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*ONE PIECE* MANGA FANDOM AS A PARTICIPATORY CULTURE: REDDIT AND YOUTUBE PRACTICES

MA Thesis

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**Introduction**

Manga has become increasingly popular around the world ever since the 1990s (factsanddetails.com, 2008). In recent times, according to the sales statistics of manga in comparison to American comic books, at least in the US, manga sales increased by 16% which is triple the amount of the sales growths of the adult comic and graphic novel category in the US (Watson, 2020).

In this thesis I study the currently very popular Japanese manga series, *One Piece*. More specifically, the objective of this thesis is to observe and analyze how fans of the manga/anime series *One Piece*, participate and contribute to their fan communities through the creation of participatory culture. A culture, created by manga and anime consuming fans that can actively change and interact with the cultural landscape and community surrounding them. A culture that demonstrates how media consumption and creation today are becoming more interactive processes: "We are moving away from a world in which some produce and many consume media, toward one in which everyone has a more active stake in the culture that is produced." (Jenkins, 2009: 12)

The primary research question that this thesis poses is what are the predominant participatory practices of the *One Piece* fandom and how do they shape this fan community. There are three sub-questions that will help me in answering my main research question: How do *One Piece* fans participate in the fandom on social media? How are the fan practices significant for the fans within the fandom? What is the perceived relationship between Oda and the fans and how it is reflected in fan creations? I will answer these questions auto-ethnographically.

The thesis is structured into six main chapters. The first chapter is an introductory part in which I provide general background information about manga, *One Piece*, and its author to showcase their significance. Second, I will describe my worldview to provide an explanation of the perspective from which I have conducted this research. The third chapter will focus on the theoretical framework where all the key concepts that are important for understanding the topic of participatory culture, fandom and their practices are defined and explained. In the fourth chapter, I will describe the methods that I used for conducting this research which mainly involved autoethnography which was useful in gathering all the important information regarding the fandom and their practices, and discourse analysis through which I studied online fan discussions. In the fifth chapter I provide an analysis of the most predominant fan practices of the *One Piece* fandom. The sixth chapter serves the

function of a discussion where I describe and emphasize all of my findings that I have discovered over the course of this work.

**Chapter 1: Background and Context**

**1.1 Manga as a Global Influence on Fandoms and Participatory Culture**

To define manga comics in a satisfying manner is impossible (Berndt, 2008). However, for the purposes of this thesis, they are defined as pieces of visual culture that are able to captivate the readers with a multitude of things such as stories, characters, visuals, emotions and more. Furthermore, Zoltan Kacsuk noted that "manga has become a staple element of youth culture in various places around the world", which for this thesis, accentuates the global influence that manga can have on masses of people not only at the place of the genre's origin, Japan (Kacsuk, 2018: 2).

While defining manga can be difficult, understanding the qualities that manga has will be beneficial when moving forward to analyze the participatory culture around *One Piece*. Derived from the Japanese language, manga through its meaning consists of two parts. Firstly the "man" part of the word translates into English as being whimsical, involuntarily, and unrestrained, while the "ga" signifies brush stroke and picture (Katcsuk, 2018: 1). By putting these two different parts together to form the word "manga" we reach a very literal definition of manga that is a whimsical picture, however, in the more modern context of the English language, it is mainly used to refer to Japanese comics (Katcsuk, 2018: 2).

Finally, while manga is different from comics of Europe and America, the scholarly history of what has today become the norm for the modern Japanese comics is much more influenced by the complex cultural and political history of Japan; similarly they were influenced by the comic strips and political cartoons that were implemented into the nation's field of culture (Stewart, 2013). These influences arose primarily during the Allied nation's occupation of Japan at the end of the Second World War (Stewart, 2013). Therefore, to better understand the evolution of manga until today, as well as what were the factors that influenced it the most, a brief summary of the more important parts of manga's history shall be described.

**1.2 Background of Manga and Anime, Origin are the Animal People**

*Chōjū-jinbutsu-giga* that in English translates to *Animal-person Caricatures* is a work that is often credited with being the piece that established the right-to-left style of reading which

is also incorporated in the modern manga. Furthermore, *Chōjū-jinbutsu-giga* is also considered as being the very first piece of manga in history. The piece that consists of four distinctive scrolls dates back to the mid 12th and the 13th century, and because of this, the primary understanding is that manga was born at the time when this work was contrived by the supposed artist of this piece, Toba Sōjō (Larking, 2018).

Thanks to the influence of Toba Sojo's work, a style from the Edo period of Japan called toba-e became popular around the mid 18th century in Japan, and key elements of this style are still present within the field of Japanese visual culture, especially in manga (Larking, 2018). Toba-e style's influence on modern manga has led to an emphasis on visual humor and words were deemed less important (Larking, 2018).

Furthermore, at the time, toba-e also introduced the concept of anthropomorphized animals and creatures, which also influences modern manga creation, for instance, with the currently quite popular manga series *Beastars* where the entire main cast is animals that take on human-like attributes (McCarthy, 2014: 1).


**1.3 Further Developments and the Rise of Manga and Manga Artists**


After the introduction of toba-e, some of the prominent Japanese artists in Japan's history such as Santō Kyōden, Kitazawa Rakuten or Katsushika Hokusai were well-known and established also as manga artists. In Japanese, manga artists are called "mangaka". Because of this, some of their created artworks could be considered by their definition as early examples of manga artistry in the history of Japan. Hokusai, in particular, is considered to be a contributor in the popularization of the toba-e style through his woodprints. Because of this, some might even consider him to be the founder of manga as he was the one to coin the term, however, the founder of manga he was not (Berndt, 2008: 29). Another reason why Hokusai should be mentioned is that while he did create different forms of artwork such as the woodprints in the toba-e style, the manga that he created did not use the style at all (Berndt, 2008: 29). During this time, manga started becoming increasingly more popular.

However, disaster struck when the bombing of Japan happened as a result of the Second World War which was resolved with the occupation of Japan by the Allied forces (1945-1952). During the time of occupation, manga actually succeeded and flourished because it was cheap entertainment for the people and also because of the huge impact of the US comics and Disney's animations (*Superman, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck*, and

others) that the Japanese market could enjoy thanks to translations (Norris, 2009: 241). Disney and the US comics were also a big influence on Osamu Tezuka, who is probably one of the most important figures when it comes to defining the modern manga and anime industry and their evolution (Norris, 2009: 243).

## 1.4 Father of Anime and Manga, Osamu Tezuka

Osamu Tezuka, who has been titled at times to be the Walt Disney of Japan, is a great example of how the popularity of manga, most notably his manga, was growing and becoming popular during and after the occupation years in Japan (Norris, 2009: 241). Tezuka is also known as being the God of manga and the Godfather of anime, thanks to his famous works *Astro Boy* (that is loved by many till this day) and *Kimba the White Lion.* These mangas were very successful and as a result, during the 1950s and 1960s, his works helped to re-establish, shape, define and popularize the term manga and its new art style as it is known today (Berndt, 2008: 35) (Norris, 2009: 243).

Tezuka's influence is also important for the field of Japanese animation because of the *Astro Boy* anime, which was created based on the manga with the same title. Typically anime today is often an adaptation of a well-received Japanese light novel or manga or a way of promoting the original source material. Tezuka´s contributions to both the fields of manga and anime are plentiful, and only the most important ones will be covered for the framework of this thesis and TV anime's popularity is certainly one of them (Norris, 2009: 243). Before going any further, it is also integral to note that the main subject of this thesis, the series of *One Piece*, has also a weekly anime adaptation, that will be a point of reference throughout this work, and the adaptation follows the story of the canon manga written by its author Eiichiro Oda.

One of the most notable ways in which Tezuka influenced modern manga is by popularizing a dominant cute manga style, treating manga as epics that sometimes lasted for thousands of pages (Norris, 2009: 243). The *Astro Boy* manga that I mentioned earlier as one of Tezuka's works, is also categorized as a shonen. Shonen can be commonly defined as manga or anime aimed towards the young male audience, young boys (Norris, 2009: 243). While shonen is by some considered to be the most popular type of manga and anime in the US and Japan, it is also important to note that since the release of *Astro Boy*, categorizing manga by their distinctive themes became more and more popular as newer genres and types

were created. Examples of further types and genres are shojo (manga or anime aimed for girls), seinen (manga or anime aimed to appeal to young men) or seijin (manga or anime aimed to appeal to the older adult men). However, for the purposes of this thesis that focuses on the manga and anime series *One Piece* and its participatory culture, emphasis will be put on the genre that was highly popularized by Tezuka's work *Astro Boy*, shonen.

## 1.5 The Big Three from the Times of Tezuka

Here I will discuss another reason why Tezuka's works, *Astro Boy and Kimba the White Lion* are still important today. It is considered that Tezuka's works were the beginning of what is nowadays called by anime and manga fans the concept of the "big three". The big three is a term used within the anime and manga fandom when discussing the biggest three popular manga and anime titles that today are released in Japan's *Weekly Shonen Jump* magazine. Typically, the big three have consisted of only shonen titles. Many consider that Tezuka's two works were a part of the original big three titles published by the manga magazine publisher Shueisha, with the third spot filled in by the manga and later anime titled *Speed Racer*. The combination of those three titles is what helped to solidify this concept of the big three into modern-day popular manga and anime culture. Most widely, this impact can be felt when looking at the most popular and highest-selling Japanese manga magazine *Weekly Shonen Jump* into which *One Piece* is released. The most popular three titles are determined by their popularity, sales, and different fans' subjective feelings. The best titles of a decade are deemed the big three retrospectively.

The significance of the concept of the big three is mainly important because when a title in Japan gains in its popularity, then later on as history has demonstrated in the past, those same popular titles in Japan gain a following also in the western market, in the US and Europe. In the appendices can be found an image (see Appendix 2) depicting generational big threes, *One Piece* being among one of them. Furthermore, with the highest probability some of the titles in the image may be familiar to the people that were growing up during those times.

## 1.6 The Success of *One Piece*

*One Piece* is more than a twenty years long-running shonen Japanese manga series that in the year 2015 attained its author, Eiichiro Oda, a Guinness World Record title for having most copies published for the same comic book series by a single author (Swatman, 2015). This series has become the best selling manga ever created, and within the world of comic book sales rival that of western comic book titan titles such as *Batman* or potentially in the future *Superman* (Peters, 2019). *One Piece* has reached over a number of 978 chapters of manga (as of May 13, 2020). A chapter is typically around 19 to 20 pages of content. As a result of so many chapters, its anime adaptation has reached a huge number of more than 928 episodes (as of May 13, 2020). An episode consisting typically of about 20 minutes of content. Because of the huge number of chapters and anime episodes, the net worth of the author is said to be around 200 million American dollars, and his income has reached an estimation to around 21 million to 26 million dollars yearly.

Figures aside, *One Piece* is a long-running shonen series. It is integral to note that typically the stories told by long-running manga are meant to go on for a very long time. Inevitably because of this, people who come to the decision of reading and following these series reach a state where a much greater amount of time is focused on them getting to know the series' world and its characters. Over the amount of time that following shonen manga such as *One Piece* can take, the relationship with the story and world being unfolded in front of the reader can change to form a stronger bond between the consumer and the product. As a result, consuming the text until the series ends becomes nearly impossible. Therefore, long-running series such as *One Piece* will usually maintain the reader's attention on a weekly and regular basis. Furthermore, the length of the series in both manga and anime forms has over time become a detriment to the series. For *One Piece,* its length and the time that it would take for new readers or anime watchers to catch up with the series is usually the main reason that people interested do not even give it a chance. However, fans have developed some workarounds regarding the length of the work. Most members of the *One Piece* community advise new readers and anime watchers to as a minimum read or watch the series until chapter 95 of the manga or episode 44 of the anime, after which they are considered suitably informed to be able to decide whether to continue or to stop. The fandom shares an understanding that the chapters/episodes up to that point display the qualities of *One Piece* that its author later focuses and fixates on. Therefore, this has constructed this general idea that if you do not like it by chapter 95 or episode 44, then it probably is just not for you.

However, if it is, then the biggest piece of advice is to continue and avoid spoilers as much as you can because otherwise, a big piece of the enjoyment can be stolen as a result of knowing what is to come in the story. Finally, another fan-recommended way to decide whether to get into the manga is to watch the official anime retellings of the series. However, this way can be problematic because the retellings tend to skip large parts of the story, its character development, and more. There is also a third way which would recommend reading fan-created summaries of the story, but that is generally considered a bad approach.

While the readers want more of their favorite story, the weight of this mentality inevitably seems to crush the very same pieces of work or at least its creator to keep their creation ongoing and long-running. While this is not the case with *One Piece* yet, it is important to note that many other long-running shonen manga (that are similar to *One Piece*) have already ended their journeys because of this. Or, they have had a long term drop in quality because of the strains put on the creators (in a desire to please their readers and fans) who would normally keep up with the demand for more content week after week. This, according to my observations, is because of the consumerist mentality of modern society, and because of this, the work that Eiichiro Oda has done with his manga is truly remarkable. Examples of abrupt endings for manga series, for example, is the title *Bleach* that ended in the year 2016, even though the author Tite Kubo kept moving forward with his work, a drop in quality of the material was very prominent during the final years of that particular manga (Peters, 2018). Therefore, it is surprising that the intense lifestyle of Japanese mangaka who creates long-running series, at least for the current time, has not stopped the creator of *One Piece*. Oda works on his manga on an almost weekly basis for fans all around the world to enjoy, without any significant quality drops, and has gained appraisal from fans.

**1.7 What is *One Piece*?**

*One Piece* is an adventure following the character called Monkey D. Luffy, whose dream is to follow in the great footsteps of a pirate who goes by the name Gold Roger and is known by everybody in the world of *One Piece*. The story takes place within the golden age of pirates and piracy that started after the execution of the King of the Pirates, Roger, who was also Luffy's inspiration to becoming a pirate. Roger's death is what started the great age of piracy because as he was being executed he was asked about the treasure that he acquired over his lifetime of being a pirate, to which he essentially replied with the sentence: "It's

yours if you can find it...But you'll have to search the whole world!" (Oda, 1997:1) According to Roger the treasure is right where he left it (Oda, 1997:1), and the treasure's name is identical to the title of the series "One Piece."

By most characters in the *One Piece* world, The King of the Pirates is defined as a gender-neutral title given to the strongest pirate alive, as well as the new owner of the treasure called the One Piece. However, to both Luffy and Roger, the title represents the person with the most freedom on the sea. Because of this, Luffy's dream is to one day become the King of the Pirates.

Because of the series' length and Oda's strength as a writer, the long-running shonen format has allowed the author to build a believable world with an immense sense of depth. In the following additional summary, some of the complexities that show both Oda's writing skills as well as the sort of goofy and engaging nature of the manga will be exemplified while giving some further context related to the world, its rules, its characters, and story.

In the story, Luffy is our main protagonist, who as it happens, has also eaten one of the magical fruits, called devil fruits, which within the world of *One Piece* are consumables that grant the eater special superhuman powers. The power that Luffy gained from eating one of the devil fruits (*gomu gomu no mi*) was that his body acquired the properties of rubber, making him a rubber human, which allows him to extend his body while punching, kicking or doing anything else. However, as in most fictional storytelling, no great power comes without any drawbacks. The eater of the fruit loses the ability to swim, and as such, ever since eating the fruit, Luffy is incapable of swimming and would simply drown. This is even a bigger risk factor because the world of *One Piece* is composed primarily of water and islands.

As Luffy leaves his home island, he gets attacked by a creator called "Lord of the Coast", a Sea King (Sea Kings are creatures like fish because they live within the waters of the *One Piece* world, however, usually they are very large and dangerous for most people in *One Piece*) whom he knocks out with a single punch. Continuing on his journey he gets caught up, with his tiny boat, in a maelstrom that leaves him with the only option of sacrificing the boat and escaping it in a barrel that he had on his boat which he needed to do because of his inability to swim. After some time, the barrel that he used as a means of transportation gets picked up by pirates whom Luffy inevitably defeats and leaves them to be taken in by the marines who represent a corrupted law and government of the *One Piece* world (pirates are the enemies of marines and most typically the antagonists, except for the straw hat pirates, who are led by our main protagonist, who seeks the Gold Roger's treasure).

Along his journey, Luffy meets various individuals from which only a few end up becoming a part of the main cast of the manga, who collectively are called the straw hat pirates (the name is indicative of the symbolic straw hat worn by the main protagonist). In the current storyline, the main cast consists of ten Straw Hats known by their names and mentioned here according to the order that they joined the crew: Luffy, Zoro, Nami, Usopp, Sanji, Chopper, Robin, Franky, Brook, and Jimbei. Similarly to Luffy, each of these crew members also have a unique dream, some more general than others. As examples, Zoro wishes to become the greatest swordsman in the world while Nami's dream is to map out the entire world and none of their dreams clash with each other's and Luffy's dreams. Furthermore, as Luffy is not adept at vital skills to keep the health and safety of his crew under control, most of the Straw Hats specialize in a unique ability that helps Oda to enforce why each member of the crew is important to Luffy and each other. Nami being the navigator and Sanji being the cook are some of the primary examples.

While a pirate crew of ten members may seem extremely small, and it is, a core element that Oda has planted into his story and the main cast is the idea that they are "Nakama". In simplified terms, this word can mean friend, comrade, crew mate, however, to Luffy and his crew because of their typically tragic backgrounds and the way that their characters are developed, this concept of "Nakama" among the Straw Hats means to be someone closer than family. As a result, the Straw Hats are a tightly knit bunch, but they are also stronger because of it.

Finally, I will give some more information about the world of *One Piece* and how the story so far is structured. The world of *One Piece* consists of multiple tiny island nations, some of which the Straw Hats along their journey visit. While there are similarities among the different populations of the world, no two places visited are the same or identical to each other. Each new location that the Straw Hats visit has its own unique identity. Differences that can be seen while reading and following the story are unique cultures, customs, economy, and inhabitants. In providing such depth to each place visited, Oda makes the locations visited feel tangible in both its place in the world and its structure. While it would take an enormous amount of time to bring out why each location in the world has a sense of uniqueness a very brief example could be provided by briefly describing the island of Zou.

Zou is an island unlike any of the islands within our own reality. The island of Zou is a cursed living and breathing behemoth sized elephant. On the back of the elephant there is a fully grown and established forest in which the people (called minks) with beast-like qualities such as bears, cats, dogs, and bunnies live on. Finally, the island is governed

according to a day and night system, in which a knightly warrior dog rules the people during the day and an equally strong and fat cat leading the people during the night. Many of the islands have this much or even more thought put behind them, helping the author to establish a world that encompasses differences that can still be seen on Earth. Finally, before moving on to the structure, Oda makes an effort to not only make the places that the Straw Hats visit seem different and unique but a very similar or even a greater amount of detail is put on the side characters, especially the villains of the series. Each villain and side character, no matter if they are a marine, a pirate, or something completely different, have their own allegiances, place of origin, history, and things that they wish to become or accomplish. Also, none of the above must tie into the stories of our protagonists as they often are linked to characters introduced within the story earlier or later on. Sometimes these links are also addressed by Oda himself through the manga, and on other occasions, through the rare fan questions in which Oda sometimes describes how the characters are related to one another.

## 1.8 Academic research on *One Piece*

Till now, existing academic research on *One Piece* has been primarily concerned with how the manga is an important example piece when comparing it to western or European literature or discussing the richness of historical Asian cultures and customs. In his text analyzing the influence of surrealism on Oda, and Oda's penmanship, Willi Barthold noted, that *One Piece* has undoubtedly gained a prevalent position in Japanese pop-culture, however, there still seems to be a relatively small amount of academic attention given to Oda's prolific creation (Barthold, n.d.). Therefore, because of the lack of further academic research on the subject, some parts of this work will also have to rely on non-academic discussions. Such an example would be the below-referenced video by Super Eyepatch Wolf, which while not academic, helps to describe Oda's writing and drawing in both the long and short term types of storytelling.

The ways in which Oda structures the layout and narrative of his manga are twofold. In a video discussing *One Piece,* Super Eyepatch Wolf mentions these two different perspectives from which we can analyze Oda's writing and structuring of the manga. Oda is a master at short term and long term storytelling, and by understanding his work from these distinct perspectives, knowledge about why *One Piece* has endured over the years like it has, can also be acquired (Super Eyepatch Wolf, 00:08:10 - 00:08:25). The mastery of short term

storytelling can be experienced when the author is capable of laying out their work in a way that it becomes a pleasurable reading experience (Super Eyepatch Wolf, 00:08:25 - 00:08:35). In *One Piece* this can be experienced when reading and observing panels drawn by the author, and realizing how he provides guidance to the reader's eyes, how he depicts the emotions of his characters, and how practically everything on the page is important for whatever the situation and circumstances are. Through short term storytelling the audience can sense Oda's high level of engagement when focusing on visual storytelling, and because of that *One Piece* becomes a joy to read on a page to page basis (Super Eyepatch Wolf, 00:14:07 - 00:14:18). Because of all of this and more, the act of reading *One Piece* feels good (Super Eyepatch Wolf, 00:14:18 - 00:14:22).

Oda's mastery of long term storytelling can be seen and explained by how he has kept sustaining his narrative and the end goal for his manga since the very earliest days of his manga (Super Eyepatch Wolf, 00:14:18 - 00:14:22). According to this, and what I can also agree upon in my own reading and viewing experiences of *One Piece*, Oda never feels like he is focused on just the next major arc or plot points but instead on the long-running narrative of *One Piece* as a whole (Super Eyepatch Wolf, 00:16:00 - 00:16:08). By working multiple pieces into the story and having them pay off later on, leaves the act of reading *One Piece* on a long term basis to be a very satisfying experience (Super Eyepatch Wolf, 00:16:45 - 00:17:15). By understanding these two perspectives of seeing Oda's writing, what I hope to demonstrate in my research, in regards to all of this, is how *One Piece* fan practices on social media platforms and in fanon content have been influenced by the way in which Oda has planned and written the chapters.

**Chapter 2: Worldview**

According to Creswell (2009) in *Quality Inquiry & Research Design*, everybody sees the world of research from different perspectives. Through acknowledgment of this fact, I find that each researcher is better capable of understanding how their work and findings will be important in creating greater sense within the world. For making sense of paradigms of social research I found helpful works by Creswell (2009), Peterson & Gencel (2013), and Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill 2015 based on which I decided that this master's thesis relies on the interpretivist worldview. The interpretivists seek subjective reality, constructed by how human beings see and interpret the world in their respective context. So, truth is not absolute but relative in interpretivism (Peterson & Gencel 2013: Introduction). As my own worldview for this paper will be in the mindset of the interpretivism research philosophy, it also gives an account of the fact that all of the data in an ontological sense is not within the realms of objectivism but rather subjectivism.

According to John Dudovskiy (2016) hermeneutics deals with interpretation. Furthermore, an interpretivist approach implies that true meanings emerge only at the end of the research process, suggesting an inductive and hermeneutic approach (Dudovskiy 2016).

In my thesis I will be interpreting how fans go about participating and creating participatory culture on the internet on two different social media platforms. I will observe how fans interpret the text they fan and how the fandom behaves, participates, or creates when, for instance, something important occurs within the context of the manga that they all read. An interpretivist hermeneutic approach will allow me to focus on how fans experience their fandom as well as how certain core practices within their communities shape the participatory culture that is created and shared by them onto the social media platforms used for this research.

To be able to better interpret fan experiences, I approach my research by using ethnographic and auto-ethnographic methods. That is to say, I will be a participant as well as an observer of the *One Piece* fandom and the fan's world, and therefore, by experiencing this so-called world of *One Piece* fans I will also be able to explain and give insight to the various practices that take place within the *One Piece* fan communities.

I will be describing fan practices on social platforms YouTube and Reddit. For instance, through observing the different practices that fans create as a means of participatory culture I can consider what sort of perceived relationship exists between the fans and the author of *One Piece*, and how this further explains the type of fan practices that can be

observed online. For instance, when the author takes regular breaks and he leaves a massive cliffhanger or reveals characters or details filled with mystery, do fans get outraged, disappointed, or excited? Furthermore, if there is a big reveal or an unsolved mystery, will the fans react in any shape or form to these reveals or mysteries at all? Lastly, is there content that the author of *One Piece* denies them, and is fanon a means of a substitute?

A part of my worldview is that I believe that people cannot be separated from their knowledge. Therefore, an inevitable aspect to consider is that a part of my fan community-based observations and conclusions will be influenced because I attempt to take on the roles of a researcher supplemented with the position of a fan of the series. I believe such a role to be advantageous because I am capable of using and describing my own personal experiences and cultural knowledge to evaluate and illustrate what is happening within the *One Piece* fandom, and why.

**Chapter 3: Theory**

**3.1 Participatory Culture**

In this thesis, a key concept for discussing the *One Piece* fandom practices on the social media platforms of YouTube and Reddit is participatory culture. The concept of participatory culture is usually associated with the American scholar Henry Jenkins, who in his text *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (2009) defines this form of culture and cultural engagement as consisting of five distinct qualities.

According to Jenkins (2009: 5-6), participatory culture has the following qualities:

1. a "low barrier to artistic expression and civic engagement"
2. "strong support for creating and sharing with others"
3. there is a chain of passing along knowledge where the novices gain information from the ones with the most experience
4. members believe, that their contributions matter and are meaningful
5. members share with each other some sense of social connectedness, which Jenkins describes with an example of them caring about what other members think of their creation

Through these qualities, Jenkins also believes that the power of participatory culture is to prioritize and emphasize community, fan involvement, and interaction (Jenkins, 2009: 6).

Jenkins puts a great deal of emphasis on the significance that technological advancements and developments can have on the formation of cultural communities (Jenkins, 2009: 7-8). The communities that Jenkins seems to be referring to are the average consumers that because of the technological advancements and developments have greater opportunities in "recirculating media content in new and powerful ways" (Jenkins, 2009: 8). An example of such a community is the fandom of *One Piece* readers and watchers, that exist on multiple different platforms such as YouTube and Reddit. Furthermore, while new technological tools that Jenkins mentions are available to most cultures and communities, Jenkins considers it most important on what they are actually being used for (Jenkins, 2009: 8). For instance, the uses provided by Jenkins' example are to "foster skills and cultural knowledge necessary to allow the users to deploy those tools towards their own ends" (Jenkins, 2009: 8).

Finally, some of the examples of this media content that is circulated, shared, and created through technological means within this fandom (which I will discuss throughout this thesis) include fan memes, videos, images, drawings, and more. However, before going any further, I would mention how a fan is possibly different from an ordinary consumer and what is the main issue with being one today.

According to Joli Jensen, there are not many literary sources or texts that study fandoms as part of a "normal, everyday cultural and social phenomena" (Jensen, 2016: 13). However, the main difference and issue that Jensen seems to suggest is the way that both sides, the fans and people with a general interest in the subject, are perceived unequally in modern society (Jensen, 2016: 13). Mainly, she states that fans, unlike ordinary consumers, are primarily stigmatized and treated differently because they openly display their interest, affection, and attachment to their chosen field or fandom focus (Jensen, 2016: 9-10). According to Jensen this stigma comes from the fact that normal fan behavior can sometimes be misinterpreted or lead to excessive fan behavior which is the primary type of fandoms that are portrayed in the media. These can further lead to the general misconception that fans are destructive and deviant. Jensen (2016) suggests that fans should be discussed in relation to much larger questions of what it means to desire, cherish, seek, long, admire, envy, celebrate, protect which this thesis would like to explore further. Words of Henry Jenkins reflect that the power of participation is not a result of the destruction of popular or mass culture, which I interpret more as deconstruction rather than destruction, and instead, this force comes as individuals, consumers, and fans (who may all be one and the same) are capable of "writing over it, modding it, amending it, expanding it, and while adding greater diversity of perspective they are capable of recirculating culture back into the mainstream media" (Jenkins, 2006: 257).

Therefore, in this thesis, *One Piece* fans are defined differently from ordinary consumers because they openly show and display that they are fond and passionate about the manga/anime series of *One Piece* through fan practices that are the primary focus of discussion in this thesis.


## 3.2 YouTube, a Platform Where Fan Content Becomes Participatory

Henry Jenkins hinted at how technology is important to participatory culture, but Jean Burgess and Joshua Green go further to assert that "YouTube is one of the most well-known

and widely discussed sites of participatory media" (Burgess and Green. 2009). Furthermore, Jenkins has stated that "YouTube as a platform values amateur content" and according to Burgess and Green, the public's imagination was captured by this platform thanks to the combination of mass popularity and particular user-created videos (Jenkins, 2009; Burgess and Green, 2009: 4). Combined with the public prominence of YouTube, as well as the Japanese manga boom in the west, *One Piece,* and *One Piece* fandom practices have never been a bigger part of the landscape of mainstream media and contemporary popular culture as they are during the more recent times (Burgess and Green 2009: vii; Johnson-Woods, 2010: 221).

In addition to that, researcher Clement Chau has claimed that YouTube as a social media platform is not only relevant for publishing and sharing content online (Chau, 2010: 67). YouTube contains both social and technical features that can better foster the formation and growth of participatory culture among its users, that grow to become a community (Chau, 2010: 67). For this thesis, the attention concerning this platform will be put on the *One Piece* fan community on YouTube to show how fans of *One Piece* use the site to produce content for their community that can be defined as being participatory. The following subchapters will discuss reviewing and speculation that seemed to be the most dominant aspects of One Piece participatory culture on the YouTube platform.

## 3.3 Reviewing and Fans as Reviewers

In this thesis, the creators of participatory content, *One Piece* fans, will be discussed as creators that due to recent technological advancements have the power to not only recirculate but also create media in new and interesting ways. On the social media platform YouTube, a type of particular user-created review videos that the *One Piece* fandom favors are review videos.

The act of "vernacular reviewing" was described by Maarit Jaakkola in her 2018 article that discussed and compared this method to what would typically be considered the standard method for review creation, that is through the means of "institutionalized reviewing" (Jaakkola, 2018: 12). In the article, institutionalized reviews are defined as being professionally produced and operating "in the discourse of high and popular culture" (Jaakkola, 2018: 13). Additionally, Jaakkola mentions the lack of existing knowledge

concerning review practices beyond the institutionalized forms and their amateur counterparts (vernacular reviewing and its various subdivisions) (Jaakkola, 2018: 12). For instance, Jaakkola discusses game reviewing, toy reviewing, cultural product reviewing, and parody reviewing. (Jaakkola, 2018: 21). Furthermore, she also notes that it is unavoidable to discuss vernacular reviews separate from its institutionalized counterpart as the term 'reviewing' is derived from this institutionalized practice (Jaakkola, 2018: 13).

In Jaakola's text the vernacular reviews were often described as being YouTube videos and the focus of these reviews would be on popular or consumer culture. Furthermore, according to Jaakkola these reviews are typically "carried out by laypersons" (Jaakkola, 2018: 13). For the purposes of this paper, the laypersons who would also be the series' reviewers are considered as fans of the manga series *One Piece*.

Within the cultural realm, reviewing is considered to be an integral part of the system that helps to judge if a new cultural object in public is "good" or "bad" (Jaakkola, 2018: 11). Based on that distinction, it is a reviewer's job to either praise or negatively criticize the reviewed object in an adequate manner (Jaakkola, 2018: 11). Furthermore, Jaakkola notes the features of cultural object reviewing resemble vlogs (featuring a person speaking to the camera) that sometimes can make use of voice effects or visual add-ons (Jaakkola, 2018: 22).

Manga which I already discussed, would be typically categorized by non-Japanese audiences simply as a "comic". Therefore, by viewing manga as a specific unit of the comic book medium, according to Jaakkola, manga chapter reviews would also count as vernacular reviews of cultural products (Jaakkola, 2018: 22). Furthermore, such reviewing of cultural products happens through a "connoisseurial basis", that in terms of a review would involve a voice-over or an image of the object being reviewed (Jaakkola, 2018: 13). When reviewing cultural objects, an important element of vernacular reviews is that a lot of the content within the review video is either informative or recreational for the fans (Jaakkola, 2018: 23). Furthermore, vernacular review videos, according to Jaakkola, seek to hand the viewers new experiences and information about the product (Jaakkola, 2018: 25). For the manga chapter reviews this could be, for instance, pointing out something that the other fans would not have noticed or just did not catch (Jaakkola, 2018: 25).

To better describe how fans can end up becoming reviewers, Jaakkola describes that adapting such a role is a combination of the act of fan self-proclamation (when the fan assigns the position of a reviewer to himself) and legitimacy that he needs to gain within the fan community (Jaakkola, 2018: 14). The legitimacy is what will be gained when the

reviewer on the platform of YouTube gains further subscribers, views, and comments (Jaakkola, 2018: 14). Another way that this could be understood is that gaining legitimacy can take a lot of time. Therefore, becoming a reviewer is technically also a matter of a fan's motivation, commitment, or desire to become an authentic reviewer who can capture the attention of the community. In this thesis, the legitimacy of *One Piece* fan reviewers will be discussed when conducting a comparison of their total subscribers, and views, and comments that are received after uploading their review of the latest chapter.

Finally, as the last point for the importance of vernacular reviewing, Jaakkola notes, that the creation of review videos is far more a means of participation within fan communities, and as such, apart from the social and cultural contexts of their topic they are incapable of freestanding (Jaakkola, 2018: 24). Beyond that, Jaakkola states that within vernacular reviews the position of the reviewer is not explicitly highlighted (Jaakkola, 2018: 24). Rather, other titles such as fans or collectors are emphasized, and the act of reviewing is framed as something which is unintentionally incorporated (Jaakkola, 2018: 24). Therefore, I find that the reviewer's position in this fandom is much better described through the definition of a fan who is more devoted to the cultural object of the *One Piece* chapter. To specify, the devotion leads fans to become more directly involved and committed in the explicit creation of *One Piece* participatory culture. Furthermore, vernacular reviews represent a means for fan scenes to experience what Jaakkola referred to as the feature of "co-consumption" which as a more prevalent feature of user-generated reviewing allows the videos to help fans experience "shared moments of consuming cultural objects", rather than a simple opinion or moral and aesthetic values (Jaakkola, 2018: 24).

To summarize, in this subchapter I have primarily focused on describing the practice of vernacular reviewing that is typically defined as a non-institutionalized review that can be commonly found on the YouTube platform. Vernacular reviews that focus on cultural objects such as comic books, can display fans as people who are capable of utilizing reviewing as a means of participation within their own fandom. The general understanding is that in the case of a manga/anime series fandom, vernacular reviews are both informative and re-creative of a cultural experience, and this idea will be further explored in the analysis. In the end, Jaakola notes that vernacular reviewing can be a means for fans to be able to share moments of co-consuming with other fandom members.

From this point moving forward, the vernacular reviewing practice within the framework of the *One Piece* community on YouTube will be called simply reviewing, and the final product of the discussed fan practice shall be called straightforwardly a review.

### 3.4 Something to Think About: a Call for Fan Speculation

Discussions around the fannish behavior of collecting comics have helped theorists to distinguish comic books as a distinctive item of collectible value that can provide research and researchers further invaluable information about the relationships that fans have and develop with their fan objects (Jenkins, 2017: 223). Particularly, the merit of the stories that comics tell is examined to question if they "may inspire new insight about the relationship between fandom, collecting, and consumer culture" (Jenkins, 2017: 233).

Jenkins notes that there is an occurring development where comic books are seen more frequently as items of collectible value, and more importantly for this thesis, they are moving from being considered instead of a "junk" medium towards becoming a respectable embodiment of art (Jenkins, 2017: 223). "Comics are a rich medium for thinking about "stuff", that also "at the most basic level" get appraised." (Jenkins, 2017: 233). That is to say that the practice of the fandom speculation of the *One Piece* manga, which will be discussed, results in observations that carry meaning for both the readers and its author. This is because, according to Jenkins, "comics as a medium have particular affordance that encourages their readers to scan the landscape and pay attention to mise-en-scène, where the artist may well be fabricating or duplicating material objects" (Jenkins, 2017: 234).

When paying close attention to Oda's work, the *One Piece* fandom can use both their visual literacy and socializing within the fan-scene because of the close attention and focus on the small details of the manga that conclusively may seem to also insinuate for further participatory fan activity. This directs further attention towards fandom meaning making as well as the contributions that take place within the *One Piece* fandom. The second YouTube practice that I will analyze is fan speculations called *One Piece* theory videos. In short, Jenkins concludes that "comics are stuff; comics tell us about stuff; and comics show us stuff" (Jenkins, 2017: 234), and speculation comes from the fans when they, as Jenkins already stated, think about the stuff between the pages of the rich medium of manga.

### 3.5 Speculating, Concerns of Fan Metatexts

A part of this thesis will focus on fan speculative behavior in the participatory landscape of the *One Piece* fan community. In this subchapter, I will focus on the relationship that the

manga's narrative has with the online *One Piece* fandom who not only consume but speculate about Oda's manga and its narrative. Within the *One Piece* community, speculation is a form of fan-created theories and hypotheses that in this thesis are discussed in the form of YouTube videos (however, textual based theories are common as well).

Peterson views speculation as a solution for fans that are perplexed by unsolved matters within a particular media text. As such, Peterson notes that fans gravitate towards others with a similar passion and motivation to solve these matters and are willing to spend their time, energy, and resources to discuss the text seriously (Peterson, 2005: 152).

Peterson adds that when discussing speculation as a form of metatexts, "The sharing of such speculative discourse through fan clubs, fanzines, chat rooms, and websites creates a basis for sociality, which in this thesis considers metatextual theory and speculating videos on YouTube as the site for potential fan discourse (Peterson, 2005: 152). Therefore, much like how it is stated by Lincoln Geraghty, "fan-created content and conspiracy theories serve to weave a more complex narrative web" (Geraghty, 2017: 1). Finally, I find these ideas correlate well with the ideas of Stanley Fish who gave rise to the notion of an "interpretive community". "For Fish, the meaning of any reader/text transaction is a function of the interpretive strategies and conventions adopted by readers as members of a particular interpretive community" (Beach, 1993: 106). Therefore, rather than looking at individual readers within a community it should be the community and the way that it operates that should be investigated first. As within these communities the readers share common interpreting and reading strategies that as a community can benefit their common speculative capabilities.

A relative concern to speculation as well as spin-off creation that will be discussed later, is the concern that come with the integrity of creator and text. Lesley Goodman states that through the volume of different fannish works and practices fans attempt to perfect the textual universe while also offering mutually exclusive changes to a specific representation or aspect of fiction (Goodman, 2015: 5). This provides further questions to the integrity of fans that want to both maintain the order and unity of the fictional universe, characters, and storyline but also the toll that different fan practices can have on a text's core elements (Geraghty, 2017: 5,6). The question would be what are the morals and standards of a community because as Goodman states "the extent of this critique varies greatly by fandom and by interfandom community" (Goodman, 2015: 6). That is to say that there is no consensus, and the values are dependent largely on the members of the fandom as to whether the community rejects or accepts the changes that fan practices bring forth. Finally, what

both Goodman and Geraghty seem to prioritize is that fans value the core text and elements of a universe and fan creations that spread false information are punished by angry comments or hate.

While mentioning the diversity of fanworks, Louisa Ellen Stein identifies a tension between what she defined as the two established fannish concerns of expansiveness and limitation (Stein, 2006: 247). When discussing fan speculation practices, the focus will be put on expansiveness. Expansiveness refers to the nature of the meta-text which allows for open readings due to the multiplicity of characters and narratives (Geraghty, 2017: 4). While Geraghty talks about the narratives in video games the same type of comparison of multiplicity in a narrative can be explored within the *One Piece* manga. To illustrate this Geraghty notes that "by adding an expansive meta-narrative which prompts them to fill gaps in backstory either to enhance their gameplay or solve mysteries left supposedly by the game designers" (Geraghty, 2017: 5), and by replacing the word "gameplay" with "reading", and "game designer" with "author", it is clear that fans are encouraged to speculate about the purposeful plot holes left for further interpretation. This will be further elaborated in the analysis where a comparison will be made of two speculative videos that tackle the identical question about Oda's narrative with different solutions and answers.

According to Peterson, metatexts that create fan anticipation are generated by the advanced knowledge of fans from official sites (such as the one that releases the weekly *One Piece* manga chapters), and because of this it could be also said that because self-created narratives disseminate online, it allows more room for fans to think of "greater interpretation and interaction with both text and subtext, context and metatext", noted by Geraghty (Peterson, 2005: 152; Geraghty, 2017: 4).

In the next sections the focus will be shifted to Reddit as a platform for other participatory practices of the fandom, where the main focus will be on deconstructing the creation fundamentals of character drawings, fan spin-off series, and the practice of coloring.

## 3.6 Reddit as a Place for Community Building and Interaction

Reddit is both a meta-community, where there are discrete groups and individual communities with their own particular interests called subreddits, as well as a culture that could be referred to subsequently as a culmination of many cultures formed in many different ways (Moore, 2017: 2313). Reddit is a boundary-spanning platform because it combines

multiple different unique qualities from different sites and corners of the Internet, and because of this, Reddit should be considered when discussing online interaction and the nature of participatory culture (Massanari, 2015: 6-7). How different communities and cultures communicate with each other can be different, however, Moore brings out that various studies root participation to the qualities of "informativeness or information-seeking, socializing and community building, status-seeking, and entertainment" (Moore, 2017: 2315).

According to Moore, the practices that Redditors[1] take in their respective communities constitute what Jenkins, Ford, and Green (Jenkins, et al. 2013: 154) have regarded as meaningful participation (including posting content, commenting and voting on content and comments posted by others), because the audience on Reddit chooses, creates, shares, and exchanges the type of media that they pick (Moore, 2017: 2315). Therefore, contributions on this platform can be considered to be a part of any community's participatory culture.

In Moore's study, the findings indicated that socializing and community building with status-seeking and entertainment were all beneficial factors when considering Reddit as a site for online participation, however, informativeness and information-seeking were not (Moore, 2017: 2319-2320). Therefore, when considering the results, Moore claims that the Internet cares more for community building and interaction that the platform is providing its users (Moore, 2017: 2320). Finally, even though Reddit is known usually on the Internet as a source for news and discussions, Moore's research communicates how the connections of the communities and similar interests and the desire to connect with others are what allow communities to grow and evolve (Moore, 2017: 2321-2322).


## 3.7 Contemporary Culture and Nostalgia

According to Jaakko Souminen, the term nostalgia "contains a strong collective - if not even a collectivising - dimension" (Souminen, 2008). This can be similar to how Henry Jenkins describes the term in relation to the activity of fan collecting and collections that "involves the creation of a world that protects the contents (of the *One Piece* manga) from the ravages of time by removing them from circulation and use" (Jenkins, 2017:226). Therefore, because

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[1] This meaning the Reddit users

of these attributes that thinkers have tied with the term "nostalgia", I will explore how the question of nostalgia can apply to fans and fandom practices on the Reddit platform.

Souminen's idea refers to nostalgia as the cause for the successes of various "media presentations, e.g. history documents and fiction series on television", that also allow the followers and fans of these forms of media to share as well as to re-experience the past events, situations, experiences (Souminen, 2008). Furthermore, he mentions that nostalgia strengthens the values of a consumerist society which he reasons with the remastering of video games that may come for example with a new set of increased difficulties or challenges (since the time of their original release) that can in his example influence and provide parents with another chance to reminisce when playing video games with their children (Souminen, 2008). As such nostalgia can be seen as a weapon used by big companies to make a consumer buy the product that they are selling.

However, as Souminen discusses nostalgia under the blanket concept of "digital culture" mainly doing so with video games, it does not limit the range and prominence of this term only to this one type of digital media content. Therefore, a proposal he brings forth from Anu Koivunen (Koivunen, 2001) can perhaps better explain how important it is to question the boundaries of nostalgia to the topic of this thesis about the *One Piece* fandom and fan practices. In his article Souminen states: "According to Anu Koivunen, nostalgia is not an explanation but a question, which "concerns objects, forms, meanings as well as effects"" (Souminen, 2008).

Because *One Piece* is more than twenty years old, I find that fans and readers can be prone to nostalgia that can make them remember past experiences of reading and enjoying the manga in the past. "If I were to create a utopia, it would not be the past. It would be something incorporating favorite elements from the past – aesthetics from the past, ideas from the past" (Hoffman, Grace, 2015: 219) Therefore, I want to discuss how nostalgia is not only a weapon for big companies trying to sell a product to the consumers but rather, nostalgia can be a source of inspiration for fans to practice fanart to celebrate their fandom experiences that are fueled by this sensation. Partly this is because Henry Jenkins stated that "nostalgia as is often noted, is a deeply conservative force in contemporary culture" when discussing the history, functions, and storytelling techniques implemented into graphic novels, comic books, and comic strips (Jenkins, 2013:318). To follow up on this statement, in the analysis I will examine whether there is some sense of visible nostalgia within the *One Piece* fandom on Reddit, and if there is, how does it affect the participatory culture of the *One Piece* fan community.

**3.8 Fan Art Beyond Nostalgia and Copying (A Briefing into Fan Art)**

"Fan-art" is defined by Olga Perova as something that is created or crafted through means of using the plot or characters of an original work (Perova, 2018: 31). Among some of the various forms that it can take today, Perova notes that fan art can take the shape of "illustrations, caricatures, parodies, or intervention of a few works at once"(Perova, 2018: 31). While quite a broad definition with seemingly little or no limitations whatsoever, fan art can be a wide term that may be perhaps determined only by the motivations of the creators themselves, the fans.

Before the 60s and 70s fan creations were limited to shades such as black and white (Perova, 2018: 31). While the spread of colorful images took the world of fan creations further, the uprise of fan art in the more modern context is dated back to the 1960s and 1970s when shows and films such as *Star Trek* or *Star-Wars* gained their widespread recognition that largely contributed to a bigger uprise of newer forms of fan-art (Perova, 2018: 31). With computers and simpler creative tools at the disposal of fan content creators, creating fan art has never been simpler.

In the past, fans were uncertain about the legality of fan art and thought that the activity of creating such works was illegal (Tushnet, 2017: 77). The general understanding of fans today (in the 21st century) is that fan creations count as "fair use" and noninfringing as long as the creator of fanwork gains no profit from their fan art (Tushnet, 2017: 77). Many non-profit fandom activities today occur on the internet, however, since many strict and big corporate brands that are still not welcoming of "fair use" type of fan contributions and participation (including remix works, memeification, shipping[2] of characters and more), this further complicates the rights and the legality of what fans are capable of doing online as of today.

Considering that the main subject of this thesis One Piece, that originates from Japan, I consider it important to mention here that unlike in the western world, in Asian countries the "Doujinshi" (amateur manga publication that are sometimes also created and inspired by certain series and their plots and characters) fan-art culture is also accepting of the fact that fan arts are sold by their creators for profit (Perova, 2018. 31-32). On that account, all further discussion and qualities of such creations will consider the perspective standardized in the

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[2] Shipping is a term often used to express likeability of romantic character pairings.

West. That is to say that the "Doujinshi" fan-art culture shall not be taken into consideration when discussing fanworks and practices.

Perova in her article notes that the art community treats paintings that are based on the intellectual property of others in a highly negative fashion, with American painter Gwenn Seemel considering fan creations only using the popularity of the original work for its own self-benefit (Perova, 2018: 32). However, with all that in mind, there is a side within the field of academic studies that insist on considering fan practices as creative processes that not only copy but rather rethink and work around the original as to create something different, unique, something more (Perova, 2018: 32-34, Hetrick, 2019: 1290).

In her article titled "Fan Art/Fiction Production as Creative Processes", Laura J. Hetrick notes that there is fan art that may also reflect many of the fundamental qualities of Jenkin's concept of participatory culture that were already discussed. Hetrick claims that fanworks are self-directed and not bound by any rules (Hetrick, 2019: 1290). Fans are able to shape the fate of characters, and both creativity and innovation are in the hands of the creator who has the power to choose what tools are right for the vision that they have for their creation (Hetrick, 2019: 1290). Furthermore, many creators may give advice or seek guidance online and in person, so the desires and fantasies held and manifested pose no negative real-life consequences, making fan art creation immensely a more positive thing rather than negative (Hetrick, 2019: 1290). Overall Hetrick communicates that fanworks should not be viewed as being just a copy-cats of the original (Hetrick, 2018: 1290). Instead, Marjorie Coohe Manifold notes that contributive and creative engagement with pre-existing images and ideas made by others may lead to culture crafting (Manifold, 2009: 19). Institutionalized means of art creation can help to form or define national identities, entertain narratives, and engage with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Manifold, 2009: 19). Similarly, fan artists are also acting out their roles on the cultural playing fields as both fans and artists that according to Mainfold's words are doing "important and meaningful work" (Manifold, 2009: 19).

## 3.9 From Fanon and Canon to Territorialization of Fanon and Canon

In this part of the text I will explain the terms "canon" and "fanon" that will be often used over the course of this thesis. Furthermore, I will also showcase how quite recent academic studies on fan art and fan fiction have started to provide more theoretical framework to fan

creations through the concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that originate from the ideas of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and French psychoanalyst Félix Guattari. In doing so, this will allow me to better elaborate on the various fan practices that are happening within the *One Piece* fandom.

"There is a symbiotic relationship between creators and owners of mass media works and the fan communities inspired by their work" (Chaney, Liebler, 2007: 1). Within this quote, the authors are hinting at a creator of a work who is the maker of what can be defined as canon, and the fan communities who are inspired by this canon to create their own stories or interpretations called fanon. According to the quote, the relationship is described as being symbiotic, and therefore, potentially a beneficial and sustainable one.

In the same article a definition for canon is given:""Pop culture canon" is usually defined as a body of work that establishes its own internal storylines and/or character history, deemed to be "official" by either the creator or publisher." (Chaney, Liebler, 2007: 3), that in the case of this work would be the manga of *One Piece* created by the creator Eiichiro Oda. *One Piece* is the canon work that has its storyline, characters, and history, and as such also all elements that Oda writes are considered as canon regardless if fans disagree or agree with the way that it is written. This should be clear because the authors of the article additionally note that a true agreement on the canon is rarely ever achieved, however, within this thesis the manga *One Piece* will be defined and looked at as the canon regardless of other disagreements that may come with such a statement.

In comparison to canon, "fanon" is mainly "described as an alternative universe or a re-telling of a media text by fans" and while these fan-created ideas can be implemented into the canon of a story, fanon is most typically as an example used to fill in narrative gaps or to create origin stories among other reasons (Chaney, Liebler, 2007: 6). Therefore, what I will mainly discuss as fanon within the analysis is *One Piece* content that is created by the fandom as a means of participatory culture. After describing what is defined as canon and fanon respectively, I will now move forward to describe the concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that can manifest themselves in different fandoms as well as cultures.

Laura J. Hetrick offers a theoretical framework that could be taken to investigate the importance and value of fan-created works through the concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization (Hetrick, 2018: 1290 - 1293). Hetrick's paper on the matter defines "deterritorialization" when objects, characters, and other possible elements that are chosen by the fan are removed from all of the important values attributed to the thing that is being deterritorialized (Hetrick, 2018: 1291). Hetrick states that the concept helps to explain fan

art creation (Hetrick, 2018: 1291). According to Hetrick's words, deterritorialization is used so that all the values and meaning that any part of the canon has would be removed, so that fans could "produce change through their own creations" (Hetrick, 2018: 1291). Therefore, to summarize, deterritorialization is part of the process that allows fans to initiate the process of creating from scratch something that already exists within another territory, in this case the *One Piece* canon.

Reterritorialization is the second half of the process for fan art creation. Reterritorialization can occur mainly in two ways. First, when the elements that were deterritorialized become a part of some other new setting or possibly even a part of the body of another work (Hetrick, 2018: 1291). Second, when the fan modified creations are reused and reapplied for further modifications of the original source material, the canon, from which the deterritorialized and reterritorialized elements were derived (Hetrick, 2018: 1291). Hetrick further explains the first method by giving an example where the character Garfield from the American comic strip *Garfield* is implemented into the world of Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*. It is in such an example where Garfield is removed from his media, the comic strip, and implemented into a completely different atmosphere of storytelling, a fairy tale that encompasses evil witches and beautiful princesses. Simply put, the fans strip away what is written by the originator, and they give and put characters into new attires, settings, scenarios, and more through the process of reterritorialization (Hetrick, 2018: 1292, 1293).

The second way the reterritorialization can happen is described by Hetrick herself who states that when people within a place start to produce an aspect of popular culture themselves, and as with fan art, they make it their own in the context of their local cultures. This would be for example if fans of Sleeping Beauty were to create an extension of the original story by either creating, drawing, or writing dream sequences to the princess's story that would occur in-between the story before she inevitably would meet the prince. In this case, reterritorializing occurs within the same universe where further details are given to what were the thoughts or events that took place within the dreams of the princess, however, Hetrick notes that another example of a similar process is with crossover fan art (Hetrick, 2018: 1293). Crossover fan art is described through Hetrick's ideas as an instance where two or more fandoms are crossed over with the usage of characters, settings, or universe and deterritorialized to create something new, transformative, and reterritorialized (Hetrick, 2018: 1293). Finally, similarly to our example, when discussing *One Piece* content the primary focus will be put on whether and how these two concepts (deterritorialization and

reterritorialization) can be spotted when observing fan practices within the *One Piece* fandom.

**Chapter 4: Methods of Study**

In my thesis, I want to discuss and analyze the predominant practices of participatory culture within the fandom of manga that is written and illustrated by Eiichiro Oda called *One Piece*. The work is autoethnographic (Ellis, 2010) as the primary bulk of the work done is in correlation with my decade long personal experience (auto) to understand the cultural experience (ethno) of being both a fan and a member of the *One Piece* manga series fandom. However, the data is collected both auto-ethnographically (self-observation and fieldnotes) and ethnographically (observation of specific situations in field-sites, taking field-notes, asking participants questions about their meaning making). Finally, it is also important to note that the focus of this thesis will be directed primarily to a certain few particular aspects of the *One Piece* fandom, and therefore the expected results of this research will speak within the terms and boundaries of what qualifies as a micro-ethnographic work instead of a holistic ethnography (Lechisa, 2017).

The main source of data gathered for the purposes of this research was a month-long process of participant observation on the American video-sharing platform, YouTube, as well as the news aggregator discussion website called Reddit. Both of these platforms contain a quite steady amount of the *One Piece* manga readers, reviewers, and fans which were highly fruitful for my systematic field notes that I took during the observation period. Primary objects that were turned into data consisted of YouTube manga chapter reviews as well as speculation and theory videos found on the platform (in addition to their comments, views, and channel subscribers), as well as Reddit threads, comments, fan colorings, character drawings, as well as manga spin-off chapters (as well as the fan reception in the form of comments left for these dominant practices). I also had conversations with some of the fans that had created participatory culture for the platform Reddit, to whom I directly messaged through the Reddit direct messaging feature, and asked about the things that motivated and inspired them to contribute and create fan content.

To begin my role as a participant-observer, initially, I created an observation plan (Spradley 1980, cf Appendix 1) based on some of the preliminary thoughts and assumptions that I expected to see throughout my fieldwork. Also, the focus for such an observation plan was put on what is considered by Spradley the main qualities of ethnography within a social situation (the situation of being a fan) that are the place, the actors, and the act (Spradley, 1980). The fieldwork consisted of what Nicholas H. Wolfinger described as comprehensive note-taking (Wolfinger, 2002). According to Wolfinger, comprehensive note-taking benefits

the research because the ethnographer can later recall details that can usually be lost and forgotten. Furthermore, according to Wolfinger this method also allows for a better (more comprehensive) depiction of the research sites, which further helped me to expand on what participatory practices I would and could collect from the platforms that I would eventually conduct my research on (Wolfinger, 2002). Here, I will provide a brief overview of the steps taken for the thesis which is divided into two main parts that individually focus on the two main platforms that I use for my research.

Over the month that I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork, I focused on gathering information that would help me to narrow down the list of potential platforms for *One Piece* related content. According to my prior experience as a fan, the assumptions for platforms were YouTube and Reddit, however, at the start, I was extremely doubtful of the data that I would be able to collect from only these two platforms. It was important to pinpoint the platforms, as that would later on indicate what types of participatory fanon content creations would be chosen for my research. In addition to all of the above, I also kept up with my fan activities which for the norm would consist of reading the latest chapters of *One Piece* and watching a couple of chapter reviews, which in this thesis are discussed as an example of a transformative fanwork. While doing so during my fieldwork, I noticed that this process of reading and watching a review was integral to my fan experience, and therefore, that was the reason why I chose to discuss the chapter reviews and my reading as a part of my thesis.

The canon *One Piece* content and related fan practices during the time of my participant observation were the three latest chapters (chapters 967-969) of the *One Piece* manga, however, I continued my regular habits if anything valuable would turn up in future chapter releases post chapter 969. As such, the primary data for chapter readings and reviews consists of content since chapter 967 and beyond, after which the transformative content on the media platform of YouTube, mainly the chapter reviews, was watched.

In terms of watching the chapter reviews after reading the latest chapters, I noted down whether there were any changes in my opinion of the latest chapters after watching other fans on YouTube discussing it. The main purpose of watching the reviews was to see what the main objective, influence, or goal of these video-based reviews discussing and analyzing the *One Piece* chapters is. Additionally, I also watched different reviewers and noted down as much as possible about their style of reviewing, topics that they discussed, comments or moments of respect towards Oda's writing, how they reacted to things within the chapter emotionally and other information, which was mainly written down and

categorized as data. For instance, review video observations were color-coded so I could simply notice the different important aspects that I would later bring out in the discussion.

I have given pseudonyms to all included One Piece manga chapter reviewers on YouTube for the sake of their anonymity. The YouTubers that are discussed more frequently are therefore called simply YouTuber1, YouTuber2, and YouTuber3. These YouTubers were chosen because they kept a routine of uploading reviews frequently after each release of a new *One Piece* manga chapter. However, the length of their videos and the content also seemed to differ at times on a substantial level that made eventually me question why and how come are they so different from each other. Secondly, another motivator to pick these YouTubers was that they posted other *One Piece* related content that could be also considered as participatory culture or transformative works such as theory videos, character discussions, fanart impressions, other adaptations of *One Piece* discussions and more, that as a result, provided me with additional data. Particularly I focused on theory and speculating videos as those would usually be the second type of *One Piece* content that I would look at on this platform as a fan of the series. I compared theories from one of the picked channels to the canon release, after which I observed if any different YouTube creators guessed accurately, and how this influenced fan reception and opinions of the YouTubers legitimacy. The YouTubers used for this comparison are YouTuber2 and YouTuber4 (who is only used for speculation comparison as that is the channel's main focus). Finally, I also considered the YouTubers' popularity, which I analyzed by comparing the initial three review channels to each other. The motive is to observe the popularity and legitimacy that these reviewers have gained based on their subscribers, views, as well as comments.

The second part of this thesis focuses on the Reddit platform. On this platform the focus is to observe individual fan-created artworks which for the most part include recoloring of the original black and white manga panels, creating *One Piece* fan spin-off arcs or storylines, and artwork dedicated to specific characters within the narrative of *One Piece,* which are usually motivated by favoritism towards certain characters and scenes, a special occasion for the franchise, or to better illustrate the reasons why this character may be better than the other character that people within the fandom love so much. To get to the answer of fan motivation to create fanart and participatory content I wanted first-hand feedback from the fan artists themselves, and therefore, I created a discussion thread on Reddit where I asked fans to describe me their motivations and ideas when creating *One Piece* fan content. I also had conversations with Reddit creators who had uploaded spin-off series, character drawings, as well as other forms of fan art onto the platform. The emphasis in this part will

also be put on the reception that this fan participatory content receives within the fandom, mainly on Reddit, and depending on the reception, the aspects most valued by the comments and the people giving feedback to these types of fan creations. Furthermore, much like with the YouTubers, for the sake of anonymity, all Redditors, and one deviantartist that will be discussed in further detail for any given purposes were pseudonymized. Also, at certain points in my analysis I will provide illustrations that are visibly available online on the Reddit platform, therefore, all cited fanworks are used in accordance with the fair-use law. In addition, I have consent from Reddit artist AnonSketch to use his work, and therefore, works by this artist will be indicated with his username.

A final consideration is to discuss the relationship between Oda and the *One Piece* fandom, after which I will reach to a conclusion that will describe the participatory nature of the *One Piece* fandom, as well as the purposes of the fan content creation that takes place within the community on these platforms. Oda's relationship with the fandom will be analyzed based on a meme within the fandom, titled "Goda", as well as how Oda through his manga may be teasing or challenging his fans that is inspiring the speculation practice mentioned earlier.

**Chapter 5: Analysis**

**5.1 Fandom Similarities on YouTube and Reddit**

While Reddit is used by *One Piece* fans as one way to share fanart and works with other fans, the platform, similarly to YouTube, is also used to have discussions about the recent chapters of the manga and anime episodes. Reddit is a platform where theories about *One Piece* are just as common as they are on YouTube, if not more. In this analysis, Reddit will be looked at from the perspective of a platform containing *One Piece* fanart, discussions, and fan creations. In many aspects, what will be mentioned about *One Piece* fans, content, and practices on the Reddit platform shares similarities with the fan content on YouTube.

On Reddit, the series *One Piece* has its own subreddit. The *One Piece* subreddit has more than 415 thousand members, called Straw Hats. The subreddit consists of discussions and threads about the series that relate back to the *One Piece* manga, anime, and all other *One Piece* related topics and news. However, discussions about the *One Piece* video games and hentai (hentai is a genre of manga and anime that contains overtly sexualized characters and sexually explicit images and plots) are an exception because they are not allowed on this subreddit. It is because the subreddit's moderators have set certain rules determining what content is allowed.

Reddit has a method for categorizing general themes and topics in subreddits called flairs. In the *One Piece* subreddit, the current chapter flair is used for fans to be able to discuss together, as a community, the contents and discoveries of the latest chapter. Much like YouTube videos in the form of chapter reviews (which will be discussed as being a benefit to a fan's experience of reading a chapter), Reddit threads discussing the most recent chapters imply a very similar type of fan engagement. The only difference between the two is the media through which the fans and fandom communicate with each other.

Much like the practices on YouTube, such as chapter reviews and theory videos, in Reddit threads, fans describe how the current chapter made them feel. Furthermore, other things that are discussed are how they would rate the latest chapter, what they may have liked or disliked about this chapter, what they speculate is going to happen in the next chapter, their thoughts about Oda's character development, the plot progression, and more. Similarly like the current chapter flair that is used for Reddit threads acts similarly to YouTube chapter reviews, the *One Piece* subreddit has another flair for theory dedicated threads that deal exclusively with fan speculations. This also resembles the theory videos on

the platform of YouTube. In conclusion, there are some similar key practices among the most popular *One Piece* fandom creations on the YouTube and Reddit platforms, and these practices are seemingly the most popular within this fandom.

This is better demonstrated by the fact that current chapter and theory flaired threads on Reddit gain a lot of fan traction on Reddit. The same applies also to YouTube theory and manga chapter review videos which are among the most common and prevalent types of fan practices on the two platforms.

As a result, on Reddit as well as YouTube, hundreds to thousands of fan-created works of participatory culture are created weekly. However, besides the fan practices that were mentioned here, there are many other types of *One Piece* related fan creations that need to be discussed. The analysis of fan practices will focus on each platform separately. First, the most prevalent YouTube fan practices will be discussed. Afterward, the practices that are unique and exclusive to Reddit (different from the ones mentioned in the YouTube part) will be introduced and further analyzed.

## 5.2 How do One Piece fans participate in the fandom Online

During my ethnographic research and observation of my own activity as a *One Piece* fan, I discovered that a very integral part to experiencing the One Piece fandom and One Piece manga chapter readings was my innate desire to watch and observe the latest chapters of One Piece being reviewed and discussed by other fans. For this thesis I observed these reviews and discussions within the fandom on the social media platform of YouTube and Reddit. These platforms were chosen for a couple of reasons, however, the main reason was that on both platforms, as soon as the latest chapter is released, my news feeds on phone and computer would get filled up with posts of videos and Reddit threads that were very tempting. It is important to note that other platforms also can provide in-depth chapter analysis or artwork inspired and even created by Oda, such as the *One Piece* Discord channel or other fan dedicated websites to the manga (www.thelibraryofOhara.com, www.fanpop.com/clubs/one-piece). However, the decision to pick Reddit and YouTube over all of the others, was that in my opinion they together provide the best introduction to the community because most of the discussions and topics concerning the fandom are very current and active.

Therefore, to be a bit more specific, after each newly released chapter of *One Piece*, I was personally interested and questioning mainly the following three things. What did other fans think of this chapter? Did I miss something crucial when reading? Were there any big revelations in my opinion that should be discussed within the fandom? When trying to find an answer to these questions, I decided to take a closer look at what are the most consistently uploaded *One Piece* related videos and Reddit posts on the platforms of YouTube and Reddit, and why these practices are relevant to my own experience as well as the *One Piece* fandom. On YouTube, primarily two distinct types of fan creations are uploaded after the release of a new *One Piece* chapter: *One Piece* manga chapter reviews, and *One Piece* theory videos. These will be discussed in the following subchapters.

## 5.3 YouTube Manga Chapter Reviews

Manga chapter reviews are created by *One Piece* readers, who give their feedback to the most recent chapters according to their impressions. Frequently, during the end of a review, the reviewers also express what they anticipate to happen in the next chapter thanks to their newly gained canon ("official") knowledge (Peterson, 2005: 152)[3]. The reviews on YouTube follow the logic of "amateur reviewing" described by Jaakkola (Jaakkola, 2018: 12,21,22). The format of these reviews consists of reading (or quickly browsing) through the chapter, one panel at a time, describing what can be seen within the pages of the manga. Because of this, it also provides a very similar experience to an actual reading of a *One Piece* chapter. At first glance, the review can even come off as more of a reading session of a *One Piece* manga chapter rather than a review of it, however, this goes back to the fact that Oda fills his manga pages and panels with a lot of visual data that can leave parts of the chapter to be left unnoticed. "Oda is an expert at cramming as much visual information into a page as possible" (Super Eyepatch Wolf, 00:10:58-00:11:02) and because of this even my own readings of the chapters are often lacking in gained knowledge. This means that my readings alone are not always capable of providing me with the full experience of the entire chapter. Therefore, to ensure that nothing will be missed from the chapter, watching reviews that feel as if they are a second or even third reading of it are beneficial to the fandom because of the

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[3] The original assumption with Peterson's idea of anticipation was that it would play a large role in speculation and not in reviewing videos

different perspectives that each reading and reader can provide. In this sense, watching reviews provides a way to get a more fulfilling experience of that chapter.

> *"A much more relaxed watching experience. Connection created in the video between the Roger pirates and Strawhat pirates in terms of their journey. Flowing interpretations that take me once again through the significant chapter moments. I like the different type of interpretation provided by this review as I find that the focus is more not on what happens but what are its inherent implications."* (Day 3 extract from my reflection in the ethnographic diary)

While each review can provide different perspectives and interpretations of a chapter, a lot more can depend also on how the review is made. A *One Piece* chapter review can be presented through the use of different methods. These methods include applying different theories to the chapter, drawing out different assumptions, and an in-depth description of impressions that the chapter gave to the reviewer. Furthermore, reviews also focus on different aspects, topics, and key points that pique the interest of the fans. In my fieldwork, where I observed three different *One Piece* reviewers on YouTube, two out of the three followed what I could consider a more traditional style of creating a chapter review. The third reviewer had a more distinct way of reviewing, that I will also elaborate on further after discussing what can be considered as a more traditional style of a manga chapter review.

What I differentiate as the traditional style of reviewing is where the reviewer explains and discusses most of the pages and panels in a sequence identical to the way that they were presented in the canon manga chapters. This method prioritizes qualities such as retelling the narrative, detailed explanation of the events surrounding the characters, and explanation of why individual panels are important for the readers. They also personalize the reviews with their unique qualities such as either imaginative performances of scenes (which occur in the manga) or referencing popular culture in relation to the manga's world. The reviewers applying the traditional way were YouTuber1 (whose main pros are calm and collectedness) and YouTuber3 (who focused more on being funny and excited). While reviewing, YouTuber1 mixes his usual style of reviewing with on-the-spot theories (theories made on the spot), which focus usually on predicting certain events that may take place because of a character's actions in a panel. YouTuber3's reviews, however, are very much descriptive and less interpretive. "Moving on next, we have Roger talking to Rayleigh, and Rayleigh is like: *Well who's gonna find the One Piece you know now?* And Roger's like: *Well I'm thinking my son will, or my child will*, and Rayleigh's just like: *You don't even have a child*, and you know, Roger's like: *Well there's still time.*" (YouTuber3)

YouTuber3 constantly acted out scenes to make his reviews more comedic and entertaining for the eyes of the fans, while YouTuber1 referenced the online dating app of tinder, and how characters in the *One Piece* world could potentially benefit from it. "So what happens is that Roger downloads tinder, and he gets a match, and that match is all the way in the South Blue in an island called Baterilla. That's where Rouge is, that's where his match is, and that's where he goes." (YouTuber1) While these are the elements used to make their reviews stand-out from the rest, these comments are not meant to be taken seriously and they are used to trigger a "like" or a chuckle out of their viewers.

The other (non-traditional) method of reviewing would focus more on different aspects that were deemed of higher importance because of their potential impact on the given chapter or the story as a whole. The theorist would then construct the review based on the elements that he considered more important for his own review and discussion. In such a review, the aspects picked out construct bigger segments within the review video. This method was applied by YouTuber2. YouTuber2's videos seemed more objective but also far more speculative and interpretive in his content because of the different style of reviewing. Because of this, when comparing the experience of the chapter that I received from all the different chapter reviewers, his points seemed stronger because they were explained more in-depth and in a more analytical way. "But yea on the other hand I want to talk about Toki, guys. There is a very real possibility that Toki may actually be alive based on the decisions that Oda made in this chapter." (YouTuber2)

> *But you notice that there's kind of like a conspicuous panel in the middle of this chapter where they're like:* **Oh, you know Toki got shot by an arrow in the leg,** *and then Oda made a point of pointing it out, and overall I felt like the reaction to the arrow, you know I understand that her getting shot is a big deal, but it's like it felt overdramatic, it, it didn't feel like something that needed to be in the chapter.* (YouTuber2)

Sometimes he also takes a theory floating within the fandom and deconstructs it in a chapter review and explains how the released chapter either proves the theory to be either wrong or just impossible because of the newer developments within the chapter. In his reviews there is less humor, it is less of a retelling and more of an analysis of the good and the bad aspects of the chapter.

While these were all the different aspects of the chapter reviews, a common element that all of them shared was giving the chapter a rating at the end of the review, which during my observation was most of the time very positive.

Another similarity that the chapter reviews shared was that they focused more on the details and contents of the manga. Therefore, the reviews are often visually simplistic and do not put emphasis on their visual qualities and production. To describe the simplistic visuals, the videos often feature the reviewer talking in front of a simple white background which is sometimes replaced by screen captures from the *One Piece* manga, or images of fan creations and fanart. Furthermore, the reviewers also share the activity of inviting other fans to share their thoughts and opinions of the chapter within the comments section of the review, inspiring further discussion and online interaction within the fandom.

Another observation was that at the end of each chapter review (that were observed for this research), the reviewers expressed their anticipation because of how satisfying the current chapter was, and how intensely hyped[4] and excited they are for the next one. They sometimes also stated what they would expect from the upcoming chapter which makes the viewers and fans even more excited for the future events in the manga.

## 5.4 Perceived influence of Observing Manga Reviews

While watching the chapter reviews, I noticed that watching other fans discuss the positive and negative aspects of a chapter influenced how I felt about the chapter after my initial reading. While for instance I may have not been amazed or in love with all the chapters created by Oda during my initial read, as I discovered while writing my fieldnotes, my opinions of chapters changed after I came to see the chapters through the eyes or from the perspective of the reviewers.

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[4] Hype can be described as a strong feeling of excitement and anticipation.

| Date, Time | Descriptive Note | Reflections | Feelings | Questions/notes for observation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Day1** 06/01 | Noticed a release for One Piece chapter 967. Read the chapter. | Reading the chapter gave me a deeper understanding of the character of Roger and his adventures. The chapter hints at a lot of the major plot points and characters that are in the (current timeline -its a flashback) dead or absent. Learn more about Roger and his crew the Roger pirates, as well as how he became to be known as the king of the pirates, what type of abilities he has, how he discovered the location of the One Piece treasure (Buggy Shanks did not go), and how he became or was respected by many of the people alive and around him. Lots of jumps within the timeline, and a lot of content, but still in my opinion relatively easy and interesting to follow. | Pleasantly pleased by the content of the chapter. Happy mainly because of the information that can be learned about the previous king of pirates and having the feeling that there is more to both the treasure of One Piece and the world and its past that I as a reader still do not know. It is surprising. Curious to find out more and know more. I think and hope Roger's part will continue, though I am afraid the next chapter will discuss different things that I might not enjoy as much as this chapter. | I am typically annoyed by flashbacks, however, this one was very enjoyable compared to how I generally feel about flashbacks. Probably because it has to do with the ending and main drive for the story rather than an individual arc of the series. Perhaps the whole is more important and enjoyable for me than its separated parts? |

Fig. 1. Merila, Raimond. "Extract of my ethnographic diary day 1, Initial reactions to reading *One Piece* chapter 967." 6 January, 2020.

For instance, when observing the reviews for chapter 967 each of them seemed to affect my opinion of the chapter in one way or another. In my initial opinion I was pleased by the chapter and I thought it was easy to follow. YouTuber3's video which was both long and extremely observant, made me notice that I missed most of the hidden details because I did not search for them whereas YouTuber3 did a great job at looking at all the pages in a

more detailed way. I figured out that I had made a great error when thinking of the chapter as being easy to follow.

| Date, Time | Descriptive Note | Reflections | Feelings | Questions/notes observation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Day2** 07/01 | Watch review by YouTuber3 discussing the chapter 967 that I read | The video mentions things I had not originally noticed during my own reading of the chapter. The color page of the manga chapter that is a collaboration with a J. pop band and One piece manga characters animated to a music video. The scanlation of the manga that I read was missing also the cover page which he describes as the protagonists playing a Portuguese cardgame. Also he describes among the multiple call-backs and references the multiple and important connections (make me feel awe) back to older chapters and Oda's interviews. YouTuber3 makes up hypothetical scenes of what-if scenarios as there is room for the imagination of the audience. Finally theorizing about Roger's laugh and the One Piece treasure. | By watching the review I discovered a lot of things that I actually missed or did not actually care about when reading the chapter. I was encouraged to check out the band which I did and now the song is on a loop in my head as well as the video encapsulates a lot of One-Piece like elements that give me the chills when watching the music video. I'm surprised that I missed the cover page which the video reminded to me. Connections made me realize how awesome, and in-depth this chapter was. After that I Smiled and laughed. | Hour review by YouTuber3 was slightly overwhelming mainly due to its lenght and focus was fading away. |

Fig. 2. Merila, Raimond. "Extract of my ethnographic diary day 2, noticing a change of opinion after watching the chapter review." 7 January, 2020.

I finished watching YouTuber1's and YouTuber2's videos later. I focused less on the smallest of details that appeared in the review videos of YouTuber1 and YouTuber2 because I had already learned about them from watching the review made by YouTuber3. Because of this I felt like I was more invested in the interesting discussions about the end of the series and Oda's writing that were brought out by the other two reviewers (YouTuber1 and YouTuber2). Although before my auto-ethnographic research I knew about the enjoyment that can be experienced by watching *One Piece* chapter reviews, later after I had begun my

analysis, I discovered that a big part of experiencing *One Piece* through the YouTube platform happens in this specific way. For me, as well as other fans, watching a video after or during a chapter reading is a process that many *One Piece* fans on YouTube exercise. They allow for a different experience of manga, especially *One Piece*, as different perspectives allow for a wider grasp of everything that occurs within the *One Piece* story.

Similarly, I noticed how the comment sections for all the videos were discussing the topics mentioned by the reviewers, which made me realize how many different fans follow the weekly video reviews. The size of the comment section for each chapter review typically differs depending on the size of each reviewer's audience. However, they are usually all in English as the common language that most fans on YouTube use when discussing *One Piece*. I will mention that to a much greater surprise I noticed a comment mentioning how the reviews and reviewers of *One Piece* are, for some, the greatest source of their enjoyment of the series (see Appendix 3).

> *I've been watching YouTuber1 for over 7 years now, back then when he was still reviewing One Piece and Naruto (both Manga and Anime) at the same time. Since then, there have always been rougher times for us, in terms of One Piece AND reallife. But all this time, every week, I come back to this channel to see YouTuber1 talking some One Piece. Weirdly, he was there through all my personal milestones in this past 7 years without even knowing I exist. Ever since the Oden Flashback started, it felt like - parallel to the flashback and Roger's journey - the final round has officially started. It might take another 5 years (or even 10), but One Piece is ending. And just now, I have realised that I wouldn't enjoy the end of the series as much if it wasn't for YouTuber1 and all the other reviewers. I have reached a point where experiencing the end of One Piece together is more important to me then the actual story.* (YouTuber1 fan)

> *I am grateful for you and your work YouTuber1! Keep it up just the way you feel like doing it - I am sure it will end up perfect!* (continuation YouTuber1 fan comment)

The main error of my reading of chapter 967, as it may also be for other fans, was that I did not focus on the visuals of the manga as much as I should have. Because of that, by watching the reviews I gained a greater appreciation for the chapter that I initially thought of being quite average. Therefore, for a fan, participation and co-consuming media with fellow fandom members through this example can be potentially an enhanced, educational, informative as well as recreational form of consuming the *One Piece* story (Jaakkola, 2018; Jenkins, 2009). In the future, I hope to learn from this experience and the reviewers and focus more on the little details, even if the temptation to breeze through the chapter that I and possibly many other fans do to quickly find out what is going to happen.

To better describe fan participation and activity surrounding review watching, in the next subchapter I will also evaluate the reviewers' subscribers, views, and how they reflect or impact the number of comments that each review video receives.

## 5.5 Discussion About Reviewers' Subscribers, Views, and Comments

The chapter reviewers that I observed as a part of my fieldwork have different numbers of subscribers. The viewers are probably both *One Piece* fans and chapter review watchers, and therefore, I will assume that the subscribers for these YouTube channels of *One Piece* reviews are just like myself, fans of Oda's manga.

Out of the subscriber base for each reviewer, when comparing the number of their subscribers to the number of the views (this can represent the approximate number of people who have watched the video) gained for each of the newest chapter reviews, it appears that only about a third or half of the subscribers tend to watch them regularly. Of course, that is under the assumption that most of the views come from the subscribers.

Among the reviews that I discussed, YouTuber3 has currently (April 2020) nearly 500 000 subscribers, YouTuber1 has around 250 000, and YouTuber2 has a little over 200 000. The view count for a video reflects the number of the reviewers' subscribers. In the case of the reviews of *One Piece* chapter 967, the number of views (a few months after they had been uploaded) are for each of the noted reviewers a half of their subscriber count. This means that YouTuber3's review has nearly 250 000 views, YouTuber1's video has a little over 130 000 views, and YouTuber2's has equally 130 000 views. However, because chapter 967 has been titled by the fandom as being quite phenomenal, the numbers for the reviews concerning that specific chapter are slightly inflated in comparison to the number of views and comments of the other manga chapter reviews. The comment section for each review shows a similar pattern. YouTuber3's video has a little over 3000 comments, YouTuber1's has nearly half of that at 1600 comments (which also mirrors the total number of YouTube subscribers that both reviewers have). Finally, YouTuber2's review has almost a 1000 comments which in comparison to the subscriber and view totals follows the explained pattern.

Before another example I would like to address how active this fandom is according to my gathered information about the channels' subscribers, views, and comments. Therefore, according to a web article written by Carla Marshall (2015), videos within the

entertainment category (the category that these reviews are placed in on YouTube) gain on average per video 9816 views (Marshall, 2015). With the number of views that all the YouTube review videos for chapter 967 received, it is clear that these *One Piece* review videos are viewed above average, which indicates that the fandom is very active on the platform. Furthermore, Mark. R. Robertson has established another way to observe how successful YouTube channels are, which can be based on the ratio between subscribers and views, and views to comments (Robertson, 2014). According to Robertson, the average ratio of views to subscribers is equal to 14%, however, the best ratio out of all is to observe the differences that exist between the total number of viewers to comments, which is typically 0.5% (Robertson, 2014). As such, in the example that I provided, the views of the videos were nearly half of the total number of subscribers, indicating that indeed these channels according to Robertson's (2014) findings are successful. Furthermore, the number of 250 000 views accumulated to a total of above 3000 comments, which is over the required 0.5% (1250 comments) threshold suggested by Robertson. The same could be stated for both of the other two video's view and comment ratios, as Robertson's 0.5% (2014) from 130000 would equal 650 comments. However, as I established earlier, both of the comment sections for these videos were above 650, and therefore, the *One Piece* fandom is a community filled with active fans in the YouTube comments, which also benefits the participatory culture. To provide further evidence, the same will be considered in another example.

YouTuber3's *One Piece* chapter 969 review video has a little over 160 000 views which compile nearly a third of his subscribers, YouTuber1's video has 74 000 views giving another third to the list, and YouTuber2's video has about 71 000 which is almost identical to YouTuber1 and the earlier example. YouTuber3's chapter 969 review has nearly 1500 comments, YouTuber1's has a little over 900 comments, and YouTuber2's has over 500 comments. These numbers follow the logic and presumptions about the correlation of fans viewing and commenting habits that I explained and showcased with the example of these two chapter reviews. Additionally, this example also gives positive results to both Marshall's (2015) and Robertson's (2014) claims that I mentioned above. Therefore, everything so far demonstrates that fans of *One Piece* are active on the social media platform YouTube. From the stance of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009: 5-6), fans are clearly engaged with their creations and discussions that they further support and share with each other through the interaction that takes place on the YouTube platform. Therefore, as I have demonstrated, not only do *One Piece* fans create videos, but the videos further encourage them to engage with each other either through simple views, or the more visible and expressive comments.

Finally, the focus of this subchapter was to give more insight into the size, legitimacy, as well as the influence of these *One Piece* YouTubers on the platform. As most of these reviewers have been creating reviews for quite a long time, they have acquired a substantial number of followers which can only potentially influence their legitimacy as *One Piece* YouTubers as well as reviewers. I described the pattern of deduction from the biggest value of a subscriber count to the lowest value of comments and how the subscriber count can predict both the views and comments for the most average of chapter review videos. However, in the process of this description a more interesting discovery was the fact that a certain chapter (meaning chapter 967) was able to double the usual amount of views and comments that each of the reviews would typically get. This is an interesting discovery and one that will be given further context when I will discuss how chapter 967 was received on both platforms YouTube and Reddit with a sense of nostalgia.

## 5.6 The Prominence of Fan Speculations

A fundamental aspect within the *One Piece* fandom is the act of fan speculation. Fan speculations on YouTube are called theory videos. The fans who speculate are called *One Piece* theorists. *One Piece* Theories within the fandom are a primary example of fans interpreting the manga, creating discussion around it, and gravitating towards each other to further explore these theories and their validity. Not only does this occur in the comments under YouTube videos, which demonstrates YouTube's potential to foster communities (thanks to its commenting feature), but also similar discussions may take place on other platforms (e.g. Reddit which I will discuss later) where fans may indulge themselves to talk more about *One Piece* (Chau, 2010: 67; Peterson: 2005: 152). Therefore, Not only does YouTube demonstrate its potential as a platform for potential fan discourse, but it also provides insight into how the *One Piece* community is also an interpretive community (Petrson, 2005: 152; Beach, 1993: 106).

A known fact about Oda within the fandom is that Oda loves to foreshadow future events in his manga. Because of this, *One Piece* fans often love to take any sort of clues that they can find within the manga to create potential solutions to the various questions about the story that they have. The simplest example of such foreshadowing is the following: since the beginning of the *One Piece* story, the audience has always had a clear image of the dreams, desires, and final destinations of the protagonists. Luffy's dream is to get the One

Piece treasure, so it is obvious to assume that when the story ends he will obtain it. The only question remaining for the *One Piece* fandom, however, is the question of how will such dreams and desires be fulfilled, and what will happen on that journey that Oda started almost 23 years ago. While foreshadowing can be the main reason why theories such as this are also found on the Internet, I would first like to discuss some other potential reasons and motivations behind fan speculations.

In English "volumes" and in Japanese "tankobons" are a collection of about 9 to 11 chapters of *One Piece* manga. Ever since volume 4 of *One Piece*, Oda started a question and answer column within these collections of the manga where the fans of the series have the opportunity of getting their *One Piece* related questions answered by the author. In one of these columns, Oda answered a question about the length and the ending of the manga. Oda replied that he has always had the climax of the story in his head from the start, however, he has no idea how long it would take for him to reach it (see Appendix 4). A motivator for theories, in this case, is that the readers know that the ending for the story already exists, however, they cannot simply enter the author's head to get the easy answer to such a question. So, for now, after more than twenty years of reading, the fans are no closer to even knowing how the story will end, what is the One Piece treasure, and what will happen when the Straw Hats eventually find it.

To continue further, the reason why speculation takes up a big portion of fan practices within this fandom may be the fact that Oda is weaving together past, present, and future arcs of his manga. Therefore, the assumption is that not everything that he writes is locked until the very end. In magazines dedicated only to a collection of about 30 *One Piece* chapters, known as *One Piece* log books (simply called "logs" by the *One Piece* fans), Oda gave further insight into how he came up with 9 out of the 11 characters with the title of Supernova within one day. Sudden creative moments such as this are an example of how changes in Oda's creative writing can happen spontaneously. Oda's comment on the matter (see Fig. 3.) depicts how he indeed predicted the likelihood of the character called Kid (a supernova) becoming an important character. However, when mentioning the character Law (another supernova), he states that he did not imagine that he would become similarly important. As of current events, Law has become an extremely popular character within the *One Piece* manga fandom. I believe that Oda is referencing this attention and popularity that Law gained (as well as the other supernova) when he states that he had not even imagined the thought that they would become such important characters not only for his story but also to the fandom.
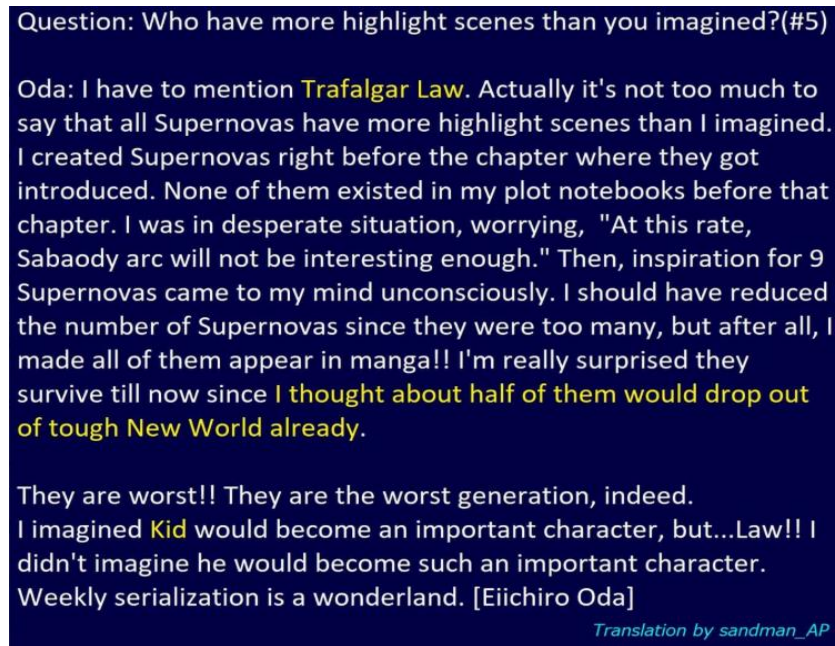
> Question: Who have more highlight scenes than you imagined?(#5)
>
> Oda: I have to mention Trafalgar Law. Actually it's not too much to say that all Supernovas have more highlight scenes than I imagined. I created Supernovas right before the chapter where they got introduced. None of them existed in my plot notebooks before that chapter. I was in desperate situation, worrying, "At this rate, Sabaody arc will not be interesting enough." Then, inspiration for 9 Supernovas came to my mind unconsciously. I should have reduced the number of Supernovas since they were too many, but after all, I made all of them appear in manga!! I'm really surprised they survive till now since I thought about half of them would drop out of tough New World already.
>
> They are worst!! They are the worst generation, indeed.
> I imagined Kid would become an important character, but...Law!! I didn't imagine he would become such an important character. Weekly serialization is a wonderland. [Eiichiro Oda]
>
> Translation by sandman_AP

Fig. 3. @sandman_AP. "Here is my translation for Oda's message about Law in ONE PIECE the 27th Log released 30 minutes ago. Oda himself didn't imagine Law would become an important character." Twitter, 20 December, 2017, 5:29 PM. https://twitter.com/sandman_AP/status/943503687334240256/photo/1. Accessed: 25 May 2020.

What I find most important about this comment, is that it demonstrates how elements of the manga (that Oda can suddenly come up with) can end up influencing the author to reconsider both their value and purpose within the story. In the comment, Oda states that he has let the characters survive and exist for much longer than he had originally planned. Therefore, I would like to question if this decision was intentional or not. After the release of this comment in late 2017, the supernova are still characters that Oda frequently utilizes but since the author has yet to further elaborate on the value and backstories of all of these characters, mysteries for fan speculation still exist. One of the mysteries is the identity of the supernova Jewelry Bonney, whose importance in Oda's narrative threads and the story is discussed in a speculation video created by YouTuber1. The speculation video was created by YouTuber1 because of the break in the weekly schedule of the *One Piece* chapters (during the time Oda was sick). This way, YouTuber1 compensated for the lack of a chapter review by creating a speculation video instead.

> *...I think it's easy to forget that Oda just a normal human being and that he needs to take care of his health, and that he gets sick. That being said, today*

*we're going to be talking about one of my favorite female characters in the series, second favorite female character under Robin, Jewelry Bonney. So I'm going to start off talking about her character and then I'm going to use her as a springboard to branch off to other narrative threads, and how I think they are going to connect sooner, rather than later.* (YouTuber1)

This speculation video demonstrates how Oda is still utilizing the supernova characters today in a manner that is fitting the narrative and the mysteries that he keeps. As a result, the supernova have become puzzle pieces that encourage fan speculation.

With this ever-changing world that can still gain expansions from its author, it is seen that the desire of the fans and *One Piece* fandom to predict these future changes or potential upcoming events of the manga on social media, especially on YouTube and Reddit, has become a very relevant practice. Regardless of its true origin, whether it is to raise further discussion within the fandom, to challenge the author, inspire him, or just surprise him with the endless amount of (mainly false) predictions and expectations, this activity is practiced on YouTube in the form of what fans call *One Piece* theory videos. Theory videos share a lot of the qualities with review videos. However, in its quite open-natured point of entry (everybody is free to theorize), the emphasis is more on assuming and re-reading for clues within the text that eventually, when put together, form a sort of hypothesis. This hypothesis may or may not be true until Oda's reveal of the truth within the manga. Evidence is primarily shown by manga panels that prove the point of the theorist, and many times, they discuss why other theories are wrong in their assumptions with further reasoning taken from the canon of *One Piece*.

Finally, an additional reason why these predictions are relevant and may become a crucial element for the series as a whole is that Oda himself has noted that if he ever discovered that someone had guessed how he plans to finish his story, he would likely change the outcome of the manga (Loo, 2019). While this point only touches upon the ending of the manga, from this it can be assumed that either Oda does not enjoy when his readers and fans can figure out things that he has not yet revealed, or he loves to test their clairvoyance. A possible conclusion could be that Oda may be also interested in how the fans perceive the chapters that he creates, and possibly out of his curiosity, he could be checking how fans and readers engage with the contents of the manga and with one another.

A clear example of similar Oda-like trickery that seems to invite fans to further speculative practices was when in the latest *One Piece* chapter, chapter 978, Oda decided to create a masked character whose name is "Who's Who".

*Anyway, Who's Who, it's interesting that Oda decided to call this masked man Who's who, because there is a card game, obviously, titled "Who's who" and part of the game, part of the, part of the objective of the game is to be able to figure out a player's identity. Okay, so, there's like I think there's like three players and one of them is a soloist, so people have to figure out who the soloist is as they play. So I think it's almost an invitation from Oda, for us fans for the reader, to say: "Ahaa, let's see if you can guess who this character is?"* (YouTuber1)

Furthermore, the only clue to his identity because of his mask is his appearance, leaving the identity as another mystery to be uncovered. Therefore, with all of that considered, Oda can come off as a person and author who challenges his fans to predict the ending or the hidden identities of characters. However, he can also be seen as a threat to these same predictions, that were the fans to accept his challenges and truly guess correctly, he would (and in other cases could) need only to change things to prove them wrong.

Speculation videos are important within the *One Piece* fandom. They serve the function of starting up meaningful discussions about the *One Piece* series. I observed speculation mainly on YouTube, where speculation videos are contributions that expand how *One Piece* fans discuss questions and narrative threads that interest them, as fans of Oda's story and world. Through speculations, fans also communicate their opinions and knowledge that they think can be valuable or unknown to other members of the *One Piece* fan community.

## 5.7 Example of a True Theory VS False Theory, What Was the Result?

During my fieldwork, a lot of questions were posed over the identity of a traitor among the group of characters that the readers were following. Among the reviewers that I observed, all of them during these chapters mentioned the identity of the traitor, and who they think that is, however, none of them went out of their way to discuss the matter for a more extended amount of time.

A sort of exception for the previous statement was YouTuber2, as he had made a video discussing the identity of the traitor in April of 2019, and as of the current events in the manga, his theory has also proven to be wrong. Because of some of the more recent chapters, the fandom now knows the true identity of the traitor and many theories of the reviewers may have been disproven. An interesting question related to this event was: what

is the aftermath of such a reveal within the canon of the story? I have chosen two theory videos, one that accurately predicted the true identity of the traitor within the story, and one whose predictions were not accurate in order to analyze the outcome of this situation. I will showcase how fan reactions to a theory that got its predictions and assumptions wrong differ from the reaction to the theories whose prediction was correct and confirmed. The main question is what are the main types of reactions depicted within the comment sections of these videos, and how they may differ after the revelation of the traitor's true identity.

Before going any further, I would like to note that these theories differ in their release date by 5 months, which in the manga's release schedule could accumulate up to (more or less) 20 manga chapters. Knowing that 11 months ago (April 10, 2019) YouTuber2 YouTube channel assumed that the character called Bariete was the traitor. However, the fandom now knows that YouTuber4 also made a theory about the traitor 6 months ago (September 14, 2019). In his video, YouTuber4 assumed and accurately predicted that the samurai in *One Piece* called Kanjurou was the traitor. This affected the fandom and comments of both of these videos in a couple of ways which will now be discussed.

The recent comments within the video's comments section under the false theory video consist of a couple of running themes. First off, fans over the time of the release of this video were arguing amongst one another who the actual traitor was, with some of the comments showing support towards YouTuber2's theory and others completely disagreeing with him.

While each fan may have their own opinion, the main characters suspected by the fandom of being the actual traitor were Carrot, Kanjuro, and (because of this specific theory video) Bariete. More recent comments appeared after the reveal of the true traitor. These comments would "laugh" at, and express negativity toward YouTuber2's theory through sarcastic comments on how the video aged well. They would also mainly reference that the true identity of the traitor is Kanjurou. Since in the previous subchapter I mentioned that the fans are clearly actively engaged in their community, they can be very passionate about their comments. However, while these comments may appear as merely taunting the reviewers about their incorrect theories and there are only a few of them, they can be viewed as one of the negative effects on the participatory culture around One Piece. They can also negatively impact the legitimacy of the theorist from the perspective of the fans.

However, despite this I would like to argue that even some negative comments can fulfill a meaningful role for the fans and viewers of the YouTuber's content. These comments can be seen as a guide for the viewers, communicating that there is no real purpose

in watching this particular theory video after it has been proven to be incorrect. Therefore, fan responses in the form of comments give others valuable knowledge that should be considered. Because the theory in the video is no longer an issue that fans would normally discuss, fans redirect each other's attention elsewhere. For instance, it could be redirected to the correct theory video that might be well-deserving of some more praise and attention from other community members, who may still be unaware or not informed that another creator in-fact was correct with their speculation and prediction about the traitor's true identity.

The fandom in this perspective can be seen acting as less of a judge and more of a guide in the video's comments section. Guidance is given to fans who may have not yet read the latest chapters or are just unaware of recent events. While they might be judging YouTuber2 for being wrong in his prediction, they are also guiding the future viewers of the video by letting them know that the theory had already been proven to be false. Therefore, the viewers will have an easier decision regarding whether they should watch the video or if it is, at that point, not necessary anymore. That is, unless the fans still want to know or are curious about what were some of the common theories before the revelation of certain situations in the manga. Moreover, because the speculation videos discuss uncertain content, unlike with the manga chapter reviews, which are usually focused more on the fan's first impressions, the comments prove to be a far more important resource for fans in this specific instance. All of this information is communicated in the comments section of speculation videos, and it proves that a lot of valuable information is shared on the YouTube platform. This information can help the fans of long-running series to easily catch up with the unfolding story.

Now I am going to discuss the comments for the theory video that was correct in its assumption (which was done by YouTuber4). In comparison to the wrong theory video presented by YouTuber2, the comments section of YouTuber4's video is far livelier in terms of both the number of comments, and the positivity they express. Most of the comments compliment the theorist on the fact that they guessed Oda's foreshadowing correctly, while others call him jokingly the "Oda in disguise" which can be seen as an act of praise. It is a way of joking that Oda himself is making YouTube videos about his own manga and revealing mysteries before they are released to the public in the canon. Furthermore, some of the other chapter reviewers that I did not follow during my ethnography also praised the theory by YouTuber4 as it made them reconsider their thoughts about the traitor. In general, the reception for this theory is full of excitement, praise, and hype for further theories from this *One Piece* YouTuber. At times, it seems that people are more excited about the theory

than the actual manga chapters themselves, which shows how much fans enjoy these discussions that they are having, separate from the usual weekly chapter releases.

At the times, when theory videos become the true reality for the *One Piece* fandom and readers, such an occurrence may in-fact become a point where the experienced theorists encourage other fans to make their own theories in return. Seeing the praise and excitement caused by other fans both predicting and interacting with the community shows that the only prerequisite for entry is a passion for Oda's work, even if the theory is later proven to be wrong. This is because, at the time of said theory's creation, it still served the purpose of creating further ideas, discussion, and assumptions in the minds of the fans. For instance, during the false theory video, a lot of discussions were still constructed based on who fans considered to be the main suspects of being the traitor.

Finally, many of the *One Piece* theorists show their passion for *One Piece* by promoting the manga in each video (which is done by other content creators as well, however, it was more prevalent among the theorists). They also promote other *One Piece* merchandise which they are not obliged to do. This shows that they truly care about Oda's work and try to support it, helping it to continue for as long as possible. After looking further into the background of the theorist, by which I mean YouTuber4 who correctly guessed the traitor's identity, it appears that when designing his channel's theme or content he was inspired by the other theorists on YouTube. This shows that by creating a theory and taking part in the discussion within the fandom, one can learn or even teach others how to better read and theorize. Therefore, fans can also benefit from these results because conclusively, when the reviewers inspire each other, they make more content about the manga that the fans love. Because of this, I find that the *One Piece* fandom on YouTube is a community where both the viewers and creators feel that all forms of contributions matter and that there is value in sharing their thoughts with others. In the case of speculation videos, as I have discussed, this is through the creation of insightful or creative theory videos, or the further judgment, guidance, discussion, and elaboration on the fan theory takes place within the comment section of the video. According to Henry Jenkins (2009), such sharing, learning from others, creating, and contributing, are qualities notable and important to participatory culture.

**5.8 Who is Goda?**

In the chapter discussing the prominence of fan speculations, I have explained how Oda would act if any theory about the ending of his manga would come to his attention. When reviewing the chapters 967, 968, and 969, the majority of the reviews rated the chapters to be extremely good, even phenomenal. With all of this in mind, *One Piece* fans have created a meme out of the manga's author, and that meme is related to a figure known only to this fandom as "Goda" (typically spelled either in all caps or with a beginning capital letter). To further elaborate and explain this meme within this fandom, it is necessary to delve deeper into the field of Reddit chapter discussions, where fans (similarly to the chapter reviews on YouTube) have discussions about the most recent of *One Piece* chapters. I will also bring out examples of this meme from some of the fan practices that were already mentioned earlier.

The meme of Goda is a title for the *One Piece* author that stems from the combination of two words. The first word is "God", and the second word is the author's last name, "Oda". Within the fandom, Goda is a term used with a promotional significance. To explain how this works, we will take a look at the theory video used for the discussion relating to fan receptions of an accurate theory, as well as the Reddit's current chapter thread about *One Piece* chapter 967.

When Oda writes a chapter that is received by the fandom with lots of praise, the fans often instead of saying "Oda did a great job with this chapter" note that "Goda did a great job with this chapter". They elevate the greatness of the author and the work that he created, sometimes coupled with the reasons explaining why they think so. For example, with chapter 967, which was a phenomenal chapter for some fans, the fans refer to the author as Goda because of his great writing skills that can appear as skill that a godly figure would possess (see Appendix 5). This is to say that the term "Goda" is used when extreme joy is seen among the fandom that in most cases is caused by the release of a spectacular chapter. As an example, *One Piece* chapter 967 received praise for being capable of moving the readers to the point of crying. Furthermore, Oda in this chapter referenced back to chapter 19 that in the long term writing spectrum means that the author tied this chapter that appeared 950 chapters ago together with the current storyline. While various authors may be capable of writing and connecting plotlines, to me as well as other *One Piece* fans, such level of continuity that was displayed in chapter 967 is from a reader's standpoint remarkable.

Remarkable writing deserving of a remarkable terminology when addressing the author, Goda.

Another example of this is when observing the theory video by YouTuber4. While in many cases theory videos fail (which is addressed by the fans as an occurrence due to the magnificent writings of Goda), if a theory video turns out to be correct the creator of the theory is held in a similarly higher regard within the *One Piece* fandom (see Appendix 5). In the correct theory example, the creator of the theory is regarded (as mentioned earlier in a joking manner) as the Goda in disguise on YouTube, who is demonstrating his brilliant foreshadowing skills to his fans. However, understandably, the fans in this case are just praising the great assumption work done by the *One Piece* theorist. To some fans, the fact that the theorist was capable of accurately predicting the identity of the traitor is also deserving of a similarly godly status.

Finally, as the last note to describe the influence of Goda within the *One Piece*, anime and manga fandoms, *One Piece* fans have taken the liberty of the Internet and visually illustrated how Eiichiro Oda is godly to them. They do this not only because of the amazing singular chapters that Oda writes but also to show his importance within the industry of manga and anime. This is depicted by an image of the notable mangaka replacing religious figures in an image (see Appendix 6). In the image, Oda's face is a replacement to the central God figure's face within the picture. Furthermore, the heads of the two authors, Tite Kubo and Masashi Kishimoto, who are known by their manga titles *Bleach*, and *Naruto* are replacements for the other more lowly subjects that sit under this powerful god-like mangaka's domain.

As a whole, the meme of Goda represents how highly the fans of *One Piece* can take the respect that they have for the series' author. Goda has become to represent, just like other memes on the Internet in the past, an idea and a theme within the *One Piece* fandom culture, depicting the phenomena and the greatness of the author Eiichiro Oda, and his manga series known as *One Piece*. While it is the greatness of Oda's work that has created the meme Goda, similarly *One Piece* itself has become an inspiration for a lot of other sorts of creations on the platform of Reddit. Therefore, the following chapter will look at artwork practices found on Reddit and how fanworks known as fanon are received by members of the *One Piece* fandom.

**5.9 Reddit Practices**

In this part that looks at some of the frequent practices of *One Piece* fans on the Reddit platform, the emphasis is put more on recurring similar fanwork patterns, themes, and elements that eventually lead to the creation of original or imitative fan creations. In doing so, I will discuss what types of fanart content are popular on Reddit and what are the key motivators or ideas that motivate fans to participate within the community by sharing these creations with other fans.

The first part will discuss fanworks and interaction among the fans on the platform that relies heavily on pre-existing *One Piece* content. Examples of this are the reimagined and redrawn scenes of certain pre-existing *One Piece* manga panels or colorings that add color into Oda's work. These panels were originally, just like most other manga panels, consisting only of shades of black and white. The second part will focus on original and creative, but One Piece inspired fan creations

Finally, as Reddit is a platform used mainly for having discussions with people that share a common interest, in this case the interest being the series *One Piece*, a question that will be touched upon after looking at some fan creations on the platform is how is fanart generally received by the members of the *One Piece* fandom. It will also help to answer what is the most important thing to consider when creating fanart in this community.

**5.10 The Trigger for Weekly Fan Colored Manga Panels (Colorings)**

A practice that is very prominent on the *One Piece* subreddit is when fans take it upon themselves to color *One Piece* panels that were originally drawn by Oda in the shades of black and white. The colorings, which are typically single panels from the latest chapter of the manga seem to focus on the panels that leave a great amount of impact on the fandom. To demonstrate colorings as a prominent form of fanworks, I will take the chapter 967's reception and discussion thread on Reddit. The thread is the equivalent to a manga chapter review on the platform of YouTube which I explored in the YouTube practice analysis.

As I observed Reddit discussions using the current chapter flair within the scope of my fieldwork, I focused on looking at some of the potential reasons, motivators, and ideas for why *One Piece* fans would practice the coloring of *One Piece* panels.

| Date, Time | Descriptive Note | Reflections | Feelings | Questions/notes observation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Day 29 Feb 8 | The prominence of colored pages of manga https://www.deviantart.com/one-piece-pirates/gallery/51843110/manga-colored-page | Colored pages for the manga are a very common way that Oda's work gets color into them through fans working on adding color to the black and white original manga pages. | On Reddit after every chapter there is an amount of colored pages that get posted as threads. I feel as this is an integral part for the One Piece community. | These same ones that are typically posted onto Reddit are very often actually from Deviantart. |

Fig. 4 Merila, Raimond. "Extract of my ethnographic diary day 29, realization of coloring prominence." 8 February, 2020.

*One Piece* chapter 967 has already been discussed as being a phenomenal chapter for *One Piece* fans. Because of this, the discussions revolving around this manga chapter generated more views and comments for the reviewers on YouTube. Discussing the chapter a bit further, a lot of focus and positive feedback was given to Oda (on Reddit and YouTube) especially in terms of the chapter's final panel (see Appendix 7).

The positive feedback for this chapter and its final panel can be seen by looking at some of the reviewers whom I have discussed earlier. YouTuber2's feelings, which the YouTuber expressed after reading the chapter are expressed in the following sentence: "I kind of want to cry, in part because the chapter was beautiful, and in part because of the journey that it took to get here."(YouTuber2). However, similar reactions about the chapter and panel can be also seen when looking elsewhere, including Reddit.

The following Reddit comments express fan reception for *One Piece* chapter 967: "That panel of Roger laughing is going to stick with me forever. Just feels like such a legendary panel." (user comment from Redditor1), "You feel like crying and laughing at the same time by looking at that panel." (user comment from Redditor2), and "I don't get how you're supposed to read this with so many tears in your eyes …" (user comment from Redditor3). The list of comments gives further examples of how the chapter was received by the fans as a single chapter, but primarily, how the last panel of that chapter seemed to emotionally touch various members of the *One Piece* fandom. While each chapter of *One*

*Piece* can have its charm for fans of the series, it is clear from the fan comments and reception that the final panel from chapter 967 had an especially strong emotional significance and impact on its readers. The biggest impact that I noticed after reading the chapter, watching the reviews, and observing the chapter reception on Reddit, was that I realized the larger significance of the chapter that I did not notice or grasp in the beginning. I am surprised that by observing other participants within the fandom gave me a better realization of why this chapter was important. While I may not go that far and say that I cried because of this chapter in any particular way, it made me contemplate on how close the end of this series may be.

Part of what I think is the cause of the significance for this chapter was that after more than twenty years, things within Oda's narrative are starting to wrap up and that for some members within the fandom is scary, myself included. It is scary, "because the idea that the object will last is also partially an illusion since all material culture is always in some state of decay" (Jenkins, 2017: 226). Eventually, *One Piece* will end and that is especially for fans a difficult thing to process. Furthermore, as *One Piece* is a very long-running manga series (that is, in the comic book form), fans are invited to become active participants who can emphasize how important the meaning of a given scene within the manga panel is. Therefore, the impactful scenes within panels deserve coloring because of their significance to the fans (Gardener, 2013: 248).

Furthermore, the importance of the panel from chapter 967 can be also seen by acknowledging that this panel acts as a nostalgia-inducing element for some fans (Jude, 2017: 48; Jenkins, 2013: 318). The fact that both comic book form and nostalgia have become integral, is clearly visible when returning to the emotional feelings of the reviewer because of both the chapter's beauty and the journey that the series took to get this far (YouTuber2). In this sentence, YouTuber2 returns to the idea of the journey that is felt by reading *One Piece*. Furthermore, as this truly depicts a feeling of nostalgia, possibly, this same nostalgic journey can never be recovered ever again (Jenkins, 2017: 226).

For a brief moment I also want to discuss research that has been done to study the effects that colors have on a person. In-fact, color studies may be the final needed key to understanding why colorings are popular within this fandom. It can be assumed that another reason behind the popularity of colorings is because *One Piece* is mostly black and white and lacking in color. According to Lynnay Huchendorf, "color has been found to increase a person's arousal" (Huchendorf, 2007: 1). Arousal, which begins as a "hardwired response to our experiences" and is linked to positive emotions like joy, happiness, excitement, and the negative emotions which are connected to arousal are anger, frustration, and hate (Williams

and Karim, 2018). Therefore, when observing the colored images, the emotions of joy, happiness, and excitement can come up, which further elevates the arousal that a reader or fan of the series receives from the coloring. Similarly, negative emotions can also be felt, for instance, when a coloring parodies a monumental event or it misrepresents a scene or character in an unfavorable way. Finally, why all of this is important, is that higher arousal is also linked to making people talk and communicate more (Williams and Karim, 2018). Essentially what I am implying here, is that not only are colorings a part of the *One Piece* fandom's participatory culture, but it is an act that further reinforces participation within this fan community by amplifying the emotions involved.

To summarize, *One Piece* chapter 967 had an emotional impact on this fandom, and for the most part fans seem to agree on this chapter's sentimental value. Through observing fan reception, it is clear that the part of the chapter with the biggest impact as well as significance for fans was this chapter's final panel. The same panel that was the trigger for the many subsequent colorings of it on Reddit after the release of chapter 967. This final panel induced in fans the desire to both cry and laugh that at first glance may sound confusing, however, in the midst of all of that confusion are emotions that nobody else but those same readers can understand, value, and experience. Because the fans and readers can understand the significance of a panel, colorings are a way to talk and communicate with the community about these panels in further detail. Furthermore, I discussed the influence that color itself can have on fan behavior, which suggests that the increase of arousal linked to colors can increase the desire within fans to talk and communicate more about *One Piece*. Therefore, it is not simply about a single panel, but it is what is being felt, remembered, and experienced through it. It is the journey, adventure and story with its beginning, and its inevitable end.

## 5.11 Colorings, Practice on Oda's Work

In this part, I will discuss how the practice of coloring is by its purest nature an example of participatory culture within the *One Piece* fandom on Reddit, and how fans further shape the content that can be found on the platform. I will also try to describe the open-ended nature of colorings in the *One Piece* community. As I have already stated, the practice focuses on taking pre-existing *One Piece* content (typically a panel from the latest chapter of the manga) that fans not only consume and discuss, but further enhance it through their own creativity

that allows them to give greater meaning, value, and depth to it by applying color. However, before discussing this practice's participatory qualities, I will first elaborate on what are the most typical approaches that fans tend to take or consider when creating this type of fanon content.

Generally speaking, colorings are the simplest form of participatory fan-created content. The process generally involves fans choosing a panel that they want to color, looking at the colors used for the characters in the *One Piece* anime, and then simply drawing within the lines filling the panel with color. However, things are not always as simple as I just explained them to be. Specifically, there are two primary concerns that my description lacks. First, the instance when the *One Piece* anime or Oda have not yet given certain characters any color. Second, the uncertainty whether colorings are strictly required to follow the color combinations used within the *One Piece* anime.

The first problem arises typically when either the anime adaptation has not yet reached that far to guide any of the coloring choices available. Additionally, if Oda himself has also in such a situation not given any further information (in the form of colored panels or any other type of supplementary material) about the colors that should be used when drawing the mentioned character, things can become complicated. Generally speaking, in such a situation, colorings made with less information about characters or locations are usually more open to individual creative interpretations on how the character or setting might look like when animated by Toei Animation (the animation studio for the *One Piece* anime), or colored by Oda himself. In this case, colorings are the most open natured means of participation in the fandom, because fans are free to experiment with the looks of a character and explore the ideas of what colors would be more suitable according to their own subjective and collective opinions.

The second problem is very much related to the first because the decisions on colors come down to individual fan preferences. There are usually no issues even if the coloring is completely different from what the fandom knows or expects. The usage of different colors can be confusing and odd at first glance. This makes it preferable when the colors applied are familiar with what the fandom already knows. Generally speaking, because colorings are very much open to a fan's interpretations, usually, all colorings created are accepted and appreciated mutually within the community. Therefore, I will elaborate upon further reasons why colorings can be considered to be a participatory practice within the *One Piece* fandom.

| Date, Time | Descriptive Note | Reflections | Feelings | Questions/notes observation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Day 5 10/01 | Observing deviantart, reddit for chapter 967 fanart content. Stumbled upon a One Piece podcast that in the description bar had a link to a google earth type of a map of the world of One Piece. https://claystage.com/one-piece-world As well as an impactful uncolored panel with a soundtrack that was impactful for the readers of One Piece manga chapter 967. https://streamable.com/3s5ro | Most of the fanart that I saw on deviantart.com and reddit were colored versions of the most highly regarded panel of the manga chapter. While other secondary characters (mainly some characters yet unseen) were also given colored or redrawn images mainly the art constructed by fans for this chapter is centered on a single yet powerful image of Roger and his discovery of the island. | I initially thought that the initial artwork that I could find would be bigger or with more variations, however, the fan-created content that I did find was either overly detailed or just images that with a few added details and color brought more life into the reading material. The colored versions added more life and beauty to the original black and white manga pages. Other versions added a soundtrack to a panel and this also added impact to what the image/panel conveyed. | Fan art mainly the colorings are or seems to be a common form of appreciation to panels or images that fans regard as good or perfect or amazing etc. |

Fig. 5 Merila, Raimond. "Extract of ethnographic diary day 5, I observed/reacted/evaluated colorings and their impact on me as a fan." 10 January, 2020.

In the case of chapter 967, fans created multiple versions of colorings for the impactful final panel of the chapter. In the appendices there are a few examples of colorings that were posted on Reddit after the release of the chapter (see Appendix 8,9).

There are three qualities of participatory culture that I am going to discuss. The first quality of colorings that correlates with participatory culture is that they have a low barrier needed for artistic expression (Jenkins, 2009: 5-6). The second is that strong support is given for further creation and sharing of finished content with others (Jenkins, 2009: 5-6). The third is that colorings provide social connectivity to this fandom (Jenkins, 2009: 5-6).

First, as a participatory practice, colorings are simple by their nature because they only require the original manga panel after which fans are free to add colors as they see fit according to their own tastes, styles, and more. However, in many cases fans go beyond this simplistic copy coloring of the author's work, and truly make the work their own by drawing

up the same or similar scene with their own skills and capabilities from the beginning (see Appendix 10).

Second, on Reddit, colorings are shared with the fandom and as a response for sharing their work, the fandom can provide feedback. On the *One Piece* subreddit, colorings are usually extremely well received. Some further examples are also in the appendices (see Appendix 11).
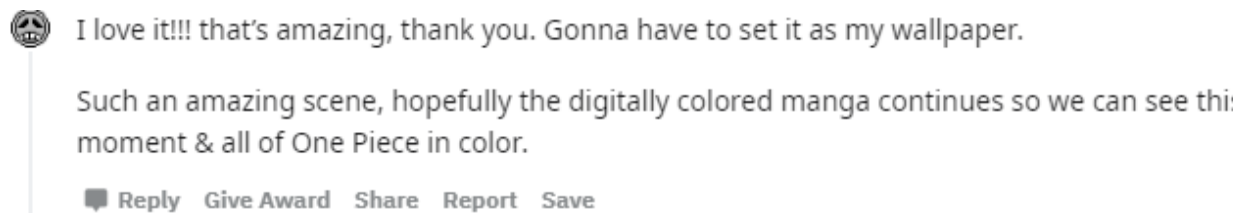


Fig. 6. Merila, Raimond. 2020, "User comment from Redditor4", screenshot of a Reddit comment, 19 April, 2020.

Furthermore, colorings provide fans the opportunity to see the loved panel with more vivid colors. Especially on Reddit, where sharing colorings is easy as everybody with an account can make their own threads. The practice of panel coloring often amazes *One Piece* fans who usually seem to encourage the further creation and sharing of other fan content on the platform (see Appendix 12).

Third, in some cases colorings can add further social connectivity to the fandom. Colorings of the final panel of 967 were relatively common after the chapter's release. The number of colorings and positive reception for this panel created more threads discussing, for instance, why that certain panel seemed overly special to the fandom. While each opinion was unique in their own way, it emphasizes that a single panel can be interpreted in multiple ways which induce further fan discussions. For some, this panel represents the upcoming end of the series, for others, it reminds them of all the fond memories that they have experienced with it. However, while there are plenty of other interpretations, for most of the fans, it is meaningful to share emotional experiences with one another after reading the latest chapter of *One Piece*. The following list of comments will demonstrate this behavior: "Bitter sweet tears" (user comment from Redditor5), "Man reading the last 2 pages of this chapter, contrary to the reactions of the pirate king's crew, I teared up a little. I can't wait to see what Wano will lead us to!" (user comment from Redditor6), "I have no clue why I teared up when I read this chapter." (user comment from Redditor7).

## 5.12 Fan Artists Perfecting their Craft

Colorings are one of the most frequent practices a few days after the release of the latest chapter, as that is the time when there is the biggest amount of excitement within the fandom. However, not every fan artist is interested in simply enhancing the work of somebody else (in this case Oda). Therefore, there are other prominent practices on Reddit. One of these is drawings of characters popular within the *One Piece* world, and the second is fan-created spin-off series. In most cases, these drawings are of popular characters from the series that usually are the protagonists, however, nearly as frequent are also drawings of the series' main antagonists. Spin-offs (as they are usually called within the fandom), however, take Oda's world and characters in *One Piece* and construct their own plots and storylines that in some scenarios argue or disagree with the canon of *One Piece*.

In my fieldwork, during day 13, I focused on how active fans on Reddit were also frequent participants in creating their original artwork inspired by Oda's world and characters in *One Piece*.

| Date, Time | Descriptive Note | Reflections | Feelings | Questions/notes observation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Day 13 Jan23** | Observing some fan work on reddit | Prominent content not based off of any chapter artwork that could be seen was of characters that are all present within the main storyline as well as a list of protagonists mainly ones of luffy but also some others. Artwork of villains or antagonists is also surprising for me. | I feel that because of the vast world that the story inherently encompasses and how each character typically gets a lot of development from Oda a lot of fan art is also dedicated to the villains and side characters because of the fact that sometimes even the minor characters can be as important or even more important than the main cast. | Villains are cool in artwork and art of them is not rare. |

Fig. 7. Merila, Raimond. "Extract of my ethnographic diary day 13." 23 January, 2020.

Daily posts by fans that have created their own images of characters and places are not that unusual on Reddit. Typically, through drawings fans show their devotion, love, fanaticism, or respect for the work that Oda has created. To further understand the mindset of fans who create fanart for *One Piece*, I created a discussion thread on Reddit. In the thread I asked questions about what motivates and inspired them to create fanart, and whether they focus on mimicking Oda's style or prefer working on their own style when gathering inspiration for their creations.
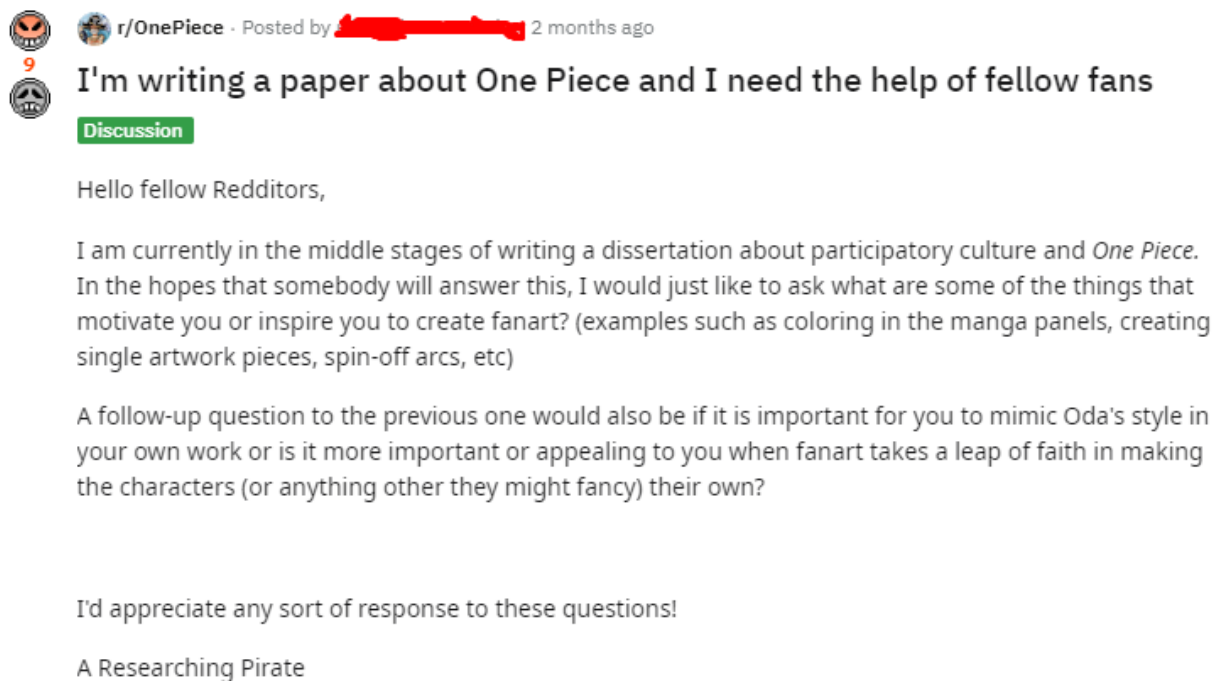


Fig. 8. Merila, Raimond. 2020, "Reddit post I Created for Fan Motivations and Inspirations", screenshot from Reddit, 19 April, 2020.

By not asking exclusively about character drawings or spin-offs, I hoped to draw in a bigger number of fans willing to describe what are some things considered before creation. Additionally, after further consideration, I had a few private conversations with a few other Redditors. One of these redditors was the creator of a photograph that contained *One Piece* merchandise (a post well-received on the platform). I asked him what led him to create such content for the subreddit. Another one of these redditors, who I asked the same question, was a creator of a spin-off series inspired by Oda's *One Piece*.

In the Reddit thread, from the answers that I received from fan artists, fans tend to mimic the style of Oda when trying to broaden their horizons as artists. The main reason why Oda seemed to be a good role model for the people that responded was mostly because

of the interesting and creative style of the author. Mimicking was mentioned primarily because it allows the fan artists (especially novices) to either further improve themselves in their own creativity and work, or help them learn what type of art style is suitable for them.

Fans mentioned that there are plenty of reasons why they create artwork, however, they seemed to agree upon certain ideas concerning what they try to achieve when creating fan art. When focusing more on their own style and originality, the main detail was to experience Oda's characters in different settings and attire that the fans would miss or not experience if only following the canonical storyline and its universe. As such, through collaborations and networking on Reddit fans are learning the skill of "play" - the capacity to both experiment and find solutions to their problems (Jenkins, 2009:4). Fans are experimenting and playing with their surroundings to have new experiences that they would otherwise not have. Therefore, fans like to draw the characters of *One Piece* by imagining them in different settings, backgrounds, poses, and attire (fan play) to see what could happen if the authorship of the manga and characters were handled differently. By learning this skill, participatory culture is just as it was noted by Jenkins (2009: 4), educational. Out of all of the answers, the most interesting one was from a fan who expressed how they would love to experience the world of *One Piece* in a way that would be similar to the universe depicted in the action animated film titled *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*.

Moving forward to look at the private direct conversation that I had with one of the Redditors. He created a thread that was quite popular and well-received on the subreddit for several days that was indicated by the number of user upvotes it got. User votes, categorized as upvotes and downvotes, help Reddit communities to spread or diminish the visibility of a post appearing in a subreddit. Upvotes help threads stay more visible because if multiple people within a community of shared interest like that specific post, it will stay higher in the subreddit feed as a sort of suggestion for further user attention and traction. The post by this Redditor gained around 6000 upvotes that is in terms of this subreddit quite remarkable.

The user's thread was a photograph of a water cup from which tiny droplets of the water are jumping out. Furthermore, the background of this photograph features the logo of the *One Piece* default pirate jolly roger from a t-shirt that the user owned. Through my conversation with the user, they explained that photography is a big hobby of theirs. They went further to state that they are particularly fond of a specific type of macro photography that they were trying to create when taking the picture of the water droplets. The problem that came up when taking the photo was that nothing quite fit right with the background, so they spent quite some time looking for something that would suit it. After browsing through

their belongings, it turned out that a shirt with a *One Piece* symbol was fitting for what they were looking for. Furthermore, this redditor explained that *One Piece* has been a big part of his life for at least 6 years now.

Looking further, in the thread he described taking 185 shots before settling for the one that he uploaded on the subreddit, which from their description on the thread was a collaboration of the two most important things for him. This fan art can be seen as a creation that was created without the initial intention of actually creating fan art. It is because the events that lead to its creation were based on spontaneous choice of portraying matching subjects in a photograph. While working on his hobby of photography, the redditor (who is also a fan of the series of *One Piece*) simply struggled to find a suitable subject for the background of his which resulted in a piece of popular fanart. However, it was his experience of being a fan and buying fan merchandise of the series that helped him in return to finalize the macro photograph that he was hoping to create.

To summarize, these different genres of fanart of photography, character drawings, and spin-offs are just the given examples of how diverse fan art creation can become. While in the first example I explored what goes into the more intentional fanart creations, the findings suggest that fan artists are similar to professional craftsmen of art practice who are trying to become better at their craft. In the case of the *One Piece* fandom, fan artists who are more experienced may mimic Oda's style to learn something new, while the novices test as well as try to discover which art style could be right for them. However, sometimes, the more experienced artists are just using Oda's characters or the world and elements that he created as a source for inspiration (similar to the second example of a *One Piece* fan doing macro photography). It can show that the art that fans create, not only can reflect their status as fans but also their own deeper interests, who they are as creators, and what it is that they like to create. Finally, while it is possible that there are boundaries for things such as how much a fan artist can draw inspiration from Oda's work until it becomes a habit of just growthless copying, the one thing that may not have any boundaries is the limitless imagination of fans. So perhaps one day, a *One Piece* spin-off series that is largely inspired by the movie title *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* is not just an idea but a spin-off concept that may, in fact, come to fruition in the future.

## 5.13 The Practice and Results of Character Drawings

This part of the analysis will focus on the fan practice of character drawings. Character drawings within the *One Piece* fandom consist typically of a canon character taken from the *One Piece* manga, on to which fans can afterward use their own imagination, interpretation, and creativity. Generally, the base model for the character is left unchanged, however, changes are typically applied to their attire, powers, facial expressions, design, and artistic style. Essentially the features that are changed are typically according to the fan artist's creative vision, style, or skills. This reaffirms Hetrick's (2019) theory saying that the creation of fan art uses deterritorialization to reimagine, and therefore, reterritorialize. Observations and examples of this are for instance when characters of *One Piece* are drawn and clothed into attire that is more usual to our own world's design and fashion instead of the clothing that these characters would usually wear in their own manga-based context. The following examples within the appendices are comparisons of protagonists before and after fan reterritorialization (see Appendices 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18).

The most prominent characters that are used for fan-created drawings are typically the main protagonists of the manga, its current or past main antagonists, or liked allies of the protagonists. Sometimes drawings can focus on characters that do not appear so often in the canon and can be seen more as side characters. However, my observations imply that there are certain fan-favorite characters that will, in most cases, have more drawings than the less popular or liked characters of Oda's manga. In the case of the following example, the drawing of a character that the fan art depicts is of an antagonist. The character is an example of a fandom favorite character, as within the *One Piece* character popularity polls (which appear usually after every hundred chapters or so) he has taken spots within the top 10, top 20, and top 30. This is remarkable because the character itself has had seldom appearances ever since the beginning of the canon manga, and even till this day, his popularity is carried simply through his unique qualities (his history with the previous Pirate King, the fact that he is a clown and a pirate which is funny and entertaining, he is a "friend" of Luffy's role model, and more) as a character within the *One Piece* universe. Antagonists such as this are the second most common type of character drawings within the fandom. In the appendices I have included further examples and comparisons of characters who are not protagonists, before and after fan reterritorialization (see Appendices 19, 20, 21, 22).

In both cases of character drawings of protagonists and antagonists, the fandom reception for these types of artworks seems to be overwhelmingly supportive. To illustrate this, some of the comments that followed the posting of these images are provided.
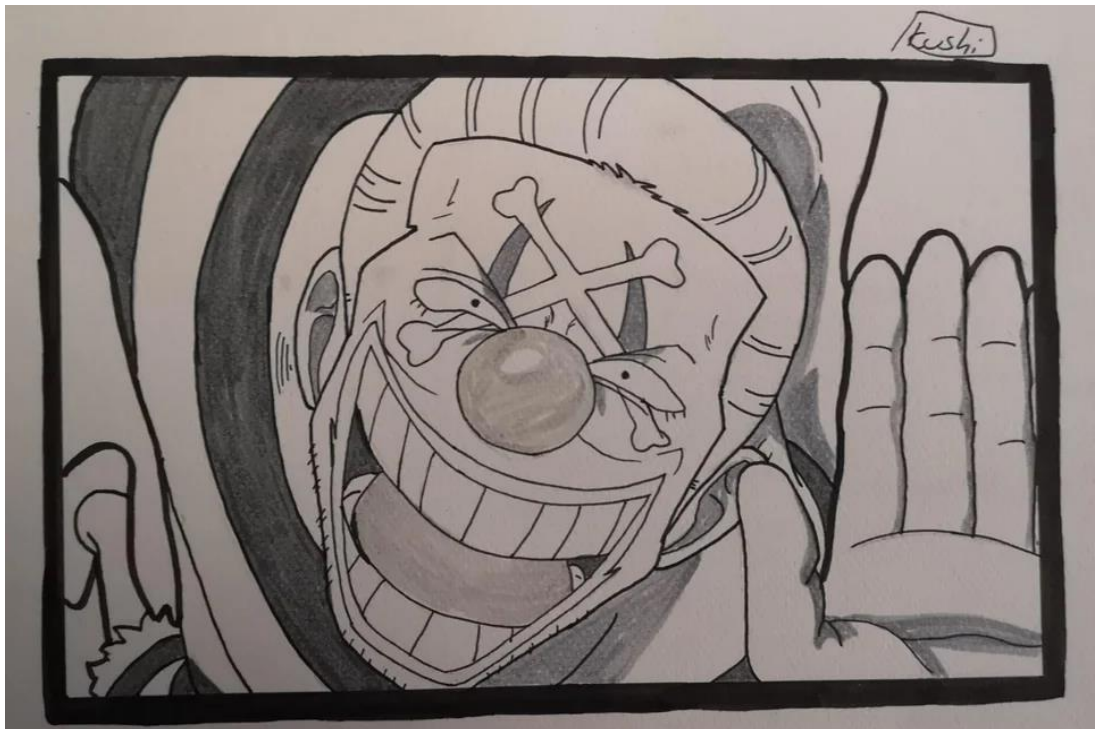


Fig. 9. kuashi95, 2020, "Some fan art I did if the Clown Prince of Crime-Er I mean Buggy the Clown." Reddit, 13 January,Accessed: 25 May 2020.[5]

The above image (see Fig. 9.) had, however, only two comments, one being a comment and the other being a reply to that comment by the creator of the character drawing. The comment was as follows: "Buggy art is best art" (user comment from Redditor8). The reply was: "I 100% agree" (user comment from Redditor9). While this example of comments is simplistic, it displays that the contribution and sharing of the character drawing is still valued and important even though it is possible that the drawing was viewed by a very small number of users within the fanbase (Jenkins, 2009: 5-6).

To take another example I shall display another drawing within the fandom to observe the amount and tone of the comments. The example is one of the more memorable scenes within the entire series, and therefore, the expectation is to see fan support, interaction, and the fandom coming together to respect the character drawing made by a member of their cultural community.

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[5]https://www.reddit.com/r/OnePiece/comments/enuhvq/some_fan_art_i_did_if_the_clown_prince_of_crimeer/

Fig. 10. AnonSketch, "I try to capture emotion in my illustrations, so I drew my favorite moment from One Piece." Reddit, 15 April, Accessed: 25 May 2020.[6]

The reception for this artwork was very positive, and it also created further discussions revolving around the particular scene showcased within the drawing of the moment and characters. "Two of my favourite characters in story. So awesome work. Love it" (user comment from Redditor10), and "This gave me chills man. You really captured their determination" (user comment from Redditor11). Finally, I added a third comment into the appendices to showcase how heated can a reaction comment get when fans want to state clearly how important can a scene and character be for them, and for the fandom as a whole (see Appendix 23).

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[6] https://www.reddit.com/r/OnePiece/comments/g1v7ya/i_try_to_capture_emotion_in_my_illustrations_so_i/

**5.14 What Matters in a Fanmade Spin-Off**

The final practice that will be discussed further is fanon stories of the *One Piece* manga and world, that in this fandom are called most typically fan spin-offs. Spin-offs are a fan practice where fans go to the length of trying to create their own stories and storylines that either co-exist or disrupt Oda's canon in *One Piece*. I will discuss the general consensus that I received during my participant observation on Reddit. I will also describe fan feelings about spin-offs and bring examples of a few such works, which will be provided to further showcase why spin-offs are a noteworthy example of a practice within this fandom. It is common in fandom-based research to refer to spin-offs as "fan-fiction", however, I will explain why *One Piece* fans often define their works as spin-offs rather than fan-fiction.

During days 24 and 25 of my ethnographic research I discovered a fan artist whose spin-offs were discussed by *One Piece* fans on YouTube as well as on Reddit. The works that were discussed originated from the website dedicated primarily to community artworks and photography, Deviantart, and the user, whose works became the point for fan discussion within the two *One Piece* communities, was Deviantartist1. In a Reddit thread titled "*One Piece* Fan Spin off", a *One Piece* fan was asking other fans for help in finding a similar spin-off to the one he had just read, which would be inspired by the manga *One Piece*. While the fan did receive guidance regarding his question, the more interesting aspect that I want to point towards is the conversation that fans had afterward. This conversation among the fans brought out their opinions about fanon spin-offs and how much they should or should not interfere with Oda's canon. The following text examples consist of extracts from the same forum thread.
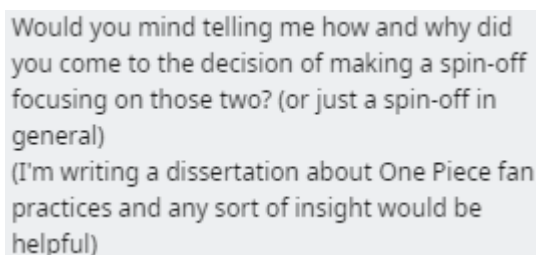
> *Personally I'd prefer a 0% canon spin off that doesn't forcibly affect the main story; the world of One Piece is so large and carries so much variety, it would be a breeze to fill in gaps of other areas/ backstories to a lot of characters. I could see a completely awesome One Piece spinoff that doesn't mingle at all with any existing characters, and still be a greatly viable story.* (user comment from Redditor12)

> *yeah but every devil fruit that someone creates in a fan manga could end up existing in the real manga one day. No matter if an existing character would have cameos or a major role in that spin off or none existing character would ever appear. In the end every devil fruit will be one step closer to a plot hole. :( Maybe a real good one would get master odas attention and he would decide to let that story live. :D* (user comment from Redditor13)

Furthermore, while these examples illustrate the potential that fans see in Oda's work as well as fellow fans who create spin-offs. There were others who also emphasized the amount of work that creators needed to do when creating spin-offs in the first place. Often, the fans like if the creator of the spin-off takes a lot of time to make the spin-off compliant to the canon. However, if the spin-off heavily interferes with the canon it is frequently disliked by many fans. In this regard, this was the first comment to the thread that was asking for similar spin-off examples: "I dislike how this interferes heavily with canon concepts, attributing a lot of that western style "Complex ancient artifact that holds power" stuff'' (user comment from Redditor14). However, a more positive viewpoint was from a different user responding to the thread that stated: "would love to see that, but the story would have to be just as awesome as the real one…" (user comment from Redditor15).

To briefly summarize, the first-mentioned spin-off demonstrated the issue that fans noted as tampering too much with Oda's material and not living up to the same quality. Therefore, this allows me to conclude that fans seem to appreciate when spin-off creators mix their own creations with Oda's timeline and characters within *One Piece* rather than interfering with the balance that Oda has created so far.

An example where the balance of Oda's work has not been interfered with comes from a different Reddit user. This user decided to share his own manga with the fandom on Reddit because of the absence of the canon during April 2020. This user's spin-off manga was about two *One Piece* characters that were present in the beginning stages of the original manga and anime. After their debut and departure these characters were seldom, if at all, mentioned again, and therefore, any creations around these characters set an example on how fan creations can expand upon Oda's world rather than interrupt it. I personally enjoyed the story and its narrative, because it has a creative take on characters that have been absent for a long time, and I found myself enjoying it so much that I went to personally compliment the creator of the spin-off. It felt exactly like reading Oda's manga, however, that was simply not it. Because of this, I also thought that it would be interesting to ask how they came to the decision of creating the spin-off, and the following images will show the creator's answers to my questions.

Would you mind telling me how and why did you come to the decision of making a spin-off focusing on those two? (or just a spin-off in general)
(I'm writing a dissertation about One Piece fan practices and any sort of insight would be helpful)

Fig. 11. Merila, Raimond. 2020, "Direct-message Questions I presented to my spin-off Informant", screenshot from Reddit, 19 April, 2020.
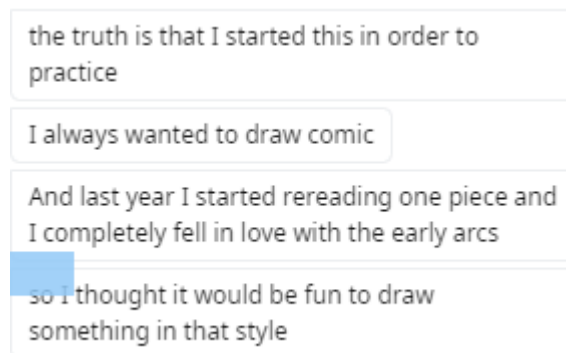


Fig. 12. Merila, Raimond 2020, "Direct-message Answer from my spin-off Informant", screenshot from Reddit, 19 April, 2020.

The answers to my questions describe a couple of motivations that I already mentioned about some previous fan practices. Mainly the fan started creating a spin-off out of the desire to practice, and the fact that they wanted to draw a comic. Furthermore, he has been a fan of *One Piece* for more than a year, after which he reread some of the earlier arcs. These arcs seemingly inspired him further and conclusively lead to the creation of a spin-off inspired by the style of Oda, and the styles of the *One Piece* manga. Therefore, this further provides information to the fact that fan interests can co-exist and lead them further to contributing to the participatory culture of the *One Piece* community. Finally, this example is further demonstrative of the fact that when these works are innovative, expansive, and not disturbing what Oda has created, the fandom reception will also clearly be a positive one, rather than negative. This was the case in my own exploration of the text as a fan, however, there were other users on Reddit that seemed to be having similar thoughts and opinions as me. The first opinion of a fan to set an example is this comment: "this is pretty good! Keep up the great work :)" (user comment from Redditor16), and another example is the following opinion: "Just read all 4 chapters! Great stuff, really funny and cool art style." (User comment from Redditor17).

Deviantartist's spin-off that was discussed earlier in a specific Reddit thread was not as highly appraised, however, fan appraisal was gained by the second example of an innovative *One Piece* inspired lore expanding spin-off. However, I would like to mention that not all of the deviantartist's works have been received negatively within the fandom. A

very different spin-off that he made was more critically acclaimed as being extremely well done by YouTuber3. YouTuber3, as a fan, appreciated the time (nearly three years) that the spin-off creator spent to create a story for the antagonist character called Kuro in *One Piece*. I also experienced through my own reading that because this story was faithful to Oda's canon, the spin-off did an incredibly great job at fleshing out the character that had stayed in the story for a relatively short amount of time. Noting back to Hetrick's (2019) mentioned concepts of deterritorialization, and reterritorialization, Kuro's character was taken out of the canon *One Piece* storyline by a fan, and as such, the fandom gave him his own unique story that helped to flesh out his character and story for a much more enjoyable and greater experience. As with deterritorialization and reterritorialization, Robin Brenner has stated that "the act of ripping apart source material and putting it together in new ways also allows fan creators to add in the content they want to see but are not getting from professional published media" (Brenner, 2013: 33). As readers of *One Piece* never received full closure to what happened to the character of Kuro after he was defeated by Luffy within the canon of *One Piece*, the Kuro spin-off provides a great example to how fans are capable of doing exactly as Brenner (2013) along with Hetrick (2019) have tried to emphasize with their own writings. Fans take content from the original source material to build upon new and exciting ideas with their creativity that allows them to experience additional content that was not included in Oda's canon. As I see it, fans create stories that they want to see in addition to what was already given to them by Oda, and they do this through the practice of creating fan spin-offs that according to their collective opinions are better when inspired (not copying or disrupting) the canon lore of *One Piece*.

Finally, the reason why the fiction pieces, that are created within the *One Piece* community, are called "spin-offs" rather than what they would normally be described within the field of TV and film fandom or academic research as "fan-fiction". While there is no clear evidence that this applies to all the given cases and examples within the *One Piece* community, in the example above the author described that his work is simply a spin-off because of the following reason: "Spin off cuz it sounds better than fanfict." (Jakupi, 2020) Therefore, it is truly the fans that decide on what they are creating, nobody else.

**Chapter 6: Discussion**

Over the course of this research, I, both as a fan and a researcher explored the fan community of the Japanese manga/anime series *One Piece*. Since there is little research concerning this series, and it is still gaining in popularity, the purpose of this research is to give insight into the experience of a *One Piece* fan, and fan activity that takes place on the social media sites of YouTube and Reddit. The goal of this thesis was to set *One Piece* as an example of how modern consumption of texts has become more engaging and highly participatory.

From the beginning, I placed myself as one of the subjects of my own research. By doing so, I noticed specific qualities of my behavior that were influenced by the fact that I am a reader, follower, a fan of the manga series. After each newly released chapter that I read, my mind was filled with the following questions: What did other fans think of this chapter? Did I miss something crucial when reading? Were there any big revelations in my opinion that should be discussed within the fandom? It is also at this point that I would like to note that these questions are very descriptive of the point of Henry Jenkins' participatory culture (2009). In this regard Jenkins says that a community, in this case, the *One Piece* manga/anime fan community, provides the fans with the incentive to contribute and create, participate, or do both. In multiple instances, the fan practices can be seen as a response to the release of new *One Piece* manga chapter releases. Therefore, it appears that the *One Piece* fan community can be adequately described also as an interpretive community (Beach, 1993). Therefore, common reading and speculative abilities should be heavily considered when discussing some of the findings of manga chapter review videos and speculative theory videos found on the YouTube platform.

It was often the case that the practices of fans were related to their own hobbies or interests such as drawing, photography and comic book creation, or other notable franchises or pieces of fiction that they follow or like. That is to say that the personal interests of fans were mixing with their own fan behaviors and practices, leading to the creation of a participatory culture. Next, I will discuss the dominant *One Piece* fan practices in the form of manga chapter reviews and speculation videos.

I interpret the form of manga chapter review videos as a form of Jaakola's (2018) vernacular reviewing because the videos focus on an element of consumer/popular culture (the manga *One Piece*). The review videos could be described as a participatory cultural object within the YouTube space that are incapable of freestanding because they are created primarily as a reaction to the latest chapter of the manga. Furthermore, most importantly,

they create fan discussions within the comments section and are valuable to the fandom, according to my findings, as a means of "co-consumption" (Jaakkola 2018).

My own experience, as a fan, when looking at these videos displayed ignorance concerning the elements that would provide me as a reader greater satisfaction after the initial reading of the manga. After co-consumption in the form of these reviews, I became more aware of what I had missed or failed to notice during my unguided observation. That is why vernacular *One Piece* chapter reviews are more than just a description of the latest chapter of the *One Piece* manga. They become transformative works by being able to "add new insight and meaning to the original work" (Tushnet, 2017: 78). Therefore, according to my research I find that co-consumption in the form of a chapter review is a form of participatory culture. It shows that the community's contributions matter, can be educational, and as a result they have an impact on the perception that fans can have of a chapter.

Not only are the reviews important but the observations of the comment section of these videos potentially elaborate on the importance of these reviewers. Concerning the usual core elements of the reviews, such as opinions, ratings, and individual reviewing styles or patterns, there were also specific approaches that were taken by the reviewers. Some were more calm and collected and others were more humorous, leading to a finding that the personas who review might be just as important as the reviews to the fans. A big part of my own fan experience was watching reviews that became second nature after reading each chapter, otherwise, it would feel as if I have never even read the chapter, to begin with. Furthermore, this was also supported by fan comments under these videos who in a similar tone noted that they would not enjoy the series if not for all the reviewers. Conclusions from both instances suggest that experiencing the manga together with a fan community has its own value, therefore not only do reviewers help fans to co-consume but they also increase the joy of reading because in that instance it is done collectively, together.

For Jaakkola (2018), an important aspect of vernacular reviewing was the reviewers' legitimacy. The legitimacy of a reviewer (but also theorists) can be constructed in two specific ways. First, legitimacy is given by the fans to the *One Piece* reviews on YouTube through the platform's technical features (Chau, 2010: 67). I mainly discussed the correlations that exist between subscriber counts, views, and comments, which are some of the site's features that are displayed for the fans and viewers to see. The higher the numbers, the more reliable and trustworthy the reviewer and theorist may seem to other members of the fandom. Therefore, such statistical numbers can be indicators to fans of the level of legitimacy that the content creators have, which can also allow fans to judge whether to listen

to what the reviewer and theorist has to say or not, or whether to even accept and trust what they are saying as truth. This is because for the first type of legitimacy, the reviewer or theorist needs to be considered legitimate by somebody else first (Jaakkola, 2018: 15). The second type of legitimacy can be gained by raw determination and passion for creating and uploading videos constantly and consistently. This is because the second source for a reviewer's or theorist's legitimacy is their own sense and approval of the fact that they are who they say they are. If they are a reviewer, they review with passion and determination, when they make theory or speculation videos, they create those also with the same type of will and vigor, and through such "self-proclaiming of oneself" (Jaakkola, 2018: 15), they gain the second type of legitimacy needed to become legitimate.

The question with legitimacy became a bigger concern when I observed the practice of speculation videos, specifically a theory video by YouTuber2. After the Oda's manga chapter proved that YouTuber2's theory was wrong, the upsetting news had an impact on the comments section of his video. Negative comments telling YouTuber2 to stop creating speculations amount to a decrease in legitimacy for this particular content creator. Negativity may arise from the fact that after a reveal by Oda within the canon of *One Piece*, a speculation video can be seen as disagreeing with the core text which typically fans value above all other *One Piece* related creations and practices (Goodman, 2015, Geraghty, 2017). Furthermore, this trend can be also seen in reverse with the second case that I mentioned. The second speculative video was correct with their assumptions. In a correct example legitimacy rises, in the false condition negativity ensues. However, not only did fans discuss the matter and still value the different fan contributions, they can also become inspired by them to create their own content. The practice of speculation gave a greater amount of insight to how I could describe the relationship between Oda and the *One Piece* fans.

By referring back to Peterson (2005), who clearly states that questions and problems arise from fan readings and investments made to the text, this further implies that the fans themselves construct issues as the visible gaps or problems that they notice. When a character's identity is a mystery, just like another mystery is the final treasure of the story, it feels like Oda is calling his fans to unravel the mysteries that he is supposedly leaving in the manga intentionally. As with the example of correct and false theory, the correct theory displayed all the possible options while noting why some of them are probably wrong, after giving their own take on who the actual traitor in their own opinion is based on their reading and analysis. In such a case, the correct theorist considered what other members of the community had discussed, and only after considering all of the possibilities, they constructed

their own speculation/theory video that exposed why the other theories are false and why this specific theory is correct. Participatory culture works through the process of "throwing ideas" out there, later to only return and see them becoming much better and improved because of the engagement with communities (TEDxNYED - Henry Jenkins - 03/06/10, 2010: 00:07:20 - 00:07:48). Speculation videos are in that sort of an example in a constant loop of discussion wherewith more additional information, further theories are created that expand on the theories that are already existing.

In the part of the analysis discussing speculations, I explored the boundaries within which Oda also communicates with his readers via questions and answers, where he hints at things with rarely giving away anything too revealing. Furthermore, he does this also through the *One Piece* manga, where he would suddenly change the contents if he had the desire to do so. These thoughts display that either Oda loves to imagine his readers as clueless, or he takes great joy in challenging his fans and readers by intentionally giving them frustrating as well as interesting questions. He might be curious about what the fans think. This is partly why Oda has become a meme of his followers who often after well-received manga chapters call him by the name "Goda". It is a meme often used when discussing the author, usually on the Reddit platform, after the reveal of a chapter that was really and extremely good.

Another frequent practice on Reddit was the act of coloring the black and white manga panels. The Coloring practice was displayed primarily as the result of an impactful scene or a deeply rooted feeling of nostalgia (Souminen, 2008) that a panel had induced in the readers. This, much like with the YouTube practices, is again a response from the fandom after reading the latest chapters, a similarity shared primarily with the manga chapter reviews. Nostalgia is a force within modern day consumerist cultures. In the context of the fandom, nostalgia can be understood as a form of a question that focuses on the meanings and effects of the fans' experiences (Souminen, 2008). The panels that could be deemed more important or memorable to the fandom seemed to be the panels that get colored, which allows fans to experience their favorite panel in new and fun ways. The coloring would help the panel persist in their minds, and also recreate the feeling of what it felt like to look at the panel for the very first time. Colorings of chapter 967, for instance, were panel colorings provoked by the strong emotional impact of the chapter or given panel. The scene that took place within the chapter provoked memories of reading *One Piece,* that were remembered through the reading, and thoughts about the series' future. Furthermore, colorings invoke the fandom's arousal because of the effect that colors have on people which (to all observed appearances) can promote further fan participation (Huchendorf, 2007: 1; Williams and

Karim, 2018). Similarly, to other forms of Reddit fan practices, fans were generally supportive and open-minded to each other's creations that were shared always after the chapter's release on Reddit.

Character drawings as well as fan spin-offs are seemingly created to deterritorialize and reterritorialize (Hetrick, 2018). Analysis of character drawings shows that this practice concerned itself primarily with protagonists and main antagonists of the series. A significant piece of information supporting this claim were character popularity polls, in which typically protagonists would take rankings within the top 10 to top 20, or 30, leaving the additional spots within the rankings to various others, such as the character that I mentioned in my analysis — Buggy the clown. This additionally proves that, at least when looking at character drawings, the common shared ground within the community is that specific characters are more popular than others, and therefore, they are more deserving of drawings and reinterpretations. Furthermore, with the instance of Buggy the clown, the frequency of their canonical presence is not a required factor for specific characters to be drawn by fans, rather, a bigger importance is a character's popularity. Therefore, character drawings are based on the selections that fans make, and not by the author's canon manga.

Another important feature for character drawings was that the base model for a character was kept the same or similar to the original, which I assume is so that the character drawn would be recognizable to others. However, various different aesthetics like their clothes, abilities, setting, or expressions would be changed (reterritorialized) depending on the fan creator's choices (Hetrick, 2018). As drawings usually have fewer implications for any narrative and are just a means of reimagining them, most character drawings are generally well-received and encouraged on the Reddit platform. The drawings that gained more traction were full of feedback, subjective feelings about the characters, and conversations about the manga and how the character that was redrawn is depicted, interpreted, or understood by the fandom. Fan reception of character drawings was never concerned with the integrity of the drawing. The drawings mainly allow fans to experience characters through different interpretations and features — the things that fans were missing or imagining when reading the canon.

Last, spin-offs created by fans are similar to speculations, as spin-off series are created typically to give endings to individual character arcs or closure to pieces that seemed missing from Oda's canon. Because of this, spin-offs seem to represent parts of the story that fans either see as lacking or they show a desire to see more of their favorite and familiar characters. Well received spin-offs were original creations that were either filling the gaps

or expanding the world of *One Piece*. Those spin-offs that defied Oda's narrative and created problems for the cohesive structure of the *One Piece* universe were received in the majority negatively. According to this finding, the fanon that *One Piece* fans create is preferably compliant with the canon, and therefore these works are also viewed with more leniency. However, as there can be spin-offs for different people with different opinions and values, not all fan creations distributed and fan creators within the community share in such a generic sentiment. With spin-offs, fans have the ability to participate in expanding the world of *One Piece* in ways that make sense according to the world that Oda has already constructed. They also can expand upon the parts of the world and characters that Oda left open to his audience, being the individual reader and participative community.

With an overview and summary of the dominant participatory practices of Reddit and YouTube, these platforms are clearly online playgrounds where fans are free to perform various activities that displays them not only as consumers of the *One Piece* series but also fans and contributors.

**Conclusion**

In this thesis I illustrated the predominant ways that *One Piece* fans contribute and participate in the creation of participatory culture on the social media platforms YouTube and Reddit. Through the process of an auto-ethnographic fieldwork I determined that the fan acts which are the most visible and influential to this participatory culture are the *One Piece* YouTube chapter review videos and fan speculations created by content creators who have achieved legitimacy. In addition to the practices of the *One Piece* community on YouTube, the activities that fans on Reddit demonstrated were creating colorings of the manga panels, drawings of characters, and their own *One Piece* spin-off series. Each activity of the fandom serves a purpose for fans, and therefore, what is gained from participation and time spent within the community can differ greatly.

On YouTube, manga chapter reviews are the earliest signs that indicate the release of a new *One Piece* chapter. The review induces co-consuming and co-experiencing of the latest manga chapter that above all else prioritizes discovering and defining the meaning(s) of this chapter. Speculations are enhanced and detailed observations of the contents of any given topic within the series that are still mysteries for the fandom. They are based on everything that is known and gathered by the readers and fans so far, to come to a potential and possible answer to the questions existing among the readers and fandom. In both instances fans also further develop the points brought out in the video as a form of community-based discussion.

On Reddit, colorings are a frequently reappearing type of fan creations that use color to bring up community-based interaction through the emotional arousal that colors can stimulate. Furthermore, these creations are influenced by the nostalgia factor that motivates the coloring of panels that appear to the fandom as the most meaningful. Character fan drawn images are of characters that have garnered the most popularity in the fandom, which defines them as worthy of deserving a re-interpretive depiction or a dedicated drawing. Furthermore, character drawings always respect the laid-out structure for what I called in this thesis the base model of a character (defined by Oda in a chapter where a new character is introduced for the very first time). Last, spin-offs achieve closure and satisfaction of filling the plot holes in a cohesive whole. Obeying the canon is valued and preferred in the fandom while straying from it can be viewed negatively by the fans.

These findings demonstrate the difference in the value and meaning behind each practice within this participatory culture. Because *One Piece* is the series that has inspired

all current and future acts within this fandom, the memeification of the author Oda into Goda demonstrates two things. First, the dependence of the fandom on the author providing them weekly manga chapters, and second, the deserved respect that fans have for the work of the author.

According to my own experiences as a fan, the systematization of these experiences through this auto-ethnographic project and through the analysis of other fans' practices on YouTube and Reddit, I would argue that as a participatory culture, the *One Piece* fandom is characterized by being relatively welcoming and educational to people with a passion for Oda's work. The core attributes I observed were that fan-created works are valued and shared within the community and that quantity (meaning intense participation and fannish enthusiasm), outweighs the need for quality (the aspect of a fan creation being of a higher artistic degree). Fans support each other in creating and being open about their thoughts about the series, even if canon compliance and respectful appreciation of the author's work is a noticable preference in the community.

I believe that further research on why manga has become increasingly popular, and what this popularity entails for the participatory culture would be beneficial. Since *One Piece* has been going on for more than twenty years and manga is only becoming more popular in different parts of the world only quite recently, could the popularity of *One Piece* be an indicator for other similar trends appearing in the near future, or is *One Piece* along with its fandom just an anomaly that should be studied further.

**Summary of the Thesis (Estonian)**

*One Piece* **manga fännide kogukond (fandom) kui osaluskultuuri vorm: Redditi ja YouTube`i tavad**

Käesolevas autoetnograafilises töös ma kirjeldan ning analüüsin *One Piece`i* manga fandomi valitsevaid praktikaid Redditi ja YouTube`i platvormidel. *One Piece* on Jaapani koomiks (manga), mis on tänaseks muutunud üheks kõige populaarsemaks koomiksiks terves maailmas. Minu magistritöö koosneb sissejuhatusest, kokkuvõttest ning kuuest peatükist, mida ma siin esitatavas kokkuvõttes üritan lahti seletada.

Sissejuhatuses kirjeldan lugejale, miks see töö on oluline, ning püstitan põhilise uurimisküsimuse: millised on dominantsed osaluskultuuri praktikad *One Piece`i* fandomis? Seda üritan ma lahti seletada, lähtudes kolmest erinevast alaküsimusest. Esimene alaküsimus küsib kuidas *One Piece*'i fännid osalevad fandomis läbi sotsiaalmeedia. Teine, kuidas on fännide tavad nende jaoks tähendusrikkad. Kolmas, missugune on fännide ning autori vahel olev ning taju- suhe.

Esimeses peatükis keskendun manga ning *One Piece`i* tutvustamisele ning seletan lahti nii manga kui ka *One Piece`iga* seonduva ajaloolise tausta. Erinevates alapeatükkides kirjeldan, mis asi on manga, millal tekkis n-ö esimene manga teos, mis on *One Piece*, miks ta tähtis on jne. Samas kirjeldan ma Jaapani manga ning animatsiooni ajalugu, milles mainin Osamu Tezukat, keda tihtipeale kutsutakse Jaapani mangade ning animatsioonide ristiisaks. Tema elutöö tulemus puudutab olulist osa minu tööst, kuna tänu Tezukale suudan ma lahti seletada erinevaid manga tüüpe ja täpsustada, missugune manga on *One Piece*. Pärast sellist lühitutvustust kirjeldan olemasolevaid akadeemilisi töid, mis seonduvad selle teemaga, ning selgitavad, miks *One Piece* ja tema autor pakuvad uurimiseks nii suurt huvi. Pärast esimest peatükki keskendun ma lühidalt töös rõhutamist leidvatele maailmavaatelistele küsimustele, et saada vastus, miks just sarnane vaade osutub sellele tööle kasulikuks.

Teoreetilises osas kirjeldan põhimõtteid ning kontseptsioone, midaolen läbivalt oma töös kasutanud. Kõige tähtsam mõiste minu analüüsis on Henry Jenkinsi (2009) *participatory culture* (osaluskultuur). Pärast osaluskultuuri defineerimist tutvustan ning seletan lahti minu töös kasutatud platvorme YouTube ja Reddit.

YouTube`i praktikaid seletan ma lahti lähtudes minu olemasolevast fännikogemusest *One Piece`i* fandomis. Kirjeldan mõningaid viise, kuidas fännid sellel platvormil osaluskultuuri viljelevad. Mis puudutab spetsiifilisi fännipraktikaid, mida oma töös arutan, siis liigitan nad teooria osas kaheks, kuna YouTube`i praktikaid on kirjeldatud läbi retsensioonide ja spekuleerimise. Samas ma arutan,  miks YouTube on 21. sajandil muutunud nii oluliseks platvormiks, eriti arvestades osaluskultuuri teooriat ning *One Piece`i* kasvavat populaarsust maailmas.

Seoses Redditiga pean mainima,  kuidas see platvorm  pakub fännidele võimaluse luua ning jagada oma teoseid platvormil, kus erinevad kogukonnad on jagatud (olenevalt erinevate inimeste huvidest) subreddititeks, sealhulgas on ka *One Piece`i* fännid loonud oma subrediti. Selles subredditis võivad manga fännid arutleda teemade üle, mis mingil moel suhestuvad selle mangaga. Hiljem kirjeldan, kuidas fännid võivad olla mõjutatud nostalgiatundest ning püüan mõista, kas fännid loovad kunstiteoseid ainult sellepärast, et nad soovivad imiteerida *One Piece`i* autori stiili, või on nendes teostes midagi enamat kui manga autorile järeleahvimise püüd. Peale selle seletan lahti mõistete *fanon* ja *canon* sisu ning kuidas fännid *One Piece`i* mangat lugedes või vaadates inspiratsiooni leiavad. Sellega seoses kirjeldan natukene rohkem ka mõisteid *deterritorialiseerimine* ning *reterritorialiseerimine,* mis on olulised seetõttu, et fännid leiavad inspiratsiooni omaenda kunsti jaoks *One Piece`i* mangast, mille järgi nad siis kas imiteerivad või tirivad välja ideid, mida kasutavad omaenda fänniteoste loomiseks.

Meetodi-peatükis kirjeldan põhilisi meetodeid, mida kasutasin andmete kogumiseks. Nii You Tube`is kui ka Redditis võtan enda kanda osalusvaatleja rolli, mis lubab mul kogeda ning paremini mõista, mida fännid selles kogukonnas loovad, jagavad ning tunnevad. Anonümiseerin enamiku YouTube`i ning Redditi kontode varjunimed. Ainukesteks eranditeks jäävad  kunstnikud, kelle töid kasutan illustratsioonidena, arvestades autoriõiguse põhimõtteid, kuna kõik need teosed on Internetis avalikult nähtavad ning kõikidele kättesaadavad . Pean ära mainima  ka fakti, et ma olen loonud omaenda Redditi postituse, milles küsitlen fännide motivatsioone fänni kunsti tegemiseks, samuti küsitlen ka teisi Redditi meedia loojaid, kes minu vaatluse ajal olid postitanud Redditisse enda loodud teoseid.

Analüüsi alustan kirjeldusega, missuguseid kogemusi võivad fännid saada, vaadeldes retsensiooni-  ning spekuleerimisvideosid YouTube`i platvormil ning missugune on nende

videode tähtsus fännidele ning *One Piece* `i osaluskultuurile. Teises analüüsi osas kirjeldan fännivärvinguid, tegelasjoonistusi ning *fan spin-off* -koomikseid, mis on põhilised fännipraktikad ,mida uurisin Redditi platvormil.

Arutelu ning kokkuvõtte osas koondan  ma kõik oma seisukohad ja leiud  ning selgitan,  missugused neist on aidanud  mul vastata oma uurimisküsimusele ning mis on üllatavad ja huvitavad. Retsensioonivideod paistavad fännidele tähtsad olevat, kuna nad võimaldavad fännidel *One Piece*`i mangat koos tarbida ning kogeda. Teine retsensioonide funktsioon *One Piece*`i osaluskultuuris on arutleda, leida ning määratleda, miks kõige uuem *One Piece*`i peatükk on seeria narratiivile või üleüldiselt oluline ning tähtis. Spekuleerimisvideosid arvestades leian, et erinevalt retsensioonidest on see praktika tavaliselt seotud ühe spetsiifilise teemaga. Teemadeks on tavaliselt näiteks tegelaste varjatud identiteedid või muud peidetud saladused , mida *One Piece*`i autor tüüpiliselt oma teose kaante vahele ära peidab. Mõlemate videode juhul on tähtis, et fännid kaasavad ennast videodes toodud teemade arutelussse ning  et videod olid tehtud fännide poolt, siis mõlemad vastavad Henry Jenkinsi osaluskultuuri nõuetele.

Redditi leidudes on näha, et kõige sagedamini praktiseerivad fännid *One Piece*`i erinevate paneelide värvimist, lemmik- või populaarsete tegelaste joonistamist ning omaenda koomiksite (*spin-offide*) tegemist. Paneelide värvimist motiveerib nostalgia ning emotsionaalne stimulatsioon, mida värvid võivad tekitada. Sellepärast on ka manga paneelide värvingute mõju osaluskultuuri suhtes üpriski üllatav. Rohkem värviti paneele, mis tundusid fännidele tähtsamad ning sisukamad. Tegelasi joonistati tavaliselt rohkem populaarsete tegelaste puhul. Joonistuste juures on tähtis ka see, et tegelased oleksid teiste kogukonnaliikmete poolt äratuntavad ning tänu sellele on joonistuste puhul tähtis, et tegelaste baasmudel oleks sama või isegi identne *One Piece*`i *canonis* leitava mudeliga. *Spin-off* -koomiksid demonstreerivad, kuidas fännid loovad *fanonit*, et leida lahendusi avatud lõppudega kohtadele Oda mangas. Peale selle nad illustreerivad ka seda, kuidas kogukonna liikmed võivad tekitada iseendale heameelt, mis saavutatakse huvitavate *spin-offide* loomise ning jagamiste protsessis (kus fännid võivad lisada ning eemaldada neile soosivaid jm asju). Redditi protsesse jälgides avastasin ka seda, et *One Piece*`i fandomis on tihtipeale tähtis, et fännide loomingud ei vastanduks, vaid hoopis täiustaks manga *canonit*. Põhiline on aga see, et enamik fännide loomingust oleks vähemalt *One Piece* `i *canoniga* kooskõlas.

Minu viimane alaküsimus keskendub fännide ning autori vahelisele suhtele . Sellele küsimusele vastan oma töö lõpus, kus põhiliselt arvestan seda, kuidas manga autor on memeifitseeritud Godaks (mis seostab manga autori jumalaga). Arvestades kõigega, leian, et Goda tähendus on fandomis kahepoolne. Ühelt poolt näitab Goda meme seda, kuidas fännid vajavad manga autorit, et üleüldse jõuda manga loo lõpuni, aga teiselt poolt ka seda, kuidas autor on saavutanud oma fännide seas jumaliku staatuse. Austus, mis on saavutatud ning teenitud läbi manga *One Piece`i* kirjutamise, joonistamise ja loomise. Seepärast on ka *One Piece* omakorda saavutus, mille ümber fännid ise praktiseerivad osaluskultuuri läbi käesolevas töös kirjeldatud praktikaid.

**Appendices**

**Appendix 1: Observation Plan**

1) Weekly reading of the One Piece manga -- Writing down my own personal feelings about the weekly chapter. (write down my own observation of my own reading and habits/feelings)

2) After a day or two read my feelings and what I initially felt and see how it may differ from how the other fans of the series felt about it. Fans in large amounts are on both YouTube and Reddit where I can see reactions on the latest chapters and fan perception and reception. (fan reception and how it differs or is largely the same?) (observe at the following days of a chapter release the feedback of fans, notes, and screencaps)

The following method was used to take fieldnotes:

| Date, Time | Descriptive Note | Reflections | Feelings | Questions/notes observation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Day 4 09/01** | Observing the fandom on Reddit under the discussion and theory topic of chapter 967 | Observing the fans and fandom of One Piece on Reddit depicts that at least from what was observed that all of the fans agree that the chapter was good, what some would call perfect and impactful. Words such as legendary and the ways in which their language implies some sort of crying or emotional impact from the chapter. | I feel a strong agreement with most of the discussions and comments that fans had about this chapter. Oda receives a lot of praise from fans in regards that fans are all pleased with the chapter, however, some pointed out the long period that they would have to wait for the next chapter which for One Piece especially in January is the case which is slightly disappointing at the same time. | As some comments suggest fan content was created for this chapter's panels (or a sort of reworking of it) |

3) in relation to points 1 and 2, draw the main points of fan interests and their focus? (what are they most interested or excited about)

4) The difference or chapter reception and what sort of additional fan content creation does it lead to? Observing fan content on YouTube and Reddit (artwork, theory videos and their

content) Are their differences that occur depending on the so-called quality of the latest chapter. For example:

Question of authorship----good chapter=>hype, positive review, other additional content such as theorizing fans.

Bad chapter=> criticism, confused or mixed interpretation, feelings of chapter or character that should've been handled differently, fanfiction to right the wrongs of the canon via fanon. (youtube videos and fan content evidence?)

5) Does watching YouTube videos on the latest chapter or any other content that is relatable to me as a One Piece fan, help me to better understand (perhaps even sway my opinion) on what actually happened in the series, its characters or anything other than would affect my enjoyment or lack of enjoyment of the manga/anime?

(My initial observation plan for my participant observation which began 06/01/2020 and lasted until 10/02/2020. The original plan was to fill in the diary 7 times a week for every single day, however, a slight shift occurred because during specific days I was unable to do my research because of a lack of either a laptop and/or the internet. Inspired by Spradly, 1980)

**Appendix 2: History of The Big Three**

(Merila, R 2020, " Generational big threes." screenshot from Instagram, 19 April 2020.)

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**Appendix 3: Comment Appreciating Reviewers**



I've been watching ▓▓▓▓ for over 7 years now, back then when he was still reviewing One Piece and Naruto (both Manga and Anime) at the same time. Since then, there have always been rougher times for us, in terms of One Piece AND reallife. But all this time, every week, I come back to this channel to see ▓▓▓▓ talking some One Piece. Weirdly, he was there through all my personal milestones in this past 7 years without even knowing I exist. Ever since the Oden Flashback started, it felt like - parallel to the flashback and Roger's journey - the final round has officially started. It might take another 5 years (or even 10), but One Piece is ending. And just now, I have realised that I wouldn't enjoy the end of the series as much if it wasn't for ▓▓▓▓ and all the other reviewers. I have reached a point where experiencing the end of One Piece together is more important to me then the actual story.

I am grateful for you and your work ▓▓▓▓ Keep it up just the way you feel like doing it - I am sure it will end up perfect!

(Merila, R 2020, "YouTuber Comment." YouTuber1 fan video comment, 19 April 2020.)

**Appendix 4: Oda SBS Answer About *One Piece´s* Ending**

D: Hi, Oda-sensei! I have a serious question. One Piece has been going on for quite some time, hasn't it? Have you thought of the ending already? Though personally, I wouldn't mind if it continued on forever. One Piece is the BEST!!! from Mac

O: I've answered this in some magazines and interviews. Originally, my plan was that One Piece would continue for five years. I've always had the climax in my head from the start, I've just been working toward it since. But my original estimates were a bit short, and I was unable to finish up my story within five years (ROFL). And now our pirates have been adventuring for nine years, and I have no idea how much longer they will be at it (hey!).

(Merila, R 2020, "Oda's Answer to a Fan Question." screenshot from the *One Piece* wiki, 19 April 2020. https://onepiece.fandom.com/wiki/SBS_Volume_42.)

**Appendix 5: Goda Comments**

You did it again I'm starting to think this I's GODA'S YouTube troll account LOL great work

(edited)

It's ok Oda, you can tell us it's you. We get you just wanna flex your GODA brain

REPLY

are you GODA in disguise bruhhh? 😄

REPLY

Oda truly earns his Goda nickname

Reply    Give Award    Share    Report    Save

(Merila, R 2020, "Reddit and YouTube User Comments." screenshots from Reddit and YouTube, 19 April 2020.)

**Appendix 6: GODA**



("Goda" meme, 2020, Google image, Accessed 19 April 2020.

**https://i.ytimg.com/vi/4okepd4JNJM/maxresdefault.jpg.**)

**Appendix 7: Chapter 967**



(Oda, 2020, 967, Shueisha.)

**Appendix 8: Coloring**



(Amanomoon, 2019, "One Piece Coloring Last panel from Chapter 967 ( Roger )." Reddit, 29 December, Accessed 19 April 2020.

https://www.reddit.com/r/OnePiece/comments/egzoeu/one_piece_coloring_last_panel_from_chapter_967/.)

**Appendix 9: Coloring**



(birusse, 2019, "Coloring of 967 last page." Reddit, 28 December, Accessed 19 April 2020. https://www.reddit.com/r/OnePiece/comments/egpsku/coloring_of_967_last_page/.)

**Appendix 10: Redrawn Coloring**



(dooperco, 2020, "Redraw/Coloring of the iconic Roger panel of chapter 967." Reddit, 16 January, Accessed 19 April 2020.

https://www.reddit.com/r/OnePiece/comments/ep9kos/redrawcoloring_of_the_iconic_roger_panel_of/.)

**Appendix 11: Comments for Fan Creation1**

Nailed it, thank you for sharing :)

Reply   Give Award   Share   Report   Save

Man, the page was already fantastic, but you just made it so much better!

Reply   Give Award   Share   Report   Save

You did this? Nicely done!

Reply   Give Award   Share   Report   Save

This is absolute perfection! You're going to be on my homescreen for a LONG time, thank you so much for this gift ♥

I love this! I look forward to these colored panels every chapter release!

Reply   Give Award   Share   Report   Save

Man you're actually amazing, mad props for this. There chapter itself was amazing but the colouring and the lighting on this page really make it that much more powerful

amazing job man!

Reply   Give Award   Share   Report   Save

It feels like official colouring! Did you go back the old chapters and check out what colours they use? xD This is real job well done.

I wanna give the guy props because this is pretty impressive given how quickly they did it and how clean it all looks

Reply   Give Award   Share   Report   Save

(Merila, R 2020, "User Comments on Reddit List." screenshots from Reddit, 19 April 2020.)

**Appendix 12: Comments for Fan Creation2**



Could anyone make a phone wallpaper of the panel of Roger laughing?

Reply   Give Award   Share   Report   Save

I love this! I look forward to these colored panels every chapter release!

Reply   Give Award   Share   Report   Save

Why arent you getting more attenion your art is BEAUTIFUL

Reply   Give Award   Share   Report   Save

(Merila, R 2020, "User Comments on Reddit." screenshots from Reddit, 19 April 2020.)

**Appendix 13: Gear 4 Luffy Base Model**



("Fourth Gear! The Phenomenal Bounce-man!." *One Piece*, written by Eiichiro Oda, directed by Hiroaki Miyamoto and Toshinori Fukuzawa, Toei Animation Co., Ltd., 2016.)

**Appendix 14: Gear 4 Luffy Character Drawing**



(rzulian, 2020, "Awaken Luffy.. Gear V? Final Haki/Form? Myth Paramecia, Design by me, hope u guys like it." Reddit, 1 May, Accessed 21 May 2020.
https://www.reddit.com/r/OnePiece/comments/gbhnij/awaken_luffy_gear_v_final_hakiform_myth_paramecia/.)

**Appendix 15: Brook Base Model**



("Plunging into the Devil's Sea! The Mysterious Skeleton Floating in the Fog!." *One Piece*, written by Eiichiro Oda, directed by Konosuke Uda and Munehisa Sakai, Toei Animation Co., Ltd., 2008.)

**Appendix 16: Brook Character Drawing**



(Soumomo, 2020, "SEAFREAK Brook by me." Reddit, 22 April, Accessed 21 May 2020.
https://www.reddit.com/r/OnePiece/comments/g629uq/seafreak_brook_by_me/.)

**Appendix 17: Zoro Base Model**



("Arriving! A Burning Island - Punk Hazard!." *One Piece*, written by Eiichiro Oda, directed by Hiroaki Miyamoto, Toei Animation Co., Ltd., 2013.)

**Appendix 18: Zoro Character Drawing**



(se7enseas, 2020, "Zoro in Streetwear Fashion (by @KeepOnSanity on Instagram)."
Reddit 26 April, Accessed 21 May 2020.
https://www.reddit.com/r/OnePiece/comments/g89bs1/zoro_in_streetwear_fashion_by_kee
ponsanity_on/.)

**Appendix 19: Kaido Base Dragon Form**



("The Strongest Man in the World! Shutenmaru, the Thieves Brigade Chief!." *One Piece*, written by Eiichiro Oda, directed by Masahiro Hosoda and Akitaro Daichi, Toei Animation Co., Ltd., 2019.)

**Appendix 20: Kaido Dragon Form Character Drawing**



(tgomesarts, 2020, "Kaido(dragon form) - fanart I did." Reddit, 4 April, Accessed 21 May 2020.

https://www.reddit.com/r/OnePiece/comments/fuhpxr/kaidodragon_form_fanart_i_did/.)

**Appendix 21: Hancock Base Model**



("Hard Battles, One After Another! Devil Fruit Users vs. Devil Fruit Users!." *One Piece*, written by Eiichiro Oda, directed by Hiroaki Miyamoto, Toei Animation Co., Ltd., 2010.)

**Appendix 22: Hancock Character Drawing**



(kimichanxx, 2020, "I drew my girl Boa Hancock with vintage aesthetic." 26 April, Accessed 21 May 2020.

https://www.reddit.com/r/OnePiece/comments/g8joi0/i_drew_my_girl_boa_hancock_with_vintage_aesthetic/.)

**Appendix 23: Strong-Willed Comment**

Imma go on a rant right now. Most fans seem to NOT RECOGNIZE the absolute *gravity* of this scene when it comes to Zoro and Sanji's relationship. Let's get one thing straight: Zoro and Sanji DO NOT hate each other. Even if there's a specific line in the manga where one or both say they hate each other, they more mean it the way siblings say they hate each other, in that it's not a genuine hatred. And Actions speak louder than Words, and their actions in this scene CLEARLY show they care about each other.

Zoro and Sanji's primary goal in this scene was to save Luffy, and I don't mean to diminish the importance of that- they were both trying to sacrifice themselves for Luffy.

But the thing is, if it was that simple, and they *really* hated each other, Sanji would not have intervened. It would've been a simple kill two birds with one stone, Zoro dies and Luffy is saved. He didn't know Robin and Brook were watching, he didn't think anyone was watching, he could have just sat back and let it happen. But he didn't.

Sanji went *out of his way* to **offer his life** in place of Zoro's. He knew, that upon his death, his entire background with the Vinsmokes would be revealed, and his friends would learn his past he didn't want them to know. But he was completely willing to sacrifice all of that, including his **life** to save not just Luffy, but Zoro too.

And it works vice versa for Zoro, too. Once again, if he hated Sanji, he would've let him sacrifice himself. He could get rid of the damn cook and save Luffy in one fell swoop. Once again it would've been two birds, a win-win. But he didn't. He knocked out Sanji to ensure that he would live.

Zoro and Sanji were both completely ready to die for each other. Even if they have a passionate rivalry, they are still friends. All of the Straw hats are friends, that's what makes it One Piece.

🗨 Reply   Give Award   Share   Report   Save

(Merila, R 2020, "Longer Fueled User Comment." screenshot from Reddit, 21 May 2020.)

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