

BLOCKBUSTER

F U T U R E S

OCT 28–30, 2024 * INDIANA UNIVERSITY CINEMA

CALL FOR CONFERENCE PAPERS

Blockbuster Futures

October 28–30, 2024 | Indiana University Cinema | Bloomington, IN

Blockbuster films have been instrumental to the evolution of the art and economics of the film industry for decades. What Charles Acland (2020) calls the “blockbuster strategy”—“the rationale that embraces the big-budget cross-media production at the expense of other industrial and artistic approaches” (8)—underpins contemporary industrial, technological, and aesthetic models of global blockbuster filmmaking. Yet, blockbusters are on the precipice of change, and in the U.S., they are showing their first signs of sustained destabilization. *Black Widow* and *The Eternals* (both 2021) were the first two Marvel Cinematic Universe films to fail to make back their costs in theatrical release. Several box-office failures from established franchises landed in 2023, including *The Marvels*, *Shazam: Fury of the Gods*, *The Flash*, *Ant-Man and Wasp: Quantumania*, and *Transformers: Rise of the Beasts*. That same year, Disney announced a decrease in funding and content development in the Star Wars and Marvel franchises. High-profile film cancellations like *Batgirl*, *Black Adam 2*, and *Wonder Woman 3*, combined with company streaming losses from subscriber plateaus and high-cost-low-return blockbuster franchise TV production, signal a growing caution around the form. Simultaneously, Hollywood continues to depend on international markets as the primary revenue drivers even while global blockbusters are thriving outside of Hollywood’s influence. Indeed, the global success of India’s *RRR* (2022) and China’s homegrown blockbusters like *The Battle at Lake Changjin II* (2022) and *Moon Man* (2022) generated hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue.

Despite the complexity of these variables and the associated turbulence they engender, it’s clear blockbusters won’t be abandoned by global film industries anytime soon. As we approach the next phase of the blockbuster, this conference is interested and invested in thinking through the past and present of global blockbusters, broadly constructed, to imagine blockbuster futures across medium, industries, geographies, time, business models, genres, forms, and aesthetics.

Encouraged topics can include but are not limited to:

- Intersections of blockbusters and race, representation, gender, and/or sexuality
- Blockbusters as sites of transnational flows of financial and cultural capital
- Blockbusters and geopolitical impacts on cultural creation
- Blockbusters and postcolonialism/neocolonialism
- Inclusive film production
- Technological and aesthetic developments in effects-based filmmaking
- Permutations in the development, use, and utility of the term “blockbuster”
- Genre blockbusters/genre and blockbusters
- Impacts of blockbuster filmmaking on exhibition

- Indie blockbusters/independent film and blockbuster strategies
- Blockbusters and streaming
- Blockbusters and television
- Intersections of games (electronic and other) and blockbusters
- Risk in blockbuster filmmaking/financing
- Work on specific franchises (MCU, DC Cinematic Universe, *Fast and Furious* franchise, *Mission: Impossible* franchise, etc.)
- Below-the-line blockbuster labor (including unionization)
- Blockbuster franchises as star systems
- Blockbuster aesthetics
- Queering blockbusters
- Crippling blockbusters
- Blockbuster filmmaking as industrial strategy and practice

This conference will serve as the foundation of a special issue of *The Journal of Popular Culture* focused on blockbuster futures.

Conference submissions are due by **MAY 1, 2024 11:59pm EDT**. We strongly encourage practitioners—filmmakers, programmers, and exhibitors—to participate in the conference to help connect blockbusters to their broader impacts on film ecosystems. Submissions can take the form of preconstituted panels (min of 3 and max of 4 participants) or individual submissions.

Submission Requirements for Preconstituted Panels

- panel abstract (1300 min-1500 max characters without spaces)
- paper abstracts for each presenter (1300 min-1500 max characters without spaces)
- bio for each presenter (300 min-400 max characters without spaces)
- 3 keywords that best describe your panel

Submission Requirements for Individual Submissions

- paper abstract (1300 min-3000 max characters without spaces)
- presenter bio (300 min-400 max characters without spaces)
- 3 keywords that best describe your panel

Blockbuster Futures will include a keynote by Robin R. Means Coleman and Novotny Lawrence (editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Black Horror Film*, 2024) on race, genre filmmaking, and blockbuster resistance. Additional keynotes to be announced.

Blockbuster Futures includes a pre-conference weekend marathon screening of the *Fast and Furious* franchise (films 1 through 10: Part 1) on October 26 and 27.

SUBMIT

Questions? Email: bfconf24@iu.edu

About Indiana University Cinema

[Indiana University Cinema \(IU Cinema\)](#) is dedicated to using film and cinema studies for intellectual emancipation and cultural edification. As an autonomous academic unit and a world-class curatorial program and art house exhibition space, IU Cinema curates unique artistic, educational, and intellectually enriching programs for all. This manifests in myriad forms, including but not limited to film series; visiting scholars, filmmakers, and various film industry professionals, offering students unparalleled access to

some of the most influential global artists and experts; conferences and symposia; student-film showcases, internships, and practical industry experiences; and community engagement. Since its founding in 2010, the Cinema has served over 330,000 people, programmed films from 52% of the 195 United Nations-recognized countries and offered more than 52% of programming completely free of charge.

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