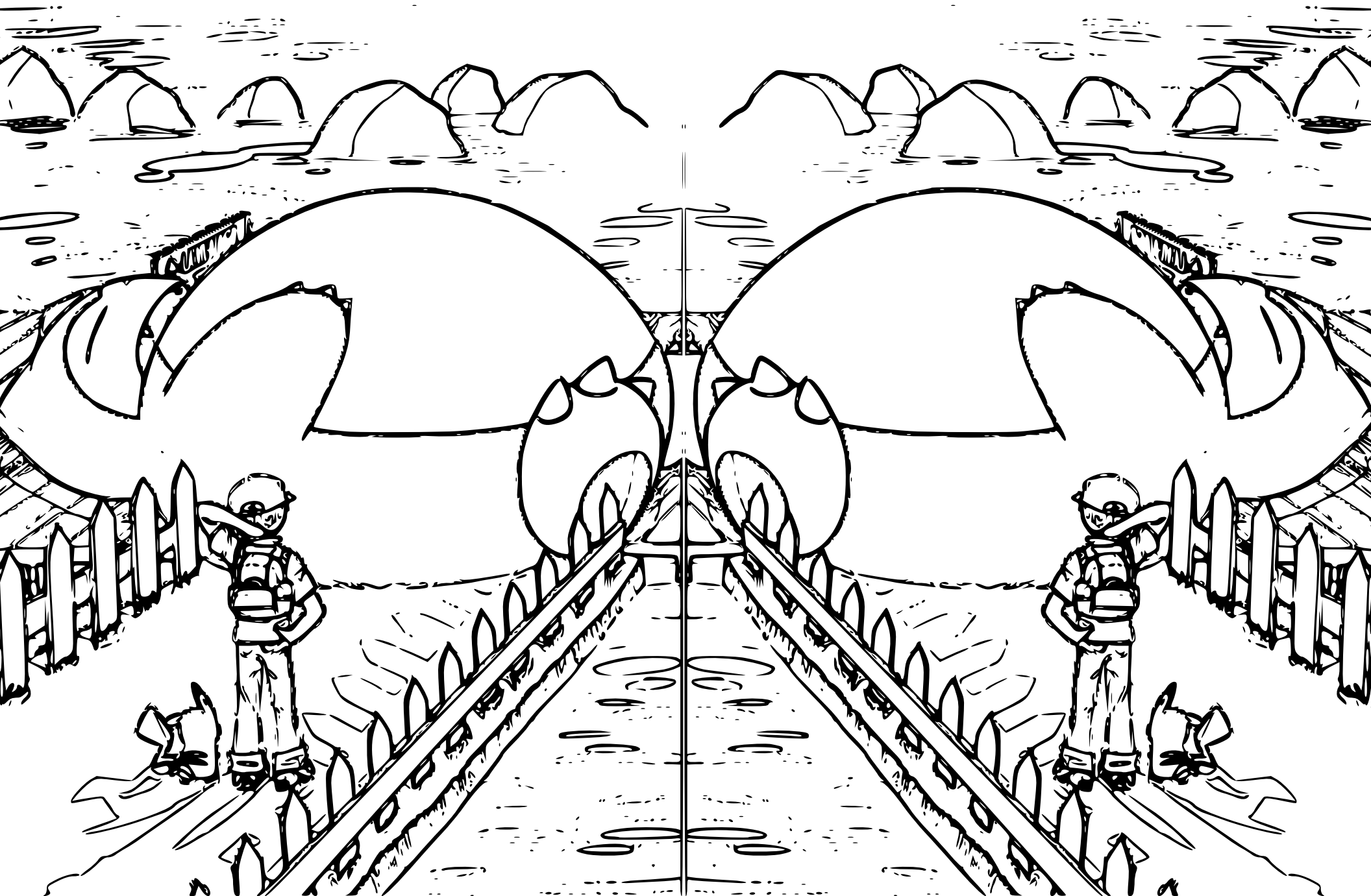


“Perhaps contemporary intellectuals experience anxiety in the face of the idea of radical change because we fear projecting only a repetition of our own sullied world under the guise of the new or because we cannot distinguish between the rhythms of change inherent in the system of late capitalism and changes that might actually displace the system by a new one altogether. Whatever the reasons, we remain—for the most part—stuck either celebrating the products of postmodern culture, thereby replicating the giddy rhythms of the postmodern ‘change’ itself; endlessly diagnosing the problem, thereby critiquing a system whose failures are by now well known; or enclosing genuinely new situations in past narratives or paradigms of understanding, thereby failing to understand uniqueness”

—Elen E. Berry & Carol Siegel

Pokémon Center: Newness: Youth:

On the Biotechnological Prosthesis of
of Pokémon as Considered Against
Deleuze & Guattarri's *A Thousand
Plateaus*



NEGATECIT(Y) COUNTERFEIT LIT SERIES

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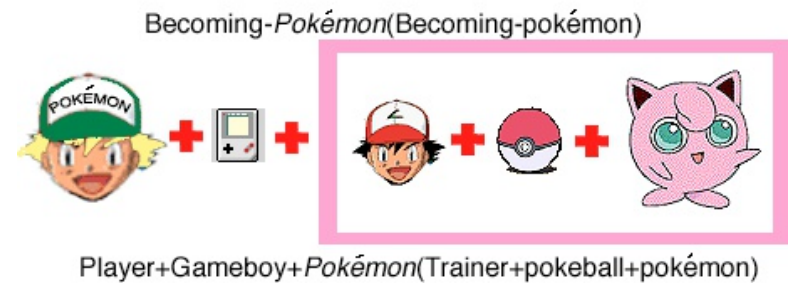
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*To protect the world from devastation,
to unite all peoples
within our nation;
to denounce the evils of truth and love,
to extend our reach to the stars above...
surrender now or
prepare to fight.*

—*T. Rocket*



The pink section of the diagram illustrates the process of becoming-pokémon through the trainer-pokeball-pokémon assemblage. One level above this assemblage is the process of becoming-*Pokémon* through the player-gameboy-*Pokémon* assemblage. Since the process of becoming-*Pokémon* involves playing the game which consists of a narrativized version of becoming-pokémon.

6. According to an ABCNews online article from March 28, 2001:

Saudi Arabian authorities have decreed that there's no place for the imaginary, superpowered creatures that make up the *Pokémon* universe in the Islamic state. The country's highest religious authority issued a fatwa against *Pokémon* cards and games.

Accusing the immensely popular game of "possessing the minds" of children while promoting Zionism and gambling, Saudi Arabia's Higher Committee for Scientific Research and Islamic Law issued the fatwa, or religious verdict, this weekend.

The entire article is available online at:

<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/world/DailyNews/pokemon010326.htm>

1

transformations will affect "humanity," however, remain to be answered.

4. The equation for velocity:

$$\vec{v} = \frac{\Delta \vec{d}}{\Delta t}$$

Velocity (v) is equal to the change in distance (d) over the change in time (t).

The equation for acceleration:

$$\vec{a} = \frac{\Delta \vec{v}}{\Delta t}$$

To compute acceleration, velocity occupies the "distance" position of the velocity equation. In other words, distance is to velocity what velocity is to acceleration. In a virtual world, where distance or space is of little importance next to the speed of information transfer, speed is the "distance" and rates of "acceleration" are the new velocity. In this scheme, the rate of change is vector of progress, rather than the steady pursuit of a goal. This situation resembles Moore's Law, which states:

The observation made in 1965 by Gordon Moore, co-founder of Intel, that the number of transistors per square inch on integrated circuits had doubled every year since the integrated circuit was invented. Moore predicted that this trend would continue for the foreseeable future. In subsequent years, the pace slowed down a bit, but data density has doubled approximately every 18 months, and this is the current definition of Moore's Law, which Moore himself has blessed. Most experts, including Moore himself, expect Moore's Law to hold for at least another two decades. ("Moore's Law")

To put it plainly, the rate of technological change has created a sort of "Moore's Law of Cultural Change" for an information economy.

5. A diagram of "becoming-becoming-pokémon."

POKÉMON CENTER: NEWNESS: YOUTH

[1]

There are many reasons that scholars and thinkers have failed to adequately describe the new. For some, there is simply no will to theorize beyond the present moment. For others, the desire is strong, but there is a lack of imagination or an unwillingness to escape from ideologies that have proven reliable in days long gone. But perhaps the most profound reason for this failure is fear, fear of a future that is already present, but unrecognizable—something already hideous and already shocking. Capitalism has succeeded to the extent that it has been able to imagine more radically than the most radical of thinkers. And thinkers have responded by situating themselves within the comfort of the institutions, burying themselves in the debris of a demographic explosion, sorting through rapidly proliferating identities. Critics have become like historians of old, labeling, cataloguing, differentiating, but this time along horizontal lines rather than a chronological one. But this still leaves the vector of change itself ignored.

[2]

Rather than single *Pokémon* out for criticism or suspicion, I hope to

have demonstrated the ways in which new mutations of the economic system are being envisioned in popular culture texts. The “youth of today” (and I use the term recklessly) are hard at work learning to navigate this new landscape through new metaphors, materials, and mystifications—learning new intuitions. The new logic that is unfolding does not hold up the old models, thus the same old critiques will not do.

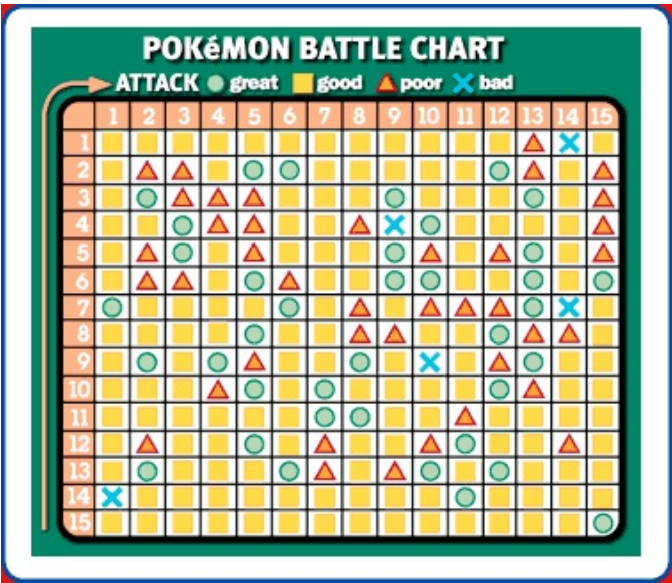
http://www.pokemon.com/games/games_02c10.html

3. Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* discussed the way in which “postmodern” aesthetics are brought about by (and are expressions of) contemporary economic conditions. As an outgrowth of a globalizing marketplace that can no longer manage inconsistencies, postmodern culture is erratic, cut-up, and ambiguous. As a “worldview” or cultural system, the postmodern condition also provides fertile ground for greater economic penetration as identities and tastes proliferate alongside new marketing and distribution strategies. The result is a rapid acceleration of change as consumer needs, cultural innovations, and an eager marketplace feed each other. Jameson describes the ways in which a consumer culture run amok has “jumped the track” and generated our unique historical situation:

So I come to my principal point here, that this latest mutation in space—postmodern hyperspace—has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mapable external world. It may now be suggested that this alarming disjunction point between the body and its environment—which is the initial bewilderment of the older modernism as the velocities of the spacecraft to those of the automobile—can itself stand as the symbol and analogon of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects. (44)

“Postmodern hyperspace” then, is a new spatial organization (which is a disorganization) or a “smooth space” in which rapid economic growth spurred by consumer quests for “self-actualization” can flourish without borders. As Jameson correctly points out, modernist machinery, “which represent[s] motion” is being replaced by postmodern machines which can only be “represented in motion” (45). However, it is through these new machines, in motion, that “our minds” are learning strategies of mapping “the great global multinational and decentered communications network.” In other words, at least some of the concerns which Jameson expresses can be answered in games and toys which are constructed of the materials of this new space and time. How these

do in battle against another, refer to the chart below:



- | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1: Normal | 6: Ice | 11: Psychic |
| 2: Fire | 7: Fighting | 12: Bug |
| 3: Water | 8: Poison | 13: Rock |
| 4: Electric | 9: Ground | 14: Ghost |
| 5: Grass | 10: Flying | 15: Dragon |

On the left side of the chart, look for the type that corresponds to your pokémon. On the top of the chart, look for your opponent's type. From your type, trace a line to the right, and from your opponent's type, trace a line going down.

Look at the symbol in the space where the lines meet. This will tell you whether you have a great chance, a good chance, a poor chance or no chance at all of winning the battle. For example, a Fire-type (#2) will have a great chance against a Bug-type (#12), but a poor chance against a Rock-type (#13). Use this chart to plan your battle strategies.

The "Oak Files" are available online at:

SECTION: PIKACHU: LANGUAGE:

The crocodile itself does not reproduce a tree trunk, anymore that the cha[r]meleon reproduces the color of its surrounding (D+G 5).ⁱ

[1]

The trainer-pokémon relationship in *Pokémon* is characterized by a number of interesting linguistic features. In this imaginary world, flows of power are reflected by different linguistic capabilities of trainers and their creatures. The most notable instance of this power relationship is the invocation of the pokémon by its trainer. The invocation of pokémon is formed of two parts. The trainer selects a pokéball and hurls it at the opponent while reciting the words, “I choose you,” followed by the pokémon’s name (or vice versa). The physical act of selecting the pokémon is accompanied by a verbal command on the part of the trainer, linking the physical power of release to a verbal authorization. The return to the pokeball is also conducted through command and action. The result is a linking of language to action, an authoritarian demonstration of power in which, “Language is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience” (D+G 76).

[2]

On the other end of this dynamic is the pokémon itself, which typically speaks only its name and/or truncations of its name (see appendix: Bulbasaur). This severe restriction to the pokicⁱⁱ lexicon can be viewed

as a typical instance in which authority speaks, and the subjugated minority is deprived of its ability to speak. The identities of the pokémon in this scheme are limited only to their own names, names whose main purpose serves the trainer's need to command and differentiate between the various functions of the subjects under his or her command. Such claims are supported in the "persona" of Mewtwo, the deviant clone pokémon who seeks to establish itself as a figurehead for a Pokécentric Regime—a totalitarian order in which the proletarian pokémon usurp the authority of the training class in exchange for rule by the verbally competent clone.

[3]

But this view of pokémon language masks the complexity of the trainer-pokémon relationship, and itself silencesⁱⁱⁱ to promote a unidirectional power flow from trainer to pokémon. To return to the idea that the pokémon only speak their own names—the unintelligible gibberish of the "other"—might prove useful here. Far from being a disempowered tongue, deprived of its truth-value by the master, poké-speak is encoded with a certain measure of truth, if for no other reason than that, as Deleuze and Guattari posit, "Language is neither informational nor communicational" (79). In this scheme, poké-speak, as a streamlined language, lacks the capacity for the effective transmission of information. While the trainer's language pretends to the expression of choices or desires while really embodying a command (a command which is already being enacted through the throwing of the pokéball and the automated release), the pokémon's language, on the surface, is what it is.^{iv}

[4]

This is not to say, however, that poké-speak is inert or without function. To return to the idea that "language is made not to be believed, but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience," again provides insights into the relationship between trainer and pokémon, but this

Endnotes

1. Here is a colorful version of the Roland Barthes' diagram on the relationship between sign, signifier and signified.



As Barthes suggests, the interplay play between signifier and signified can result in a sign which itself is a signifier for another signified, which in turn constitutes another sign. To repeat this process, so that the new myth-level sign can again signify based on twists and turns in culture and language, or to suggest that the language-level signifier may be (or become) a sign, is to gain entry into the world of the untranslatable/only-translatable.

This illustration was snatched from the following website:
<http://www.lclark.edu/~soan370/mythdiagram2.html>

2. In the videogame versions of Pokémon, there are 15 different types which have advantage and weaknesses relative to other types. The chart below and its explanation are from the "Oak Files," Nintendo's official online strategy guide:

There are 15 major types of Pokémon, and each type has specific strengths and weaknesses. To find out how one type of Pokémon will

time, reveals a different relationship altogether. By creating a language that consists entirely in repetition and recombination, poké-speak takes on the characteristics of the musical refrain, described by Deleuze and Guittari as follows:

“Instead, what needs to be shown is that a musician requires a first type of refrain, a territorial assemblage refrain, in order to transform it from within, deterritorialize it, producing a refrain of a second type as the final end of music: the cosmic refrain of a sound machine” (349)

By establishing poké-speak as a language of eternal (or only) refrain, each new iteration of the same old thing recontextualizes it, thereby engaging in a process of perpetual deterritorialization. To clarify, poké-speak is untranslatable in the sense that there is really only one word (the creature’s own name), but this untranslatability, through use, becomes only-translatability as the entire lexicon is bound within the language system of the single word. One word means all things and meaning can only be derived from context; *meaning is constructed through refrain.*^v “Thus the sign has already attained a high degree of relative deterritorialization; it is thought of as a symbol in constant referral from sign to sign” (D+G 112). It is a language that is always new and always old. It is a language that can only be understood through a constant strategy of translation, or movement from signifying sign to signifier.¹ The language of the pokémon thus commands, but not in the ordinary sense. The language itself compels obedience to its logic of constant deterritorialization.

[5]

The command of language thus becomes the command itself. The deterritorialization at the hands of language flows not from trainer to pokémon, but from pokémon to trainer. As the trainer invokes the deterritorialized subject, he or she, too, participates in the linguistic community of the pokémon. The trainer does not so much have to speak the language of the pokémon, for:

“It is certainly not by using a minor language as a dialect, by regionalizing or ghettoizing, that one becomes revolutionary; rather by using a number of minority elements, by connecting, conjugating them, one invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming” (D+G 106).

The trainer only has to employ the deterritorialized/deterritorializing refrain of the pokémon's name to become something new. The invocation of the pokémon brings about a combination of parts—the trainer's autonomy is compromised through both the assemblage and the use of the alien tongue. The logic of this deterritorialization is paralleled in the way that the trainer uses the pokémon to achieve specific ends. The trainer invokes one of several pokémon based on its particular functions. A water pokémon is good against a fire pokémon, an insect pokémon is good against a plant pokémon, a plant pokémon is good against electric pokémon, etc.² Certain situations call for the invocation of specific responses (much like a book uses your eyes in order to complete the assemblage of subject-eye-book reading machine). The pokémon serve as stand-ins for physical combat—they extend the capabilities of the body, or complete the effect-producing machine. In other words, *pokémon are biotechnological prostheses*.^{vi} The creature in the pokéball is, metonymically, the effect of the trainer-pokeball-pokémon assemblage.

[6]

To return to the linguistic operations of the trainer/pokémon dynamic,

“A type of statement can be evaluated only as a function of its pragmatic implications, in other words, in relation to the implicit presuppositions, immanent acts, or incorporeal transformations it expresses and which introduce new configurations of bodies” (D+G 83).

Here is the full force of the command power of the deterritorialized poké-speak. Unlike the trainer's empty commands which pretend control, the shreds of poké-speak embedded in their language make deterritorializations occur, both physically and linguistically. The invocation of the master is supposed to occur as follows:

more central not only to the workings of capital, but to its very creation, it would seem that the organization of the State itself could be subject to disruption or deterritorialization. If the “striated space” that “smooth space” is enlisted to serve is itself being replaced by “smooth space” of an information-based economy, and freedom to navigate the channels of communication without inhibition becomes itself a commodity, then “the State” is in a precarious situation. The State must become nomadic, and subject itself to deterritorialization.

WAR MACHINE

The “War Machine” is a tool of the nomad through which capture can be avoided and smooth space preserved. Rather than the military (which is a State appropriation of the war machine), the war machine is a collection of nomad-warriors engaged in resistance to control, war being only a consequence—not the intended object. The military on the other hand, is an organization formed by the State formed specifically to wage wars and immobilize adversaries (which are determined by the State):

The question is therefore less the realization of war than the appropriation of the war machine. It is at the same time that the State apparatus appropriates the war machine, subordinates it to its “political” aims, and gives it war as its direct object. (D&G 420)

Unlike the military, the war machine is not influenced by the economic and political concerns of the State. The war machine is a “grass roots” affair which bubbles up from common concerns for freedom to move, and as a result it is part and parcel of nomadic life.

of movement which prohibits free motion. Smooth space refers to an environment, a landscape (vast or microscopic) in which a subject operates. Deleuze and Guattari explain:

Smooth space is filled by events or haecceities, far more than by formed and perceived things. It is a space of affects, more than one of properties. It is haptic rather than optical perception. Whereas in striated forms organize a matter, in the smooth materials signal forces and serve as symptoms for them. It is an intensive rather than extensive space, one of distances, not of measures and properties. Intense Spatium instead of Extensio. A Body without Organs instead of an organism and organization. (479)

Conducive to rhizomatic growth and nomadic movement, smooth space consists of disorganized matter and tends to provoke a sensual or tactical response rather than a starkly rational method of operation or a planned trajectory.

STATE

One of the fundamental tasks of the State is to striate the space over which it reigns, or to utilize smooth spaces as a means of communication in the service of striated space. It is a vital concern of every State not only to vanquish nomadism but to control migrations and more generally, to establish a zone of rights over an entire "exterior," over all flows traversing the ecumenon. If it can help it, the State does not dissociate itself from a process of capture of flows of all kinds, populations, commodities or commerce, money or capital, etc. There is still a need for fixed paths in well-defined directions, which restrict speed, regulate circulation, relativize movement, and measure in detail the relative movements of subjects and objects. (D+G 385-85)

In other words, "the State" operates through the capture of movement and the partition of space. Similarly, the State is also concerned with striating space or building into it a hierarchical system of relations which places the occupants of each strata at odds with those of other strata. As Deleuze and Guattari describe it, the State is concerned chiefly with creating structures or constructs through which lines of flight can be harnessed and controlled. The State, thus, harnesses energy by creating inequalities.

Interestingly, Deleuze and Guattari mention the necessity of "smooth space as a means of communication" in the service of the State. But, as information becomes more and more central to the economy and as the exploding telecommunications market becomes

"For sublime deeds like the foundation of a city or the fabrication of a golem, one draws a circle, or better yet walks in a circle as in a children's dance, combining rhythmic vowels and consonants that correspond to the interior forces of creation as to the differentiated parts of an organism" (D+G 311).

For the pokémon trainer, the invocation is not organized, and is thus not the invocation of the organic body. Instead, it is a simple process which only invokes a "differentiated part of an organism"—a body that is itself an organ—in other words, a "Body without Organs."

[7]

In invoking the rhizomatic BwO^{vii} through the sideways slipping speak of the pokémon, the trainer is involved in the process of "becoming-animal" by becoming part of a deterritorialized assemblage of trainer-pokeball-pokémon in which the pokémon's effect is indistinguishable from the effect of the trainer. The victory of the pokémon is the victory of the trainer, and this process of identification moves the trainer sideways through the assemblage. The smooth space established across the assemblage creates a continuity in which true sublimity of the invocation can be realized, "the golem" invoked is not the monstrous "Other" of the pokémon (or pocket monster), but it is the invocation of the machinic^{viii} and alien monstrosity of the assembled self. The reality expressed is not the reality of the trainer's command, but the "becoming-" reality of poké-speak itself: "The becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not" (D+G 238).

[8]

In relation to capital, this linguistic dynamic is evident in the relations between the first- and third-world nations. Deleuze and Guattari explain, "When international organization becomes the capitalist axiomatic, it continues to imply a heterogeneity of social formation, it give rise to and organizes its 'Third World'" (436-37). In a world which

frames labor relations along the lines similar to the trainer/pokémon dynamic, reducing native tongues to gibberish, while the master's tongue globalizes, the parallels are quite evident. And as with pokémon, it is easy to construe a monodirectional flow of power, but here as elsewhere deterritorialization is occurring in interesting ways. Rather than craft an apology for exploitation or pretend that third world subjects are in control of first world corporate heads, I am trying to outline a situation in which the deterritorializing logic of deterritorialization^{lolwut} exists external to the traditional conceptions of power, always changing the rules and relationships between labor and capital. In the most basic sense, the third world as a source of labor, a market, and a location of the imaginary (global music, cuisine, crafts, and tourism) exerts an influence on the first world that exceeds the mere sum of center and margin—the synthesis itself creates a system by which dualities do not provide easy answers.

[9]

In defining the “Other” language as that which is “only-translatable,” the center engages in the process of “invoking” its own monstrous self as an effect-producing assemblage. The person or body of persons occupying the “trainer” position engages in a process of becoming-other, or deterritorialization. Rather than claim this rhizomaticization of capitalist logic as a victory (poetic or otherwise), this “postmodernization”³ (to use Jameson's concept^{ix}) of capital is perhaps a nomadization of the capital normally associated with the State. It is an evolution: the labor pains of the Nomad State: the State of Speed.

The nomad is thus a way of being in the middle or between points. It is characterized by movement and change, and is unfettered by systems of organization. The goal of the nomad is only to continue to move within the “intermezzo.”

RHIZOME

“Rhizome: A prostrate or subterranean root-like stem emitting roots and usually producing leaves at its apex; a rootstock.” (Oxford English Dictionary Online)

As a model for culture, the rhizome resists the organizational structure of the root-tree system which charts causality along chronological lines and looks for the originary source of “things” and looks towards the pinnacle or conclusion of those “things.” A rhizome, on the other hand, “ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (D&G 7). Rather than narrativize history and culture, the rhizome presents history and culture as a map or wide array of attractions and influences with no specific origin or genesis, for a “rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo” (D&G 25). The planar movement of the rhizome resists chronology and organization, instead favoring a nomadic system of growth and propagation.

In this model, culture spreads like the surface of a body of water, spreading towards available spaces or trickling downwards towards new spaces through fissures and gaps, eroding what is in its way. The surface can be interrupted and moved, but these disturbances leave no trace, as the water is charged with pressure and potential to always seek its equilibrium, and thereby establish smooth space.

SMOOTH SPACE

“Smooth space” exists in contrast to “striated space”—a partitioned field

The "Body without Organs" or BwO is a term Deleuze and Guattari have taken from Antonin Artaud which consists of an assemblage or body with no underlying organizational principles, and hence no organs within it. The BwO is a post-Enlightenment entity, a body but not an organism:

You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit. People ask, So what is this BwO?—But you're already on it, scurrying like a vermin, groping like a blind person, or running like a lunatic; desert traveler and nomad of the steppes. On it we sleep, live our waking lives, fight—fight and are fought—seek our place, experience untold happiness and fabulous defeats; on it we penetrate and are penetrated; on it we love...The BwO: it is already under way the moment the body has had enough of organs and wants to slough them off, or loses them. (D&G 150)

The Body without Organs is thus, as Deleuze and Guattari explain, also a "plane of consistency," which, concretely ties together heterogeneous or disparate elements" (507). In other words, the BwO provides the smooth space through which movement can occur. Rather than the unifying principles of a system of organization, the BwO's system of embodiment is constituted through principles of consolidation.

NOMAD

"Nomadism" is a way of life that exists outside of the organizational "State." The nomadic way of life is characterized by movement across space which exists in sharp contrast to the rigid and static boundaries of the State. Deleuze and Guattari explain:

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.). But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence. To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the intermezzo. (380)

SECTION: SQUIRTLE: GAMES:

"Is this not the origin of an important theme, 'the nomads as child stealers'?" (D+G 393)

[1]

Pokémon, as a feature of material culture, has at its center, a convergence of multiple "games" (or discourses), which position children as its players, trainers, consumers, producers, and subjects. In the Pokémon collectable card game (CCG), "trainers" square off against one another through individualized decks constructed from collectable cards which serve as the fetishes for the imaginary creatures under the trainers' control. On the other end, is the narrativized "game" of the cartoons in which the imaginary play is acted out by Ash Catchem and other trainers. The Nintendo Gameboy editions provide a portable electronic version of play against other virtual trainers while supplying an ongoing narrative that bridges the world of the CCG with that of the cartoon. The Nintendo 64 versions provide even further developments of the narrativized game with enhanced graphics and sounds that create a bridge from cartoon to Gameboy. Surrounding these four interpenetrating games are various toys, action figures, collectibles, soundtracks, strategy guides, webpages, meals, and merchandise which further connect the pieces to varying degrees. The implied target of this web of "games" is the child, as demonstrated in the person of Ash Catchem and the toyish nature of the merchandise. The age of this

“child” is irrelevant, but the games do enjoy popularity with what we conventionally understand to be youth (for now, the “not-yet-adult”). Deleuze and Guattari discuss the exteriority of the “war machine” to the “State apparatus,” proposing that “This exteriority is first attested to in mythology, epic, drama, and games” (351). Not that this is necessarily true, but taking this proposal as a point of departure for a discussion of capital, Pokémon offers an ideal context for an interrogation of the concept of an “exterior war machine” and its relation to the State.

[2]

The intertextuality of Pokémon described above is best illustrated by opening moments of the first episode of the Pokémon cartoon, “Pokémon I Choose You,” which begins with an animated rendition of the Gameboy videogame display, which becomes the Pokémon Stadium (both a Nintendo 64 game AND an institution in the cartoon’s narrative), which becomes a TV show (either a “sportscast” within the cartoon’s narrative or a Pokémon cartoon within the cartoon’s narrative), and ends with a view of Ash (the cartoon’s hero) who is watching these layers unfold on his television, much like the “real-life viewer” watches the unfolding process transpire from one strata above Ash (unless of course, the show Ash sees is about us). The result is a relatively tight and coherent bundle of concepts that permit a great deal of “agency” on the part of the player, but only so long as the player generally interpellated through the competing poke-discourses. In other words, the game’s simulation engenders a “culture” which makes real many of the truths embodied in the game—the principles advocated in the show are functional.

[3]

Before I proceed with this discussion, it might be useful to describe the different games that can be played, beginning with the Collectible Card Game. To play the game, each player uses a deck of sixty cards, which

BECOMING-

"Becoming-" is a process of change, flight, or movement within an assemblage. Rather than conceive of the pieces of an assemblage as an organic whole, within which the specific elements are held in place by the organization of a unity, the process of "becoming-" serves to account for relationships between the "discrete" elements of the assemblage. In "becoming-" one piece of the assemblage is drawn into the territory of another piece, changing its value as an element and bringing about a new unity. An example of this principle might be best illustrated in the way in which atoms are drawn into an assemblage with nearby atoms through affinities rather than an organizational purpose. The process is one of deterritorialization in which the properties of the constituent element disappear and are replaced by the new properties of the assemblage—"becomings-molecular of all kinds, becomings-particles" (D&G 272). The discussion of "little Hans" introduces the wide range of possible "becomings-":

Hans is also taken up in an assemblage: his mother's bed, the paternal element, the house, the café across the street, the nearby warehouse, the street, the right to go out onto the street, the winning of this right, the pride of winning it, but also the dangers of winning it, the fall, shame...These are not phantasies or subjective reveries: it is not a question of imitating a horse, "playing" horse, identifying with one, or even experiencing feelings of pity or sympathy. Neither does it have to do with an objective analogy between assemblages. The question is whether Little Hans can endow his own elements with the relations of movement and rest, the affects, that would make it become horse, forms and subjects aside. Is there an as yet unknown assemblage that would be neither Hans's nor the horse's, but that of the becoming-horse of Hans? An assemblage, for example in which the horse would bare its teeth and Hans might show something else, his feet, his legs, his peepee-maker, whatever? (D&G 257-58)

As Deleuze and Guattari explain, the process of "becoming-" is not one of imitation or analogy, it is generative of a new way of being that is a function of influences rather than resemblances. The process is one of removing the element from its original functions and bringing about new ones.

BODY WITHOUT ORGANS

Glossary

ASSEMBLAGE



An assemblage is any number of "things" or pieces of "things" gathered into a single context. An assemblage can bring about any number of "effects"—aesthetic, machinic, productive, destructive, consumptive, informatic, etc. Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the book provides a number of insights into this loosely defined term:

In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds constitutes an assemblage. A book is an assemblage of this kind, and as such is unattributable. It is a multiplicity—but we don't know yet what the multiple entails when it is no longer attributed, that is, after it has been elevated to the status of the substantive. On side of a machinic assemblage faces the strata, which doubtless make it a kind of organism, or signifying totality, or determination attributable to a subject; it also has a side facing a body without organs, which is continually dismantling the organism, causing asignifying particles or pure intensities or circulate, and attributing to itself subjects what it leaves with nothing more than a name as the trace of an intensity... Literature is an assemblage. It has nothing to do with ideology. There is no ideology and never has been. (3-4)

The book, as described above, is a jumbling together of discrete parts or pieces that is capable of producing any number effects, rather than a tightly organized and coherent whole producing one dominant reading.

The beauty of the assemblage is that, since it lacks organization, it can draw into its body any number of disparate elements. The book itself can be an assemblage, but its status as an assemblage does not prevent it from containing assemblages within itself or entering into new assemblages with readers, libraries, bonfires, bookstores, etc.

can be selected from a catalog of hundreds of cards, some of which feature one of the 150 pokémon that have been identified by pokémon researchers like Professor Oak. The goal is to construct a deck that contains an array of pokémon, energy, and training cards that will allow the "trainer" to draw the combination of cards needed to beat the other pokémon "trainer." The specifics of the game are less important than the fact that decks are assembled from a large number of cards and that having the right cards will enable one player to vanquish another. As a result of this massive pool of cards and the variable nature of the game, the "ability" of the trainer relies heavily on the proper possessions.

In the Pokémon trading card game, one of your goals is to collect each of the cards, similar to your goal of collecting each of the Pokémon in the Game Boy game. But not all Pokémon cards are as easy to catch as others. The Energy cards are the most basic and most common kind of cards. Your Pokémon cards, Evolution cards, and Trainer cards come in four different varieties: common cards are marked in the bottom right-hand corner with a ●. Uncommon cards are marked with a ◆, and rare cards are marked with a ★. In addition, some rare cards are printed using holographic foil. These "holo" cards are the hardest to catch and collect. In addition, a limited quantity of each set of Pokémon cards is printed with the  symbol, which shows that those cards are first-edition cards from that set. The same cards may be reprinted in the future but never with the  symbol, ensuring that your first-edition cards will maintain their value!^x

In other words, the CCG relies heavily upon the trainer's ability to collect the pokémon. The capacity to collect involves a level of knowledge about scarcity, abundance, and demand. It involves the cultivation of a connoisseurship in regards to what's a good deal, what cards work well in combination with others, and where to go to get the cards one needs. Similarly, the social nature of the game asks trainers to participate in an economy of trading, which involves not only getting a good deal on a rare card, but also completing a collection, and getting the right cards to make a strong deck.

[4]

As described in the rules, to collect pokémon cards is also to “catch” the pokémon themselves, creating a parallel logic between the CCG, the Gameboy version, and the cartoons. Interestingly, not only does the CCG insert itself into the world of the cartoon’s narrative, but the narrative reflects back upon the CCG in an interesting way. In the animated feature film, *Pokémon 2000*, the film’s villain explains how his descent into villainy began: “I began my collection with a Mew card.” At the height of the plot’s dramatic resolution, collecting emerges as a pathology. The villain who nearly destroys the world through his desire to collect the rarest pokémon, began his career with the collection of a rare and desirable Pokémon card. Not only does this muddle the boundaries between the narrative and spectator by suggesting that in the narrative world, as in our world, collecting Pokémon cards is a feature of everyday life; but it calls into question the difference between the “collector” and “trainer.” By demonizing the mere collector and affirming the power of the trainer, the film establishes an aura around connoisseurship in which those who care most deeply for their menagerie (real or otherwise) are the true winners. It’s not enough to play, the true trainer has to love.^{xi}

[5]

The Nintendo Gameboy version of Pokémon features an interactive narrative in which the protagonist (here the player selects a name for his or her virtual persona) searches for pokémon to capture and trainers to battle. This version loosely follows the narrative of the cartoon, but allows the player to choose the itinerary. After many hours of play, during which *Willy* (that’s my poké-identity) has been the loving trainer of a Bulbasaur (whom I have nicknamed *Lil Romeo*), I have found that aside from breathing life into the limited graphics of the Gameboy, the cartoon has provided a number of incredibly useful strategic hints. By imitating the cartoon’s Ash, my Willy has been able to defeat several of the trainers and collect some of the badges he will need to proceed to the tournament (which is also a reference to the

Editor's Notes

- i. The (D+G) and page number refer to Deleuze & Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*.
- ii. 'Pokic' is a adjective neologism that means "of or pertaining to pokémon."
- iii. "itself silences" [sic] may have been meant to mean 'silences itself' or something else.
- iv. "is what is it is" [sic], perhaps 'is what it is.'
- v. Emphasis mine.
- vi. Emphasis mine.
- vii. 'Body Without Organs,' see Glossary
- viii. "machinic" [sic], probably "of or pertaining to machines" cf. 'mechanical'
- ix. "Jameson's concept" refers to ????
- x. Tell that to my Holofoil First Edition Charizard that is worth \$20 instead of \$200
- xi. cf. Debord's notion of 'commodity fetishism' in *Society of the Spectacle*
- xii. Emphasis mine.

new capitalist axiom. The increasingly atomized individual him- or herself becomes the terminal through which speed is realized. Through technology, the city itself is at home within each individual, and armed with this technology, the individual acts consistently through proxy—reduced ultimately to an expression of pure informational speed.

CCG tournaments).

[6]

But the mechanics of the Gameboy itself provide an interesting means of replicating the logic of the narrative. The Gameboy is a small, hand-held device which can go wherever the “trainer” goes, enabling him or her to train at any given moment. By making play more mobile than the already mobile decks of cards (which require another player and a flat surface to play on), the game allows the player to move much like the characters themselves must move in order to capture more pokémon and fight more battles. Not unlike the cellular phone, which has liberated the white collar worker and service worker from the land line, this type of portable hand held technology is clearly a case of “the becoming of everybody/everything, becoming-radio, becoming-electronic, becoming molecular” (473). In the case of the Gameboy, the fictional warrior world of the nomadic pokémon trainer engenders a becoming in which the “trainer”/player in becoming-Gameboy, is also becoming-“war machine.” The result is a double process of becoming—a becoming-becoming-pokémon.⁵

[7]

Another feature of the Gameboy is that it can, through the aid of a cable, be attached to another Gameboy, permitting the two games to speak and interact, allowing players to trade pokémon from one machine to another, giving actions in the Pokémon narrative further “real-world” correspondence, for if the show is to be believed, trading is the way to form “Pokémon friendships” (“Battle Aboard the St. Anne,” episode 15) in which sideways movement of pokémon from trainer to trainer could conceivably establish relationships worldwide (a sort of six degrees of separation). In addition, the Gameboy cartridges can be attached to the Nintendo 64 with the aid of an adapter apparatus, allowing trainers to bring their Gameboy-trained pokémon into the world of slick three-dimensional renderings with stereo sound and

fluid animations—a becoming-cartoon; a transformation of the ordinary pokémon images into the “animated substance” of the cartoon.

[8]

The significance of the interplay between the various games being played is that they function to create multiple interfaces that can be implemented in a number of ways, both physical and metaphorical. In such smooth terrain, “A rhizome ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (D+G 7). Rather than force connections, the game designers, illustrators, writers, marketers, advertisers, and programmers, (themselves a complex machine) create the opportunity for multiplicity. Whether you see yourself as an Ash, Team Rocket (Pokémon villains), *Willy*, yourself, or even me is not important, it is only important to enact in multiples by becoming-pokémon (which itself becomes synonymous with collecting).

[9]

The looseness (smooth space) that I’ve described here would seem in some scholars’ estimation represent a threat to the social order. To encourage this sort of “play” might seem subversive, especially when directed at children. And some conservative groups have responded through censorship and burning rituals directed at Pokémon as immoral (one group even issued a fatwa against Pokémon).⁶ Others, conversely, might see Pokémon as a form of Capitalist indoctrination, merely situating children within the economy of haves and have-nots while reinforcing consumerist tendencies. And perhaps both are right to fear Pokémon, but for the wrong reasons. Deleuze and Guattari share insights into the reason for this crisis, “In the case of the child, gestural, mimetic, lucid, and other semiotic systems regain their freedom and extricate themselves from the ‘tracing,’ that is, from the dominant competence of the teacher’s language—a microscopic event upsets the local balance of power” (15). Rather than reproduce points on existing

situation in which capitalism is no longer the ideology it was once thought to be, instead it is the substance of a new materialism.

[11]

The consequences of this messy reconfiguration of capitalism are radical shifts in economics, government, and the social. Deleuze and Guattari define the aesthetics of the nomadic experience, “In short, we will say by convention that only nomads have absolute movement, in other words, speed; vortical or swirling movement is an essential feature of their war machine” (381). This characteristic motion, evident in the life of the pokémon trainer as well as global capital, has as its essence “speed.” What this reconfiguration, however seeks to bring about, rather than mere “absolute movement,” is absolute speed itself. To reconfigure their statement, only-nomads have absolute speed. The goal, rather than to find smooth space through which only nomads can move, is to create a “smooth space” that is itself only-nomad, in which speed usurps mere movement as the absolute.⁴ Deleuze and Guattari anticipate this partially, claiming, “if it is the modern State that gives capitalism its models of realization, what is thus realized is an independent, worldwide axiomatic that is like a single City, megalopolis, or ‘megamachine’ of which the states are parts, or neighborhoods” (434-35). But rather than the consolidation of all states into a sort of megalopolis, it may be better to think towards a proliferation of urban centers as envisioned by Virilio:

Home shopping, working from home, online apartments and buildings: ‘cocooning,’ as they say. The urbanization of real space is thus being overtaken by this urbanization of real time which is, at the end of the day, the urbanization of the actual body of the city dweller, this citizen-terminal soon to be decked out to the eyeballs with interactive prostheses based on the pathological model of the ‘spastic,’ wired to his/her domestic environment without having physically to stir: the catastrophic figure of an individual who has lost motricity and who abandons himself for want of anything better, to the capabilities of captors, sensors and other remote control scanners that turn him into a being controlled by the machine with which, they say, he talks. (Open Sky 20)

It is here that the world of *Pokémon* finds its clearest expression in a

[9]

It is this development in capitalism which has brought about the war against Mewtwo. Mewtwo's mobilization of the Poké-proletariat in pursuit of a centralized and coherent poké-utopia is resisted by the trainers on explicitly ideological grounds. Ash ultimately ends the battle of total annihilation by pointing out that pokémon shouldn't be made to fight. His self-sacrifice, and subsequent resurrection through the magic of pokémon tears, leads Mewtwo to the realization that pokémon should never battle. Mewtwo ceases his aggression and pledges himself to peace. The crisis is successfully averted. But why do the trainers engage in combat with Mewtwo's totalitarian army in the first place? *To protect the sanctity of their nomadic lifestyle which consists of making pokémon fight each other.*^{xii} The war machine is mobilized on ideological grounds for post-ideological ends. Fortunately, the realization that leads them to victory is wiped away for their own good by Mewtwo's grand telepathic *deus ex machina*. The result is a preservation of the nomadic way of life and of the entire social system.

[10]

It is important to remember that the nomad, in this case, is also a capitalist, enmeshed in a system of accumulation of capital, trade, and speculation. Although the economy of *Pokémon* may resemble a pre-capitalist system of barter, it is important that the needs represented by the pokémon themselves are purely spectacular. They reflect no sort of vital nourishment or necessity beyond their use-value as signs. At all levels of play, pokémon exist as fetishized commodities which rely upon simulated combat (on the part of the trainer/player) via biotechnical machines. Under a system of electronic and plastic commerce, dollars become only vague abstractions. Value still trickles through the cash nexus, but cash itself loses its value as a constant or universal signifier in a system in which exchange rates can grow and recede based on belief and consumer confidence. Money, as a nomad itself, creates a

trajectories (immorality, ideology), perhaps the child subjects are situated on a third trajectory.

"Enjoy your last moments of freedom Pidgey, because you're mine" (Ash Catchem to Pidgey, "Pokémon, I Choose You," episode 1)

[10]

The "child" which Deleuze and Guattari refer to is the same "child" towards whom *Pokémon* is directed. Rather than think in terms of years lived, although this childishness certainly demonstrates generational features, the new child is born of the coupling of technology and biology which is alluded to in both *Pokémon's* form and content. The atrophy that follows the trainer-pokeball-pokémon assemblage, in which the pokémon are biotechnical extensions of the body's own capabilities, produce an infantilization that sees its greatest fulfillment in what Virilio describes as: "No future—the eternal childhood of the Japanese 'otakus' of the eighties—refusing to wake up to a life by leaving the world of the digital imagination, by exiting from manga land" (*The Information Bomb*, 94-5). This bodily "youthfulness" which is accompanied by the psychological youthfulness of consumer culture potentially positions all subjects to be victimized by the "nomadic child stealers," but hardly in the conventional sense. Instead, the theft will be accomplished through the stealing enacted in the trainer-pokémon relationship in which childlike pokémon are abducted by nomadic trainers. The "children" of today are increasingly snatched up and nomadized within themselves, enacting the self-reflexive process of becoming—"war machine." This deterritorialization breaks down the boundaries between the State and the war machine, not through an appropriation of a version of the war machine by the State, but through a process of double-becoming in which the State itself (as an organization of subjects) is deterritorialized through the "becoming-imperceptible" (through bodily atrophy) and the "becoming-animal" (the radical deterritorialization of the biotechnical body) of its subjects. The State itself is the source and container of the barbarian horde, the

nomad is no longer outside.

[11]

This new nomadic capitalist, emblazoned in the person of the child, finds its expression recent surges and recessions in global capital and new treaties and associations of “States,” in which states effectively abolish themselves in their own self-interest. The new barbarian, in search of smooth economic spaces to roam freely, is the embodiment of a sort of guerilla capitalist, with no allegiances, no ideology to guide or threaten, a mobile phone, and laptop. This new war machine will itself steal children, always colonizing, in search of “the special body, in particular the slave-infidel-foreigner, [...] the one who becomes a soldier and believer while remaining deterritorialized” (D+G 393). The new child-capitalist will not be without his/her pokémon.

assemblage, bringing about its own “becoming-“, the becoming-“war machine” of the pokémon trainer. Thus, bringing about the following situation: “Wars...become a part of peace. More than that, the States no longer [appropriate] the war machine; they [reconstitute] a war machine of which they themselves [are] only the parts.” (D+G 467) The State itself may become deterritorialized.

[8]

With this in mind, it is easy to see the conflict between Mewtwo and humanity as more than the mere expressions of competing statist ideologies. Mewtwo’s position as a humanized and transformed third-world subject, armed with first-world technoscience reflects a hybridity that can be seen in the geopolitical conflicts that we see today. Slobodan Milosevich or Saddam Hussein, for example, embody this sort of hybridity, in which the formerly subjugated seek to establish strong, centralized States under the classic Modernist tropes. The first-world nations resist the strong impetus towards nationalism which many independence-seeking regimes would need in order to build strong economies and to shrug off the exploitation that the current system of “free trade” enables. But because national independence is such a strongly Modernist (and hence centralizing) concept, it will always take on totalitarian shades—and the resistance to these regimes will always be clothed in the language of ideology. However, the real reason is an issue of radically different and incompatible systems of economics—one ideological, the other post-ideological. Under an ideological system of economics, a system (communism, socialism, capitalism) is yoked to a narrative of human values and human worth. Under a post-ideological system, nomadic capitalism relentlessly shreds ideology through the international nature of global business and media. There can be no governing State for a capitalism that has already exceeded the boundaries of the State. Nomadic capitalism is not opposed to the existence of ideologies within States, it only objects when these ideologies leak outwards and attempt to centralize beyond their boundaries.

In this system, the State's capacity for violence is enacted in the absence of war through instruments of social repression and in the presence of war through the organized structure of a military institution. In either case, the violence of the State is structured and thus operates with a motive of stasis or end—two ready examples being the internal repression of Nazi Germany which employed violence for the creation of a stable and centralized notion of racial purity, the other being the United States who employed the total annihilation of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in pursuit of an end—both employing the logic of the “final solution” in two different directions.

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This opposition between the war machine and the State does not preclude an intersection of the two, but as Deleuze and Guattari define it, the combination is necessarily an appropriation by which the war machine is filtered through the State's logic of finality, centrality, and stability. At the core of this theory is a theory of capitalism:

The factors that make State war total war are closely connected to capitalism: it has to do with the investment of constant capital and equipment, industry, and the war economy, and the investment of variable capital in the population in its physical and mental aspects (both as warmaker and as victim of war). Total war is not only a war of annihilation but arises when annihilation takes as its 'center' not only the enemy army, or the enemy State, but the entire population and its economy. (D+G 421)

Because of capitalism, the State-appropriated war machine becomes functional, taking on “war as its object” (D+G 418), it becomes a tool to be employed when needed.

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The appropriation of the war machine by the State, however, brings about a hidden crisis in addition to the possibility of total war. By employing the war machine as a tool, the State itself enters into the

SECTION: CHARMANDER: WARMACHINE:

“Pokémon by nature are friendly creatures and prefer cooperation to confrontation” (Professor Oak in “Pikachu’s Vacation,” Pokémon: the First Movie)

[1]

In *Pokémon: the First Movie*, a situation develops in which the elusive, ancient, and powerful pokémon, Mew, is cloned from DNA found in a fossil. The result of this operation is the creation of Mewtwo, a flawed and evil version of the original. Driven by a crisis of identity, Mewtwo agonizes over his status as a clone, melodramatically wondering aloud, “Am I only a copy!?” And then goes on to declare a war upon humanity, striving to pave the way for a New World Order of pokémon clones. This, of course, doesn’t happen. But the set of relationships that this storyline enumerates can be read as a rather sophisticated allegory for contemporary geopolitics.

[2]

Key to this discussion is the linguistic capacity of Mewtwo. His ability to express his motives is necessary to an understanding of the plot, which in itself supports claims I have made elsewhere that poké-speak’s lack of variation and untranslatability/only-translatability is characteristic of their status as an “Other.” The presumption is that its motives need to be expressed because its desires generate the conflict and drive the plot; the effect is that Mewtwo’s motives resemble our own closely enough that they cease to be so radically “Other”—even if

they are judged to be morally reprehensible. To clarify, the poké-speaking pokémon cannot be understood because their motives are unimportant and alien. The trainer is freed to translate and produce satisfactory meanings. Mewtwo cannot be trained, but can negotiate with humanity because its mode of thinking is consistent with our own—he is driven by a personal quest for identity.

[3]

Mewtwo's dual citizenship (human/pokémon) is the product of the technological/ industrial relationship between first and third worlds. Following the logic of what has prompted some scholars to prefer the term "developing world" for the third world, Mewtwo is a pokémon in development, the product of an exploitative technical advancement. The vaguely identified scientists (emblems of a militarized technoscience) involved in Mewtwo's creation churn Mew's DNA (seized from the tropics) through their machine in order to create a westernized version of the original. But rather than produce a useful subject, they create something else entirely. This Frankenstein's Monster story is described by Deleuze and Guattari: "On the contrary, central capitalism needs the periphery constituted by the Third World, where it locates a large part of its most modern industries; it does not just invest capital in these industries, but is also furnished capital by them" (465).

[4]

Interestingly, it is not the State which arises to battle the menace of Mewtwo, it is the loose network of children—the pokémon trainers—who unite to fight the threat with the help of non-cloned pokémon. It is the nomad that rises to fight the marginal figure of Mewtwo and its army of clones. Aside from the wandering nature of the pokémon trainer, some definition of the nomadism and its relation to the war machine, may clarify the terms of this battle. Deleuze and Guattari offer an interpretation of Virilio as a definition:

As Virilio says, war in no way appears when man applies to man the relation of the hunter to the animal, but on the contrary when he captures the force of the hunted animal and enters an entirely new relation to man, that of was (enemy no longer prey). It is therefore not surprising that the war machine was the invention of animal-raising nomads: animal breeding and training are not to be confused with either the primitive hunt or with sedentary domestication, but are in fact the discovery of a projecting and projectile system. Rather than operating by blow-by-blow violence, or constituting a violence 'once and for all,' the war machine, with breeding and training, institutes an entire economy of violence, in other words, a way of making violence durable, even limited. (396)

In addition to wandering and capturing pokémon, the trainer's application of the pokémon's force to battle has clear parallels to the nomadic invention of the "man-animal-weapon" or "man-horse-bow assemblage" (D+G 404). Furthermore, the nature of the existence of the pokémon trainer as a way of life and the way this way of life is expressed through the succession of quick contests between trainers clearly illustrates the "economy" of violence over the war-to-end-all-wars logic of total annihilation.

[5]

This positioning of the trainer (as nomad) in opposition to the totalitarian and statist mentality of Mewtwo is problematized by two factors; Mewtwo is a pokémon (and a third-world subject by analogy), and the war machine (trainer tribe) rises up in defense of humanity (the First-world, characterized traditionally as "States"). Another factor which complicates and reconciles this difficulty is the appeal to non-violence and non-exploitation which turns Mewtwo away from its plans for global domination. Deleuze and Guattari define the State in opposition to the nomad's war machine described as follows:

It will be noted that war is not contained within this apparatus. Either the State has at its disposal a violence that is not channeled through war—either it uses police officers and jailers in place of warriors, has no arms and no need of them, operates by immediate, magical capture, "seizes" and "binds," preventing all combat—or, the State acquires an army, but in a way that presupposes a juridical integration of war and the organization of military function. (352)