In the past few decades, a number of artists have experimented with the moving image essay as a mode of writing that blurs the distinction between creation and interpretation, fiction and documentary, history and memory. This seminar will be devoted to films and videos that have contributed to the emergence of new forms of visual thought, from Chris Marker’s Sans Soleil and Jean-Luc Godard’s Scénario du film Passion to Agnes Varda’s The Gleaners and I. As we follow the trail set by these works, we will read texts by Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Roland Barthes, among others. We will also consider essayistic experiments in the fields of photography, performance, and installation art. Because we stand at a pivotal juncture in the reconfiguration of our mediatic landscape, particular attention will be given to those works that problematize the relation between the analog and the digital.
This introductory course on problems in contemporary critical theory will begin by focusing on critique of ideology in the Marxist tradition (with particular attention to Sartre, Althusser and Jameson, along with some of their major predecessors, allies and adversaries, including such thinkers as Eisenstein, Barthes, Bataille and Derrida). We will then discuss how the relationships between discursive, institutional and aesthetic practices and their pragmatic effects are rethought in the writings of such theorists as Foucault, Rancière and Deleuze. While the primary focus of the course will be on theoretical texts, these texts will also be considered in dialogue with literary and cinematic works.
In this course, students revise and expand a paper written in a previous course with an aim towards producing a work approaching publishable quality, of approximately 20-25 pages in length. While deepening students’ knowledge of their chosen subject area, the course also provides students with a forum in which to work through some of the methodological challenges of academic research and writing. In the revised paper, students will develop an original argument relative to a significant problem or research question; demonstrate knowledge of relevant primary and secondary sources; engage critically with a well-defined theoretical methodology or scholarly corpus; and draw out clearly the significance of their findings. The class will meet regularly as a group for the purpose of discussion and feedback on individual work, and students will give short presentations on various aspects of their projects including the research methodology, the state of knowledge on their topics, and the contribution to the field. In addition, students will meet individually with the professor to discuss their progress. Work written in the quarter will be shared and discussed in the final meeting of the quarter. Taught in English. Although required for French Ph.D. students in the 2nd or 3rd year, this course is appropriate for graduate students across the humanities. The professor will contact enrolled students at least one week prior to the first meeting so as to solicit the paper they wish to develop in the seminar. Any student who enrolls after that date should contact the professor as soon as possible before the beginning of the quarter.