

EWIS: The Future yet to come: For a Global Politics of Hope

Workshop title: Popular Culture and the End of the World: Imagining Dystopia and Utopia in the Anthropocene Epoch

Conveners: Aristidis (Aris) V. Agoglossakis Foley (avaf@st-andrews.ac.uk) and Julian Schmid (SchmidJ@ceu.edu)

Call for papers:

In the weeks leading up to mid-July 2023, the world was hit by an entirely unexpected phenomenon: *Barbenheimer*. The dual release, on the same day, of Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* and Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer* captured the attention of the public in a slightly unusual way. Rather than being viewed as two entirely disconnected movies, the simultaneous release of the two sparked a cultural phenomenon that, by blending the two titles, highlighted the underlying similarities between the two. Eschewing the obvious differences, the inclusion of themes such as existentialism and the Anthropocene point to the notion of hope, or lack thereof, that plagues our time. The former is apparent as *Barbie*'s questioning of the perfect, 'plastic', life and realisation of death coincides with J. Robert Oppenheimer's portrayed crisis in the aftermath of the creation of the atomic bomb. The latter points to the not only cultural, but also political significance of the two. Nuclear weapons and oil (plastic) are at the forefront of the Anthropocene. The cultural phenomenon that combined the two movies shows how potential extinction and distracting consumerism go, more often than not, hand in hand.

The goal of this workshop is to explore how popular culture as political theorising can create life-worlds and denote meaning that shape realities and existences. The *Barbenheimer* phenomenon points to the duality between utopia and dystopia, hope and despair that underpin the current human condition. The hope created by the atomic bomb in *Oppenheimer*, and end of the Second World War, is immediately followed by the despair of a potential nuclear apocalypse. *Barbie* equally develops a space that grapples with questions of patriarchy and female empowerment while sustaining the status-quo of a world at the brink of ecological collapse. The existence of both a dystopia and a utopia, of hopelessness and despair, within the same stories, points to the specific nature of the zeitgeist. In other words, it underscores how it is only the very real, contemporary, *topos* that can contain the purely speculative nature of the non-places, whether good or bad. This workshop welcomes submissions that focus on any combination of popular culture, IR, political theory, the Anthropocene, existentialism, and utopias/ dystopias, among others. The workshop is bringing together a wide and diverse range of scholars, both from within International Relations and other disciplines, that interrogate the connections between popular culture, understood as forms of political theorising, and the political life, examining what essentially constitutes each one of us as a political animal, and the implications of it.

Potential submission can engage with (but are not limited to) questions around:

- Popular Culture and World Politics
- Utopia and Utopianism in the Anthropocene Epoch
- Dystopia and International Relations / Political Theory
- Connections between Anthropocene and Modernity
- Existentialism and Absurdism in International Politics
- Hope and Hopelessness in the Anthropocene
- Cultures of Climate Crisis and Capitalist Consumerism