

Imagining Politics Otherwise: Popular Culture, Security, and the Aesthetics of Disruption

Wednesday 3 June 2026 09:00 (1h 30m)

As International Studies looks ahead to the next fifty years, this panel argues for the transformative potential of popular culture as a space for rethinking political futures. Engaging with film, music, literature, videogames, and comics, the papers collectively explore how cultural production challenges dominant narratives of security, identity, and apocalypse, offering new directions for research and pedagogy.

The panel explores the creative practices within and associated with popular culture to think anew about world politics considering, for example, interrogating both cinematic representations of nuclear apocalypse and their real world imaging, via disrupting linear narratives to expose the silences structuring nuclear imaginaries. Relatedly, science fiction's temporal elasticity allows for critical reflection on historical trauma and contemporary anxieties. Music can be similarly used and the panel explores how David Bowie's can be used to critique existential insecurity to envision inclusive futures through dystopian aesthetics. Thinking anew about both popular culture and world politics also features in the discussion of superhero narratives and videogames, with the former being seen as a producer rather than mirror of US security imaginaries. Videogames also contain representations which can subvert gender norms and provoke reconsideration of representation and resistance.

Together, these papers call for methodological innovation and interdisciplinary engagement, urging International Studies to embrace cultural analysis as central to understanding global politics. By foregrounding aesthetics, affect, and imagination, the panel asks: are we ready to take seriously the cultural forces shaping the political landscapes of the future?

Track Classification: British International Studies Association