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Why Delight in Screamed Vocals? Emotional Hardcore and the Case against Beautifying Pain

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Abstract: Emotional hardcore and other music genres featuring screamed vocals are puzzling for the appreciator. The typical fan attaches appreciative value to musical screams of emotional pain all the while acknowledging it would be inappropriate to hold similar attitudes towards their sonically similar everyday counterpart: actual human screaming. Call this *the screamed vocals problem*. To solve the problem, I argue we must attend to the anti-sublimating aims that get expressed in the emotional hardcore vocalist's choice to scream the lyrics. Screamed vocals help us see the value in rejecting (a) restrictive social norms of emotional expressiveness and (b) restrictive artistic norms about how one ought to express or represent pain in art, namely that if one is going to do so they must ensure the pain has been 'beautified'. In developing this second point I argue that emotional hardcore is well-suited (though not individually so) for putting pressure on longstanding views in the history of aesthetics about the formal relationship between art and human pain.

I know that we more refined Europeans of a wiser, later age know better how to govern our mouths and our eyes. Courtesy and propriety force us to restrain our cries and tears. The aggressive bravery of the rough, early ages has become in our time a passive courage of endurance.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*

Sophocles, such a wise poet of the stage, the first, as it were, to establish morality and propriety on it, who was perhaps alone in striking the right balance in this respect; Sophocles, who with his Philoctetes knew how to transform the agonies of the body into agonies of the soul—how will he have depicted his Laocoön? With a terrible scream as his main attribute? An excellent means of moving our eardrum, but not our heart.

Johann Gottfried Herder, *Critical Forests, or Reflections on the Art and Science of the Beautiful*

1. Introduction

Why should we care to be one of Lessing's 'refined Europeans?' Why, like Herder, prefer art that moves our hearts, rather than our eardrums? In these epigraphs, we find two important figures in classical German aesthetics suggesting that artists who take human pain as their object do well to find a formal mode of expressing or representing it that is compatible with conventional beauty. Roughly, artistic expressions of pain (physical,

emotional) should sound, look, and feel *good*; that is, despite their contents, such works should on balance generate aesthetic experiences which are more pleasant or uplifting than disturbing. Discussing the dramatic arts, Lessing says that ‘[the] closer the actor approaches nature, or reality, the more our eyes and ears must be offended; for it is an incontrovertible fact that they are offended in nature itself when we perceive loud and violent expressions of pain’.¹ The Lessing-Herder lesson for artists is thus fairly simple: if you wish to take pain as your artistic object, all the while remaining hopeful that your work will be properly received, then you must *beautify* it. Otherwise, the audience becomes offended; the work fails to ennoble. The alleged value of beautification is thus twofold: it is good for artist and audience alike.

Andrew Huddleston has recently offered a helpful gloss on Lessing’s thesis. Huddleston discusses a phenomenon he calls ‘aesthetic beautification’, by which he means ‘the artistic expression or representation of something that itself is not, or not ordinarily, beautiful, but representing or expressing it *in a beautiful way*’.² The cases of aesthetic beautification Huddleston considers are ones ‘where a work of art represents or expresses something to which we would, in ordinary life, attribute a negative valence (suffering, horror, death, and the like), but it does so [...] with a “veil of beauty” over it’.³ Huddleston uses Robert Mapplethorpe’s photographic works as an example. ‘Some of his most celebrated pictures depict sado-masochistic homosexual content, but in a highly stylized way with carefully crafted compositions’.⁴ In the case of Mapplethorpe’s photographs, Huddleston says their aesthetic beautification works as an ‘invitation to reevaluate [our] attitudes towards what is depicted, to find in the apparent incongruity of form and content beauty where none might be expected to be found’.⁵ Were these photographs not veiled in beauty, it is likely they would be incapable of generating a valuable type of aesthetic engagement (e.g. spurring reflection). Instead, they would be crudely (and perhaps exploitatively) pornographic.

¹ Lessing, G.E. (1984: 24).

² Huddleston, A (2022: 124).

³ Huddleston, A (2022: 120). The language of a ‘veil of beauty’ comes from a passage from Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* which Huddleston places at the beginning of his essay.

⁴ Huddleston (2022: 130).

⁵ Huddleston (2022: 130). Provoking reflection in this way is just one of the roles Huddleston assigns to aesthetic beautification—this is its ‘subversive’ role. There are two other roles for beautification that he discusses: one hedonic, the other consoling. Of these two, Huddleston appears more interested in working out the details of beautification’s ability to console, and for good reason: the hedonic medication of beautification is in some sense old hat.

Of course, not everyone accepts that the beautification of pain and other negatively valenced objects and emotions is a good thing. Many are familiar with Susan Sontag's remarks on photographs of human suffering. 'Transforming is what art does', she explains, 'but photography that bears witness to the calamitous and the reprehensible is much criticized if it seems "aesthetic"; that is, too much like art'.⁶ And a few pages later: 'Beautifying is one classic operation of the camera, and it tends to bleach out a moral response to what is shown'.⁷ While Sontag's expert knack for ambivalence leaves us unsure where she falls on the issue, we don't have to be as noncommittal. There just are good reasons to put pressure on the Lessing-Herder thesis, and so to be against beautifying pain, or so I will argue here.

I take up this task by considering a specific set of dissenting voices, namely those who, as I shall argue, reject the beautification of pain through their musical works. This is especially true in the case of emotional hardcore music, a genre of 'heavy' music which few contemporary aestheticians pay attention to.⁸ Not only do we find elements of the genre serving as explicit rejections of beautification, but, more interestingly, we have strong reasons to believe that part of emotional hardcore's appreciative value lies in this very rejection. This is especially true when we consider one of its central performative elements – these vocalists *scream* rather than sing the lyrics. As I will explain later, I see this as choosing to allow the music's negative emotional content a form of expression befitting its originally experienced intensity. These vocalists recognize the incongruity of singing beautifully about themes like depression, nihilism, break-ups, and familial abandonment. And fans appreciate this choice; that is, they do not simply value the music's lyrical (emotional, narrative) content, but its lyrical form as well. *They delight in screamed vocals.*

But isn't this puzzling? After all, we ordinarily do not aesthetically value the sound of a human being screaming in pain. To do so seems problematic on a number of fronts, both moral and aesthetic. The same goes for a lot of the 'pain experiences' or 'pain contents' which are deemed fit for undergoing the beautification process. Is there not something odd about the way a director of a true crime documentary is more concerned with the lighting of the set than, say, the mourning parent before them who they're asking

⁶ Sontag, S (2003: 76).

⁷ Sontag, S (2003: 81).

⁸ See Miller, J (2022)

to recount the murder of a loved one? And is it not odd for us, the viewer, to find the whole spectacle rather pleasant to take in?⁹ These examples suggest that appreciating screamed vocals is an instance of a more general problem we run into once we reject beautification. With the beautification of pain cast aside, we end up on dicey appreciative grounds—we seem to be taking sadistic delight in other people’s pain, and since we no longer have recourse to beauty to defend our attitude, we’re in trouble.

As the problem of screamed vocals is an acute instance of the more general issue just discussed, it will be my focus here. A more perspicuous characterization of the problem might go like this:

The screamed vocals problem: Why do appreciators of emotional hardcore music attach appreciative value to screamed vocals, to the point of positively delighting in hearing them, while acknowledging that it would be inappropriate to hold similar attitudes towards their sonically similar (sometimes indiscernibly so) everyday counterpart: actual human screaming?¹⁰

Of all the different genres of heavy or aggressive music, the problem is especially pressing for emotional hardcore, since its screamed vocals are meant to sound like their everyday counterpart (unlike, say, the more demonic screams you find in death metal). To solve the problem, and so to begin to see how we can non-sadistically appreciate artistic expressions of pain in the absence of beautification, we must be able to locate values and meanings in musical screaming which cannot be found in everyday screaming, values which, despite the formal similarities between the art object (musical screaming) and the non-art object (everyday screaming), make an appreciative difference.

My argument will be that the appreciative value of screamed vocals lies in their direct (even if tacit) endorsement of two kinds of anti-sublimation, one emotional, the other aesthetic. The vocalist’s choice to scream the lyrics conveys to the listener the value in allowing painful feelings and emotions an expressive form befitting their original

⁹ We need not appreciate the same things in life as we do in art. Nevertheless, there are clearly certain categories of objects which we so disvalue in life that when we find ourselves aesthetically engaged with them, and enjoying that engagement, some explanation of the evaluative mismatch is called for.

¹⁰ This is not a paper about the ontology of art, nor about the ontology of emotional hardcore. That said, the screamed vocals problem as stated is likely to remind some of Danto’s problem of indiscernibles. See Danto, A (1981).

phenomenology, especially their originally experienced intensity. The result is that screamed vocals work to upend restrictive social norms of emotional expressiveness, which is something appreciators value.¹¹ This is the value of emotional anti-sublimation.

When it comes to aesthetic anti-sublimation, I will argue that emotional hardcore rejects the kind of aesthetic beautification we find in Lessing and friends. As an artistic aim, anti-sublimation interacts with the *meaning* of the music so as to make the appreciative difference needed to solve our puzzle (this is my general claim). This transformation in meaning subsequently transforms the normative contours of the listening experience, and this is what justifies the appreciator in attaching value to the sound of human screaming, when ordinarily that would be inappropriate. Echoing Danto's aesthetics (which I come to later), the musical screams of emotional hardcore embody a meaning that everyday screaming does not.¹²

Here's how things proceed. Section 2 connects beautification to general ideas about the transfigurational power of art while also touching on and rejecting one way of defusing the screamed vocals problem; it also introduces popular evidence that many *do* react negatively to musical screaming. Section 3 gets deeper into emotional hardcore, introducing some of its features. Section 4 makes the initial case that emotional hardcore is against the beautification of pain. Section 5 brings the problem into sharper relief by considering its connection to the frequently discussed paradox of painful art. Sections 6 and 7 discuss emotional hardcore's anti-sublimating aims, arguing for their respective values. Section 8 distinguishes my solution to the screamed vocals problem from one found in Jerrold Levinson's discussion of the related 'paradox of musical masochism'. Section 9 concludes by returning to the normative aspect of the screamed vocals problem, where I draw on Danto's aesthetics to offer a solution.

2. The Transfigurational Power of Art

The question the screamed vocals problem raises is what the appropriate appreciative response is to artworks containing human screams of physical or emotional pain,

¹¹ The account I offer here of the value of musical screaming can, I think, apply to other art forms featuring unsublimated expressions of pain, especially the dramatic and performance arts.

¹² I intend this solution to bring Danto's aesthetic theory to mind. However, whereas Danto's theory is devised in response to questions about art's ontology, I have chosen to appropriate elements of that framework to solve a normative problem of appreciation. For the more developed statements of Danto's view of art as embodied meaning see Danto, A (1997; 2007; 3013). For a general criticism of Danto see Carroll, N (1997).

especially where they are intended to sound sonically similar to their everyday counterpart. There is a psychological and a normative component to the question. Psychologically, it is puzzling why some positively delight in the sound of human screaming in art while taking no pleasure in hearing everyday screaming. Normatively, it is puzzling that though there are certain kinds of screams we have defeasible reason not to aesthetically appreciate, when that same kind of scream occurs in an artwork, we might very well be *justified* in taking up that attitude.

Most agree we should not attach appreciative value to screams coming from an aggrieved spouse outside the courthouse; from the psychiatrist's office; or from the teenager who just got dumped outside the coffee shop. Encountering someone who did not share this judgment, we would likely find them evaluatively askew. One could try to argue, however, that this judgment is too quick, since context matters. If, for example, you know the psychiatrist in question subscribes to the non-standard practice of 'primal therapy', then hearing the screaming coming from their office might please you, since you take it as a sign that the patient is working through their pain. But here the appreciative value being attached to the screaming is moral or interpersonal, not aesthetic. Even if you were to use the term 'beauty' in describing this person's screamed emotional release, the charitable interpretation would understand you as saying that acts of healing such as this one possess *moral* beauty. But if you were actually meaning to say that you find it nice to aesthetically regard this person's trauma, to treat it in an art-like manner, then I think we'd be vindicated in our earlier verdict that you are evaluatively defective.¹³

Imagine Sam attaches value to everyday screaming because he likes hearing the far upper reaches of the human vocal register; he is an admirer of the sounds the human voice is capable of producing, especially the ones it rarely produces given that so much of human utterance only falls within a certain sub-range of the total volume of the human voice. Knowing what Sam likes, we introduce him to Tracey Emin's short film *Homage to Edvard Munch and All My Dead Children* (1998).¹⁴ The film opens with a naked Emin crumpled into a foetal position on a wooden dock in the Oslo Fjord (allegedly, a location

¹³ One could think that, like a patient in primal therapy, the screamed vocalist is not currently in pain – they're just going through 'pain motions'. Given the inward-directedness of emotional hardcore's lyrical content, however, the screams often seem to be expressing a deep pain, whether near or distant; and the same can be said of the patient in therapy. If this is true, aesthetic appreciation looks inapt.

¹⁴ Or maybe we have him watch the pilot episode of *Twin Peaks* so he can enjoy Grace Zabriskie's startling scream as Sarah Palmer. Thanks to Anthony Cross for the example.

Munch used for several of his paintings, and possibly as the background of *The Scream* [1893]).¹⁵ After initially confronting us with Emin's naked body, the camera pans out to the surrounding waters, glimmering from the sun, shortly after which Emin unleashes a deathly scream, not letting up for almost a full minute.¹⁶ When the film ends, Sam tells us about what a marvellous aesthetic experience it was listening to Emin scream. At first glance, there doesn't seem to be anything wrong with this. Unlike the case where Sam tells us how fortunate he was to have walked by the coffee shop earlier that day, just as the dumped boyfriend was letting rip his scream of pain, we feel no impulse towards moral censure. In fact, we agree with him: Emin's screaming is wonderful. But isn't this a problem? Isn't there *some* kind of tension between our attaching appreciative value to Emin's screaming but none to its everyday counterpart? After all, we're dealing with the same formal-expressive medium.

A natural response here is the flat-footed one: this is a film, this is art. Presumably, the argument goes, we do nothing wrong when we attach appreciative value to the aesthetically relevant elements of an artwork. And Emin's screaming is just that – it is a central element of the film. Sonic similarities aside, there is no problem valuing artistic screaming. When we enclose human screaming in an art context, it is necessarily transfigured into an object worthy of aesthetic appreciation—the screams become art (or at least a part of a work of art). This is why we are justified in liking Emin's screams, but not the dumped teen's.

This response to the general problem of artistic screaming rests on familiar ideas about the transfigurational power of art, especially when it comes to works featuring human suffering. Art is commonly thought of as having the power to transfigure physical and emotional pain, transforming it into something beautiful and therefore potentially worthy of positive aesthetic appreciation. Lurking implicitly in these discussions is the idea that we owe a certain amount of gratitude to art for its special ability to bring before our attention things we ordinarily do not like attending to so that they become appreciable in a way we can tolerate, thus setting up the conditions for a beneficial engagement. This is why Lessing thought that the Greek master who produced the Laocoön Group was so deserving of praise. They were able 'to attain the highest beauty

¹⁵ The details are recounted in Fuch, R (2006).

¹⁶ For a wonderful discussion of Emin's short film as it relates to empathic engagements with art, see Johnson, C (2010).

possible under the given condition of physical pain'.¹⁷ What was the alternative? Ugliness, apparently. Lessing asks us to 'imagine Laocoön's mouth forced wide open, and then judge! Imagine him screaming, and then look! From a form which inspired pity because it possessed beauty and pain at the same time, it has now become an ugly, repulsive figure from which we gladly turn away'.¹⁸

Surely, we can imagine something similar being said by the large mass of individuals who cannot fathom (a) why a vocalist would decide to scream, rather than sing the lyrics, and (b) how anyone could enjoy that non-beautified sound. Anecdotally, I can report on reactions to 'screaming music' (as detractors like to call it) ranging from the refusal to grant it music status, to demanding to know why anyone could enjoy listening to it, to criticizing the artistic skill of the performers. Casting such remarks aside as so much aesthetic conservatism would seem an apt response were it not the case that even some self-identified fans of heavier, more aggressive music share Lessing's sentiment about screaming in art.

Several years back, on the Reddit thread [r/LetsTalkMusic](#), a user wrote in with a question about 'Screaming vocals and why people find it abrasive'. It inspired a thoughtful discussion on the aesthetics of musical screaming. Here's one response, from the user 'texture':

It's terrible. What does the screaming add? It's not melodic. It doesn't harmonize. It's not even rhythmically appealing. It's not aligned emotionally with the rest of the music.

Some of these complaints are echoed by others. More than one user noted that screaming is without harmony or melody. Another concurred that 'screaming reduces the impact that the actual lyrics have'. But the more interesting replies came from those who identify as fans of heavier music but who nevertheless find certain styles of screaming off-putting. A user called 'Change_you_can_xerox' said that they like a lot of different types of screamed vocals, but the kind they 'find unpalatable is the emo/post-hardcore/metalcore type that's usually a guy that sounds like a teenager shouting in a nasally tone that just

¹⁷ Lessing (1984: 17).

¹⁸ Lessing (1984: 17).

comes off to me as irritating and trying too hard to sound angry and coming off as petulant’.

As we will see in a moment, this characterization is not wholly true to the main style of screaming found in emotional hardcore. Still, I think it’s fair to say that the kind of scream being criticized is closer to what we find there than in, say, death metal. But that’s not what’s important. What matters is that negative reactions to the kind of musical screaming that is my interest here remain popular among fans and non-fans alike, which suggests that many find the lack of beautification in emotional hardcore to be an appreciative hurdle. If you’re going to sing your pain, make it pretty!

3. What is Emotional Hardcore?

According to the foregoing discussion, the oddness of liking artistic screaming is thought to disappear once we allow for a certain gloss on the transfigurational power of art, i.e. the beautification of pain. Can this not apply in the case of emotional hardcore? Consider the facts surrounding the artistic construction of screamed vocals: they are accompanied by musical instrumentation; recorded in the studio (or the garage); creatively written; and sung and re-sung to get them to sound right. Do they not, then, have all the hallmarks of an object which the artist intends to transfigure, rather than leave in its original, non-aesthetically-transfigured form?¹⁹

I do not wish to deny that *some* type of artistic transfiguration is at work in emotional hardcore. Nevertheless, I will argue that whatever transfiguration is in play here, it is not of the beautification variety, since emotional hardcore is against the very idea of beautifying pain. Applied to this genre of music, our problem still needs a solution. But it will have to be one that factors in emotional hardcore’s rejection of beautification while also explaining why that aspect of the genre is something appreciators positively value. We also need to know how it is that they can adopt that attitude while avoid becoming sadistic admirers of human screaming. Before getting there, I’d like to say a little more about the musical genre up for discussion.

By ‘emotional hardcore’ I mean the style of music typically associated with some of the bands included in emo’s first and second so-called ‘waves’, and the current bands

¹⁹ This logic applies equally to non-musical cases as well. The art context transfigures Mapplethorpe’s otherwise exploitative photographs and makes them worthy of viewing; and it does the same to the physical and emotional brutality of Eugene O’Neil’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (1956), or Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* (1995).

which play in their shadow.²⁰ Here are some earlier bands which can be uncontroversially classified as emotional hardcore acts: Indian Summer (1993); Portraits of Past (1993); You and I (1996); Saetia (1997); On the Might of Princes (1999); Hot Cross (2000). More recently, we have: Touché Amoré (2007); State Faults (2010); Dreamwell (2017); and Frail Body (2019).²¹ (Add more if you like; I have no interest in policing genre boundaries.)

But what exactly is the style of music these bands play? What is the emotional hardcore ‘aesthetic’? Here we should follow Jesse Prinz on the aesthetics of punk rock and avoid trying to give an ‘inclusive’ aesthetics of emotional hardcore that would identify necessary features.²² Rather, when we talk about an ‘aesthetics of x’, we should take that in both a narrow and a broad sense. Sticking with Prinz, thinking *narrowly* about emotional hardcore’s aesthetic involves thinking about the music’s capacity for producing ‘sensory pleasure’ in the listener in virtue of its formal properties. Thinking *broadly* about the aesthetics of emotional hardcore, by contrast, will mean considering it as an ‘art-making tradition’, where, for Prinz, that involves listing ‘the features considered valuable within a community of people who make or consume art’.²³

What features of emotional hardcore are likely to be considered valuable by its community of fans? First, there is a concern for musical dissonance. In a recent review of Indian Summer’s album *Giving Birth to Thunder*, writer Ian Cohen notes that ‘[t]here is nothing medium about Indian Summer’.²⁴ Cohen says the album’s ‘defining moments are like a flash flood—torrential, merciless, and not even remotely beautiful, mowing down everything in its path’.²⁵ The musical dissonance of emotional hardcore comes in the form of fast tempos, sloppy melodies, grating guitars, quick transitions from loud to soft, plenty of distortion, and the spastic and often uneven quality of the vocals. Referring to Indian Summer, Cohen says they are ‘anti-groove’.

Second, looking at emotional hardcore thematically, we see it often engages themes of self-disappointment, anxiety, abandonment, love, loss, longing, existential

²⁰ Ian MacKaye, core member of DC Punk acts like Minor Threat and the infamous Fugazi was notoriously dismissive of the label ‘emo’, saying that all hardcore music was emotional. For my part, I do not see much use in being strict about which bands fall in which waves of emo.

²¹ These are the years of the band’s first EP or LP.

²² Prinz, J (2014: 584).

²³ Prinz, J (2014: 583).

²⁴ Most tracks on *Giving Birth to Thunder* appear first on *Science 1994* (some under different names)

²⁵ Cohen, I (2019).

emptiness, sadness, nihilism, and a slew of other emotional and existential maladies. For instance, at the chaotic crescendo of their track ‘Woolworm’ (alternatively titled ‘Angry Son’), Indian Summer’s vocalist Adam Nanaa screams the lyric, ‘I am the angry son!’, expressing his anger and sadness at his father’s having abandoned the family at a young age.²⁶ Here’s Nanaa:

My brother and I came from dysfunction. That’s what we knew. [...] I didn’t know shit about politics, so why would I sing about that? My old man bailed on us when we were right out of the womb. When you start screaming [“I am the angry son”], it’s hard to read that any other way’.²⁷

As a further example of emotional hardcore’s steady preoccupation with generalized angst and anxiety, consider the lyrics found at the end State Fault’s track ‘Moon Sign Gemini’ off their album *Clairvoyant* (2019):

I drank a spell from your wishing well
And joined my heart with the night
But it could never quell
My sleepless worry

As is the case with so much of this music, here we find an explicit reference to pangs of the heart, and the emotional (sleepless) anxiety they produce.

One thing that thus marks emotional hardcore off from its earlier relative, hardcore punk (especially the D.C. scene), is its preponderantly inwardly-directed lyrical content. We don’t find quite the same heightened concern with large-scale social evils and issues of justice and state violence that we find in punk music (we just saw Nanaa admit without regret that he knows nothing of politics).²⁸ Instead, emotional hardcore’s narrative content is typically about problems that are intensely personal. And even when that is not the case, that is, even when the problems sung about are problems we all face,

²⁶ Cohen, I (2019).

²⁷ Shipley, K (2019).

²⁸ Of course, we don’t find this in all punk – still, as several of Prinz’s examples make clear, punk rockers like to make claims about the existing political order. Prinz (2014: 585).

the lyrics often remain focused on illuminating an inner, highly particularized experience without remarking on its objectively shared features.²⁹

The last element of emotional hardcore I'll mention is of course that the majority of its vocals are *screamed* (though sometimes they're yelled or groaned; and other times they might be better classified as whimpered). As already noted, there are other music genres which feature screamed vocals, e.g. various forms of metal. But one difference between the screamed vocals in emotional hardcore and the screamed vocals in other heavy or aggressive music is that the latter are not as concerned with maintaining a connection to the vocal patterns and cadences of everyday screaming. A lot of the screamed vocals found in various kinds of metal—especially those with classic rock influences—can be rightly classified as a kind of 'sing-screaming', where the screaming or yelling follows a constructed melodic pattern that is meant to resemble the way a song is classically sung, rather than the way a human being typically screams. For instance, a classic metal scream (or growl) seems to follow vocal patterns we can find in standard rock music with its non-screamed vocals. Obviously, this is not true of all sub-genres of heavy music. For example, when it comes to grindcore (e.g. Napalm Death) or death metal (e.g. Cannibal Corpse), the musical screaming we encounter borders on the animalistic and otherworldly, sometimes sounding as though it is straight out of a horror movie. But then this also marks these other kinds of musical screaming off from the kind found in emotional hardcore music. For while we might take the grindcore vocalist as intending to remind us of our animality, and the death metal vocalist to be reminding us of the 'devil within', neither appears to be aiming to sound like the ordinary person in the grip of emotional pain. Where a death or doom metal scream can tend to sound inhuman, emotional hardcore screams are *unmistakably* human.

To recap, some noticeable features of emotional hardcore include musical dissonance, inwardly-directed lyrical content, and screamed vocals. Of course, there are other elements we could discuss: bad recording quality; the blurred line between recorded tracks and live performance; lack of formal vocal training; and certain prominent

²⁹ On a view like Lessing's, this would be another criticizable feature of the genre, and one which speaks against beautification. Lessing praises Sophocles' Philoctetes for his resilience to pain, noting that '[his] pain has not so dried his eyes that they have no tears to shed for the fate of his old friends [...] (Lessing 1984: 29). Too much emotional self-preoccupation, as we find in emotional hardcore, thwarts beauty.

philosophical themes (e.g. existential despair, nihilism). Still, I assume this is enough to give someone unfamiliar with the genre a sense for it.

Now on to solving the screamed vocals problem.

4. The Initial Case Against Beautifying Pain

In this section, with the help of a few examples, I begin to make a case for the claim that emotional hardcore is against the beautification of pain. Listening to Saetia vocalist Billy Werner's screams on tracks like 'An Open Letter' or 'Closed Hands', it is hard to miss their intentionally disharmonic and dissonant character, two features which makes his vocals sound more like 'non-singing' than 'sing-screaming'. The same goes for Touché Amoré vocalist Jeremy Bolm, especially his screams on their first LP *...To the Beat of a Dead Horse* (2009). At the end of the track 'Honest Sleep', the instrumentation stops, and all we hear is Bolm, throat dry, voice raspy, screaming:

I'm losing sleep, I'm losing friends
I've got a love hate love with the city I'm in
I'll count the hours, having just one wish
If I'm doing fine there's no point to this

To be sure, as with all vocalizations, musical or otherwise, we can discern a pattern to Bolm's screaming if we wish. But the point is that the vocal patterns we often hear in emotional hardcore music typically flow from the spontaneous and natural expressiveness of the human voice, rather than from some kind of regimented choral contrivance. The emotional hardcore vocalist has not hired a voice coach; no one needs to be taught how to scream.³⁰

This thought about the disharmonic character of screamed vocals is further supported by the song-to-song prosodic variability we detect in the music. Again, this can be attributed to the unevenness of the screamed human voice. This is unlike, say, pop music, or even so-called 'melodic' hardcore, where, if the vocalist fails to sing the right note, attain the right timbre, or follow the prescribed melody the vocals will re-

³⁰ There of course will be certain exceptions to this, e.g. various speech pathologies.

recorded.³¹ However, given the impoverished economic conditions in which a lot of early emotional hardcore bands make their music (or at least their first EPs), multiple attempts to ‘sing it right’ are virtually unheard of. But more to the point: what would it even mean to ‘sing it right’ in this case? This is not about mastering a predetermined and ideal vocal expression of the inner state the vocalist is singing about; it’s not about ‘sounding good’ according to the standards of ‘having a good voice’. Rather, this is about letting the inner emotional state spontaneously dictate its own formal mode of expression, regardless of whether it ‘sounds good’ according to classical standards.

The intentional absence of, and unconcern with, explicit musicality is the main piece of evidence why it is right to think emotional hardcore rejects beautification. This is part of a larger point, namely that a central feature of emotional hardcore is that the vocalist *intends* their musical screaming to be sonically indiscernible from its everyday, non-musical counterpart. They simply scream the way any human being might, and they do this instead of ‘sing-screaming’, and also without trying to conjure up something demonic. But what (non-sadistic) value can this have for appreciators? *How can they like this?* That is the next question that needs to be answered.

5. Parallels with the Paradox of Painful Art

How can we explain the delight appreciators take in screamed vocals? Given the structure of the problem, it is tempting to seek answers in discussions of the more familiar ‘paradox of painful art’ (‘paradox of tragedy’, ‘paradox of painful music’).³² According to Matt Strohl’s recent survey of the terrain, the paradox of painful art involves two claims: ‘(1) people ordinarily avoid painful emotions and (2) people actively seek out experiences of art that involve painful emotions’.³³ In the case of emotional hardcore, the problem is that we ordinarily find screams of emotional pain hard to listen to, yet when they figure in the music, we find ourselves actively enjoying listening to them.

³¹ Obviously, the singing can sound different from song to song on a pop album because the singer is aiming to hit different notes or to sing different songs in different keys. But that is not what is going on in emotional hardcore. Arguably, the vocalist is not aiming to hit any notes at all. This is something emotional hardcore obviously shares with its punk rock ancestor. See Prinz (2014: 586; 588).

³² For discussion see Levinson, J (2011); Smuts, A (2009; 2011); and Strohl, M (2019). For a recent collection featuring several essays on this theme see *Suffering Art Gladly: The Paradox of Negative Emotion in Art*, ed. Jerrold Levinson. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

³³ Strohl (2018: 1).

Of the kinds of cases Strohl discusses, the screamed vocals problem is most akin to the case of noisy music: ‘When I listen to some punk, metal, and avant-garde jazz, I feel agitated. I particularly like music that makes me feel this way’.³⁴ One point Strohl makes about the noisy music case worth highlighting is that it shows how we cannot always account for the positive valence of a painful art experience in terms of some distancing mechanism, and this has the result that we should be careful about adopting any kind of ‘totalizing’ solution to the paradox.³⁵ There are going to be cases that push us in the direction of pluralism, and Strohl thinks that is a good thing.

For my purposes, what is especially noteworthy about the noisy music case is that it is the *formal* elements of the music which are responsible for the listener’s being enjoyably agitated, rather than the music’s emotional content.³⁶ It is in this way that the screamed vocals problem could be taken as an instance of the paradox of painful art. In other words, the problem is not why we like music with sad, angry, and depressing emotional *content* (although surely that is something to be discussed); the problem is why we delight in the formal mode of expression that that sadness, anger, and depression takes. Similarly, the noisy music problem is not the problem of why we like agitating content. (What even is the ‘content’ of a track which records the sound of a fork being turned over and over in a gerbil’s wheel against the backdrop of a cement mixer?) Rather, it is the problem of why we delight in sounds that typically agitate us.

Strohl does not say explicitly how he prefers to solve the problem of noisy music, although we can guess he will utilize his idea of ‘strong hedonic ambivalence’. Given ‘the phenomenal heterogeneity of pleasure’, says Strohl, there could be ‘cases where an overall experience has the pleasure structure partly in virtue of some element having the pain structure’.³⁷ Why not apply this strategy to the screamed vocals problem it?

The answer I am inclined to give is that, for many appreciators, when the experience of hearing screamed vocals is pleasant, the best explanation for this is that the *whole experience* is pleasant – none of its elements have the pain structure. To be sure, appreciative variation exists. Setting aside cases of ironic dislike (‘her scream is so bad

³⁴ Strohl (2018: 2).

³⁵ For a discussion of the ‘distancing-embracing’ model of negative emotional enjoyment see Menninghaus, W et al. (2017).

³⁶ It seems a real question whether noise music even has explicit, rather than merely inferred or guessed-at, content.

³⁷ Strohl (2018: 6). Strohl draws inspiration from Aristotle’s theory of pleasure.

that the music is good'), I do think it is typically true that finding a vocalist's scream unpleasant is enough to make it the case that one's total experience of the music is unlikely to be a hedonically ambivalent affair.³⁸ That said, I am happy to give some ground to the Strohl-style take on the problem so long as we don't push aside the very real experience of finding some screamed vocals to be simply delightful, goose-bump producing, awesome. In such cases, *there is nothing negatively valanced about the musical experience*. And that makes it unlike the case of liking some artwork overall because of how unpleasant some part of it is.

If we are going to dip into the literature on painful art to solve our problem, it will be worthwhile to look at accounts which argue that we can non-ambivalently enjoy artistic representations of pain. In her paper 'Playing with Fire: Art and the Seductive Power of Pain' (2014), Iskra Fileva discusses the phenomenon of artworks whose emotional contents hit 'too close to home', and which we value for that very reason.³⁹ Fileva thinks artworks that convey all-too-human messages—that love comes to an end; that we all die; and that for many of us our deaths will be without grace and dignity—liberate us and make us feel respected as the mere humans that we are. According to Fileva, this liberation is '*intoxicating*: in art, we can give voice to concerns we don't quite know how to address'.⁴⁰

How does this constitute an answer to the paradox of painful art? The guiding idea behind Fileva's analysis is that 'painful art feeds on conversational restrictions'.⁴¹ Elsewhere in the paper she says that it challenges 'conventional conversational boundaries, as well as boundaries of thought'.⁴² The value of painful art is thus to be found in the way such works converse with agents about elements of human life they are often unlikely (or unpermitted) to discuss amongst themselves, where the reasons for this reservedness and hesitancy have to do with norms of conventional conversation.

In the next two sections, I appropriate the spirit of Fileva's response in order to solve the screamed vocals problem. The main difference will be that whereas Fileva focuses on restrictions to the emotional *content* of everyday conversation, and the value

³⁸ Recall the reddit comments from earlier: those were people who didn't like a band *because* they didn't like the screamer.

³⁹ Fileva, I (2014).

⁴⁰ Fileva, I (2014: 180-181).

⁴¹ Fileva, I (2014: 181).

⁴² Fileva, I (2014: 180).

that arises when artworks flout them, I focus on restrictions placed on *forms* of emotional expressiveness by the social norms governing self-expression. I hope to show that part of the reason why appreciators attach value to screamed vocals is because they carry the meaning that we ought to allow our emotions and feelings a form of expression befitting their originally experienced intensity; thus, they serve as a frontal, in your face endorsement of *emotional anti-sublimation*.

6. Emotional Intensity and Emotional Anti-Sublimation

A quick look at Freud's view of sublimation will get us going. Freud defines sublimation as 'a process that concerns object-libido and consists in the instinct directing itself towards an aim other than, and remote from, that of sexual satisfaction; in this process the accent falls upon deflection from sexuality'.⁴³ Freudian sublimation is a process by which an agent's sexual energies are redirected towards something other than sexual gratification: artistic creativity, busy work, meditation. He also says that through sublimation our sexual instincts undergo a change in 'accent'. Before sublimation has occurred, what is accented is the object of our sexual attraction (or perhaps just our sexual arousal itself). But after sublimation, it is the 'deflection' that gets accented, rather than the original object. One way to understand the change in accent that occurs through sublimating one's sexual instincts is to see it as augmenting the experienced intensity of the original instinct. Through the sublimating process, the original sexual instinct finds a new form of expression that is, for all intents and purposes, incongruous with the form of expression it originally sought, i.e. sexual activity.

Lying in the background of the Freudian account of sublimation is the thought that our sexual instincts initially seek a form of expression congruous with their originally experienced intensity. Sexual energy seeks sexual intercourse as the primary means of release, rather than, say, painting, distance running, or meditation. But of course it would be very bad for others and ourselves if we always allowed our sexual energies the precise form of expression they seek (expression in sexual activity). Thus, we have become accustomed to sublimating them in morally and prudentially acceptable ways.

We can tell a similar story about our ordinary human emotions and feelings. Although they often seek a form of expression befitting their originally experienced

⁴³ Freud, S (1961: 94).

intensity, they are hardly ever able to achieve this, since the set of social conventions governing emotional expressiveness we have erected, and which we stringently enforce through behaviours ranging from strict verbal disavowals ('stop doing that') to dirty looks is inherently restricting. On a daily basis human agents are normatively prescribed to find ways of expressing their emotions and feelings that are incongruous with their original intensity. This is true of both pleasant and painful emotions. Our research team makes a breakthrough, and we cannot contain our joy; we want to high-five or hug our colleagues. But unless we are intimately acquainted with these colleagues to the point of knowing they are comfortable with it, we recognize that it is not professionally appropriate to express our joy through such physical contact. Instead, we sublimate a truly intense experience of elation and relief into the commonplace and plain exclamation: 'good job'!

Turning to the painful emotions, who hasn't been told that 'if you're angry, don't shout; leave the room'? Who hasn't felt like releasing the weight of an awful day right here and now, by crying at the grocery store, screaming in traffic? And yet we pull up short, converting our tears into deep breaths, or turning on the radio or Spotify to allow Taylor Swift or some other pop star to sing our sadness for us (and in a way that is much more beautiful than our unfiltered bawling).

The screamed vocals paradigmatic of emotional hardcore music are an explicit rejection of these socially restrictive norms of expressiveness. To see the bite of this point, consider how we respond when people tell us how they think we should feel. This policing of our emotional contents can be frustrating or annoying in a mild case, and patently offensive in a serious case, since for the most part I am going to feel how I feel regardless of how you tell me I should feel. Because emotions are recalcitrant, I can easily ignore your emotional policing; often, it doesn't register with me at all. Restrictions on the formal expression of emotions, however, are harder to disregard.⁴⁴ We are well-schooled in ensuring that by the time a negative emotional state is outwardly expressed, its expressive form is socially palatable. This shows that whereas it is difficult for us to shed emotional contents at will, it is fairly easy for us to manoeuvre between different ways of expressing those very same states. While I can fairly easily ignore you telling me that I

⁴⁴ It goes without saying that some forms of sublimation are pro-moral and pro-social and should be encouraged for that reason.

should not feel angry, or that my feelings should not be hurt (again: I will feel what I feel), it is harder to ignore the interpersonal suggestion (which could become a command) that I leave the room rather than start yelling and screaming.

But this is precisely what the musical screamer intends to reject through their choice to scream, rather than sing, the lyrics. As fans, we appreciate screamed vocals for the way they give expression to the idea that we ought to allow our emotional pain a more natural, more unbridled form of expression, one more closely in tune with the original experience. The vocals are our chance to remember what unaestheticized, unsocialized pain sounds like. Seeing a live show is similarly a chance to remember what that looks like. To be sure, I am not denying that there is a kind of minimal artistic transfiguration at work here. My claim is only that this species of artistic transfiguration is not of the beautifying variety for the simple reason that the vocal expressions of emotional pain have been left in their natural-expressive form. This is what I mean when I say that emotional hardcore serves as a frontal endorsement of emotional anti-sublimation.

7. Aesthetic Anti-Sublimation

We find a classic art-historical representation of the relationship between music and pain in the so-called myth of Apollo and Marsyas. According to the myth, the two engage in a musical contest, Apollo playing the lyre and Marsyas the flute. Whoever plays more beautifully wins. Their prize? They get to do whatever they want with the loser. As the myth is told, Apollo wins, after which he decides to punish Marsyas by flaying him alive.

Why inflict such a horrible punishment on the loser of a musical contest? Andreas Dorschel, reflecting on Jusepe de Ribera's representation of the myth in his painting *Apollo and Marsyas* (1637), gives an answer: 'Pain and screaming preclude music; at the same time, the penance executed demonstrates that Marsyas's music had too closely resembled a scream to start with: It had been steeped in bodily expression'.⁴⁵ Thus, we have something like the following *Apollonian* justification of Marsyas' punishment:

The Apollonian justification: Pain and screaming preclude music. As a musical form, flute playing closely resembles screams of pain; indeed, it *too* closely

⁴⁵ Dorschel, A (2011).

resembles them. Therefore, in playing the flute, Marsyas has in fact done something anti-musical, thereby gravely affronting musical beauty.

What I find significant about the example of Apollo and Marsyas is not the specific claim that pain and screaming preclude music. Rather, it is the more general one that artistic representations of pain are permissible *only when the artist has sublimated that pain and thus transformed into something beautiful*.

If we contemplate that the artist has already begun the sublimation process by deciding to find an artistic expression of their emotional pain, we notice that this Apollonian demand is effectively asking one to undertake a *second* act of sublimation, one occurring at a higher order than the first. The artist is asked not only to turn pain into art (first-order sublimation), but to turn it into *beautiful* art (higher-order sublimation). But notice that even if screamed vocals could be counted as sublimating at the first order via the minimal sort of artistic transfiguration discussed in section 2, they are nevertheless patently against second-order sublimation. Screamed lyrics are not intended to be beautiful in that sense.

This second point is the strongest evidence we have for the claim that emotional hardcore is against the beautification of pain. Indeed, as I conceive of things, aesthetic beautification is the pinnacle of aesthetic sublimation (life sublimated into art); thus, aesthetic *anti*-sublimation (life non-sublimated into art) is a direct endorsement of aesthetic anti-beautification. Moreover, I submit that appreciators have no qualms with music that is so ‘steeped in bodily expression’ that it cannot conform to standard models of musical beauty (to use Dorschel’s characterization of the Apollonian complaint). The attitude of the typical emotional hardcore fan with respect to screamed vocals is that emotional pain can be taken up as the subject matter of the musical arts without the artist(s) having to beautify it.⁴⁶ Put differently, screamed vocals of the sort found in emotional hardcore do not disturb what we might think of as the ‘life-element’ of human pain (which has an obviously important bodily component). The same cannot be said, I

⁴⁶ This is not to deny that on some occasions, for some bands, listeners may very well have preferred for the vocalist to subject her voice to beautification. After all, it could turn out that I do not to like that vocalist’s way of screaming, and think she would’ve been better off with a more conventional vocalization of her pain. Thus, it is not true that I should always hope a particular vocalist gives her emotional pain the ‘apt’ formal expression. Depending on the level of vocal skill, some pain should be screamed, and some should be sung. Thanks to an anonymous referee for calling this to my attention.

conjecture, for, say, Taylor Swift's sad songs, or Apollonian sculpture. These are *too* beautiful to bear the right formal similarities to life.

8. Levinson on Expressive Potency

At this stage, it might help to make explicit the sort of strategy I've been using to present a solution to the screamed vocals problem. I have taken the natural step of trying to point to some value(s) or reward(s) which the musical experience of screamed vocals carries in hopes of showing that that is enough to explain our positively valuing hearing them, despite the surface level puzzlement in our doing so. This is effectively the approach Jerrold Levinson takes in his paper 'Music and Negative Emotion'. One of these rewards is what he calls 'expressive potency'.

If one begins to regard music as the expression of one's own current emotional state, it will begin to seem as if it issues from oneself, as if it pours forth from one's innermost being. It is then very natural for one to receive an impression of expressive power—of freedom and ease in externalizing and embodying what one feels. The sense one has of the richness and spontaneity with which one's inner life is unfolding itself, even where the feelings involved are of the negative kind, is a source of undeniable joy.⁴⁷

Levinson has unquestionably hit on one of the more profound elements of some of our listening experiences. There are occasions where hearing even just one note of a piece of music can produce a kind of clarity about our inner experience, where the feeling is that of the music's having been able to reach into us and retrieve, for external contemplation and articulation, something that has been plaguing us. The music becomes a means of self-clarification and self-knowledge.

I am happy to acknowledge some overlap between the reward of emotional anti-sublimation and Levinson's reward of expressive potency. Sometimes, hearing a musical scream of emotional pain moves us to imagine that we are the ones screaming. From there, we might enter a state of self-clarification whereby we come to know just how

⁴⁷ Levinson, J (2011: 328). Thanks to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to explore the connections between what I say here and Levinson's idea of expressive potency.

emotionally hurt we are, and this in turn can be an acknowledgement that we really ought to be ignoring social conventions of emotional expressiveness; we ought to be screaming, since that is what the emotional state we are in expressively calls for. At the very least, we can be pleased with the acknowledgement that someone is letting rip a good scream, even if it is not us.

That said, I think there are two reasons why the values discussed in the last two sections—emotional anti-sublimation and aesthetic anti-sublimation—are not wholly equivalent to the reward of expressive potency. First, note that Levinson is trying to find something that would make having a negative musical experience worthwhile. The presupposition here being that there is something masochistic about subjecting ourselves to negative emotions through art, and so we need an explanation of the rewards accompanying this kind of behaviour. Hence the name of his problem: ‘the paradox of musical masochism’. But this is not the problem I am responding to here, and so even if expressive potency applies in the case of screamed vocals, it may not work in a way that solves the problem. Let me say more.

As I see things, the screamed vocals problem is much closer to the problem of musical sadism, and thus it has a different starting point than the paradox of musical masochism. Levinson focuses on the initial oddity of the appreciator’s liking feeling *pained* by the music *in their own person* (noting that the pain often goes away once we are made aware of certain rewards the experience brings). My concern, on the other hand, is the oddity of the appreciator’s liking feeling *pleased* or *delighted* by the formal expression or representation of *another person’s* pain. In the case of musical screaming, even if we answer, ‘the pleasant feeling comes from the expressive potency of the experience’, that doesn’t yet make us any less sadistic, since we’re still delighting in a formal object (human screaming) that we ordinarily should (and do) not delight in.⁴⁸ Attending to the sadistic element of this experience shows that there is a normative component to the screamed vocals problem which is not immediately apparent in Levinson’s paradox. Thus, we should be careful about how we apply his solution. It may not capture our full concern.

⁴⁸ Although this doesn’t strike me as common, we can allow for cases where the appreciator identifies with the pain behind the scream, and, subsequently, finds themselves pleased by the pain this identification produces in them. In a scenario like this, we could say there is something masochistic about liking screamed vocals. Thanks to a referee for suggesting this point.

Second, I've also argued that experiencing screamed vocals is valuable in how it makes us aware of art forms which reject the artistic demand of beautification. Creating opportunities for audiences to experience expressive potency could be one valuable element that comes out of a more general artistic drive to be against beautification. But it strikes me that non-beautification's implications are more wide-ranging than simply what it does for the audience. For instance, the goal of aesthetic anti-sublimation could inspire artists in their art-making pursuits without them giving any thought to what their art may provide to its audience.

9. Answering the Justification Question

By way of conclusion, recall the normative component of our problem: how are we *justified* in attaching appreciative value to screamed vocals all the while acknowledging it would be inappropriate to hold similar attitudes towards their sonically similar (and sometimes indiscernible) everyday counterpart? The suggestion of the last few sections has been that the former, but not the latter are intended to express certain valuable anti-sublimating aims, and that this makes a justificatory difference. The lingering issue, however, is that these values are importantly connected to the non-beautified quality of the musical screaming. But real life screams are similarly non-beautified. And so couldn't the values of non-beautification and emotional anti-sublimation be present in them (values which, as I've been arguing, it make senses for a person to value)? If the two classes of scream are equally non-beautified, then what really makes the appreciative difference?

I will draw on Arthur Danto's aesthetics to address this final worry, with the secondary aim of revealing the larger art-theoretic orbit in which the ideas discussed here find themselves.⁴⁹ Danto famously gives two necessary conditions for art status: aboutness and embodiment.⁵⁰ It is in virtue of being *about* something that artworks 'possess meaning.'⁵¹ But lots of things possess meaning without being art. For example, a bedroom in a disgusting state of disarray could 'mean' that Tracey is lazy, or that her life is unravelling. That doesn't make Tracey's bedroom scene art (even though it is 'about' something). For Danto, what transforms something possessing meaning into art

⁴⁹ The application of Danto to issues of non-beautified art is especially fitting in light of his reckoning with the 20th Avant-garde in Danto, A (2003).

⁵⁰ Most notably in Danto (1997), but the ideas are already there in Danto (1981).

⁵¹ Danto (2007: 125).

is the way the meaning it possesses is embodied in the work (plus some art historical and critical facts). This leads Danto to define artworks as *embodied meanings*.⁵² Thus, the reason Tracey Emin's bed ('My Bed', Tate Modern, 1998) is art, whereas her bed (her *bed* bed) is not is because this particular presentation of inner disarray, of a life's unraveling, tells us something about the phenomenon that its everyday counterpart does not (and the artworld recognizes as much). Nodding to Kant, Danto will say that 'My Bed' is art, whereas my bed is not, because only the former is an 'aesthetical presentation of ideas'. To say that artworks are 'embodied meanings' is thus just to say that they are objects which intentionally present or express ideas.

Without committing to Danto's ontology, it is hard to ignore that his view nicely explains why I am permitted to take up a certain attitude towards Emin's bed ('My Bed') which would be ill-fitting in the case of her *bed* bed, or my bed. In expressing an idea, 'My Bed' means something that other beds do not, and this meaning interacts in interesting ways with the normative stakes of the experience.

Applying this insight to the screamed vocals problem, this is what we get: musical screaming *means* something that everyday screaming does not. In other words, screamed vocals transform the meaning of emotional pain so that our focus turns towards the values of emotional anti-sublimation, non-beautification, and original forms of human expression. And this alteration in meaning can go some way towards lessening the worries about musical sadism, since I am not actually delighting in the pain itself, but in these richer meanings it carries. In this way, we've come back around to art's transfigurational power, but by an alternate route, one more suitable for solving the screamed vocals problem. For the essential thought is that differences in meaning can penetrate through similarities in formal medium to the point where the very same form—a scream, a bed, a Brillo box—will start to sound or look different, with this transformation then opening space for a wider range of appreciative attitudes.

The second noteworthy thought from Danto has to do with the way differences in meaning interact with the values objects express. More often than not, what an everyday scream of emotional or physical pain means is that someone is in emotional or physical pain, plain and simple. When this is the case, the only value to be acknowledged or

⁵² Danto (1997; 2007; 2013).

appreciated is the humanity and dignity of the person in distress. To look for anything more, like the value of emotional anti-sublimation, would be to turn their pain into a spectacle.

Here, then, we return to problems concerning the blurring of art and life that we've been engaged with from the beginning, and which become especially acute for art forms which reject beautification, as I've argued emotional hardcore does through its adoption of screamed vocals. Two objects, the 'life object' and the 'art object' might be their names, can possess enough formal similarities so as to demand similar appreciative attitudes on the part of the spectator (and they likewise store similar values). From there it becomes a question of how willing we are to allow ourselves to be taken in by the spectacle of one, but not the other. As an artistic spectacle, the screamed human voice signals the values of non-beautification and spontaneity of emotional expressiveness—this is the formal mode through which these values come to mean something they otherwise would not. Whether we then wish to turn around and treat actual human screaming in the same way, that is, whether we wish to transfer the meanings of the art object to the life object, depends on our eagerness to make more of that experience than its practical-moral substance calls for. Doing so would be to take a step towards making a spectacle, making art, of everyday life—a prospect as tantalizing as it is sinister.⁵³

⁵³ Thanks to audience members and attendees at the 2021 Southern Aesthetics Workshop at Auburn University for their probing questions and comments on a much earlier version of this paper. Special thanks to my commenters: James Shelley and Jeremy Killian. I would also like to thank David Fisher and Matt Strohl for discussing some of these ideas with me, and Rachel Zuckert for her extensive comments on a middle draft. Lastly, I am grateful to two anonymous referees from this journal for their many productive comments and criticisms throughout the review process.

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