The title of this course with its hyphen is meant to hold in suspension two media and artistic practices and draw our curiosity toward writers and image-makers who seek to collapse the distance between the two terms. With the emergence and popularization of photography as a medium in the 19th and early 20th century, a discourse developed that sought to maintain the separation between literature and photography. Charles Baudelaire and Marcel Proust were among the critical voices that saw the practice of photography (and later, cinema) as antithetical to the artistic vocation of literature. Their reaction was part of a wider critical disparagement of photographic media that stressed its mechanical nature and questioned the value of the photographer’s role.

Nevertheless, writers have found inspiration in the photograph, emulating the flat realism of photo techniques as well as incorporating and reflecting on the unique ontology of the photo in their narratives. Similarly, certain filmmakers have reflexively compared their editing techniques to the stylistic choices of writers and privileged their voiceover commentary and montage technique as a means of writing with the camera. In this course, we will explore what is gained, in terms of reflecting on history, the limits of representation, and the possibility of building communities in the future, by bringing together writing and the image.

Key texts will include theoretical works by Roland Barthes, Jacques Rancière and Susan Sontag, writings by André Breton and W.G. Sebald, and films by Guy Debord, Haroun Farocki, Chris Marker and Agnès Varda.