalism, a proof that capitalist realism hasn't completely stifled the imagination, and a call to action for a future we can all see ourselves wanting to be a part of.

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СОЛАРПАНК НАСУПРОТ КАПИТАЛИСТИЧКОМ РЕАЛИЗМУ

Apstrakt: Марк Фишер је проширио концепт капиталистичког реализма као друштвено-економског поретка који толико дубоко гуши машту да му не можемо замислити никакву алтернативу. Фишер је веровао да нам је за борбу против капиталистичког реализма потребна ефикасна критика. Ако је капиталистички реализам идеологија, онда ефикасна критика може доћи из контраидеологије. Верујем да је спекулативна фикција и уметнички покрет познат као *соларпанк* утопијска премиса која нам је потребна да изградимо ову контраидеологију. Овај есеј ће почети да гради филозофију соларпанка првенствено размишљајући о соларпанку као идеологији и показујући његове бројне предности у односу на прошла утопијска схватања будућности. Следећи Марксов и Енгелсов третман идеологије, Грамшијева културна хегемонија ће такође бити разматрана у односу на Фишеров капиталистички реализам. Имајући у виду истовремене егзистенцијалне кризе климатског колапса, економске неједнакости, депресије и отуђења – што је све погоршано капиталистичким моделом – потребно је нешто изван „ефикасне критике“ за превазилажење ових изазова. Постоји нада да ће овај оглед помоћи у разумевању могућности соларпанка да одговори на ове изазове и пружи визију боље будућности изван капитализма.

Кључне речи: идеологија, соларпанк, капиталистички реализам, утопија