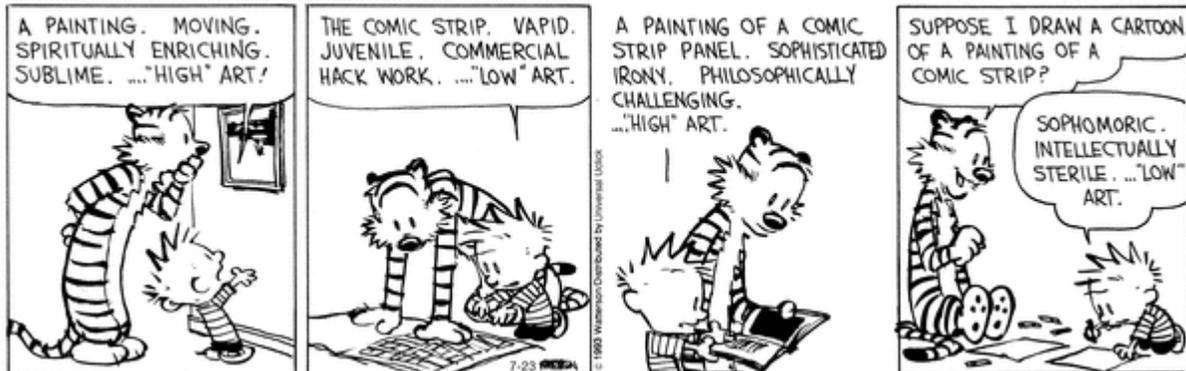


CULTURE VULTURE Summer 2020

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Have you ever gone to a four-star/thumbs-up film and fallen asleep? Were you shocked when *Once* won the Tony for Best Musical? Do you secretly think that *Breaking Bad* is a lot more poignant than *Hamlet*? Do you wonder why novels about love and family by men are Great Novels and novels about love and family by women are chick lit? Could your grandma paint some of that stuff in the Museum of Modern Art? **Culture Vulture** is a course in reading, writing, and thinking about the art of criticism. Students will be introduced to some of the best and most important cultural critics and to some of the key critical debates of the last decades. What makes something “high” or “low” culture? Is “taste” just a matter of opinion? How much does the race of an author matter? Why can we scream at a concert but talk in whispers in a museum? Now that the Internet has made everyone a critic, do the “official” critics matter? We’ll take advantage of our location in New York City and inhale culture—art, film, theatre, books, TV—and then learn to write about it, both as arts reporters and as cultural critics.

This is a course in reading and writing criticism—and a course in thinking about culture, in all its many meanings. Our culture, the culture we live in—and perhaps our particular subculture or subcultures—informs our readings of “culture.” Each week we will consider broad cultural debates, focus in on a particular cultural genre, and of course consume culture and write about it. Students are expected to attend as many performances of all kinds as possible, to read, to watch TV, to visit museums.

Readings will be handed out in class or posted on NYU Classes. In addition, you should keep up with culture on your own: New York City offers endless possibilities, ranging from ridiculously expensive to absolutely free. You can find extensive listings in *The New York Times*:

<http://www.nytimes.com/events> (just click around to find the particular events that interest you). The full list appears in Friday's paper. The Public Theatre's famous Shakespeare in the Park series is happening right now (that production of *Julius Caesar* you may have read about): <http://www.publictheater.org/Tickets/?SiteTheme=Shakespeare>. It's free, but you have to stand in line for hours for tickets. And of course there's Broadway theatre (with "student rush" ticket prices), lots of movies, major art museums and small (free) galleries ... or you can always listen to music and watch TV. And don't forget to read books!

I assume you already have your own favorite cultural commentators; please be ready to share. In the meantime, I want everyone to keep up with the critics of *The New York Times*. You should be reading the *Times* every day. I also find *Slate* pretty interesting: <http://www.slate.com/articles/arts.html>. And you might check out *New York Magazine's* weekly Vulture section: <http://www.vulture.com/>. If you're a music person, you probably already keep up with Pitchfork: <http://pitchfork.com/>.

The work: Student participation in this seminar is key: you are expected to attend all sessions, to complete all the reading, and to participate actively in discussion. Each student will write three reviews during the six-week semester, two short pieces and one longer critical essay. In addition, you will each—working in groups—take responsibility for one class presentation on a particular art form (if you're a film buff, for instance, you'll choose film). Your job isn't to give us a list of movies or TV shows, but to provide classmates with an overview of the key critical issues in your field. We'll talk more about this in class.

SYLLABUS

- 7/7 Is everyone a critic? What is taste? Who decides? Introduction to the course. In-class writing assignment.
- 7/9 Fourteen ways of looking at a film. Read: Everything in *Frozen* folder, plus "Everybody's a Critic/And That's How It Should Be" by A.O. Scott and "The 'Last Jedi' Backlash Provides a Useful Primer in How Not to Watch a Movie" by Ann Hornaday (both in *The Role of the Critic* folder). How to construct a simple review.
- 7/14 Looking/seeing: painting and photography. "We only see what we look at." Read: John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, and Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (in *What We See* folder on NYU Classes), plus all the critical essays on art and photography (in *Art* and *Photography* within the larger *Critical Essays* folder).
Student presentation #1: Art.
Review #1 due. Sharing of student work.

- 7/16 Why do we write at all? Read: George Orwell, "Why I Write"; Joan Didion, "Why I Write" (both in *Why We Write* folder). More sharing of student work.
- 7/21 The role of the critic. Why do we need critics? The classic responses. Read: Margaret Fuller, "A Short Essay on Critics"; Matthew Arnold, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time"; Alfred Kazin, "The Function of Criticism Today"; *New York Times Symposium: "The Masters"* (all in *The Role of the Critic* folder). **Student presentation #2: Film.** Read: A selection of classic film reviews and essays, everything in the two *Film* folders, one in the larger folder *Critical Essays* and one in the larger folder *Reviews*. Discussion: How is a review different from a critical essay? More sharing of student work.
- 7/23 The role of the critic. Modern responses. Read: *The New York Times Symposium "Why Criticism Matters"*; Daniel Green's critique of the symposium; and Daniel Mendelsohn's "A Critic's Manifesto" (all in *The Role of the Critic* folder). **Student presentation #3: Theatre.** Read: Everything in both *Theatre* folders, the one inside the *Critical Essays* folder and the one inside *Reviews*. **Review #2 due.** Sharing of student work.
- 7/28 Manifestos and debates. High and low art. Read: Dwight Macdonald, "Masscult and Midcult"; Pauline Kael, "Trash, Art, and the Movies"; and Steven Johnson, "Watching TV Makes You Smarter" (all in *High, Middle, Low?* folder). More sharing of student work.
- 7/30 The personal and the political. Why do we read/listen/look? Read: Ben Brantley, "A Searing Encounter with David Lynch's 'Blue Velvet'"; Jeannette Catsoulis, "The Beatles Awaken a New Sensation"; and Neil Genzlinger, "A Reluctant Teenager, A Barbershop Quartet and a Revelation" (all in *First Encounters* folder). More sharing of student work. **Student presentation #4: Music.** Read: Everything in both *Music* folders, the one inside the *Critical Essays* folder and the one inside *Reviews*.
- 8/4 The political and the personal. What is political criticism? Feminist criticism? Is the race or sexuality of the critic important? Read: Aura Bogado, "White Is the New White"; bell hooks, "Facing Difference: The Black Female Body"; Daniel Mendelsohn, "The Women and the Thrones"; Henry Louis Gates, "What's In a Name?"; Katha Pollitt, "The Smurfette Principle"; Kathleen Rowe, "Roseanne, Unruly Woman"; Michelle Wallace, "Spike Lee and Black Women"; Robin Wood, "Responsibilities of a Gay Film Critic"; Vito Russo, "The Celluloid Closet"; and Molly Haskell, from *From Reverence to Rape* (all in *The Politics of Culture* folder). **Student presentation #5: Television.** Read: Everything in both *TV* folders, the one inside the *Critical Essays* folder and the one inside *Reviews*.

- 8/6 Becoming a critic. **Leads for Review #3/Critical Essay due.** Sharing of student work.
- 8/11 **Review #3/Critical Essay due.** Sharing of student work.
- 8/13 More sharing of student work. Celebration!

Learning Objectives

In this course, students will:

- Write clear, accurate and engaging prose in an audience-appropriate manner
- Demonstrate critical thinking, independence, and creativity appropriate to the role of journalism in a democratic society
- Develop critical skills and sophisticated understanding of a variety of cultural forms, including art, film, television, and music
- Work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, and diverse perspectives
- Use technological tools and apply quantitative concepts as appropriate

A Word About Grading

This class is both a writing workshop and a seminar, which means that student engagement is key. Your grade will be based on participation in our discussions, your presentations on the reading and on an art form, and of course on your three writing assignments, two reviews and a critical essay. This grading rubric is not applied rigidly and there is room for flexibility, but in general, your final grade will be calculated roughly as follows: discussion and participation, 10%; reading presentation, 15%; cultural presentation, 15%; 3 writing assignments, 20% each.

Accommodations

Students with disabilities that necessitate accommodations should contact and register with New York University's Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at [212-998-4980](tel:212-998-4980) or mosescsd@nyu.edu. Information about the Moses Center can be found at www.nyu.edu/csd. The Moses Center is located at 726 Broadway on the 2nd floor.

Diversity & Inclusion

The Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute is committed to creating an inclusive learning environment. The Institute embraces a notion of intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along a number of dimensions.