Few people would deny the pervasiveness and power of popular culture. It is increasingly visible, not only as an economic force, but as a powerful force of education and socialization, and as one of the primary ways in which people make sense of themselves, their lives and the world. As people are increasingly caught up in its seductive hooks, popular culture becomes something more than a mere representation of, or fantasy about, the "real" world. Popular culture is a significant and effective part of the material reality of history, effectively shaping the possibilities of our existence. It is this challenge—to understand what it means to "live in popular culture"—that confronts contemporary cultural analysis. This is not just that popular culture has become a dominant forum for ideological struggles, nor that it has become the predominant source for the iconography of people's lives. Popular culture plays a significant, active role in the material milieu in which they live. It is this role that needs to be interrogated.

CULTURAL FORMATIONS AND SENSIBILITIES

The first map attempts to describe how a set of cultural practices comes to congeal and, for a certain period of time, take on an identity of its own which is capable of existing in different social and cultural contexts. Unlike notions of genre, which assume that such identities
Cultural Studies

depend on the existence of necessary formal elements, a formation is a historical articulation, an accumulation or organization of practices. The question is how particular cultural practices, which may have no intrinsic or even apparent connection, are articulated together to construct an apparently new identity (e.g., the articulation of rhythm and blues, country and western music, and certain techniques of Tin Pan Alley into something called rock). As Foucault describes it:

A discursive formation, then, does not play the role of a figure that arrests time and freezes it for decades or centuries; it determines a regularity proper to temporal processes; it presents the principle of articulation between a series of discursive events and other series of events, transformations, mutations, and processes. It is not an atemporal form but a schema of correspondence between several temporal series.

To account for the emergence of the formation, one must look elsewhere, to the context, the dispersed but structured field of practices in which the specific articulation was accomplished and across which it is sustained over time and space. It is not a question of interpreting a body of texts or tracing out their intertextuality. Rather, the formation has to be read as the articulation of a number of discrete series of events, only some of which are discursive. The formation is not accountable in its own terms, but only in terms of its specific conditions of possibility and its own effectivities. Through such a mapping, one can understand not only the emergence of a particular cultural formation, but its possible transformations and deployments.

My analysis of rock in Part II attempts to understand its existence as a real cultural structure by placing it into the historical relations which enabled its appearance. In this way, I hope to identify at least a part of rock’s specificity. By mapping the way in which certain textual practices were articulated to a variety of other cultural, social, economic, historical and political practices (e.g., a certain apocalyptic rhetoric, youth, bohemianism, juvenile delinquency), the formation of rock comes into existence, and into our view. Whether in fact this identity is real in musical terms is irrelevant, for the existence of the rock formation has had its own effects; it has enabled other events and practices: it has become the condition of possibility for other social and cultural articulations.

A cultural formation describes the lines that distribute, place and connect cultural practices, effects and social groups. Such an articulation not only involves a selection and configuration from among the available practices, but also a distribution of the formation itself within the social space. That is, a formation—and the practices within it—is not equally available at every social site, nor to every fraction of the population. Different social groups have differential access to specific clusters of practices and these relations are themselves part of the determination or articulation of the formation. Moreover, at different sites, for different fractions, the distribution and configuration of the formation itself will determine different relations to and experiences of the formation itself.

A cultural formation is articulated into and functions within different contexts of daily life. Such articulations create a series of “alliances,” each representing a particular selective appropriation of the formation itself; no alliance includes every element of the formation. From one perspective, this is merely a description of the fact that no one is likely to relate to every practice within the formation; no rock fan listens to every record, or likes every sound, or approves of every title. The same “text” can and often will be located in a number of different alliances, and in each it will be articulated differently; it will be, at some level, a different practice with different relations to and effects on daily life. An alliance is a secondary articulation of the formation; it too is a material collection of practices, structured both in relation to other alliances and to the more abstract cultural formation itself. An alliance is a local, yet potentially dispersed, concretization of the more abstract existence of the formation.

From another perspective, the formation itself makes a number of different positions available to different groups, all of which may have some relationship to the formation. “Audiences” do not exist outside the formation and specific alliances; they are incorporated into them, part of their configuration of practices and relations.
Cultural formations surround and invade the bodies of their various populations, incorporating them into their own spaces, making them a part of the formation itself. People can be inserted in very productive and complex ways, and many of the practices of cultural enthusiasts clearly function to guarantee and even exaggerate this effect (e.g., the active role of rock audiences and the importance of local music).

Every formation cuts across and operates on a number of different planes of effects. These different planes are themselves organized within and by the formation so that a particular configuration (which may or may not be identifiable with a single plane) is dominant. I will call such a dominant organization of effectivity a “sensibility,” which is similar in many ways to Williams’ “structure of feeling.” Every formation puts into place a particular sensibility, which describes its effects in people’s daily lives and thus the way in which a particular formation is lived. It defines the relationships that can exist between specific practices and the individuals or groups located within the formation (or any alliance within the formation). It determines how specific practices can be taken up and lived (e.g., as texts to be interpreted), how they are able to affect people’s places in the world, and what sorts of practices can be incorporated into the formation.

A sensibility can be understood in a number of different ways. For the individuals living within it, it defines a historically determined and socially distributed mode of engagement with (or consumption of) particular practices. It determines the “proper” and appropriate way of selecting cultural practices, of relating to them, and of inserting them into daily life. In other words, the notion of a sensibility replaces and refines the concept of taste, for the sensibility of a particular formation determines the very meaning of “taste” within it. Taste means entirely different things in different formations. Unless one understands the sensibility active within a particular formation, the appeal to taste fails to identify the domain within which the differentiations of taste are being made. The formation determines the ways in which those living within it can relate to its elements; it defines the possible and appropriate relations that exist within the context it constructs. It identifies the ways the formation empowers the groups existing within its spaces, and simultaneously, the ways these groups empower the practices of the formation. Empowerment refers to how cultural formations in daily life make possible particular sorts of practices, commitments and relationships.

For the formation itself, a sensibility is a principle of articulation which defines the planes and intersections of effects on which the practices of the formation operate. It identifies the specific sorts of effects that are produced, the relationships between the practices and the structures of daily life that are enabled. A sensibility locates the particular planes and organizations of effects that dominate the formation it governs. It determines the coherence among the elements of a formation. One can only understand how the various pieces of a formation (or an alliance) “fit” together in terms of its sensibility. How the specific sounds, styles and behaviors of a specific alliance (e.g., surf music and surf culture, or thrash music and skateboards, or the particular configuration of “mod” culture) make sense together depends upon the sensibility at work.

Of course, identifying the sensibility of a formation is rarely a simple matter: a formation can, in different contexts, be articulated to different and even multiple sensibilities, although one is likely to be dominant. Thus, sensibilities do not belong to particular sorts of practices (e.g., as if literature always produced meaning). Nor do they belong to specific social groups (as if intellectuals had some proper authority over meaning). Sensibilities have to be articulated to different formations and populations, and this struggle often defines the politics of culture.

Pierre Bourdieu has described some of the most important sensibilities operating in contemporary culture. Academics often locate every cultural practice within an “aesthetic” sensibility which foregrounds the formal structure of the text and a “disinterested” relation to the text. This sensibility subordinates function to form, life to “art.” It treats everything—whether works of art, profane cultural objects, social events, or even natural objects—as things to be considered in isolation, as the embodiments of formal principles of construction. A more common sensibility involves a motivated reading
which treats everything as an ideological act, and asks what it says to, and about, the life of a social group. For example, religious fundamentalists seem to experience culture in terms of the moral prescriptions "embodied" within different practices, of the ways they function to regulate the routine behavior of daily life. Both of these sensibilities involve different organizations of the planes of signification and representation. And both judge cultural practices by standards that lie outside of the relationship to the practice itself. Is it formally complex—given a certain definition of complexity? Is it ideologically correct—given a certain definition of moral or political correctness?

However, the dominant sensibilities of contemporary popular culture often construct different organizations, involving other planes of effects, including desire (a libidinal sensibility), fantasy, economics and especially pleasure. Of course, pleasure is itself a complex phenomenon and the term covers a number of different relations: the satisfaction of doing what others would have you do; the enjoyment of doing what you want; the fun of breaking the rules; the fulfillment—however temporary and artificial—of desires (although here we should acknowledge the complex and close relationship between desire, as psychoanalytically understood, and ideology); the relief of catharsis; the comfort of escaping from negative situations; the reinforcement of identifying with a character; the thrill of sharing another's emotional life; the stature of expertise and collecting; the euphoria of "vegging out"; the compulsion of overconsumption.

All of these are involved in the normal and common relationship to popular culture. People are engaged with forms of popular culture because, in some way and form, they are entertaining; they provide a certain measure of enjoyment and pleasure. Of course, such relationships might also produce ideological effects, either directly or indirectly (through the articulation of pleasures to ideological positions, or through the pleasures of ideological reinforcement), but these are almost never the source of the relationship, nor the plane of their primary effectivity.

POPULAR CULTURE

If, as I suggested earlier, the media are not identical to popular culture, then we must ask about the sensibility which articulates some media formations as popular. That is, what makes popular culture popular? The question seems innocent enough, but as soon as one begins to look for an answer, one finds a great deal of ambiguity and uncertainty. What is it, after all, that is in need of explanation? Popular culture has always been a rather paradoxical field; it is usually defined in explicit opposition to the "legitimate" culture of the intelligentsia (what Bourdieu describes as the dominated fraction of the dominant class). But it also stands ambiguously poised in relation to the actual culture of the dominant classes. Reading the literature on popular culture, one would never guess that the various fractions of the middle and upper classes have a popular culture of their own.

"Popular culture" exists within a complex series of terms (mass, elite, legitimate, dominant, folk, high, low, midcult) and oppositions (civilized versus vulgar, dominant versus subordinate, authentic versus inauthentic, self versus other, same versus different) which are, in various contexts, linked together in different ways. Even within these series, the relations are never stable or comfortable: As Stallybrass and White have demonstrated, even while those "in power" may be threatened and even "repulsed" by the vulgar tastes of "the masses," that vulgarity often continues to function as a repressed fantasy which structures the more "cultured" tastes. As intellectuals have tried to consider popular culture more sympathetically, their strategies evidence their continued discomfort: they divide it into the acceptable and the unacceptable; they grant value to certain elements, practices and commitments but first remove them from their daily context and often from their sensibility; or they celebrate those texts that are consistent with their own cultural tastes and political projects.

Popular culture has been defined formally (as formalized), aesthetically (as opposed to high culture), quantitatively (as mass cul-
Cultural Studies

ture), sociologically (as the culture of “the people”) and politically (as resistant folk culture). Sometimes it is identified with mass culture and condemned for reducing culture (and the masses) to the “lowest common denominator.” At other times, it is located outside of mass culture, as if it had some necessarily more authentic relation to the people and consequently had some intrinsically greater possibility of articulating resistance to the dominant culture. Often, discussions of popular culture conflate aesthetic, sociological and political questions. How can popular culture be different from mass culture when it seems so odd to say that the contemporary forms of mass culture are not popular? Is popular culture identified more directly with particular social groups—those who are oppressed or actively subordinated? Is it intrinsically more likely to articulate resistance? Is it qualitatively different from other forms of culture? But, then, how can something be popular at one historical moment and not at another? Or how can some popular culture practices become integrated into other cultural formations?

Can the difference between popular practices and other forms of cultural practices be defined by moral or aesthetic criteria? History has shown that texts move in and out of these categories (e.g., what was popular can become high art) and that a text can exist, simultaneously, in different categories. There are no necessary correspondences between the formal characteristics of any text and its status (or audience) at a particular moment. Is it, then, a matter of where the text comes from, of how and by whom it is produced? But again, there are too many exceptions to this assumed correlation. The mode by which a text is produced, or the motivations behind it, do not guarantee how it is placed into the larger cultural context nor how it is received by different audiences. So perhaps the answer is the most obvious one: what makes something popular is its popularity; it is, in other words, a matter of taste. But this formulation does not help very much, for the same questions remain, albeit in different forms: how much popularity? whose tastes? and what do these different tastes signify?

One cannot overcome the ambiguities inherent in such questions merely by pointing out that the relations between different cultural domains are continually being redefined and challenged. Certainly, the boundaries of the popular are fluid. Culture is never a fixed set of objects, and the meaning of “the popular” as a qualifier is always shifting. The construction of the popular is always the site of an ongoing struggle; its content as well as its audience varies from one historical period to another. It is a domain in which different meanings and values, many of them with powerfully constituted political inflections (whether dominant, subordinate or oppositional) confront and mix with each other. This terrain of cultural diversity no doubt plays a significant ideological role, for it is here that popular experience and identity are constructed and framed.

Such diversity need not recreate the old dichotomy between folk and mass culture, between a pure and spontaneously oppositional culture and an externally produced and repressive culture. Every cultural practice is a hybrid, already located within this complex terrain, and thus it is partly determined by the various contradictory forces, tendencies and positions that are already operating. There are no pure cultural practices, as if records with acoustic guitars were somehow less contaminated by the technologies and economies of capitalist culture, as if reggae were not an impure and complex melange of many cultural influences. Nor is there ever a simple relation between specific cultural practices and preconstituted social groups which exist independently of their cultural practices. It is in the struggles around popular culture that social identities and groups are constructed. If “there is no fixed content to the category of ‘popular culture,’ so there is no fixed subject to attach to it.”

Although there is no necessary content to, or boundaries around, popular culture within a social formation, there are always boundaries already defined and content already inserted. At the same time, popular culture does not simply and always function outside of the dominant culture—whether the dominant is understood as the domination of an elite or of the masses. Simply making popular culture into an abstract site of struggle, an empty signifier, does not specify what the struggles are about or how they are organized in any historical moment. To say that popular culture is the site of a struggle does not automatically tell us what people are struggling over and
what the weapons are. The cultural analyst has to enter onto the terrain of popular culture to understand the ways in which it works and struggles, to recognize that its place in daily life and the social formation is defined by more than its difference from something else (and even by more than its potential as resistance).

Popular culture appears to describe structures of taste or degrees of consumption that are not legitimated by the critical or commercial systems of discrimination. But can we approach it more directly, in its positivity: popular culture points to an assemblage of formations, to other sensibilities and to another plane of effects. I want to start with the fact that people spend time with popular culture and that it matters to them, that it is often an important site of people’s passion. This is often treated as if it were trivial compared to the “meaning-fulness” of specific texts. But in fact, its “mattering” may have its own impact on history and daily life.

Critics often ignore popular culture’s immediacy, its physicality and its fun: its very popularity. If it is a form of escapism (which seems woefully inadequate to describe the complexity of relations to popular culture), what is it escaping from? And what is its escape route? One has to explore the work popular culture is doing, which is very different from merely celebrating its fun: “Many left intellectuals are not only fed up; they are, in a sense, bored. It gets draggy to keep on repeating all that left-wing stuff when the nation is busy waving plastic flags at Fergie. . . . All these people on the left . . . are in fact rediscovering popular culture as really quite good fun. However the vast majority of people knew it was quite good fun all along.” More importantly, there are different forms of fun, and fun may have different effects in specific contexts. Fun is itself articulated into larger structures of daily life, and of social and political relations.

When the New Left Review began in the early 1960s, Stuart Hall wrote: “The task of socialism is to meet people where they are—where they are touched, bitten, moved, frustrated, nauseated—to develop discontent and at the same time, to give the socialist movement some direct sense of the times and the ways in which we live.”

Interestingly, the images are all physical, emotional and passionate. Surely, Hall did not intend to suggest that how people think, how they interpret the world, is not a significant part of where they are, but where and how they live, especially in the field of popular culture, are perhaps more powerfully determined by other sorts of relations. Popular culture is always more than ideological; it provides sites of relaxation, privacy, pleasure, enjoyment, feeling good, fun, passion and emotion.

Popular culture often inscribes its effects directly upon the body: tears, laughter, hair-tingling, screams, spine-chilling, eye-closing, erections, etc. These visceral responses, which often seem beyond our conscious control, are the first mark of the work of popular culture: it is sentimental, emotional, moody, exciting, prurient, carnivalesque, etc. Such effects are not intrinsic to popular practices. They are historically articulated and a large part of the struggle over popular culture concerns the ability of certain practices to have such effects. My students regularly oppose classes on rock because, in some sense, they know that too much intellectual legitimation will redefine the possibilities of its effectiveness; it will become increasingly a meaningful form to be interpreted rather than a popular form to be felt on one’s body and to be lived passionately and emotionally. Popular culture is not defined by formal characteristics but by its articulation within particular formations and to specific sensibilities.

**AFFECT AND THE POPULAR**

Popular culture seems to work at the intersection of the body and emotions. Emotion is itself a notoriously difficult topic for cultural critics who often try to explain it as if it were merely the aura of ideological effects. Such accounts cannot explain why certain practices elicit strong emotive effects while others do not. The very fact that there is an unavoidable quantitative aspect to emotions suggests that there must be more to the production of emotional effects. I conclude that they are the product of the articulation of two planes: signification (rather than ideology, since people can be quite emotional about meanings that do not claim to represent reality) and affect. And consequently, I will locate the sensibilities of popular formations primarily on the plane of affect.
The most obvious and perhaps the most frightening thing about contemporary popular culture is that it matters so much to so many different people. The source of its power, whatever it may seem to say, or whatever pleasures it may offer, can be identified with its place in people’s affective lives, and its ability to place other practices affectively. For many people, certain forms of popular culture become taken-for-granted, even necessary, investments. As a result, specific cultural formations become “affective alliances.” Their logic or coherence—which is often so difficult to define—depends upon their affective relationships, their articulated places within people’s mattering maps. One cannot assume that such affective alliances satisfy needs created elsewhere, or that they create the needs which they in turn satisfy.

Affect is perhaps the most difficult plane of human life to define and describe, not merely because it is a-signifying (and contemporary theory is so heavily directed toward signifying practices), but also because there is no critical vocabulary to describe its different forms and structures. But this does not mean that affect is some ineffable experience or a purely subjective feeling. Affect is a plane of effects, a matter of “actualization, effectuation, practices . . . an ability to affect and to be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act. 13

Affect is closely tied to what we often describe as the “feeling” of life. One can understand another person’s life, share the same meanings and pleasures, but still not know how it feels. Such “feeling” is a socially constructed domain of cultural effects. Some things feel different from others, some matter more or in different ways than others. The same experience will change drastically as its affective investment or state changes. The same object, with the same meaning, giving the same pleasure, is very different in different affective contexts. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that different affective contexts inflect meanings and pleasures in very different ways. Affect operates across all of our senses and experiences, across all of the domains of effects which construct daily life. Affect is what gives ‘color,’ ‘tone’ or ‘texture’ to the lived.

There are different forms of affective investments. These are the result of the energy of affect articulated through different principles of structuration. First, one can distinguish between libidinal (sexual) and nonlibidinal investments. 14 Libidinal affect (or desire in psychoanalytic terms) is always focused on an object (whether real or imaginary), while nonlibidinal affect (affect for short) is always dispersed into the entire context of daily life. Desires can be satisfied, if only temporarily and mistakenly, while affect can only be realized. The concept of desire assumes that there are hidden truths behind or below our conscious life (the unconscious), while affect always exists on the surface. And there is an active mechanism of hiding (repression) which constitutes the unconscious, while affect seems to operate in something like the “preconscious.” A second distinction can also be drawn, within nonlibidinal effect, between moods and will. Moods define the affective frames within which we find ourselves, frames which surround any activity and inflect any investment. 15 Will (or passion) defines investments which appear to be isolated instances in the particular context. 16

Each of these forms of affect can be articulated through the mediating effects of ideological narratives to produce different forms of emotional response and involvement. Our emotional states are always elicited from within the affective states in which we already find ourselves. Unlike emotions, affective states are neither structured narratively nor organized in response to our interpretations of situations. Compare, for example, The Sound of Music and David Lynch’s Wild at Heart: both are extraordinarily manipulative, but while the former works on and through emotional narrative, the latter works more immediately on affective investments. For the purposes of my analysis, I will use “affect” to refer to its nonlibidinal forms, ignoring the differences between mood and will.

Affect actually points to a complex set of effects which circulate around notions of investment and anchoring; it circumscribes the entire set of relations that are referred to with such terms as “volition,”
“will,” “investment,” “commitment” and “passion.” Affective relations always involve a quantitatively variable level of energy (activation, enervation) that binds an articulation or that binds an individual to a particular practice. Affect identifies the strength of the investment which anchors people in particular experiences, practices, identities, meanings and pleasures, but it also determines how invigorated people feel at any moment of their lives, their level of energy or passion. In this quantitative dimension, affect privileges passion over meaning, as if simply willing something to happen were sufficient to bring it about (e.g., as one ad campaign continuously declares, “Where there’s a will, there’s an A”).

Affect is also defined qualitatively by the nature of the concern (caring, passion) in the investment, by the way in which the specific event is made to matter. Too often, critics assume that affect—as pure intensity—is without form or structure. But it too is articulated and disarticulated—there are affective lines of articulation and affective lines of flight—through social struggles over its structure. The affective plane is organized according to maps which direct people’s investments in and into the world. These maps are deployed in relation to the formations in which they are articulated. They tell people where, how and with what intensities they can become absorbed—into the world and their lives. This “absorption” constructs the places and events which are, or can become, significant. They are the places at which people can anchor themselves into the world, the locations of these matters.

These “mattering maps” are like investment portfolios: there are not only different and changing investments, but different intensities or degrees of investment. There are not only different places marked out (practices, pleasures, meanings, fantasies, desires, relations, etc.) but different purposes which these investments can play. Mattering maps define different forms, quantities and places of energy. They “tell” people how to use and how to generate energy, how to navigate their way into and through various moods and passions, and how to live within emotional and ideological histories. In fact, affect is the missing term in an adequate understanding of ideology, for it offers the possibility of a “psychology of belief” which would explain how and why ideologies are sometimes, and only sometimes, effective, and always to varying degrees. It is the affective investment in particular ideological sites (which may be libidinal or nonlibidinal) that explains the power of the articulation which bonds particular representations and realities. It is the affective investment which enables ideological relations to be internalized and, consequently, naturalized. But this description may make such investments sound too conscious or at least subjective. If affect cannot be “found” in the text or read off its surfaces (any more than meaning can), it is also the case that affect is not simply something that individuals put into it. Affect is itself articulated in the relations between practices. It is, as Lyotard suggests, the unrepresentable excess—the sublime—which defies images and words, which can only be indicated. But there is no single way in which such affective investments are lived or manifested. As one college student in a television documentary put it, “I don’t think the old ways of showing that we care are the ways that we show we care now.”

The dominance of the affective dimension does not mean that such popular formations do not also involve relations of ideology and pleasure, materiality and economics. Daily life always involves the inseparable articulation of these various domains; it can only be understood as the complex relations among these. But within the relations of and to popular culture, the determining moment is often the history of struggle within and over the affective plane. For it is in their affective lives that people constantly struggle to care about something, and to find the energy to survive, to find the passion necessary to imagine and enact their own projects and possibilities.

Popular culture, operating with an affective sensibility, is a crucial ground where people give others, whether cultural practices or social groups, the authority to shape their identity and locate them within various circuits of power. People actively constitute places and forms of authority (both for themselves and for others) through the deployment and organization of affective investments. By making certain things matter, people “authorize” them to speak for them, not only as a spokesperson but also as a surrogate voice (e.g., when we sing along to popular songs). People give authority to that which they
invest in; they let the objects of such investments speak for and in their stead. They let them organize their emotional and narrative life and identity. In this way, the structures and sites of people's investments operate as so many languages which construct their identity. Insofar as such investments are dispersed, their identity is similarly dispersed. But insofar as their investments are organized, both structurally (in affective alliances) and intensively, popular culture establishes different moments of relative authority, moments which are affectively connected to each other (e.g., the investment in rock may make an investment in certain ideological positions more likely, although it can never guarantee them). To put this another way, affect is the plane or mechanism of belonging and identification (of which identity, constructed through either ideological or psychoanalytic interpellations, is only one form). This opens up the possibility of investigating, not only the different sites of investment (anchoring) and identification, but also the different modes of such investments.

The image of mattering maps points to the constant attempt to organize moments of stable identity, sites at which people can, at least temporarily, find themselves “at home” with what they care about. Affect defines a structure and economy of belonging. The very notion of “the popular” assumes the articulation of identification and care; it assumes that what one identifies with (including moments of identity) matters and that what matters—what has authority—is the appropriate ground for identification. But mattering maps also involve the lines that connect the different sites of investment; they define the possibilities for moving from one investment to another, of linking the various fragments of identity together. They define not only what sites (practices, effects, structures) matter but how they matter. And they construct a lived coherence for those enclosed within their spaces.

This analysis of popular culture suggests that everyone is constantly located within a field of the popular, for one cannot exist in a world where nothing matters (including the fact that nothing matters). Contemporary popular culture may be, in fact, the conjunctural articulation of a relationship which has historically constituted the popular in very different forms and domains, including relationships to such diverse things as labor, religion, morality and politics. There is no necessary reason why the affective relationship is located primarily on the terrain of commercial popular culture. But it is certainly the case that, for the vast majority of people in advanced capitalist societies, this is the primary space where affective relationships are articulated. It is here that people seek to actively construct their own identities, partly because there seems to be no other space available, no other terrain on which they can construct and anchor their mattering maps. And the consumer industries (and the new conservatism) increasingly appeal, not only to ideological consensus, but to the contemporary structures of affective needs and investments (e.g., “sleeze TV,” which always attempts to present the position of maximum passion or sentimentality). However, I do not mean to suggest that the category of the “popular” exists in the same way in every historical situation, that there is a singular stable affective sensibility. The popular can only be understood historically, as located in a set of cultural sensibilities.

The empowerment produced by one's place within an affective (popular) alliance is not the same as that produced through pleasure, for on the affective plane, pleasure can be disempowering and displeasure can be empowering. Empowerment here refers to the reciprocal nature of affective investment: that is, because something matters (i.e., one invests energy in it), other investments are made possible. Affective empowerment involves the generation of energy and passion, the construction of possibility. Unlike pleasure, an affective investment in certain practices always returns some interest through a variety of empowering relations: by producing further energy (e.g., rock dancing, while exhausting, continuously generates its own energy, if only to continue dancing); by placing people in a position from which they feel they have a certain control over their (affective) life; or by reaffirming the feeling that one is still alive and that this matters. In all of these cases, affective empowerment enables one to go on, to continue to struggle to make a difference. The investment in popular practices opens up strategies which enable one to invest in new forms of meaning, pleasure and identity, and
to cope with new forms of pain, pessimism, frustration, alienation, terror and boredom.

But the affective investment in certain sites demands a very specific ideological response, for affect can never define, by itself, why things should matter. That is, unlike ideology and pleasure, it can never provide its own justification, however illusory such justifications may in fact be. The result is that affect always demands that ideology legitimate the fact that these differences and not others matter, and that within such differences, a particular term becomes the site of our investment. Ideology does this by articulating the investment to a principle of excessiveness. Because something matters, it must have an excess which explains the investment in it, an excess which ex post facto not only legitimates but demands the investment. The site of investment is constructed as an excess, distinguishing it from other potential sites. The more powerful the affective investment, the more powerfully it must be ideologically legitimated, and the greater the excess which differentiates it from other sites. For example, the rock fan “knows” there is something more in rock music which distinguishes it from other forms of music. This excess, while ideologically constructed, is always beyond ideological challenge, because it is called into existence affectively. The investment guarantees the excess. But the relationship between the planes of ideology and affect is itself historically articulated. What happens as the relation becomes increasingly tenuous?

Affective empowerment is increasingly important in a world in which pessimism has become common sense, in which people increasingly feel incapable of making a difference, and in which differences increasingly seem not to matter, not to make any difference. Affective relations are, at least potentially, the condition of possibility for the optimism, invigoration and passion which are necessary for any struggle to change the world. At this level, popular culture offers the resources which may or may not be mobilized into forms of popular struggle, resistance and opposition. The organization of struggle depends upon its articulation to different affective organizations and empowering investments. While there is no guarantee that even the most highly charged moments will become either passive sites of evasion or active sites of resistance, without the affective investments of popular culture, the very possibility of such struggles is likely to be drowned in a sea of historical pessimism. On the other hand, affective relations can also be disempowering (even through an initial moment of empowerment). They can render ideological and material realities invisible behind a screen of passion—not quite an aestheticization of politics. They can position people in ways which make them particularly vulnerable to certain kinds of appeals, and, most frightening, they can easily be articulated into repressive and even totalitarian forms of social demands and relations. Affective organizations, and hence popular culture, are a complex and contradictory terrain, but one that the Left ignores at its peril.
Notes

15. Ibid.
22. It is important to realize that anti-essentialism is not the same as social constructionism. Although any anti-essentialist position is likely to embrace social constructionism, not all social construction positions are anti-essentialist (e.g., various phenomenological or pragmatist versions).
24. Ibid., p. 80.

CHAPTER TWO: MAPPING POPULAR CULTURE


This was the area of interaction between the official consciousness of an epoch—codified in its doctrines and legislations—and the whole process of actually living its consequences. . . . It was a structure . . . yet it was one of feeling much more than of thought—a pattern of impulses, restraints, tones . . .

The peculiar location of a structure of feeling is the endless comparison that must occur in the process of consciousness between the articulated and the lived. . . . For all that is not fully articulated, all that comes through as disturbance, tension, blockage, emotional trouble, seems to me precisely a major source of major changes in the relation between the signifier and the signified.

4. My thanks to Larry Bennett for his help.
9. Ibid., p. 239.
CHAPTER THREE: POWER AND DAILY LIFE


3. This is a model of mainstream avant-garde which has animted a great deal of contemporary film theory, including most of the work that came to be associated with the journal Screen. See C. Penley (ed.), Feminism and Film Theory, New York, Routledge, 1988.


5. This has been an important and influential model in cultural studies. See D. Hebdige, Subculture: The Meaning of Style, London, Methuen, 1979, and Janice Radway, Reading the Romance, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

6. Although most writers would use "everyday life" in this context, I will reserve this term for a more specific historical articulation of daily life. See chapter 7.

7. For example, see Iain Chambers, Popular Culture: The Metropolitan Experience, London, Methuen, 1986.

8. For example, see John Fiske, Reading the Popular, Boston, Unwin Hyman, 1989. Actually, it is not clear that this is Fiske's position as much as it is the reading that has been constructed of him, but one that he seems to accept at times.

9. John Clarke, personal communication. Similarly, Raymond Williams defended his notion of culture as a whole way of life (answering E. P. Thompson's concept of a whole way of struggle) by maintaining the distinction between class conflict and class struggle: "If you define the whole historical process as struggle, then you have to elude or foreshorten all the periods in which conflict is mediated in other forms, in which there are provisional resolutions or temporary compositions of it." Raymond Williams, Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review, London, New Left Books, 1979, p. 135.


16. M. Foucault, "Questions of Method: An Interview," Ideology and Consciousness, 1981, no. 8, pp. 4–5. The relation between apparatuses and regimes is ambiguous since each can be constructed from multiples of the other.


22. Ibid.