CHAPTER TWO

Structures of Stance in Lived Experience

At first glance, applying the notion of stance to particular research situations might seem to be a straightforward proposition. To attend to stance would be to attend to the styles with which composers compose, arrangers arrange, listeners listen, painters paint, and viewers view. However, unforeseen complexity arises from the fact that the production of expressive culture is not merely the creation of physical objects, and reception is not merely registering preexisting forms and bestowing meaning upon them. To the contrary, the production of expressive forms always involves a constituting of those forms in experience, and reception is always an active grappling that influences, not just the experienced meaning of those forms, but the audience's perception of their very shape.[1] As a result, understanding stance requires additional theoretical work. We need to explore the differing forms that stance can take, the ways in which stance interacts with other dimensions of experience, and the question of stance and time. These issues are the focus of this chapter.

Fundamental Dynamics of Stance

When we think of interpretation, the paradigm case we use is often one of judgment or decision. A prosecutor presents her evidence to a jury, and the twelve citizens sit in a room, think about the facts, discuss them, and, in a self-conscious act of judging, render a verdict. A similar model may seem to fit our most naive understanding of language learning. There is certainly no inherent relationship between the sounds "c-a-t" and the furry creature that sits on my lap at the end of the afternoon, and in our everyday theorizing we suppose that a child learns the meaning of "cat" by associating those

sounds with the species *Felis domesticus*. Here, processes of thinking and judging are seen to attach meanings to things as a hat is attached to a head. Of course, such processes do take place in experience and are part of the overall interpretive dynamics of expressive culture; they are, however, only one part of that dynamic, and there are situations in which they do not occur at all. I will refer to any situation in which a meaning is bestowed through an active, self-conscious process as one of *active valuation*.

Active valuation can certainly play a role in experiences of expressive culture, but it is very different from stance, and understanding the relationship between the two is important. As the valual component of the pre-reflexive (though not pre-conscious or unconscious) constitution of lived experience, stance is a necessary part of all experience, while active valuation is optional. For example, the luxuriant pleasure (or moderate enjoyment or crushing tedium) of releasing oneself into the flow of downtempo electronic dance music can be accompanied by distanced acts of critically judging the choice of samples and use of sequencers. But such active valuation need not occur for the music to be meaningful, and it is the manner of engaging with the track in acts of listening and bodily movement that is the source of much of its meaning. When we conflate meaning making with active valuation, we sometimes assume that all situations without active valuation are meaningless and thus turn a blind eye to the rich continuum of meaning that exists in all of our experiences. Such a flawed perspective spawns an equally flawed opposite, a romantic reaction against the scholarly study of expressive culture and ardent claims for the ineffability of "spirit" or "soul" in music or other forms of artistic behavior. The notion of stance can serve as a corrective here by drawing our attention to the chronic nature of value and meaning making in every domain of experience, not just those instances where we bestow meaning through an active and self-conscious process.

The types of qualities invested in stance are as diverse as the forms of meaning in experience. It would be impossible to construct a typology here, but we can suggest landmarks in this territory and perhaps sketch at least one possible way of mapping it. For example, one nearly universal quality of stance is *facility,* the ease or difficulty with which a practice is carried out. In his landmark study *Verbal Art as Performance,* Richard Bauman placed facility of production at the center of his definition of performance: "performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence" (1977:11).[2] We can build on these observations by noting that it is not only in the performance of expressive culture that this facility is important, but also in reception and composition, and that facility doesn't merely refer to the physical production of expressive forms or the real-time composition of text but to the constitution

of experience. Our earlier example was deeply concerned with facility—the composer's smooth or clumsy handling of the rules of voice leading, the performer's deft or awkward articulation of the chords and melodies at the keyboard, the listener's effortless or struggling attempt to follow the key changes and form. Facility is broadly present as a quality of intentional engagement because it stems from the very actuality of our constitution of experience, our ability to have formed an experience at all.

While it is hard to imagine situations in which facility is not present, the meaning of facility and its importance are constructed differently in varying social worlds. The instrumental guitar rock of the 1980s and certain branches of punk music are two straightforward examples of contrasting traditions where facility or infacility, respectively, are valued, but the interpretation of facility is actually a complex issue. In competitive figure skating, it is not raw facility (the mere ability to execute moves) that is valued, but the more fine-grained stance quality of *effortless* facility (the ability to execute moves with no apparent difficulty) that skaters, judges, and fans care about. This contrasts with professional wrestling, which also values the ability to execute complex moves but prizes displays of straining exertion, rather than ease. Further, in those genres of expressive culture for which virtuosity is not a key issue, facility beyond basic competence may be of secondary or even negligible importance. Like other stance qualities, facility can be threaded through lived experience in a rich and complex manner. For example, fans new to jazz may marvel at John Coltrane's effortlessly flowing production of musical lines (i.e., they may hear the facility of his performance) but may at the same time be frustrated at their own inability to follow the fast-moving chord changes implied by those lines (i.e., at their inability to hear the music with a felicitous stance).

Beyond facility there are no universally necessary types of stance qualities or universally applicable typologies that I can discern. However, it will be useful to hazard a list of typical categories, with the full awareness that they are historically contingent, culturally specific, and porous.

Affect, for example, is a broad class of stance qualities. I compose a piece of music with frantic anger or mild annoyance; the art critic views paintings with her heart hardened against them, predisposed to disliking them and intent on revealing their tiniest flaws; the congregant lights the candles with awe and reverence, or distraction and doubt. Affective qualities mix with facility to create *timbres of attention and action*: the theatergoer who watches the play with rapt engagement or the Theater 101 student who reluctantly follows the play's plot to prepare for her test; the professional potter whose distraction is palpable in the tiny cracks in the glaze and the uninspired pattern, or the first timer who eagerly digs her fingers into the clay.

Style is a particularly complex category of stance qualities, mixing the affective timbre of social relationships with qualities of attention and facility. Cool, down home, geeky, solid, flighty, and sophisticated are a tiny collection of possible stance qualities that might fit into the category of style, and teasing out the components of even one of these would be a substantial project. For example, to say that the singing of Canadian vocalist Carol Pope is cool is at least partially to say that the valual quality with which she articulated Rough Trade's songs involved a very specific approach—articulating her melodies with a sure-footed confidence, directing them at her audience with a haughty regard, constituting them in her lived experience with what at least appears to be an intense attention, and all of these qualities of engagement in production and constitution overlain with a thinly disguised rage. When particular styles of intentionality become connected to social groups or social individuals, we have what might be referred to as *stance qualities of identity*—a Neapolitan approach to imagining a line or a heavy metal style of listening.[3]

A possible misreading of these examples can serve as an opportunity to clarify key features of stance and introduce an important concept—*sedimented quasi-stances*. In culturally specific ways of engaging with an object of attention (what I referred to in the previous chapter as noetic sub-modes, such as the composition of a formal study in a music class or playing that study at a recital), stance may seem to be equivalent to style, and, as I suggested above, there is certainly a partial connection between these ideas. Stance refers to the valual quality of intentional engagement, and as the term is commonly employed, style covers some of that terrain. However, the reason that stance and style may seem identical in the previous examples is the high level of abstraction that plays out there. When stripped of its details, stance may seem to be nothing more than "a way or mode of doing something" (as in Dell Hymes's classic formulation of style, 1974:434). The gerund "doing" in this construction points toward action, but the full phrase is a noun phrase, and this is the crux of the matter: when conceptualized as style, stance loses its "act character," a phrase that, as we saw in the last chapter, Husserl used to refer to the agentive and practice component of intentionality. Style is an important concept in its own right, but it is different from stance.[4]

Consider the genre of proverbs. Here, the proverb is the noemata, "telling proverbs" and "listening to proverbs" are noetic sub-modes, and one might be tempted to refer to a particularly parental style of performance as a common performative stance. At first glance, all of this seems relatively straightforward, and the now familiar performance-studies approaches to verbal art in folkloristics—attention to timbre, prosody, and contour—would seem to capture the phenomena that we are interested in here.

In fact, they do tell part of the story. The difficulty is that, *by focusing on regularized features at high levels of abstraction, such analyses capture only the cultural resources that situated practices draw on and deploy, not the performances themselves or their fundamental agentive qualities.* Thus, for example, the chiding tone and singsong rhythm with which a parent intones "a penny saved is a penny earned" are nearly as much a cultural commonplace as are the words of the proverb. Evidence of this can be found in the *Peanuts* animated television cartoons, where the characters of teachers and parents never speak in words but instead use nonsense syllables intoned with a nasal, singsong character; here, the prosody, contour, and timbre of the adults' "dialog" not only communicates meanings but, even in the absence of actual words, also references and evokes the cultural tropes of proverb telling. The *generalized* features of timbre, prosody, and contour in proverb telling here are not performative stance; to the contrary, the chiding tone and singsong rhythm are preexisting cultural resources, and performative stance is the particular way in which they are handled and engaged in a specific situation. Subtle control of stance is exactly what sets apart the high school actress and her over-the-top, clichéd performance of a teacher from a finely trained thespian who puts just the right amount of spin on the words, calibrating this particular performance on this night to those of the other actors and creating a meaning that works with this very specific context. It likewise separates the performance of the annoyed but indulgent father of one from that of the exhausted and long-suffering father of six. While generalized performative features of style are a first approximation of stance, further reflection shows them to be something that the person *has a stance upon* and reveals that stance is the irreducible practice component that inevitably takes up style and adapts it to a given situation. As a result we can think of styles as *sedimented quasi-stances*—abstract and generalized ways of approaching a noema that lack the reality in lived practice (and the attendant three-dimensional complexity) that stances have. In addition, as we saw above, stance doesn't only operate in performance; it also operates in reception and composition, which are less frequently interpreted in terms of style and which also involve an irreducibly practice-based component.[5]

The distinctions between stance and sedimented quasi-stance are basic to a stance-oriented approach to research. Looking at performance in terms of cultures and their styles, we see people and the affective cast of their performances as articulating or exemplifying a preexisting pattern. Looking at performance in terms of stance encourages us to see people in all of their concreteness. Following this approach, we of course understand that all expressive behavior is shaped by its social context and attend to the cultural

resources at play in any given situation; however, we see those resources as sedimented quasi-stances, things that people bring to bear on performance. Further, we go beyond attention to sedimented quasi-stances and seek out stance itself. In doing so, we see the ways in which such resources are taken up in performance, viewing action in all of its inevitable concreteness and the processes by which that full concreteness shapes the meaning of a performance or situation.

Though the stance-quality categories of facility, affect, timbres-of-attention-and-action, style, and identity are admittedly ad hoc and porous, we can be specific and precise about the ways in which stance-laden intentional practices plug in, so to speak, to the differing phenomena of the immediate field of experience. So far I have discussed stance as a relatively unitary phenomenon. But when we consider the immediate lived situation before us, it is clear that we do not relate to it as an undifferentiated, monolithic block. On the contrary, we engage with differing facets of the lived situation in differing ways, and the valual quality of our engagement with those facets could be referred to as *facet stances.* Return once again to our original example of music performance. Our student pianist has always been an "expressive" player; her dynamics are subtle and varied, and her teachers have always said that her phrasing is very musical. At the same time, however, she has small hands and has a hard time remembering long pieces. In her performance of "Composition Study 5" on that evening in early May, her playing is particularly ebullient, with a sprightly tempo and sensitive dynamics in the left-hand accompaniment. Though she plays all of the notes in the piece, there is the slightest hesitation in grabbing the more difficult, spread chords that appear occasionally there, and similar hesitations appear in transitions between the sections. Her relationship to the various elements of the piece—the notated dynamics, the spread chords, the overall form—constitute facet stances. The valual quality of the first facet stance is confident and sensitive, while that of the latter two is awkward and uncertain.

Distinct from facet stance is *meta-stance*—not the stance that one has on one's primary object of attention (noema) itself, but the stance that one has on one's *stance* on that noema.[6] For example, the problems that the pianist had with the spread chords and form were something she could never completely overcome this semester. When she played "Composition Study 5" in January during her lessons for her teacher, every near fumble was followed by a bar or two of very dynamically and timbrally flat performance that lasted until she had controlled her frustration and regained her focus. Her teacher worked with her on this, explaining that even the best performer

makes mistakes and that she can't let herself become distracted by an error when she's in front of an audience. Assimilating this advice took time. In March, near fumbles were often followed by aggressive overcompensation, passages with exaggerated dynamic and timbral shifts. At the May concert, the student pianist still wasn't able to grab all the spread chords in section transitions, but she had improved her relationship to this very failing. When the near fumble occurred, she played right through, with no apparent breakdown in the texture of the dynamic and timbral nuances. "Nearly fumbling awkwardness" is a description of the pianist's facet stance on the spread chords and transitions, and, in the May performance, "unflappability" and "self-assured focus" describe her meta-stance. Meta-stance is not uncommon in performance. Where there are sedimented quasi-stances, as in the Chopin performance discussed in the previous chapter and the "penny saved is a penny earned" example, the unique articulation of those quasi-stances in particular performances can rightly be said to have a second-order quality. Similar examples of meta-stance can be found whenever popular musicians perform or record "covers" (songs originally composed and performed by other bands) or in theatrical revivals.

Because the constitution of experience is a coherent actor's social practice even as it engages a multifaceted noema, the various facet-stances and meta-stances relate to one another in a complex way that may be called *total stance*. Using slightly different terminology, I have discussed one aspect of this phenomenon at length in my earlier work (Berger 1999, 2004), and I will only touch on it here. At any given moment, our experience is organized into a complex foreground/background structure, with some phenomena emerging with sharp detail at the focus, others appearing in a blurry fashion in the background, and still others receding into the ever more distant horizon. Drawing one's focus from one noema to the next, fostering certain constitutive processes and diminishing others, allowing oneself to lapse into a state of vague disattention, or spurring oneself on to an active and alert engagement would all be differing ways in which total stance is manipulated. Such processes of organizing attention are rightly called stances because the intensity with which particular phenomena appear in experience and their place in the overall field of attention unquestionably have a valual quality. When I foreground the melody and background the accompaniment, or foreground the music and background the performer's body language, I don't just move them around in the experiential field; those positions entail differing valences and meanings, and the overall tenor of the experience thus formed is a meaningful whole composed of those valences. This is not to say that phenomena in the foreground are always considered to be the most important or that those in the background are insignificant.

As my previous work has suggested, backgrounded phenomena color and shape those in the foreground, and the meanings attached to differing positions in the experiential field are culturally specific. The point here is that the organization of attention draws the various constitutive processes into a complex whole, and as a result, constitutes the person's relationship to the immediate situation, forming a total stance.

Total stance is a result of direct and immediate relationships among stances. But indirect relationships among stances also contribute to meaning, and in many ways these are the most important of interpretive dynamics. As we have seen, the objects of consciousness are not unitary and undifferentiated; they involve multiple facets. As we have also seen, lived experiences of meaning depend on both the particular object that the subject engages and the stance with which that engagement occurs. Drawing these ideas together, we can observe that the experienced meaning of any given facet is a synthesis of the meaning found in the facet and the facet stance that engages it; if we call this a facet/facet-stance complex, then the overall experience of the meaning of the object is a synthesis of all of the facet/facet-stance complexes.

The language here is cumbersome, but the situation to which it points is intuitive, and an example with somewhat exaggerated contours will make the idea clear. Consider an emeritus professor of piano pedagogy in attendance at the student concert discussed above. Simply out of habit, the professor may listen with a focused and critical ear to the performer's agility on the keyboard, but she may be more forgiving in her partial attention to the composer's treatment of expressive resources. Sharply aware of the sensitive dynamics and the play-them-as-they-lay approach to the difficult chords, and more dimly aware of (and more generous toward) the composition, she finds herself inspired by the music. Describing her experience at the reception after the concert, she tells a colleague that what she heard was energetic youthfulness. "Our tradition has a promising future," she tells her friend. Noting the errors in performance, she admits that there were some rough edges, but she says that these were more than made up for by the composer's smooth control of voice leading and the performer's sensitive dynamics. The impression of energetic youthfulness that the professor experiences is not merely a function of the music sound, even if we consider the sound as a unity of heterogeneous elements made meaningful in a cultural context. To the contrary, her impression is a product of heterogeneous elements heterogeneously grasped, and a meaningful unity brought to that gestalt of gestalts by constitutive practice. If, for example, our pedagogue were to focus with a more critical ear on the composer's bland themes and their indistinct treatment, she might have

been less inspired by the piece's promise of a vibrant future for her musical tradition. However, by paying less attention to the composition and judging it by a lower standard, the main thing that she notices about "Composition Study 5" is the smooth control the composer has over her materials. Here, the relationships among the facet stances and meta-stances contribute to meaning in an indirect fashion, as routed through the facets of the object of her experience.

The notions of facet stance, meta-stance, and total stance are the basic tools of stance-oriented research. Observing events and reading texts in these terms helps us to see the varied elements of meaning that emerge in a person's experience and to make richer and more nuanced interpretations. Moreover, such an approach helps us to understand the meaning of a work or performance, not just as the sum of its semiotic parts—or even as a whole that is greater than the sum of its semiotic parts—but as the result of a person's differentiated and yet holistic engagement with those many parts. In so doing, we get a fuller view of basic interpretive processes.

Exploring the multifacetedness of our engagement with the world leads to a related issue: the multifacetedness of the things in the world themselves. As we have seen, the intentionality of consciousness ensures that stance engages with its objects, and because of the intimacy of that connection, the forms that stances may take are as varied and shaped by culture as the full breadth of experience itself. One cannot, of course, construct a typology of all possible objects of attention or even construct a scheme of categories for describing the types of objects that emerge in experiences of expressive culture. The term *object of attention* can be a misleading one, making us think of experience as populated by nothing but stable, material things; if our phenomenology of stance is to be as rich as it needs to be, it is important to get a sense of the great diversity of such objects. Exploring rules, gestures, and other types of noema, the following series of examples is intended to point toward the variety of objects that people might confront in experiences of expressive culture and to suggest the differing ways in which stance might engage them.

First, consider a game of chess-by-mail. The first player, Trinna, types her opening move on the piece of paper and mails it to her opponent. When the second player, Helena, receives Trinna's letter, she has one day to choose a move, type a response, and mail it off. As in the composition class example, the rules of the game stipulate that the players must not set up a chessboard but must sustain the game strictly "in their heads." In this context, the objects of attention are ideas—actually enacted moves, the current chess position sustained in imagination, and possible next moves.

In thinking about her next move, Trinna paces her apartment, reflecting on her options with aggression or delight, smooth precision or distraction. What constitutes "making a move" here is highly subtle. It may occur only as the letters are typed on the keyboard or the envelope is released into the mailbox. Alternatively, one might argue that such acts constitute only the transcription and communication of the move, and that the actual move making occurs at the moment of decision on the commute to work, when the player has irrevocably committed herself to a course of action. Acts of thought or gesture such as these may be made with certainty or hesitation, resignation or joy. It is worth emphasizing that the complex dynamics of media and expression referred to earlier play out in this example as well. If Trinna and Helena are experienced players, they may have a clear sense of the stance of the other, rightly doping out the intensity or caution of the other player's thinking as expressed in a move that is bold and creative or traditional and timid. If either player is unfamiliar with the game or her partner's style, the other's stance may be harder to ascertain. Here, the objects of attention are positions and moves in the conceptual space of the chessboard (i.e., they are ideas), and stance engages itself with its object, emerging as the valual quality of acts of thinking and imagining. Contrast this with the situation of a musician sight-reading a piece of music. Here, the objects of attention are the score, the instrument, the sound, and the performer's own body; stance in this context refers to the valual quality of acts of reading, playing, and listening. Philosophers in the tradition of Merleau-Ponty and Todes would suggest that both examples involve embodied activity in the sense that there is no thought without a brain to think and in the sense that, as Hubert Dreyfus has argued in his discussion of chess-playing computers (1992), the seemingly disembodied relations of logic such as those among the pieces in a mental game of chess gain their structure and sense from our primary embodiment and engagement with the world. Whatever position one takes on the relationship between mind and body, one can agree that the objects of attention in these two examples are experienced differently and that the noetic processes that engage these objects differ correspondingly.

Many of the examples I have explored so far involve situations in which a performer engages with a pre-composed text. This is not always the case, though, and we can get a richer understanding of the ways in which the objects of experience differ and of the corresponding diversity of stances by returning to an earlier example, inspired by R. Keith Sawyer's work on improvised comedy (1997). In this genre, the pre-composed entity is not a text or a static set of instructions to perform a series of actions, but a more abstract entity—a set of rules. The various subgenres of improvised comedy are

often referred to as "games," so it will be convenient to refer to the most immediate object of noesis in improvised comedy as the move.

Consider a game with the following rules: two actors take the stage and improvise a scene. They can portray any characters that they like, but their roles must be of differing statuses (e.g., a teacher and student, or a worker and a boss); the audience gives the actors a line, and however the scene develops, the actors have to end the scene with that line. If an actor were to take the stage and indicate that she was driving a limousine, that action would constitute a move, in that it sets up the situation and requires all of the other actors to respond to it. The stance would be the affective or valual quality with which the move is made: quickly leaping in to mime steering-wheel gestures or waiting for the other player to make a move; accompanying the driving gestures with the phrase "Where are we off to today, buddy?" (thus defining the setting as a taxi cab), or merely doing the mime, which could indicate a bus scenario, a family trip scenario, or a child driving her Big Wheel. Each one of these differing options indicates a differing stance on the move. Because the predefined elements of the genre specify rules rather than bodily or verbal gestures, there is a second level of noemata here, the *improvised text,* which includes the specific words, gestures, or blocking enacted by the players. Because the improvised text is a key element of the participants' experiences, the participants will have a stance on it as well; for example, the actual words an improviser utters can be said with certainty or fumbled insecurity, the gestures made aggressively or weakly.

For anyone who knows the rules of the game, the moves and the improvised text are distinct levels of experience, and stance in both contexts can play a key role in meaning. Sawyer reports that it is bad form to try to control the direction of a game and not be open to the definitions that other actors bring to an emerging scene. Imagine an inexpert actor entering a scene, immediately miming steering-wheel gestures, and saying to the other actor, "Come on, President Jones, you better not be late for your inauguration"; his mime gestures are crude and sloppy, and his working-class Brooklyn accent is broad. Here, his move is "miming a car and becoming a chauffeur to the president on inauguration day." Angry that he doesn't get enough respect in the troupe, his stance on the move is aggressive, quickly defining not only his role but the scene and the other actors as well. His text is the line "Come on, President Jones, you better not be late for your inauguration" and his miming gesture. As an inexpert actor, he defines the steering wheel poorly and mumbles the words. Here, his stance on the text is the opposite of his stance on the move—uncertain and stumbling, rather than clear and specific. Picking up the earlier terminology, we can observe

further layers. His broad accent is a sedimented quasi-stance; indeed, as an element defining the scene, it might be clearer to call it a *quasi-text* upon which his stance is clumsy and broad. In this example, rules, moves, improvised texts, and actions are the noemata (objects of attention); comedy improvisation is the noetic sub-mode; and the uniquely layered structure of experience is the surface around which the tendrils of stance, so to speak, wrap themselves.

Indeed, stance engages with its object so intimately that even fuzzy and ill-defined noemata engender corresponding stances. Consider the example of Carl, an amateur dancer reluctantly dragged onto the dance floor at a disco by his friends. Carl doesn't like to dance and doesn't know any specific dance moves. In an ill-defined manner, he shifts his arms and legs roughly in time with the music. To the surveillance camera at the club, nothing in his movement is ill-defined. At time X his arm is exactly 2.3 inches from his torso, and by time Y he has lowered his arm by exactly 0.125 inches. However, this gesture is not a dance move per se, to either his partner or to Carl himself. One could call his precise movements a movement text and his listlessness a stance upon that text, but his experience of his movements is not specific enough for that interpretation to be phenomenally salient for him or the other participants. Of course, a choreographer might compose a piece that depicts a reluctant and uncertain movement, and the gestures the choreographer specifies might be the same as the ones that Carl made. Interpreting a performance of the choreographer's piece by a professional dancer, an interpretation of the choreography-as-text and the dancer's stance upon the choreography might be warranted. This, however, is a very different scenario from the one of Carl at the disco. Where the object of attention emerges in a fuzzy manner, the stance will by definition engage itself with that fuzziness. At best we can say that the object is a "generalized dance movement" and the stance is "apprehensiveness and reluctance." It should be emphasized that the fuzziness does *not* come about through an absence of intention, in the everyday, non-phenomenological sense of that term as a preexisting plan set out in words or images. Indeed, dancers can make crisp and well-defined gestures without such explicitly formed, before-the-fact plans. What make Carl's gestures fuzzy are his imprecise proprioceptive self-awareness of the position of his limbs, a vague experience of how those positions might be changing in time, and little coherent connection among the differing moments in his awareness—in other words, a lived experience of both the actual movement and the relationships among its parts that consistently lacks detail or clarity.

Considering phenomena such as these, one might be tempted to suggest that the boundary between the object of attention and one's stance upon it begins to blur. Even here, though, stance does not collapse into its object. The same reluctant dancer could make equally fuzzy and ill-defined movements with a clumsy joy or even with annoyance or rage. Consciousness is always intentionally linked with its object, but, as we have seen throughout, it is fundamental to experience that we can distinguish our immediate objects of attention from the manner in which we grasp those objects—that, contrary to the obscurantist implications of Yeats's rhetorical question in "Among School Children," we can, and indeed routinely do, tell the dancer from the dance. The larger point here is to highlight the intimacy with which stance engages and envelops its objects, even ones that are defined in a loose and fuzzy manner.[7] Taken together, the chess, improvised comedy, and dance examples highlight the diversity of objects of attention that people confront and find meaningful in experiences of expressive culture. An awareness of stance not only sharpens our observations in the field and our interpretation of texts, it also reveals the unity that underlies seemingly disparate phenomena. A chess player's intense attention to a series of moves, a comic's clumsy handling of the rules of an improvisational game, a dancer's tentative relationship to his gestures, or a student pianist's smooth facility with a composition and keyboard: all are forms of stance.

Stance and the Expansive Quality of Meaning

We have now seen some of the basic dynamics of stance. While stance is a fundamental element of meaning in expressive culture, it is by no means the only element, and the next logical step in our discussion would be to explore how stance is related to other modes through which meanings emerge in a person's experience. The dynamics involved here are some of the most fascinating in the phenomenology of expressive culture. Meaning is the fungible currency in the economy of our lifeworld, constantly crossing borders between one phenomenon and its neighbors, one location and the next in experience. A woman viewing a play, for example, sees an actor direct a subtle, leering glance at an actress on the stage; the viewer experiences the glance as vile, and feels uncomfortable as painful memories of sexual harassment in the workplace come forth into her awareness unbidden. News that his favorite political candidate has just won an election lightens a music critic's mood, and he finds himself unusually receptive to a CD from a genre that he normally dislikes. Insecurity about her job and a sense of weakening

race privilege shape a white music teacher's listening during orchestra auditions, steering her attention to every flaw and weakness in an African-American violinist's performance. Examining the expansive quality of meaning is crucial for placing stance in the context of other modes of experience and seeing its relevance for the study of expressive culture.

Before we can explore this topic, though, we need to double back and take a closer look at an issue that is at the core of stance—the act character of experience. Though this discussion will lead us through some more densely philosophical language and into some examples of mundane situations that may seem to be far afield from expressive culture, it is necessary because it lays the groundwork for later analyses. Having a clearer sense of stance itself, we will then be able to make our first approach to the relationship between stance and other modes through which meaning emerges and to gain a series of concepts crucial for the study of expressive culture.

Consider this slightly fictionalized description of a situation from my own life. For the last six months, I have become more and more angry with a person whom I will call Jeff. I felt that he was treating me badly, and the more time passed, the more frustrated I became. One Saturday afternoon, Jeff called on the phone, and to my mind, his words added insult to my still raw injury. After the conversation, I read a magazine and fumed. I couldn't concentrate on the articles, and tired from a long week, I decided to take a nap. I lay down in the bedroom, closed the door and the light-blocking shades, and curled up in bed. With the house quiet, my eyes closed, and no aches or pains, there was little to my experience besides my thoughts. These were enough, though. My last conversation with Jeff dominated my experience and kept me from sleeping. I thought about what he had said, what I had said, what I should have said, and the way his words contradicted his actions in recent months. Angry and hurt, I couldn't settle down; one after another, ideas sped quickly through my mind as I hunted for some new wrinkle or angle on the situation. After a while, I looked at the glowing digital clock. Ten minutes had passed, and I hadn't gotten a wink of sleep. I started to think about how the conversation was ruining my Saturday afternoon and tried to put it out of my mind. Actively forming the words in my head, I thought, "Get some sleep and stop dwelling on Jeff. Think about the novel you are reading instead of spinning your wheels." I actively thought about the plot and the characters, replayed amusing scenes in my mind, and wondered how the book might end. Almost immediately, my thoughts returned to Jeff, and for the next ten or fifteen minutes, I shifted back and forth between thinking about Jeff and thinking about the novel. Eventually, I focused on the more pleasant thoughts, that train of ideas about Jeff became decreasingly intense and vivid, and sleep overcame me.

Certainly, most people can understand this experience. We have all had times when our thoughts dwelt on topics we would rather set aside. The spoiled nap example presents a situation where thoughts were almost the sole object of experience, where the valences were angry and unpleasant, and the fast and aggressive pacing of thoughts was unwanted. It is the phenomenon of distraction, rather than anger or fast-paced thinking, that I want to explore here. To remove those qualities from consideration, let us turn to an alternative example of a young man shopping for items for his plot in the community garden. He takes his plants very seriously, and for the last three years he has participated in the garden's annual competition. Now it's early spring, and he needs to make very specific decisions about the cost, color, and size of the flowers that he wants to grow, their compatibility with one another, the soil, the light conditions, and the rules of the garden association. Walking through the nursery, he is bombarded with images, sensations, sounds, and smells, and he keeps trying to plan out his beds. In past years, he quickly and efficiently tacked between looking at the botanical offerings, imagining different garden scenarios, and considering his budget. However, on this spring day he is one month into a heady love affair, and thoughts of his beloved distract him from the task at hand. Images and thoughts about his lover drift lazily through his mind, and he realizes that he has been at the garden store for an hour without making any headway. He forces his mind to his plot and plans, and for ten or fifteen minutes thoughts of the garden and thoughts of his lover vie for his attention. Eventually the shopping task takes root in his mind, and he is able to mentally sketch out a scheme and buy his items.

In some ways, the experiences of the hypothetical, love-struck gardener are different from those of my spoiled nap. The gardener had a busy, rich sensorium, while mine was limited largely to my thoughts. For him, the distracting ideas were pleasant ones, not filled with anger, and the desired pacing of his thoughts was quick and businesslike, not slow and dreamy. Despite these differences, the dynamics of distraction operate in the same way in these two examples: a train of thought dominates the person's experience, prevents him from doing what he wants to do, and at least briefly resists his attempts to displace it with another. Should such distraction become chronic and interfere with one's ability to carry on everyday activities, one would call it obsession. While relatively few people experience that type of mental illness, distraction is something that everyone has faced, and its unique dynamics can illustrate the relationship between stance and other forms of meaning in a way that less compelling experiences could not.

On a basic level, the phenomenon of distraction illustrates a point raised earlier: we do not merely "have" thoughts. Rather, we have relationships

with our thoughts, and the valual quality of our thoughts is complex and multidimensional. Looking more closely, we see that the phenomenon of thought—distinct auditory forms, or wispy and ephemeral conceptual entities that appear to oneself alone—have affective or valual qualities built into them. The thought "Jeff lied!" is suffused with anger like heat in a glowing coal; pleasure and delight run through "I love Jan!" like the grain in a plank of wood. Further, and this is the situation in which stance can be most clearly seen, the thought does not merely emerge in our experience. We participate in its emergence, and that participation has a valual quality. When I first tried to take a nap, for example, I *embraced* my thoughts about Jeff. I allowed thoughts to tumble forward, grasped them richly, and even scanned what Don Ihde would call the "leading edge" (1976:93) of the living present for each new wrinkle and angle.[8] Later, in an act of reflexive consciousness, I realized that this anger had usurped my original plan to get some sleep. I wanted to have a relaxing nap and get my Saturday afternoon back on track, but the thoughts kept coming nevertheless. Resisting my thoughts of Jeff, I focused on thoughts about my novel and tried to approach my stream of consciousness with less intensity.

Resisting and embracing are, of course, stances in the strict sense of the term I defined in chapter 1 (affective, valual, or stylistic qualities with which a person engages the objects of her attention), and the utility of the distraction examples is that they illustrate the Husserlian "act character" of experience in places where they are deeply intimate. If we consider thoughts only in unproblematic, everyday activities where the flow of ideas from one to the next is unimpeded, it becomes easy to conceptualize thinking as an automatic process and to assume that one's thought and one's engagement with that thought are one and the same. Distraction highlights the act character of both thinking and our stance upon thinking. Resisting or embracing a flow of thoughts, or grappling with or giving into distraction, are the kinds of experiences I want to evoke here, because they offer the most directly lived sense of the act character, not just of thinking and the stances we have upon it, but of stance in general. With everything largely removed from experience but thought, and with anger making those thoughts vividly intense, the napping example highlights stance in its purity and affords a uniquely direct understanding of our topic. Further, these examples illustrate that the valence of thought and the valence of a stance upon that thought are two different things. In the gardening example, there is a clear difference between the valence of dreamy pleasure that inheres in the thoughts of the beloved and the gentle but persistent resistance with which the gardener tries to set those thoughts aside. In the nap example, the distinction is more subtle. The

valence of the thoughts is anger, but the stance upon them is frustrated resistance to thinking about Jeff, not anger per se.[9]

At this point, we may seem to have come far from the topic of expressive culture but are close to the heart of stance, and pursing this last topic will lead us to ideas directly relevant to the study of artistic behavior. The distinction between the valence of thoughts in experience and the stances we have upon those thoughts can be made for all objects of experience. Further, valences move smoothly between locations and modalities of lived experience, changing shape and transforming as they go. Indeed, this traffic and transformation of meaning is more than just an interesting phenomenon; it is one of the fundamental features—perhaps the defining feature—of meaning itself.

By its very nature, the meaning content of individual phenomena involves valences that radiate out, richly interacting with the valences of our noetic processes (i.e., our stances), the global valual qualities of the immediate lifeworld, and sometimes even with the broader, more persistent elements of the person, such as dispositions and capacities. To return to the nap example: as I attempt to sleep, I think, "Jeff lied to me. He told me that he would do X, Y, and Z, but he told Mary that he would do just the opposite. When I called him, he denied ever having committed to doing X, Y, and Z. I can't believe he lied to me!" As I suggested above, the thoughts themselves do not appear in my experience only as pure propositional contents; rather, they are suffused with the valual qualities of energy and pain. Further, that complex of meaning radiates outward to other parts of my experience. On a basic level, the valences of each individual thought shape the pacing and intensity of the ones that follow it. Red hot with pain, the thoughts flow quick and fast from one to the next, glowing with intensity. Early in the example, the valence of my stance is in perfect consonance with the valence of my thoughts; I actively and energetically pull the thoughts forward, searching the horizon of the living present and actively holding them in the center of attention. But the expansion of meaning does not stop here. Meanings may radiate outward to interact with the full breadth of my immediately lived experience. Angrily thinking these angry thoughts, my body tenses, my breathing comes faster, my heart races. I toss and turn on the bed and cannot find a comfortable position for my pillow. This example is almost trivial in its straightforwardness, but most situations involve a more complex traffic and transformation of valence among the forms and modalities of experience. Early in the example, my involved stance stoked the affective intensity of my thoughts; later, though the thoughts were still painful, I actively tried to take a more cool and detached stance. I observed the thoughts, allowing them to pass through experience

without scanning the temporal horizon of the living present for each new nuance or detail, and my distanced stance took some of the pain and sting out of the thoughts.

Examining this situation, we can specify a range of locations and modalities with which valences may appear in lived experience. Teasing out all of the dynamics would require a full phenomenology of affect and meaning, a task far beyond the scope of this study, but I can sketch here some of the forms that valences may take. Consider mood, for example. As a very rough first approximation, we could say that we experience mood as the global affective character of immediately lived experience. Approaching the issue in the style of Merleau-Ponty, we can observe that mood is a property of the lived body, both something that happens to us and something we do. In everyday life, it is common for us to feel that mood operates in each of these ways. In powerful states like depression, overwhelming affective responses weigh the body down, stop thought in its tracks, and install affects of sadness and pain at the dominating center of experience. At the opposite extreme are times when we can exercise agency in affect, shaking ourselves out of a dreamy mood or actively calming a restless anxiety. Speaking very loosely, we can describe mood as the ensemble or gestalt quality of all valences in our experience, a global affective character of the lived body that appears to us as the environment in which we operate. In this context, meaning and valence radiate out beyond the focal phenomena and one's stance upon them to interact with one's overall mood.

Beyond this global character, valences emerge in a range of other modalities and locations within experience. For example, affects can sometimes appear as discrete, objectlike phenomena. Previously, we saw how valences can be experienced as qualities embedded in some other object. Affects are a kind of valence, and in everyday life, body parts are the phenomena in which affects are often embedded—a fist clenched in anger, eyes brimming with tears, hands shaking with fear. Indeed, the famed James-Lange theory of emotion claims that physiological reactions are the sum and substance of affect, that to feel an emotion is to identify after the fact that a bodily response has occurred (James [1890] 1981). However, at times the affective qualities of specific bodily phenomena are so great that we describe them as affect-things, rather than as the body in affect. The "fear in the pit of my stomach," for example, may be a particular posture of my stomach muscles and nervous system. But because it is rare that I am focally aware of those internal organs, I likely feel the affect, not as a tensed part of my anatomy, but as an objectlike thing. If affect-as-object represents the most intense and sharply bounded modality in which valence may enter into lived experience, then disposition is the opposite extreme. In general, philosophers

use the term *disposition* to refer loosely to a tendency to think, act, or feel in a particular way. At their most expansive, valences exceed beyond objectlike things, qualities of focal phenomena, stances, or moods, and function in this way. In unreflexive behavior, the disposition itself is often outside of experience. Here, I simply act in a certain manner and feel that the valual qualities of the immediate phenomena, my stances on them, or my global mood are shaping what I do; in reflexive self-consciousness, however, I theorize that I was disposed toward a certain course of action. Because I do not directly experience the disposition as a thing in itself but only posit it in retrospect, dispositions can be said to exist in a zone beyond the horizon of the immediately lived. Disposition represents the expansive character of meaning operating at its extremity—meaning having trafficked beyond the horizon of qualities, phenomena, stance, or mood.

In a related fashion, we can observe that it is not merely affective qualities or valences that expand beyond themselves in lived experience; the meaning contents themselves operate in this way. The most dramatic examples of this kind of generative process are evident in self-hypnosis or psychotherapeutic affirmation. In self-hypnosis, one enters a relaxed state of mind and, as much as possible, blocks from one's experience any perceptual information. This accomplished, one conjures words in one's mind, and, in theory, the meaning contents expand forward, producing the corresponding state in imagination. One tells oneself, for example, to imagine a red apple sitting on a green table, and the image appears vividly in one's experience. In a related fashion, certain kinds of psychotherapy rely on what are called affirmations. If the patient suffers from anxiety, she is told that before leaving the house each day, she must spend five minutes alone repeating an affirmation to herself, such as "I can handle anything the world throws at me." In theory, the meaning content of the repeatedly imagined words diminishes the predisposition to respond to situations with fear. Whether or not affirmations are effective forms of therapy, it is fundamental to the nature of meaning that its contents should expand beyond themselves. In the nap example, I think, "Jeff wasn't telling the truth!" and that meaning content draws forth thoughts with related contents: "I shouldn't have trusted him!" "What else has he lied about?" "What am I going to do about this?" "Am I really this bad a judge of character?" Further, meaning contents cross sensual modalities. Thinking my angry thoughts about Jeff and his lies, for example, I may visualize a smug expression on his face, hear the taunting, nasty guitar line from Buckethead's "Revenge of the Double," or find the lyrics and vocal melody from the Magnetic Fields's song "I Don't Believe You" running through my head. The traffic of meaning in experience is as multifaceted as it is diverse.

Seeking to identify the expansive quality of meaning, this discussion has operated at a high level of abstraction—at the level of meaning per se, not at the level of particular kinds of meanings in particular spheres of experience. The issue of why and how particular meanings expand is obviously an enormous one, and in any given social situation the power relations of the society in question will play a fundamental role in these processes. Ultimately, a dialectic of social context and agency determines how one set of meanings leads to another for an individual or group, and it is the intellectual tradition of discourse studies that seeks to understand how these factors play out in history to shape connections among ideas. While this kind of research is essential, it does not invalidate phenomenological inquiry into structures of lived experience; indeed, the two complement one another. Attending to the dynamics that I have sketched here, we can more richly interpret the social discourses that play out in particular places and times.

Such an approach is particularly valuable for those who study performance. Thinking about the expansive character of meaning in situated events, we can observe how the meaning of a performance for an individual is not just shaped by her experiences of the elements of the text, but comes about through an interaction among those meanings, the stance quality with which she engages them, and her larger mood and dispositions. In my own fieldwork, for example, I have observed how some commercial hard rock musicians will view the shows of rival bands with a critical and affectively flat stance, listening for any mistake or flaw in the performance; only slowly, across the span of a show, might they allow their affective experience of the text to color their mood. Considering a very different genre, it is precisely the interplay of disposition, mood, performative stance, and text that was in question when the comic Gilbert Gottfried decided to take the chance of doing 9/11 jokes at a Friar's Club Roast in the period shortly after the attacks on the World Trade Center. In considering this material, the question for Gottfried was whether or not the mood of mourning had lifted enough from his audience for them to find the jokes humorous. This is precisely a question about meaning's expansive quality: How would the crowd's disposition and mood affect their stance on the objects of their attention (Gottfried's jokes)? What texts and what performative stance in the telling of the jokes would make the audience grasp the material as funny, rather than as offensive?[10] The concepts that I have introduced in this section provide some language for thinking about issues such as these and suggest areas of research. They are only a starting point, though, and to explore these concerns more deeply, we need to examine the role of time and time perception in the traffic and transformation of meaning, as well as the ways in which meaning expands, not just across differing

locations in an person's lifeworld, but between people in performance events. The former concern is taken up in the next section, and the latter is the topic of the next chapter.

Dynamics of the Expansive Quality of Meaning: Time and Practice

Summing up the discussion so far, one might say that experience has been conceptualized as having a number of components: a graded field of phenomena, each of which is embedded with meaning contents and valences; a subject's engagement with those phenomena, which involves a specific affective, stylistic, or valual character (i.e., a stance); a global valual environment of mood; and a horizon beyond which valences exist as dispositions. Likewise, one might speak of all of this as a space and say that meaning traffics and is transformed within this space.

To say that something moves across a space is necessarily to raise the issue of time. Though in many ways mysterious, the temporal dimension of experience is fundamental in our lives and present for us in the most mundane occurrences. I go to the movie theater to watch a comedy, for example, and the images and sounds appear one after the other. Though the film has gotten mixed reviews and I generally don't like the director, I try to approach it with an open mind. In my experience, the first camera shot is intriguing, and I'm amused by the layout of the credits on the screen. The first few lines of dialog strike me as funny; then, however, the lead character delivers a joke that I find to be sexist, and most of the jokes fall flat for me after that. Image after image, line after line unfolds until two hours and ten minutes have passed, and the film is over.

The dynamics of meaning in time are rich and complex.[11] On a basic level, we can observe that, beyond the raw fact that events proceed in succession, the movement of meaning and valences in the space of lived experience is iterative—that what happens at one moment shapes what happens in the next moment.[12] In terms of preliminaries, I enter the theater with a universe of past experiences and capacities that predispose my initial engagement with the images and sounds. The background cultural knowledge I have allows me to make sense of the social roles and situations depicted in the film. This knowledge combines with ideas from my culture about what goes on in movies in general, knowledge of particular films, genres, actors, and directors, reviews, word-of-mouth knowledge about this particular film, and my own highly contingent and situated mood at the particular moment the film starts. All of this shapes my stance on the very first images and sounds that pour forth from the screen and sound

system, and my initial experiences come about through a complex interaction of the filmic text and my stance upon it. Amused by the opening shots and layout of the credits, for example, I overcome some of the initial skepticism I had about the film and find myself laughing at the first few lines of dialog. When the main character makes a joke that is blatantly sexist, the fragile goodwill that the film has established evaporates, and my skeptical stance removes some of the pleasure from the lines that follow. This in turn creates a downward spiral, and my stance on the film disposes me against much of what comes next. Clearly, the movement of valences among my experience of the film, my stance, and my mood is an iterative process—a series of steps, each of which influences the one that follows it.

The straightforward, each-event-shapes-the-next processual dynamic of iteration well describes some of the simpler processes in biology or mathematics, but the fullness of lived experience is far more complex. In lived experience, past events do not merely shape future ones; they are retained within experience and accrete to form large-scale variegated phenomena over time. As a result, new iterations do not merely shape future ones but can cause present retentions of past ones to change as well. This process is the complement of iteration, and I will refer to it as *retrospection*. The simplest example of retrospection can be found in what linguists call "garden path sentences" and in the structure that humor scholars have found in certain kinds of jokes. Consider these lines from Judy Tenuta's 1987 live standup comedy recording *Buy This, Pigs!*:

> How many times have you been walking down the street, and you see someone coming towards you from the past that you don't want to talk to. . . But they recognize you, they recognize you and they try to make you talk to them. And they say "Judy, Judy." They said, "Judy, were you going to walk past me without saying hello?" And I said, [pause] "No, Mom."

Here, the first two sentences of the joke bring up a general type of situation: a person running into someone that he or she does not want to see. The speaker in the first sentence of reported dialog is "they," and we are led to believe that Tenuta is still describing a general situation, not one with particular people. When we hear the word "Mom" in the punch line, however, we must go back and reinterpret the previous sentences, retrospectively seeing that Tenuta is avoiding, not some acquaintance in a generalized situation, but her mother particularly.[13] Following Husserl's fundamental observations on time consciousness ([1929] 1964), we can observe that Tenuta's words from the recent past continue to exist in the temporal thickness of the listener's experience (what Husserl called the "living present"), even as each new moment passes. When Tenuta utters the word "Mom," there emerges in the listener's experience a conflict between, on the one hand,

the idea that "Tenuta pretended to ignore someone," which is persisting in what Husserl called "retention" (the present awareness of recently past phenomena, which remain in experience even as new phenomena continuously emerge), and, on the other hand, the new meaning content "Tenuta pretended to ignore her mother," which is forming in what Husserl called the "now-point" of the living present. In other words, the past sentence isn't brought back from mental storage into an infinitely thin moment and actively imbued with a new meaning; on the contrary, the meaning content of the still persisting past utterance changes, even as it remains in the retentional portion of the living present. I will expand my discussion of Husserl's insights into time consciousness in the next chapter. For now, my goal is only to illustrate the interpretive dynamic of retrospection, in which meanings in the now-point shape those in the retentional portion of the living present without an act of memory proper or a process of active valuation.

Examples of retrospection are neither limited to humor nor unusual in expressive culture. Retrospection occurs in large-scale narrative structures, such as in the film *The Crying Game,* when we discover that a character who appears to be of one gender is actually of another, after which the broader sense of the story on the temporal scale of the entire narrative undergoes a shift. Indeed, retrospection is fundamental to entire genres. Much of the pleasure of the classical drawing-room murder mystery is the neatness with which its ending ties together the clues laid out in its early scenes. Likewise, much nineteenth-century symphonic music depends on a narrative structure in which the piece returns, through smooth and clever modulations, back to its home key. Greek tragedy sets up complex crisis situations, the resolution of which brings the narrative to its conclusion. The revelation of the murderer based on clues that were never given to the reader, the clumsy key change back to the original tonal center, or the deus ex machina ending all cause us to invalidate the pleasure of the earlier scenes or movements. When such genres are successful, culminating acts complete the empty anticipations of closure formed and retained in the early scenes, thus producing a sense of satisfaction.

Striking or dramatic examples of retrospection may seem to be little more than isolated literary or narrative devices, but the accretion of meaning and the more subtle cases of retrospection are fundamental to the lived experience of expressive culture. In many traditions of literature and theater, for example, the central point of the work is to depict a complex character. Each of the protagonist's actions shows a different side of her character, and the well-drawn protagonist is one whose personality is complex and multidimensional, possessing varied motivations and feelings that

nevertheless hang together in a coherent or at least dialogic manner. Reading a novel that comes from such a tradition, we find that each new scene reveals more and more of the character's personality and causes us to view her past actions in a new light, forming a complex whole that is revealed over time. Where dramatic retrospection involves the sudden inversion of past meaning, subtler forms of retrospection such as these modify the meaning of past scenes merely by virtue of their joining into a long-scale temporal gestalt with the present scene and the emerging meanings of new scenes.[14]

The fact of retrospection does not invalidate iteration; indeed, the two interact in a complex manner that is crucial for experiences of expressive culture. At each point in time, the flow of new experiences and the person's evolving stance upon them bring further new experiences to light. This is the primary iterative quality of experience. But lived events do not merely move forward; past phenomena accrete and events expand in lived time.[15] The past is retained, forming a complex relationship with new phenomena, and as it does so, iteration becomes complemented by retrospection. In the movie theater example discussed previously, positive valences radiate forward from the unexpected clever lines in an early scene to soften my hard-hearted stance; they also radiate backward in retrospection to color the first few scenes with a sunnier hue. When a sexist line turns my stance on the film cold once again, each new scene more deeply entrenches that negative stance in a series of iterations. These also have a retrospective impact: I do not suddenly deny that those early lines were funny, but I experience them as situated within the context of the mass of tedious, humorless passages. Scene after scene piles up to form a relatively long temporal whole, the new episode not only shaping both those that follow and my ongoing stance in iteration, but also reaching backward in retrospection to color those past. Thus, the circulation of valence among various modalities and locations in experience (foreground phenomena, background phenomena, one's stances upon such phenomena, the global contexts of mood and disposition) takes place in a living present that not only moves forward to the future but expands to retain an accreting past.

So far, the discussion of time has focused on the noematic pole of experience (i.e., on objects of consciousness), rather than the processes that constitute them. Reversing that emphasis returns us to the issue of stance and begins to draw us toward our conclusion. Retrospection and iteration are not automatic processes. They are actively achieved, and the manner of that achievement—the stance of a person's temporal engagement with a work or performance of expressive culture—is crucial for the meaning that a person finds in that work or performance. The reader of character-driven novels,

for example, maintains a stance on the characters over time, actively bringing them into her experience and making them meaningful. Reading a particular novel, I may follow the machinations of the plot and connect each new action to the character's ongoing history, assembling the large-scale experience of the plot with facility. Alternatively, I may let my attention wander, losing interest in the character and allowing the descriptions of her past actions to slip out of my experience. As I read the early scenes of the novel, it is not clear to me if the author is espousing an elitist view or simply revealing the main character's elitism. When a heavy-handed plot twist makes it clear that the world of the novel is divided between the creative elect and the mundane masses, my primary retrospective constitution reads those ambiguous scenes with a skeptical eye and sees them as elitist, and I attend to the rest of the chapter in a distracted state. Then again, I may read with a more generous eye, a more open stance. Lightly passing over that section and resisting the urge to retrospectively reinterpret those scenes, I may forge ahead, looking for passages more attuned to my sensibility.

The examples of stance that we have explored in this book so far are quite diverse, and it is worthwhile to take a moment to emphasize the conceptual unity that underlies this diversity. The examples from chapter 1 and the first part of this chapter mainly illustrated stances on small temporal scales: the pianist's immediate bodily stance on her piano playing and the phrase that she is currently performing; the listener's stance on the melody being played right now. The examples of iteration and retrospection focus on stance in the large temporal scale of an event: one's stance on the character whose actions unfold for the person across several hours of reading. Despite the difference of temporal scale, both sets of examples involve a person actively engaging an object of attention and making it come alive in her awareness, and the affective quality of that engagement shapes her overall experience of meaning.

Moving to a higher level of abstraction, we can observe that underlying both the iterative process of one event coming after the next and the accretive retention of experiences in the living present is the fundamental fact that experience must be *sustained*. At each moment in the event, the person must attend to newly emerging phenomena and also continue to constitute other elements of the living present on various time-scales. The fact that experience must be sustained may seem obvious, but the point is worth emphasizing because it illustrates the stratum of agency that underlies all experience. Watching a movie, attending a play, or listening to a concert, one may become lost in the narrative or caught up in the sounds, and, reading these events in a naive manner, it may seem that experience simply happens

to the person. Comparing such performances with those tedious or uninteresting events where one struggles to follow the thread, focus on the performers, or even keep one's eyes open, we could be tempted to suggest that experience has both active and passive modes. The phenomena of distraction that opened the previous section suggest that this is not the case. Situations of being absorbed in a performance illustrate the pull that the world can have on our experience and the effortlessness with which processes of engagement can occur. What is obscured in such situations, and what the phenomena of distraction reveal, is the acts of sustaining experience that—whether they involve an affirmative quality of work or not—are the sustained, ongoing achievement of the subject. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi ([1975] 2000) has argued that the person's absorption in the immediate task before her takes place when her capacity to carry out action is evenly matched with the demands of the situation. This is certainly true, but absorption also depends on our ability to hold at bay the deep well of irrelevant capacities, dispositions, memories, and thoughts, and to allow ourselves to be open to a world that beckons us forward. Holding-at-bay is a phenomenon that requires much deeper exploration, but here the point is that openness-to-the-world is a property of the subject, not the environment around her; more precisely, it is a property of the subject's dialectical engagement with the world. Whether the acts of constituting experience occur smoothly or with great work, they are the doing of the person and must be sustained.

Beyond its native interest, the fundamental stratum of agency in experience is important for research into expressive culture because it highlights dynamics that are essential to meaning. Understanding how the moments of a performance are shaped by iteration and retrospection, and attending to the ways in which such moments add up to form complex, long-scale events of one of many possible configurations can help us interpret expressive culture more richly. When conducting interviews, observing events, or interpreting texts, scholars can gain fuller and more nuanced readings by sensitizing ourselves to such dynamics. Valences and meanings move among phenomena, stance, and mood; this movement exists within a temporal space that evolves forward in an iterative fashion, expands in accretion, and even rewrites its own history in retrospection. The complex experiences that result are neither the simple aggregate of isolated events occurring in a series nor an unbroken unity welded together among various events in a manner that overcomes time, but rather are a particular set of what William James ([1904] 1967b) would call "conjunctive relationships" and "disjunctive relationships" between experiences actually lived by a person.

These ideas may seem abstract, but they describe in general terms the dynamics of experience that are intimate and directly grasped. I catch a stand-up comic at a local club. I listen to the first few jokes with a skeptical ear, find myself seduced by a couple of fast lines, begin to feel that the material is repetitive, am almost drawn back in by some serious remarks, find myself brought up short by a homophobic line that retrospectively invalidates some of the earlier material, and lose interest at the finish. I remark that the comic is homophobic and lacking in creativity, but it is the pacing of these elements and my stance upon them, not the elements alone, which shape my experience. I don't merely see the individual jokes as homophobic; in retrospection, they color my overall long-scale sense of the comic's character as a swaggering, dominating bully. Alternatively, a line at the end of the act that is both hilariously funny and politically progressive wins back my heart, and I see the swagger as resistant, rather than dominating. It is the subtle dance of valence among phenomena, stance, and mood—a dance that takes place on the expanding stage of the living present—that gives experience its rich texture, and interpretive work can only be enhanced by increasing our sensitivity to these movements.