Of all the recurring themes in the history of cultural studies, it is arguably the relationship between popular culture (especially mass mediated popular culture) and various forms of cultural legitimacy and authority that has most consistently inflected the politics of the field, both in its substantive contributions to academic debate, and in its own struggles for institutional space. While some might argue that these battles have been fought and won, others clearly feel that contemporary reconfigurations of “the popular” demand renewed attention. Of these three recent anthologies, two (Hop on Pop and High-Pop) make explicitly polemical, though sharply differentiated, contributions to this renewal, while the third (Prime Time Animation) provides substantial new coverage of a particular popular media genre.
At over 700 pages, *Hop on Pop* is a book of the correct size and weight to be dropped dramatically onto a colleague’s desk in answer to their mutterings about the dubious substance of popular cultural studies – “the culture that sticks to your skin”, as the authors, paraphrasing cyberpunk author Bruce Sterling, would have it. The framing of the introduction to the volume as a “manifesto” does little to dispel this impression of revolutionary zeal, despite disclaimers to the contrary. The editors state: “we are interested in the everyday, the intimate, the immediate; we reject the monumentalism of canon formation and the distant authority of academic writing”; they further claim to represent “the first generation of cultural scholars to be able to take for granted that popular culture can be studied on its own terms, who can operate inside an academic discipline of cultural studies”. Therefore, *Hop on Pop* is explicitly framed in relation to the struggles over authority and cultural value both inside and outside cultural studies. The introduction refers to the “irreverent pleasure” in using the name “hop on pop” (A Dr. Seuss reference) for a serious academic anthology. However, also recognizing that popular culture has demonstrably gained more space in the academy, the editors state that they aim both to “play with our newfound freedom and to secure ground for a new approach.” Under this new approach, popular culture is to be framed not in industrial or economic terms, but on the basis of several defining (textual) characteristics: immediacy, multivalence, accessibility, particularity, contextualism, and situationalism – characteristics which, according to the manifesto, are to be ideals of academic writing on popular culture as well as being identifiers of popular culture itself. In the introduction, there is also a useful survey of the history of popular culture as a field where politics and pleasure have been defined and contested; industrially, politically, and academically. Finally the editors come to rest on an “emergent position in cultural studies that reflects the contributions of a generation of academics who see that the politics and pleasures of the popular are contingent upon its historical context in late capitalism, as well as upon its forms and users.”
Taken together, the essays included in the anthology do indeed cover the “historical context in late capitalism”, the “forms” and “users” of popular culture. The anthology is impressively diverse in subject matter and approach, despite an understandable (if unreflexive) emphasis on North American popular culture. As we must expect, the cultural politics of race, gender, and sexuality, are central, with class, regionality and youth given slightly less space. As we also must expect, the cultural politics of identity are articulated, in the essays, to the production and consumption of music, film, television, and digital media. Of these areas of identity, however, (again, predictable given the focus on American identity), it is race that features most prominently – there are several explorations of the ways in which whiteness and blackness have been performed, regulated and reconfigured in jazz (Evans), cinema (McPherson, Wojcik) and television (Brooks). In selecting the essays, the editors have made more than a token attempt at providing a sense of the history of popular culture, which is important given the manifesto’s emphasis on contextualization.

Given the emphasis on everyday life, it is also pleasing to see some analysis of embodied and spatial practices – collecting (Bloom), travel (Hartley), thrift-shopping (Tinkcom et. al.), and stripping (McCarthy). As a set text on an introductory course dealing with cultural studies and popular culture, particularly in a US university context, *Hop on Pop* has enough breadth and depth, and enough reflective editorial input, to stand alone, and while it does not necessarily redefine the field of cultural studies in the ways the editors seem to believe it should, it will certainly become a milestone in the history of cultural studies publishing.

However, with the partial exception of Dianne Brooks’ piece “‘They Dig Her Message”: Opera, Television, and the Black Diva”, there is little sense of the cultural forms and users who are thought to lie outside the popular, unless they figure as the cultural authority figures whose definitions of cultural value are up for debate. In this sense, the book does not so much break down the binaristic distinction between popular culture and historically legitimated high culture as invert it (retaining a high level of abstraction in language) or even disregard what is thought to lie on the other side of the high-popular divide. Indeed, to some extent the collection misses the
territory in which such boundaries are most often contested and blurred – the section of the book devoted to essays on “taste”, for example, is not concerned with illuminating ways in which audiences make value judgements about popular forms, or the ways in which cultural capital is becoming realigned with popular forms of discrimination, but with the “bad taste” of the people, or the devaluing of the cultures of subordinate groups, and the ways in which such constructions of taste have been policed from above.

A much more focused, but equally polemical, recent contribution to these discussions about the status of “popular culture” in the cultural studies imagination is *High-Pop: Making Culture into Popular Entertainment*, edited by Jim Collins. As he carefully explains in the introduction, Collins’ newly minted term “High-Pop” does more than mark out the territory marked out by high culture borrowing from the popular, or vice versa; rather, as indicated by the subtitle, it is both a description of new patterns of high cultural distribution and consumption, and a constitutive description of “high-pop” as a *bona fide* cultural field. This cultural field is characterized in three ways: firstly, on the basis of mass marketing and mass consumption assumed to be the sole province of the popular; secondly, on the basis of the new mainstream consumption practices defined by Collins as “popular connoisseurship”; and, finally, by the emergence of a new set of cultural *auteurs* previously excluded from high culture: the designer, the interior decorator, the domestic cook.

Almost without exception, the essays contain careful and consistently critical elaborations of the ways in which earlier ideas about the bifurcation of high and popular culture via institutions and mechanisms of class distinction must now be rethought in light of widespread and observable phenomena. For example, mainstream cinema has seen a recent flowering of literary adaptations or films that reference literary works (such as *Shakespeare in Love*), albeit with a postmodern and irreverent twist (Corrigan); blockbuster museum exhibitions represent a convergence of high culture’s canons and mass marketing techniques (Wallach); the contemporary corporate brand functions like the artist’s signature, and vice versa (Frow).
Additionally, the ability to exercise “educated” taste – which is to be distinguished from middlebrow “good taste” – in the domestic sphere (through interior design, decorating, or cooking) is no longer the exclusive domain of cultural experts, but has been extended, via the (usually televised) mediation of “auteur” tastemakers, to a culturally competent mass audience (Collins).

The success of this volume lies in the close integration of the arguments set out in Collins’ Introduction with the theoretical work and illustrative examples provided by each of the contributors. High-Pop is clearly a major contribution to the contemporary theoretical debates around cultural value and the reconfiguration of the cultural or creative industries, and will be indispensable to any scholar whose work engages with these problems.

*Prime Time Animation* is a far more straightforward enterprise: it offers no manifestos and does not directly engage with the ongoing debates in cultural studies over the ways in which cultural value or academic weight are ascribed to particular cultural forms. However, it is explicitly intended to address a gap in the media studies literature and to mark out a space for the academic study of one popular cultural field – television animation – approached as industry segment, as creative practice, and as textual form. The anthology it delivers on these intentions very well, covering the industrial loci and economics of prime time animation, as well as the major texts (from *The Flintstones* and *The Simpsons* to *South Park, Daria* and *The Powerpuff Girls*).

The first section of the anthology includes essays that contribute to the cultural history of animation as a field of creative practice, initially flourishing in cinema, and for economic reasons being transposed to television. Paul Wells tracks the changing aesthetic of animation (from “classic” to “recombinant”) from its institutional centres in the Hollywood studios (Warner Bros and later Disney) to its eventual home on television. Jason Mittell follows up by examining the relationship between cultural form, cultural value and scheduling in his discussion of the dominance by cartoons of

Saturday morning television. Allen Larson looks at the 1990s boom in animated sitcoms in light of the synchronous growth of cable television and the fragmentation of the US television audience, a topic taken up by Hilton-Morrow and McMahan in their comparison of the two distinct “booms” (the 1950s and the 1990s) in prime time animation in relation to television networks, and by Sandler in a detailed analysis of the Cartoon Network as an example of the relationship between animation, branding, and media conglomeration. The first part of the anthology ends with Crawford’s survey of the social and industry implications of emerging digital technologies and media.

The second part of *Prime Time Animation*, subtitled “readings”, presents a reasonably wide, if unavoidably partial and occasionally predictable map of the range of cultural work done by contemporary television animation in relation to core areas of cultural identity and politics: constructions of the family (Tueth), youth and generationalism (Newman), gender and consumption (Van Fuqua), and class and taste (Alters). There is one essay that attempts to unpack the way that certain cartoons function as cultural texts in relation to their position in “prime time” (Farley), and one that deals with the consumption and re-use of prime time cartoons (Ott). Collectively, the essays in this second section lack the critical mass and coherence of the historicized industry analyses in the first section. Indeed, the volume may have had more impact if it had an unapologetic focus on the relationships between the changes in cartoon aesthetics, the media industries, and the relations between those industries and the wider culture. As it stands, however, it is a substantial contribution to the media studies literature. It would be a useful addition to undergraduate reading lists for courses that include television animation as part of their curricula; and for researchers, it will prove a useful background source of this specific area of media history.