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. Each student will write three reviews during the six-week semester, two short pieces and one longer critical essay.

**READINGS**

Some of the readings we’ll discuss—in whole or in part—may include:

*For Keeps*, Pauline Kael  
*Beginning to See the Light*, Ellen Willis  
*Ways of Seeing*, John Berger  
*Against Interpretation*, Susan Sontag  
*Whose Art Is It?*, Jane Kramer  
“The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin  
In addition we’ll read a variety of critics writing in newspapers, literary journals, and online. Daily readings will be handed out in class or posted on NYU Classes.

**TENTATIVE SYLLABUS (Subject to Change!)**

Week 1: The role of the critic. What is taste? Who decides?

Week 2: Manifestos and debates. High and low art. First student reviews due.


Week 4: Film and television. Political responses. (What is feminist criticism? Is the race or sexuality of the critic important?) Second student reviews due. Sharing of student work.

Week 5: Looking/seeing: painting and photography. “We only see what we look at.”

Week 6: Getting personal—speaking from the self. Longer student essays due. Sharing of student work.