“Gotta Catch ‘Em All:” Theorizing Pokémon as a Rhizomatic Franchise

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation establishes that the texts in the Pokémon franchise form a rhizome as described by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*. In a rhizomatic system, every element in a system connects to every other element in the system, and new and potentially deeper meaning is created by these connections. Beyond a series of individual texts that share characters, locations, and game mechanics, the Pokémon franchise represents a single rhizome of non-hierarchical, linked texts that generates substantive meaning via the intra-actions between texts.

One aspect of this dissertation is defining exactly what constitutes a rhizomatic connection. Surface level, inconsequential interactions do not create significant, meaning-making, rhizomatic links. Karen Barad's theory of agential realism provides a foundation with which to better inform what is and is not a significant rhizomatic connection. Specifically, rhizomatic connections are not interactive, but intra-active. The rhizomatic nature of the Pokémon franchise is further established by drawing maps that reflect the rhizomatic connections between the texts. These maps do not just reveal a connection between every point in the rhizome, as this interconnected network is a given (since they all are Pokémon texts), but establish the foundational basis for the rhizome. For Pokémon, this foundation is the linked elements of capturing, battling, and training which are present in every Pokémon text.

Pokémon's rhizomatic nature explains the franchise's proclivity to explore contrary dichotomies and attain thematic and ideological cognitive dissonance, particularly concerning global consumer capitalism. Pokémon's frequent commentary around complex contemporary societal situations is one reason why the franchise

connects so well with its audience and explains its popularity. Exploring the rhizomatic structure of Pokémon generates insights concerning textual authorship in a franchise, transmedia literacy and control around what has become the single most profitable entertainment franchise in history. As media and modern society become more networked, globalized and rhizomatic to better reflect each other, understanding the paradigms which define these complex systems is essential for both the artists creating new media and the scholars who study these texts.

To Angie, Gabby, Elise, Jonah, Maureen and Snorlaxes everywhere.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

By any metric, Pokémon is one of the most important entertainment franchises in media history. Pokémon is the most profitable entertainment franchise ever; framed as both a symptom of and balm for the horrors of global neoliberal capitalism; and an oft-used example to highlight the globalization, corporatization and decline of western media. (Buchholz, Allison, Yano) Pokémon has been the subject of both papal edicts and Muslim fatwas; faced accusations of promoting secret Satanist propaganda; and portrayed as a unique standalone religion. (Barrett, Griffin, Jackson, Gould) When ending his presidential campaign in 2011, Republican politician Herman Cain, before quoting part of the *Pokémon the Movie 2000* theme song*,* said, "I believe these words came from the Pokémon movie, I'm not sure who the original author is, so don't go write an article about the poet, but it says a lot about where I am – where I am with my wife and my family, and where we are as a nation." ("Herman Cain Admits to Quoting Pokémon Movie During Campaign.") In 2016, during her own run as a presidential candidate Hilary Clinton held a campaign event at a *Pokémon GO* Pokéstop, with the official Clinton campaign website advertising: "Join us as we go to the Pokéstop in Madison Park and put up a lure module, get free pokémon, and battle each other while you register voters and learn more about Sec. Hilary Clinton!!! Kids welcome!" (Statt) Pokémon also remains profoundly popular, with one scientific study reporting children in Britain can more easily identify Pokémon than actual, real-life, native wildlife and another tracing how playing Pokémon permanently rewires the synaptic pathways of children who play the game. (Balmford et al, Gomez et al)

The motivation for this dissertation is the desire to understand how this specific franchise became such an important part of modern, global popular culture and while this dissertation encompasses many areas of scholarship including media literacy, film theory and popular culture studies, it is also at its core, a dissertation that attempts to define Pokémon. At one basic level, defining Pokémon is simple – they are the fictional creatures that populate Pokémon video games, movies, television shows, manga, trading card games and a wide variety of merchandise. In these texts, human Pokémon trainers capture and collect these creatures to use in battles against other trainers, as a way to increase their strength, and ultimately become the Pokémon champion of a fictional geographic region. Beyond simply collecting and battling, trainers may explore the narrative worlds presented in these stories, meet and interact with other characters, fight villains, and complete adventures to further a variety of stories and challenges. At this level, Pokémon texts can be analyzed the same as any other individual book, film or game. However, such analyses might overlook the aspects that define Pokémon, not as a traditional media canon with a central film or book from which other texts are spun-off or licensed, but as a more complex media structure.

Another way to define Pokémon is as an economic phenomenon, a hugely profitable business conglomerate that includes a wide portfolio of intellectual properties. Pokémon is the highest grossing entertainment franchise of all time, earning $100 billion since its debut in 1995. (Buchholz) In their July 2023 issue, *License Global* magazine ranked The Pokémon Company International as the world's 5th largest product licensor, with $11.6 billion in retail sales during 2022, more than the combined single year sales of Sanrio ($3.8 billion), the NFL Players Association ($2.7 billion), the BBC ($3.4 billion),

SEGA ($724 million), and Formula 1 ($284 million). ("The Top Global Licensors 2023") Demonstrating the escalation of Pokémon's popularity, the May 2014 issue of *License Global* had Pokémon as only the 40th largest franchise, with yearly sales of $1.5 billion – indicating a $10 billion per year increase in retail sales in less than 10 years. (Lisanti)

Much of the increase in Pokémon's popularity can be attributed to the free-to-play mobile game *Pokémon GO*, an app that was released for iOS and Android in July 2016 and downloaded 752 million times during its first year of release. (Minotti) On the second anniversary of the game's release, Brian Barrett reported on the continuing popularity of the game stating, "more cumulative time is spent playing *Pokémon Go* than any other game, it's not even close: One in five minutes spent on the top 20 games on Android in May [2018] was devoted to chucking virtual Pokéballs." A 2016 study by Tim Althoff, Ryen W. White and Eric Horvitz found that over a three month period, *"Pokémon Go* has added a total of 144 billion steps to U.S. physical activity," led to an average increase of 25% in players' physical activity and "could have a measurable effect on life expectancy, adding an estimated 2,825 million years of additional lifetime to its U.S. users alone." Showing the continued popularity of the app, *Pokémon GO* generated $566.38 million in annual revenue during 2023, more than the $550.45 million generated in 2016 or the $444.75 generated in 2017, the first two years of the game's life. (Clement)

Pokémon can be defined not just as a financial juggernaut, but a cultural power as well, a media phenomenon that influences millions of people across more than one hundred countries. According to The Pokémon Company's website, as of the end of March 2023, over 480 million Pokémon video games and 52.9 billion trading cards have

been sold, up from 300 million and 25.7 billion in 2018 respectively. ("Pokémon in Figures," "Business Summary.") There are more than 1250 episodes of the animated television show which has aired in 192 different countries and regions while the first 24 Pokémon movies have grossed more than a billion dollars worldwide. (Katz) More than 550 companies license Pokémon and the official Pokémon shop carries 4,000 different *types* of products. ("Business Summary") There has been a touring Pokémon musical (*Pokémon Live!*) three Pokémon liveried All Nippon Airways passengers jets, a Pokémon theme park, and for a day in 2018, the Pokémon Slowpoke was the official governor of Japan's Kagawa Prefecture. (Baseel) Speaking to the ubiquity of Pokémon, Henry Jenkins writes that "many Western children today are more familiar with the characters of the Japanese Pokémon series than they are with those from the European fairy tales of the brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Anderson." (1992: 109)

This dissertation formulates and explores yet another definition of Pokémon: as the exemplar multimodal, transmedial, rhizomatic media franchise. The central argument of this dissertation is that the Pokémon franchise is structured around a rhizomatic paradigm –the individual franchise texts are defined by their links to each other and as parts of a larger system that does not include a hierarchical or canonical valuing of texts or modalities. Furthermore, the relationship between these individual texts (and even the elements within these texts themselves) is open, constantly in flux and resistant to deep structural relationships beyond the shared rhizomatic connective principle. While Pokémon may not be unique in being organized with this structure, it is the most popular and successful example of such a textual system. This rhizomatic media structure, while not solely responsible for the popularity and uniqueness of Pokémon, is a central aspect

of Pokémon's identity and one that needs to be considered when studying Pokémon and related franchises. This structure is central to Pokémon's identity as not just a network of texts, but as a business, a cultural institution and a vehicle of ideology. In essence, Pokémon cannot be defined, understood, or comprehensively studied without exploring its rhizomatic structure – a structure that has not received the scholarly attention it deserves.

Supersystems, Convergence, and Media Mixes

Examining media, not as a series of individual texts, but as a singular, multimodal group of texts within a franchise is not a novel concept. In 1991, Marsha Kinder, observed that between 1989 and 1991, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle (TMNT) franchise spawned: four different games for three different video game systems; two blockbuster films; a live touring musical group; a network television series; a syndicated comic strip; and more than 1,000 individual pieces of branded merchandise. (122) Kinder theorized the TMNT franchise as a paradigmatic example of a media structure she called a "supersystem," defined as:

> a network of intertextuality constructed around a figure or group of figures from pop culture . . . In order to be a supersystem, the network must cut across several modes of image production; must appeal to diverse generations, classes, and ethnic subcultures, who in turn are targeted with diverse strategies; must foster "collectability" through a proliferation of related products; and must undergo a sudden increase in commodification, the success of which reflexively becomes a

> "media event" that dramatically accelerates the growth curve of the system's commercial success. (123)

Kinder says this media grouping can be accessed via any of the individual constituent texts in the network, regardless of modality, and that each supersystem, "has its own unique history and its own pattern of growth, adaptations can move in any direction; the specific sequencing is merely a combination defined for peak marketability." (127) Kinder also commented on the educational and ideological attributes of elements in the supersystem saying, "video games not only accelerate cognitive development but at the same time encourage an early accommodation to consumerist values." (119) Kinder's work is one of the first to explore how the transmedial aspect of a franchise is necessary to understand the individual texts in a franchise as well as their audience. Many of the aspects of Kinder's supersystem, such as multiple entry ways into a franchise and the capitalistic ideological overtones of such systems, remain commonly noted aspects when studying multimodal media systems.

Building on Kinder's work, David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green noted the difficulty in defining Pokémon as a multimodal franchise using traditional media definitions, observing that Pokémon:

> is not clearly just a 'text', or even a collection of texts – a TV serial, a card game, toys, magazines or a computer game. It is not merely a set of objects that can be isolated for critical analysis, in the characteristic mode of academic Media Studies. It might more appropriately be described, in anthropological terms, as a 'cultural practice'. Pokémon is something you *do*, not just something you read or watch or 'consume'. (12)

For Buckingham and Sefton-Green, transmediality is essential for understanding Pokémon, saying the franchise is "clearly" more than a collection of individual texts, and is better defined as a "cultural practice" that transcends the reading, watching, or playing of any individual constituent texts. Also like Kinder, they make note of the ideological implications of this multimodal textual system, saying the franchise "inducted" and "trained" its audience and was, "a means of developing in children the 'multiliteracies' that are now essential for democratic participation; or, alternatively, as a means of producing 'good' (that is, docile and obedient) consumers." (29)

Transmedia storytelling is a central aspect of Henry Jenkins' ideas around convergence, another critical model focused around multimodal textual systems. While Kinder's transmedia superstructures are based on shared characters, Henry Jenkins sees transmedia storytelling as an aesthetic based more on world building than on narrative, and focuses on texts that range across differing mediums (film, television, video games) while sharing a narrative setting. Buckingham and Sefton-Green's definition of Pokémon as something you do, and not something you read, play or watch, influenced Henry Jenkins' ideas around convergence with Jenkins specifically noting that, "transmedia storytelling is perhaps at its most elaborate, so far, in children's media franchises like Pokémon." (1992: 128) Writing about Pokémon, Jenkins says, "there is no one text where one can go to get the information about the various species; rather, the child assembles what they know about the *Pokémon* from various media." (1992: 128) As with other transmedia systems, an audience member cannot fully experience Pokémon via any one text or even one modality of text. Using the language of Buckingham and Sefton-Green, truly "doing" Pokémon involves experiencing multiple texts across multiple modalities.

Jenkins sees Pokémon as a crash course through which kids can learn about "new kinds of social and cultural structures" that are experienced when children follow a narrative across modalities and texts and that through Pokémon "children are being prepared to contribute to a more sophisticated knowledge culture." (1992: 129) Importantly, these lessons are ones that might not be taught or experienced outside of popular culture with Jenkins saying:

> Our workplaces have become more collaborative; our political process has become more decentered; we are living more and more within knowledge cultures based on collective intelligence. Our schools are not teaching what it means to live and work in such knowledge communities, but popular culture may be doing so. (1992: 129)

For Jenkins (as with Kinder, Buckingham and Sefton-Green), Pokémon might then be defined in another way – as a primer for how to understand and succeed in an increasingly more networked society that is dramatically shaped by the pressures of neoliberal, global capitalism.

Closely related to Jenkins convergence theory is the media mix, a term created by Japanese media companies to describe the deliberate creation of franchises that spread across multiple modalities to specifically increase profit for media producers. By offering more texts in more modalities, audience engagement can be sustained for longer periods and hence consumption can be maximized. Mizuko Ito says that while these Japanese media mixes were originally created to further capitalist consumption, the multimodal networked nature of these franchises also created sites, "for alternative forms of symbolic value and economic exchange," and children's participation in these franchises was a

"form of refusal or resistance to 'adult' values of labor, discipline and diligence and institutions of school and workplace." (104) While created to maximize profit, these media mixes also created a form of play that ultimately, "is represented as mobilizing the power of the margin." (105) Like other theorists, Ito points out the dual nature of the multimodal franchises under analysis – they both further capitalism and consumption, while at the same time creating spaces for rebellion and resistance to dominant culture.

Expanding upon Ito's work, Mia Consalvo notes that a key difference between Western media franchises and Japanese media mixes is that Western companies usually follow a "center-periphery" paradigm in their creation of multimodal franchises. In this model, Western media franchises include key canonical texts (often blockbuster films) that are the focus of the franchise, while other texts (like adapted video games) play a secondary role and are not permitted to make lasting changes to the overall shared narrative space. Consalvo says the Japanese media mix offers a different form of audience engagement, "unlike in the American model, here central characters or a theme or world are created, then gradually filled by various media products, none of which take center stage." (137) Buckingham and Sefton-Green also comment on the decentered, non-canonical structure of Pokémon saying:

> we cannot make sense of phenomena such as Pokémon in terms of an original text and a collection of "spin-offs" that subsequently exploit its success. The computer game undoubtedly came first, but it seems that (as with other such phenomena) Pokémon was planned as a cross-media enterprise from a very early stage. (19)

This system, where each text has equal potential to further a larger overall narrative arc or world, and introduce new characters that may have their stories continued in other modalities suggests a more networked based and less hierarchical grouping of texts.

In summary, each of these theorists agree that there is an understanding of media that can only be achieved by studying texts as singular interconnected groupings versus focusing on individual texts in isolation. If a narrative begins in one text, and continues in another text and modality then the franchise grouping of texts is an essential identifying aspect that must be considered when studying these texts. After all, if there is no complete narrative or story arc in a single text, then studying that single text is akin to studying only a chapter or excerpt from a larger novel and making conclusions concerning the work as a whole. However, while these theorists agree on the value in studying these franchises as a united group of texts versus solely as individual texts, the mechanics of how these textual groupings form and work are not a central focus of their work.

Pokémon, Rhizomes and Textual Interconnections

The original impetus for this dissertation was the question: why is Pokémon the most profitable entertainment franchise is history? This success is more impressive considering that Pokémon is seen, even by its own fans, and even after more than 20 years and hundreds of texts, as a fad which is continually on the decline. In trying to answer this question, the transmedial and multimodal nature of the Pokémon franchise (which is a key identifying feature and one of the most commented upon aspects of the franchise by those who study it) is clearly an essential element of Pokémon's success.

However, neither: Kinder's superstructure; Buckingham and Sefton Green's idea of Pokémon as cultural practice; Jenkins convergence theory; or Ito and Conslavo's ideas around the media mix are adequate in fully explaining the specific structure that links the thousands of texts in the Pokémon franchise. Many major entertainment franchises are transmedial and multimodal, but those attributes alone do not guarantee success, much less the phenomenal success achieved by Pokémon.

The texts that constitute the Pokémon franchise are interconnected in complex ways that evoke the rhizomatic paradigm described by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Originally presented in their 1980 book, *A Thousand Plateaus* (which, with their 1972 book *Anti-Oedipus,* forms a two-volume collaboration, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia)* the rhizome is a poststructuralist theory used to describe complex, networked systems. In comparison to arborescent constructions, which are hierarchical, closed and restrictive; rhizomes are decentered, interconnected and open. In detailing what a rhizome is, Deleuze and Guattari denote six specific characteristics. The first two are connection and heterogeneity – every point in a rhizome is connected to every other point in the rhizome, regardless of whether those points are of the same "nature." (21) The next characteristics are multiplicity and asignifying rupture. Rhizomes have no defined beginning or end, instead all points are middle points. and should a rhizome ever be broken, it can reform around any surviving points. The final two characteristics of the rhizome are cartography and decalcomania. The rhizome, "pertains to a map that must be produced," and is a "tracing that must be put on the map, not the opposite." (21) Upon a close examination of the interconnected texts of the Pokémon franchise, a defining rhizomatic structure becomes apparent and is a key aspect to the franchise's development and ideology.

However, no claim can be made that Pokémon's rhizomatic structure is central to the franchise's success and popularity without first definitively establishing that Pokémon truly is structured, organized, and interlinked rhizomatically.

Much of the previous academic work focused around Pokémon and multimodal textual systems in general suggest rhizomatic connections may be inherent to these textual systems. Ito and Consalvo's observation that Japanese franchises like Pokémon do not follow a center periphery organization, but instead follow a paradigm where all texts in the system hold equal value matches up to Deleuze and Guattari's ideas concerning connection and multiplicity, where all points connect to each other and all points are middle points. Kinder's emphasis that every text or modality in her superstructure can serve as an entry point to the textual system and that "adaptations can move in any direction" evokes the rhizomatic characteristics of multiplicity and asignifying rupture. (127) Jenkins, Buckingham and Sefton-Green all comment on Pokémon's educational and ideological capacity. For Buckingham and Sefton-Green, Pokémon being something you do and not just consume makes it an ideal vehicle to teach how to both succeed in a modern networked society and how to become a better consumer. Jenkins calls Pokémon a primer for "a more sophisticated knowledge culture," that is based on "collective intelligence," with workplaces that are more "collaborative," and political processes which are "decentered." (1992: 129) Pokémon's capacity to both promote and resist the same ideology speaks both to the heterogeneous characteristic of the rhizome and to the rhizome's foundational aspect of openness, in contrast to hierarchical arborescent systems. The fact that all of these critics are specifically looking at both multimodal and

transmedial franchises connects to the rhizomatic characteristics of heterogeneity and multiplicity.

Using Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the rhizome is not a novel approach when formulating the workings of networked systems or in media studies in general. The rhizome was first presented as a way to explain the organization of the book *A Thousand Plateaus*, not as a series of chapters that must be read in order, but as a series of plateaus that can experienced openly in any order. While the rhizome was originally introduced to explain the organization of a book, other media theorists have embraced the concept as a useful model for studying the inner workings and organization of digital texts. Janet Murray sees the "tangled rhizome" and the "solvable maze" as the two defining configurations of texts that exist within electronic environments. (126) Similarly, Espen Aarseth equates the rhizome to Umberto Eco's net, which along with the linear and the maze form three types of labyrinths, a concept Aarseth uses to help define and theorize ergodic texts like video games. (6) Juan Francisco Belmonte says that video games, even when they only offer a player a limited number of choices, can and should still be seen as rhizomatically open, particularly when the representations of space and time in a game are considered. Beyond looking at how individual games themselves might be rhizomatically structured, other theorists have looked for rhizomatic linkages beyond the internal structures of specific games. Colin Cremin says that, "video game play is rhizomatic . . . we do not 'interact' with video games as such we are part of a video game assemblage." (444) This implies that all video games are inherently rhizomatic at the individual textual level. Other theorists have moved beyond the individual texts themselves and looked to the communities that have sprung up around these popular

texts. In their work with adolescent students, Kathy Sanford, Liz Merkel and Leanna Madill have used the rhizomatic metaphor to better understand the gaming and learning communities that formed among adolescent students. With that said, using the concept of the rhizome to explore how individual texts in a specific franchise are organized, and creating maps tracing the links between those texts is a novel approach to explaining and understanding multimodal franchise structures.

This dissertation will establish that the individual Pokémon texts are rhizomatically linked and this rhizomatic structure is a key defining aspect for this franchise. A rhizomatic structure will be demonstrated using Deleuze and Guattari's definition of the rhizome. Specifically, using the seventh generation of Pokémon texts as a research group, I will show that all the texts in that generation connect to all the other texts in that generation and that the texts linked are not always linked to texts of the same nature. A key aspect of this study is explicating exactly what a rhizomatic connection is. Surface level, inconsequential connections do not create rhizomatic links, which are significant connections that create meaning via linkage. To better inform what is a significant versus insignificant connection, I will use Karen Barad's theory of agential realism and specifically their concept of intra-actions which, "signify *the mutual constitution of objects, and agencies of observation within phenomena.*" (197) The Pokémon rhizome will link all the texts under scrutiny in a way that can be extended to other texts (both previous and future generation of Pokémon texts) demonstrating the characteristic of multiplicity. Furthermore, the basis of the connection between texts will be flexible enough that a rhizome can be created between other groups or subgroups of Pokémon texts, demonstrating the characteristic of asignifying rupture.

While the first four characteristics of the rhizome are often discussed by theorists, the last two, cartography and decalcomania, are much less frequently referenced. While Deleuze and Guattari say "the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced," there are few examples of actual, physical rhizomatic maps. (21) Considering that a rhizome connects every point in its system to every other point in its system, every rhizomatic map essentially looks the same. Furthermore, such a map has no real navigational value, since every rhizome has multiple entries and exits and every point leads directly to every other point. Still, when looking at rhizomatic systems, this is a map that Deleuze and Guattari tell us "must" be drawn. To this end, this dissertation will show the rhizomatic nature of the Pokémon franchise by creating maps based upon the rhizomatic connections between the texts. What is key to these maps is not just they connect every point in a rhizome, as this interconnected network is a given (since they all are Pokémon texts), but the foundational basis that defines meaningful rhizomatic connections.

The larger concept of the rhizome and popular culture texts like Pokémon are both exploring similar issues from different perspectives – namely how modern society is organized and how individuals can possibly live and thrive in a modern consumerist society. The basis of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome is to explain and understand contemporary thought structure, psychology and philosophy. As noted above, Henry Jenkins says that contemporary culture is more collaborative, open, and decentered and that, "our schools are not teaching what it means to live and work in such knowledge communities, but popular culture may be doing so." (1992: 129) In essence, popular culture and the rhizome are both focused on helping their respective audiences make sense of contemporary culture. If popular culture reflects and comments upon

contemporary society, and contemporary society is becoming more rhizomatic, it is only natural that popular culture itself would become more rhizomatic. In some ways the central value of Pokémon is that its rhizomatic structure creates a training ground where its audience (many of whom are children) can learn about and more fully understand rhizomatic structures in general – lessons that carry over to the rhizomatic structures which play an increasingly oversized role in shaping and organizing contemporary, global networked societies.

Dissertation Organization and Overview

The central question of this dissertation emerged from the work of previous theorists, and has as its premise the creation of a model that better explains the structure of the Pokémon franchise. While I have already touched upon the work of theorists like Marsha Kinder, David Buckingham, Julian Sefton-Green, Henry Jenkins, Mizuko Ito and Mia Consalvo as being inspirations for this dissertation, a more thorough literary review needs to be conducted before attempting to map the Pokémon rhizome. To this end, an in-depth literature review is the next chapter of this dissertation. While there is a surprisingly small amount of academic work focusing on Pokémon, much of the academic work that does exist, focuses on the ideology and general appeal of Pokémon. Without speaking directly to the structure of the franchise, these works remain important to my argument, in that the themes and ideology of Pokémon are the basis for the rhizomatic linkages that are at the center of this dissertation. A second part of the literature review is an overview of the texts that do comment on the structure of the Pokémon franchise as a whole. These texts (some of which have been briefly discussed

above) both reveal how my proposed rhizomatic structure fits within current thinking on the subject and why a rhizomatic structure may be a better model for looking at franchises like Pokémon. Finally, this literature review examines the handful of works that are using rhizomatic characteristics to explore textual linkages. While there is some overlap, this dissertation is unique in: specifically defining what constitutes a rhizomatic link; looking at one specific franchise; and creating actual maps of the rhizomatic textual systems.

After establishing where my work sits in relation to previous and current scholarship concerning Pokémon, multimodal textual theory and media structure organization, I present the methodology used to demonstrate the rhizomatic structure of Pokémon in the third chapter of this dissertation. The first part of this section is a delineation of what constitutes connection in rhizomatic systems. If connections can be drawn based on simplistic shared textual aspects, then the concept of the rhizome holds no real philosophical value, for if everything can be connected rhizomatically, then nothing is really connected rhizomatically. To differentiate trite connections versus connections that matter, I use Karen Barad's work on agential realism and specifically the idea of intra-action, the idea that the connections between objects is where meaning is created. In this chapter, I also delineate the subset of Pokémon texts which serve as a research group. While it can be argued that a rhizomatic structure can be identified and demonstrated using all of the existent Pokémon texts, such an undertaking would needlessly complicate this dissertation, necessitating an analysis of many thousands of texts versus the roughly one hundred proposed in my study. The multiplicity and asignifying characteristics of the rhizome suggest that if a rhizome can be demonstrated

within a subset of texts in a franchise, then a rhizome exists for the whole of the franchise. For this dissertation, I confine my analysis to a subset of Pokémon texts that were released between 2016 and 2019, which roughly constitutes the seventh generation of the Pokémon franchise. In this methodology chapter I also discuss some of the considerations around the creation of the rhizomatic maps that form a central part of this dissertation. To explore a methodological background concerning how to map non-geographical spaces, I use Patricia Sullivan and James E. Porter's book *Opening Spaces: Writing Technologies and Critical Research Practices,* a portion of which details the creation of various "research scene" and "methodological frame" maps. In this book, Sullivan and Porter explore the differences between modern and post-modern mapping strategies, ultimately advocating for a post-modern approach. Ultimately, this dissertation presents multiple maps, most of which do not successfully demonstrate a rhizomatic textual system. However, by first exploring these non-rhizomatic maps, why and how the final rhizomatic map is successful can better be demonstrated.

The next chapter of this dissertation focuses on the presentation and analysis of the various maps created in pursuit of demonstrating the rhizomatic nature of the Pokémon franchise. Looking at previous theorists who defined transmedia text systems based on shared characters or settings, the first rhizomatic map discussed tries to link all of the texts under analysis via a shared character. Ultimately, a truly rhizomatic map cannot be created using this parameter as there is no single shared character across all of the Pokémon texts under analysis. Even though this mapping ultimately fails, it raises useful questions around what constitutes significant, intra-active links. The second group of maps examined are based on the nature of the texts under analysis. Specifically,

looking at the heterogeneous characteristic of the rhizome, I draw maps based on how game elements are presented in narrative texts and how narrative elements are presented in game texts. This second mapping strategy also fails to demonstrate the existence of a rhizomatic connection within the Pokémon franchise. While there are rich connections between texts of differing types (narrative to game texts, and game to narrative texts) there are no corresponding connection between texts of the same type. The narrative-to-narrative connections and game-to-game connections are not significant enough to constitute a full rhizomatic textual system. The final, and ultimately successful map created is based around, not thematic elements, but pre-thematic elements. Specifically the pre-thematic, linked elements of capturing, battling and training are found in all Pokémon texts and creates true rhizomatic linkages between Pokémon texts. These linkages go beyond multiple texts simply presenting the same elements, but through these elements working as conduits for intra-action in a way that creates a mutual construction of textual identity. Notably, these elemental motifs are not themes in and of themselves, but instead the building blocks of themes and ideology are the basis of the links and what promotes a richer variety of interpretations and complexity within the textual system.

The final chapter explores the implications and value of the dissertation, namely why does theorizing multimodal franchises as rhizomatic systems matter? First of all, this dissertation demonstrates that Pokémon is a rhizomatic structure along the lines proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, and that this structure provides more complete insight into the workings of this franchise than the variety of different transmedial, multimodal structures presented by previous theorists. To fully understand Pokémon, necessitates understanding it as a rhizomatic media system and understanding the basis of the connections that link

the texts within this system. In a franchise that contains thousands of texts, with new ones constantly and continually created, the central uniting principle between these individual works is their rhizomatic connection based around battling, collecting and training. This dissertation has value beyond simply providing better insight into the organization of the Pokémon franchise. Much of the work around Pokémon focuses on its dual nature to both promote capitalism and provide respite from the consumerist aspects of capitalism. A franchise made up of many texts that presents criticism of complex, networked systems through its own organization as a complex, networked system generates more in-depth, nuanced, and valuable insight than any standalone individual text. The nature of a rhizomatic textual system, that links dozens, hundreds or thousands of texts and generates new and subtle meaning shifts and perspectives via each text linking with each other text, may be the only way media can comment on and provide perspective into the highly interconnected societies and systems that define the 21st century world. The methodology and research approach used in examining the Pokémon franchise in this dissertation provides a set of tools that are valuable to both future media creators and media critics. This dissertation provides a model for what rhizomatic media structures look like; creates specific approaches that define what connections are significant enough to be rhizomatic; and presents a foundational basis for how to create and draw the maps that define rhizomatic media structures.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Considering the immense popularity of the Pokémon, relatively little scholarly work has examined this phenomenon. A cursory search for the term "Pokémon" on Google Scholar in July 2020 only returned 33,600 results. In comparison "Star Wars" generated 806,000 results, although that franchise has grossed $31 billion less, and "Harry Potter," a franchise younger than Pokémon generated 196,000 results, while grossing $67 billion less. This lack of scholarly recognition is actually noted in many of the scholarly sources that do focus on Pokémon. Shirley M. Ogletree, Cristal N. Martinez, Trent R. Turner and Brad Mason say that, "although the popular press has published numerous articles on the Pokémon phenomenon, social scientists have paid little attention." (852) David Surman notes that just two books (Anne Allison's *Millennial Monsters* and Joseph Tobin's anthology, *Pikachu's Global Adventure)* when "considered together . . . comprise a substantial contribution to the academic interpretation and analysis of Pokémon." (161)

A lack of study of the Pokémon phenomenon might be explained by the continual prognostications toward its demise. Writing in 2004, Tim Jordan claimed that Pokémon, "had clearly passed its time as a globally obsessive brand for children by the early 21st century." (462) Joseph Tobin introduced his 2004 Pokémon-focused, academic anthology by saying that "as the Pokémon craze comes to an end we are left with the task of analyzing its significance and understanding the dynamics of its rise and, just as interesting, its fall." (4) Even more recent reports concerning the popularity of new iterations of the game are tinged with journalists predicting its decline. The headline for Paul Tassi's *Forbes* report on *Pokémon GO* becoming the top grossing game in August

2019 was “People Still Play That?” Even after grossing $176 million during the month before the article was written, three years after the game’s initial release, Tassi began his piece by stating “I remain truly astonished with the momentum that Niantic has been able to sustain with *Pokémon Go*.” In the introduction to their 2019 anthology, *The Pokémon Go Phenomenon*, Jamie Henthorn, Andrew Kulak, Kristopher Purzycki and Stephanie Vie, say that “Almost as quickly as it emerged, *Pokémon Go* dissipated into the haze of pop culture memory,” and that “as of this writing, *Pokémon Go* has largely been forgotten.” (2) Somewhat paradoxically, in the same introduction those authors acknowledge that “Pokémon games tend to attract a younger demographic who may stay interested in the franchise for decades.” (6) In essence, while Pokémon is a multimodal, decades spanning, highly-profitable, media juggernaut, it is still viewed as a transitory fad by both the popular press and scholars. For this reason it has not received its fair share of academic consideration. This is not to say that there is no serious work surrounding the Pokémon franchise – just that there is significantly less than any other comparable franchise.

Since the central focus of this dissertation is an analysis of whether Pokémon represents a rhizomatic system, it is important to first explore and summarize the previous academic work that discusses Pokémon and closely related franchises. I will first start by discussing the dominant currents and themes of previous Pokémon-centered academic work, much of which focuses on identifying the appeal, and underlying ideology of the franchise. Especially valuable is the small body of work that focuses on the media structure and textual organization of Pokémon and similar franchises. Finally, considering the centrality of the rhizome to this dissertation, I will finish this chapter by

analyzing how other scholars have used rhizomatic characteristics to theorize media or textual systems. In essence, this chapter will explore what previous scholars have written about Pokémon in general, what have they said about the media organization of Pokémon and franchises like Pokémon and what work has been done using the rhizome as a foundation for theorizing media organization.

The Pleasures and Perils of Defining Pokémon

Much of the academic work surrounding Pokémon focuses on defining exactly what Pokémon is, and why such a large audience was and continues to be attracted to the phenomenon. Pokémon in its earliest iterations was seen as an odd children's fad and scholars writing in the early 2000s focused on delineating exactly what it was and why its audience liked it. If there is a single seminal or foundational work that defines the starting point of scholarly analysis of Pokémon, it is David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green's article, "Structure, Agency and Pedagogy in Children's Media Culture." They begin this Pokémon-centered piece by saying "despite the seemingly endless outpouring of adult concern and bewilderment that surrounds Pokémon, it is actually difficult to find a single term to describe it." (379) As noted in the previous chapter Buckingham and Sefton-Green reject defining Pokémon as a "collection of texts," or a "set of objects," but instead see it as a "cultural practice," saying "Pokémon is something you *do,* not just something you read or watch or 'consume.'" (379) These two themes still permeate much of the academic work that is focused on Pokémon, including this dissertation: the difficulty in defining exactly what Pokémon is; and the closely related idea that Pokémon

is not a standard text that is simply read, watched or played but an interactive, community-based, activity.

As part of the challenge in defining Pokémon, a subsection of academic literature concerning Pokémon focuses on examining just how Japanese the franchise is. Koichi Iwabuchi argues that the franchise was created to be as "culturally odorless" as possible, that while the franchise was created in Japan, by Japanese authors and artists, the creators of Pokémon strived to create a product that had few direct cultural associations to Japan. The creators of Pokémon chose a mukokuseki art style which Iwabuchi says, "literally means something or someone lacking any nationality, but which is also used to refer to the erasure of racial or ethnic characteristics and context from a cultural product." (58) Even more of the cultural connections of Pokémon to Japan are excised through localization – the process by which the games, television shows, movies and other Pokémon properties are translated and tweaked for non-Japanese audiences. Iwabuchi quotes Gail Tilden, a Nintendo of America executive who discussed the localization process:

> We try hard to keep American children from thinking of Pokémon as being from Japan. This requires localization, not to hide the fact that Pokémon is made in Japan, but to convey the impression that these are global characters. Therefore, we do not want to make Pokémon American, either. We want Pokémon to become global characters that children all over the world will find familiar. (70)

What is notable in this process is that it is not the original Japanese versions of the text that are individually localized and sent to various foreign markets, but texts that are first Americanized. The original Japanese texts (including games, television shows, movies

and trading cards) are first localized for American audiences, and it is then these Americanized texts that are used as the sources for the myriad of international localizations. This leads Iwabuchi to say that "Given the fact that these globally circulating Pokémon are the American versions rather than the Japanese originals, Nintendo of America's marketing of Pokémon as global characters is a prime example of the Americanization of Japanization." (70) Because of how these texts are both produced and subsequently localized, "consumers of Japanese animation and games may be aware of the Japanese origin of these commodities, but they perceive little 'Japanese bodily odor.'" (58) This debate concerning how Japanese is Pokémon and other video games and anime that originate in Japan, stretches beyond Iwabuchi. Some scholars disagree with Iwabuchi and argue that Pokémon's Japanese cultural odor cannot be removed. For example Hugh Davies argues that the collecting and journeying themes that are at the heart of the Pokémon franchise originated in the traditional types of Japanese seasonal play, specifically: insect collecting; shrine pilgrimages; rail tourism and stamp collecting.

The question of the Japanese-ness of Pokémon is not an immaterial one. Anne Allison points out that by 2003 the market for Japanese video games, anime and manga had grown larger than that of the Japanese auto industry, and says that the growth in Japan's media exports is directly tied to the growth of Japan's actual political power. (2003: 383) This political power is in the form of "soft power," defined by Joseph Nye as the "ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments," a power that "arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideas, and policies." (x) However, the Japan presented in Pokémon (and other Japanese media) is

clearly not an actual representation of any real country. Instead, according to Allison, the exported version of "Japan" operates:

> more as signifier for a particular brand and blend of fantasy-ware: goods that inspire an imaginary space at once foreign and familiar" and that the "current popularization of Japanese 'cool' around the world is best understood in terms of its fantasy formation that in turn, lends itself so productively to capitalist marketing." (2006: 277)

Similarly, Elaine Gerbert argues that Japanese franchises like Pokémon "appeal to America not because they evoke images of Japan but because, on the contrary, they represent fantastic worlds inhabited by highly imaginary creatures who hold not so much the promise of knowledge of a given foreign culture as escape from the familiar." (108) Gerbert is worried less about the conscious removal of Japan's cultural odor from Pokémon or even how Japanese the text is, as she is concerned about the Japan that this text presents, saying that:

> Pokémonization may reinforce darker stereotypes of Japan as a dystopian, robotic, soulless society in which the human is subordinated to the machine. The extreme forms of commercialization that have followed in the wake of anime programs – the marketing of toys, clothing, books, and food affiliated with favorite characters – can only reinforce the image of Japan as a land of "economic animals," or as some Japanese social critics have begun to fear, as a land of "infants." (116)

Like Gerbert and Allison, Iwabuchi ends his article with a focus on the economics of Pokémon, saying that while the origins and Japanese-ness of Pokémon and other similar texts absolutely matters, they probably matter less than the commercial consumer

capitalism that is the basis of wanting to make texts culturally odorless. For Iwabuchi, the more pertinent point is not where Pokémon lies in a split between Japanese and American media (a split that he says is "increasingly insignificant and difficult to trace") but where Pokémon lies in a split between capitalist multi-national conglomerates and individuals living in poverty, that "the consumerist ideology in Pokémon that is readily understood and embraced in countries such as the United States and Japan highlights the widening material divide that globalized capitalism violently promotes." (73) The heart of Pokémon and its central ideology is not one that is promoting Japanese or American ideals, but capitalistic, consumerist ideals.

This dichotomy of Pokémon as a rich and rewarding fantasy world versus Pokémon as a franchise that nakedly promotes and encourages hyper-capitalism is the most pervasive theme in the scholarly work that focuses on Pokémon. Anne Allison notes that when designing the original Pokémon video game, one of the central motivations of its creator, Satoshi Tajiri, was to "give kids a means of relieving the stresses of growing up in a post-industrial society." (2003: 388) Specifically, Satoshi noticed that in the competitive world of modern capitalism, "the pressure to study, compete and perform starts as early as birth," and that "increasingly, people spend more time alone, forming intimacies less with one another than with the goods they consume and the technologies they rely upon (cell phones, walkmans, palm pilots, GameBoys)." (2003: 388) He believed that the game he created could provide some relief to this loneliness, by allowing children to build intimate relationships with the creatures who populate the Pokémon world. Allison discusses these intimate relationships and says that to Pokémon's audience:

> these commodity spirits are “shadow families”: constant and reliable companions that disseminate “unconditional love” in these postindustrial times of nomadicism, orphanism, and stress. Animating what can be the loneliness, anonymity, and dislocation of life at the millennium, such properties also animate capitalism itself: playscapes whose logic (as in Pokémon) masters new frontiers by “getting” indigenous creatures and converting them into possessions, powers, and pals. (2006: 231)

To put it even more bluntly, she quotes Japanese game executive Riri Furanki who says, “Parents die, but characters remain forever” (2006: 91). The problem with the relationships that the audience build with these characters is that the central way these relationships are sustained is largely through consumerism, by catching more Pokémon usually via more purchases. As Allison points out, “while cuteness may bring postmodern relief, then it comes at the expense of a cascading commoditization.” (2003: 393) In essence, Allison sees Pokémon as both an ideological tool that helps spread global consumer capitalism AND provides comfort and relief to the problems that global consumer capitalism causes:

> While the aim of the game is continual acquisition, the objects one “gets” are both thingified (valued economically) and personalized (cute monsters inspiring affection, attachment, and love). The logic of play here involves a currency of shifting and multiple valences—between spirits and profits, companions and capital, inalienable and alienable goods. Capitalism is thus equally mimicked and (re)constructed in the forms of play/consumption engaged by Pokémon. (2006: 196)

An exploration of this paradox, that Pokémon can help relieve the pressures of consumerism via even more consumerism, a phenomenon that Allison refers to as "Pokémon capitalism" is one of the central ideas of her book and a concept that re-emerges throughout much of the academic work that focuses on the franchise. In their seminal essay, Buckingham and Sefton-Green also noted the strong consumer capitalist undercurrent that is at the heart of the Pokémon franchise, saying:

> Pokémon could itself be regarded as a form of 'consumer training' – a means of inducting children into the habits and competencies that are required by our commercially based media culture . . . Yet, even within these limitations, it can be seen either positively or negatively – as a means of developing in children the 'multiliteracies' that are now essential for democratic participation . . . or, alternatively as a means of producing 'good' (that is, docile and obedient) consumers. (394)

As Buckingham and Sefton-Green see Pokémon as teaching multiliteracies for democratic participation, so does Allison say that Pokémon "mimics and prepares kids for a new kind of world," one which is more multi-cultural and global. (2003: 395) While there is a sense that anything that supports neoliberal capitalist ideology is inherently negative, Allison, Buckingham and Sefton-Green are careful not to bring any overarching value judgements to the franchise and even suggest that the capitalistic aspects of Pokémon may help its audience gain skills and literacies that can help them succeed in the neoliberal capitalistic societies they live in.

The duality of Pokémon's as a narrative and group of characters that evoke emotional connection and a franchise that promotes hyper-capitalism is one of the

defining elements of the Pokémon phenomenon. Some theorists argue that there is a split in this duality based somewhat on modality, saying that the emotional connection is more likely to come from the narrative texts, while the capitalistic elements are more prevalent in the ludic texts that focus more on the collecting aspect of the franchise, seen in its official motto: "Gotta Catch 'Em All." Tim Jordan makes this argument by linking the consumer and emotive aspects of the franchise to different Pokémon modalities writing:

> One layer of Pokémon is mainly based on videogames and cards and embodies commodification and themes of mastery and acquisition, while another layer is mainly based on cartoons and movies and offers symbolic resources to children to explore emotional development within and without families. (474)

Jordan sees the same paradoxical split of Pokémon both promoting and criticizing capitalism that Allison does, however while Allison sees this duality in each individual text, Jordan sees it split by modality. Closely related to Jordan's observation about how Pokémon are used differently in narrative versus ludic contexts, Shige Suzuki's work examines what happens when yokai (Japanese folk monsters, of which many Pokémon are based) are disconnected from their narrative roots. Suzuki says that there is a definitive split between using these creatures for narrative purposes, versus using them as characters, disconnected from their larger source narratives, as when they are collected in a Pokémon game, and that "the present-day Japanese media mix, which prioritizes character building over storytelling, diminishes the folkloric, collective, and critical nature of yōkai that was exercised in their narrative forms." (2211) When used for storytelling purposes, these characters can be used to positively critique society, but when disconnected from their deeper narratives (as they are, not just in Pokémon but other

derivative monster collecting games like *Yo-Kai Watch*), these creatures, "discipline kids in the direction of conforming to such a market society." (2212)

While Suzuki's work suggests there is a connection between the amount of narrative in a text and that text's ability to critique complex systems – that Pokémon and related monster collecting games featuring less narrative will then be less able to critique capitalism – these texts are not devoid of critique. Shortly after its release, Raechel Dumas examined *Pokémon GO* with Anne Allison's ideas of Pokémon capitalism in mind and found that the minimization of narrative did not lessen the game's paradoxical, simultaneous criticism and endorsement of capitalism. Instead, Dumas found that, "*Pokémon Go* marks a new phase in the development of what Allison terms 'Pokémon capitalism'" and discovered new ways that the collection heavy gameplay allowed this dual aspect to continue into new offshoots of the game. (385) Because *Pokémon GO* works by remapping a virtual augmented reality game space over the real world, it allows for a refiguring of actual economic environments. For example, hyper capitalistic spaces like shopping malls are transformed from places to primarily buy things, to places to primarily collect Pokémon. Because Pokémon spawn more frequently in areas where there is more cell-phone usage, aspects of the real world, like the urban-rural divide are refigured in *Pokémon GO*, as rural players are more likely to venture into more heavily populated areas or even change their commuting habits in order to catch more Pokémon in the game. Dumas says that these changes and refigurings of space emerge not from any narrative elements but simply from the collecting dynamic central to the game, and taken as a whole highlight, "the power of Pokémon accumulation as subversive practice" (388)

When looking at *Pokémon GO*, other writers argue that the pleasure and popularity of this specific iteration of Pokémon has little to do with any inherent aspects of *Pokémon GO* itself, but the fact that it is an easy way to reconnect with beloved characters from one's past. Brendan Keogh argues that there is really nothing new or innovative in *Pokémon GO.* He notes that augmented reality games existed for more than a decade before *Pokémon GO*, that the data and gameplay aspect of *Pokémon GO* is lifted from Niantic's earlier game, *Ingress*, and that the vast majority of the character intellectual property predated *Pokémon GO*. In essence, *Pokémon GO* is a reskinning of a previous game, with the addition of old IP and game dynamics. For Keogh, the popularity of the game lies solely in the intersection between "the Pokémon franchise's sheer brand power and the ubiquity of the smartphone as an intimate and incorporated technology that we take out into the world as part of our self." (41) In essence, the game is played because it is on a device most people carry with them at all times and features popular, characters that evoke positive, nostalgic connections.

The previous academic work concerning the themes and ideology found in the Pokémon franchise is relevant to this dissertation for two reasons. First, many of the themes explored by previous writers will serve as the basis of the connections that will be explored later in this work. For example, Dumas sees *Pokémon GO* as a standalone text that furthers Allison's ideas concerning Pokémon capitalism while Keogh sees the pleasure in the game lying almost solely in its convenience and nostalgic connection to previous texts. While both of these theorists are looking at *Pokémon GO* based around its connection to previous texts, they both see these connections very differently. For Dumas, *Pokémon GO* furthers and intensifies the ideological content of previous

iterations of the franchise. For Keogh, *Pokémon GO* is a derivative text that owes its popularity solely to a blasé repackaging of popular characters in a more convenient form. From a modernist perspective, these two different views might be based on two different audiences experiences with the same text. However, when looking at the franchise via a postmodern rhizomatic mapping, these different views can be mapped together via differing lines of flight and entryways to a larger structure. Both ideology and nostalgia can each serve as the basis of heterogenous connections that can be mapped together onto a franchise in a rhizomatic system. The shifting nature of the rhizome may help clarify issues around a changing grouping of texts and differences in audiences, and even make some of the contradictions in the existing literature less problematic.

A second reason the previous work explored above is relevant to this dissertation is that the need for a framework that allows for a heterogenous, multi-modal, constantly changing franchise to be examined as a unified whole is presaged through much of this previous work. This leads to the larger focus of this dissertation: that a franchise like Pokémon might be better analyzed as a singular rhizomatic conglomeration and not as a series of individual stand-alone texts or even modalities. Many of the authors writing about Pokémon have only focused on one modality of the larger phenomenon. Even works that sought to tackle the totality of the Pokémon phenomenon have had trouble theorizing a franchise that contained so many modalities and an ever growing number of texts. For example, the main question explored by Buckingham and Sefton-Green's paper referenced above is: how is Pokémon different from other texts and franchises and how might a framework of structure and agency explain Pokémon? In exploring this fairly narrow question, they found they, "inevitably had to make distinctions both between

different aspects of the Pokémon phenomenon (the games, the cards, the cartoons) and between children themselves." (393) Other early work on Pokémon tacitly recognized the disjointed unification of the various modalities of the franchise. In the same essay where he explored how different modalities of Pokémon were more likely to carry differing ideologic focuses, Tim Jordan also acknowledged the difficulty in even trying to separate Pokémon into parts noting, "Pokémon is both its material manifestation in a series of games, movies, branded towels, and so on, but is not only these things. No single product, even the first two foundational games constitute Pokémon by itself." (463) In short, much of the previous work on Pokémon, while extremely valuable and relevant, still recognized the limitation of examining only one part of a giant multimodal franchise. By theorizing Pokémon and other franchises as a single rhizomatic system, some of these previous limitations may be lessened or removed altogether.

Pre-Rhizomatic Media Mixes

While the previous section of this chapter explored previous work regarding the themes and ideology of Pokémon, much of this work focused on only a portion of the texts and modalities that constitute the Pokémon phenomenon. Other work has been done exploring how Pokémon works as a grouping of texts that span multiple modalities. While my work looks at using Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the rhizome as an organizing principle to better understand multimodal franchises, something previous work does not necessarily do in full, it is still valuable to begin my analysis by examining how Pokémon and similar franchises have been previously theorized as a grouping of

texts, and to roughly explore how a proposed rhizomatic structure, while different, may offer valuable insights as an organizing theory.

Perhaps the most common model used to examine Pokémon and other closely related multi-modal franchises is the media mix. Marc Steinberg traces the origin of this term to Japanese marketing discourse, noting the term was "featured as one of the monthly key words in the 'Contemporary Advertising Dictionary' column of the January 1963 issue of the advertising journal Senden kaigi (Advertising Meeting)." (139) In this earlier marketing form, the media mix was a method to maximize cross-media advertising via a series of techniques, algorithms and tools which could be mobilized to ensure that the marketing of a product was maximized. Specifically, the marketing media mix looked at television, radio, newspapers and magazines, and was a method to formulate which percentage of a marketing budget should be used in each of these areas. The idea of the media mix is still an important concept in advertising. A 2021 post from the Amazon Advertising blog says that, "a media mix encompasses all the possible ways a product reaches its chosen audience(s)—or people—through avenues like traditional advertising, grassroots marketing, digital advertising, social media, email and landing pages." The post also explains that, integrating digital advertising to traditional media buys (like television and print) accounts "for the highest ROI (return on investment) for the price" and that "a brand's media mix is important for total ROI." ("What is a media mix and why is it important?") In short, the term media mix originates in the advertising or marketing space as a way to most effectively send a unified message (which is usually to purchase a product) across multiple modalities. Steinberg notes that while the term media mix continues to refer to the "synergistic use of multiple media works to sell other

such works within the same franchise or group" it has taken a wider meaning in popular discourse, which defines a media mix franchise as simply "the translation or deployment of a single work, character or narrative world across numerous mediums or platforms" (142) In essence, while the term media mix is often used inside academia as a way to analyze contemporary transmedia franchises, it is rooted in advertising, merchandising, and capitalism.

While the term originated in the advertising world and has a popular usage as a simple shorthand term for a multimedia text or franchise, the media mix has developed into a concept that belies more depth and meaning than its simple capitalistic roots might suggest, while never shedding its origin as a strategy to ultimately promote consumption. Based in the work of Eiji Otsuka, Steinberg says a media mix must link elements of the text and consumption via three key elements:

> first, the relation between narrative fragments and the grand narrative or worldview; second, the parallel relation between character and world; and third, the idea that consumption is itself a form of participation in the production of texts and in anime worlds." (183)

The ultimate purpose of a media mix is to create characters and worlds which can never be completely comprehended or experienced, but which demand continual participatory consumption to access and for continued exploration. The idea of the media mix as a form of participatory culture relates strongly to Henry Jenkins work concerning fan communities and convergence culture. This connection between media mixes and convergence culture is one of the foundations of the work of Ito Mizuko. While Jenkin's work focuses on more active participation like fan fiction, Ito looked at franchises in

which the participation was largely based on basic capitalistic consumption – simply buying film tickets, games or merchandise. Like Steinberg, Ito noted that media mixes were more than just a shorthand way to discuss intermodal franchises, that a media mix works to "sustain intertextual referencing" (94) – what occurs in one text or textual modality encourages interaction or purchase of another.

For Ito, a key aspect of these consumption-focused media mixes was that they were franchises that did not have a single central canonical text or medium from which other derivative pieces are spun off. By dispersing the texts across mediums and modalities, and not having one central focus, Ito argued that the audience can have a "sustained and omnipresent engagement" with a franchise. (96) According to Ito, an ongoing, continuing textual relationship that does not depend on a specific film release or video game launch creates a new relationship between audience and text, and that "unlike the spectacular film release or the cyclical television special, this form of engagement is often nurtured over years of ongoing viewing, reading, collecting, and social exchange, a relationship more of connoisseurship than consumption." (96) While the media mix is diverse and flexible enough to allow participation beyond consumption, and there are examples of this participation (ranging from writing fan fiction to cosplaying to attending conventions) it is clear that consumption is still a key, if not THE key, method of interacting with these franchises. Building from Ito's ideas, Mia Consalvo called the non-media-mix tendency to focus on hierarchically more important canonical texts and spectacular release the "center-periphery" paradigm, where corporations (usually American) establish, "a particular canon for some universe, either through films (Star

Wars), books (Tolkien and Middle Earth), or a television series (Star Trek).” (137) In contrast, she says Japanese companies have created franchises built around:

> a different form of engagement with the world of cross-media and cross-product promotion; unlike in the American model, where central characters or a theme or world are created, then gradually filled in by various media products, none of which may take center stage. (137)

In this form of media mix, no one modality or text is central or canon, and no modality or text is secondary. What is key, is keeping these texts in balance to promote further participation via consumption. Secondary spinoff texts are not there to simply serve as ancillary advertisements for a central canonical text. Instead, in Ito and Consalvo’s formulation of the media mix, all texts in the system encourage consumption of all other texts in the system.

While most conceptions of the media mix theorizes the transmodal texts as somewhat in balance, this does not mean that the media mix values all texts equally. Ito says that intertextual referencing “permits the hierarchies of value elaborated in one domain (e.g., between different trading cards described in the *manga* story) to underwrite economies of scarcity in another (the card game, the video game, etc.).” However, this intertextual influence on the “value” of a text does not necessitate the eventual emergence of a canon – only that a change in one mode can influence other textual modes. For example if the anime aspect of a franchise introduces a storyline prominently featuring a new character, then the trading card representation of that character would naturally become more popular and in-demand by collectors or game players. This is akin to how a rookie year baseball card of a successful player will almost invariably become more

valuable than the rookie card of a player that did not have a notable baseball career. One text having the potential to influence the value of another text suggests, if not outright proposes, that a media mix is a system that is constantly in flux and change. However, most media mix analyses do not integrate these constant changes into their model. While noting that new texts are constantly introduced into a media mix, suggesting constant change to the system itself, most models generally only analyze long-term historical changes, akin to Steinberg's analysis of the Atom Boy animation media mix from the 1960s to present.

One of the key aspects of the Pokémon franchise is not just the lack of primacy of any one text over another, but the constantly shifting roles of these texts, and even the shift in elements within the texts. Arguably, Pokémon cannot be fully understood by only looking at one of the mediums it resides in, but instead it must be looked at as a larger, non-static structure existing across mediums that include video games, card games, television shows, films, and merchandise. David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green discuss this linked structure:

> A significant aspect of this knowledge – and indeed of Pokémon in general – is its *portability*: that is, the ways in which it can be transferred between media and between social contexts. Children may watch the television cartoon, for example, as a way of gathering knowledge that they can later utilize in playing the computer game or in trading cards, and vice versa . . . in order to be a master, it is necessary to "catch" all its various manifestations. (22)

The links between these mediums change over time. A new Pokémon introduced in the video game will inevitably appear in the television series and card game, and the plot of

that television series will then influence later video games. Similarly, a new release in any medium (be it game, movie or cards) will often influence the content of other mediums. “Legendary” Pokémon are given out in the video game to commemorate the release of a film they are featured in or an expansion of the card game they are a part of. For example, in December 2011, in the United States: the feature film *Pokémon the Movie: White—Victini and Zekrom* was released in theaters; the television movie *Pokémon the Movie: Black—Victini and Reshiram* aired on the Cartoon Network; the Pokémon Victini was given away as a special event in the video game *Pokémon Black* and *Pokémon White;* and special Victini themed merchandise was given away as part of a “V for Victini” sweepstakes. The only way players could obtain Victini in the video game was to take part in this special event, suggesting that the Pokémon was created first for the movie and only secondarily for the game. An avid player of the card game might go to a movie or buy a fast food meal they have no interest in watching or eating to obtain a trading card they cannot obtain any other way. In essence, for a player of the card game, the value of one mode of the franchise has temporarily shifted in service of another mode. While they may not normally care about the Pokémon movies (seeing them as immature and childish in comparison to the more advanced and strategic aspects of the card or video game) for a short while they do value the films, even if it is just to obtain a specific game card. This shifting nature of value (which is more complex than simple cross promotion) occurs across other aspects of Pokémon. A code to obtain a Pokémon in the video game might only be given to those attending a movie premier, convention, or fan event, while rare trading cards might only be obtainable by purchasing the video game at a specific retailer.

The interrelatedness of referencing across mediums, and a system which is constantly in flux suggest a more complicated relationship than can be explained simply via the idea of the media mix as a way to sustain audience interaction with a franchise. Henry Jenkins specifically identifies Pokémon as a franchise that teaches children about complex networked social structures and institutions saying "our schools are not teaching what it means to live and work in such knowledge communities, but popular culture may be doing so." (2006, 129) If Pokémon really is the training ground to introduce children to highly networked, constantly changing knowledge communities, then this franchise must be more complex than just a basic media mix system. While Pokémon is certainly an example of a media mix structure or system, it is much more than just this, and many key aspects of Pokémon's media structure, influence and ideology cannot be explained simply via this media mix aspect. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari's ideas concerning rhizomatic structures provides a better theoretical framework to explore media structures such as Pokémon. While the media mix is a useful starting point, and helps explain aspects of Pokémon's media structure organization, it is not complete. Specifically, this framework does not account for the sometimes paradoxical flux or tension inherent in the textual system and meanings of Pokémon – a flux that exists between the texts, elements of the text, and between the texts and the audience. The traditional media mix also has limitations in theorizing how a media system changes as new texts are released and older texts shift position in a system. While Pokémon is absolutely an example of a media mix, it is also much more than that.

Entering the Rhizome

The central premise of this dissertation is that Deleuze and Guattari's ideas concerning the rhizome offer valuable insights into theorizing and understanding multimodal media structures. While I believe there is some originality in this idea, substantial previous work in media studies either touches upon the same ideas that Deleuze and Guattari saw as essential to the rhizome or even uses Deleuze and Guattari's ideas directly in their work. Some aspects of the rhizome are integrated into previous academic work as a simple matter of course. For example, the characteristic of heterogeneity is, by necessity, found in all work focusing on multimodal texts and franchises in that it is impossible to have something be multimodal and not be heterogeneous. Other aspects of the rhizome appear in other work via a type of parallel development. The idea of media ecology overlaps with much of the theoretical ground that the rhizome covers, not because one is directly an offshoot of the other, but because both look to biology and nature as a source of organizational inspiration. Other aspects of the rhizome are almost unmentioned in media studies, notably for this dissertation, the characteristics of cartography and decalcomania.

Although the media mix may the most used model for theorizing multi-modal franchises like Pokémon, a handful of theorists have begun pushing past this model to present alternate (and more rhizomatic) media structures. These new models are not a replacement or a repudiation of the idea of the media mix, but more of an expansion. Recent work in the area of media ecology is the body of work that comes closest to, and has the most overlap with, Deleuze and Guattari's ideas concerning the rhizome and my application of the rhizome as a way to better understand media structures. While the

organization of this section of my dissertation might suggest that the media mix, media ecology, and rhizomatic media structures are separate models or ways of thinking about media, this would not be accurate, as there is a great deal of cross development between these models. For example, Mizuko Ito defines the media mix, not as separate from, but instead part of a larger media ecology, saying "the current digital cultural ecology introduces two key sociotechnical innovations," which are the media mix and hypersociality. (91) Similarly, early in his book *Anime's Media Mix*, Marc Steinberg defines the media mix as a separate term from media ecology, while simultaneously noting that the concept of the media mix requires a previous existent media ecology and even notes a link to the work of Guattari saying:

> anime in particular and the media mix more generally require a concept of "media" as a system of interconnecting forms – as an ecology. Borrowed from the work of Matthew Fuller, who builds on that of Félix Guattari, the term *media ecology* is meant to signal the necessity of treating media in the plural. The term acknowledges the dynamic interplay of media and things, which are changing and interdependent and interact much like an ecosystem. (x)

Steinberg notes that his use of the term media ecology is rooted in the work of Matthew Fuller, whose book *Media Ecologies* builds not just on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, but also Marshall McLuhan, Gregory Bateson, and Neil Postman.

Fuller notes that media ecology is a term historically wrought with multiple meanings saying, "the term 'media ecology' is used and in circulation in a number of ways." (2) Just as some theorists use media mix as a synonym for transmodal franchises, so too is the term used as a shorthand denotation for a collection of texts that a particular

audience member has access to or can interact with. While acknowledging this use by literary scholars, Fuller also says that it can (and is) used in a way that is more connected to ideas of environmentalism and more in line with the ideas of Postman and McLuhan, saying that the environmental aspect of the concept:

> suggests that there has passed, or that there will be reached, a state of equilibrium: that there is a resilient and harmonic balance to be achieved with some ingenious and beneficent mix of media. Ecologists focus rather more on dynamic systems in which any one part is always multiply connected, acting by virtue of those connections, and always variable, such that it can be regarded as a pattern rather than simply as an object (4)

Considering that Fuller's take on media ecology has roots in the work of Deleuze and Guattari and that the environmentalist media ecology he discusses is one that highlights media as a dynamic system with multiple, always variable connections – hints of a rhizomatic media structure begin to emerge.

Thomas Lamarre's book, *The Anime Ecology* is both rooted in the ideas of Deleuze and Guatarri and uses a biologically based concept of media ecology as a way to theorize transmodal media genres and franchises. Early in his book, Lamarre makes the argument that convergence and media mix may not be fully adequate models to theorize a franchise, genre or media structure, and advocates the need for more complex theory:

> Prior studies of multimedia franchise models, such as Japan's media mix and America's media convergence, have tended to treat them as simple combinatory systems, a gathering together or mobilizing of components. When seen from the angle of television, however, it becomes clear that something like media mix

> depends on a site of encounter between polarized infrastructural tendencies, which makes for a charge running through the components and provisionally ordering them. While "ecology" is a loaded term, thanks to its naturalistic connotations, it is not an entirely inapt term either. (26)

When using the term media ecology, Lamarre uses it in a similar way to Fuller, and makes clear that it is more than just a synonym for all the media that an audience has access to or uses. Lamarre goes so far as to make a differentiation between media environment (the media which surrounds an audience) and media ecology saying, "where the environmental model dwells on individual interactions at the level of organisms and surroundings, the ecological approach explores the infraindividual intra-actions that are brought into relation (composed) via the energy cascade." (115)

Ultimately, Lamarre's goal is to advocate for another way of thinking about media that goes beyond models predominantly based in the media mix, convergence and the media environment, saying these models "focus exclusively on interaction and individual interactivity, downplaying or ignoring questions about intra-action and infraindividual resonance (semblance and affect) across media." (114) Lamarre explores this shift through a genealogical approach of media (from broadcast television to modern video games) and uses Pokémon's relationship to the actual biological environment as a case example. After first identifying Pokémon as a franchise centered around exploring fictional biological environments and one whose central narratives often feature cataclysmic, ecological crises Lamarre then says:

> Another kind of question thus emerges around the *Pokémon* series, a question about the relation between media environments and natural environments, and

> between ontopower and environmental crises. Let me address this question via the genealogy of platformative characters, which offers insight into the complex forces historically summoned and ordered within transmedia ecologies, which continue to exert pressure on the present. (224)

Ontopower, a term that originates in the work of Brian Massumi and is built from the ideas of Michel Foucault, is the idea that the perception of possible preemption of an act can prevent that act from being set into motion in the first place. Lamarre is asking whether Pokémon, by highlighting ecological issues both narratively and within its structuring, can have any influence on real-world biological crises. Ultimately, Lamarre returns to the contradiction explored by earlier writers: is Pokémon a cause of contemporary problems or does it provide relief from (or even possible solutions to) those problems? In this instance, the question is more problematic – since the devices on which the franchise is consumed are, "clearly contributing to the planetary depletion of resources and the global exploitation of labor, it is fair to ask whether the individual intra-action of platform and cute animal simply serve to conceal the unpleasant truth?" (225) What influence does a popular game, that often centers its narrative around solving huge environmental catastrophes, have on solving actual real world crises? Does the argument change when one considers that the creation, manufacture and distribution of both Pokémon games and the hardware to play these games may actually be a root cause of a real-world environmental crisis? While Lamarre sees some of the same themes and ideology in Pokémon as previous writers, his analysis is based not on the individual texts themselves or even the interactions between texts and audience, but how these texts intra-act with each other, the audience and elements outside the media system. This is also a

model which accounts for changes and genealogical growth over time. For example, in his analysis of anime, Lamarre notes that the shift from audiences watching characters on broadcast television to individually interacting with those characters on personal, portable games systems matches societal shifts from more static, open, community based interactions to more mobile, closed, intimate, technical based interactions. These shifts are not just seen in the evolution of the predominant medium of consumption (from broadcast television to cell-phone-like, individual video games) but in the development of popular characters (from giant superhero mecha to cute Pokémon) and even the devices used to consume media.

Lamarre's work around media ecologies and this dissertation share a theoretical overlap. Notably, we both begin with the same central concern – whether there is a theoretical model that can explain transmedia franchises beyond that provided by media mix and convergence theory. We also both look to the work of Deleuze and Guattari as well as an organizing biological metaphor as a basis to build our theoretical models. With that said, there a number of important differences that separate our work. One is there is a foundational difference between the rhizome and Lamarre's media ecology. In discussing the limitations of the media mix as a model, Lamarre says that:

> To counter the received tendency to treat media as a combinatory system, I draw on the prior discussion of television infrastructures to consider how the underlying media ecology channels the distributive force of television through the media mix. In this context, I explore how the television-animation ecology bifurcates beyond one-to-many and point-to-point tendencies into hierarchical and heterarchical tendencies as well as unidirectional and environmental tendencies. A

> media ecology, then is not a simple combination of elements but rather a complex assembling of infrastructural tendencies relative to a distributive force. (29)

While we agree that media systems need to be seen as "a complex assembling of infrastructural tendencies," my use of the rhizome as an organizing model eschews "hierarchical and heterarchical tendencies as well as unidirectional and environmental tendencies." When Deleuze and Guattari say "the rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple . . . it has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle" they suggest a system that counters hierarchical tendencies. (21) Even if our definitions of media ecology and rhizomes were the same, I still believe that my proposed project would have value. Lamarre is primarily interested in how the media ecology of anime and television interact, while I am interested in the rhizomatic structure of Pokémon. In essence, Lamarre explores how a whole genre and specific media mode is structured while I am interested in how one specific multimodal franchise is structured. Furthermore, a core aspect of Lamarre's argument is formulating a genealogy of textual modes along largely historical lines. Alternately, I am more interested in the cartography and decalcomania aspects of the rhizome and examining how a media franchise might be mapped via non-modernist methods. While we begin with many of the same reasons for wanting to examine potentially new theoretical models and even base our work in similar theoretical groundings, we end up creating different models with different uses.

While Pokémon may be an understudied franchise in comparison to both its audience size and economic power, there is still a sizable body of academic work that focuses on Pokémon. As I move toward theorizing the franchise as a rhizomatic structure, this previous work is immensely valuable. Much of the existent academic work on

Pokémon and related franchises focuses on defining what Pokémon is, its roots and identities as well as the themes that permeate the multimodal texts that constitute the whole. Part of the appeal of theorizing a franchise in rhizomatic terms is that it allows a highlighted focus on the connections between the texts. The basis of many of the connections between these texts will be found in this earlier work. A focus on these connections is also why current models of media built around convergence and media mix theory may not be adequate to fully explain a transmodal franchise. While other theorists (most notably Thomas Lamarre) have made this same observation, and created models around media ecology that run close to my own proposed ideas, I believe my larger focus on the rhizome, as explained more fully in the next section, still has value and may provide heightened insight and understanding of the Pokémon franchise specifically, and contemporary transmedial text construction in general.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The rhizomatic structure that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe in their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* is pervasive throughout the Pokémon franchise. Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome is a collection of disparate points as well as the ever-changing relationships between these points. Similarly, the core of the Pokémon franchise is the Pokémon creatures themselves, each of which represent a point whose significance, non-significance and basic identity are constantly in flux: they are characters in a game, television, film, or comic book narrative; they are pieces in a complex video and card game that might be played individually or in a group; they are toys and merchandise that are part of children's imaginative play; they are intellectual property to market other products like fast food, airline travel and tourism; they are pop-culture artifacts to be bought and sold; they are cultural objects whose popularity reveals insight into areas ranging from video game theory to media globalization. They cannot be just one of these aspects nor can they be all or even many of them at the same time. The Pokémon rhizome is larger than the individual Pokémon themselves – it also encompasses: the Pokémon texts; the Pokémon audience; Pokémon's capitalist business controllers; the symbol of Pokémon as a representations of non-American media power; and countless other facets beyond the more than 1000 individual Pokémon themselves.

Deleuze and Guattari explain the rhizome as a "map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight. It is tracing that must be put on the map, not the opposite." (21) One of the first items a player receives in most Pokémon video games is a map showing the physical layout of the world to be explored.

Depending upon the player's goals (whether to play competitively against others, collect all of the Pokémon, or just experience a story) they will inscribe a different path, one that may (or may not) be influenced by media beyond the video game. For example, a player may change their in-game journey to capture a favorite Pokémon from the television show or to determine the weakness of a specific Pokémon in the card game. Their journey may be confined to one specific game or may cross multiple texts or types of texts. In essence, the map they are given in-game is simply a starting point, and should that player ever decide to actually document a complete Pokémon journey they would find it difficult, if not impossible, to inscribe their travels onto any actual physical map. Even as a casual Pokémon fan, they may have wandered across modalities and achieved their goals not through simply playing one game but through playing multiple video and card games; watching a few episodes of a television show; collecting promotions tied to other modalities (movies, television shows, card games, phone apps, physical in-store giveaways); or interacting with in-person or online friends.

The struggle that David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green face in identifying what Pokémon is, saying it is "clearly not just a 'text', or even a collection of texts," suggests its rhizomatic organization. (379) Is it a phenomenon? A franchise? An entertainment property? A fad? While Buckingham and Sefton-Green eventually settle on "cultural practice," their initial inability to pick the proper noun for what Pokémon is relates to one of Deleuze and Guattari's central principles: "the rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple." (21) The irreducibility of Pokémon prevents both simple naming and basic categorization. Likewise, when Deleuze and Guattari describe a system which "operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots" they are

directly referring to the rhizome, but they could as easily be describing how Pokémon works. (21) At the individual narrative level, the audience seeks to expand and conquer the Pokémon world, a process which can only occur through capturing many different Pokémon. Central to Pokémon is that this narrative recurs in numerous offshoots in a variety of mediums and forms. At a larger level, Pokémon works as a series of interconnected businesses, properties and narratives. It expands into new international markets, new mediums and captures new influence to the point of overwhelming the entertainment establishment and popular culture. This influence and power is based on expanding as many variations and offshoots of the Pokémon story, characters and imagery into as many aspects of popular culture as possible.

While the rhizome is endemic to, and shapes all aspects of Pokémon, this dissertation focuses on just one facet – how differing texts from various modalities, bind together to form a rhizomatic textual system. The central hypothesis of this dissertation is that the rhizomatic principles described by Deleuze and Guattari provide a useful model to describe the organization and shaping principles behind many modern media franchises, of which Pokémon is one. To prove this hypothesis I show that the defining principles of the rhizome are evident in how individual texts are constituted and organized within my Pokémon case-example. Specifically, I demonstrate that the defining characteristics of the rhizome are key to the organizational paradigm of the multimodal, multi-textual conglomeration of Pokémon texts.

Connections and Connections that Matter

The first defining aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome are connection and heterogeneity: "the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature." (21) Based on this concept, I can trace a connection between each and every text in the Pokémon franchise and find significant, meaningful links between these texts, regardless of the original modality, purpose or objective of any specific text. Much of Deleuze's and Guattari's discussion of the rhizome focuses on the nonarboreal, nonlinear, open aspect of the rhizome, and while they say "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be," there is less specific guidance toward what is and what is not a "connection." (7) A too broad consideration of connection has the potential to make the model I am suggesting so overly encompassing that any and all narrative or game texts could be seen as forming a rhizome. For example if I claim the nodes of my Pokémon rhizome are connected because they feature "non-human characters" or "rules based systems" then every fantasy or science-fiction franchise or even random grouping of games and films would be fully interconnected. And while this might be technically true, a system defined by such trite linkages does not rise to the level of a rhizome and is not useful or valuable to further media or literacy studies.

In order to provide a more specific and useful definition of what defines a connection in a rhizomatic system I look toward Karen Barad's theory of agential-realism. For Barad, "phenomena are constitutive of reality. Reality is composed not of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but of things-in-phenomena." (140) In essence, Barad argues that meaning is created not by pre-existing entities, but by intra-

actions that create phenomena, and that the observation and description of these phenomena actually define what is intra-acting. Barad says that intra-actions, "signify *the mutual constitution of objects, and agencies of observation within phenomena* (in contrast to 'interaction,' which assumes the prior existence of distinct entities). In particular, the different agencies ('distinct entities') remain entangled." (197) Through intra-action, not only is reality defined, but so are the boundaries that delineate the entities intra-acting in the first place. Barad's ideas concerning agential realism interfaces with Deleuze and Guattari's idea concerning the rhizome, specifically when using the rhizome as a model to examine multi-modal media structures. Barad's focus on intra-action is akin to Deleuze and Guattari's statement that: "unlike structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines" (21). The rhizome is not delineated by *what* it connects, but *how* those elements connect. For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is defined by the connection between nodes, just as for Barad, reality is defined by the intra-actions between non-preexistent entities. In both of these systems meaning is created, not via which elements are connected, but via the connections themselves.

The connections in my rhizomatic media model, are intra-actions that create phenomena via constituting entanglement between agencies. Barad says that "*phenomena*, according to my agential realist account, are neither individual entities nor mental impressions, but entangled material agencies." (56) Concerning entangled agencies, Barad notes that "'intra-action' *signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*." (33) The idea of "mutual constitution" is of particular importance when

tracing connections between works in a textual system. Mutual constitution means that two entities intra-act in a way that both are (re)created or (re)defined by each other. For my work, this means one way connections between texts are not intra-actions. Hence if one text is simply using the characters or setting of another work in a derivative way, and that the new text does not offer fresh insight, critique, or redefinition of the original text there is no *mutual* constitution. For the constitution to be mutual and so comprise intra-action, there has to be a two-way flow that shapes the defining boundary of both texts that are intra-acting to create phenomena. Seeking out intra-active, phenomena-creating connections, particularly when those connections may be heterogeneous, entails finding links that go beyond surface similarities and basic narrative or rule-based elements. To this end, my study focuses more on thematic and ideological connections, and preference connections where themes and meaning is created when differing texts connect.

An example of one of these significant is based around Anne Allison's argument that one of the core themes of Pokémon is the dichotomy inherent in the franchise's emphasis on acquisition: "While the aim of the game is continual acquisition, the objects one 'gets' are both thingified (valued economically) and personalized (cute monsters inspiring affection, attachment, and love)." (2006: 197) With my focus on connections, I am interested in how this theme moves across and is enhanced by its linkage with other texts. For some connections, this may be as simple as two related texts sharing the same theme. For example, the main character's central motivation in the anime series is to become Pokémon champion of the fictional region he is exploring. Throughout the series, he is collecting new Pokémon creatures and building his relationship to them as a means to further that end. The connection between any two individual episodes may simply be

the continuation of this linear story, and at one level this same story of training, battling, and collecting repeated over and over in a simplistic way appears to devalue the significance of the connection between any two episodes. At another level, the fact that the same story is repeated over and over (at the writing of this dissertation, more than 1000 times) is what makes this a connection that matters – for the audience member their relationship with the text and what it represents grows stronger when they see this same story cyclically repeated weekly, if not daily, in an almost mimetic way.

This acquisition based theme, explored narratively in the anime, manga and films is also presented ludically in the various Pokémon games. Specifically concerning games, Ian Bogost's work concerning procedural rhetoric as a way to reveal ideological claims both within individual texts and in the intra-action between texts is particularly valuable. Bogost defines procedural rhetoric as "the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures" and advocates for the use of this methodology in the analysis of individual games, believing that the ideological message of a game can be ascertained by looking at the rules and "procedurality" that define gameplay. (ix) Where Bogost argues that analyzing the rules that bind a game together are an important way to reveal the underlying ideology of an individual game – the rules and procedures that bind the individual elements of the Pokémon system together also reveal the intra-active connections that define the underlying ideology of a rhizomatic system. This is particularly valuable, because the nature of the rhizome is flux and change, not within the individual texts themselves but in the connections between these texts. Procedural rhetoric provides a method to analyze the rhizome that does not dictate stasis, imply that

the system will not change, or demand a belief that this is the only way the rhizome can be analyzed at any specific moment. In Pokémon, the game mechanics necessitate collecting as many Pokémon as possible and specifically reward players at different milestones upon capturing a certain number of different Pokémon. Procedurally, the link between games may not just be one of concepts and ideology, but may in fact be an actual game based link with players trading the Pokémon creatures captured in one game to another, for example certain Pokémon captured in the mobile phone game *Pokémon GO* can be traded to and used in the Nintendo Switch console games *Pokémon: Let's Go Pikachu!* or *Pokémon: Let's Go Eevee!* In these ways, the emphasis on acquisition which is presented narratively in the anime, is also explored procedurally through the game mechanics of various interrelated Pokémon games. Hence, specific themes and ideological messages are highlighted not just through rote repetition in multiple texts or modalities, but through these themes being presented in different ways that actually connect differing texts and modalities.

While homogenous connections are inherent to any textual system, when defining and tracing a rhizome, heterogenous connections are particularly valuable – so in the case above, how the same theme is presented narratively and ludically, via traditional story and via procedural rhetoric. This represents a heterogenous connection: at a base level it is a connection because the same theme is present in multiple texts and heterogenous because the theme is presented via differing modalities. Furthermore, and crucial for my study, these heterogenous connections redefine and change the meaning of the texts by virtue of their very existence and so represent more significant connections. Not all themes present in one text of the franchise are found in other texts of the franchise and

simply by virtue of a singular theme crossing texts, that theme (and any underlying ideology connected to, or enhanced by that theme) is given emphasis. If this thematic connection is heterogenous, then this connection is given even more weight. It may not be a shared theme that leads to a connection between texts, but shared or related elements that when combined generate a theme. These types of links are more rhizomatic in that the meaning (theme) is generated only when the separate texts connect in an intra-active manner.

Gotta Catch 'Em All? Texts Under Scrutiny

The next two defining points of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome, the ideas of multiplicity and asignifying rupture, directly relate to the challenges in choosing and limiting which texts are included in this research study. While the Pokémon rhizome theoretically includes all of the texts created during the more than 20 years of Pokémon's existence, this project does not and should not encompass such a large textual pool. To trace even the most basic connections between all of these texts (if one could even create a list of these texts, as they might contain unofficial and unrecognized works from more than 100 different countries and dozens of languages) might, without exaggeration, take more than one human lifetime. Furthermore, this amount of detail is not necessary according to the defining principles of the rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari note that the rhizome is a multiplicity that, "has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills." (21) This suggests that it is not possible to catalog all aspects or elements of any rhizome, making an attempt at completion unattainable. In other words, if I could trace *all* of the texts in a rhizome then

it would, by definition, not be a rhizome. Concerning asignifying rupture, Deleuze and Guattari also say "a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines." (9) This suggests that if I can demonstrate that a part of a structure is fully rhizomatic, even if it means breaking that part of the structure from a larger whole, this broken part would be enough to demonstrate the structure is rhizomatic. With this said, I limit the group of Pokémon texts I am studying both by date and by type. While I focus on mapping one piece of the Pokémon rhizome, my analysis reveals, but does not pursue, lines of flight as well as connections to other Pokémon texts outside my study.

In terms of date, I limit my research to Pokémon texts fully released between February 2016 and February 2019. Pokémon texts are released in what fans refer to as generations, delineated by the introduction of new fictional settings in the Pokémon world as well as groups of new Pokémon and human characters which are shared across the various modalities of Pokémon texts. The seventh generation of Pokémon was announced on February 26, 2016, and featured the Alolan region, a fictional group of islands inspired by the Hawaiian islands. On February 27, 2019, the eighth generation of Pokémon was introduced, with the announcement that it would take place in the Galar region, a fictional island based on Great Britain. These dates, covering a three year period, from the announcement of the seventh generation to the announcement of the eighth generation are the first limiting factor used to create a subset of texts for my study. This complete cycle of the Pokémon franchise contains all of the various constitutive texts that represent the Pokémon rhizome (i.e. films, television shows, games). If I cannot demonstrate a rhizomatic relation within one full cycle of the franchise, than I would

argue no such relationship exists. Similarly, since a generation contains a full set of the various types of Pokémon texts, it is the smallest unit of texts that should logically be examined to find a rhizomatic relationship.

I define a Pokémon text as a text that features the term "Pokémon" prominently in its title. The titles of most Pokémon texts are somewhat formulaic. For example the films under analysis are: *Pokémon the Movie: Volcanion and the Mechanical Marvel, Pokémon the Movie: I Choose You!* and *Pokémon the Movie: The Power of Us.* Similarly, each season of the anime television show is officially labeled *Pokémon the Series*, regardless of season and each release of the card game is labeled *Pokémon Trading Card Game*, regardless of set. However, this convention is more problematic for other texts and modalities, particularly with video games that include Pokémon in the game, but not in the title. For example, while *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* is a wildly popular game officially released by Nintendo and prominently features Pokémon – it is not considered in my study because it does not include "Pokémon" in its title. Many of these games are created by outside developers who license Pokémon as a way to add them to already existent properties of franchises. Sorting based on title means many smaller mobile games, like *Pokémon Quest, Pokémon Duel,* and *Pokémon: Magikarp Jump* are included in the study while arguably larger, more popular console-based games like *Detective Pikachu*, *Pokkén Tournament*, and the aforementioned *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* are excluded.

There is a need for some discussion concerning whether a text is *fully* released between February 2016 and February 2019. Part of the multiplicity of a rhizome means that "it has neither beginning nor end," and so finding clean break points to determine

where a generation begins or ends is not easy or even possible. One of the key defining attributes to determine which Pokémon text connects to which generation is to see where it is set in the fictional Pokémon geography. For the anime, shows from *Pokémon the Series:* XYZ, which took place in Kalos (the region which delineated the sixth generation of the series) continued airing in the United States until January 21, 2017, more than two months after *Pokémon Sun* and *Pokémon Moon*, the first games in the seventh generation were released on November 18, 2016. On the tail end of the seventh generation, episodes from the *Sun & Moon: Ultra Legends* anime continued to air until March 7, 2020, four months after the November 15, 2019 release of *Pokémon Sword* and *Pokémon Shield*, the first text from the eighth generation of the series. Likewise, for the *Pokémon Trading Card Game*, three sets nominally from the previous generation were released after the announcement of the new generation of Pokémon texts. For the sixth generation, the expansion sets: *Pokémon Trading Card Game: XY – Fates Collide* (May 2, 2016); *Pokémon Trading Card Game: XY – Steam Siege* (August 3, 2016) and *Pokémon Trading Card Game: XY – Evolutions* (November 2, 2016) were released between the February 2016 announcement of the seventh generation and the actual mid-November 2016 release of the first text that featured the Alolan region which defines the seventh generation. For the seventh generation, the expansion sets: *Sun & Moon – Unbroken Bonds* (May 3, 2019) *Sun & Moon – Unified Minds* (August 2, 2019) and *Sun & Moon – Cosmic Eclipse* (November 1, 2019) were released between the February 2019 announcement of the eight generation and the actual mid-November 2019 release of the first text that featured the Galar region that defines the eighth generation. This study excludes the partial seasons of the anime while including the three series of trading cards released between the

announcement and actual release of the seventh generation. Each season of the anime constitutes a complete story and analyzing a partial story arc ignores the intra-active links that are at the center of this study. In contrast, each trading card game set release is a true standalone ludic text. While it does not make sense to include an incomplete story and character arc, as would occur when analyzing a partial season of a television show, it also does not make sense to exclude a complete standalone text that is released during the defining dates for the study.

My guideline concerning a text being fully-released during the selected dates also necessitates a discussion concerning the difference between re-releasing a text and re-making or re-creating a text. During this three year period, a number of the Pokémon games were re-released by Nintendo as part of their virtual console marketplace. *Pokémon Red*, and *Pokémon Blue*, the very first Pokémon games, originally released in Japan in 1996 and the United States in 1998 and *Pokémon Yellow*, originally released in the United States in 1999 were re-released on February 27, 2016 as part of the announcement of the seventh generation of Pokémon games. These re-released games were not changed in any substantial way for their 20 year anniversary re-release, featuring the same low resolution graphics, gameplay and even bugs found in their original Gameboy release. In essence, these are the same games released twenty years earlier, only running on a different console. In contrast are the games, *Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu* and *Pokémon: Let's Go, Eevee*, each released by Nintendo on November 16, 2018. While these games nominally share the same narrative as the aforementioned first generation game, *Pokémon Yellow,* including sharing characters, location and basic plot, these games were not simple re-releases, but instead were true remakes. While these new

games followed the same rough plot as their predecessor, they have significant additions and changes to the gameplay and story. For example, the *Let's Play* games converted the original 2D top-down style of their source games into a 3D style; incorporated extensive changes in the basic game mechanics; and added new characters to the game that can be battled for special rewards. This study includes the fully updated games as they are new unique texts (indicated by their new unique title) while the re-released games are not included as they are not new texts distinct from their late 1990s versions.

In terms of type of text, I am first limiting my study to texts that contain narrative or ludic dimensions. This means that while my study includes Pokémon video games, films, television shows, card games and mobile applications – it does not include Pokémon toys or merchandise. The reason for this limitation is partially based on maintaining an achievable study (including Pokémon toys as objects of research, even within the three years I am looking at, would swell the number of texts studied to the thousands) and partially to keep this work more grounded to the film and game texts that are more generally seen as the purview of film and media studies. Secondly, I am limiting my study to texts that were released in both the Japanese and North American markets. These divisions are a simple way to create a grouping of texts that are unequivocally part of the Pokémon media system. While there may be debate concerning whether a word search on the back of a box of Pokémon fruit snacks, a learn to read phonics book only sold at school book fairs in the United States, or slash fan fiction featuring Pokémon/human bestiality are "true" Pokémon texts, few can argue that a text created in one major global market and localized to another under the oversight of Pokémon's

legally recognized intellectual property owners are not part of the Pokémon media system.

This textual division is self-admittedly not absolutely precise and, though defined, has some aspect of subjectivity to it. Notably, I have chosen to exclude Pokémon manga from this study for a handful of reasons. First, is because of the manga's unbalanced lack of popularity. While extremely popular in Japan, the manga does not achieve a corresponding level of popularity outside of its originating nation. This is reflected in the official Pokémon Company website, whose business summary omits the manga while specifically highlighting video games, the trading card game, apps, video, official shops; licensing and tie ins, and international business. ("Business Summary ｜ The Pokémon Company") Furthermore, this official Pokémon Company omnibus website contains quick navigation links to sites including: the official TV anime website; the official Pokémon movie website; the official online Pokémon store; the Pokémon themed restaurant chain, Pokémon Café; the Pokémon with You charity foundation; numerous Pokémon video game websites; and even the website for Pokémon Local Acts, a group that uses Pokémon as "ambassadors" to promote Japan's local regions. Notably absent from the Pokémon Company website, or even its lengthy list of outside sites and references is even a passing reference to any Pokémon manga, suggesting it is not one of the key parts of the Pokémon franchise, or at least a lesser part when compared to the video games, trading card game, movies and anime that both the company site and this dissertation focus on. While this site lists links to the relatively small Pokémon charity and Pokémon Japanese tourism program on every page, it makes no reference to the manga at all. A second reason the manga is not part of this specific study is limiting the

study to texts that fall within a range of dates. The Pokémon manga is first released in Japan and then localized for English speaking audiences by a third party company, Shogakukan. However, unlike the anime, which has an average delay of about three months between Japanese and American release, the English versions of the manga are often released a full year after the Japanese versions. For example, Volume 1 of the *Pokémon Adventures: Sun and Moon* manga was released in Japan on June 23, 2017, seven months after the release of the mainline video games. However, the English translation of this manga was not released until May 8, 2018 almost a year after the Japanese manga release, and more than two years after the announcement of the new Pokémon generation. The release of the first issue of manga that takes place in the fictional Alolan region that defines the seventh Pokémon generation is actually closer in time to the announcement of the eighth Pokémon generation (Feb 2019) than it is to the announcement of the generation which it is nominally a part (Feb 2016). A final reason for excluding the manga is that neither including or excluding this (or any other) additional group of texts substantially alters the end results of my analysis. Ultimately, this dissertation demonstrates that Pokémon is a rhizomatic media system, and this result would not be impacted by whether the manga is part of the media sample or not. Part of this is a because of the asignifying rupture and multiplicity characteristics of the rhizome – if this subset of texts can be shown to be a rhizome, then I am still achieving the goal of this dissertation of showing Pokémon to be a rhizomatic media structure. Considering that the Pokémon video games, apps, movies and anime are under analysis, the media sample is large enough to make determinations and conclusions about how Pokémon is organized as a textual system. Making this media sample larger by adding manga, or

merchandise, or even fan created works does not skew the end results, especially when this analysis focuses on larger trans-medial connections.

With these limitations, the research study encompasses: 10 video games, including both console games and mobile apps; 3 feature films; 2 seasons of the television show, totaling 91 episodes; and 14 sets of the trading card game encompassing roughly 2000 cards. Part of my work in defining the rhizomatic structure of the Pokémon system is determining the points that define an individual textual node in the rhizome. While an individual film or video game is a nodular text, an individual card from the trading card game is not. This is based on the idea that the film or video game can be read independently as a unique self-contained text in a way that an individual game card cannot. The narrative based Pokémon films and games have a beginning, middle and end that is nominally self-contained. While I am arguing that all of the texts under consideration have connections which extend beyond their self-contained narrative, each of these narrative texts has the ability to stand alone and create meaning independently from their rhizomatic connections. Similarly, any of the games which do eschew narrative, also represent a self-contained system of meaning creation. Jesper Juul's classical game model definition defines a game as a "rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are negotiable." (36) An individual card from a trading card game represents neither a complete narrative or, based on Juul's definition, a complete game. For this reason I do not track each individual card

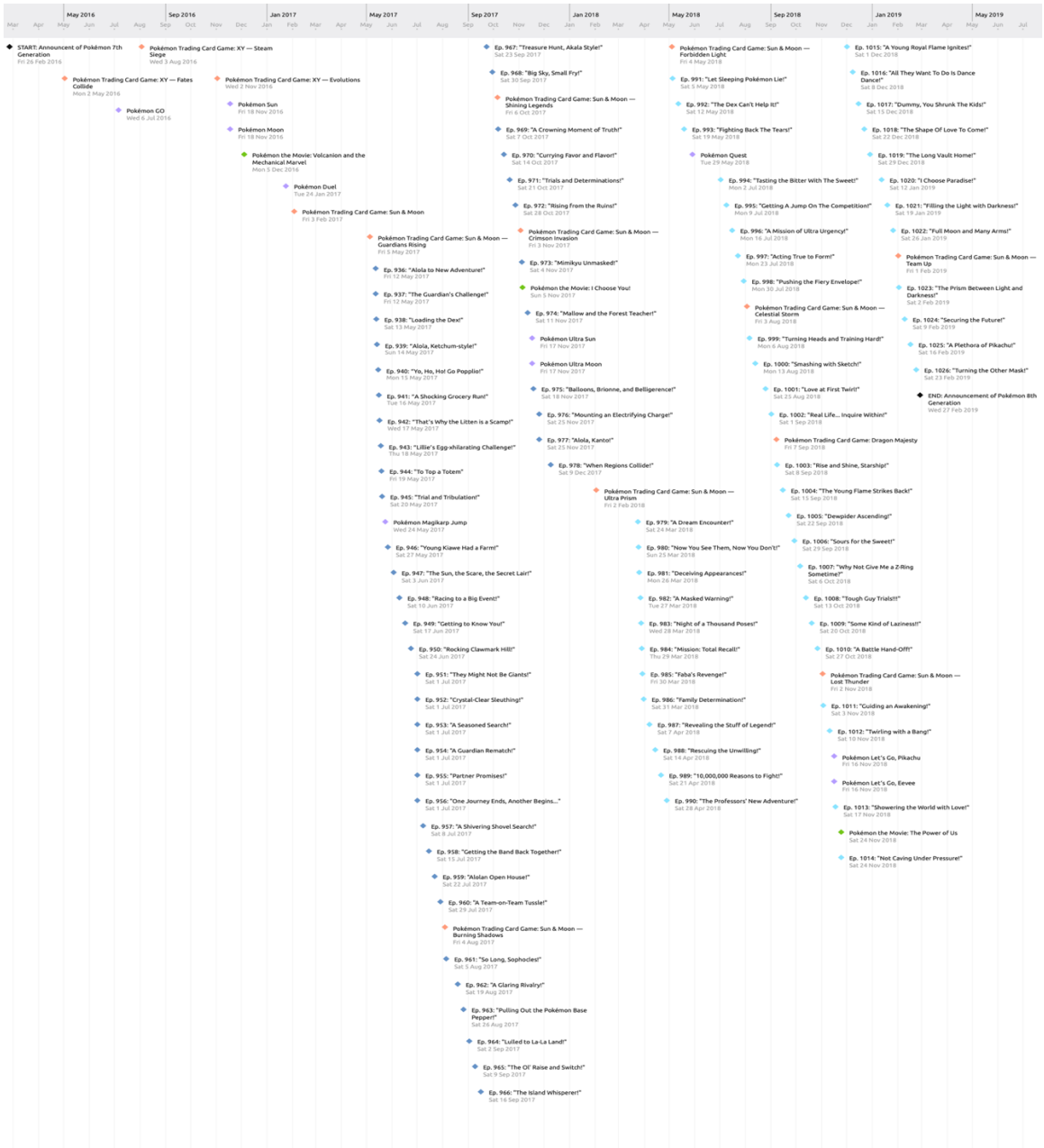

Figure 1: Timeline of 7th Generation Pokémon Texts.

as a unique textual node in my study. Instead, this study considers each trading card set or expansion set as an individual text, as each of those sets constitutes enough related cards with which to create a deck and play the trading card game as designed.

Mapping Rhizomes

After identifying significant intra-active textual connections, I will then map these connections in order to illustrate the rhizomatic nature of the Pokémon media franchise. Two of the defining aspects of the rhizome are cartography and decalcomania. In terms of cartography, part of the definition of the rhizome is that it is "a map that *must* be produced" and so if Pokémon is a rhizomatic media structure then a map of this structure must be produced. Furthermore, a rhizome map is not a static representation of a real place or a document that helps one navigate from one specific place to another specific place. Deleuze and Guattari say that "the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight. It is a tracing that must be put on the map, not the opposite." (21) This implies that the act or process of mapping is the true reason one should engage in rhizomatic cartography and not the desire to eventually possess a physical map object in hopes that such a map might provide knowledge of an interconnected system. Guidance and wisdom emerges from creating the map, and not by any actually use value such a map offers.

For inspiration concerning mapping methods and methodology I look to Patricia Sullivan and James E. Porter's work creating postmodern maps of research scenes and methodological frames in their book, *Opening Spaces: Writing Technologies and Critical*

Research Practices. The difference between a typical geographic or navigational map versus a rhizome map matches the split that Sullivan and Porter see between a modernist and post-modernist mapping strategy. Sullivan and Porter argue that, "assumption of a modernist mapping strategy is that the map represents information about an existing and static reality. Such maps are used more for organizational and representational purposes." (79) While traditional modernist mappings are appropriate for fixed, stable situations and relationships these "depictions typically do not show the movement or flexibility seen in postmodern mappings." (97) To this end, Sullivan and Porter advocate a postmodern mapping methodology for more complex systems. Some of the relevant procedures for this methodology are to "use multiple maps to avoid totalizing and freezing 'situation,'" to "show changes across maps," and to "show contrast in views." (97) To this end, I produce not a single map but a series of maps to provide insight into the shifting nature of a rhizome. The look and scope of these maps is largely determined by the intra-active, rhizomatic connections linking these texts.

In their book Porter and Sullivan noted the use of both modernist and post-modernist mapping strategies working together to help understand and theorize complex situations. Some of the maps they created were Venn diagram-esque "Research Scene Maps," which helped identify positions and enframements within various research studies. For example, for one of their studies they created a map (Figure 4.1 from *Opening Spaces*) which was simply a series of boxes encasing or overlapping other boxes. This diagram shows Porter and Sullivan (the teachers/researchers) as fully enframing Max, a researcher who's work they were studying. In turn, Max was examining how users worked with a computer based tutorial he was updating and is

shown in the diagram as fully encircling the text (a tutorial in this case), user and computer. However, the text, user and computer each overlap in varying degrees, with the diagram indicating that Max was more focused on the text than either the users or the computer. One of the conclusions Porter and Sullivan reached in their analysis, and which was made clear via the creation of this map, was that Max did not focus enough on his users and instead privileged the tutorial text and the computer over the user experience. When the users had difficulty with his computer tutorial, Max viewed the error, not in the tutorial itself, but in the user's interaction with the tutorial. The point in my sharing of this element of Porter and Sullivan's work is that while they acknowledge that these maps are modernist, they still advocate for their value saying, "based loosely on the conventions of Venn diagrams, such maps, when they are used in a modernist way, aim to clarify complex relationships by mapping them in relationship to one another." (97) These maps, while modernist and somewhat limiting, still have a limited value in providing a meaningful snapshot of a complex situation at one specific point in time.

While acknowledging some value for modernist maps, Sullivan and Porter acknowledge that "modernist depictions typically do not show the movement or flexibility seen in postmodern mappings," and that "such diagrams are not entirely stable, even for modernists." (97) To correct these weaknesses, Sullivan and Porter advocate for a more complex postmodern mapping strategy. One example of a postmodern map is built from combining and remapping previous research experiences that were first mapped via their modernist research scene maps (Figure 4.4 from *Opening Spaces*). Porter and Sullivan's goal for these new maps was not to chart a research scene, but instead create what they call a "methodological frame map" that positions the researchers

of previously mapped research scenes onto a map defined by theory-practice and theoretical-empirical axes. Hence, both Max and Sullivan and Porter's position from the previously discussed research scene map are re-charted onto a postmodern map based on where their research approaches fall on two differing axes, a vertical axis corresponding to action (degree of particularization) that ranges from theory to practice and a horizontal axis corresponding to episteme (methodological preference) that ranges from theoretical to empirical. This chart is then divided into four quadrants that loosely characterize methodological approaches: theoretical episteme and theory oriented action connects to an abstract theory approach; empirical episteme and theory oriented action connects to an empirical reflection approach; theoretical episteme and practice oriented action connects to a situated theory approach; and empirical episteme and practice oriented action connects to an empirical practice approach. In this case Sullivan and Porter see Max as preferring theoretical over empirical methodological approaches (horizontal axis) and privileged general theory over specific particular use examples (vertical axis). Based on where Max's approach falls on those two axes, Sullivan and Porter say that his methodological approach can be characterized as distinguishing "abstract theory," the quadrant where his approach ends up being charted. Plotting relationships across multiple axes of data to create more precise mapping strategy is what Porter and Sullivan see as one of the primary advantages of this type of map:

> Instead of taking its conventions of construction and reading from Venn diagrams, these figures connect with the plotting of coordinates on an XY-axis. These diagrams are not, as the earlier ones were, a fabric woven somewhere and placed

somewhat arbitrarily on a page. Instead, particular points on the picture take on more meaning because they represent an intersection of two continuums. (98)

Significantly, Sullivan and Porter see their postmodern maps as less arbitrary than their modernist maps and more valuable in their ability to illustrate shifting positions in time.

While my mapping methodology is inspired by Porter and Sullivan's work, I use this mapping strategy in different ways and for different purposes. While Sullivan and Porter were mapping how researchers were situated within their studies and how this situatedness influenced and categorized their overall methodology, I am in many ways creating more simplistic maps. After all, the focus of my study is mapping a grouping of texts that are already recognized as a unified franchise. The fact that I can create a logical grouping of Pokémon texts to include in one study, means that this group of texts are already unified, if by nothing more than by the attributes that caused them to be included in my study. What is valuable for my study is to show not *whether* Pokémon is a connected and united system, but *how* it is a connected and united system and how thee connections define the franchise. With that said, the methodology modeled by Sullivan and Porter provides a useful path forward for my own work. At a core ideological level is Sullivan and Porter's assertion that the "power of the mapping strategy is in showing that by mapping you can get a better handle on a messy picture." (90) Another similarity is that my approach necessitates multiple maps to fully trace out the relationships. Homogenous connections between texts are first mapped via a more conventional Venn diagram like diagram while the more rhizomatic heterogenous connections are mapped via secondary, more postmodernist mapping strategy.

Limitations and Key Assumptions

There are a number of limitations to this proposed methodology and to this dissertation in general. One of the first key assumptions in my proposed dissertation is that the related theories of convergence and the media mix are not sufficient to properly explain a more complex media system or franchise like Pokémon. I advocate for a theoretical model that is rooted in Jenkins' ideas of convergence and the closely related concept of the media mix. These ideas are themselves partially built from the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari and as noted in the previous chapter even share some of their foundational characteristics with the foundational characteristics of the rhizome. Beyond the media mix, many of my ideas are closely related to other contemporary theorists, notably Thomas Lamarre's work concerning media ecology, which shares both a desire to create a theory beyond the media mix and relies even more heavily on the work of Deleuze and Guattari as the theoretical base to theorize transmedia. My work is not meant to either challenge, replace or serve as an addendum to any of these other models, none of which I see as incomplete or incompatible with my work. Instead I am advocating another way to look at the ever changing multi-textual transmedia franchise systems that are becoming dominant in popular culture. With that said, for my model to have any value it does need to be able to provide some new insight or lens that provides value beyond current theories. In short, while I can demonstrate that Pokémon is a rhizomatic media system, I also have to show that this means something and provides insight and use beyond any extant theoretical systems.

Beyond ensuring that this work truly adds something new to the conversation concerning media theory, there is one key theoretical challenge to the proposed

methodology of this dissertation in general. At the core of this dissertation is a central idea of using a post-structuralist lens to explore and define the structure of a media system. This means I am somewhat paradoxically proposing to use a philosophy that implicitly rejects structure as the basis for defining the structure of a media system. In describing the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari say: "In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system . . . defined solely by a circulation of states." (21) There is a very real question in what value there is in using this model to theorize how a media system is organized. How is saying that Pokémon is organized around an "acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system," different from saying there is no organizing system to Pokémon? Similarly Deleuze and Guattari say:

> Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature. (21)

If the rhizome is "unlike a structure," then how can I use it as a model to explain the structure of Pokémon? Part of the idea of the rhizome is that it encompasses all possible nodes, assemblages and lines of flight that may connect a group of points. If the rhizome is everything, then can it really be anything? I believe that these concerns are ameliorated by the value the rhizomatic model brings in defining a system as more than a "set of points and positions" and by providing a model that incorporates shifting links and

relationships into fundamental organizing definitions and principles. What is interesting about Pokémon is not just that it is a group of games, movies, television shows, toys, clothes, memes, theme parks, musicals, corporate branding icons, or political symbols. What is interesting about Pokémon is the shifting and changing links that audience members make between textual elements and their lived experiences as subjects within a capitalist society.

While the suitability of the rhizome's ability to account for shifting intra-active links that just do not connect texts, but define them, is one of the reasons it was chosen for this work, it also has the potential to suggest a theory that is more subjective than practical. According to Barad, intra-actions, "signify the *mutual constitution of objects, and agencies of observation*" in contrast to interactions, "which assumes the prior existence of distinct entities." (197) This aspect, combined with the multiplicity and asignifying rupture characteristics of the rhizome means that this dissertation is not really examining one clear Pokémon rhizome, but potentially up to: 46,845,258,497,542,906,565,743,123,628,083,841,643,926,795,049,986,2031,533,310,318,788,629,800,927,518,416,622,330,123,618,486,343,228,862,579,684,398,745,837,012,213,486,653,229,822,121,742,374,957,258,403,779,058,860,032,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 slightly different but closely related rhizomes, simply based on the different permutations or order in which the 118 texts this dissertation examines could theoretically combine into. Since every new text means new connections, which each redefine the system, there is no one true objective rhizome. Furthermore, for Barad, what is "real" is the phenomenon that are created by the intra-actions between the objects. How does one define and theorize a system, when the texts (which are traditionally at the

center of any media studies work) are themselves not "real"? When a media system is defined by the connections between texts, how is it possible to define an objective connection between texts that are read and experienced differently by different audience members?

However, just as Barad highlights this potential problem concerning subjectivity, they also provides a solution to this problem. A central aspect to agential realism is the role that apparatus plays in looking at and studying a system. When discussing apparatuses Barad says that they are not simply passive, objective, outside observers of systems, but are instead integral parts of any intra-active system of phenomena under scrutiny. Apparatuses are productive of phenomena and different apparatuses examining the same system may find different phenomena. Simply by determining how a system is observed, the system is shaped and defined, or as Barad says:

> The crucial point is that the apparatus enacts an agential cut – a resolution of the ontological indeterminacy – *within* the phenomenon, and *agential separability – the agentially enacted material condition of exteriority-within-phenomena – provides the conditions for the possibility of objectivity* . . . Different agential cuts produce different phenomena. Crucially, then, the apparatus is both causally significant (providing the conditions for enacting a local causal structure) *and* the condition for the possibility of the objective description of material phenomena. (175)

While Barad takes her inspiration for apparatus from actual scientific instruments that measure how photons travel in quantum physics experiments, this principle carries over to the humanities work at the center of this dissertation. While I am looking at how texts

instead of photons interact with each other, there is still a process of observation. Although there are no electron microscopes or mesh slits analyzing this system, there is still an observer and apparatus, even if that apparatus is not material in nature. In fact Barad says that the key aspect of apparatus is not centered around its physical materiality, saying instead that, "apparatuses are *material-discursive practices – causal intra-actions through which matter is iteratively and differentially articulated, reconfiguring the material-discursive field of possibilities and impossibilities in the ongoing dynamics of intra-activity that is agency.*" (170) In essence, by studying, analyzing or even just reading a group of texts an audience member takes on a role akin to that of apparatus in a scientific experiment. When Barad says: "apparatuses are not passive observing instruments; on the contrary, they are productive of (and part of) phenomena," so too there are no connections between texts in a franchise without an audience looking at the texts, observing them and hence both producing and becoming part of that system. (142) Including an observer as part of a map is not novel – the modernist map discussed by Sullivan and Porter above included their positionality as "Teachers/Researchers" looking at Max's work. It does help make any maps created less subjective, by giving a more objective reference to where the connections are being defined. While another researcher may see different connections than I do, the maps I create do not become invalidated by this, because they clearly define that the connections as the particular ones I observed.

In summary, my central hypothesis is that Pokémon represents a group of texts that have a rhizomatic relationship with each other, a relationship that though not unusual is not one necessarily shared by all franchises or groups of related mass-media texts. I demonstrate this hypothesis by first choosing a logical subset of Pokémon texts which are

analyzed to ascertain whether they work together rhizomatically. Creating a subset of texts to test is in line with the asignifying rupture and multiplicity principles of the rhizome. I test the rhizomatic nature of these texts through textual analyses that specifically look for connections between texts, connections which may be heterogeneous. To ensure that these connections are significant I utilize Barad's ideas concerning agential realism, which argues reality is created not through the interactions of pre-existent entities but via intra-actions which create phenomena that define the boundary and reality of entities. Barad's work concerning how apparatus does not just measure but actually shapes and defines a system also helps this work be less constrained by issues of subjectivity in defining and tracing connections. Assuming these connections exist, I map these interactions in a way that shows the rhizomatic principles of cartography and decalcomania. As a model for this mapping I use Sullivan and Porter's work concerning post-modern mapping. In creating these maps, I demonstrate a model that is different from previously defined system; is not hampered by any internal theoretical inconsistency of using post-structuralist theory to define structure; and is useful to other media scholars.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

Connection is the foundation upon which the Pokémon franchise is built. The inspiration for the very first Pokémon text was not rooted in character design, narrative trope, or game mechanic, but in how two Game Boys, Nintendo's 1989 handheld videogame console, interconnected and exchanged data via a Game Link Cable. Early Pokémon game programmer Junichi Masuda traced Pokémon's genesis to when designer Satoshi Tajiri saw a Nintendo Game Boy Game Link Cable and asked him, "don't you think it would be fun to trade monsters?" (qtd. in "Translation: Matsuda Discusses Game Freak History") In another interview Satoshi discussed his game concept saying, "I decided to make a game that could bridge the gap between the connectivity I imagined, and what the Link Cable could actually do. That's what Pokémon is." Later in this same interview he said, "For Pokémon, we built a robust game system that promotes meaningful connectivity." (qtd. in "Translation: Satoshi Tajiri's New Book") This interlinking of players is further encouraged by releasing mainline Pokémon games as pairs (for the seventh generation, this is *Pokémon Sun* / *Pokémon Moon, Pokémon Ultra Sun* / *Pokémon Ultra Moon* and *Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu / Pokémon: Let's Go, Eevee*) and only featuring certain Pokémon in one version of the game. This meant that a player could not accomplish the task given by the franchise's official motto of "Gotta Catch 'Em All" without connecting and trading between two versions of what is narratively the same game.

As the franchise evolved and developed, interconnection remained a central structuring concept, and made Pokémon a key case example for exploring rhizomatic textual systems. The focus of this chapter is mapping the interconnections and intra-

actions between the texts that constitute the Pokémon franchise. To fully understand how to map a franchise using this methodology, it is beneficial to start by creating maps that fail to show rhizomatic connections between texts. While it may seem counterintuitive, by first learning how and why some rhizomatic assemblages do not work, I can later explain why the final mapping of this project does work and represents a rhizomatic media structure. To this end, I will begin by creating a map based upon a single character serving as the connection point for all texts and ascertain whether such a map represents a rhizomatic system. I will then explore whether a map can be created based upon how elements of one textual modality are represented in a different textual modality. Finally, I will examine a mapping based on pre-thematic principles and motifs.

Mapping Strategy 1: Pikachu, I Choose You!

The first map I present in my analysis is one based on whether a single specific Pokémon, can serve as the basis for a connection across all the Pokémon texts under analysis. The Pokémon most likely to appear in all Pokémon texts is Pikachu, the yellow and brown electric mouse Pokémon introduced in the first generation of Pokémon texts in 1996. This specific Pokémon was not chosen at random, but because Pikachu is the de-facto mascot representing the entire Pokémon franchise. Beyond its role as the central companion Pokémon to Ash Ketchum, the film and television series protagonist, a Pikachu has appeared in giant balloon form in every Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade since 2001, was the only Pokémon listed in Guinness' top video game characters of all-time list and has a protein necessary for synapse formation named after it. (Benkwitt, Marchiafava, Sato et al.) The city of Topeka, Kansas was renamed "ToPikachu" on two

separate days, once in 1998 and again in 2018. (Shank) When naming Pikachu as the "most important Pokémon that impacted the franchise's history" David Bashir said, "Pikachu is king of the pocket monsters. . . . if your mom calls every Pokémon 'Pikachu' then you know in your heart that it is the most important Pokémon of all time." Because of its iconic stature, one would think that Pikachu would appear, if not prominently, then at least in passing, in every Pokémon text and if a rhizomatic map can successfully be created based around any single Pokémon, Pikachu is the single best candidate for this task. As one of the central and recurring characters in the narrative, Pikachu does not just appear, but usually plays a central role in every single anime episode and every feature film under analysis. Pikachu is also the titular companion in one of the video game texts of this generation, *Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu.* However, as shown in Map 1, while Pikachu is a part of the majority of texts under analysis, it does not appear in all of the texts. Furthermore, for many of the texts under analysis, making a definitive determination concerning Pikachu's presence is sometimes surprisingly difficult.

While Pikachu's presence is clear in most of the predominantly narrative texts, it can debated whether Pikachu definitively appears in many of the ludic texts, and it is their ludic nature that makes this mapping problematic. With the exception of *Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu*, all of the video games of this generation can be narratively completed without ever capturing or even necessarily encountering a Pikachu. Looking specifically at the Alolan-set mainline games *Pokémon Sun, Pokémon Moon, Pokémon Ultra Sun* and *Pokémon Ultra Moon,* Pikachu is a Pokémon that can potentially be obtained, but only with some difficulty. Pikachu only appear in two specific locations in the game (Route 1 and Hau'oli City) and then only under one specific gameplay condition – when a

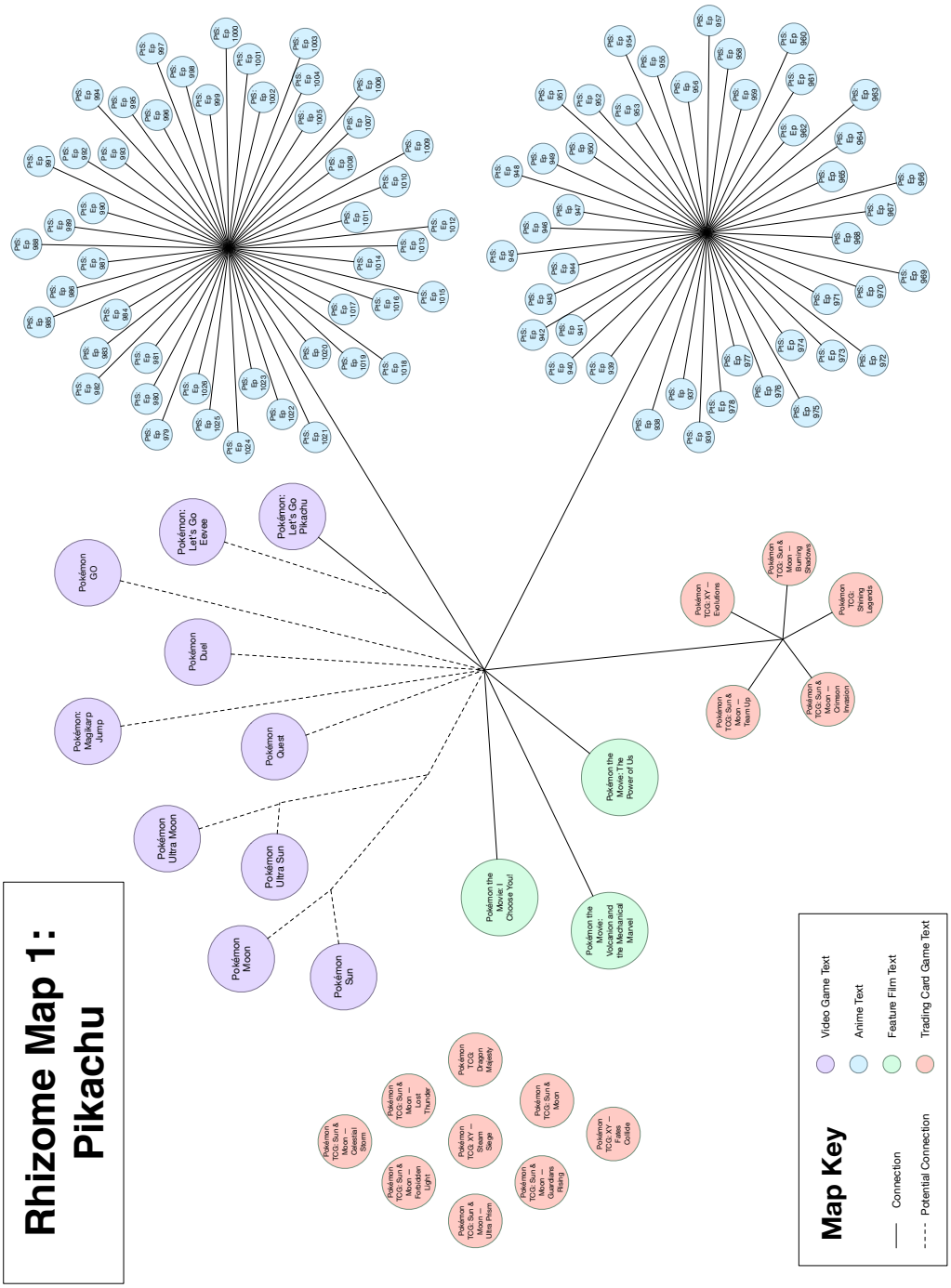

Figure 2: Rhizome Map 1: Pikachu

Pokémon being battled calls for help and a Pikachu joins the encounter. Even when a Pokémon calls for help, it is not guaranteed that another Pokémon will appear and even should another Pokémon appear it is unlikely to be a Pikachu.

There is a more reliable way for a player to get their own Pikachu in these games: by capturing the Pokémon Pichu and then evolving it into a Pikachu by increasing its in-game friendship value and then leveling it up. This is still a somewhat difficult task. Pichu is a rare spawn in the game –appearing in limited parts of two locations, and only representing five percent of the spawns in those areas. (Serebii.net Pokédex Locations - #172 Pichu) Players unfamiliar with the game's mechanics may easily miss encountering a Pichu or, even if they do find a Pichu, fail to catch it, or when they catch it, not know how to evolve it into a Pikachu. Furthermore, it is possible, although unlikely, that because of how the game randomly generates Pokémon spawns using statistical probability percentages, that a Pichu (or a Pikachu) never spawns in the game.

Even if they do not capture their own Pikachu, there are some guaranteed ways that players can at least interact with a Pikachu within these games narratives. For example there is a "celebrity" Pikachu named Chuuster in the lobby of the Hano Grand Resort that players can meet and interact with. Similarly, there is a Pikachu themed nature preserve called Pikachu Valley in *Pokémon Ultra Sun* and *Pokémon Ultra Moon* where players can interact with (but not battle or capture) wild Pikachu. However, the game can be narratively completed without these encounters. While it would be unusual to complete the game's story without ever encountering a Pikachu at all, it is definitely possible. In essence, a player who wants to obtain their very own Pikachu in these games may not be able because of poor random number generation and may not even see a

Pikachu even though they completed the game, because they did not explore certain, optional parts of the game world.

In the other video games from this generation, Pikachu's presence is even more questionable. When *Pokémon GO* was first released in July 2016, Pikachu was both a sought after and difficult to find Pokémon, to the point that one of the first book-length print guides for the game (published July 26, 2016 — less than a month after the game's release) was subtitled "How to Catch Pikachu." (Markus) Likewise, a 2016 news article in *The Guardian* answered the question "Where do I find Pikachu?" before even discussing mechanics central to the game like Pokémon Gyms and Pokéstops. (Bastow) *Pokémon Duel* and *Pokémon Quest* are similar; while Pikachu can be obtained in these games, it is a rare spawn and the games can be narratively completed without ever obtaining or encountering one. In *Pokémon: Magikarp Jump*, the only playable Pokémon at all is Magikarp. Other Pokémon do appear to "watch" the battles – which is simply two Magikarp competing to see which can jump higher. In this game Pikachu appears in the game as a support Pokémon, meaning that it can be chosen to "cheer" for the player's Magikarp and bestow an in-game benefit in the competition. While Pikachu nominally appears in *Pokémon: Magikarp Jump,* and so is recorded as a rhizomatic connection for the purpose of this study, there can be some debate on whether a connection can be made between a game where Pikachu is a fully capturable Pokémon that the player can use in battle versus a game where Pikachu is just an optional background element.

With the exception of *Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu* there is no guarantee that any player of any of the video games will catch or even encounter a Pikachu. While it is likely they will, depending upon how thoroughly they explore a game's world or how

often they play, it is possible that a player could spend many hours engaged with these games and never even see, much less capture a Pikachu. Unlike the films or television shows where it is clearly a binary – either Pikachu is part of the text on not – for video games this is not clear. One cannot say with clear certainty that Pikachu is definitively part of any of these texts. Instead, the best that can be said is that there is a possibility of Pikachu. Depending on varying encounter percentages in different games, there is a higher Pikachu potential in some games than others. Similar to Schrodinger's cat, we cannot determine whether Pikachu is in any specific video game text until the game is played. Even then, we only know if Pikachu is in the text for *that* specific player and playthrough – the next run could be an entirely Pikachu-free game experience.

Based on the parameters set for this study, Pikachu does not appear in all of the trading card game texts under scrutiny. Of the 14 *Pokémon Trading Card Game* expansion sets under analysis, Pikachu cards only appear in five of those sets. However, similar to our video game analysis, this basic observation warrants more discussion. Just as trying to determine whether Pikachu appeared in a particular video game led to questions concerning how video game texts are read or experienced by different audience members, determining whether Pikachu appears in a specific card game text leads to problematizing what constitutes a specific text or what a specific rhizomatic node might be. When determining the individual texts under analysis, I determined that each set release of the card game was a separate text. While one individual card could not be used by itself to play the card game, an expansion release of one set of cards could. If a player chose to limit themselves to buying only packs of cards from one specific release set they could create a playable deck using cards they obtain from that single set to play the game.

For example, if a player wanted to, they could create a fully playable deck using only cards from the *Pokémon Trading Card Game: Sun & Moon – Guardians Rising* expansion set. The trading card game is played as a competition between two players, each with a constructed deck of 60 cards that are a combination of: Pokémon cards; support cards such as items, trainers, or stadiums; and energy cards.

While a player could theoretically construct a deck using only cards from the *Guardians Rising* expansion set, in practice few players would likely do this. Many core, basic-use cards that a player would need to make a competitive deck are simply not part of each expansion. During the seventh generation, when new expansion sets were released, a pre-built, purchasable, playable deck was also released as part of each expansion. This allowed new players to learn the game by being able to purchase a strategically viable deck that they could use as-is and then customize by adding and removing cards obtained through trade or purchase. Notably these pre-built decks, each released alongside an expansion set and prominently featuring the more powerful Pokémon cards included in that expansion set, also contained cards from outside that expansion. For example, two pre-built decks were released with the *Guardians Rising* expansion, "Hidden Moon" and "Steel Sun." These decks each prominently featured the "legendary" Pokémon that was also featured on the box art of the Sun and Moon video games, Lunala and Solgaleo. These legendary Pokémon cards were the centerpieces of this trading card game expansion set, being prominently featured on the card boxes and packs for purchase. Notably, of the 25 unique cards in each of these pre-built deck, 11 were NOT from the *Guardians Rising* expansion, but instead came from previously release trading card sets. Even more noteworthy, five of the unique cards in the "Hidden

Moon" deck ("Energy Retrieval," "Potion," "Switch," "Psychic Energy," and "Fire Energy") and three of the unique cards in the "Steel Sun" deck ("Energy Retrieval," "Switch," and "Psychic Energy") originated in the very first 1999 iteration of the *Pokémon Trading Card* Game. While it is possible to fully create a playable deck for the *Pokémon Trading Card Game* using only cards from one expansion, most players do not do this, but instead combine cards from multiple sets to create the best deck possible. In building competitive trading card game decks, which are in many ways, the key text when examining the trading card game, not even the publishers of the game limited themselves to cards from a single expansion, even when creating decks to promote said expansion. All of the pre-built promotional decks released during the time of this study needed to utilize cards from more than one expansion, some of which have been rereleased and reprinted since the first iteration of the trading card game in 1999.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the observation of how textual definitions shift depending upon what is being mapped, is somewhat of an irrelevant aside. Ultimately, when mapping these texts, if there was a "Pikachu" card in an expansion set it was connected to the hypothetical rhizome map and if there was not, it was not linked. However, this discussion is important because it shows that when rhizomatically mapping a textual system, questions will be raised concerning the boundaries and definitions of what is being mapped. While textual and definitional boundaries may appear clear before mapping connections between texts, those boundaries might shift as different maps are created and explored. This is not an unanticipated challenge. In her discussion of agential realism Karen Barad says that "in contrast to a typical 'interaction,' which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-

action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-actions." (33) Put another way, and as it relates to this study, the texts being mapped do not really significantly exist until they connect to other texts – an ontological paradox acknowledged by Barad who notes that "the notion of intra-action constitutes a radical reworking of the traditional notion of causality." (33) When changing the basis of how we draw maps we are, in essence, changing the apparatus of the study and as Barad says, "apparatuses are not mere observing instruments but boundary-drawing practices—specific material (re)configurings of the world." (140) Understood this way, a lack of textual boundary reconfiguration in our proposed rhizomatic maps indicates that we are not seeing actual intra-active connection between our texts.

If we limit our connection to only trading card game expansions that have a "Pikachu" card included, we still have an issue of potentiality versus actuality, akin the video game texts discussed earlier. For the trading card game players who build decks using an expansion set with a "Pikachu" card in it or those who battle another player who did so, Pikachu is always potentially part of their text. One part of this potentiality is whether the player actually has a Pikachu card to add to their deck. Even if a Pikachu card is potentially available in an expansion set, one specific card is not statistically guaranteed or even likely to be obtained in any purchased pack. Theoretically, a player could purchase many, many card packs and never pull the Pikachu card they desire. Assuming that a player is lucky enough to draw a Pikachu card (or trade for it, or purchase it as a single card), at any point they could remove one card from their deck of 60 and add a Pikachu card. Similar to how the video game player has no guarantee of encountering or not encountering a Pikachu when playing the game, the trading card

game player at any point could add a Pikachu to their deck, or face another player with a Pikachu in their deck. Likewise, if a player chooses to, they could never add a specific card to their deck and never see that card in play, even if it is available and sought after in an expansion set being used to build a deck. In building this first map, the potential of Pikachu was enough for me to create a rhizomatic connection between texts, but as the above discussion shows, this linking is more complicated and more problematic than it initially appears.

It is also worth discussing whether there is a difference between the species Pikachu, and the character Pikachu. My analysis so far has equated these two. However, the Pikachu featured in the films and television series is a specific Pikachu with a specific personality and character traits. This Pikachu is the main partner Pokémon of Ash, the film and television series protagonist. A recurring plot point throughout the television series is that Team Rocket, one of the main antagonists of the series want to steal that specific Pikachu because it is special and more powerful. When my analysis notes that Pikachu appears in every episode of the television show and film franchise, it is not *a* Pikachu I am referring to, but this specific Pikachu. Does it make sense to draw a rhizomatic link between a specific character's partner Pokémon that has a unique personality and a random Pikachu that a player in the video game catches? This link is akin to saying that there is a link between two works because they both feature humans.

After tracing and analyzing these connection, a rhizomatic map cannot be created that links the texts under analysis based on a shared character. At a base level, this mapping does not work because there is not one single character or Pokémon that appears across all texts and, specific to this mapping, because of the absence of Pikachu in a

number of the trading card game expansions. At a more complex level, there are questions whether just the potential of encountering a Pikachu (or any other specific Pokémon) in a given game is enough to sustain the creation of a rhizomatic link.

Ultimately, even if there was a Pokémon that existed in all the texts under analysis, this would still, not by itself, create a rhizomatic textual structure. In other words, if we look at all the texts that do have Pikachu and are connected in this map, would those texts form a rhizomatic system based on their shared Pikachu-ness? The answer to this is no – simply sharing a character, location or other singular textual element does not create a true meaningful connection between texts. Barad argues that reality is defined primarily by the connections between things, more so than the things being connected. When defining meaningful connections, Barad focuses on intra-action and phenomena. The connections that build rhizomatic systems are intra-actions between texts, and using Barad's framework where, "'intra-actions' *signifies the mutual construction of entangled agencies,*" there is no such construction between texts that simply share an element. (33) We can look at the assemblage of texts that are united by the fact that they both contain Pikachu, but there is no intra-action between those texts as there is no meaningful recontextualization when those two texts link. Two texts sharing the same species of Pokémon does not create any new meanings or generate any real insight by virtue of both having a Pikachu appear somewhere in their narrative or ludic space. Furthermore, Barad says, "the primary ontological unit is not independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties but rather *phenomena*," which they define by saying, "phenomena are the ontological inseparability/entanglement of intra-acting agencies" (139) For the majority of the texts under analysis, linking an anime episode to a

video game by virtue of both having a Pikachu in the text does not really redefine the boundaries or entangle either text. One of the key purposes in creating rhizomatic maps is a search for phenomena, with Barad saying "Phenomena are constitutive of reality. Reality is composed not of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but of things-in-phenomena." (140) Simply having any text element shared between two texts will not rise to the level of intra-action and will not generate the reality defining phenomena that this dissertation seeks.

The purpose of the extensive discussion concerning whether the potential of encountering a Pikachu counted as its appearance in a game, or whether there was a difference between linking a specific Pikachu versus Pikachu in general was to highlight the frailty of these connections. The connections between texts in a rhizomatic system define the system. If there is debate around whether a specific textual element even necessarily appeared in the text, then there is no way that any connection based around such an element is significant enough to base a rhizome around. Following Barad's ideas on intra-action, where meaning is created via connection, no single textual element, whether it be a character, setting, game mechanic or object will rise to the level of being the basis for a significant enough connection for which a rhizome would be defined across multiple texts.

Pokémon texts do not form a rhizomatic system and cannot be truly linked or defined by the simple presence of a particular character or element, any more than a grouping of science fiction stories could be seen as forming a rhizomatic structure by virtue of featuring spaceships. For this reason, instead of drawing the map as I did in Map 1, it is more accurate to draw this map as per Map 1A – a series of texts that are not

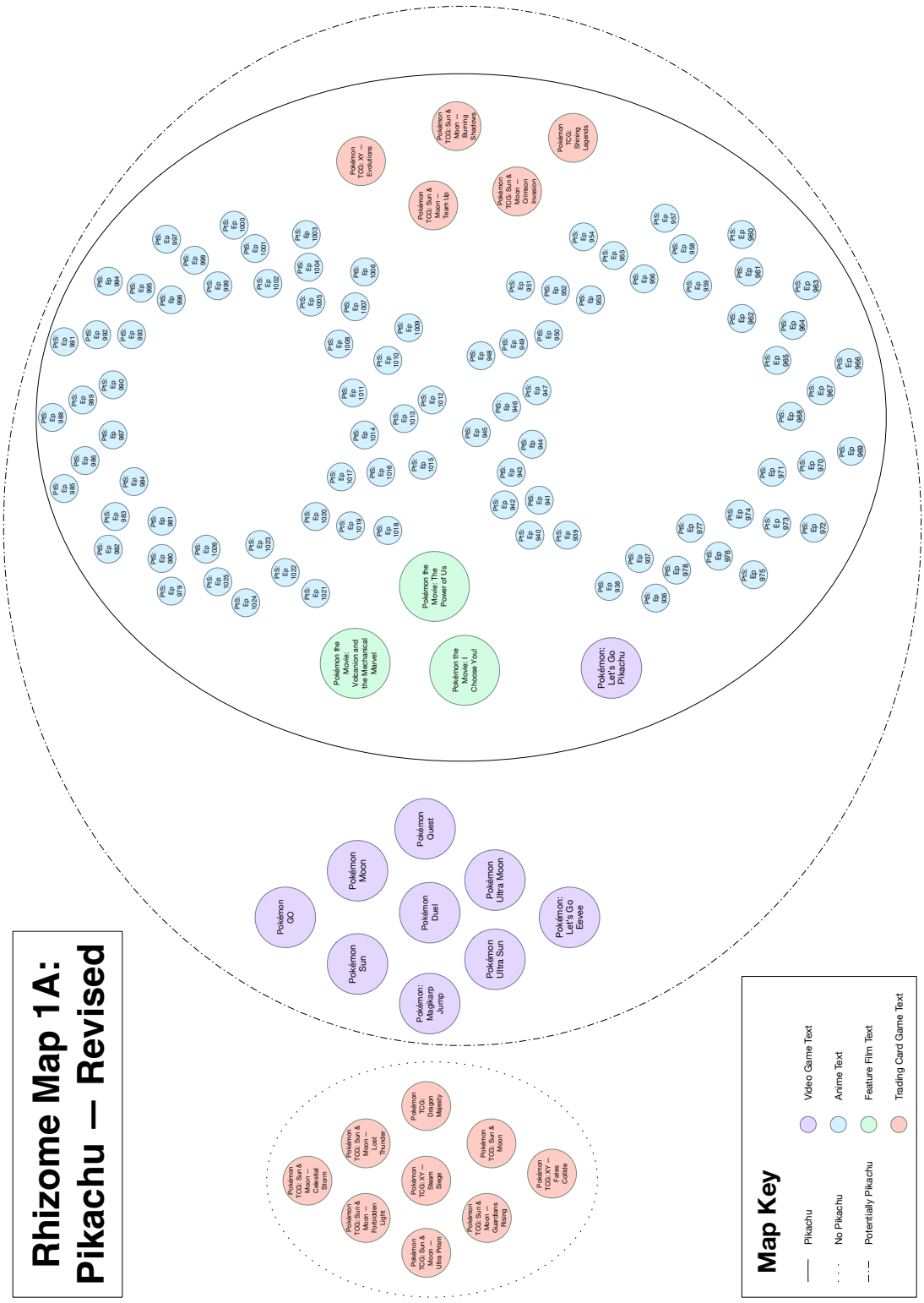

Figure 3: Rhizome Map 1A: Pikachu – Revised

actually linked to each other via true connections but as a series of texts that are mapped together via a Venn diagram. In this mapping we have texts that absolutely include Pikachu, texts that absolutely do not include Pikachu and texts that might include Pikachu. There are elements of the Pokémon franchise that do feature in all texts ranging from specific elements like Pokéballs (the tools by which Pokémon are stored and captured) to the concept of Pokémon themselves (which was the basis of my delineating which texts are included in this study). While a circle could be drawn around all the texts under analysis on the basis that they all feature Pokéballs, the connection formed by these shared elements do not even rise to the level of the modernist maps that Porter and Sullivan discussed and they certainly do not constitute the heterogenous connections that create meaning via intra-action and phenomena which Barad explores. A simple mapping of a shared character, element or mechanic across texts may have value in possibly defining a genre or determining which texts constitute a franchise, but it will serve as the foundation to define a rhizomatic system.

Mapping Strategy 2: Game in Narrative, Narrative in Game

The first map drawn for this analysis failed because it attempted to connect texts via broad, shared textual elements. Finding connections between texts based on the commonality of a basic element, like a character type or setting, while objectively demonstratable creates, at best, a linked system of no real value that is based on interaction and not intra-action. In order to create a map based around meaningful intra-active connections, for my next map (Rhizome Map 2), I looked toward the heterogeneity characteristic of the rhizome which Deleuze and Guattari say is the idea that “traits are

not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature." (21) One of the characteristics of the Pokémon franchise is that it often presents a traditional narrative element ludically in a game text, and conversely present ludic elements from the game texts in a narrative work. For example, in the anime episode, "Alola to New Adventure!", the first episode of the television series under analysis, the show's protagonist Ash Ketchum sees another character's Pokémon use a Z-Move, one of the new mechanics introduced in the seventh generation of Pokémon video games. What the move is, how it is used and what in-game item is necessary in order to use this move are all explained to both Ash and the audience narratively through character dialogue. These mechanics are explained in a way which temporarily stops the narrative flow and works more as a hint for video game players than it does as an organic story element. In a similar way, in the next episode, "The Guardian's Challenge!" Ash is battling a powerful Pokémon named Tapu Koko, one of the Island Guardian Pokémon, who uses a move called Electric Terrain. Right after using this move, Professor Kukui says "That's Electric Terrain." Another character then shouts, "Hey Ash! Electric-type moves become more powerful while Electric Terrain is in effect!" Again, this detail is presented as an aside, with the battle temporarily paused for the move to be explained. This piece of information is a direct connection to multiple video game texts and has heightened relevance to audience members who play one of the ludic iterations of Pokémon. This reference to a game mechanic does not really serve a narrative purpose, and actually temporarily pauses and diverts the narrative flow. Notably, every single narrative text of the Pokémon generation under analysis, including every episode of the television series and every Pokémon feature film makes overt references to a ludic aspect of the franchise, either by: referencing the name of a move;

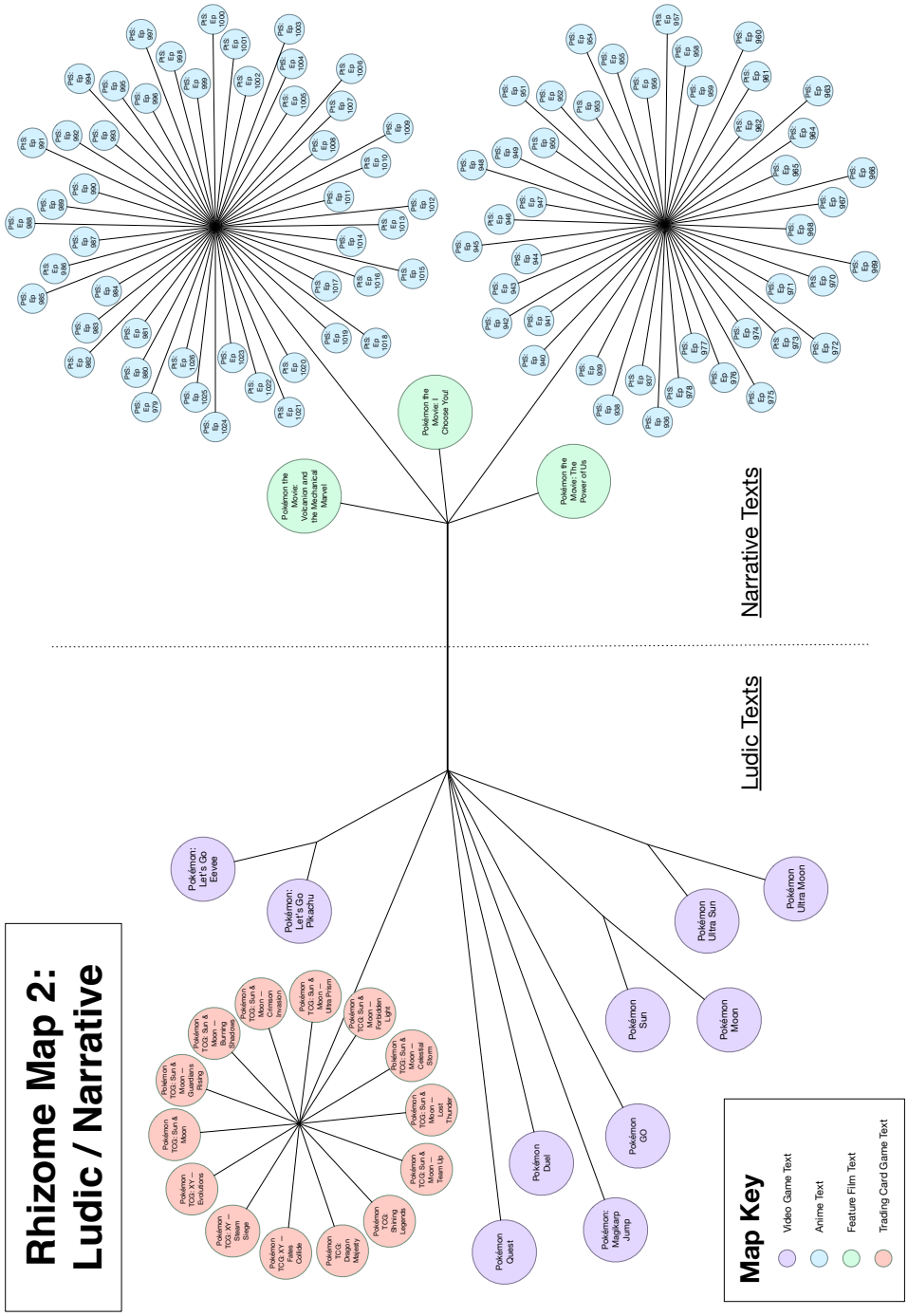

Figure 4: Rhizome Map 2: Ludic / Narrative

detailing a game mechanic; describing the use of in-game items; or simply noting that a specific move is strong or weak against a specific type of Pokémon.

On the other side of this dynamic, the more ludic parts of the Pokémon franchise consistently present narrative elements in their texts. Furthermore, these narrative elements are integrated into the game texts in a way that creates connections beyond a simplistic sharing of a character or setting, creating more complex connections that meld narrative elements organically with the ludic texts. One example can be seen through the same characters featured in both the television show and the mainline video games. These characters share the same names, character design (clothing and appearance), personality traits, and favorite Pokémon regardless of the narrative or ludic text they appear in. As an example, the character Mallow is present in all the Alola-set texts, including the video games, trading card game and anime. In all of these modalities, the character looks exactly the same, a girl wearing a pink flower in her long green hair. In all modalities, she favors grass-type Pokémon, and is frequently shown alongside the Pokémon Steenee. When battled by the player in the mainline video games, Steenee is her final ace Pokémon, while in the anime we actually see Mallow evolve her Steenee from a Bounsweet in the episode, "A Seasoned Search." The main plot of this episode is Mallow and Ash searching for Yellow Nectar so Mallow can cook "Legendary Alolan Stew," for her friends. This aligns to a storyline in the Alolan-set video games where Mallow challenges the player to gather various ingredients to cook the "Mallow Special," a dish which attracts a boss Pokémon to further the game's plot progression.

Shared characters also form the basis of connection between the trading card game texts and the video game and narrative texts. Most of the main characters of the

anime narrative are featured on a card in the Pokémon Trading Card Game. For example, in the 2017 *Pokémon Trading Card Game* expansion *Burning Shadows*, the card "Kiawe" was introduced, referencing the fire-type trainer Kiawe who is featured in both video game and narrative texts. This card allows a player to search their deck for and immediately add four fire energy to one of their Pokémon, but forces them to immediately end their turn after doing so. Beyond featuring art that directly matches the image of how this character appears in both the anime and Alolan-based video games, the in-game usage of the card references one of his basic character traits, that he uses fire-based Pokémon which metaphorically matches his brash personality. While the *Pokémon Trading Card Game* has relatively few narrative elements, a player could create an imaginative play-based scenario using this card. In doing so, the card game battle becomes an extension of the narrative elements of the rest of the franchise – just as Kiawe helps fire Pokémon users throughout various parts of the anime and video game narratives, so too does he help a trading card game player who chooses to use Kiawe's beloved fire Pokémon. Some theorists have gone so far as to argue that the trading cards are more closely linked to the anime than they are to the video games, with Gilles Brougére saying:

> Collecting and trading the cards and playing the card game are more tangible ways of imitating the actions of the trainers in the TV series than is possible on the Game Boy. I would suggest that the success of the cards is primarily due to their ability to reproduce elements of the TV series. (203)

The *Pokémon Trading Card Game* is directly connected to the narrative Pokémon texts with every expansion featuring characters, locations and and even specific notable items

from the narrative texts including the mainline video games, the anime television series and the feature films.

One potential concern with tracing links between narrative and game elements is that these connections are not consistent or necessarily similar. The specific ludic element that creates a connection between two texts in one instance is not the exact same in another instance. For example we can draw a connection between the anime episode, "A Plethora of Pikachu!" and the Alolan-set video games when Ash watches a different trainer's Pikachu use the special, electric-type, Z-Move Catastropika. After seeing this, Mimo says "Pikachu should be able to use it too," to which Rotom Dex replies, "it can't be used until a Pikachu pika learns the Volt-Tackle move first." To audience members who play the Alolan-set video games, this lets them know a number of things including: Pikachu can learn a unique Z-Move called Catastropika; this move is an electric-type move; and that a Pikachu needs to learn the move Volt Tackle in order to use this new Z-Move. Likewise, the feature film: *Pokémon the Movie: I Choose You* connects to the same mainline video games by, in the opening of the film, showing a battle between Gengar and Blastoise, a battle that references the opening of the both very first Pokémon video games, and the very first episode of the anime. During this battle, after Blastoise attacks Gengar, the battle announcer says "That was an ice beam, and Gengar is frozen! What will the trainer do now?" This narratively presents a number game elements including: that Blastoise, a water-type Pokémon can learn the ice-type move Ice Beam; that ice-type moves are effective against Gengar; and that an Ice Beam can cause other Pokémon to become frozen. However, because these are different moves, the question is raised of whether this constitutes enough similarity to construct a rhizomatic grouping. Is

it one rhizome when some texts are connected via the move Catastropika while other are connected via the move Ice Beam, or should this be traced as two different rhizomes based on different moves?

The question of how specific a connection needs to be to form a single rhizomatic system becomes more problematic when the numerous connections in a single rhizome are each based around a different element – for while every video game text can be linked to every narrative text, almost none of these connections will be based around the same element. This becomes even more complicated when we begin tracing connections, not just based not around specific Pokémon moves, or Pokémon moves in general, but based on wider ludic elements. While many of the connections in this map focus on the narrativization of a Pokémon move, others are based on narratively presenting in-game objects (as when Electrium-Z is first shown in the anime episode, "Trial and Tribulation") game mechanics (like when evolution is presented in the episode, "A Seasoned Search") or game features (such as when Totem Pokémon are introduced in the episode "To Top a Totem"). These elements vary widely enough that a criticism could be made that tracing different game elements is actually tracing different rhizomes. However, restraining rhizomatic connections to only exact matches goes against Deleuze and Guattari's characteristic of heterogeneity and risks creating a rhizome that is overly simplistic and prescriptive, akin to the failed character-based rhizome explored earlier in this chapter. In other words, even if there was a single, specific game mechanic presented in every narrative text and a corresponding single, specific narrative attribute presented in every game text, then the connections that formed this rhizome would not have any aspect of heterogeneity and would most likely be so basic as to not have merit or

meaning, similar to a rhizome drawn around a shared character. The value in tracing a rhizome based on how elements from different modalities appear in other modalities is that it allows the potential rhizome to generate useful insights for researchers. Put another way, the basis of this objection is that the connections between texts are not homogeneous enough. The response to this potential criticism is that one of the defining characteristics of the rhizome is that the connections can be heterogenous.

Even with this concern addressed, this rhizomatic map ultimately fails for a number of reasons. One problem in drawing this rhizomatic map is that many of the texts under analysis feature such scant narrative that they have difficulty in presenting any narrative elements in a ludic manner. What narrative they do present is different enough from the majority of texts under analysis as to make drawing connections to other texts difficult, at best. The narrative elements of the app-based Pokémon games *Pokémon: Magikarp Jump* and *Pokémon Duel* consist of only a tiny sliver of a frame story to explain the basic tournament competition setup that each of the these games use to measure progress. Both of these texts are set in completely different locations (Hoppy Town for *Pokémon: Magikarp Jump* and Carmonte Island for *Pokémon Duel*) than all of the other texts in this generation of game, which mostly take place in the Alola region. Similarly, while both of these games feature a simplistic narrative centered around trying to win a competitive tournament, and feature supporting characters who aid and/or compete against the player in their journey (i.e. Mayor Karp and Dr. Splash in *Pokémon: Magikarp Jump* or Luca and Master Rosé in *Pokémon Duel)* these characters are unique to these texts with no characters from the mainline game, anime, or films appearing in these app-based games and no characters from these app-based games appearing in any

other Pokémon text before or since. Even the gameplay mechanics of these games are somewhat unique. *Pokémon: Magikarp Jump's* gameplay is a competition based around which player's fish Pokémon Magikarp can jump higher based on a single numeric stat, while *Pokémon Duel* is a boardgame-based representation of Pokémon battling. Both of these versions of Pokémon share aspects with other game texts in the franchise (for example using berries to help train Pokémon in *Pokémon: Magikarp Jump* and typings and matchups as a key characteristic of battling in *Pokémon Duel)* but ultimately have no substantive connection to the narratives of any of the other texts of this Pokémon generation.

The other app-based Pokémon games of this generation feature even less narrative elements and hence less connection to the predominantly narrative texts under analysis. *Pokémon Quest* takes place on Tumblecube Island which, like the other app-based games, is a new and unique location. The basic narrative of this game centers around exploring the island, collecting new and powerful Pokémon to unlock new regions of the map, which can then be explored to obtain new and more powerful Pokémon to unlock new regions of the map. There is a linear story with the player eventually encountering Mewtwo, the final boss Pokémon who has been manipulating the character's journey in order to win its freedom. However, after defeating Mewtwo, players simply gain access to Happenstance Island, a new region of the map which can then be explored to obtain new and more powerful Pokémon. Notably, the terrain of this new island changes every time it is visited, allowing this game to theoretically be played ad infinitum or at least until all possible Pokémon have been captured and/or trained to become fully leveled and powered up. There are no other characters or even trainers in this game and no traditional

battles between teams of Pokémon, or other trainers, only battles with wild, trainer-less Pokémon, leaving only scant space for a basic frame narrative to emerge. In sharing some basic game mechanics (such as typings and moves) with the other ludic texts *Pokémon Quest* does link to the other texts under analysis. However, there is no link to any of the larger shared narrative throughlines found in any of the anime or film texts.

Pokémon GO, while being one of the most popular texts in this (or any other) generation of Pokémon has the fewest narrative elements of any text under analysis. While there are a few characters in this game (Professor Willow and the team leaders Candela, Spark and Blanche), upon initial release these characters served no plot purpose beyond motivating the in-game tutorials which explained how the game mechanics worked. As with the other app-based games, these characters are unique to *Pokémon GO*, and make no appearance in any other Pokémon text. There is no linear narrative plot progression in *Pokémon GO* beyond earning experience points and levels via capturing and battling Pokémon. Instead, the novelty of the game is in its augmented reality aspect that allow players to interact and catch Pokémon in actual lived, real-world spaces. As a result of this real-world connection, *Pokémon GO* is one the few Pokémon texts that is not specifically set in any fictional Pokémon region. The central focus of the game is capturing and leveling up Pokémon, and at its initial release, the only way players could even somewhat battle another character was by leaving a Pokémon in a static gym which players from another team could fight. Notably, a player has no ability to control Pokémon left in gyms, meaning these battles are not really between two players, but instead between a player and an AI using a player's Pokémon. Not until July 2017, a year after the game's initial release, could players work together to catch more powerful

Pokémon in raids and not until November 2018 could players battle each other directly. (Pokémon GO / Version History)

Even with these additions, there really was, and still is, no strong narrative aspect to *Pokémon GO*. While *Pokémon Quest* has a final boss that defined some sort of an end to the story progression, which is conveyed to the player via game credits rolling after beating this boss, the closest *Pokémon GO* comes to this is an arbitrary player level cap of 40 (which was later raised to 50 in 2021). Gaining levels in *Pokémon GO* does not further any sort of plot progression nor does it unlock any new content beyond cosmetic attributes like clothes for an in-game avatar. The closest *Pokémon GO* comes to having any narrative elements is the ability to do in-game " research," a feature not found in the original release, but added to the game in March 2018. This game feature unlocks the ability to capture special Pokémon or gain rare items via completing tasks like capturing a certain number of Pokémon of a certain type or completing a specified number of special Pokéball throws. These research events are presented via a short narrative sketch, usually Professor Willow assigning the player a task. For example, during a Halloween themed research event in 2018, the Professor shared this dialogue:

> Oh, Player! You've dropped by just in time. As I was out on my regular walk one evening, I stumbled upon this odd stone. Something told me to bring it back to my lab for further research, and ever since then, strange things have been happening. Papers shifting around, water glasses tipping all by themselves... When I tried using my computer to research it, I got an error message with the number 108 flashing! Player, can you help gather some data on nearby Ghost-type Pokémon? I have to believe we can solve these spooky occurrences with science!

At this point Professor Willow asks the player to: catch 10 Ghost-type Pokémon; make 8 great throws; and use 108 berries to help catch Pokémon. Once this is accomplished, another series of tasks are given the player which once completed will allow the player a chance to capture the rare Pokémon Spiritomb. As a demonstration of the lack of any real long-term story progression, this same research event, with the exact same text and tasks repeated verbatim, was used a year later in 2019. Even with the eventual addition of minor narrative aspects to *Pokémon GO*, the game still has no real connection to the other more predominantly narrative Pokémon texts as it shares no characters, setting or plot with any other Pokémon text.

The app-based Pokémon game texts have only one direction of connection with the franchise narrative texts. While each of the app-based game texts feature enough Pokémon game mechanics to trace a narrative to ludic connection (as in when a game mechanic is presented in an episode of the anime), there is no corresponding ludic to narrative connection for these texts. None of these apps share characters or even a settings with any other text, making a link via these narrative elements impossible. When the anime references how one Pokémon type is strong against another, that piece of information works across all Pokémon texts. However, since these texts take place in different settings, with different characters, and different frame stories there is no connection from the narrative rich texts like the anime or films to these app-based games with minimal narrative.

Based on this analysis, the initial tracing of Rhizomatic Map 2 fails as an example of rhizomatic mapping. With that said, it is worth discussing this map and the strategy used to create it in order to help elucidate the type of connections necessary to create a

rhizomatic mapping strategy that can succeed. A question worth exploring is: if the app-based texts that are set in their own unique locations were removed, could we then create a rhizomatic grouping of the remaining texts? Looking at these texts and their connections, the answer is still no. While most of the texts under analysis are set in the Alola region and feature characters connected to this region, a notable number of texts in this generation do share a setting, but one that is not Alola. The feature film *Pokémon the Movie: I Choose You,* and the games *Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu* and *Pokémon: Let's Go, Eevee* are all set in the Kanto region, the setting of the very first Pokémon texts from 1996. Not only were these texts set in the same location as the first generation of Pokémon texts, they are actually remakes of texts from that generation. The *Let's Go* games are remakes of the original Game Boy game *Pokémon Yellow,* which is itself an update of *Pokémon Blue and Pokémon Red.* All of these games follow the same story, feature the same characters, and share the same narrative plot progression, only with updates, bug fixes and minor tweaks. Similarly, *Pokémon the Movie: I Choose You* is a remake/reimagining of the first few episodes of the anime, recounting how Ash first met Pikachu, the Pokémon who would become his longtime traveling companion.

Similar to the app-based games, there is a much clearer range of connections from the narrative Pokémon texts to the game texts. The game texts share similar enough game mechanics, that any ludic references in the anime or feature films are almost always fully applicable to any and all of the games texts, even if those texts feature different characters or are set in a different location. However, also similar to the app-based games, there are difficulties in connecting the narrative elements of the Alola-set texts to the *Let's Go* games or *Pokémon the Movie: I Choose You,* which are both set in the Kanto

region. These Kanto-based texts feature stronger connections to the Pokémon texts from more than twenty years ago, such as the first seasons of the anime, than they do with more contemporary texts, because these older texts share both characters and a setting with the remade games. Similarly, three of the trading card game expansions under analysis: *Pokémon Trading Card Game: XY – Fates Collide, Pokémon Trading Card Game: XY – Steam Siege* and *Pokémon Trading Card Game: XY – Evolutions* as well as the feature film *Pokémon the Movie: Volcanion and the Mechanical Marvel* all feature characters, Pokémon, and locations from the Kalos region. What this means for our analysis, and one of the key reasons why this map eventually fails in creating a rhizomatic connection, is that we see not the emergence of one rhizome among these texts but multiple potential rhizomes, each centered around different shared locations and shared characters. The Alola based texts create a bi-directional grouping where the Alola set narrative texts connect to the Alola set game texts. Similarly, the Kanto and Kalos based texts each create a bidirectional grouping between themselves as well.

Going further down this route, the next question is whether a rhizome could be mapped based on a shared location? Could we trace one rhizome across all the Kalos based texts and another rhizome across all of the Alola based texts? Instead of defining the texts based on release date, as this study did, could this study be conducted based on shared fictional locations? The answer to this question is again no, for two key reasons. First is that the links between the ludic texts and between the narrative texts have the same flaws as the character based map explored earlier. In this proposed mapping, the game texts are connected to the game texts simply based on being game texts and the narrative texts are connected to the narrative texts because they are narrative texts. These

connections are not substantial and certainly not intra-active. The theory behind the creation of this second mapping strategy was an exploration of heterogenous connections between ludic and narrative texts and while this strategy does provide useful insight into how similar elements are presented in different modalities, it assumes and presupposes that all of the narrative texts and all of the game based texts are already linked. However, these presupposed connections are not present, and any assumed link are based on shared characters, settings, game mechanics or story – elements that our first Pikachu-based mapping showed are not adequate foundations for rhizomatic connections. Even if there was some bi-directional connection between all the narrative texts and all the ludic texts, there still would not be rhizomatic connections between ludic and ludic texts or from narrative to narrative texts, meaning *all* of the texts under analysis are not linked and the definition of a rhizome is not met. This mapping strategy, at best connects each ludic text to every narrative text without connecting to any other ludic text and connects each narrative text to every ludic text without connecting to any other narrative text.

A second major point of failure in this mapping strategy is its dependence upon pre-defining a text as either ludic or narrative before the mapping process begins, a binary that cannot be easily defined for many of the texts under. For example, one of the notable aspects of the mainline Pokémon games is that they are heavily narrative focused, to the point that they are more like story-based role playing games than they are competitive, fighting games. The story in these games is linear and is experienced in the same order for each player. There is no strong justification to define the mainline Pokémon games as ludic texts and not narrative texts. However the paradigm used to create this rhizomatic map demands a definition of texts as either one or the other. A fault

with a mapping system based around ludic versus narrative elements is that this mapping ideology presupposes the nature of these texts as being ludic or narrative and so creates a map that simply reflects this presupposition. The goal of this dissertation is to generate new insights into texts and textual systems. Creating mapping systems with pre-determined textual definitions and boundaries will either fail outright or create a rhizomatic grouping that while valid is not useful, simply reflecting back any inherent textual presuppositions. Hence, the second rhizomatic map created shows groupings of texts based on location and which ones are ludic and which ones are narratives – data and insight we had at the beginning of this mapping process. The central meaning and usefulness of this map is rooted in an exploration of the difference between the ludic and narrative aspects of the texts and how these differing modalities explore similar elements. However, to generate this map, these meanings and identities (ludic and narrative) had to be established *before* the connections based on these traits were generated. In essence the texts already are defined, with their boundaries established before any connections are formed. This goes against Barad's definition of intra-action, which says the boundaries of elements in an intra-active system are not pre-existent and only emerge after elements link within a system and generate phenomenon.

In short, this second rhizomatic map fails for a number of reasons. At a fundamental level it does not link all the texts in the study. While the anime and feature film narrative texts can link to the ludic game texts in a complex, useful way that provides some level of insight by virtue of all the ludic texts sharing related gameplay mechanics, not all the ludic texts can reciprocally connect to the narrative texts. Some of the game texts under analysis feature so little narrative that there is no real way for them

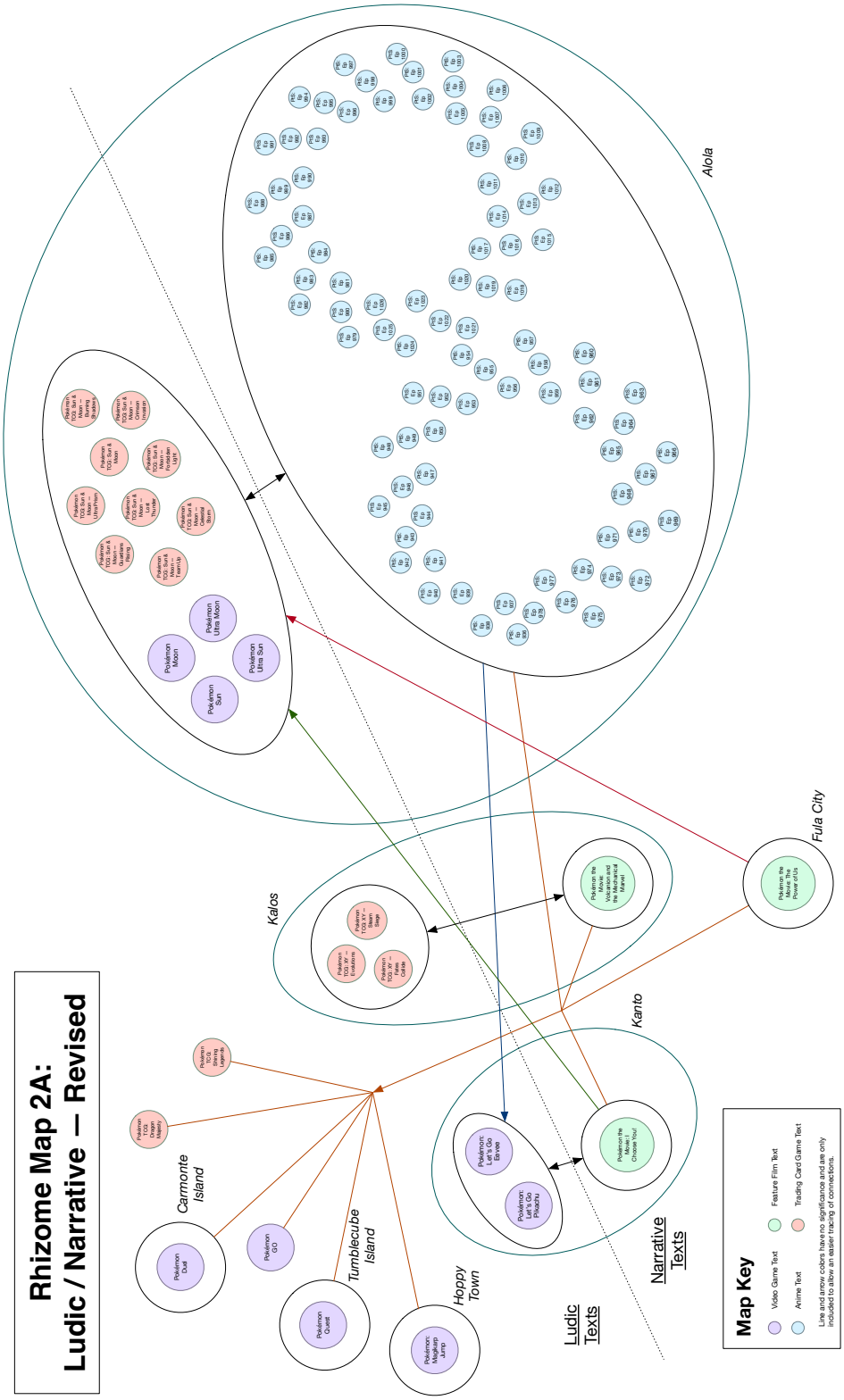

Figure 5:Rhizome Map 2A: – Ludic/Narrative Revised

to ludically present any definitively narrative element found in other texts. Further complicating this rhizomatic tracing is that it presupposes a linkage between all of the ludic texts and all of the narrative texts, a connection that our first attempt at mapping shows is not adequate. Instead, these texts are linked together via the presupposition that they are already linked by their status as narrative or ludic texts. Even if a bidirectional connection could be found between every narrative text and every ludic text, this rhizomatic map would still fail as it is based on a pre-defined pre-supposition that categorizes every text as either narrative or ludic and hence creates a map that simply reflects that presupposition and offers no real further insight. Such a mapping provides no real value, as what texts are narrative and what texts are ludic was a precondition used to draw connections between texts.

After examining the shortcomings in the second rhizomatic map drawn, a more accurate mapping of the ludic versus narrative textual mapping is better shown in the revised Rhizome Map 2A. Here various texts are grouped, but not linked, by setting and status as narrative or ludic texts. The dividing line between narrative texts and ludic texts remains as a way to show heterogeneous connection. As discussed earlier, there are one way linkages between all the narrative texts to each of the ludic texts. However, the ludic texts only link back toward the narrative texts that share a location, and hence share narrative elements like characters or plot elements. While Map 2A is accurate and more complex than any of the previously presented maps, it is ultimately not showing a true rhizomatic system or rhizome map by virtue of not connecting all the texts in the system to all the other texts in the system.

Mapping Strategy 3: Capturing, Battling, Training

The first map presented in this chapter demonstrated that a rhizomatic map cannot be created using basic, shared elements of a text, such as a character or location. The second map presented showed that a rhizomatic map needs to have a defining aspect which unite connections in a way that is both significant and does not presuppose or predetermine the nature or attributes of either the text or the rhizome. Rhizomatic connections: must be complex enough to generate insight into a textual system beyond highlighting a shared component; may or may not be heterogenous; and should generate intra-active meaning creation for the system and not simply link predetermined, pre-existent meanings.

The first principle of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome is that, "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be." (7) This principle alone makes all the earlier maps traced out in this chapter both irrelevant and inherently non-rhizomatic. Based on a simple reading of this principle, every rhizomatic map will and indeed, **must** look exactly the same – every point connecting every other point. For this study, that map will look like Rhizome Map 3, a map where all the texts link to every other text via a central shared connection point. The connectivity principle of the rhizome means that even attempting to explore different maps is a futile task because every rhizomatic map looks identical. Considering that the multiplicity principle states that a rhizome, "has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and overspills," the number of points in a rhizome are not static or constant. (21) A map of a rhizome cannot even serve the function of showing which path one might take

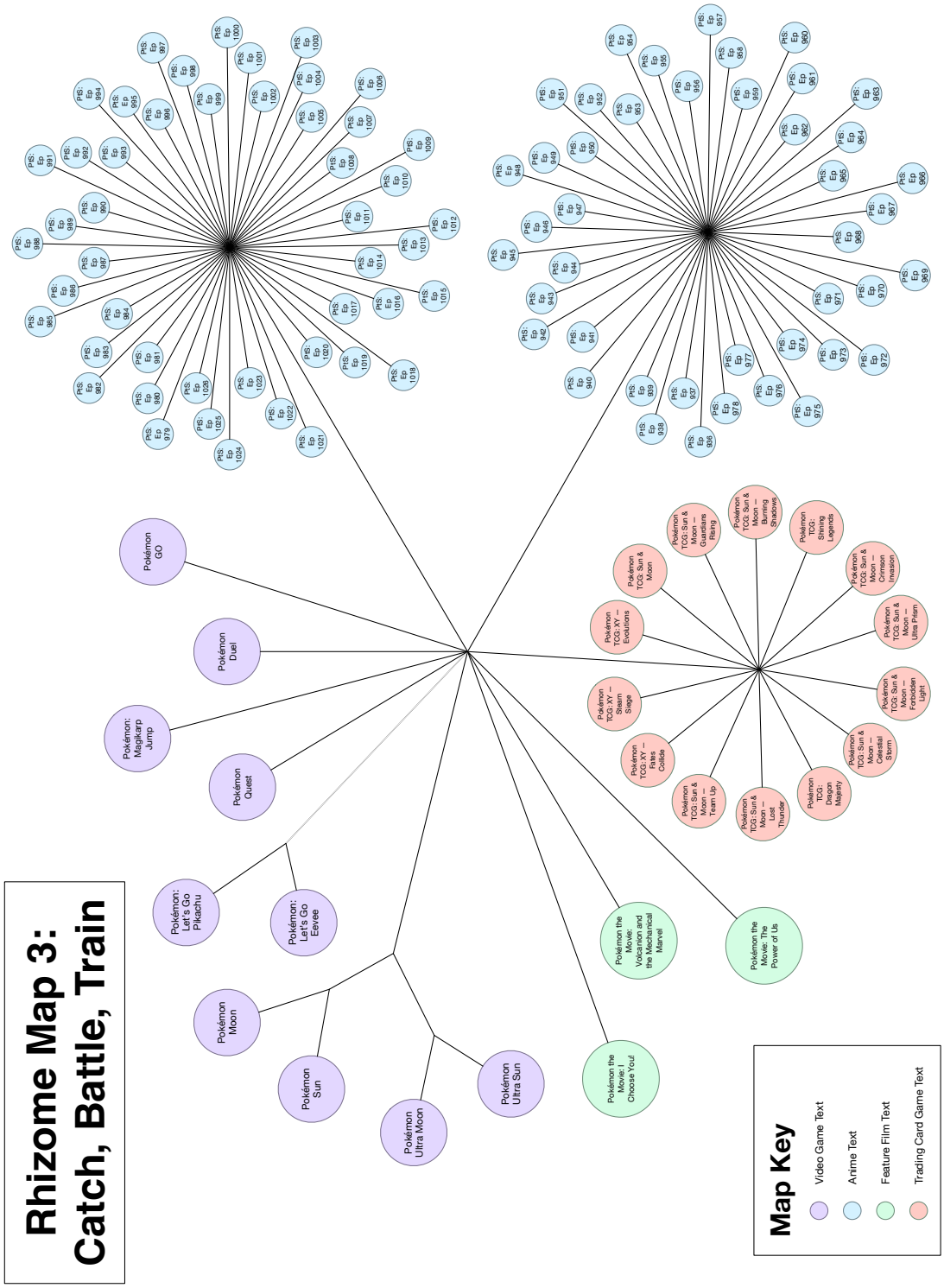

Figure 6: Rhizome Map 3: Catch, Battle, Train

to move from one point to another as these paths are constantly in flux as the rhizome grows, overspills and rearranges itself to create new connections. While a rhizome is always in flux, a map is not and so any rhizomatic map drawn becomes outdated the moment the rhizome inevitably shifts. One is reminded of the quantum physics that inspires Barad's work – one can either know the location of a photon or its momentum, but not both, making any mapping of subatomic particles difficult at best. Based on these principles alone, drawing a map of a rhizome seems to serve no real purpose as every rhizomatic map looks identical and has no real navigational purpose. Instead, these maps are simply snapshots of what a rhizome looked like when the map was created, but almost certainly does not look like anymore, nor will it likely look that way again.

With this said, rhizomes **must** be mapped. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, "the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed," and so creating what may seems at first a useless map is one of the key defining characteristics of a rhizome. (21) The key to these rhizomatic maps is that they are defined not by the physical things they connect, but by the connections between those things. While these maps may at first not seem useful, it is only because we take the metaphor of maps too literally. What we are looking at in this specific Pokémon rhizome is not a landscape of actual or fictional locations but a series of texts intra-acting with each other. What is important about these maps is not where the texts sit in relation to each other (and in fact even implying that one point sits in a position that has a relation to another point is too arborescent for the principle behind the rhizome). Instead, it is the connections that matter and are the motivation behind these maps. While there need to be actual, real texts that can be mapped in relation to each other, what is at the core of this work is the connections that

unite these texts, and the meaning and insights that are created in these connections and in the intra-actions between texts. Put another way, the key aspect of a rhizome is what defines the central point where all texts unite. This matches Barad's idea that "the primary ontological unit is not independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties but rather phenomenon," which are "the ontological inseparability / entanglement of intra-acting 'agencies.'" (139) We are looking for something that connects all the texts and in connecting all the texts generates and reveals phenomenon or meaning through intra-active connection.

As discussed in earlier chapters, a number of theorists (for example, Gerbert, Iwabuchi, Buckingham & Sefton-Green) comment upon the link between Pokémon texts and themes focusing on neoliberal, global, consumer capitalism. Notably, Anne Allison describes the phenomenon of "Pokémon capitalism," the idea that the Pokémon franchise simultaneously promotes capitalism while also serving as a way to mentally and emotionally escape or endure capitalism. While many theorists explore how both pro- and anti-capitalist themes are a central part of the Pokémon franchise, it is not these themes that are the foundation for the rhizomatic links this dissertation strives toward finding. While the work of these theorists could be synthesized in such a way that shared themes might be traced from text to text, this map would absolutely fail to connect all texts for the very same reason the first two mapping strategies failed. Simply identifying a shared theme across texts is no more useful than identifying a shared character across texts. Likewise, identifying the texts that are more or less capitalistic and tracing links to other texts based on how various levels of resistance to or endorsement of capitalism are formulated via connection also fails, because it presupposes and presumes the existence

of these themes in the texts. This leads to a rhizomatic map that fails for the same reasons as a map based on connection between ludicity and narrative.

What links all the texts under analysis is not any shared theme across texts or modalities, but instead a shared basis for and precursor to theme. Specifically, the Pokémon texts are rhizomatically connected via the shared attributes of capturing, training and battling. While every Pokémon text under analysis does not necessarily directly present or incorporate each of these three elements, every text does prominently feature at least one of these elements. Importantly, these are not truly three separate elements, but instead are three aspects of one overarching and uniting foundational principle.

One of the central focuses of the Pokémon franchise is capturing as many different Pokémon as possible during any textual journey. The central motto of the entire Pokémon franchise is, and has always been, "Gotta Catch 'Em All." This motivation is presented in all of the mainline games in this generation (as well as every other generation) by the Pokémon professor giving the player character a Pokédex at the beginning of each game, and asking the player to "fill" it by capturing at least one species of every Pokémon. The Pokédex is a sentient encyclopedia-esque computer that tracks salient details about every Pokémon encountered and caught, including how many different Pokémon a player has caught, and which Pokémon have not been encountered or caught. To encourage capturing as many Pokémon as possible, certain unique rewards are earned when a predetermined number of different Pokémon are caught and recorded in the Pokédex. In *Pokémon Sun* and *Pokémon Moon*, the trainer receives the Shiny Charm (an item that doubles the chance of finding highly sought after, differently colored

Pokémon variants called shinies) only after catching 300 Pokémon and showing their Pokédex to the professor. Every video game text under analysis in this generation has some form of Pokédex as part of the game, tracking and encouraging the collection of all the different Pokémon available in each text. Even *Pokémon: Magikarp Jump*, a game that only allows players to use one specific species of Pokémon has a form of Pokédex, tracking differing patterns and colors of Magikarp. Beyond the overt encouragement to capture more Pokémon by rewarding players in the game when they fill their Pokédex, various shared, game-design elements encourage the capturing and collecting of new Pokémon. In all the games under analysis, players at the beginning of a game can only find and catch weaker Pokémon and to most efficiently move through the game will need to replace those weaker Pokémon with more powerful Pokémon that can only be found later in game. As an example, in *Pokémon Ultra Sun* and *Pokémon Ultra Moon*, one of the first areas a player encounters in which they can catch Pokémon is Route 1. In this area, a level three Pokémon is the highest level Pokémon that can be encountered, and the most powerful Pokémon that can be caught is Buneary, with a base power of 350. In comparison, in the Poni Wilds, an area found toward the end of the game, Pokémon of level 44 can be encountered and caught, with the most powerful Pokémon obtainable being Gastrodon, a Pokémon with a base power of 475. (Poni Wilds – Alola – Serebii.net Pokéarth, Route 1 – Alola – Serebii.net Pokéarth)

While the *Pokémon Trading Card Game* texts do not offer any formal in-text rewards for catching as many different varieties of Pokémon as possible, the desire to collect is still a focus of this iteration of the game. A number of researchers have noted how many players, particularly children, are more interested in collecting the cards than

in actually using them to play the game they are nominally created for. In a study of Massachusetts elementary school children, Joseph Tobin found that "few boys played the trading-card game by the official rules, while the majority . . . played with the cards by holding and looking at the cards, sorting them and discussing them." (245) Similarly, in a study of French children, Gilles Brougére found that while price guides for Pokémon cards usually valued cards based on their use in the actual *Pokémon Trading Card Game*, "children's trading strategies . . . for the most part, were based less on economic rationality then on their emotional connection to the cards." (198)

The focus on capturing and collecting different species of Pokémon is also a central motif of the narrative texts under analysis. A specific Pokédex (called the Rotom Dex) is one of the central characters in the anime, appearing in the majority of episodes as a companion to the human characters and often provides exposition, sharing the names of new Pokémon or explaining what is occurring when game elements like specific moves are shown in the television show. Similarly, Team Rocket, the main antagonists of the anime series since the first generation, are reintroduced to the 20th season of the anime when, in the episode "Loading the Dex," their leader Giovanni tells them, "Now go and collect Pokémon the likes of which I've never seen before," before sending them to Alola. Capturing various Pokémon is a continual story element in many episodes throughout the anime. In season 20 Ash catches a Rowlet in the episode "First Catch in Alola, Ketchum Style!," a Rockruff in in the episode "Rocking Clawmark Hill!," and after multiple episodes of building a relationship with and earning its trust, a Litten in the episode, "One Journey Ends, Another Begins…" In the episode, "So Long, Sophocles!" Ash finds a Charjabug, and brings it to his friend Sophocles to capture as a going away

present. Other episodes feature secondary characters catching Pokémon of their own (i.e. James from Team Rocket catching a Mareanie in "The Sun, the Scare, the Secret Lair!" or Kiawe catching a Marowak in "A Crowning Moment of Truth!"). The feature films also use the capture of Pokémon as central plot points. *Pokémon the Movie: Volcanion and the Mechanical Marvel* begins with the leaders of the Azoth Kingdom searching for the Pokémon Magearna with the hopes of eventually catching it. *Pokémon the Movie: I Choose You!* is a retelling of how Ash first obtained his Pikachu, while *Pokémon the Movie: The Power of Us* features Ash and Pikachu competing in a Pokémon catching contest.

A second linking attribute in the Pokémon franchise is Pokémon battles. This is easily the most prevalent single aspect found in all Pokémon texts, with every single Pokémon text featuring some aspect of Pokémon battle. The six mainline video games under analysis all feature battling, not just within the game narrative, but also via local, in-person or online matches where two actual human players can battle each other. While *Pokémon GO* and *Pokémon Quest* do not feature trainer versus trainer battles, they do prominently feature battles between a trainer's Pokémon team versus wild Pokémon, either as a way to gain experience points to train Pokémon or as a precursor to capturing a wild Pokémon. *Pokémon Duel* and *Pokémon: Magikarp Jump* each feature Pokémon battles, via a digital board game setup or high jump contest respectively. All of the *Pokémon Trading Card Game* texts under analysis are almost completely focused on battling, with the card game built around players building a deck of 60 cards to a battle another player and their chosen deck of 60 cards.

Pokémon battles are also a central feature of the narrative texts under analysis. All of the feature films and the vast majority of the episodes narrativize at least one trainer versus trainer battle in their story. Often, other characters comment on the battle as it is occurring, providing exposition concerning: the names and types of Pokémon used; the names of moves used; and whether those moves are strong or weak against the Pokémon battling. In the few episodes where a battle is not specifically dramatized, there is some reference to or presentation of Pokémon battling. For example, the episode "Partner Promises!" follows the story of Ash and Pikachu visiting a secluded island to rest and relax. At one point they watch two wild Pokémon battle each other. When Ash speaks to the wild Pokémon, they run off. At another point in the episode, Ash has Pikachu use one of its battle moves to break a rock and free a trapped Pokémon. In this episode, while there was no trainer versus trainer battle as found in most episodes, there was still a presentation of Pokémon fighting and a trainer directing their Pokémon to use one of their moves. The episode, "Crystal-Clear Sleuthing!" is another example of an episode without any formal presentation of Pokémon battling. This episode is a detective story that follows Ash and Rotom-Dex trying to find a missing Electrium Z-Crystal that they believe might have been stolen. While there was no battling presented in this episode, it is still discussed by characters. At one point all of the students in the class are sent outside to battle each other and Kiawe asks to challenge Ash because he wants to practice being hit by the move Gigavolt Havoc. Ash has to make up an excuse about not having Pikachu with him that day because he cannot use the Gigavolt Havoc without the missing Z-Crystal. While there was no battling presented in the episode, battling is still a plot

point, and specific info about battling (the Electrium Z Crystal is needed to use the move Gigavolt Havoc in battle) is still narrativized.

A rhizomatic linking could be created solely by using Pokémon battling as the basis for the connections. However, while this would work, it would not accurately reflect the complexity and nuance of the Pokémon rhizome. For some of these texts, battling is the central emphasis of the text. For example, the Trading Card Game texts are almost solely focused on battling – creating a deck of cards to play against another player and their deck of cards. Collecting different Pokémon is secondary, a way to integrate stronger Pokémon into a deck to make that deck more competitive. However, in other texts, and for many audience members, battling may be far from the primary focus. For players focusing on the narrative elements of the game or speedrunners trying to complete the game as quickly as possible, battling is of interest only because it is sometimes necessary to advance the plot and they may desire to complete those battles as quickly as possible. For example, a player cannot move across the various islands of the Alola region unless they beat each island Kahuna in a Pokémon battle. Similarly, in the *Let's Go* games, players cannot advance without beating the various Gym leaders in the Kanto region. More importantly, battling cannot really be separated from the collecting or capturing dynamic. During the in-game tutorial portion of *Pokémon Sun* and *Pokémon Moon* focusing on catching Pokémon, Professor Kukui says, "you've gotta weaken a Pokémon up a bit before you try lobbing a Poké Ball at it!" In the mainline Pokémon video games, Pokémon become easier to catch based on the fewer number of hit points they have, and whether a status condition like sleep is forced upon them during a battle, and most of the more powerful Pokémon in the game are incredibly difficult to catch

without first weakening them via battle. This mechanic is reflected in the narrative Pokémon texts, as whenever a character in the anime of film series seeks to catch a Pokémon, they battle it first. For players focused on the narrative of a game, battling may only be a means to capture a Pokémon – either as a way to get access to more powerful Pokémon to more quickly advance the story or a way to achieve the game's stated goal of, "gotta' catch 'em all." However, these examples demonstrate that capturing Pokémon is directly intertwined with the process and mechanics of battling a Pokémon.

The third aspect of the Pokémon rhizome is training. For many of the Pokémon texts, training works more as a secondary aspect to battling and capturing Pokémon. For example, in all of the mainline games, Pokémon are trained by battling or capturing other Pokémon, which results in a Pokémon receiving experience points. After earning a specified number of experience points, a Pokémon's level increases which also brings about an increase to that Pokémon's statistics (Attack, Defense, Special Attack, Special Defense, Hit Points, and Speed), which determine how effective a Pokémon is during a battle, and may also allow a Pokémon to learn new, and more powerful moves. By battling in the mainline video games, Pokémon earn experience points which can increase their stats, in turn making them more effective in battle.

Battling is also commonly shown in the narrative Pokémon texts as a way to train Pokémon. In the anime episode "A Glaring Rivalry!" we see training presented in a number of ways, all of which are typical and found throughout both the anime series and the films. Early in the episode Ash trains his Pokémon by having them battle each other on the beach near the house he is staying at. At one point, the Pokémon watching the battle react to Rockruff using the move Rock Throw against Rowlet. After the battle, Ash

praises each of his Pokémon and Rotom Dex comments, “Rockruff’s Rock Throw has much more power now.” The narrative clearly presents training as Pokémon battling each other and shows Pokémon becoming stronger via this process. Later, upon meeting a trainer named Gladion and seeing him defeat another trainer’s powerful Pokémon, Ash challenges him to a battle, saying “I wanna become a Pokémon Master and so I wanna have a battle with all of the awesome Trainers in the Alola region!” After battling each other and then Team Rocket, who are defeated when Gladion uses a Rock-type Z-Move, Ash tells Gladion that he wants to “try a rock-type Z-Move too!” Hearing this, Gladion tells Ash how he can obtain the Z-Crystal that is necessary for Ash’s Pokémon to use that type of move. In this example, Ash seeks out rival trainers to battle saying that in order to become a Pokémon Master he has to battle other trainers, as a way to train his Pokémon to make them stronger. After battling, Gladion tells Ash how his Pokémon can use a powerful move and how to get access to that move, both of which will make his Pokémon stronger. This episode is not unique and throughout all of the anime and film texts we see many examples of trainers and their Pokémon battling other Pokémon as a form of training to make their Pokémon stronger.

The connection between battling, capturing and training is also present in the app-based games *Pokémon: Magikarp Jump*, *Pokémon Duel*, *Pokémon GO*, and *Pokémon Quest* with some slight variances. In *Pokémon: Magikarp Jump* and *Pokémon Duel*, experience is earned via battling, but not when new Pokémon are caught. However, in *Pokémon: Magikarp Jump*, a new Magikarp can only be caught after completely training the previous Magikarp, while in *Pokémon Duel*, new, more powerful Pokémon can only be caught using the in-game currency that is earned through battling. In *Pokémon GO*,

experience is earned when catching and battling Pokémon, but it is acquired by the human trainer player character and not the Pokémon themselves. Instead, Pokémon are leveled up via using the in-game items, candy and stardust, that are each acquired through battling and capturing Pokémon. A player's level, which is earned by gaining experience points, is connected to training via a level cap that prevents a players from increasing any Pokémon's level beyond their character level. In other words, if a player is level 34, then their Pokémon cannot be leveled up beyond level 34, even if the player has enough candy and stardust to do so. In *Pokémon Quest*, new Pokémon are obtained by cooking stews using ingredients obtained after battling and defeating wild Pokémon, and Pokémon only gain levels by sacrificing and combining other Pokémon with the Pokémon being trained. While the mechanics are different in these various app-based games, there is still a direct connection between battling, capturing and training. While many of these games add different in-game currencies or mechanics, ultimately there is a causal relationship between catching, battling and training in all these games.

Another aspect of Pokémon training is evolution. Certain Pokémon, when trained properly, will evolve into a different, more powerful Pokémon, with some Pokémon able to evolve multiple times. Evolution is shown in the anime series, such as the episode "Rising from the Ruins!" which shows Ash's Rockruff evolving into a Lycanroc, or in the episode "A Seasoned Search!" in which Mallow's Bounsweet evolves into a Steenee. In the mainline video games most Pokémon who evolve do so simply by reaching a specific level, although some have additional training conditions. For example, in the Alola based games: Salandit evolves into Salazzle when it reaches level 33, but only if it is a female; Sandshrew and Vulpix can evolve into Sandslash and Ninetales respectively,

at any level, but only if the player uses an Ice Stone, an in-game item; and Magneton, Nosepass and Charjabug will evolve into Magnezone, Probopass and Vikavolt respectively, but only if they are leveled up in the specific in-game location, Vast Poni Canyon. Evolution as a game mechanic is found in all of the video game and app-based games under analysis and in all of these games evolution both makes the Pokémon stronger and occurs after training the Pokémon via earning experience points or using items that are gained via battling or capturing Pokémon. When Pokémon evolution is shown narratively, it occurs after battling, mirroring the game mechanic of evolution occurring upon leveling up a Pokémon via battling. The Pokémon evolution mechanic is another way that training is presented in these texts, with evolution shown as a way to make Pokémon stronger as a reward for training Pokémon via battling or capturing other Pokémon.

Evolution is also a key mechanic of the trading card game, and the central way training is represented in the card game. Many of the battles in the *Pokémon Trading Card Game* hinge upon which player can more quickly introduce a weak "Basic" Pokémon into play and evolve that Pokémon into a more powerful "Stage 1" or "Stage 2" form. The popular card "Lycanroc GX" from the *Guardians Rising* expansion set has 200 hit points and an attack that does 110 points of damage in comparison to its pre-evolution form, "Rockruff," a Pokémon with only 60 hit points and a max attack of 30 points. Pokémon lines with multiple evolutions can be even more powerful. For example, "Charizard GX" from the *Burning Shadows* expansion, a Pokémon with 250 hit points and an attack that does 300 points of damage, evolves from "Charmeleon," a Pokémon with 90 hit points and a max attack of 70 points, which itself evolves from

"Charmander," a Pokémon with 70 hit points and a max attack of 20 points. Beyond just gaining access to more powerful attacks and more hit points, evolved Pokémon are more likely to have special abilities or unique single-use moves. "Lycanroc GX" has the "Bloodthirsty Eyes" ability, allowing the player who evolved Rockruff into Lycanroc to switch out their opponent's attacking Pokémon for one of their reserve (and presumably weaker) Pokémon, while "Charizard GX" has access to "Raging Out GX," a once per game attack that forces their opponent to discard 10 cards from their deck. A central mechanic of the *Pokémon Trading Card Game* is that a Pokémon cannot be evolved on the same turn it is played, meaning that it takes multiple turns to evolve newly played Pokémon into their stronger forms, assuming that a player has the proper cards in their hand to facilitate the evolution. Hence many decks are built around bringing evolved Pokémon into play as quickly as possible. Other decks may be built with slightly less powerful Pokémon that can be deployed more quickly to knock out an opponent's Pokémon before they can be evolved into a more powerful form. The gameplay is complicated by special cards which can speed up, slow down, or prevent Pokémon evolution or provide immunities from certain evolution levels. For example, within the *XY – Evolutions* expansion set is the card "Mew," a Pokémon who is immune to attacks from any evolved Pokémon and the card "Devolution Spray," which allows a player to devolve their own Pokémon. Evolution is a key element by which training is represented in the *Pokémon Trading Card Game* and an important way these texts connect to both the other game and narrative texts under analysis.

Ultimately, the attributes of catching, battling and training are linked in the Pokémon franchise. The best way to catch a Pokémon is to first train a team of Pokémon

by battling, strengthening those Pokémon so they can, in turn battle and weaken a wild Pokémon as a precursor to capture. The best way for a Pokémon to earn experience and possibly increase their level is by battling and capturing other Pokémon, with higher levels bringing an increase in stats and the possibility to learn new moves or evolve into a more powerful Pokémon form. Finally, Pokémon battle as a form of training and as a way to make capture easier. In short, Pokémon are caught after battling and training other Pokémon, to battle Pokémon a trainer must first catch and train them, and Pokémon are trained by catching and battling. Crucial to our rhizomatic mapping, one of the attributes of catching, battling and training is foregrounded in every Pokémon text, with many texts featuring multiple aspects.

Unlike our earlier mapping, these linking attributes are not simply a shared element, such as a character, setting or game mechanic. Instead, these linking attributes define the franchise, and are what unites and links the disparate texts and modalities, ranging from the trading card game and phone apps centered around how high a fish-Pokémon can jump to AAA console-based video games and multi-million dollar feature films. These linking attributes do not, in and of themselves, rise to the level of constituting theme or ideology, but are the precursors to theme and ideology. Catching, battling and training are attributes that when found in a single text may not necessarily evoke a response or signify any larger meaning. However, when these attributes are repeated, emphasized and ultimately foregrounded across a wide variety of texts and modalities, themes do arise. Furthermore, the themes identified by other researchers would not be prevalent or necessarily even apparent without a rhizomatic connection

between texts. Key to the Pokémon rhizome is that these themes arise after the texts connect.

Many of the scholars looking at Pokémon have identified themes around neoliberal capitalism and consumerism as central to the franchise. These themes are not contained in all, or even most of the texts under analysis, and only become apparent and emphasized after suggestive motifs around consumerism, which are often a negligible part of the individual texts, are repeated over and over and when the texts link to each other. Themes centered around neoliberal capitalism are heightened when the audience must consume multiple texts to fully experience the franchise. For example, it is not possible or easy to obtain all the Pokémon in any single game in order to achieve the franchise's motto of "gotta catch 'em all" without traversing across multiple texts and multiple modalities. The anime and film texts build emotional connections between the audience and Pokémon, a relationship which can be built by watching more episodes and playing the games. For every mainline game, a paired copy needs to be purchased or linked to in order to fully fill the Pokédex of either paired title. In *Pokémon: Let's Go, Eevee* and *Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu*, this consumerism is heightened further with two highly sought after Pokémon (Meltan and Melmetal) only becoming available after a player links *Pokémon GO* to their Nintendo Switch game. When the connected aspects of battling and training are combined and intertwined with catching, Anne Allison's point that, "while cuteness may bring postmodern relief, then it comes at the expense of a cascading commoditization," is too conservative a take. (2003: 393) The easiest, and possibly only, way one can become a Pokémon master, fully collecting, training and battling all Pokémon, is by completely embracing the franchise and consuming many

texts across multiple modalities. Experiencing and understanding the Pokémon franchise entails participating in an unbridled, multi-modal consumerism, that ultimately only encourages even further consumerism.

This final map succeeds where previous mappings failed. Every text connects to every other text via intra-active elements which both define the franchise and redefine the boundaries of the texts under analysis. Presenting the trading, battling and capturing of Pokémon across multiple texts and multiple modalities, the foundational elements take on greater ideological weight and generate different themes than would otherwise arise if these elements were presented in only one text in the franchise. Pokémon's commentary toward capitalism is not strongly present within any single individual text, but only becomes apparent when more and more texts link to each other. Game players can more effectively train, capture and battle their own Pokémon by consuming as many texts from as many modalities as possible, with other texts often revealing and making explicit what would otherwise be murky or difficult to ascertain game elements. Audiences of the narrative texts can likewise heighten their emotional connection to the Pokémon franchise by seeing their favorite characters and Pokémon: overcome challenges through battling; grow after training; and create new relationships with freshly captured Pokémon, all within many different texts. Audiences can also mimetically recreate the journeys presented narratively by playing a game where they can capture, train and battle their very own Pokémon. These links may be heterogenous, with the passive representation of Pokémon battling in a narrative text connecting to the active mechanic of capturing a Pokémon in a ludic text. This rhizome represents multiplicity as the traits of catching, battling and training extend to Pokémon texts beyond those in the study and this rhizome

can be expanded to include fan-made or other Pokémon texts that were released during the time period under analysis but not included in this study. Just as this rhizome can be expanded, it could just as easily be split apart. If half of the texts were randomly removed from this analysis, the remaining texts would still connect via the shared attributes of catching, training and battling, and the thematic and ideological insights generated by these connections would remain intact. In terms of cartography, there is a map, "that must be produced," not because one is needed to navigate anywhere, but because the system and franchise is defined by the connections between texts which can only be seen at the point where all texts connect, a point that can best be observed and analyzed via creating a map. (21) In terms of decalcomania, this rhizomatic map is a "tracing that must be put on the map, not the opposite," because again, this is not a true map that can be used to navigate between actual pre-existing things. Looking to Barad, these texts are not truly defined until they are put into an intra-active system, with the reality of the system found in the connection between elements. The tracing is put on the map because the tracing (i.e. the connections between elements) is what defines the system and not the texts being connected via such tracings.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Emblazoned on the cover of November 22, 1999's *TIME* magazine was the headline: "Pokémon! For many kids it's now an addiction: cards, video games, toys, a new movie. Is it bad for them?" At the time of publication, the first Pokémon movie had just been released in the United States and so-called "Pokémania" was in full swing. The film, like the rest of the Pokémon phenomenon, originated in Japan where it would go on to be, for a time, the all-time, top-grossing movie released in that country. Howard Chua-Boan and Tim Larimer's cover article was titled "Beware of the Poké Mania" and alternated between observations such as: "what can be objectionable about the too-cute-to-live Pokémon named Jigglypuff, a ball of fluff whose greatest power – not to be scoffed at – is a stupefying lullaby?" and reporting which noted "last week a nine-year-old boy on New York's Long Island stabbed an older schoolmate in a dispute over [Pokémon] cards." (82-83) This duality was the central focus of the article – why do children like Pokémon and ultimately, is Pokémon good for them? *TIME*'s writers noted, "the key principle of the Pokéocracy is acquisitiveness. The more Pokémon you have, the greater power you possess" and that when children give into their desire to "Catch 'Em All" as Pokémon's official slogan encourages:

> Grownups aren't ready for their little innocents to be so precociously cutthroat. Is Pokémon payback for our get-rich-quick era – with our offspring led away like lemmings by Pied Poké-Pipers of greed? Or is there something inherent in childhood that Pokémania simply reflects? (83)

The simplistic question of whether Pokémon is good for kids remained central to mainstream media's interest in Pokémon during its early years. In 2000, Sat2000, the

satellite television station run by the Vatican, tacitly endorsed Pokémon saying the game was "full of inventive imagination," did not have "any harmful side effects" and focused on "ties of intense friendship." (Barrett) In contrast the Associated Press reported in 2001 that Saudi Arabia's highest religious authority declared a fatwa against Pokémon because the games showed, "symbols associated with Israel and are harmful to kids." The Associated Press writer said, "Because of severe punishments for violators, which would include lashings, revoking of a trade license, stiff fines and deportation, the Saudi edict is expected to be strictly followed." In 2016, this fatwa was renewed and updated to specifically include *Pokémon GO* in the ban. (Griffin) Concerns about hidden messages or destructive ideology in Pokémon were also raised in the United States. In 2016 Michael Nunez reported that pastor and radio show host Rick Wiles believed that *Pokémon GO* could be used by ISIS to "spawn demons" and "murder Christians" quoting Wiles' belief that:

> The enemy, Satan, is targeting churches with virtual, digital, cyber demons. I believe this is a magnet for demonic powers . . . They're spawning demons inside your church. They're targeting your church with demonic activity. This technology will be used by the enemies of the cross to target, locate, and execute Christians.

Throughout much of its history, mainstream media's focus was explaining exactly what Pokémon was to perplexed parents and then assuring them that it was either a harmless fad or a danger worthy of outrage and censorship.

In Spring of 2024, *TIME* magazine released an advertisement-free, special issue, sold via newsstands and grocery store checkout lines, completely dedicated to Pokémon.

Compared to the panic-inducing headline 25 years prior, which focused on whether Pokémon was an addiction and questioned: "is it bad," the 2024 issue featured four different collectable covers and presented a welcoming, even celebratory exploration of Pokémon with the cover headlines: "Pokémon. The Games. The Shows. The Evolution. 25 Years: Pokémon in America. The World's Most Valuable Media Franchise. How to Master *Pokémon GO."* Instead of worrying about trading-card-induced playground violence, this issue celebrated the capitalistic success of "The World's Most Valuable Media Franchise," and rather than exploring whether the franchise represented a societal danger, this issue promised tips on, "How to Master *Pokémon GO."* Most tellingly, the issue reprints the central cover story from the original 1999 issue, only with a new headline: "When we feared Pokémon. Can cute critters be a bad influence? In 1999, TIME writers thought they might be." (26) The 2024 editors of TIME, specifically say "when we feared Pokémon," implicitly declaring that this fear is past and beyond consideration for a 2024 audience. If this updated headline does not fully demonstrate that skepticism toward Pokémon is a relic of the late 1990s, the other articles in the special issue make this sentiment clear by: highlighting the inclusivity of Pokémon ("Pokémon is for Everyone"); exploring why Pikachu is so popular ("Why We Love Pikachu"); and providing tips and tricks for anyone who wants to pursue a career buying and selling Pokémon trading cards ("Investing in Trading Cards"). Among the 21 articles in the 96 page issue are tips on how to spot fake Pokémon cards, an overview of Pokémon's teeth-brushing and sleep apps, and a quote from Ken Sugimoro, one of the original Pokémon character designers, saying, "I think characters play the role of consoling those who have been through hardship . . . and I hope Pokémon can play that

role as well." (43) In 1999, Pokémon's central news value (and best hope to sell magazines) was via hyping up its potential danger to children and fueling a nascent moral panic. Twenty-five years later, *TIME*'s editors collaborate with the Pokémon franchise more than report on it, releasing special ad-free issues with collectable covers to encourage fans to buy multiple copies of the same editorial content, including reprints of decades-old articles. This special issue demonstrates that, by 2024 Pokémon had become a fully accepted, highly celebrated, pop-culture franchise that is a fully integrated and normalized part of mainstream media. Throughout this dissertation I point out the immense popularity and profitability of Pokémon that came about as the franchise moved from skepticism to normalization. This popularity is a key element in understanding the franchise as a rhizomatic system and is central to the importance of both Pokémon and this dissertation. This chapter focuses on how the popularity and success of Pokémon is linked to its rhizomatic structure and the themes and ideology this structure promotes.

Up to this point, this dissertation focused on establishing that Pokémon is in fact organized around a rhizomatic paradigm. However, simply stopping here and establishing the Pokémon franchise as a rhizomatic system without exploring the implications of this revelation would be frivolous. If Pokémon is a rhizomatic system, but this organizational structure does not further media studies or generate any useful insight into Pokémon or media in general, then this research project has little value. In this chapter I discuss how Pokémon's rhizomatic nature is a key element that defines the franchise and in doing so, must be accounted for in any work which studies the franchise. Specifically, the rhizomatic nature of the franchise is what lends Pokémon the ability to explore contrary dichotomies and attain thematic and ideological cognitive dissonance. Pokémon's ability

to explore and comment on complex contemporary societal situations is why the franchise connects with its audience and explains Pokémon's popularity and economic success. The rhizomatic structuring of the Pokémon franchise raises questions concerning authorship, literacy and control around what has become a multi-billion dollar international media power. Pokémon is almost certainly not the only rhizomatic franchise and the methodology used to establish Pokémon's rhizomatic organization is valuable when both studying and creating other multimodal, transmedial franchises.

As described in their book, *A Thousand Plateaus,* Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari introduced the rhizome as a way to explore non-hierarchical, acentered, networks in contrast to linear, genealogical, arborescent structures. The rhizome has since been used to theorize and explain many aspects of a changing and evolving contemporary society. Jason Demers says that Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the rhizome was a direct synthesis of the revolutionary, liberal politics that swept across France and the United States in the late 1960s, and "*A Thousand Plateaus* as rhizome book – with its autonomous, decentralized chapters and interrelated, yet distinct and ready-to-deploy concepts – is their philosophical expression of the '68 years." (87) Shih-wei Hsu says that the rhizome is an extremely popular model for current Organizational and Critical Management Studies because it "offers strong explanatory power in capturing the chaotic, unpredictable, and uncontrollable nature of organizations," while also denoting "a mode of knowledge that can incorporate and inspire different forms of knowledge or wisdom that are marginalized and silenced by the predominant system." In the forward to the book, *New Directions in Rhizomatic Learning*, a collection of essays focused on how rhizomatic models and systems can be used to improve teaching and learning, Danah

Henriksen and Punya Mishra note that the metaphor of the rhizome, "has itself led to global cultural shifts in societies and new perceptions of knowledge." (xvi) They also say that the one of the reasons the rhizome is such a powerful metaphor and tool is that the rhizome represents a "new perception or reconception of knowledge, and how it intersects with the direction and future of contemporary global society." (xvi) Henriksen and Mishra argue that as society becomes more rhizomatic, so too must our models of teaching and learning if they are to be effective. Perhaps the most frequent use of the rhizome is as a paradigm to theorize digital networks including the world wide web and the internet in general. In a 1998 essay, Stefan Wray outlined the overwhelming frequency with which the rhizome was used to explain cyberspace, hypertext and the internet, citing dozens of examples including one from Stuart Moulthrop which equated *A Thousand Plateaus* to "an incunabular hypertext." (300) All of these examples are shared to demonstrate how frequently the rhizome is mobilized to explore how present-day society is changing and growing to become more connected, anarchic and acentered, like the rhizome itself. In many ways, the rhizome is more relevant now than to the time it was first presented by Deleuze and Guattatri, a concept Deleuze himself recognized when he said in an interview that *A Thousand Plateaus* was a "book whose time has not yet come, its conceptual riches largely unexploited." (Patton 2)

As social theorists look to the rhizome to explain ongoing societal shifts around philosophy, politics, education, management, and technology, the rhizome also provides a metaphor and paradigm to explain shifts in the media landscape. As discussed in previous chapters, media is becoming more multimodal, transmedial, and non-hierarchical. This trend is found in the work of numerous critics including: Mia Consalvo

and Mizuko Ito's discussion of the shift from a Hollywood center-periphery model to a media-mix model; Henry Jenkins exploration of fan-created texts and media convergence, and Marc Steinberg and Thomas Lamarre theorization of anime as a media ecology. Establishing Pokémon as a rhizomatically organized franchise is an extension of this previous critical work which links the organizational paradigms of society to the organizational structure of modern media franchises. As both media and modern society become more rhizomatic to better reflect each other, understanding the paradigms which define these complex systems is essential for both the artists creating new media and the scholars studying these texts.

Implications of the Pokémon Rhizome

This dissertation establishes that the texts in the Pokémon franchise form a rhizome matching the characteristics presented by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*. The first characteristic of a rhizome is connection, the idea that any point in a rhizome connects to any and every other point in the rhizome. The central idea explored in this dissertation's study was whether a rhizome can be created between texts in a franchise. The connections between these texts must be significant, as a rhizome based around trite linkages does not create a system where meaning is created through connection. To this end, I traced links that went beyond shared characters, settings or themes and instead focused on intra-active connections as defined by Karen Barad in her work exploring agential realism. Ultimately, these Pokémon texts are linked by the shared characteristics of capturing, training and battling. The franchise's official motto is, "Gotta Catch 'Em All," and for much of the audience, collecting Pokémon as

either in-game characters, trading cards or merchandise, is the central allure of the franchise. The best way to catch a Pokémon is by first battling and weakening it before catching it in a Pokéball. Much of the Pokémon franchise is built around Pokémon versus Pokémon battling, and battling is represented in every Pokémon text analyzed. For the *Pokémon Trading Card Game* or the more simplistic app-based games like *Pokémon: Magikarp Jump,* battling is the central, and arguably only, focus of the text. The narrative of mainline video games is advanced only when the player battles and defeats a series of stronger Pokémon, while the main narrative throughline of the anime and films is Ash's quest to become a Pokémon master, something that can only be achieved after defeating a plethora of strong Pokémon trainers in various battle competitions. The only way either Ash or the videogame player can win their Pokémon battles is by increasing the power of their Pokémon partners via training. Pokémon are trained via capturing or battling other Pokémon, a time-intensive task that builds emotional connections between trainer (whether real or fictional) and Pokémon. Players might catch a Pokémon in one game and move it to another, spending hours competing with a beloved Pokémon across multiple texts, even watching the anime or films for tips and tricks to maximize a training regime. Wild Pokémon are caught after battling trained Pokémon, Pokémon are trained by battling and capturing other Pokémon, and battling is the method to catch and train other Pokémon. These linked elements are the key aspects of every Pokémon text analyzed and are almost certainly present in every Pokémon text of every generation. These elements, while more than simple shared tropes, do not rise to the level of textual themes or ideology. Instead, they form the basis of the themes and ideology that define Pokémon, themes that arise only when multiple texts in the franchise intra-act rhizomatically.

While connection is the central defining characteristic of the rhizome, the other five characteristics of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome are also present in the Pokémon textual system. The second characteristic of the rhizome is heterogeneity, the idea that "traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature." (21) The multimodal nature of Pokémon establishes this characteristic. While the shared traits of collecting, training and battling are present in all the Pokémon texts analyzed, these traits are often demonstrated in different ways in texts of different modalities. For example: in the film and anime texts, the audience watches characters capture Pokémon; in the video game texts the player captures Pokémon as part of the game play; and in the trading card game, the player/collector captures Pokémon by purchasing packs of cards. The same trait is presented passively by watching a show or movie, mimetically within a virtual game world, and actually by obtaining a trading card which is a physical representation of a Pokémon that has both real monetary value as well as metaphoric game value.

Multiplicity and asignifying rupture, are the characteristics that define a rhizome as having neither a beginning or an end, only a middle and that should a rhizome be broken it will start again and grow. Any group of Pokémon texts can form a rhizome based on the connecting traits of capturing, training and battling. There are no central canonical Pokémon texts that must be included in any grouping to make it valid, nor are there any non-canonical texts that must be excluded to prevent a grouping of Pokémon texts from being rhizomatically invalid. As new audiences discover the latest Pokémon texts, they do not need to play, watch, experience or consume Pokémon texts from five, ten, or 25 years ago to either understand or fully enjoy the franchise. Even within a single generation of Pokémon texts, audience members do not have to interact with any specific

texts or modalities to appreciate and understand the franchise. An audience member who only watches the anime, plays the video game or collects the trading cards, does not face a lessened or diminished experience by not engaging in all or even many of the modalities available. Whatever grouping of texts an audience member is drawn to and consumes will form a rhizome that can actively grow with the addition of any additional Pokémon texts.

The rhizomatic characteristics of cartography and decalcomania were demonstrated through creating maps exhibiting the rhizomatic nature of the Pokémon franchise. While the rhizome is often used as paradigm to explain networked systems, few actual rhizome maps are drawn or presented. This is understandable, since all rhizome maps nominally look the same, connecting every point in a system to every other point in the system. Furthermore, since most rhizomes are constantly growing, fragmenting and reforming, any rhizome map is outdated by the time it is drawn. If I attempted to create a definitive map of all current Pokémon texts it would need to be updated weekly (or even daily if branded merchandise is included in the rhizome) and would encompass thousands of texts. Deleuze and Guattari tell us that a rhizome is, "a map and not a tracing." (12) They also tell us that, "the tracing should always be put back on the map." (13) While these two characteristics of the rhizome appear to contradict each other, they do not. While the rhizome is a map, it is a map that does not truly replicate any pre-existing system nor serve any navigation purpose, as Deleuze and Guattari say: "What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious." (12) A central value in

drawing these maps is to both create and reveal the "unconscious" connective foundations of the franchise – which for Pokémon is collecting, battling, and training. Tracings are not to be fully trusted because they can too easily arborify the rhizomatic. However, tracings must be put onto maps, for such tracings can both help identify rhizomatic blockages as well as introduce the rhizomatic into arborescent hierarchical systems and possibly deterritorialize such constructions. As Deleuze and Guattari note: "there exist tree or root structures in rhizomes; conversely, a tree branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome." (15) The Pokémon rhizome is defined by the connections between the texts, connections which are mapped based on the linked textual traits of collecting, training and battling. Actually drawing a map of these connections (as I did in the previous chapter) is a tracing and while the tracing itself is inherently non-rhizomatic, the tracing generates insights that show Pokémon's inherent rhizomatic nature and identify the foundational linking elements of the rhizome.

Ideological and Economic Repercussions

One of the most frequently discussed aspects of Pokémon is the thematic cognitive dissonance inherent to the franchise. As mentioned throughout this dissertation, Pokémon frequently explores directly opposed dichotomous themes around consumption and capitalism. Anne Allison referred to these opposing themes as "Pokémon capitalism," the idea that Pokémon texts both encourage consumer consumption while simultaneously relieving the pain that consumer capitalism creates in the modern world. (198) The Pokémon audience replaces meaningful, real-life, interpersonal human relationships which consumer capitalism prevents, with meaningful, virtual, emotional

relationships with digital characters – relationships that are predicated upon purchase and consumption. As modern society becomes more fragmented and lonely, the long-term relationships an audience builds with their theoretically immortal digital Pokémon partners is a balm against the capitalistic mass consumption transforming society. Regardless of whether: someone's economic means shift; they are forced to physically migrate to a new home; or they lose touch with any genuine human interaction – their Pokémon will always be present for them. Satoshi Tajiri said one of the central inspirations for the game was to provide children, "a means of relieving the stresses of growing up in a post-industrial society." (Qtd. in Allison 2003: 388) However, this relationship is based on consumerism, for the only way to keep a relationship with Pokémon alive is through continually purchasing new texts. Beloved Pokémon (who may have been with a player for more than two decades) can only be kept active by transferring them to the current generation of game, necessitating the purchase of the newest game. If playing one game is not enough to keep the long-term relationship between Pokémon and person vibrant, there are always other games to play, cards to trade, anime to watch, and merchandise to collect. This relationship exists somewhere between hostage-taking and prostitution – the relationship does not exist without an initial purchase, and will not continue without sustained financial investment, with any long-term emotional relationship at risk if money does not continue to change hands.

Pokémon's rhizomatic nature is a key reason the franchise has the ability to explore these opposing dichotomous themes. If one central theme or ideology (whether pro- or anti-capitalistic) was the basis for the rhizomatic linkage within the franchise, then there would not be an equal prevalence of opposing or dissonant themes. Instead,

Pokémon does not take a definitive stand on capitalism, but via its central focus on collecting, training and battling, it organically (and perhaps unintentionally) explores the full spectrum of perspectives concerning capitalism, both positive and negative. If characters, items, or settings were the connecting linkage, then there would be a much wider variety of themes and ideology found in the franchise, and the themes and ideology around capitalism and consumption that are present, would not be so omnipresent. Instead, Pokémon's commentary on consumer capitalism is easily the most prominent and commented upon aspect of the franchise by critics and researchers. The traits which link the Pokémon texts are pre-thematic elements and this allows a much wider and nuanced set of perspectives to be explored. Collecting, training and battling Pokémon as shared traits across texts does not necessarily lead to one specific ideological viewpoint, and if these traits were found in only a handful of texts in the franchise, the viewpoints that connect collecting, training and battling to consumption and capitalism would be narrower. However, when these traits are featured so frequently, (across hundreds of texts) a wider variety of perspectives naturally emerge. On one hand we can see Ash in the anime or the player of a Pokémon video game capturing Pokémon as partners and friendly companions in a heroic journey. However, we can also see antagonists, like Team Rocket, capturing Pokémon as slaves, used as gladiators to win fame and fortune for those trainers and gain money and resources for their team leaders. Ultimately, even if an audience member's favorite Pokémon is a treasured digital companion and life-partner, they may start to question why it is always Pokémon doing the actual fighting, and only against other Pokémon, and why it is the trainers who win the badges, money and clout that come with winning a battle. Pokémon are collected to battle and are trained

by battling and capturing other Pokémon. Is this battling done to economically gain resources for the trainer or as a way to heighten an emotional bond with a Pokémon? Can both happen at the same time?

Collecting and training and battling are not just the pre-thematic traits that define Pokémon as a rhizome, they are the traits that best comment upon modern consumer capitalism. Collecting can be seen as both akin to making friends, as well as monopolizing labor to exploit workers in an unbalanced power relationship. Training is a way to spend time with a companion building emotional bonds, as well as a pre-requisite for an employee to fulfil their economic roles in a workplace. Battling is a way for two companions to interact and emotionally bond with each other, as well as a way for two masters to mobilize their owned resources in a way to further increase those resources to the detriment of any marketplace competitors. Becoming a Pokémon master through collecting, training and battling entails building strong, genuine emotional connections with as many entities as possible, but also requires crushing and defeating as many entities as possible and taking defeated opponents' resources by force. The rhizomatic nature of Pokémon allows these dichotomies to be fully explored and viewed from more than one perspective. Pokémon comments on both the benefits and downsides of consumer capitalism and the modern networked world that global capitalism has created. Arborescent, hierarchical media systems are less able to explore multiple viewpoints or present opposing perspectives, because of their closed and more rigidly defined structures.

Part of the reason the rhizome is invoked in discussions ranging from philosophy and psychoanalysis to global networks and modern warfare studies is that rhizomatic

systems and thinking allow for nuanced explorations of complex topics. In 2006 Eyal Weizman reported on the use of contemporary philosophy by the Israeli Defense Forces saying:

> I asked [Shimon] Naveh why Deleuze and Guattari were so popular with the Israeli military. He replied that 'several of the concepts in *A Thousand Plateaux* became instrumental for us […] allowing us to explain contemporary situations in a way that we could not have otherwise. It problematized our own paradigms.

Soldiers trying to understand complex battlefield situations recognize the rhizome as a paradigm that can explain and theorize nuanced situations and "problematize," pre-existing "paradigms." This is the same reason the rhizome is a valuable tool to theorize modern, multi-modal media franchises. When Jenkins says, "Our workplaces have become more collaborative; our political process has become more decentered; we are living more and more within knowledge cultures based on collective intelligence," he is pointing out that society is essentially becoming more open, networked and rhizomatic. (129) Jenkins later says, "our schools are not teaching what it means to live and work in such knowledge communities, but popular culture may be doing so," a sentiment that is not surprising, for how could an essentially hierarchical and arborescent system adequately train children how to understand, much less thrive in a rhizomatic world. (129) Instead, it is inherently rhizomatic texts like Pokémon that teach children how to become "informational hunter and gatherers" in order to thrive in a modern world that is largely defined by consumer capitalism. (129) When Buckingham and Sefton-Green say that Pokémon provides "a means of developing in children the 'multiliteracies' that are now essential for democratic participation; or, alternatively, as a means of producing

'good' (that is, docile and obedient) consumers," they are basically reframing the ideological dichotomy of Pokémon in a different way – Pokémon teaches the skills to either resist capitalism or become the perfect consumer. (29) Many members of the Pokémon audience may only take from their experience the joy of acquiring as many Pokémon as possible and solely gain a deeper appreciation of consumer capitalism. Other members of the audience may create a genuine emotional connection with a Pokémon, a relationship that will grow as they bring their treasured Pokémon into each newly released text for many years to come. In the past, the emotional support this digital companion provides would come from a pet or actual human relationship, but as neoliberal capitalism reshapes society, real-life relationships are more difficult to create and sustain while the problems caused by capitalism make these relationships more necessary. Another part of the audience might experience Pokémon at a level and way in which they acquire the "multiliteracies" discussed by Buckingham and Sefton-Green. These literacies provide this portion of the Pokémon audience enough insight into the rhizomatic paradigms that define both Pokémon and capitalism to not just tolerate contemporary society, but to actually resist and confront the problems inherent to these complex systems.

As society becomes more rhizomatic, media emerge that both confronts and comments upon this shift, and this media is itself more rhizomatic, as a rhizome may be the only way to understand and explore other rhizomes. Rhizomatically structured franchises are perhaps the only way for media to comment upon and explore other rhizomatic systems. For our Pokémon case study, there are two aspects at work: the overarching rhizomatic structure itself; and the links that define and connect the Pokémon

texts to form this rhizomatic structure, specifically the linked traits of collecting, training and battling. It is these linked traits that connect Pokémon to themes around consumer capitalism, and not Pokémon's inherent rhizomatic structure. Rhizomatic media systems are capable of more naturally and fully exploring other complex real-world rhizomatic systems, of which consumer capitalism is certainly an example. Non rhizomatic franchises comment upon capitalism and do so in nuanced and important ways. Likewise, rhizomatic media franchises based around different connecting traits will likely have no connection to capitalism, but instead may provide insight into other complex structures or philosophies. Rhizomatically organized media are inclined to naturally explore complex systems – for the Pokémon rhizome this system is capitalism – but other media rhizomes might explore other nuanced systems that have nothing to do with capitalism, politics or economics. While rhizomes in general are not necessarily directly linked to capitalism, the Pokémon rhizome is. Rhizomatic franchises do not provide more or less opportunities to resist or promote capitalism because of their rhizomatic nature, but they are more inclined to explore complex systems like capitalism because of their shared rhizomatic natures.

The questions that originally inspired this dissertation was: how did Pokémon become the single most profitable media franchise in history and how did it remain continually popular for more than 25 years, all while receiving relatively little academic notice and viewed by popular culture as a passing fad? Pokémon's rhizomatic nature is certainly linked to this popularity. Writing about transmedia and convergence in 2003, Henry Jenkins said:

> The kids who have grown up consuming and enjoying Pokémon across media are going to expect this same kind of experience from *The West Wing* as they get older. By design, Pokémon unfolds across games, television programs, films, and books, with no media privileged over any other. For our generation, the hour-long, ensemble-based, serialized drama was the pinnacle of sophisticated storytelling, but for the next generation, it is going to seem, well, like less than child's play.

What instead occurred was that the kids who grew up enjoying Pokémon never stopped consuming Pokémon, with Nintendo themselves noting in their March 2017 Corporate Management Policy Briefing that "the ratio of players in their 20s and 30s has risen for *Pokémon Sun* and *Pokémon Moon* compared to past Pokémon titles." A 2019 study of *Pokémon GO* players showed 58% of the game's players were between the ages of 21 and 30, while only 18% were under 20 years old. (Malik et al.) The Pokémon audience when Jenkins wrote his article in 2003 never abandoned Pokémon, because it was not a transmedia version of *The West Wing* that they wanted, but fully rhizomatic media franchises that have not yet emerged. Examples of the demand for, and shift toward rhizomatic media can be seen in Hollywood's focus on cinematic "universes" to the point that Wikipedia's article, "List of fictional shared universe in film and television" contains more than 100 entries. These universes range from the superhero-centric *Marvel Cinematic Universe* and *DC Extended Universe* to the horror themed *Universal Monsters Dark Universe* and the *Conjuring Universe* to the science fiction and fantasy based *Whoniverse* and the *Star Wars Expanded Universe.* The preference for the word

"universe" by both creators and fans suggests a connection that goes beyond simple franchising or shared intellectual property across a group of texts.

A difference between a media universe and a standard franchise is a measure of how rhizomatic a group of texts are. Not all texts or media universes are fully rhizomatic. As discussed earlier, Mia Consalvo says that many western franchises follow a "center-periphery" paradigm, with different texts in a franchise carrying different values, with some texts more canonical than others. A franchise that is center-periphery cannot be rhizomatic, as the rhizome necessitates all points have equal connective status. All texts in a rhizomatic system connect to all other texts in the system; the rhizome has no beginning or end, only a middle; and every point in the rhizome can serve as an entry or exit. In a center-periphery model, the texts that are canonical have more value and so cannot be "middle" points in the same way that a spin-off non-canonical text is within a non-rhizomatic franchise. Likewise, in many of these franchises, the non-canonical texts require knowledge of the canonical texts to make sense. Characters introduced in mainline canonical texts may have their story continued in side novels or comic-books, but without watching or reading the canonical texts, these side texts do not fully make sense.

A modern franchise that demonstrates Western franchises becoming more rhizomatic through the deliberate crafting of media universes is Star Wars, one of the franchises that Consalvo specifically noted as center-periphery and which before 2009 was a franchise defined by canonical film texts and non-canonical novels, comic books and games. In a 2002 interview with Christopher Allan Smith and Zachary Sotolongo, George Lucas, the original creator of Star Wars said, "There are two worlds here . . .

There's my world, which is the movies, and there's this other world that has been created, which I say is the parallel universe," highlighting the non-canonical status of the non-film texts. However, since Consalvo's article was written, the Star Wars franchise has made an intentional shift to become more rhizomatic. In a 2014 press release, Lucasfilm specifically delineated which Star Wars texts were canonical and which were not. After acknowledging the existence of the *Star Wars Expanded Universe* (EU), which included novels, comic books and video games, the press release stated:

> While Lucasfilm always strived to keep the stories created for the EU consistent with our film and television content as well as internally consistent, Lucas always made it clear that he was not beholden to the EU. He set the films he created as the canon. This includes the six Star Wars episodes, and the many hours of content he developed and produced in *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. These stories are the immovable objects of Star Wars history, the characters and events to which all other tales must align. ("The Legendary Star Wars Expanded Universe Turns a New Page.")

The reason for this announcement was two-fold. First it was necessary in anticipation of the film, *Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens*, which presents a different and incompatible story from the Expanded Universe texts concerning how the central Star Wars narrative continued after *Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi.* Second, this announcement declared the franchise was moving away from a center-periphery model and closer to a rhizomatic paradigm. While previous iterations of the Star Wars franchise included some texts that were canonical and others that were not (those that were part of Lucas' "parallel universe") moving forward all of the texts created by Lucasfilm would

be canonical and interconnected. Lucasfilm's creative executive Rayne Roberts said that when Kathleen Kennedy took over as Lucasfilm president in 2012,

> She'd noticed that there would be these ancillary books or supporting materials that would be developed to support these films, and the people that would go make those were not the same people who had been involved in making the movies, and there was this kind of disconnect. And so she was very intentional about saying, "I want to create a central development team that has their hands in everything, so that all of the various media can be really intuitively and intentionally connected." (qtd. in Gallagher)

To this end Kennedy created the Lucasfilm Story Group to maintain continuity between the texts in the franchise and define all texts created by Lucasfilm equally canonical and interlinked. Beyond creating this group, Lucasfilm integrated what were previously non-canonical modalities into the central Star Wars story. For example, when C-3PO, a character that has appeared in all of the canon Star Wars films, appeared in *Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens,* their arm was now red, instead of the familiar bright shiny gold of the last six film appearances. The meaning and significance of this change is only explained in James Robinson and Tony Harris' 2016 Marvel comic book, "Star Wars Special: C-3PO." Similarly, an in-narrative broadcast announcing the return of the dead Emperor Palpatine is a key plot point for *Star Wars: Episode IX – The Rise of Skywalker.* However this announcement is not presented in the film itself and the actual broadcast is only shown in the *Fortnite X Star Wars* crossover video game event. These are both examples of how character and plot points important for understanding the films,

only being presented in what were the previously non-canonical modalities of comics and video games.

Star Wars specifically shifted away from a center-periphery model to become more rhizomatic as part of the creation of a "cinematic universe." This shift is not unique, with other franchises also creating story groups to better integrate the texts of their franchises with Stephen M. Colbert noting in 2017 that "the *Transformers* franchise recently created a writers group resembling the Lucasfilm Story Group in concept, and the *X-Men* franchise is similarly guided by writers and producers like Simon Kinberg and Lauren Shuler Donner." The motivation for making these franchises more rhizomatic is at least partially financial. In the 2014 press release which announced Star Wars' shift away from a center-periphery paradigm, Kathleen Kennedy said: "We're set to bring Star Wars back to the big screen, and continue the adventure through games, books, comics, and new formats that are just emerging. This future of interconnected storytelling will allow fans to explore this galaxy in deeper ways than ever before." ("The Legendary Star Wars Expanded Universe Turns a New Page.") This language evokes the original definition and impetus for the Japanese Media Mix – by creating more connected texts in more modalities, audience engagement, consumption and profit can be heightened. The Star Wars example demonstrates how Western media franchises are moving toward a rhizomatic structure, with texts from different modalities specifically created with non-hierarchical links. Furthermore, these texts are defined by their creators as canon, meaning any text can serve as an entry point to the franchise and one does not need to first watch the Star Wars films to understand and enjoy the non-film texts. Matching the characteristic of asignifying rupture, there may be audiences that only interact with the

comic, game or television aspects of the franchise, which are equally canonical and complete experiences.

As both the Pokémon and Star Wars franchises show, the rhizome is a natural progression of the media mix, perfected for modern consumer capitalism. When all texts and modalities are balanced canonically and intra-connected, audience interaction, consumption and resulting profits, are not just heightened, as with the media mix, but maximized. Textual intra-connection leads to deeper audience engagement with the franchise, which drives a cascading series of purchases as audiences seek to sustain this heightened emotional connection to the franchises. Buying and consuming more texts further deepens audience connection, fueling more purchases which increases connection, leading to even more purchases as audiences seek even more engagement with the texts they are now deeply emotionally invested in. In the original media mix, audience interaction was increased by reading and watching texts of varying modalities. In the rhizomatic Pokémon model, much of the audience interaction IS through consumption, with the purchasing and collecting of texts and the Pokémon linked to those texts a defining trait of the rhizome. With this in mind, the connection between Pokémon's rhizomatic nature and the economic success that is built around consumption becomes apparent.

Literacy and Authorship Questions

Establishing Pokémon as a rhizomatic franchise raises questions around authorship within a multi-textual, multimodal franchise. A rhizome which consists of many texts, with multiple different authors with no connection to each other cannot have

a singular, definitive author. Even many of the individual texts in the Pokémon franchise have multiple authors with numerous artists designing the multitude of individual Pokémon found in any single text; multiple writers creating the various interwoven narratives of the games, television shows and films; and different designers creating the wide range of game mechanics shared across the numerous games. Beyond using pre-existing intellectual property, some of the app-based games share no authorship or creative link to any other text in the rhizome. In many ways, some of these app-based game texts function more as officially licensed fan texts than as true canonical works. However, this is part of what defines convergence, media mixes, and rhizomatic structures – there is no definitive canon. The question of authorship is further heightened by the central argument of this dissertation: if the Pokémon franchise is defined by the linked aspects of collecting, training and battling, and these aspects are not deliberately defined by a singular author, then there can be no author at the franchise or rhizome level.

The relationship between author and text is already a point of friction when studying film and video games. Film studies as a discipline generally accepts the director as the author (or auteur) of a film, dating back to the work of Andrew Sarris and Peter Wollen, who were themselves building upon the work of the French writers of *Cahiers du Cinema*. This can be demonstrated via the Modern Language Association citation protocol used in this dissertation which generally requires that the director be listed as an author for any film referenced. Defining authorship for games is more difficult, with Janet Murray writing, "authorship in electronic media is procedural. Procedural authorship means writing the rules by which the texts appear as well as writing the texts themselves." (152) Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman begin their book *Rules of Play* by

emphasizing the importance of game designers, saying "the focus of a game designer is designing *game play*, conceiving and designing rules and structures that result in an experience for players." (1) However, while they imply that the game designer plays a large creative role in creating games, they are careful to never give the game designer the auteur status film directors are perceived as having. They differentiate the roles of designer and developer saying their book "is about game *design*, not game *development,"* suggesting the possibility for the developer to claim auteur status. (2) Because of the interactive nature of games, there is also some question on what role the player (or interactor) has as possible co-author of the text. Murray notes and dismisses this debate, saying:

> Contemporary critics are attributing authorship to interactors because they do not understand the procedural basis of electronic composition. The interactor is not the author of the digital narrative, although the interactor can experience one of the most exciting aspects of artistic creation – the thrill of exerting power over enticing and plastic materials. This is not authorship but agency. (153)

Any debate concerning authorship of a text becomes even more problematic when analysis moves from an individual text to not just a group of texts, but an amalgamation of nodal, shifting, open relationships between texts. In short, since the rhizomatic organization of a franchise plays a large part in shaping the meaning and ideology of a franchise, then the authorship of all texts in a franchise is at least somewhat shared. If, in the future, one person can be shown as deciding that the central foundation for all Pokémon texts is a focus on collecting, training and battling, then that person shares in the authorship of all Pokémon texts.

The networked authorship within a rhizome affects the role media production plays in defining and shaping literacy. A common shared point across the various definitions of media literacy is that one needs to be able to not just read a text, but also create a text to be media literate. Few critics would argue that someone who cannot write a basic paragraph is traditionally literate, even if they can read fluently. The question is whether this paradigm applies for other mediums? When defining video game literacy, David Buckingham and Andrew Burns argue that production skills are a key aspect, saying:

> In recent years, media education has placed a growing emphasis on the importance of student production. This builds upon a longstanding set of rationales for the value of production work, both as a creative and as a critical practice. (331)

In their essay, "Game Literacy in Theory and Practice," Buckingham and Burns explore these rationales and share the success they had in using basic game design software in a primary school classroom as a way to explore critical issues concerning video game literacy. In contrast, few film studies scholars would advocate that one need to be fluent in film production in order to be film literate. Until recently, film production equipment, even at the amateur level, was so expensive that it was cost prohibitive for even a tiny fraction of the cinema audience to attempt making their own films. Furthermore, there is a question concerning what level and amount of production is necessary to gain film literacy. Does a student need to simply work on a single film? Do they need to serve in an above-the-line or creative position? Do they need to work on a film with others, in a collaborative manner? In many ways, video game production faces the same issues

concerning practicality of production, group authorship, and collaboration – but have arrived at differing conclusions concerning what it means to be game literate versus film literate. This highlights an even broader question: what is the difference between media literacy, film literacy, and game literacy?

I do not want to advocate the value of one definition of literacy over another, nor do I believe that the definition of rhizomatic franchises suggests a better approach toward literacy than others that have come before. However, it may be a more appropriate model to explore and teach media literacy. To be rhizomatically media literate, one does not need to have created a video game, a card game, a television show, and a film within a franchise. However, understanding that new (and potentially unintended) meanings, themes and ideology arise when disparate texts in the rhizome intra-act is an essential concept for rhizomatic literacy. If new meanings are created when texts intra-act, and these intra-actions define the texts in a rhizome, then authorship extends beyond any single text. Because of the broader nature of the rhizome, the writer of fan manga, the artist who sells commissioned Pokémon drawings, and the teams of amateur programmers who create their own Pokémon games using bootlegged assets are all contributors and co-authors within a rhizome.

One example of unsanctioned work which nonetheless extends the Pokémon rhizome are the games *Pokémon Photonic Sun* and *Pokémon Prismatic Moon*. These two games are ROM hacks, fan created remixes of corporate released games that have been dissected and reprogrammed by amateur game developers. After making changes and additions to the original source game code, the fan programmers re-release the updated game ROM back into the fan community to be played on either flash cartridges or

emulators. *Pokémon Photonic Sun* and *Pokémon Prismatic Moon* are direct reworkings of *Pokémon Sun* and *Pokémon Moon*, complete with the exact story and game mechanics of the originals, including the same cut scenes, narrative settings, characters and Pokémon. According to the ROM hack creator, their remixed text "includes many changes to Pokémon stats, types, abilities and movesets, making weaker Pokémon more powerful," in order to make the games more challenging and strategically interesting for experienced players. ("Hack Series.") At the same time, mechanics that slowed down this strategic gameplay, such as the time needed to train a Pokémon or hatch eggs, was reduced. This ROM hack was released via various Pokémon and ROM hack websites on July 25, 2018, during the time period covered by this study. While an argument could be made that *Pokémon Photonic Sun* and *Pokémon Prismatic Moon* are simply updates or tweaks of a pre-existing game, the same argument could be made when comparing *Pokémon Sun* and *Pokémon Moon* to *Pokémon Ultra Sun* and *Pokémon Ultra Moon.* All six of these games, the four official Nintendo releases as well as the two fan-made ROM hacks, share the same story, characters and Pokémon designs with only relatively minor changes between them.

Other examples of fan-made Pokémon games have no direct connection to a specific previous games releases. *Pokémon Uranium* is a free, fan-made game released in August 2016 after more than nine years of development and which, as of 2024 still receives regular updates. While using Pokémon designs and game mechanics from officially-sanctioned, Nintendo-released games, this new text is set in Tandor, a completely original, fan-created region, and features more than 150 new Pokémon, and includes a Pokémon type unique to this game. Although this text is a new game with an

original story and characters, the rough plot structure matches other mainline Pokémon games – as the game's homepage says, after receiving their first Pokémon the player character can, "explore the tropical Tandor region, collect all 8 Gym badges, and battle your way to the top of the Elite Championship." ("Pokemon Uranium – Home.") *Pokémon Uranium* is a full, standalone text with a story that matches previous Pokémon mainline game releases, featuring a scope that dwarfs many of the officially sanctioned Pokémon releases, particularly the app-based games discussed in previous chapters. The legal status of *Pokémon Uranium* is best explained in a disclaimer at the bottom of the game's official homepage: "There is no financial gain made from this nor will any be sought. This is for entertainment purposes only. Please don't sue us." ("Pokemon Uranium – Home.")

What is important for this dissertation is that these works, *Pokémon Photonic Sun*, *Pokémon Prismatic Moon*, and *Pokémon: Uranium* (as well as many other fan-created games and texts) are full and equal members of the Pokémon rhizome. Although created without the knowledge or permission of Pokémon's intellectual property owners and released as free downloads, making no money for their creators, they are part of the Pokémon rhizome. These texts fully rhizomatically intra-act with the other Pokémon texts in the rhizome, whether officially sanctioned or not, and just as prominently feature the elements of collecting, battling and training as any other Pokémon text discussed in this dissertation. When viewing the Pokémon franchise rhizomatically, the creators of these unsanctioned texts share a degree of authorship with the creators of the vastly more popular officially-sanctioned, corporate-released texts. As new meanings arise when these differing texts intra-act with each other, it becomes impossible for any single entity

to ever control the authorship of or within a rhizome – a key point when theorizing rhizomatic literacy and discussing how valuable franchises might be controlled by corporate entities. Theme, meaning and ideology will emerge as texts intra-act with each other in a rhizome, and it does not matter whether those texts are sanctioned by intellectual property rights holders or created by crass groups of anarchist fans.

Ultimately, by establishing Pokémon as a rhizomatic franchise, this dissertation makes a number of contributions to scholarship. If nothing else, demonstrating that the Pokémon franchise is organized around rhizomatic principles provides insight into how at least one franchise works, and demonstrates how a group of texts from differing modalities work together as an open, networked system. Considering the immense popularity and economic success of Pokémon, defining and theorizing this single franchise is a significant contribution in and of itself. This dissertation also demonstrates new approaches and methodology for studying media franchises in general. While this study focuses on identifying Pokémon as a rhizomatic media franchise, it is unlikely that Pokémon is, or will remain, the only rhizomatic media franchise. Although it is beyond the scope of this work to establish other franchises as fully rhizomatically organized, there is certainly evidence that other franchises (such as Star Wars which was briefly discussed in this chapter) are moving toward a rhizomatic paradigm, and the methods introduced in this dissertation are useful in exploring these shifts and franchises.

The rhizomatic paradigm at the center of this dissertation is a natural progression of the theories it is built upon: Marsha Kinder's super system; Mizuko Ito's media mix; Mia Consalvo's center periphery paradigm; and Henry Jenkins's ideas around convergence. While I do not believe the rhizomatic model replaces or delegitimizes any

of these previous models, it does provide another lens that may help scholars more effectively theorize large, multimodal, transmedial franchises similar to Pokémon. The rhizomatic media franchise model also has implications for media creators, and within debates around media literacy. As media becomes more rhizomatic, the role individual artists play in creating and controlling their work changes dramatically. With these changes, the skills needed to read and create not individual works, but networked groups of texts are affected. These implications are larger than the rhizomatic media structures discussed here. However, this rhizomatic theory of media franchises is a first step in more productively exploring these topics.

In a 2023 Guardian interview with Tom Regan, the Pokémon Company COO, Takato Utsunomiya said, "Our goal is to keep Pokémon alive for hundreds of years – making sure it survives well past our lifetimes." In essence, the Pokémon COO wants to create a franchise which is immortal – one which will create new texts well after the death of any of its original creators, artists or audience members. Returning to Deleuze and Guattari's defining biological metaphor, this immortality is an attribute of rhizomatic, but not arborescent organisms. After the bulk of this dissertation was written, Tsunekazu Ishihara, the president of the Pokémon Company published a "President's Message" on the official Pokémon Company website where he noted:

> I regard the universal functions involved with Pokémon—the collecting, raising, trading, and battling—as our strength and the reason Pokémon has been loved for so long. Not only our games, but all of our Pokémon products and services share this point in common, an element that all players can relate to no matter where or when they happen to live.

In this message he notes the same connecting elements identified by this dissertation: collecting; raising (a synonym for training); trading (another way to collect); and battling as the reason Pokémon is so loved. However, he also says that that this love for Pokémon connects the audience to the texts and to each other. Continuing his message, Ishihara says, "Today, Wi-Fi communications enable players from all over the world to trade their Pokémon, turning Pokémon into a medium that connects people across country and regional boundaries and cultures." Ultimately, one of the rhizomatic connections that this dissertation did not explore might be the most crucial – are the viewers, players, and audience members of a franchise also points within the rhizome? As they mimetically recreate the journey of a television character within a video game or choose to "catch 'em all" by acquiring as many trading cards as they can – do they become a part of the rhizome? Does someone traverse a rhizome (as is implied through the mapping analogies) or does one become part of the rhizome? These are not moot questions, for if the Pokémon rhizome is immortal and as powerful as Utsunomiya hopes, then part of the appeal of Pokémon and other rhizomatic franchises is the hope of finding deeper meaning within our individual intra-actions with media that may help explain our situation within contemporary society.

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