

PHIL 4403: Philosophy of Art  
Prof. Funkhouser  
4/22/05  
Kivy, "The Profundity of Music"

\*We can make sense of profundity in literature: one literary work is more profound than another if it is about more serious, or profound, matters in an adequate manner.

--The problem for profundity in instrumental music is that it typically isn't *about* anything.

--Possible solution: Maybe music can be profound in virtue of *expressing* profound emotions. But, Kivy rejects this:  
"Perhaps profundity arises as a result of a work's concerning, being about, serious emotions. But as, on my view, music expressive of serious emotions is not about them, that it is expressive of them is no grounds at all for ascribing profundity to it." (464)

--Kivy distinguishes between the layperson and musician's judgments of profundity in music. For the layperson, Kivy claims that expression of somber emotions is indicative of profundity. For the musician it is counterpoint.

"Certainly it [counterpoint] has come to be associated with the notion of profundity. But what makes that association more than psychological or sociological? Certainly, that contrapuntal music is difficult to write and venerable with age does not alone speak for its profundity." (465)

--Kivy suggests, instead, that contrapuntal music "seems to us to reveal in some deep sense the very possibilities of musical sound itself." (465)

The contrapuntist is an "explorer". Contrapuntal music is about the possibilities of musical sound. (So, it is about itself, in a particular way.)

--So, it meets one of the conditions for profundity after all—it is about something. Also, it is about something important:  
"...for it is a matter of observable fact that instrumental music is of abiding interest and importance to a significant number of human beings." (466)

Q: But is this sufficient to make the subject matter profound?

\*But Kivy thinks that other kinds of music are profound as well. So, how can he generalize his account so as to cover these others?

--The key notion is *craftsmanship*.

“Supreme craftsmanship is, I believe, the common denominator between counterpoint and other instances of musical profundity.” (466)

Q: What is craftsmanship?

“Craftsmanship in music is the exploration of musical possibilities within some given set of stylistic parameters.” (466)

Q: So, why doesn't craftsmanship go with profundity in other arts (or does it)?

--To be profound, the craftsmanship must be present, but subtly so.

\*Kivy discusses 2 objections:

1. Just because something is of abiding interest, it doesn't follow that it is profound. It must be *worthy* of that interest.  
Kivy, quite honestly, concedes that he has no rational justification for thinking that music is profound (and collecting baseball cards isn't), but he intensely believes it nonetheless.
2. Circularity: “Furthermore, it is not altogether clear whether the general strategy of construing musical sounds as the subject of profound musical works is free of a vicious circularity?” (468)

\*Finally, not all great art must be profound.