

APOCALYPSE, UTOPIA AND ERNEST CALLENBACH'S VISION OF AN ECOLOGICAL FUTURE



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OVERVIEW

Contemporary society and popular culture are permeated by narratives of catastrophe and apocalypse, and understandably so, given the direction we are heading in terms of climate change, excessive resource extraction and consumption, and unrestrained waste. While fictional disaster narratives may have once served to raise alarm and awareness of environmental issues, currently they contribute to a growing sense of fatalism and despair about changing course, evolving new behaviors and lifestyle practices and actually improving our lives in any meaningful way. What is urgently needed now are narratives and visions of a future that is desirable, sustainable and practically achievable. One such narrative was written in the mid-1970s and influenced a generation of activists, even allegedly inspiring the first Green Party in Germany, and remains as relevant and exciting today: Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia*. A utopian novel, an early instance of cli-fi (climate fiction), and a how-to manual on making modern cities greener, cleaner and more convivial, Callenbach's book was the result of years of practical research on ecological practices, green economics, sustainable technology and environmentally friendly architecture, urban planning and design. His novel offers an accessible and inspiring model of what a more sustainable life could be like in a very near future, many of his suggestions having already been adopted around the world. This presentation will introduce Callenbach's ecological imagination and focus especially on his portrayal of sustainable consumption.

BIOGRAPHY

Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet is Professor of American Literature in the English Department at the University of Lausanne. She has published two monographs, several editions, and many articles in the field of American Studies and is currently co-editing, with Christian Arnsperger (Institute of Geography and Sustainability, UNIL), a special volume on the issue of "Ecology as Modernity's New Horizon: Narratives of Progress, Regression and Apocalypse in the Anthropocene."

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