

Dr Russell Kilbourn

*The Future of Memory: Non-Human
Memory and the Post-Humanist
Elegiac in Film and Fiction*

CMCI Research Seminar: The Future of Memory: Non-Human Memory and the Post-Humanist Elegiac in Film and Fiction

Wednesday, 22 October 2025, 4-6 pm

King's College London

Bush House (SE) 1.05

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Russell Kilbourn, Professor, English and Film Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University, Ontario, Canada

Chair: Dr Clara De Massol

About the speaker:



Russell J. A. Kilbourn is Professor of English and Film Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University. His books include: *Feminist Posthumanism in Contemporary Science Fiction Film and Media: From Annihilation to High Life and Beyond* (Bloomsbury, 2023); *The Cinema of Paolo Sorrentino: Commitment to Style* (Columbia UP, 2020); *W.G. Sebald's Postsecular Redemption: Catastrophe with Spectator* (Northwestern UP, 2018); *The Memory Effect: The Remediation of Memory in Literature and Film* (co-ed. Eleanor Ty; WLU Press, 2013); *Cinema, Memory, Modernity: The Representation of Memory from the Art Film to Transnational Cinema* (Routledge 2010).

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Forthcoming publications include *Framing Ferrante: Adaptation and Intermediality from Troubling Love to The Lying Life of Adults* (co-ed. Roberta Cauchi-Santoro; La Società Editrice Fiorentina, forthcoming Fall 2025), and a special issue of *Quaderni d'Italianistica* on *Critical Posthumanism in Italian Cinema and Media Studies*.

About the talk: The Future of Memory: Non-Human Memory and the Post-Humanist Elegiac in Film and Fiction

Transhumanist deference to a technologically augmented and/or totally artificial memory must be measured against the idea of an always already technically supported 'natural' memory. Arguably, memory has always been posthuman because it has always had a non-human, technological or prosthetic dimension

(Hayles, 1999; Stiegler, 2011; Wolfe, 2010). This immediately complicates any hard-and-fast distinction between technology and the human, as it does with 'nature' and the human. There is a distinction between a posthuman memory that identifies an aspect of the transformation of the human subject's cognitive and emotional relation to time, and a posthuman-ist memory that addresses the status of memory *after* the human: after the time of the human, 'our' time, when 'we' are no longer here. 'Posthuman memory' is memory after the (disappearance of) the human, whereas 'posthumanist memory' is memory no longer understood in (purely) humanist terms, as something belonging wholly to 'man'. In other words, to take account of the future of memory in a posthumanist context is to acknowledge that while some of the more radical revaluations of subjectivity and species being require the representation of human-like bodies, faces or voices, there is another kind of memory that demands to be thought in a post-anthropomorphic context, challenging us to conceive of a nonhuman, radically other, agent of memory/remembering. The most urgent and consequential question that emerges here is the simplest and barest: who/what does the remembering, in the time of the posthuman?

This talk is a brief critical response, through the lens of memory, to recent transformations in human self-understanding: How do cultural texts shape our sense of human identity, even as it is inflected by new technologies, on the one hand, and—in an ironic feedback loop—by human-driven climate change that not only transforms the environment on which we depend for life but also the temporal horizon of collective human existence, on the other? What could be more 'human', which is to say humanist, than the sentimental pseudo-mourning for a rapidly disappearing sense of what it means to be human? Such a nostalgic attachment to vanishing foundations is itself symptomatic of everything that is problematic about a humanist understanding of memory, or what is generally meant by 'memory' in a popular context. As this understanding is complicated by a posthumanist critique of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism (Braidotti, 2019), as well as the anthropomorphism characteristic of much contemporary culture, it becomes increasingly difficult to imagine a relationship to the past as a basis for understanding one's situation in the present, let alone a new relation to possible futures. The now undeniably problematic status of the future, moreover, casts this human-all-too-humanist elegiac tendency into relief, past and present necessarily taking on a significance possibly unique in human history.

Films and literary examples include: *Kaspar Hauser* (Werner Herzog, 1974); *Ex Machina* (Alex Garland, 2014); *Blade Runner 2049* (Denis Villeneuve, 2017); Giorgio Bassani, *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (1962); W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (2001); Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927)

Event Schedule:

- 4 - 4.15 pm: Welcome and Introductions
- 4.15 - 5 pm: Keynote Speaker presentation
- 5 - 5.30 pm: Q&A
- 5.30 - 6 pm: Drinks Reception