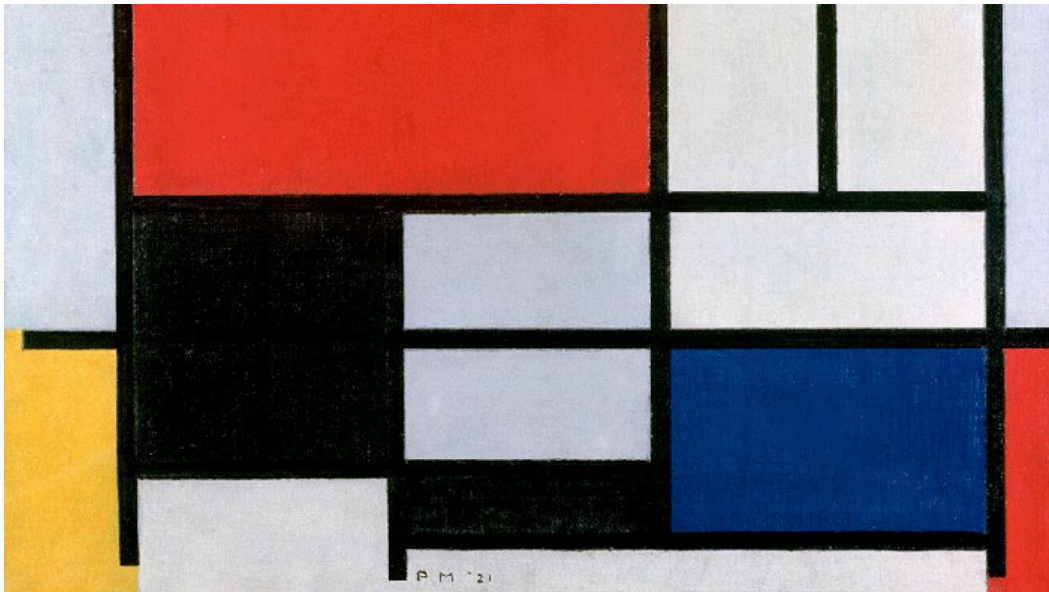




Writing & Society Research Centre Seminar Program 'Writing by the River'

The Anachronism of the Essay **Christoper Conti**



The essay embodies a form of reflective thinking, even a mode of living, at odds with the theoretical procedures that reduce the cultural object to identical moments in a comprehensive claim to knowledge. Indeed, the essay's reflective potential is rooted in an awareness of the inadequacy of the concept to the object. The essay thus thinks in fragments, achieving its rigour by adherence to particularity that confers on its knowledge claims a partial and provisional status.

If the essay's methodical resistance to method requires it to be as complex as the cultural object it investigates, such constitutive complexity is regularly glossed over in the disciplinary context. The pedagogy built on essay writing methodologies implies an identity of thought and object that stunts the essay's consciousness of nonidentity, confusing the construction with the 'scaffold'. Similarly, the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity compulsory to grant-based research obliges scholars to favour the absolute privileges of method. In any case, the arrival of Large Language Models appears to have called time on the essay as a method of assessment that had already hollowed out learning and teaching to its credentialling function.

The cultural function of the essay can be seen most clearly at the announcement of its obsolescence, in an anachronism or untimeliness acting on the present like a bad conscience, critical of the optimising logic of commercial technologies that predetermine the future by draining the resources of the present. It is with the confusion of our present situation in mind that I return to Theodor Adorno's 'The Essay as Form' in connection with Robert Musil's remarks about the cultural value of essayism to mediate the needs of the soul in technocratic civilization.

DATE: Friday 11 September

TIME: 11:00am - 12:30pm

VENUE: Whitlam Institute, ground floor conference room. Western Sydney University Parramatta South Campus – cnr of James Ruse Drive and Victoria Road, Rydalmere.

RSVP for face-to-face attendance via [Humanitix](#). To attend online please register [here](#).

ALL WELCOME!

CHRISTOPHER CONTI is Senior Lecturer of Literary Studies at Western Sydney University and member of the Writing and Society Research Centre. His work examines the disciplinary claims of literary value as an irreducible form of knowledge-building by locating them in the intersection between aesthetic and conceptual modes of understanding. He recently edited the special journal issues 'AI and the Future of Literary Studies' for *Australian Literary Studies* and 'The Transdisciplinary Imperative' for the *Journal of Language, Literature and Culture*.



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