

ACLA Seminar: Literary Criticism as Composition (Montreal, 26 Feb–1 Mar 26)

Montreal, Canada, Feb 26–Mar 1, 2026

Deadline: Oct 2, 2025

www.acla.org/seminar/19901266-d894-4c79-abab-68607f1dda41

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Literary Criticism as Composition: Montage, Genre, and the Art of World-Making (ACLA 2026).

This seminar approaches criticism as a compositional art that gathers elements across media, genres, and historical moments to propose the world in which a work might live. Building on recent reflections in aesthetics, intermediality, and visual culture, we explore montage, the politics of form/genre, and criticism as world-making. We welcome proposals that trace the afterlives of narrative motifs across movements and media; combine textual analysis with visual culture; or stage criticism itself as a creative assemblage.

Please submit a 200–300 word abstract via the ACLA portal between August 26 and October 2, 2025: <https://www.acla.org/seminar/19901266-d894-4c79-abab-68607f1dda41>

Full seminar description:

Literary criticism is often treated as a secondary act, the intellectual afterimage of the work it addresses. This seminar proceeds from the opposite premise: criticism can be understood as a compositional art, a practice that gathers elements from different media, genres, and historical moments in order to propose a world in which the work might live. The critic does not merely interpret but constructs, weaving together forms, narratives and temporalities to re-situate a work within a newly configured cultural space, animated by the critical desire to imagine and construct more just and inhabitable worlds.

This compositional premise finds a compelling articulation in Jacques Rancière's most recent work, *Les voyages de l'art*, where montage is understood as a way of bringing heterogeneous forms into relation, juxtaposing distinct temporal layers and transforming the singular image or text into part of a broader sensorium. His notion of art constructiviste links this compositional labour to the elaboration of forms of common life, the weaving of a shared sensible. A related rethinking of criticism is developed in Georges Didi-Huberman's *Gestes critiques*, which surveys a broad constellation of twentieth-century thinkers and engages with recent scholarship on the function and place of criticism today. Reading Barthes not as a fixed model but as a proposal, he frames criticism as a form of literary writing, open-ended and inventive, capable of producing what Barthes once described as an assemblage rhapsodique, a composition woven from heterogeneous fragments brought into new and unforeseen relations.

While these perspectives emphasise the temporal and narrative dimensions of criticism, Mieke Bal's concept of compositional iconography draws attention to spatial arrangement as a generator of meaning. Adapting this logic to literary criticism reverses its scope so that the elements are textual, visual and theoretical fragments. This reversal finds an antecedent in Albert Thibaudet's early twentieth-century vision of the critic as both architect and artist, balancing construction and creation. From this standpoint, recalling Bruno Latour's proposal to move beyond purely deconstructive critique, the compositional approach becomes an act of drawing heterogeneous elements together and shifting from matters of fact to matters of concern.

Our objective is to explore new trajectories, connections and compositional schemas that can renew the possibilities of contemporary critical discourse, offering tools for the analysis and reception of literary works across historical periods. The seminar invites approaches that trace the afterlives of narrative motifs across movements, genres and media; studies that combine textual analysis with visual culture; and reflections that stage criticism itself as a creative assemblage, open to contributions from diverse fields converging on the art of literary criticism as a world-making practice.

Reference:

CFP: ACLA Seminar: Literary Criticism as Composition (Montreal, 26 Feb-1 Mar 26). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 10, 2025 (accessed Oct 14, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/50507>>.