

## **ART IS DANGEROUS NONSENSE: REFLECTIONS ON KANT'S AESTHETICS AND FRYE'S MONDERNIST UPDATE.**

**By James Cunningham**

### **Introduction:**

Art is dangerous, but to what, and in aid of what? I take it that to be dangerous is to be harmful, and that Plato is authoritative when he writes, *Republic, Book I*, that do harm something is to make it worse even to the point of destroying it. The question of whether or not art harms with its charms was as germane for critical theory in Plato's time as it is now – Plato was sufficiently concerned with the issue to legislate a conditional ban on the mimetic poetics (and by extension all realist artists) until some critical remedy could be found that might render the arts harmless.

I want, however, to depart from the Platonist view of art and its dangers for more modern shores. There, we find a more complex assessment of art's dangers in the critical theory of Immanuel Kant. I will begin this paper with the argument that, as articulated in his discussion of Genius and Taste, from *Critique of Judgment*, Kant's view of art as is akin to the traditional view of fire: that it makes a good servant but a bad master. That is, unless it is disciplined by taste, artistic genius is too chaotic a ground on which to cultivate a progressive culture.

I will then proceed to show how Kant's eighteenth century assessment of danger in art finds a necessary twentieth/twenty-first century update in the critical theory of Northrop Frye.

According to Frye's late modern assessment, art is what I would characterize as one of those dangers which harm one thing to the benefit of another: as is, for instance, a forest fire, which is

a clear danger to the many trees and animals in its path, taken as individuals; and, as a result, is also a positive benefit to the life of the forest as a whole – it injects nutrients into the soil; it removes unhealthy growth and is essential to the germination of many seeds. Frye would have it, that, in like manner, Literature, and the arts generally, exist ultimately as something that cannot be contained by and thus threaten any existing social order, including our own. But, if the arts threaten us as we are, they do so in aid of our realizing what we can become. The job of criticism, argues Frye is not to see the arts disciplined by taste (itself a product of a bygone social conditioning), but to recognize in the arts a restlessness that is enduringly human. Against art's restless (humanist) vision, the concerns of (that is, what is important to) all social orders are put in critical relief as passing anxieties. Thus does art have the power to show us a truly anthropocentric as opposed to an ethnocentric culture. Our job as true recipients of art (and this is what Frye means by critics) is to “read” it in a manner that allows us to see what art shows.

Herein, then, lies the main difference between Kant and Frye: for Kant, the problem of art's intelligibility is with artistic production and the artist; for Frye it is with artistic reception and the critic. The difference, however, is one of degree not of kind. As we will see, Frye's view of the nature of art is essentially Kantian. But Kant is a theorist from another age – one in which there was no conflation of art and advertising to problematize the notion of refined taste. For Frye, the critic, there is an imperative that was not imposed on Kant to recognize in the artistic “non-sense” of the modern avant garde a truly human order, which the culture industry, and Kant for that matter, would dismiss out of hand.

## **Part One**

### **Kant:**

In his *Critique of Judgement*, Kant discusses the nature of art (especially beautiful art). In this discussion, Kant affirms the modernist position as articulated in Sidney's *Defense of Poesy* that art is not a body of doctrine, neither is its truth reducible to a version of propositional truth, or some accurate depiction/description of non-aesthetic reality. Rather, Kant sees artists as being in line with Sidney's poets who give expression to a golden world of the imagination that is at once stimulating and profound – the truth or meaning of this poetic/ artistic expression resides in its formal beauty, and in the effect of this beauty upon the recipient. To Sidney's view, Kant adds the notion that any beautiful art-work must, as a part of its essence, be an original, and Kant supports this view by supplementing Sidney's poesy with an exploration of philosophical psychology – particularly the psychology of aesthetic pleasure.

### **Kant on Pleasure**

For Kant, experience evidences three types of pleasure: sensual pleasure, aesthetic pleasure and intellectual pleasure. While sensual pleasure is tied up with desire and finds its satisfaction in anticipation and possession, intellectual pleasure is linked with curiosity and finds its satisfaction in discovery and truth. But then there is aesthetic pleasure which shows itself as an enduring sense of interest in, say, an object when our desire for the object, or our curiosity about it, are sated: this is the pleasure that derives from the contemplation of the object's form and which finds its satisfaction in admiration for the object contemplated.

Unlike sensual pleasure, aesthetic pleasure indicates that a judgment has been made.

Where the sensual experience of an object as PLEASANT is the experience of an object which

DOES please a certain individual AND NO MORE, the aesthetic experience of an object as ADMIRABLE entails the judgment that the object SHOULD please universally: that all other recipients of the same object SHOULD be pleased by it, even if they are not. When an object captures our admiration, we say of it, according to Kant, that it is more than pleasant, that it is beautiful: hence the aesthetic nature of the judgment. In its status as a judgment, aesthetic pleasure suggests an encounter with an object that, in Kant's words "at least strive[s] after something which lies beyond the bounds of [mere] experience" and which therefore "figures forth" an intelligent design or form. It is this display of intelligence – what Kant calls the form of purposive action – which deserves the appreciation of all viewers and which is apprehended by their aesthetic faculty, which Kant calls the faculty of judgment.

Unlike intellectual pleasure, aesthetic pleasure is not derived from an increase in our understanding. For Kant, our understanding is increased when objects are thought: that is, when objects are shown by the rules of logic to correspond to concepts that can be determined by and therefore known to the understanding. Equally, for Kant, the objects of aesthetic pleasure cannot be thought. This is not to say that aesthetic objects do not correspond to concepts or that their construction is not governed by rules that would ensure their correspondence to concepts. If it was, then, the judgments of aesthetic pleasure could have NO validity – could not be said to apply to all. It is to say that the concepts and rules governing the production of aesthetic objects are not determinable by and therefore are NOT recognizable to the understanding. But Kant argues that the understanding can recognize only those concepts to which sensible experience corresponds: the concepts governing the construction of aesthetic objects correspond to the super-sensible. For this reason, Kant contrasts the concepts at work in the aesthetic from those at work in the understanding by giving them the alternative name, "ideas," and says that while the

aesthetic object cannot be thought by way of a concept in the understanding, it can be presented as embodying an idea in the imagination.

If the aesthetic object can never be thought, it can be imagined. So it is that the aesthetic object is presented not in the understanding but by the imagination where, while it cannot be categorized as having a definite meaning, it can, as Kant says, be evocative of much meaning or thought. That is, the aesthetic object is presented by the imagination as something intelligent but not intelligible – as a recognizable pattern without a recognizable purpose, or what Kant calls purposive purposelessness. This presentation inspires the imagination to conceive of the manifold possibilities for meaning suggested by the intelligence obvious in the object's form. The effect of the object, then, is to render us thoughtful – to open us to many meanings – even if we strive, and it will be without success, to determine what the object actually means.

This is not to say that aesthetic objects do not have subject matter with recognizable meanings. It is to say that the meaning of the subject matter is not identical with the “meaningfulness” of the object's form. For instance, the outcome of Oedipus' investigation does yield the kind of discovery that we would call an increase in understanding. Our awareness of the outcome, however, in no way diminishes our interest in his tragedy, neither does it seem to be the point of the tragedy, as even those in attendance at the first performance of *Oedipus Rex* were well acquainted with the story on which the play is based before they entered the theatre. Rather, the point of the image of Oedipus' tragic fall seems to be its defiance of meaning. In the face of this defiance, audiences return again and again in a vain effort to make sense of what they have seen, and in so doing are exposed to its endless implications for the human condition.

### **Kant on Genius and the originality of Art**

Which brings us to the production of beautiful things. As we have seen Kant argue, the intelligence evidenced in the form of beautiful things indicates their production in accordance with rules and their embodiment of profound ideas. However, we have also seen that, for Kant, neither the rules nor the ideas guiding the production of beautiful things are supplied by the understanding: which is to say that art is not the product of the following of rules already known or learned. The point – the artist cannot create by following rules. Rather, the artist’s practice must reflect an inborn talent which, and here Kant starts to sound positively Nietzschean, GIVES the rule to art. The artist is not a ruler follower. Neither does the artist learn their skill. Rather the artist acts with the imaginative freedom of a law giver and his capacity as such is an inborn talent which Kant refers to as GENIUS. And then, Kant retreats from Nietzschean subjectivism somewhat when he avers that Genius is nature’s gift to the artist – that is, nature ensures that its “secret laws” will govern the artist’s production by donating the power to enact those laws at birth, so that the rules and ideas embodied in the artist’s work will be those of nature, and not the understanding. As such, the artist cannot be a teacher, for the artist cannot say how he came by his ideas, neither can he account for the rules that guide his embodiment of these ideas in the form of his work. But that he has the skill to fashion the ideas and rules according to which art is produced is something which his work evidences.

If the artist’s genius does not follow rules but, rather, gives the rule to art, then it must be for Kant that every work by the artist must be an original. But since the artist can also produce original nonsense, says Kant, if his art is to be beautiful, it must also produce the model: that which sets the “standard or rule of judgment for others.” Note here that the rule of judgment does not guide artists to copy models – if it did, then their work would not be original and therefore

not art in Kant's sense. Rather, rule of judgment set by the model guides those with genius to imitate the clarity of the genius that fashioned the model. Only with the clarity of the model can an artwork embody its idea so that it can be recognized and admired. To those who have no genius for the production of imaginative ideas, models are of no help, so that a model acts only to inspire those who already can, not to teach those who cannot.

### **Kant on the nature and role of taste**

If genius is the necessary condition for the production of art (that is aesthetic objects), taste is the necessary condition for the recognition and appreciation of beautiful art by its recipients. Says Kant, taste essentially is the ability to make valid judgments about the purposiveness in an object of aesthetic interest: if there is such purposiveness present, the faculty of judgment responds with admiration. For Kant, every human being has such a faculty and therefore shares in this ability. Likewise, since the faculty of judgment responds only to the purposiveness (what Kant also calls the satisfaction) in the object, each person's judgments can be said a priori to be valid for all human beings.

That all human beings do not agree about the value of art objects has to do, then, with the fact that most people never really experience the aesthetic in objects at all. Rather, they are so taken up with the sensual pleasure or the intellectual pleasure associated with the object (or conversely, so "turned off" by its lack of power to please sensuously or intellectually) that they miss the aesthetic experience altogether, and subsequently confuse sensuous or intellectual pleasure (usually the sensuous) for aesthetic pleasure. Thus is the cultivation of the arts advantageous to the development of taste, not because cultivation trains the taste so much as because it provides occasion for taste's judgments.

Kant infers, however, that there is a second degree of taste which is something like genius in that it is the inborn talent of some and not all. This is the taste which is capable of distinguishing between aesthetic clarity and aesthetic nonsense on the one hand and aesthetic clarity and the non-aesthetic common place of copies, on the other; that is, taste for which the artistic model stands out. It is what I would call this critical order of taste. Now Kant says that taste generally is not to be regarded as a productive faculty but rather as a receptive faculty only; the sole productive faculty for the production of art is Genius. So it might seem somewhat inconsistent of Kant to say also that the faculty most necessary not just to the apprehension but ALSO to the production of beautiful art (the art figuring forth in models) is taste. Yet the inconsistency is more apparent than real. As we shall now see, what Kant is referring to, here, is the dynamic relationship between the critical and productive forces inherent in the creation of beautiful art.

### **Kant on the Priority of Taste over Genius in the production of beautiful art**

For Kant, beautiful art (the art that figures forth in models) should be foremost a display of taste rather than of genius, which is to say, as Kant would have it, that beauty in art depends more on judgment than on imagination. As we have seen, Kant holds that genius produces those imaginative presentations which, though their meaning can be captured by no particular thought, are food for much thought. Argues Kant, the more genius there is in a work of art, the more imaginative images, ideas and implications the artwork presents. But more is not always better: rather more and be too much, and in artistic production can produce imaginative clutter or nonsense. As a remedy to nonsense, taste demands that artistic genius be limited so that its ideas and images are presented with the kind of clarity that critical taste or judgment apprehends only

in models. Thus taste demands of its artists that they seek inspiration in the models already recognized by taste. In the name of clarity, then, taste sends the artists to school, not to learn art making (an impossibility) but to harness their talent to the production of that which, in Kant's words, is "cultured and polished." So it is that taste determines the nature of art by insisting that arts productive forces be used in a cultured way.

**... and on why the priority of taste over genius is a good thing**

And, Kant concludes that the influence of taste on artistic production is all to the good when he says that

while [taste] brings clearness and order into the multitude of the thoughts [of genius], it makes the ideas [of genius] susceptible of being permanently and , at the same time universally assented to, and capable of being followed by others, and of an ever progressive culture.

Here Kant is telling us that if the general run of men are to apprehend the thought provoking beauty in art – and are to assent to its lessons in thoughtfulness – then its works must embody their ideas in a manner that is clear for all to see. If men miss the point of art, then, says Kant, harkening back to the arguments of Sidney, it is the fault of artists who let their genius run rampant, as it were, at the expense of good taste. We can infer, then, that, for Kant, if art is dangerous, it is so only when artists sacrifice culture to the hubris of their own genius and instead produce chaotic nonsense. The antidote to art's danger is criticism, the product of refined taste, which humbles genius and gives in useful work.

### **Kant on the benefits of a culture influenced by beautiful art**

For Kant, the effects of beautiful art on culture can only be beneficial, which Kant equates with the progressive. As clear embodiments of many thought provoking ideas, beautiful works of art have the power to render the populace that receives them more liberal – more open to new ideas and more thoughtful about them, than ever before. But more, an appreciation of art is, for Kant, an appreciation of the humanity in those who made the art. For art speaks to a consistency of judgment in all men about what is beautiful. Thus a society ruled by good taste, which harnesses artistic production of clarity and culture, will be one in which its populace will be quick to see the humanity expressed in the arts, and this includes the art of cultures alien to one's own. So it is that Kant, in the eighteenth century, envisions how art could educate its recipients to a liberality and generosity of spirit, and so create that what Matthew Arnold, in the nineteenth century would call, a centre of the intelligent and urbane spirit, but only if artistic genius serves the critical taste.

### **Part Two**

#### **Frye and Kant: the Similarities**

What of Frye? Frye shows a critical radicalism similar to that of Kant when he writes, in *Anatomy of Criticism* that originality in art is a result of art's restless reshaping of itself through its geniuses and talents. As art's geniuses and talents, artists are the creatures, not the pupils of art: art inspires, it does not teach. If anything, Frye is more radical even than is Kant: Kant sees the expression of genius in the imagination as being a donation to the imagination by nature; Frye sees the artistic imagination as its own source of genius. The implication by both views,

however, is the same. Artists are the unconscious lawmakers of artistic practice which entails that all of their works must be originals.

That Frye also sees artists as unconscious is evident in his description of artistic production, *Anatomy of Criticism*, as the “half involuntary imitation of organic rhythms or processes,” that have nothing to do with the artist’s wisdom or goodness. Indeed, Frye says of the literary artist that “[t]here is no reason why a great poet should be a wise and good man, or even a tolerable human being” (344).

Likewise, in his conception of art itself, Frye argues as does Kant, that art articulates and can be understood to have no specific meaning. Says Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, “art shows forth but cannot say anything. And whatever it sounds like to call the poet inarticulate or speechless, there is a most important sense in which poems are as silent as statues.” In essence, art, for Frye, like the poem, can never say what it means because it does not address any meaning in particular to us, so that the experience of the poem or of any art, for that matter, is not so much akin to hearing someone, as to overhearing them, and then so partially that their meaning can never be definitively determined. Like Kant, however, Frye does not take the indeterminacy of meaning in art as a sign that it is without meaning. Says Frye, the poem actually contains every interpretation that every recipient will ever make of its meaning. To wit, Frye, like Kant, sees art as productive of much thought, though no one thought captures its meaning.

If Kant has it that the idea embedded in the artwork is generative of much thought, Frye says the same about the myths embedded in literature: so that myths in literature are to Frye what ideas in art are to Kant. Like all myths, says Frye, literary myths are stories which describe the world in terms of human interest. For Frye, however, the embedding of myth in literature gives world described by literature an imaginative quality, allowing that world to reach to the

limits of human desire and fear; in literature, the mythic world becomes one of endless possibilities where, uninhibited by the limitations of logic or ethics, no possibility is cancelled out by any other. Suggestive of infinite possibilities for human living, the mythic world is one that is a gathering place for thought; which gives voice to everything that those who encounter it might say about it.

Works which embody literary myth most clearly so that they render myth as it was meant originally to be rendered, Frye calls classics, masterpieces or, after Kant, the models of literature. For Frye, literary models have their counterparts in the other arts “[w]here every once in a while we experience in the arts a feeling of definitive revelation. Thus, we may feel after a Palestrina motet or a Mozart divertimento, [that we have heard] the voice of music itself.” In Kantian fashion, Frye says that the model or classic of literature is not original because it repeats the original telling of its story or myth but because it recreates that telling anew, making the story its own. So it is that Frye says of literature, bad literature borrows, classics steal. The literary model, then, is neither derivative, for Frye, nor is it to be copied. Rather, Frye says of the classic, “The effect of studying a masterpiece is to make me admire and do otherwise.” [Here Frye is quoting from the poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins]. For Frye, like Kant, the model is not for copy, it is its clarity that is to be imitated.

**... and the BIG difference.**

And yet, Frye’s use of this very quote – “The effect of studying a masterpiece is to make me admire and do otherwise.” – by which he seems to seal the concurrence of his view of art with that of Kant, is what sets him apart from Kant. For, in the next breath, Frye says that the effect described in the quote, “making me admire and do otherwise,” applies not only to artists, as Kant

would have it, but to the recipients of art as well. For Kant, clarity in art is solely the responsibility of the artist. That is because genius, nature's gift to the artist, is the only productive faculty in art. Taste, nature's gift to the recipient, is a receptive faculty, only. The recipient of art can demand clarity of artists. He cannot produce it – if he views nonsense, even imaginative nonsense then that is what he will see. And yet, when Frye says that non-poets must also admire and do otherwise, Frye must be saying that non-poets are also creators of clarity, only it is the clarity in what they read – not only will they make out clarity in what they read, they will make clarity out of what they read, even if it is imaginative nonsense. In his use of this one quote, then, Frye has shown us his distance from Kant. For Frye, unlike Kant, judgment, especially critical judgment is a productive – a creative act.

**Frye: criticism as a creative act:**

In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye argues that the reception of any poem has two parts. First the poem is a narrative to be received over time. Secondly, however, the poem is an idea (or the image of one) that is to be received simultaneously. So Frye says that, which every poem, not only are we to hear or read the whole of it; we are to do so in order that we might hear or read to whole in it. This critical injunction on the part of Frye extends to the most fragmentary and seemingly incomplete of contemporary lyric poems. In *Modern Century*, Frye says of such poetry that it is as if the poet is handing the meaning of the poem off to the reader and requiring of the reader that they connect the dots, as it were. Certainly, for Frye, this is how criticism should view such poetry.

Fine so far, but Frye anticipates the following objection: how can we be sure that Frye's critical injunction doesn't amount to our filling in poetic gaps, as it were, with our own concerns,

thereby rendering our experience of literature, as an art, into a monument to our own anxieties and, by extension the anxieties of the age in which we live? Frye answers this objection in *Critical Path*, when he says that personal taste is necessary but not sufficient to the critical path, no matter how refined it might be. As well, taste must be trained by way of the study of literature for the ideas in it: that is, the study of myths and how they get themselves into literature.

For an outline of this study, we are referred back to Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, where he discusses the role of archetype in literature. Frye argues that archetypes are symbols of enduring human concerns (concerns are anxieties around the prospect of getting universally recognized goods – getting enough to eat, getting shelter, having freedom of movement, having sex and, of course, the spiritual expressions of such goods, as well: in community, in intimacy, in security, in love). Frye's evidence is that archetypes are symbols that appear repeatedly in all types of literature [even the most fragmentary], from its ancient beginnings to the present: reasons Frye, if they keep popping up they must symbolize something important on people's minds. In literature, the concern expressed by archetypes is explained and addressed in the myths or stories that literature tells about them. For instance, the dragon is a literary archetype and its symbolic significance is revealed only in the totality of literary myths or stories in which it appears. Thus a study of the archetypes that appear in all of literature tells us about the wide range of mythmaking in which even the most fragmentary of poems participate.

But, argues Frye, it is not enough to identify the myths of literature, if our criticism is to do its work, it is necessary also that we study how the myths get into literature: that is, how they become literary. That myths have non-literary origins where they are associated with fact and falsehood is for Frye a given. But, says Frye, myths enter literature when they participate in

literature as an order of words. In describing literature as an order of words, Frye is referring to literature as, more or less, a closed system – where words describe only those things that can be found in literature. And the things that can be found only in literature are fictions: that is, stories that are told neither to tell the truth nor to lie, to paraphrase Sidney again, but simply to demonstrate what words are capable of saying. Ultimately, criticism's job is to show how literature fashions myths into fictions, free of their associations with fact and falsehood so that they can be seen instead as expressions of imaginative possibilities for the address of human concern. As the expression of imaginative possibilities, a myth and its postulates cannot be dismissed out of hand, even if its postulates contradict those of other myths. Rather, the myth simply broadens our view of human concerns and the values that might conceivably be associated with them.

Studied by criticism at what Frye, following Dante, calls the level of anagogy, literature can be seen as tirelessly stripping myth of its existential concretions – its stubbornly persistent associations with fact and falsehood. Frye sees literature as effecting this stripping with all the corrosive acids at its disposal, most especially “satire, realism, ribaldry, and fantasy” and their corresponding genres: irony, tragedy, comedy and romance. This literary stripping of myth is but part of a greater process, for Frye, by which the arts rid the imagination of all the limitations imposed on it by things as they are. Frye concludes, then, that criticism is being creative when it insists on seeing in even the most fragmentary of poems, a tendency in the arts which is dangerous to any existing social order: that tendency of art to take the ideas which men of any age hold dear as the embodiments of truth, or conversely, which men vilify as the embodiments of falsehood and evil and recast them as imaginative possibilities, to be considered alongside other imaginative possibilities. And, of course, Frye's right about this, which is why the brother

of our current mayor, counselor Doug Ford, sees libraries as part of the war on the beloved car, and therefore an evil to be curtailed or limited, at the very least; and Margaret Atwood sees Doug Ford as being at war with the arts. But, really, no society, even the most liberal one, can tolerate the full range and effect of artistic expression and remain as it is. Not even the city of God, says Frye, can entertain such a poltergeist. Art is dangerous ... to things as they are.

### **So why then the advocacy for creative criticism?**

Criticism must train taste to see and promote the danger in literature and art, according to Frye, because the alternative, especially in this the age of the cultural waste land, is for humans to stop being human. Frye's criticism is a criticism meant for this peculiarly modern age, and, says Frye, it is the mangling of culture by the contemporary institution of anti-arts such as advertising, propaganda and mass culture generally [all of which, Adorno would call the culture industry] which necessitates this criticism.

So what does harm does the culture industry do, that it warrants the antidote of a cultural acid bath. For Frye, the great achievement, and the great sin of the culture industry is that it effects what I call a conflation of nonsense and clarity. Under the culture industry, then, criticism can no longer call on clarity as an antidote to nonsense because the culture industry has rendered them practically indistinguishable. According to Frye, the culture industry effects this conflation by endowing all of its products and promotions with the properties of mass advertising.

As Frye describes them, the tactics of mass advertising are really quite simple –though their execution might well be ingenious and complex. They amount to the inundation of a tired populace with the kind of unimaginative nonsense that is designed to exploit infantile

resentments and fears, as well as the confusion of comfort and inactivity. The endless repetition of such nonsense has the effect of making it a commonplace, and the tendency is for people to accept the commonplace as profound, even true. That the commonplace of advertising does not stand up to the least critical scrutiny is no defense against its influence. This is true for three reasons: first, the bromides of advertising are so penetrating that they seep into our mental pores, especially when we are tired and get under our intellectual skin. When we go to make decisions, they are the suggestions that present themselves and are all the more powerful for their having arrived unannounced – we think they are of our own making. Secondly, to deny them is to admit that we are boring and vacuous enough to have allowed them in. Thirdly, they are all we have. Like drug addicts, we cling to the myths in advertising's bromides AS TRUTH, lest we find that we are facing the PAINFUL TRUTH ... about ourselves. For similar reasons, we insist that we are entertained by the other parts of the culture industry, taking the fact that their nonsense has been rendered commonplace as a sign of the artfulness to which they pretend; all the while they are advertising for the advertising. The purpose of the culture industry is to give us the impression that we are being offered and given an artistic escape from reality. The truth is that we are being confirmed in our existing role as consumers, who, like any addicts will do whatever it takes to keep consuming. This confirmation serves the existing order very well.

It is against this influence of the anti-arts in the culture industry, says Frye, that contemporary art, especially the art of the avant garde, has taken a militant stance. To distinguish itself from the culture industry's non-sense which masquerades as art, the avant garde takes pains to ensure that its art cannot become commonplace by rejecting the easy communicability and easily recognized continuity apparent in all in culture industry products. In effect, the avant garde makes imaginative non-sense so that it cannot be confused with the unimaginative nonsense of

the culture industry. For Frye, criticism's job is NOT as Kant says to castigate genius for resorting to nonsense. Criticism's job, the educated recipient's job, is to make clear what art no longer can without losing its integrity. In effect, Frye's view of criticism reflects what Adorno means when he says that under current conditions, criticism had become an actually moment in [or a part of] the work of art – and a necessary one.

What the arts demand of recipients, most explicitly in the avant garde, but generally, as well, is hard work. It is this work that will give recipients something imaginative to work with so that, when they are accosted by the culture industry's bromides, they will not be in the position of those who are dependent on them because ... they have nothing else. Criticism's job is to facilitate recipients in this work. Frye describes the value of critical work in terms of the acquisition of human freedom. And I quote:

The goal of ... criticism ... is the ability to look at contemporary social values with the detachment of one who is able to compare them in some degree with the infinite vision of possibilities presented by culture. One who possesses such a standard ... is in a state of intellectual freedom. One who does not possess it is a creature of whatever social values get to him first: he has only the compulsions of habit, indoctrination and prejudice.

For Frye, art is dangerous...to things as they are. But art has to be so, if it is to be helpful to our becoming what we should be ... fully developed human beings. It is the job of criticism, not to render art benign, as Kant would have it, but to help recipients embrace its danger, and with it, their own humanity which is waiting to emerge.

