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- 1 Brienza, Casey. *Manga in America: Transnational Book Publishing and the Domestication of Japanese Comics*
- 2 London, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. 2016. ISBN: 978-1-4725-9587-4
- 3 Katherine Marazi
- 4 The case of cultural production appears to be one focused only on products. As I write this review the 2017 San Diego Comic-Con has ended and yet as an event it reminds fans and audiences alike that it is not just about the comic books, the films, the TV series or the manga and anime. It is also about the writers, the artists, the publishers, the screen writers and directors, the actors/actresses and many other agents who fall into the looming shadows of the cultural product. This need to examine the cultural production process more holistically is one of the aims in Casey Brienza's book. Beginning with a light, yet serious tone, Brienza introduces manga, a concept lacking an agreed-upon definition, as well as metaphors associated with manga. In the past, manga have been seen as "airy, odorless, innocuous, and easily transportable [products]; alternatively, [they are] militaristic, forceful, and powerful enough to project Japan's will even upon the pop culture and political juggernaut that is the United States" (7). On a broader note, manga can also be considered "a newfound global economic asset as a cultural export or brand" (7). These views aside, what appears to permeate in, around and across the "story" of manga is a cultural power struggle the process, intentions and implications of which Brienza examines in her book.
- 5 More specifically, Brienza argues that beneath the aforementioned metaphors, "is the rapid transmission and transformation of professional practice from Japan to the United States and back again, driven by cooperative, as well as competing, individual and collective desires and agendas" (9). By coining this process with the term domestication, what initially hooks one's attention and curiosity is the claim that

“domesticating Japanese manga for the United States makes manga everywhere more American” (9) thus highlighting the notion of power relations in cultural production processes. Brienza concisely and clearly outlines the scope and chapters of her book respectfully apologizing for her desire to cater to multiple disciplines but acknowledging the fact that this is also an impossible feat. Her sincerity and passion for the research conducted resonates in her writing and is truly capable of drawing a reader in to not only an informative book but an ongoing conversation.

- 6 In chapter two Brienza continues this conversation by drawing attention to the matter of agency, the role of those who create and produce manga aside from the medium itself. To quote both Brienza and Howard Becker (1982): “All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people” (35). The power dynamics of those people, what they do and how they do what they do is essentially what this book aims to examine and identify. To understand cultural production, consumption and the deeper meanings one cannot solely focus on the product at hand. Thus, Brienza explains in this chapter how a sociological perspective can aid in examining the production of culture of manga in America. The term introduced here to represent the collective labor behind manga production is that of “domestication” which Brienza complements with “directionality.” She adopts the first term based off of the concept of “localization” and her “synthesis of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of fields and Gary Gereffi’s global value chain framework” (17-18) so as to map out the structure of the American manga publishing industry. Having set the terms, concepts and initial context of approach, this chapter continues with a theoretical and historical overview where Brienza argues that “American manga publishing today most closely resembles American trade book publishing” (22).
- 7 Chapter three focuses on the Book Trade context, both Japanese and American, which as Brienza argues led to and affected the domestication of manga in America. With highly informative overviews of both contexts as well as a detailed table exemplifying percentages, sales and reviewing specific years that played a crucial role, this chapter provides the context that allows one to see how manga leveraged a foothold in America. As Brienza argues, “manga publishing companies and their employees became self-identified with the field of contemporary trade book publishing and this now defines and constrains the direction they will take manga in the future” (43). With references to Japan’s Big Three publishing houses (Shueisha, Kodnasha, and Shogakukan), the book-retailing chain superstores in America, such as Waldenbooks, and the definitive *Sailor Moon* title published by *MizzZine* in 1997, the pieces were in place thus indicating a promising future for manga in America. This was consolidated via the Chain superstores “100% Authentic Manga” marketing campaign which established the Americanized brand of Japanese manga with Viz and Tokyopop as the two main competitors.
- 8 Brienza ultimately identifies 2005 as the year American manga became a structured field of transnational cultural production, a field which actually brought comic book publishing and trade book publishing closer. And though the financial crisis of 2008 did have its effect on American manga industrially-speaking, Brienza notes that manga did have their benefits whether towards the production strategies of DC, Oni Press’s *Scott Pilgrim* series or instances sanctified by Eisner Awards such as *American Born Chinese*. Nevertheless, the competing interests and power plays between creators and publishers, media conglomerates and subsidiaries as well as cultural interests between

America and Japan will continue to influence how this field will take shape in the future.

- 9 Before viewing the future of the field, it is vital to consider the founding companies. In chapter four, Brienza broadly identifies three types of founding fathers in the American manga industry: the Evangelist, the Opportunist and the Specialist, each indicating phases in the expansion of manga in America. The Evangelist, in seeking to teach others about manga, creates the “brand new sets of social practice across national territories. Without him, there would be no break with continuity, and he is, [Brienza argues], needed for domestication to ever occur” (78). The Opportunist, on the other hand, is motivated by the financial prospects of manga and the value that can be extracted in dealing in them and investing in them. The Opportunist is subdivided into two types: a) the one who builds his own manga publishing house, b) someone who is at the helm of a large corporation and is seeking a ripe opportunity. Opportunists generally appeared around the early 2000s when manga were acquiring a strong foothold in America. Finally, Specialists are the industry professionals, people who are aware of the rules of the game, who labor “in the lower ranks of the American manga industry” (81) and demonstrate that manga have reached a mature state for Specialists to emerge from within the ranks of the manga industry.
- 10 It goes without saying that each type of founding father has his role to play and can pose as a liability in some respects but the interests across cultures and industries are also telling of various power plays and struggles. Brienza informs that the early history of manga licensing involved “foreign interests actively seeking out less-than-receptive Japanese rights holders;” in other words, Japan did not venture out to create a manga market in America, but on the contrary was rather passive (87). Choosing licenses is not a clear-cut venture nor can one predict how an intellectual property will fare. In addition, the different cultures of publishing – American publishers versus Japanese creators/artists – certainly made matters more challenging and frustrating in the event of licenses and the appearance of intermediaries who ultimately would not fully have the publisher’s, the artist’s or the product’s best interest at heart. And while alternative licensing practices, such a co-publishing and parent-company/subsidiary relationships, do alleviate some of the risks for both sides, the truth is that “[m]aking manga succeed commercially in the United States is far more difficult than it would be for locally produced original content due to restrictions upon domestication activities, and the largest Japanese companies, are, perversely, the most restrictive of their wholly owned subsidiaries” (101). In other words, the American publishing context set the game and rules for the manga publishing in America.
- 11 In chapter five, Brienza focuses on the “invisible” workers: translators, editors, letterers – some of whom work from home and as freelancers and who the US manga publishing field depends upon. It depends upon “the youth, energy, and total commitment of its many laborers. Without the nearly superhuman effort they put into the transnational production of culture, it would not exist” (112). And yet, low pay, pay cuts, insufficient salaries and benefits do pose as challenges for those working in the field; they usually take one of two directions: a) they wait it out because they see other values to working in manga besides money, or b) they decide to leave. Those who choose to stay, once the rights to the manga “assets” are acquired will engage in the following stages of the domestication chain process of transnational cultural

production: (1) translation and adaptation, (2) editing, (3) graphic design, lettering and retouch, and (4) sales, marketing, and promotions (114).

- 12 In spite of problematic working conditions in the culture industries, such as long hours, low pay and casualization, the “invisible” domestic laborers continue to work in and with manga. Evidently, the *real* reason is that they love “imposing their will upon the manga text;” “they take great pleasure in superimposing themselves upon it – at any possible stage of the domestication process” (132) and in so doing continue to demonstrate that in reality “they are engaged in a daily struggle for control over the Japanese *text* with the Japanese *people*, and this desire for control has been effectively harnessed by the American manga industry to produce manga which suits the market cheaply” (135). Brienza examines these struggles in more detail in chapter six thus confirming the “web of power relations wherein they are exploited while exploiting others” and in the end, everyone feels subordinated whilst seeking out an individual and/or collective identity to imprint.
- 13 Chapter six opens with an account of how Digital Manga Publishing (DMP) procured the necessary funds it needed via fans (fan-fund) in 2012. Brienza highlights – echoing Toby Miller’s *Global Hollywood* – how the “exploitation of labor is endemic in the culture industries, a side effect of neoliberalism, and in this the transnational cultural production of manga is typical, not unique” (139). What is more, it is vital to examine this in the rapidly changing digital landscape as well. Initially offering an account of the changes in the trade book publishing landscape from 2007 to the present, Brienza identifies three main, interconnected changes: the increasing popularity of e-books due to tablets, smartphones and apps; the physical versus virtual experience of publishing and bookselling as well as its potential future after Borders; digital deterritorialization including matters such as digital piracy, and regionalism in publishing. Evidently, with the demise of Borders, manga needed to reconsider publishing models especially with the rise of e-books and the effects of digitization. Though late in venturing into the prospects of digital manga mainly due to cultural differences, five new publishing models have emerged: (1) publisher as retailer, (2) direct-to-digital publishing collectives, (3) fan-funded publishing, (4) simultaneous laydowns, and (5) original global manga).
- 14 According to Brienza, these five publishing models are not without their problems; therefore, original global manga could be the ultimate strategic solution. Original manga have in fact been in existence since 2011 but even this notion of “original” is problematic as it raises a series of issues and questions. Doesn’t trim and size determine manga? Wouldn’t original manga be viewed by some as “fake manga”? Legal matters surrounding technical terms like ‘manga’ and ‘graphic novel’ lead to licensing problems and finally, though the benefits are quite a few, original manga also play on matters of perceptions – both those of consumers and the country from which they’ve been appropriated. In sum, however, “everyone, American companies as well as Japanese, needs to change themselves in order to succeed commercially in the United States, and the pressure to do so will emanate from America” (166) thus leaving arable ground to cultural examine the relationships between countries, cultures, and industries and how they change and evolve through such power struggles.
- 15 Brienza concludes her examination and findings in chapter seven by summing up and revisiting the three standard stories about manga discussed in the introduction. What is telling is that she reaches conclusions such as:

The US market is interfering with Japan's internal affairs, while the Japanese can but play by America's rules if they wish to do business in it. The processes of domestication, in sum, simultaneously re-inscribe and rearticulate the very same imbalances of national power that might otherwise seem to have transformed by them. [...] [After all,] it was never the Japanese, historically, who most desired to make manga succeed in America. The commitment to building transnational networks and to doing the underpaid (or free) intensive labor required to make that happen came from Americans themselves. Their desires have always structured this story, so it stands to reason, therefore, that knowing the future of the American manga industry is to know what the American actors in the field want to see happen. (173, 175)

- 16 One such effect is the directionality of transnational cultural practices by way of original manga translated into Japanese and published in Japan; potentially, indicating a reversal of the process or merely the dominating side in the power struggle?
- 17 In sum, Brienza's *Manga In America* is a highly commendable venture into areas of the cultural industries, which evidently is not that forthcoming or open about its strategies, tactics and policies. Examining areas such as production, collective versus individual labor, the relation of different cultures and the content at hand, Brienza offers more so an account of trade book publishing, transnational relations and culture, and the notion of domestication with manga being the means via which this is accomplished. It could just as easily have been TV series, film, or video games. Thus, Brienza successfully manages to bring two things to the forefront: manga on the one hand, and the trade book publishing sector on the other.
- 18 In an age of media conglomerates, franchises, licensing deals and adaptations, as well as the proliferation of simultaneous cultural products, specimens such as *Manga In America* whose examination oscillates between the specific – that of manga – but also moves towards the broader context of cultural production, is highly useful and necessary for various fields such as Adaptation Studies, Cultural Studies, Sociology, Literary Studies, Reception Studies, Digital Humanities and even Business and Marketing Studies. Consequently, it poses as yet another indication of the need to not only focus on the product at hand, but examine the cultural context of production and reception as well as the processes both producers and consumers engage in thus revealing – as well as confirming – power struggles and the new or consistent meanings that they hold.