

Punkplex dialectic

Lunarpunk and the politics of crypto

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*Here I sit, forming humans After my image; A race resembling me, To suffer, to weep,
To enjoy, to be glad, And not respect you, As I.*

— J.W. von Goethe, *Prometheus*.

Dialectic is an old concept. In Western philosophy, its roots as a method of argument and counter-argument to discern truth go back to Zeno of Elea in classical Greece. Hegel revived the term to mean a struggle between two opposites that ultimately gives birth to a third reality; neither one of the two nor the sum of them but something altogether new- the synthesis.

Lunarpunk entered the stage as an antithesis. Once the little sister of solarpunk- the weird kid looking at bugs in the undergrowth while its big sibling was engineering the grand world of tomorrow- it has come forth from the shadows and brought with it a dire prophecy. Not only does it incite fear and uncertainty that threatens the funding schemes of the solarpunk future, it also claims that, far from the merry naivety of Ethereum conferences, the world is a chaotic and vicious place that becomes more dystopic by the day. Further, it accuses solarpunks of enabling this.

The conflict between solar and lunarpunk in many ways seems to resemble the critique of the cypherpunks toward the technocrat idealists at the end of the last millennium. The latter settled in Silicon Valley and built the basis of today's Big Tech monopoly and surveillance apparatus. Cypherpunks recognized states, central banks and monopolistic corporations as enemies of freedom and were not afraid to challenge these adversaries. Above all, they leveraged cryptography as a weapon to turn the tides in an otherwise utterly unequal conflict. What are lunarpunks then, besides simply the latest reincarnation of that dark Other of cyberspace? What is new or original about their dystopian revelation?

Dialectic in Hegel's sense is not unique to Western philosophy. The concept of a primordial antagonism that brings forth a new world is much older and appears in many different forms. The Persian prophet Zoroaster explained it as an eternal struggle between light and darkness, good and evil. The Yezidi people of Mesopotamia to this day pray to the fallen angel Lucifer. They call him Melek Tawus and believe he was reconciled with God after rising in rebellion against him. Part of this philosophy is the recognition that where there is light, there must be darkness, for neither has meaning without the other. In existing together, they both have meaning

and existence beyond themselves. From such a perspective, both thesis and antithesis remain deficient, incomplete as they try to negate the other.

The critics of the current world order are overwhelmingly separated into two opposing camps. Most relevant to solar and lunarpunk is the contradiction between North American libertarians and West European anarchists. The former have a profound critique of the state's monopoly on violence and a healthy distrust for central authority. They value taking initiative to solve problems. When it comes to capitalism however they turn a blind eye to its role in the state, clinging to mythical and ahistorical notions of property and money and refusing to critically investigate their realities.

European anarchists have the opposite problem. Their critique of capitalism is strong and radical. They emphasize mutual aid and are aware of the corrupting power of money. They do not know, however, how to get rid of the state. As soon as a problem arises that goes beyond the micro-level of their communes and collectives, such as an ecological or humanitarian crisis or the rise of an authoritarian movement, they turn to the state for solutions, willfully distorting or rationalizing its role in creating these very problems. They cannot actually imagine a life outside of the state.

Where the American libertarians are proactive, the European anarchists are reactionary, and vice versa. They remain blind to the fact that state power and capital power are both highly organized coercive monopolies that corrupt those who hope to wield them.

Through this antagonism both sides' revolutionary ideas have become defanged, limiting them to fulfill the role of a controlled opposition within the spectacle of modernity. Both their strengths and weaknesses have significantly influenced the vision and politics of crypto. Moreover, they are examples of a fundamental reality of the politics of modernity, which continuously eradicates old powerful identities and creates new, sectarian ones to replace them, with the aim of preventing any kind of unity that could challenge the hegemonic monopoly.

This is where lunarpunk departs from dialectic dualism. It does not negate- it asserts. It is not concerned with challenging its adversaries but with breaking out of the prison of inevitability they have created. The cypherpunk future is now: the lunarpunk future is yet to come. It is dark, but as R.R. O'Leary said in her landmark essay 'Lunarpunk and the Dark Side of the Cycle' (2022), it is also "teeming with life." Lunarpunk is not the antithesis to solarpunk. Maybe it was named with such a relationship in mind, but it is becoming something else in relation to both cypherpunk and solarpunk: the synthesis.

When cypherpunks and solarpunks are asked what they dislike about the others' worldview the most common answers are that solarpunk is childish, full of false hope and toxic positivity, whereas cypherpunk is defeated and pessimist, individualist and void of love and emotion. Both are right.

Cypherpunk has stared too long into the abyss and become intoxicated by it. Its outlook is bleak because it refuses to see anything else. By obsessing over the infinity of the void it has lost sight of what might be, or come to be, beyond it.

Solarpunk optimism wishes to will a good, easy life into existence without sacrifice or struggle. It ignores that life without struggle is not a good life but a meaningless one. As Confucius said, "the journey is the destination." The insistence on avoiding any hardship or confrontation prevents solarpunk sci-fi from having a real impact upon the world and instead causes its art and culture to become mere escapism from the fickle spectre of modernity.

Solarpunk has been made out by its critics to be little more than technocratic totalitarianism hidden behind a spurious veil of esoteric hippiedom and reflexive virtue signaling. Apart from this face it has very important qualities that cypherpunk lacks: a belief in a better future, an ecological awareness, and a practical approach to solving human problems. There are also many more women at solarpunk conferences than there are at comparable cypherpunk events.

Cypherpunk on the other hand is combative, it does not shy away from confrontation. Contrary to solarpunk it does not have any illusions about the fairness of the system or the ability to compromise with it. But its inability to propose an alternative has led to defeatism and bitterness and caused some to turn misanthropic, believing in code and money over people.

To the VC (venture capitalist) corruption of solarpunk there is a cypherpunk counterpart. Many who claim to uphold its legacy have since given in to the lure of easy money and have settled for celebrating individual wealth rather than fighting for freedom.

Yet people from across this spectrum have much to learn and gain from one another. While the aesthetics may be different, the content is similar, as is the common enemy- seedy opportunist liberals who use cypherpunk and solarpunk slogans to peddle un-original products while surrendering the movement behind them to the agents of the state.

Lunarpunk stands strong against such corruption because it has a powerful vision and more importantly, a strategy to achieve it. While opposed to both state and capitalism, its true antagonism is with the system of domination which both state and capitalism are faces of. This ancient system of domination goes back to the god-kings and ziggurats of ancient Mesopotamia, the downfall of the goddesses of earth and forest at the hands of male deities of sun and war, the enslavement of women, stripped of their own free identity and turned into less-than-man, an object for pleasure and machine for childbearing and cheap labor.

Lunarpunk tactics may appear defensive at first. Yet to those who take a closer look they reveal themselves to be constructive and proactive. Self-defense for lunarpunks is a creative process, one of building the technical, moral and political foundation for free life. The first question lunarpunk asks is not what to defend or how, but why.

Answering that means developing conscious agency; in other words a true exercise of freedom. It informs all lunarpunk action. Hidden by the cryptographic canopy of the Dark Forest are farms and factories, libraries and laboratories, agoras and academies, where builders, warriors and philosophers are preparing for the coming storm.

Lunarpunks are not limited by the mentality of lone-wolf individualism that many cypherpunks adhere to, nor have they fallen into the trap of liberal equality popular among solarpunks that amounts to little more than centrally-sanctioned uniformity. Lunarpunks do not impose some blueprint of an ideal society upon the world but give people the tools to recover the legacy of moral and political society, which has been taken away from them over five thousand years of empire, expropriation and male domination.

Lunar tribes are collective and diverse, each as sovereign as its members, each as powerful as the entire lunar confederation. Lunarpunk is neither light nor darkness. Its name is very fitting after all. For what else is moonlight? It is not bright enough to reveal oneself to the enemy's watchful eye, but just enough to illuminate the path ahead.

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