

## INTRODUCTION

Schooling, like other important social institutions, is conducted in a complex field of forces that shape its nature and direction. Attitudes and beliefs about schooling play their part. How people with a stake in the schools—teachers, students, parents, administrators, and other citizens—make sense of it contributes to what schooling is now and what it might become. This book is written in the belief that much more serious attention needs to be paid to how participants in schooling and the public that supports it come to hold their various views about what schooling is and ought to be. There is good reason for us now, as a public, to examine the roots of our ideas, attitudes, and expectations, as these surely affect the quality of our engagement in the issues about and practices of schooling at many levels.

How are views of schooling formed? *Schooling in the Light of Popular Culture* explores an underexamined source of influence that affects the way schooling is experienced and understood in contemporary culture. That source is the flow of symbolic forms comprising mainstream popular culture. This book centers on the portrayal of aspects of schooling—its characteristics, participants, glories, and problems—as they are constructed and displayed in diverse forms of popular culture.

The main assumption of this book is that involvement in contemporary schooling at any level—whether as a teacher, student, policymaker, administrator, or concerned citizen—is conditioned by the sociocultural context in which schooling is understood, a context that is in turn mediated by powerful forms of popular culture. For those with an interest in considering what, for example, schooling is for or teachers are like or the

“crisis” in schooling is all about, popular-culture sources affect how and for whom such questions arise and how settled views in response to them become established over time. In this way, popular culture interacts with other sources of influence—such as direct experience, local networks of communication, and more formally disseminated research findings—shaping the social construction of meaning in and about schooling.

This matters for people with diverse connections to the schools. Those entering or engaged in professional roles as teachers or administrators clearly have a stake in how their work in schooling is represented in popular culture. We write as practitioners ourselves, and address this volume first, therefore, to current and future practitioners who would join with us in exploring far-reaching, but often unexamined, factors conditioning school practices and policy. Concerned citizens, parents, and school policymakers also have a stake in the way schooling is treated as a topic of popular culture. For them, this work speaks to two principal concerns. Since their direct ties to schooling are more tenuous, informal sources of insight and information are likely to loom larger for them. In addition, the interests and hopes that persons outside of schooling have for its direction are likewise dependent on the way school issues are represented and resolved within the social context of communication about schooling. Finally, students themselves, including students of education, should not be overlooked, for the meaning schooling has for them is bound up in the attitudes and expectations they have come to hold regarding school experience. We believe that numerous possibilities present themselves for broaching with students issues that are at the heart of school experience by way of exploring meaningful and revealing tendencies in forms of popular culture.

In general terms, this book seeks to foster inquiry addressing the interaction of popular culture and other sources influencing how schooling is understood. Such inquiry brings into view issues that nestle between a pair of important areas of concern and scholarship. One area involves research focused on schooling itself, studies of teachers and learners, curriculum and instruction, new technologies, and so on. This includes the range of traditional educational studies, posing and addressing problems that take school boundaries largely for granted. Increasingly, such a focus is being challenged by a vigorous research tradition that has emerged regarding modern cultural studies. Work on popular culture and, more generally, cultural studies, is burgeoning and redefining the boundaries of inquiry with regard to education (as well as other fields). There is a strong temptation to cross traditional boundaries, rethink the way fields are defined and studied.<sup>1</sup> Such redefinition is long overdue and very promising. But much of this activity is also highly specialized as well, treating issues and problems that have little meaning

for people outside of the disciplinary contexts in which they arise. Indeed, some critics have begun to decry the academicization of intellectual fervor focused on popular texts and tendencies.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, this book maintains an explicit connection to the traditional focus of educational studies, on the problems and possibilities of schooling as a locus of concern. We seek to relate school-based concerns to critical aspects of the sociocultural context which, through patterns of representation, frame and influence how schooling is understood and treated. This orientation acknowledges that, as Arthur Danto has suggested, we are in a fundamental sense representational beings, and ways of representing dimensions of our world connect with how we live and act in that world.<sup>3</sup> Our broad purpose in this book is to explore issues that center on the interaction between patterns of representation and of practice, connections at the interface of educational and cultural studies.

The studies in this volume illustrate how powerful and suggestive images and ideas about teachers, learning, and other aspects of schooling are constructed in the “texts” of various modes of popular culture. As a basis for further inquiry, these works describe important tendencies and patterns in the representation of aspects of schooling. This set of studies also provides examples of analytical approaches and strategies for thinking about the meaning of such patterns, raising questions about what mainstream popular culture contributes to the social context of understanding and action in and about schooling.

## SCHOOLING AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

We have suggested the value of inquiry at many levels exploring the relationship between popular culture and the schools. Such inquiry need not be esoteric nor highly specialized (although surely it can be informed by work that is). More critical is the widespread need to examine the vital link between forms of popular culture and the enduring place of schooling as a locus of moral and political significance in contemporary society. The interplay of these domains of interest is, in our view, of central importance with respect to considerations of schooling in the context of a democratic society.

Amy Gutmann has expressed succinctly the fundamental challenge of a democratic political culture, that of “conscious social reproduction.”<sup>4</sup> At the very least, this notion entails people participating widely and intentionally in the process through which important influences on their lives, especially public institutions, are reproduced and modified over time. The vision of widespread, deliberate involvement in the shaping of public policies that Gutmann associates with democratic

values provides a vital standard with which to assess the health of political culture. It is in light of this standard that popular culture warrants the fullest attention. A democratic society cannot be indifferent to the way common understandings of important social and institutional phenomena are formed, modified, and transmitted. The challenge today is to understand more fully why democratic deliberations on matters of this kind are vital and in what ways they are problematic.

Schooling represents an important example of the challenge confronting democratic society. Why are questions about conditions affecting the quality of democratic involvement in and about schooling important today? The general contours of a response are evident. Schooling represents a massive investment of human and economic resources in America. Its precise effect on individual lives is incalculable, of course, but important kinds of influence are readily apparent. These include the significance of what is learned and not learned, insofar as beliefs and skills are concerned, and how such school learning affects the potential for subsequent learning. Beyond this, another kind of influence involves the effects of the hidden curriculum insofar as norms, habits, and expectations are instilled in the young. And schooling maintains a social role as a sorting and selection process connected to the social hierarchy of success and privilege that students encounter after leaving school.

While such effects on individual lives are critically important, they are not the entire story. The ongoing discussion of schooling is itself a central factor constitutive of the culture of which it is a part. The nature of social deliberation and discussion about what does and should take place in schools helps define the nature of the society itself in turn. In contrast to those institutions that are largely managed by powers remote from ordinary citizens, schooling represents a widely contested social territory to which large numbers of people in the culture have immediate access. Schools therefore provide vital sites where public deliberation and compromise can still take place, and in which wider community participation remains possible.

The question of how schooling is addressed by the public is therefore doubly significant. First, it matters how individuals directly involved think about schools because it will affect the shape of lives in a variety of ways, some of them subtle and typically unacknowledged. The second concern follows from this and centers on the viability of democratic political culture. Because schooling has far-reaching effects on the shape of individual lives, deliberations about what does and should take place in schools offer prime opportunities for the building of a healthy political culture. In short, if schooling involves education and not mere training or indoctrination, those involved with schooling—students, teachers, and other participants—must reflect upon what they are doing

in schools. And if the society is to preserve and extend its democratic character, there are few sites more conducive to democratic deliberation and participation than its schools. To echo Gutmann, as an avenue of “conscious social reproduction,” the quality of public deliberations about schooling may well be read as a measure of the well-being of the political culture as a whole.

Despite the widespread credence of these claims, however, many questions arise as to the quality of discourse about the institution of schooling and the conditions for its improvement. One thing seems clear: If we take a democratic ideal with respect to schooling to mean that all concerned, to the greatest possible extent, strive to examine their beliefs and attitudes about schooling as part of an open, deliberative process of engagement, we cannot be sanguine about the current state of affairs. No one involved in schooling can fail to grasp how far this ideal is from what actually takes place. The image of schooling at the center of far-reaching conversations within communities of care and respect bears little resemblance to the way the topic of schooling is generally discussed.

In a sense, the reason for the discrepancy between longstanding ideal and current reality is not hard to find. Everyone knows schooling inside and out; thousands of hours of acquaintance makes its characteristic patterns and rhythms familiar, a matter of common perception and understanding. What schooling means, what it is for, and how well it functions are subjects about which most people feel competent to speak. Much of what is said about schooling thus exemplifies an air of confidence. Opinions on schooling generally admit of few doubts, little ambiguity. This does not mean that all agree, of course. But from whatever perspective individuals speak about schooling, and whatever observations and conclusions they articulate, a felt need to be circumspect on the topic is rarely evident. Some students know “school sucks,” for example. Many business leaders, pundits, and politicians likewise speak with utter assurance about “the school crisis.” Schools are not doing what they are supposed to do, whether that means teaching Johnny to read or underwriting America’s economic security, solving the social catastrophes of the cities, or whatever. Many concur that the problem is incompetent teachers or entrenched bureaucrats. Others point the finger at irresponsible parents, or a new breed of TV-addicted, junk-fed kids. There is a stridency in discussion about schooling that perhaps even exceeds that which is evident in other domains of public life.

Such stridency may simply be a product of familiarity. But this does not answer the question of why something as vast as schooling, as multifaceted in experience, as socially complex, should so commonly be reduced to the most simplistic, reductive, often dismissive terms. It is, after all, one thing for an individual to speak with self-assurance about

particular experiences of school, even to find them emblematic of what schooling means for that person. But it is quite another thing to characterize glibly the whole of schooling one way or another, to pronounce judgment on its status and prospects. Yet this is commonplace.

The result is a babel of voices on schooling. There are numerous conversations one can join, each with its own take on what it is all about. From the variety of perspectives held by students and teachers to the diverse views of conflicting research traditions and interest groups surrounding schooling, fractures exist across the range of groups expressing thoughts on the institution. There is an intriguing paradox here. For while the welter of perspectives and orientations would seem to invite a healthy skepticism about the correctness of any particular view, doubt and openness are rarely voiced. What is lacking is twofold. Within particular orientations, what is lacking is humility: a willingness to be circumspect with regard to one's particular orientation to schooling as a phenomenon. And beyond this, as a society we also lack the ability to converse across the lines of our various positions and interests: a willingness to take alternative readings seriously with regard to the nature of what does or should take place in schools.

The question of why simplistic, formulaic thinking about schooling has such an appeal is thus a vital one. Within the various camps of thought, and between them, there is much to be done in trying to overcome the rush to judgment. What drives the process through which the complexities of schooling are unselfconsciously reduced to a slogan or slight? We would do well to set this question more broadly in the context of issues concerning the conditions for public deliberation. Consider, for example the work of Bellah and his colleagues. A central theme of their recent work, *The Good Society*, concerns the loss of public confidence in the institutions of contemporary society.

Democracy requires a degree of trust that we often take for granted. . . . [In the United States] we have begun to lose trust in our institutions. . . . The heritage of trust that has been the basis for our stable democracy is eroding.<sup>5</sup>

Many citizens renounce the institutions on which they depend. While sometimes justified by particular circumstances, such renunciation provides no basis for the kind of deliberate engagement that Gutmann describes. It is more likely a recipe for detachment, anger, or cynical indifference.

Aligned with this is the set of changes that have taken place, and that continue, regarding what Habermas called "the public sphere."<sup>6</sup> His focus is on that "domain of our social life in which such a thing as

public opinion can be formed.”<sup>7</sup> For Habermas, the domain in which citizens may engage matters of general interest and shape public policy is, to the extent that it was realized, a historical achievement. But the very idea of such a domain is now threatened by what Habermas dubs “a kind of ‘refeudalization’ of the public sphere.”<sup>8</sup> Powerful forms of “public relations” in support of policies favoring the interests of well situated individuals and groups increasingly takes the place of “the public use of reason” in determining matters of public policy. In this analysis, we find again that a condition of democratic deliberation is undermined, in this case by the way individual participation in public policy making is marginalized and manipulated.

These remarks capture aspects of an enduring tension that is evident in the deeply ambiguous history of schooling insofar as democratic values are concerned. Schooling has, from the start, been caught up in struggles between conflicting interests, at times responding to widely held democratic impulses while at other times taking sharply antidemocratic turns. This is evident, for example, in school policy struggles centered on the conflicting imperatives of capitalist development and democratic aspirations.<sup>9</sup> Put simply, schooling has functioned as a mechanism of social reproduction, a sorting machine closely tied to, and serving to legitimate and perpetuate, the social hierarchy of power and privilege in American society. But it is also a site where significant gains have been won as individuals and groups have struggled to make schools responsive to the needs of their children.

Public discussion of schooling could build upon an understanding of this problematic past, but rarely does it do so. Concerns of the kinds we have indicated, the crisis of confidence, and the fragility of serious and open public discussion of matters vital to human interests help to account for this. But that is only a start. Perhaps, as Jameson suggests, the vision of democratic deliberation is bound to become merely nostalgic within postmodern culture, a victim of global developments in “late capitalism.”<sup>10</sup> Dislocating effects of such developments may indeed fragment human experience to the point at which efforts to define collective interests and promote democratic deliberation are empty, if not absurd. But if this troubling view is to be proved wrong, it is necessary to examine factors that contribute to the impoverishment of discourse about, and erosion of trust in, the institutions of modern society, including formal education. To do so requires inquiry concerning the way that views are formed, at various levels of engagement and interaction, about the central institutions of modern life. The quality of discourse about schooling is contingent upon how schooling is understood, the ways in which the multifarious meanings schooling has for diverse people are formed and modified over time. It is to this topic that we now turn.

## UNDERSTANDING SCHOOLING

Coming to terms with how important patterns of social life such as those comprising schooling are understood represents a considerable challenge. Efforts to do so must take into account different and overlapping kinds and sources of meaning and how these interrelate to form what Bruner has recently termed the “folk psychology” with which individuals make sense of their lives. According to Bruner:

All cultures have as one of their most powerful constitutive instruments a folk psychology, a set of more or less connected, more or less normative descriptions about how human beings “tick,” what our own and other minds are like, what one can expect situated action to be like, what are possible modes of life, how one commits oneself to them, and so on.<sup>11</sup>

“Folk psychology” in this sense surely includes a healthy set of understandings regarding the abundant school experience most individuals in modern societies have undergone. The firsthand experience people have as a result of living and working in rule-governed classrooms and schools provides basic sense-making categories for understanding what the nature and purposes of schooling are. But these categories are further developed and informed by auxiliary sources of information and meaning that are brought into relation to them. An account of such sources must include, first, the varieties one encounters of hearsay, gossip, and anecdotal information regarding firsthand experience (the range of tales told about persons and events in school settings). Next, there is the prominent category of informed or expert opinion on the nature of schooling. This includes various forms of insight and opinion deriving from individuals claiming some privileged vantage point, such as school administrators in formal or informal reports, the comments of individuals recognized as experts on educational matters, and research findings published or presented in various scholarly formats and representing a variety of paradigms of inquiry and interpretation. Finally, we encounter references to and portrayals of schooling in the diverse forms and texts of popular culture.

Of the ways in which thinking about schools is stimulated and informed, the category involving representations of schooling in popular culture is perhaps the least examined and least understood. There are reasons to believe this must change. In this regard, an observation of Anthony Giddens is pertinent.<sup>12</sup> Modern society, Giddens suggests, is unique in part because of the extent to which identity formation is tied to events and activity perceived from a distance in space and time.



Increasingly, local attachments and affiliations are being supplanted by networks of remote associations that serve to define and affirm self-identity. As this occurs, the positions we come to and identify with are not the consequence of firsthand experience alone, or local circumstances. Rather, to an increasing extent, who we are and what we believe are profoundly influenced by distant events.

John Thompson has examined this development in close detail, relating it to a historical process he calls “the mediazation of modern culture.” He traces the way media industries have

shaped, in a profound and irreversible way, the modes in which symbolic forms are produced, transmitted and received in modern societies, as well as the modes in which individuals experience the actions and events that take place in contexts from which they are spatially and temporally remote. These developments are partially constitutive of modern societies, and are partially constitutive of what is ‘modern’ about the societies in which we live today. That is, part of what constitutes modern societies as ‘modern’ is the fact that the exchange of symbolic forms is no longer restricted primarily to the context of face-to-face interaction, but is extensively and increasingly mediated by the institutions and mechanisms of mass communication.<sup>13</sup>

Thompson’s observation is important in the present context. When people speak of schooling, as when they address other phenomena of interest, it is increasingly likely that the source and genesis of their view extends beyond traditional boundaries of experience and insight. If tendencies toward crude reductionism and dismissiveness are evident, these are rooted at least in part in distant soil, mediated by images and ideas that have remote sources. The same is true for opinions that show critical insight or sensitivity, where these appear. The mediazation of culture feeds the pervasive tendency to form judgments about schooling writ large and to express these with conviction far beyond what firsthand experience alone would support.

As a result, whatever one’s stake in schooling—as a student, teacher, administrator, policymaker, parent, or concerned citizen—what one believes about schooling is influenced in ways that simply did not exist, say, a century ago. And the same is true for all those one encounters, and sometimes contests with, who also have a stake in schooling. So teachers face students who feel “informed” about what teachers, far and wide, are all about, and vice versa. Similarly, relationships among peers and across the various levels and boundaries of institutional life feature this dimension of “knowingness.” This comment is written by teacher educators; how often in our contacts with people working in

some other capacity involving schooling, or in other fields altogether, are these relationships free of tacit judgments about the work we do? Relationships in and around schooling take place in a context of preunderstandings and expectations that shape, both enabling and constraining in particular ways, the possibilities such relationships contain.

The prejudging of others on the basis of their work or role did not require modern forms of mass media to come into being, of course. But what has changed is the extent to which the mediatization of culture provides people with a sense of connectedness to distant others and the rapidity, across this network of connections, with which one can gain remote affirmations of one's views about how things are (and, always possible, awareness of distant contradictions as well). We expect that anyone reading this book feels quite capable of expressing views not only about this or that local situation of schooling but about the grander picture of what schooling is like. And views of the latter kind are not built up inductively, piece by local piece, but involve leaps of judgment in which modern media play an instrumental role.

This book reflects the belief that what individuals learn at a distance by way of mass media sources is increasingly fundamental to how they think about various aspects of their lives. As Thompson puts it:

In the course of receiving media messages and seeking to understand them, of relating them and sharing them with others, individuals remould the boundaries of their experience and revise their understanding of the world and of themselves. They are not passively absorbing what is presented to them, but are actively, sometimes critically, engaged in a continuing process of self-formation and self-understanding, a process of which the reception and appropriation of media messages is today an integral part.<sup>14</sup>

The process Thompson describes is deeply connected to how the nature and possibilities of schooling now come to be understood. Inquiry centered on such learning holds promise of entering into a central dynamic of educational and cultural development, as individuals form a sense of self and significant parts of their world, including schooling, in the context of the mediatization of culture.

## EXAMINING SCHOOLING IN POPULAR CULTURE

Rich possibilities for inquiry emerge from consideration of how processes of self-formation, schooling, and popular culture intersect. In speaking about popular culture in the context of this work, we will focus

on a dimension of this field of inquiry. While we have introduced Thompson's broader focus on the mediatization of modern culture—the entire process “by which the transmission of symbolic forms becomes increasingly mediated by the technical and institutional apparatuses of the media industries”<sup>15</sup>—we will concentrate on the symbolic forms themselves. In particular, we are using the term “popular culture” to refer to the symbolic forms transmitted by various media such as television, film, popular magazines, and music. The descriptive essays included in this book focus on widely distributed examples of such symbolic forms, what Paul Smith refers to as “popular cultural commodity texts.”<sup>16</sup>

It is important to be clear on this point, for this focus represents an intentional, and possibly controversial, limitation on the notion of popular culture. As several commentators on popular culture have pointed out, work focusing on the texts of popular culture themselves runs the risk of making unwarranted assumptions about both their received meaning and their impact on the audience consuming them. A tradition of thought originating in the Frankfurt School, and exemplified in the work of Adorno and Horkheimer, has characterized popular texts as essentially ideological in nature, crippling in effect the possibilities for progressive social thought and development.<sup>17</sup> When focusing on the texts themselves, overextended interpretations of this kind are surely possible and do an injustice to the wit and insight of consumers of popular-culture texts and their capacity to construct meanings in their own ways. Such concerns are evident in recent work in cultural studies aiming to redirect attention to popular culture in a broader sense. In this regard, we acknowledge the dimension of popular culture John Fiske describes when he comments:

Popular texts are inadequate in themselves—they are never self-sufficient structures of meanings . . . , they are provokers of meaning and pleasure, they are completed only when taken up by people and inserted into their everyday culture. The people make popular culture at the interface between everyday life and the consumption of the products of the cultural industries.<sup>18</sup>

Surely Fiske is correct in asserting the insufficiency of popular texts in and of themselves. Their content is not simply conveyed through a kind of one-way transaction, nor is their meaning in use determinable by looking at the texts alone. But care must be taken at this point as well, for, as Collins has remarked, it is possible to romanticize the open capacities of readers to invent fresh meanings for texts and create their own culture.<sup>19</sup> There is, as Thompson points out, a fundamental asymmetry in the communicative process:

[U]nlike the dialogical situation of a conversation, in which a listener is also a potential respondent, mass communication institutes a fundamental break between the producer and the receiver, in such a way that recipients have relatively little capacity to intervene in the communicative process and contribute to its course and content.<sup>20</sup>

The various contents of widely available popular-culture texts succeed, therefore, as “provokers of meaning and pleasure,” to channel and inform the understanding of persons with regard to matters treated in the texts. When particular topics and phenomena are widely encountered in popular-culture texts, attempts to understand them find a resource in those texts. Readers can surely recall examples of how some distant event or state of affairs has come to have a vivid standing in her or his mind by way of television reports, say, or a traveler’s tale. This experience is commonplace, and accelerates with the pace of mediaization as daily life is saturated with images and information from all corners of the globe.

Schooling is one such topic, albeit a very large one, likely to be understood in ways that are at least in part beholden to popular images and ideas embodied in widely disseminated texts. The nature and significance of popular-culture texts in the understanding of schooling as a social phenomenon is, however, often discounted and not well understood. Set against other sources influencing the way schooling is understood, whether firsthand experience, hearsay, or varieties of expert opinion, popular culture is likely to be interpreted as something akin to cheap gossip or simply entertainment. This tendency ignores the way that the content of popular culture ultimately can be linked, we suggest, to questions of meaning, power, and pedagogy that are of central and abiding educational significance.

## MEANING, POWER, AND PEDAGOGY

This book is addressed to readers representing diverse theoretical and practical interests. This intent is in keeping with the topic itself, focused on the interaction between, on the one hand, cultural forms that are widely distributed and participated in and, on the other, a social institution of some personal meaning to nearly everyone and wide social significance. Three broad questions suggest the scope of issues that arise within this framework.

The first question is how participation in popular culture influences conceptions of what schooling “is” and means. What schooling means for different people and the interplay of elements such meaning

making involves are intriguing and significant topics at many levels. Important issues arise with respect to how popular culture enters into the way individuals conceive of the nature and prospects of schooling, constraining and enabling understandings of certain kinds. To what extent are common assumptions about the point and purpose of schooling underscored in popular culture? Be that as it may, popular culture also carries potential for provoking a rethinking of what schooling is about and what it might mean, how it affects people's lives, and why it needs to change. For these reasons, we contend that popular culture represents an underexamined source of influence with regard to the way people, including those who are directly engaged, do and might make sense of schooling in their lives.

The second question is an offshoot of the first. If indeed popular culture influences the way individuals make sense of school experience, the question arises how wider patterns of social interaction constituting the purposes, impact, and future prospects of schooling are affected. This is fundamentally a political question concerning the institution of schooling, and suggests the way popular culture relates to power relations in and around schools. The politics of schooling, understood broadly as involving the ongoing negotiation of contending interest groups concerned with the impact and direction of practice, is bound up in matters of meaning. At various levels—including the classroom, the school, and the larger community—interaction concerning what does or should take place is contingent upon how individuals involved make sense of the situation and of others taking part in it. Popular culture is not likely to be neutral here, but its impact across the many and varied sites at which power relations exist in schooling is unclear. How, for example, do forms of popular culture contribute to the way authority in the classroom is perceived and exercised or the way school policy debates are framed, conducted, and settled? Inquiry at many levels is necessary in order to understand how various forms of popular culture function as a factor in the power relations schooling unavoidably involves.

Finally, as the comments above suggest, there is reason to ask how the interaction of popular culture and schooling does or might affect pedagogical relationships, those centered on patterns of teaching and learning, in schools. As popular culture contributes to the process through which people make sense of schooling and how schools are governed, it very likely conditions pedagogical possibilities in wide-ranging and largely uncharted ways. For this reason, popular culture presents both challenges and opportunities to those who care about teaching. Aspects of popular culture may be quite corrosive with regard to the conditions for fruitful pedagogical relationships in schools, for example,

by fostering stereotypes about, and undermining the morale of, teachers. But just as society creates and consumes images and ideas about schooling, it provides teachers in return with numerous texts and artifacts to explore with students, opening up a space for discussion about the familiar world and how it is represented in popular forms. There is great potential here for critical reflection as pedagogy takes account of the interaction between school experience and popular culture.

These three questions involving meaning, power, and pedagogy suggest both the scope of issues that the studies in this volume bear upon and the range of perspectives that link them. Potentially vital contributions to schooling at every level, and to democratic culture concerned with what takes place in schools, open by way of inquiry exploring the range of questions popular-culture studies involve, raise, and help to frame. For this reason, we hope to engage a wide array of readers in a process of inquiry, examining popular culture and its possible role in the formation and critique of beliefs and attitudes about schooling.

The collection of studies is divided into four sections. The first examines popular-culture texts created for and circulating primarily among an adolescent audience. Teen-centered films set in schools, rock-and-roll lyrics about school experience, and the presentation of educational matters in *Seventeen* magazine are explored. The second section includes studies centering on the way stories about schooling are covered in diverse mainstream informational media. These include the presentation of educational issues in *Reader's Digest* and the *New York Times* as well as the portrayal of dropouts in diverse magazines for the general public. The third section includes studies of schooling in the context of cinematic narratives set in educational settings. These include narratives about charismatic educators, elite prep schools, and persons struggling with disabling conditions. The fourth section includes studies suggesting the variety of popular modes, directed at diverse audiences, that feature an interplay of entertainment value and pointed, telling images regarding aspects of schooling. These include studies centered on schooling in mainstream comics and in cartoons aimed at a wide audience of educators as well as a study of what a week of television programming purporting to enhance schooling reveals about the relationship of schooling and television.

This set of studies in no way exhausts the possibilities for inquiry in this area. Indeed, our intent is quite the opposite. We hope here to open avenues of exploration and discussion at many levels. We believe that examining the portrayal of schooling in diverse popular-culture texts provides a way to extend conversation about the meanings and values embedded in school practices and experience. Critical examination of the content of popular culture promises to enrich the conversa-

tion by disclosing ways in which common understandings about the nature and direction of schooling are shaped, conveyed, and crystallized at different levels in and around schooling. Such conversation is, in the end, an antidote to complacency and the temptations of settled opinion. As Ariel Dorfman has commented, the need to examine deeply held views is easily overlooked:

To get rid of old clothes, clothes that are comfortable, that wear well, that hold pleasant memories, is not easy. All too often our bodies have adopted to these clothes and taken on their form, their color, their smell. It is as if they had become our skin and we had been born with them.<sup>21</sup>

Many of the popular ideas about and images of life in schools, evident in diverse symbolic forms current in popular culture, are indeed comfortable. And they can be powerful as well, sometimes nourishing the imagination regarding what schooling is or might be and at other times affirming opinions that simplify, distort, or deny important dimensions of school experience. In any event, popular culture shapes the possibilities of what does and might take place in schools, by way of its impact on how we think about such things. For this reason alone, we would have to conclude that it is a good time to tune in.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Contradictions of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991); and Henry Giroux, *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

2. See, for example, Ben Agger, *A Critical Theory of Public Life: Knowledge, Discourse and Politics in an Age of Decline* (London: Falmer Press, 1991).

3. Arthur Danto, *Connections to the World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).

4. Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).

5. Robert Bellah et al., *The Good Society* (New York: Knopf, 1991), p. 3.

6. Jurgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere," in *Rethinking Popular Culture*, ed. C. Mukerji and M. Schudson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 398–404.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 398.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 403.
9. See, for example, Martin Carnoy and Henry Levin, *Schooling and Work in the Democratic State* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985).
10. See Jameson, *Postmodernism*.
11. Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 35.
12. See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).
13. John Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 15.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4
16. See Paul Smith, “Pedagogy and the Popular Cultural Commodity Text,” in *Popular Culture, Schooling and Everyday Life*, Henry Giroux and Roger Simon and contributors (New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1989), pp. 31–46. Also see Greil Marcus’s model of “commodified culture-for-the-people” in his *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).
17. See, for example, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972); related discussions in Jim Collins, *Uncommon Cultures: Popular Culture and Post-Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Giroux, *Border Crossings*.
18. John Fiske, *Reading the Popular* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 6.
19. Collins, *Uncommon Cultures*.
20. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, p. 15.
21. Ariel Dorfman, *The Empire’s Old Clothes: What the Lone Ranger, Babar, and Other Innocent Heroes Do to Our Minds* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), p. ix.