In conjunction with reading poetry by Baudelaire and Surrealist fiction by Andre Breton, we’ll recreate their wanderings in Paris’ flea markets and squares:

Students will have a chance to search for their own surrealist “find” and write about the imagined history of that discovered object.

After reading in Benjamin and Aragon about those iconic emblems of “modernity,” the Paris Arcades, we will explore the surviving examples to discover what has changed and what has survived:
We will explore the “machine aesthetic” of the modern age through the Eiffel Tower (as it figures in literature and the visual arts), and through its contemporary counterpart--the postmodern Pompidou Center.
We will also read about and explore first hand the competing aesthetic of the organic and erotic designs of Art Nouveau that fascinated the Surrealists:

Students will be encouraged to explore, observe and respond to some of the effects of the very mixed architectural landscape that Paris presents.
Some street wanderers (Baudelaire, Breton, Benjamin and others) left textual accounts while others made visual documents (in photographs and film) of their wanderings. We will explore the work of Atget whose photographs capture the lives of poor street workers as well as the rise of commodity culture:
We will also study Brassai’s photographic wanderings in his “Paris at Night” series.

Students will be encouraged to compose their own photographic journal of Paris life on the streets, perhaps revisiting some of the same subjects or sites.
Like Woody Allen most recently, Americans have been seduced by Paris for centuries. We will look into this history through figures like Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, James Baldwin and the dancer Josephine Baker (shown here performing with the Revue Negre in Paris):

Hemingway and his friends often hung out at Le Dome; their seats are more often occupied now by tourists:

We will venture off the tourist path to seek out more contemporary haunts of artists and writers. One of the greatest pleasures of Paris life is to find your own favorite café and settle in with your writing or drawing, always with one eye on the street life passing by in front of your table.
I have certainly been inspired myself by the streets of Paris.
Here I am with my friend Bonnie on the eve of Sarkozy’s election in Paris, making clandestine night postings of the street artist Miss Tic’s satirical presidential posters. This one says “governing seriously damages your mental health”!
Our course will include reading some critical essays on street art which will prepare us for tracking down contemporary street artists like Miss Tic throughout the city. One unique site is the studio complex in an abandoned refrigerator factory known as Les Frigo—wall to wall street art! Luckily, our course will coincide with the once a year open house at this extraordinary building. Here are some photos I took on a trip to Paris this June:
Once a month the M.U.R. (the WALL) at Oberkampf hosts a new street artist, and again our lucky timing will put us there for the celebration of the June opening:

We will wander and study the art-covered streets of Belleville,

but we’ll also see how avant-garde art galleries (like Addict Gallery) and museums (like the Palais de Tokyo) have incorporated this new art form.