British International Studies Association

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Surviving the Human Epoch: Popular Culture and the (Geo)Politics of the Anthropocene

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Politics is supposedly the art of the possible. However, with the panoply of anthropogenic crises afflicting the planet – from rising sea levels and wilder storms to mass extinctions and zoonotic pandemics to desertification and ocean acidification – the limits of what is possible are steadily shrinking as humanity's power as a geological agent grows. Taking dell'Agnese's recently-published Ecocritical Geopolitics: Popular Culture and Environmental Discourse (2021) as a point of departure, our panel employs popular culture as a medium for understanding and preparing for a future politics of a world in the throes of the Anthropocene, while also critiquing the limitations of popular culture to properly address the 'Earth-worldly politics' (Burke et al., 2016) of the already-present Human Epoch. Drawing on novels, film, television series, songs, stand-up comedy and other sources of geopolitical imagination, we interrogate the survivability of existing forms of planetary governance and international relations in a dark future where the foundations of politics will be challenged to their core. Our papers – all of which treat popular-culture imaginings as political projects in and of themselves – address the entanglements of humans and more-than-human (animals, plants, viruses, AI, nonlife) in shaping global power structures, remapping of 'friends' and 'enemies' in the age of radical climate change, technological 'fixes' that amplify vulnerabilities produced by climate change and/or discourage ecological activism, and how fears about the looming threat posed to human existence are processed through popular culture's unique 'ways of seeing' what is actually right in front of us.

Membership

Track Classification: Environment Working Group