OXFORD

Looking for Profundity (in All the Wrong Places)

Bence Nanay

I. INTRODUCTION

It does not happen very often that one short paper opens an entire new subfield of a philosophical discipline. But this is exactly what Peter Kivy's 1990 paper "The Profundity of Music" achieved. In a couple of years after Kivy's paper appeared, all philosophers of music, who previously, like Charles Swann in Marcel Proust's novel (Proust (1913) 1992), would have found it difficult to utter the word 'profound' unironically, all began took this concept very seriously.

The problem Kivy (1990) draws our attention to is this: we do call some musical works profound. However, Kivy argues, given that a work is profound only if it is about something profound and given that music (or "music alone") is not about anything, this leads to something of a paradox: how can music be profound if it is not about something profound?

My aim in this article is to give a Kivy-esque answer to this question, which might be more consistent with Kivy's work in the philosophy of music in general than Kivy's own take on the profundity of music. The upshot is that what makes a work profound is not that it is about something profound, but that it actively challenges any straightforward interpretative activity (while at the same time nudges you to keep on trying to interpret it). I argue that this line of argument is very much in tune with Kivy's general theoretical commitment that "music alone isn't about anything" (1990, 204).

II. KIVY ON PROFUNDITY

Kivy points out a tension between the following three claims. First, that there is such a thing as profundity in music. His recurring examples are Beethoven's late quartets and Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Another helpful example from Stephen Davies (2002) is Bartok's Music for *Strings, Percussion, and Celesta* (1936). His second claim is that "music alone isn't about anything" (1990, 204)—something Kivy defends at length throughout his oeuvre. Finally, the third claim is that profundity (both in general and specifically in the case of music) is a matter of content. I want to focus on, and question, this third premise.

Kivy gives three necessary conditions for profundity in general. It is important that he does not suggest that these three necessary conditions are jointly sufficient. He explicitly talks of "at least three conditions" (1990, 203)—there may be others. Here are the necessary conditions that need to be satisfied by a work to count as profound:

1. it must be able to be "about" (that is, it must possess the possibility of a subject matter) (203);
2. it must be about something profound (which is to say, something of abiding interest or importance to human beings) (203);
3. it must treat its profound subject matter in some exemplary way or other adequate to that subject matter (function, in other words, at some acceptably high aesthetic level) (203–4).

Kivy arrives at these three necessary conditions by considering profundity in literature. And while he spends a fair amount of time elaborating on musical examples of profundity, his discussion of literary profundity is rather quick. He compares Goethe's *Faust* and Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*. The former is profound because it "deals with deep philosophical and moral matters" (Kivy 1990, 203), whereas the latter is not, because it is "a clever, frothy comedy of manners with no depth at all, meant to amuse and to be enjoyed" (203).

One may question this assessment. The philosophical ideas in Goethe's *Faust*, are, arguably, not particularly original and they could be even described as superficial in comparison with other romantic authors of that period. One could also argue that Wilde's play, in contrast, has a number of astute observations about human nature that are much more original (and deeper) than anything Goethe had to say in *Faust*. Nonetheless, it is difficult to disagree with Kivy's contrast that *Faust* is a profound work and *The Importance of Being Ernest* is not. But it is questionable that this contrast aligns with the contrast about the profundity of what these works are about.

Kivy introduces the Goethe and Wilde contrast in order to emphasize the importance of the profound content for profound works (that is, condition (2)). But, he argues, profound content is not enough. We also need condition (3). The profound subject matter needs to be treated in an exemplary way. But this is not an obvious condition either. Take the highly popular and critically acclaimed sitcom *The Good Place* (NBC, 2016–2020). *The Good Place* is about highly philosophical subject matter—the meaning of life, the importance of living a moral life, and so on. And there is an important sense in which this subject is treated in an exemplary way—in a way that both critics and the general public can only praise. Nonetheless few people would call *The Good Place* profound.

This is not intended to be a counterexample. Kivy is very explicit that (1), (2), and (3) are necessary conditions for profundity and there may be other necessary conditions ((4), (5), (6)). Maybe some of these other necessary conditions fail to be satisfied in the case of *The Good Place* and that is what rules it out from being profound. This example merely aims to show how Kivy's three seemingly clear necessary conditions are in fact far from clear.

III. WEAKENING KIVY'S CONDITIONS

Many philosophers of music offered ways of weakening Kivy's conditions in a way that would lead to a more plausible account of profundity in music. This almost always took the form of weakening Kivy's condition (2). As we have seen, according to Kivy, for a work to be profound, its propositional content needs to be something profound. So, the aboutness in question is a fairly strong version of aboutness: propositional content.

In the philosophy of mind, where the concept of aboutness or intentionality comes from, it used to be the norm to equate aboutness with propositional content. The reason for this is that contemporary philosophy of mind is an offshoot of philosophy of language. Most formative figures of modern philosophy of mind started out as philosophers of language. This is hardly surprising—almost everyone in that generation started out as a philosopher of language. But this focus on language left its mark on the way we now think about the mind and about representations in general.

Sentences represent the world. As do some of our mental states: thoughts, beliefs, and desires. And we understand pretty well how sentences represent the world. So, a tempting way of thinking about the mind is that its building blocks are very much like the building blocks of language: that mental states represent the world the way sentences do. Sentences express propositions. So, again, it is tempting to think of mental states as representing propositions: as propositional attitudes: beliefs, desires, and thoughts. The belief that Paris is the capital of France is an attitude to the proposition that Paris is the capital of France. The general suggestion then is that we can describe any example of representation or aboutness by appealing to this economy of propositions.

While this way of thinking about intentionality was the orthodoxy in the 1960s, it is now widely rejected at least in philosophy of mind. Perception, for example, represents the world, but it has been widely argued that it does so in a nonpropositional manner (Burge 2010; Crane 2009; Nanay 2013, 2015a; Peacocke 1992). And if we open up the possibility of nonpropositional representation in general, then it becomes clear that Kivy's account of profundity presupposes an unjustified equivocation between aboutness and propositional content.

If we do not equate aboutness and propositional content, there are various ways of weakening Kivy's condition (2). The general idea is that the necessary condition for a work to be profound is that it is about something profound, where this aboutness relation is something weaker than propositional content.

Jerrold Levinson (1992, 1996), Stephen Davies (2002), Julian Dodd (2014), and Aaron Ridley (2004) all choose this path to criticize Kivy's account of profundity.[1] Dodd replaces propositional content with "*artistic meaning*: the familiar kind of meaning uncovered in the skilful and sensitive interpretation of a work of art" (2014, 304). Ridley argues that music "intimates" (rather than propositionally represents) an attitude towards the world (2004, 153–4). For Davies, a work is profound if it "exemplifies and thereby reveals about" something profound (2002, 355).

Levinson aims to replace Kivy's propositional content with an "informal notion of *aboutness*" (Levinson 1992, 58). More precisely, he also sets three conditions for profundity:

> 1) it explores the emotional or psychic realm in a more insightful or eye-opening way than most music; 2) it epitomizes or alludes to more interesting or complex extra-musical modes of growth and development than most music, and gives us a vicarious experience of such modes; 3) it strikes us as touching, in some fashion or other, on the most fundamental and pressing aspects of human existence—e.g., death, fate, the inexorability of time, the space between aspiration and attainment. (1992, 59)

These four proposals (Dodd's, Davies's, Ridley's, and Levinson's) are very different from one another, but one thing they agree on is that Kivy's way of understanding aboutness is too demanding. Kivy's response (again, generalizing over important differences not only between Dodd's, Davies's, Ridley's, and Levinson's accounts, but also between Kivy's responses to these) is that weakening the aboutness condition makes it too weak, so much so that all musical works will count as profound. And Kivy's aim was not only to show that musical works can be profound, but also that some musical works can be more profound than others. If the only way to save the concept of profundity in music is to water it down to such an extent that it applies to all musical works, then it is not a concept of profundity worth having.[2]

Besides this worry, which is difficult not to take seriously, it also needs to be pointed out that the concepts of aboutness these critics of Kivy's use are much less clear and less well worked out than Kivy's straightforward propositional account. My aim is to move even further from Kivy's understanding of aboutness as propositional content. I argue that profundity does not have anything to do with aboutness.

Kivy's critics (Dodd, Davies, Ridley, and Levinson) all question his necessary condition (2) on profundity. But they all accept Kivy's necessary condition (1), according to which profundity is a matter of aboutness. My aim is to question both of these premises.

Ironically, moving away from the propositionality aspect of Kivy's account of profundity yields a general approach that is much more Kivy-esque in spirit inasmuch as it respects Kivy's general scepticism concerning musical aboutness.

IV. PROFUNDITY IN LITERATURE

As we have seen, while Kivy's analysis of the musically profound is detailed and sophisticated, his remarks on the literary profound, which set up the three conditions on profundity are somewhat quick. I will argue that Kivy's analysis of literary profundity is mistaken. Literary profundity has nothing to do with the subject matter. And the best way to show this is to turn to an undoubtedly profound literary work, Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*. Musil writes: "It is only serious people who could be wicked. … It's the same as the way the operatic villain's always a bass! … 'profound' and 'gloomy' are connected" ([1930–1932] 1979, 264).[3] The connection between profundity and gloominess, darkness, or unclarity is fairly widespread both in the works of the literary greats and also in the history of philosophy. The contrast between profundity and clarity is a recurring theme in another undeniably profound novel, Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. Indeed, not once but twice, Proust contrasts profundity and clarity in the context of describing probably the most famous fictional musical work,

the Vinteuil sonata, where Proust explicitly equates musical profundity with the lack of clarity (Proust (1913) 1992, 377; Proust (1919) 1970, 109).

Nietzsche is an important source of this way of thinking about profundity. He explicitly takes profundity to mean the inability to fathom something's depth (Nietzsche 1889, 27), and this implies the lack of clarity. This contrast between profound and clear crops up at the most unexpected places in Nietzsche's oeuvre, in the most unexpected contexts. For example, "Profundity of thought belongs to youth, clarity of thought to old age" (1878, 289 ["Of vain old men"—no inside joke intended]). But the most evocative passage on this contrast is the following: "Whoever knows he is deep tries to be clear, but whoever wants to seem deep to the crowd tries to be obscure. For the crowd supposes that anything it cannot see to the bottom must be deep: it is so timid and goes so unwillingly into the water" (Nietzsche 1887, 173). In short, something is profound if it is not clear enough to see its depth. A similarly metaphorical exposition of the same idea is also an important theme of the work of Emile Cioran. Here is one representative example: "The amount of chiaroscuro an idea harbors is the only index of its profundity" (Cioran 2018, 99).

These examples are not cherry-picked. While Kivy's account of literary profundity would have been the mainstream view in the era of romanticism (and before), this is no longer so on the post-romantic era. Oddly, this shift is quite salient if we contrast Kivy's two literary examples. Kivy's account of profundity would have been close to Goethe's heart. On the other hand, Oscar Wilde's constant conflation of depth and superficiality (see, for example his *De Profundis* ((1891) 2002)) could not be further from it.

My aim is to take these profound observations from some of the masters of literary profundity seriously, both as a guide to how we should think about profundity in general and, more specifically, about musical profundity.

V. PROFUNDITY VS. CLARITY

The Musil-, Proust-, and Nietzsche-inspired idea is very simple. How can we tell that the water in a lake is deep? It is deep if we cannot see the bottom of the lake. If you see the bottom of the lake, the water cannot be deep. Same with artworks. A literary or musical composition is profound if it is difficult to see how it works, if it is not clear what is going on, or if the feeling of fluency is missing. To sum up, a work is profound if it actively challenges any straightforward interpretative activity (while at the same time nudges you to keep on trying to interpret it).

A few aspects of this way of thinking about profundity need to be clarified. First, what I mean by "interpretative activity" is not necessarily an intellectual process. It encompasses all of our (voluntary, but even involuntary) activities during aesthetic engagement: attend to the work in a certain way, for example (see Nanay 2015c, 2016).

Second, in some sense murder mysteries challenge our interpretations. Does that make them automatically profound? No, it does not. Murder mysteries may intentionally hide an important clue and frustrates your attempts to interpret the unfolding events, but this frustration is, so to say, local, not global. You know exactly what kind of interpretative strategy you should approach the murder mystery with, but none of the specific interpretations you are trying out seem to work. In the case of profound works, in contrast, you have no idea what kind of interpretative strategy you should approach the work with.

Second, how is being profound, understood as actively challenging any straightforward interpretative activity (while at the same time nudges you to keep on trying to interpret it), different from being difficult? Difficult works are difficult to interpret. But in the case of profound works, it is unclear what interpretative strategies (whether those are difficult or simple) one should use to begin with.

Third, note that my characterization of profundity consists of two parts. The profound work actively challenges any straightforward interpretative activity. And it also at the same time nudges you to keep on trying to interpret it. These two parts are clearly in tension. I put the latter in parenthesis (and I often omit it below) because much of the theoretical work in the case of music is done by the former. But I return to the importance of the latter part (that the work nudges you to keep on trying to interpret it) in Section VII below.

Again, a literary or musical composition is profound if it is difficult to see how it works—if it actively challenges any straightforward interpretative activity. Thinking about profundity this way can help us to explain many puzzling features of profound artworks.

If profundity means challenging any straightforward interpretative activity, this can explain why we take *Faust*, but not *The Importance of Being Ernest*, to be profound. It is very clear what Oscar Wilde's play is trying to do: whatever else it is, it is a "*piece bien faite*"—a comedy that has the entertainment of the audience as its primary aim. And *Faust* is not profound because it "deals with deep philosophical and moral matters" ([Kivy 1990](), 203)—matters, the depth of which, as we have seen, is not obvious. *Faust* is profound because it is not clear what it is trying to achieve. Its code is not easy to crack. It poses interpretative difficulties. Further, these interpretative difficulties are very central to what the work is trying to achieve. Even if the actual "deep philosophical and moral matters" it deals with are not so deep, the work could still be profound as it (unlike Wilde's play) creates obstacles to any straightforward interpretation.

But this understanding of profundity also explains other, somewhat odd features of what makes a literary work profound. There is a systematic positive correlation between the length of a literary work and how profound it is taken to be. Short works are rarely profound. And if they are (Hölderlin's or Paul Celan's poems, for example), they are invariably and notoriously unclear and difficult to interpret. And among the profoundest works are clearly many long novels and almost no short stories or novellas (again, the counterexamples, like some of Chekhov's short stories, actively work against any straightforward interpretation).

This is difficult to explain if we focus on whether the subject matter is profound (even if we allow for the subject matter's being treated in an exemplary manner). Why should length matter for profundity if Kivy's account (or an account in that ballpark) is correct? But the importance of length is easy to explain if we endorse my account of profundity. If profundity is a matter of actively challenging any straightforward interpretative activity, then this is easier to achieve in a longer work than in a shorter one. It is easier to frustrate straightforward interpretative activities in a 3,000-page novel than in a 3-page short story. This is not to say that it cannot be done in a short story or in a poem, but it is more difficult.

Another odd feature of literary profundity is that it is more likely to happen in some genres than others. Profound comedy is rare as is profound thriller. Again, this is not explained by the profundity of subject matter as there is no reason why comedies or thrillers could not address profound subject matter (and treat them in an exemplary manner).

But these genre differences are easier to explain if we endorse my account of profundity. It is very clear and obvious what comedies and thrillers want to achieve: they want to make us laugh or be scared, respectively. They do not challenge our straightforward interpretative activity (and they cannot really do so while also remain bona fide comedies or thrillers).

The same point applies to musical profundity. It is not easy to find military marches or dance music that would count as profound—again, something easy to explain in my framework as we know fairly well what a military march or a piece of dance music is trying to achieve.

Understanding profundity as consisting of systematic challenges to any straightforward interpretative activity can also explain Kivy's most important example of musical profundity: counterpoint. Here is [Kivy's (1990)]() succinct summary of counterpoint: "The challenge of counterpoint, therefore, is, most simply stated, to juggle successfully a complex function of two variables: the number of melodies combined together, and the intrinsic, melodic interest of each of those melodies" (207). Kivy gives probably the most famous instance of counterpoint as an example, namely, Bach's chorale pre-lude on "Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sind." As he says, in this chorale prelude, "each phrase of the melody is treated as a fugue theme, with the counter-subject always an inversion of the subject" (208).

Kivy argues that this counts as a profound work because Bach had written the chorale melody years earlier, so his use of this chorale melody this contrapuntal manner counts as genuine discovery. He did not come up with this melody so that it fits this extremely complex contrapuntal pattern. He discovered of this pre-existent melody that it could be used this way.

The problem with this line of argument is that we do not actually know whether Bach was unaware of these potentials of the chorale melody when he came up with it. It is entirely possible that the use of these melodies in the chorale prelude on "Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sind" was not an act of dis-

covery, but rather the realization of a long-conceived plan. The crucial point is that whether Bach was aware of these potentials of the melody when he came up with it is irrelevant when it comes to judging the profundity of the chorale prelude on "Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sind."

I fully agree with Kivy that the chorale prelude on "Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sind" is a profound musical work. But its profundity would be unchanged if we came across some evidence that he had come up with exactly these melodies because he knew he could use their inversion as countersubject. In other words, even if writing the chorale prelude on "Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sind" were not a genuine act of discovery, this would not change the profundity of the work.

My way of explaining why counterpoints are among the prime examples of musical profundity is much less controversial. As Kivy points out, the challenge of counterpoint is to "juggle successfully a complex function of two variables: the number of melodies combined together, and the intrinsic, melodic interest of each of those melodies" (1990, 207). The salient point is that the audience faces a similar challenge—to juggle incompatible ways of listening to the musical piece.

This is especially clear in the case of Kivy's example of the chorale prelude on "Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sind," where, in order to fully appreciate what Bach does, one would need to attend both to the subject as it unfolds and as it is accompanied by the countersubject and to the countersubject as being the inversion of the subject. If we try to do the former, the latter is almost impossible. And if we try to latter, we lose sight of the former (see, e.g., Nanay 2012). In short, counterpoint compositions systematically frustrate our interpretative strategies (where, again, "interpretative" does not necessarily mean "intellectual").

Another important explanatory benefit of my account of musical profundity is that it can explain why there are more profound works in the era commonly described as modernism than before. Why is there a clustering of profound works in the oeuvre of composers like Schoenberg, Bartok, Stockhausen, Boulez? According to a Kivy-style account, this would be explained by the propositional content of, say, Bartok's music being about more profound subject matters than, say, Haydn's. And, as we have seen, this is not a promising comparison.

Theories of modernism emphasize what they often call the "negativity" of modernism, which is precisely the tendency of works created in this period (ca. 1860–1960, give or take a couple of decades on both ends, depending the art form) to systematically work against all consistent interpretations (some important examples of various versions of this take on modernism: Greenberg (1966), Clark (1982), Krauss (1993), and Nanay (2019)). If this is so, then we should expect more profound musical works in modernism (which does not mean that premodernist works cannot be profound, but they are less likely to be profound).

VI. PROFUNDITY AS AN EXPERIENTIAL CONCEPT

One important feature of this way of thinking about profundity is that it aims to explain when a work is profound in terms of the effect it has on us, not in terms of its semantic properties. In other words, profundity, according to this account is an experiential and not a semantic concept.

A helpful way of thinking about the distinction between semantic and experiential concept of profundity is to turn to the analogous distinction in the context of the depiction literature. Various forms of resemblance theories of depiction all agree that depiction is to be analyzed in semantic terms: a picture depicts an apple if there is some form of semantic or representational relation between the picture surface and an apple (e.g., Abell 2009; Hopkins 1998; Peacocke 1987). There is little else resemblance theorists agree on, but they do agree that what explains depiction is a semantic relation between the picture and what is depicted.

Contrast this approach with the experiential theories of depiction, which claim that what explains depiction is not a semantic relation between the picture and what is depicted, but rather the experience that the picture is supposed to trigger (in suitably informed spectators). Experiential theories of depiction also come in many very different varieties (e.g., Nanay 2015b; Walton 1993; Wollheim 1980), but they all agree that a picture depicts an apple if it triggers a certain kind of experience (where this experience presumably has something to do with apples).

The same distinction between semantic and experiential accounts has been used in other domains of aesthetics as well. For example, should we explain what makes a work a narrative work in terms of

what it is about (Carroll 2001; Currie 2006) or in terms of the experience it triggers (Nanay 2009; Velleman 2003)? And we can use this distinction in the present context as well.

As we have seen, both Kivy and his most influential critics all endorse some version of the semantic theory of profundity—although they differ radically in terms of just what the semantic relation in question is supposed to be (propositional content, intimation, exemplification, artistic meaning, or an informal concept of aboutness). But there have been proponents of what could be interpreted as at least gesturing towards an experiential approach to profundity. David A. White, for example, while emphasizing the importance of some semantic categories (and also some formal categories like unity (both in parts and as a whole)) for profundity, writes:

> Concepts such as unity, whole and part, identity and difference are essential elements in the articulation of profundity precisely because these concepts are necessary to any account that purports to describe reality … The work is, of course, not intended to be a sort of musical metaphysics. But if introducing concepts of wide generality can help account for certain prominent features in the experience and organization of the work, then this account articulates profundity by showing how the work can be approached as a simulacrum of reality. (1992, 32–3)

While this way of thinking about profundity is clearly not fully experiential, the allusion to the organization of our experience in terms of unity could be interpreted as a (hybrid) version of the experiential account of profundity. The same goes for R. A. Sharpe's view (2000), which (although it is also best understood as a hybrid account) stresses that profound works open up new (intellectual) possibilities in us.

Owen Hulatt, like Sharpe, talks about the importance of interpretation in the understanding of profundity and he explicitly distances himself from semantic accounts, so much so that he calls the specific form of profundity he aims to explain the "non-semantic profound" (Hulatt 2017, 202). As he writes, "experience is semantically empty (it is not discursively 'about' something general or generalizable), it is completely full in the sense of being about, in, and through, the artwork" (204). Hulatt's view is explicitly hybrid, inasmuch as he claims that there are two forms of profundity, one semantic, one non-semantic and the experiential account (which, as we have seen form the quote above, heavily uses semantic concepts) only applies to the latter form.

These experiential accounts are very different from one another. Some emphasizes the unity of our experience, some its semantic emptiness. They are also very different from my own experiential account of profundity, which emphasizes the breakdown of any straightforward interpretative activity. I tried to show in the last section that my account has significant explanatory benefits that the other accounts lack. I highlight two further such explanatory benefits in the next two sections.

VII. THE PSEUDO-PROFOUND

An important phenomenon in the vicinity is what I will call pseudo-profundity. There are works that want to come across as profound, but they really are not. Some of Damien Hirst's works would be clear examples. Take his work *The Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991). It is a vitrine with a tiger shark inside, preserved in formaldehyde. If anything, this work clearly is very explicitly about deep philosophical and moral subject matters. But is it profound?

Here is another example: Robert Barry's *All the Things I Know*. This is a very simple installation, really nothing but the following sentence written on the gallery wall with simple block letters: "All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking—1:36 PM; June 15, 1969" (1969). Clearly about deep philosophical subject matter (concerning thinking, knowing, and the difference between the two), but is it profound?

I happen to know that Peter Kivy violently disliked works of this kind.[4] You may disagree. Or you may disagree about Barry, at least (I myself think Hirst is a rock-solid case). If you do, you can replace these examples with your own candidates for pseudo-profound works of art.

But Kivy's condition (1) and condition (2) are clearly satisfied both by Hirst's and Barry's work. How about condition (3), the condition about whether the subject matter is treated in an exemplary manner? In some sense both Hirst's *The Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* and Barry's

All the Things I Know treat their subject matter in an exemplary manner. They definitely treat them in an original manner. But why is it then that these works are pseudo-profound and not profound?

Any account of profundity must be able to distinguish pseudo-profound works both from genuinely profound works and from non-profound works. And this double explanatory burden is difficult to square with Kivy's content-focused account (or accounts in that ballpark). A genuinely profound, a pseudo-profound and a nonprofound work can all be about the very same subject matter. So, conditions (1) and (2) are met in all three cases. The proponent of Kivy's approach then would need to keep apart three different ways in which the subject matter is treated. The problem is that while what sets genuinely profound work apart is that it treats its subject matter in an exemplary manner, it seems that both pseudo-profound and nonprofound works treat their subject matter in a nonexemplary manner. But then how is pseudo-profound different from nonprofound? An important *explanandum* all accounts of profundity would need to be able to explain is what genuinely profound and pseudo-profound works have in common and Kivy's approach (or any semantic approach) fails to provide such an explanation.

My experiential account, in contrast, can explain this difference in a straightforward manner. Remember that the view is that a work is pseudo-profound, if it actively challenges any straightforward interpretative activity (while at the same time nudges you to keep on trying to interpret it). Pseudo-profound works also actively challenge any straightforward interpretative activity. This is very clear in the Hirst and Barry examples. And this also explains the common denominator between genuine profundity and pseudo-profundity.

But what is missing in the case of pseudo-profound works is the second part of the characterization of profundity, namely, that while frustrating all possible interpretations, the work at the same time nudges you to keep on trying to interpret it. Hirst's shark does not nudge you to keep on trying to interpret it. Trying to make sense of what the dead shark has to do with the impossibility of death in the mind of someone living is not something that is likely to keep you up at night. And it is equally unlikely that you look at the shark mesmerized and find yourself trying out various different interpretative strategies. This is the major difference between pseudo-profundity and genuine profundity.

One might be tempted to dismiss Kivy's seemingly local and somewhat niche and esoteric idea of musical profundity. I have tried to show, while developing my own take on musical profundity, that this would be a huge mistake. In fact, choosing the right account of musical profundity has wide-ranging implications that can help us to understand a subgenre of conceptual art directly with reference to profundity and pseudo-profundity.

VIII. CONCLUSION: PROFUNDITY VERSUS FLUENCY

In conclusion, I want to draw out an additional advantage of my account of musical profundity. The concept of profundity in general and of musical profundity in particular is difficult to reconcile with the recently popular fluency-centered accounts of aesthetic experience.

According to some psychologists, musicologists, vision scientists, and some philosophers, a distinctive feature of aesthetic experience is the fluency of processing, or, to put it differently, the feeling of familiarity.[5] The feeling of familiarity or of the fluency of processing is what is referred to as a metacognitive feeling. It is not a feeling about something external (like the musical piece) but about our own mental processes. This is what makes it *meta*cognitive (it is a feeling about our mental state about music). There are many different metacognitive feelings: the feeling of surprise, the feeling of familiarity, and so on.

According to the fluency-centered accounts of aesthetic experience, what accounts for the pleasure we take in experiencing artworks and, more specifically, music, is that our processing of the musical piece is accompanied by the feeling of the fluency of this processing. Not only do we process the music fluently, we are also aware of this fluency and it is this awareness of the fluency that explains the pleasure we take in aesthetic experiences of music.

This approach has been criticized for the way it ignores the aesthetic pleasure we can take in novelty (see, for example, Cho and Schwarz 2006, in the context of product innovations). If my account is correct, then the fluency accounts of aesthetic experience have a systematic problem. The experience of profundity is an important and even central case of aesthetic experience, which we value highly. But

if profundity is a matter of the frustration of any straightforward interpretative strategies, then the experience of profundity is the opposite of the experience of fluency. In fact, one way of summing up my account of profundity is that profound works actively work against the fluency of processing.

But then the fluency-centered accounts of aesthetic experience will either have to deny the existence of profound works (both of profound musical works and of profound works of art in general) or they need to restrict their account to nonprofound works. But at the very least they need to provide an account of the tension between the experience of profundity and the experience of fluency in our aesthetic engagement. An account of aesthetic experience that cannot explain our aesthetic experience of profound works is not much of an account of aesthetic experience.

In short, Kivy's emphasis on the concept of musical profundity has extremely far-reaching consequences as long as we endorse a way of thinking about musical profundity that is more continuous with Kivy's oeuvre in general than Kivy's own take on musical profundity. This way of thinking about musical profundity amounts to taking a (musical) work to be profound if it actively challenges any straightforward interpretative activity (while at the same time nudges you to keep on trying to interpret it).[6]

BENCE NANAY, Philosophy, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium. Email: bence.nanay@uantwerpen.be

REFERENCES

Abell, Catharine. 2009. "Canny Resemblance." *Philosophical Review* 118: 183–223.

Belke, Benno, Helmut Leder, Tilo Strobach, and Claus-Christian Carbon. 2010. "Cognitive Fluency: High-Level Processing Dynamics in Art Appreciation." *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 4: 214–22.

Bullot, Nicolas J., and Rolf Reber. 2013. "The Artful Mind Meets Art History: Toward a Psycho-Historical Framework for the Science of Art Appreciation." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 36: 123–37.

Burge, Tyler. 2010. *The Origins of Objectivity*. Oxford University Press.

Carroll, Noël. 2001. "On the Narrative Connection." In *Perspectives on Narrative Experience*, edited by Willie Van Peer and Seymour Chatman, 21–42. State University of New York Press.

Cho, Hyejeung, and Norbert Schwarz. 2006. "If I Don't Understand It, It Must Be New: Processing Fluency and Perceived Product Innovativeness." *Advances in Consumer Research* 33: 319–20.

Cioran, Emile M. 2018. *A Short History of Decay*. New York: Penguin.

Clark, T. J. 1982. "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art." *Critical Inquiry* 9: 139–56.

Crane, Tim. 2009. "Is Perception a Propositional Attitude?" *Philosophical Quarterly* 59: 452–69.

Currie, Gregory. 2006. "Narrative Representation of Causes." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64: 309–16.

Davies, Stephen. 2002. "Profundity in Instrumental Music." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 42: 343–56.

Dodd, Julian. 2014. "The Possibility of Profound Music." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 54: 299–322.

Dokic, Jérôme. 2016. "Aesthetic Experience as a Metacognitive Feeling? A Dual-Aspect View." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 116: 69–88.

Greenberg, Clement. 1966. "Modernist Painting." In *The New Art: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Gregory Battcock, 100–10. New York: E. P. Dutton.

Hopkins, Robert. 1998. *Picture, Image and Experience. A Philosophical Inquiry.* Cambridge University Press.

Hulatt, Owen. 2017. "'Pure Showing' and Anti-Humanist Musical Profundity." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 57: 195–210.

Juslin, Patrik N., and Daniel Västfjäll. 2008. "Emotional Responses to Music: The Need to Consider Underlying Mechanisms." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 31: 559–621.

Kivy, Peter. 1990. "The Profundity of Music." In *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience*, 202–18. Cornell University Press.

———. 1997. "The Quest for Musical Profundity." In *Philosophies of Arts: An Essay in Differences*, 140–78. Cambridge University Press.

———. 2003. "Another Go at Musical Profundity: Stephen Davies and the Game of Chess." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43: 401–11,

Krauss, Rosalind. 1993. "A View of Modernism." In *Art in Theory: 1900–1990*, edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, 953–6. Oxford: Blackwell.

Levinson, Jerrold. 1992. "Musical Profundity Misplaced." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 50: 58–60.

———. 1996. "Pleasure and the Value of Works of Art." In *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*, 11–24. Cornell University Press.

Musil, Robert. 1979. *The Man Without Qualities*, vol. 3. Translated by Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser. London: Picador.

Nanay, Bence. 2009. "Narrative Pictures." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67: 119–29.

———. 2012. "Musical Twofoldness." *The Monist* 95: 607–23.

———. 2013. *Between Perception and Action*. Oxford University Press.

———. 2015a. "Perceptual Content." In *Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Perception*, edited by Mohan Matthen, 153–67. Oxford University Press.

———. 2015b. "*Trompe L'Oeil* and the Dorsal/Ventral Account of Picture Perception." *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 6: 181–97.

———. 2015c. "Aesthetic Attention." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 22(5–6): 96–118.

———. 2016. *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception*. Oxford University Press.

———. 2019. "Portraits of People not Present." In *Portraits and Philosophy*, edited by Hans Maes, 113–132. London: Routledge.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1878. *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*. Chemnitz: Schmeltzner.

———. 1887. *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*. Leitzig: Fritzsch.

———. 1889. *Gotzen-Dammerung*. Leipzig: C. G. Naumann.

Oppenheimer, Daniel M. 2008. "The Secret Life of Fluency." *Trends in Cognitive Science* 12: 237–41.

Peacocke, Christopher. 1987. "Depiction." *The Philosophical Review* 96: 383–410.

———. 1992. *A Study of Concepts*. MIT Press.

Proust, M. (1913) 1992. *Swann's Way*. Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff. New York: Random House.

———. (1919) 1970. *Within a Budding Grove*. Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff. New York: Vintage.

Reber, Rolf. 2012. "Processing Fluency, Aesthetic Pleasure, and Culturally Shared Taste." In *Aesthetic Science: Connecting Minds, Brains, and Experience*, edited by Arthur P. Shimamura and Stephen E. Palmer, 223–49. Oxford University Press.

Reber, Rolf, Norbert Schwarz, and Piotr Winkielman. 2004. "Processing Fluency and Aesthetic Pleasure: Is beauty in the Perceiver's Processing Experience?" *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 8(4): 364–82.

Ridley, Aaron. 2004. *Philosophy of Music: Themes and Variations*. Edinburgh University Press.

Sharpe, R. A. 2000. "Sounding the Depths." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 40: 64–72.

Smith, Lisa F., and Jeffrey K. Smith. 2006. "The Nature and Growth of Aesthetic Fluency." In *New Directions in Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Psychology of Art*, edited by Paul Locher, Colin Martindale, and Leonid Dorfman, 47–58. Amityville, New York: Baywood.

Velleman, J. David. 2003. "Narrative Explanation." *Philosophical Review* 112: 1–25.

Walton, Kendall L. 1993. *Mimesis and Make-Believe. On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*. Harvard University Press.

White, David A. 1992. "Toward a Theory of Profundity in Music." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 50: 23–34.

Wilde, Oscar. (1891) 2002. *De Profundis and Other Writings*. Ware, Herts: Wordsworth Editions.

Winkielman, Piotr, Norbet Schwarz, Tedra Fazendeiro, and Rolf Reber. 2003. "The Hedonic Marking of Processing Fluency: Implications for Evaluative Judgement." In *The Psychology of Evaluation: Affective Processes in Cognition and Emotion*, edited by Jochen E. Musch and Karl C. Klauer, 189–217. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Wollheim, Richard. 1980. "Seeing-as, Seeing-in, and Pictorial Representation." In *Art and its Object*, 2nd ed., 205–26. Cambridge University Press.

END NOTES

1   See also Kivy's (2003) response, and Dodd (2014), Ridley (2004).

2   See especially Kivy's (2003) response to Davies (2002), but see also Kivy (1997)

3   The word that is translated as 'gloomy' here is 'finster,' which could also be translated as dark or ominous. Here is the full quote in German: "«Heitere Menschen» dachte er «könnte man schlechtweg davor gesichert nennen. So wie der Intrigant immer Baß singt!» Irgendwie bedeutete das auf eine nicht ganz geheuerliche Weise auch für ihn selbst, daß tief und finster zusammenhingen."

4   Personal communication, 2008, 2009.

5   Reber (2012), Reber, Schwarz, and Winkielman (2004), Bullot and Reber (2013), Smith and Smith (2006), Belke et al. (2010), Winkielman et al. (2003), Oppenheimer (2008); see also Juslin and Västfjäll (2008) for a summary and Dokic (2016) for a distinctively philosophical analysis.

6