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Author(s)	DeVore, Trane
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Pokémon Ghosts: *Wild Fruits* and the Virtual Heterogeneity of Pokémon Go

Trane DeVore

1. Pokélogue: A nighttime encounter

I've just finished dinner with a friend at a local restaurant in the suburban neighborhood of Toyonaka where we live. We leave the restaurant and begin the walk back to our respective domiciles through the largely unremarkable collection of houses, apartment blocks, and businesses that make up the architectural vernacular of the surrounding area. Suddenly, my friend pulls out his phone and scans the roadway in front of him while looking at the screen. In addition to showing the road directly in front of us, the screen also features a few esoteric symbols and the kind of straight, light-colored guideline that you might see while navigating with Google Street View. It's night, so the roadway is mostly dark, but suddenly, out of the dark, a wildly gesticulating figure appears. It's a reddish-brown crab with claws that are waving furiously in the air in a confrontational manner. My friend touches the screen of his phone and a red and white ball appears. Flicking the screen, he throws the ball at the crab. The ball splits open, a bright white light flashes out, and the crab disappears inside of the ball. The street is now empty, and my friend and I walk on.

Later in the same evening, another friend of mine shares some images of the strange creatures that have begun to inhabit her apartment. One of these is an angry yellow bird that hovers just in front of a drink bottle, another is a blue turtle sitting on the kitchen sink, and a third is a purple rat standing on my friend's desk next to a large pile of books and research materials. She's delighted and surprised by the appearance of these creatures, and she catches them all.

It's the summer of 2016 and Japan is crawling with Pokémon.

2. Pokémon Go as virtual biodiversity

The release of *Pokémon Go* in 2016 resulted in a great deal of speculation about what effects a game that allows users to experience the discovery of Pokémon creatures in real space via augmented reality (AR) might produce. The gameplay, which involves players capturing Pokémon that have been spread out across a wide variety of locations in the real-world landscape, is made possible by the overlay of a virtual network of Pokémon that has been mapped onto the physical space through which players pass. Using the location services built into the phone, as well as the phone's internal gyroscope, the fictional creatures of the Pokémon world are placed within the immediately perceptible landscape

through the portal of the smartphone screen. In addition to the Pokémon creatures themselves there are two other features of the game that get mapped onto real-world space: PokéStops, which provide necessary supplies for the player avatars within the game, and Poké Gyms, sites where players can pit their captured creatures against one another in virtual battle.

Pokémon Go proved immensely popular upon release and a great deal of the early media attention focused on two questions: 1) Would *Pokémon Go* reverse the trend of young people staying indoors to enjoy electronic media and bring them outside instead? 2) Would the distraction provided by the game prove dangerous in situations involving such real-world dangers as encounters with automobile traffic or the traversing of uneven terrain? A great deal of the academic work centered on *Pokémon Go* has followed these two lines of questioning, to a greater or lesser extent. A cursory search on Google Scholar reveals several papers that focus on the geographic movements of game-playing populations, while an abundance of pediatric studies focus on the health and wellbeing of children. “The Geography of Pokémon GO: Beneficial and Problematic Effects on Places and Movement” (Colley, *et al*), for example, focuses on the way in which the location of sites where Pokémon, PokéStops, and Poké Gyms are abundant can be geographically correlated with wealthy and majority white neighborhoods in the United States. Papers such as “Pokémon Go and augmented virtual reality games: a cautionary commentary for parents and pediatricians” (Serino, Cordrey, McLaughlin, Milanaik) and “Influence of Pokémon Go on Physical Activity: Study and Implications” (Althoff, White, Horvitz) tend to focus on the health and physical implications for game users, with a particular emphasis on young players. A further set of studies takes HCI (Human-Computer Interactions) as its theme.

What very few essays about *Pokémon Go* seem to focus on, however, is the actual content of the game – the fantastic bestiary of creatures that populate the virtual ecosystem of the Pokémon world. According to the Pokedex, an online list of all of the creatures that inhabit the Pokémon universe, the initial release of the game featured 151 distinct Pokémon; in addition, a further 100 creatures – known as Gen 2 Pokémon – have been released into the wild and made available for players to capture since the initial introduction of the game. In this paper I’d like to explore the possibility that the virtual environment of the Pokémon world is alluring to players at least in part due to the game’s recreation of a biodiverse ecosystem that has been overlaid onto areas of urban and suburban space that have seen a dramatic decline in biodiversity and a concomitant rise in experiential homogeneity. The heterogeneous enjoyment able to be experienced through the proxy of gameplay biodiversity can, in turn, be seen as a stand-in for a more generalized sense of loss that accompanies the disappearance of heterogeneous cultural practices that are tied to specific locales, as well as the way in which the homogenization of the lived environment has resulted in the loss of life practices that tie individuals to the places where they live in meaningful and particular ways. This paper will place Pokémon Go in conversation with a variety of texts including Marc Augé’s *Non-Places: An Introduction to*

Supermodernity, David Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous*, and Henry David Thoreau's *Wild Fruits* in order to get at the way in which the desire to experience diversity linked to place has found its popular expression in the form of an augmented reality game.

3. The dead zones of suburbia japonica

I've lived in the same general area of Toyonaka city, one of the administrative subdivisions of Osaka prefecture, since I moved to Japan in 2005. During the twelve years or so that I've lived here, I've witnessed changes in the suburban landscape that can be seen as constitutive elements in a larger process of suburban homogenization both at the level of ecosystem biodiversity and at the level of the cultural and aesthetic lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) experienced by the inhabitants of these types of living environments. These changes can be divided into three basic categories: 1) The loss of privately held suburban green space; 2) the disappearance of vernacular architectural elements; and 3) a shift in architectural priorities that involves both the loss of freely utilizable space outside of homes and an increase in privacy screens that intensify the separation between the private space inside the home and the publicly shared spaces that the home abuts.

The continuing migration of the Japanese population from both rural and urban zones that lie outside of the immediate orbit of such major metropolitan centers as Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka has resulted in a situation where land prices within in-demand metropolitan locations continue to be high even as the overall population of Japan decreases. The upshot of this is that there has been a maximization in the efficiency of land use in an effort to continue to provide housing that is attractive to consumers at a particular price point while still ensuring a high rate of profit for the real estate and construction industries. The effects of these market forces on the architectural form of the suburban home have been profound. One of the most easily discernable effects of high land prices coupled with a general stagnation of wages within the Japanese economic context has been the division of fairly large lots of land occupied by single houses into several significantly smaller multiple parcels. Individual houses are then built on each of these smaller parcels, but since the demand for living space has not decreased these new houses tend to occupy almost the entirety of the newly allotted parcel space. In effect, two or three new houses now occupy the same space that was once the domain of a single family home.

In order to maximize the floor space of these new houses, they are generally built out to the very edges of the subdivided parcels that they sit on, and just as often they are built *up* as well, standing an additional story or two taller than the older houses that they have replaced. Furthermore, these houses tend to stand in extremely close proximity to one another, almost like terraced housing but with a small gap between each house. The entrances to these houses are often built very close to public thoroughfares, sometimes opening directly onto the street with almost no gap between the public roadway and the property line of the house itself. In order to create a sense of privacy within living

enclosures that are so close to one another, and to decrease the sense of vulnerability that can arise when private space borders on public space, the faces of these houses often feature windows that are smaller than those found in older Japanese suburban houses, arranged in such a way that visual access to the interior of the home is completely curtailed. When this is not the case and large windows are retained, these windows almost invariably feature thick curtains that limit visual access, or exterior sliding shutters that essentially turn the windows into walls.

One of the most immediate effects that this maximization of housing space produces is the loss of privately held green space. Urban and suburban gardens are lost, the hedges that were once used to define property boundaries disappear, and even the thin strips of unused property that so often provide the space for mini-gardens grown in planters and pots have been absorbed by the all-consuming footprint of contemporary suburban design efficiencies. The loss of green space that results from this may appear negligible, but the cumulative effects can readily be observed. One of the most evident of these effects is silence.

The silence that blankets these new suburban living environments is the kind of silence that falls when there is no rustling of leaves in the wind, no loud crying of cicadas in the summer, and a deadening lack of birdsong. This dynamic is easy to chart while walking through the neighborhood areas where I have lived for so many years. On streets where the houses are mostly new, birdsong vanishes and is replaced with silence; however, on streets where there are older houses with substantial gardens the sound of birds singing in springtime is riotous and colorful. Birds find safety and security in the hedges and trees planted in these garden spaces, not to mention plenty of insects to snack on and perhaps even an arboreal site for nesting. Even houses with very small gardens will attract a bird or two, but newer houses with little or no greenery in evidence attract almost no wildlife.

What is even more catastrophic in terms of the loss of local wildlife is the wholesale destruction of privately held green space on which housing has never been built. These spaces — which include local community gardens, tiny suburban rice fields, and miniature orchards — act as a kind of suburban oasis where wildlife can maintain a foothold and even, in the right conditions, thrive. Unfortunately, the same market forces that are driving the trend toward the subdivision of larger real estate holdings into much smaller parcels of land are also forcing the sale of these green oasis spots, which are then commonly replaced with tightly-packed houses or upscale apartment units. A bamboo grove that I used to walk by on my way to work, for example, used to act as a habitat for birds and other wildlife, in addition to its already beneficial roll in combating the heat island effect produced by urban and suburban spaces that are overly built up. Breezes blowing through the bamboo leaves would produce an organic and sympathetic rustling, and if the winds were strong enough the bamboo stalks would knock together to create a soft, rhythmic symphony of clunking sounds. This bamboo grove is gone now and has been replaced by an apartment complex that expands to fill every available space, leaving no room for plant life except for the tiniest of symbolic patches here and there. Where once

there was birdsong, quiet Aeolian rustling, and the melody of bamboo percussion, there is now a dull silence. The name of the new apartment complex is Green Hills Nagomi.

The disappearance of green space and wildlife from urban and suburban centers isn't only detrimental in terms of the biosphere, however. A great deal of empirical evidence has been collected that confirms the general assumption that green space and biodiversity are essential components of both physical and psychological human wellbeing. In a paper titled "Global Urbanization and the Separation of Humans from Nature" from a June 2004 issue of *BioScience*, for example, the authors discuss the "dissociation of urban humans from nature" and compile a survey of research that demonstrates the negative effects of this dissociation (Turner, *et al*). In their survey they catalog research that has determined that both human health and psychological wellbeing are impacted as green space and biodiversity declines, and they make the staggering claim that it is quite possible that "most of Earth's human population lives in biological poverty." The authors also cite a study that indicates that biodiversity is also a source of community cohesion and identity and can help in constructing communal understandings of place and feelings of connection and affiliation (Horwitz, *et al*). A paper in the May 2007 issue of *Biology Letters*, published online, suggests that – based on research conducted in Sheffield, England – it is not only added greenspace in urban and suburban environments that enriches the psychological wellbeing of those who live in there, but increased levels of biodiversity also positively affect the feelings of wellbeing experienced by populations exposed to biologically richer environments (Fuller, *et al*). In other words, green zones alone will not provide the maximum benefits for inhabitants of urban and suburban environments unless biodiversity is also included in the overall calculus of wellbeing.

4. Materializations of non-place in contemporary suburban housing

It is not biological diversity alone that is being threatened by the spread of these new types of urban/suburban development and the bio-scarcity that tends to accompany them: the very sense of locality itself is in danger of collapsing as a characterless and repetitive architectural environment erases the heterogeneously diverse specificity of local vernacular accretions. In the case of Japan, most new suburban housing is a hodgepodge of functionally modernist styles, usually cubic, with your choice of either white or beige – or housing that tips its hand stylistically toward American and European forms, sometimes including the postmodern adornments of fake brick or stone facades, columns that exist outside of their original historical and aesthetic contexts, or other adornments that symbolize or imply a particular architectural style without actually engaging with that style in any kind of holistic fashion. This is style as reference, rather than substance, with the reference point in question located in an indeterminate elsewhere. It is only on rare occasions that new housing of this sort engages in any way with Japanese vernacular architectural form, and when it does the houses tend to be large and designed for wealthier customers.

What are the implications of this deracination of our spaces of inhabitation? In a paper for the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* called “Meanings of Place: Everyday Experiences and Theoretical Conceptualizations,” Per Gustafson invokes Edward Relph’s phenomenological analysis of built space and his claim that “modernity and internationalization produce ‘placelessness,’” and “inauthentic physical environments” (5). Gustafson’s own work is an attempt to construct an analytic framework for understanding the way that meaning and place are linked in the minds of those who inhabit a particular area. In addition to a conceptual model that can be visualized as an equilateral triangle with the categories of *self*, *environment*, and *others* forming the points that define the triangle, Gustafson proposes a separate set of additional “themes” in order to broaden the possibilities of analysis. These themes include four “dimensions of meaning” that Gustafson labels *distinction*, *valuation*, *continuity*, and *change*. *Distinction* and *continuity* are the two categories that are most relevant to issues surrounding contemporary building practices in urban and suburban Japan. *Distinction* emphasizes that places become meaningful when they can be defined as both having discrete boundaries and sharing particular, unique features. *Continuity* focuses on the meanings associated with a long-term experience of place, including “place-bound social relations, place as a historical environment and local traditions” (13). If it is the case that the diffusion of housing that can best be characterized as having no character linked to any particular place leads to a general diminishment in the sense of *distinction*, then it makes sense to wonder if these places are somehow being hollowed out in terms of meaning as well. Similarly, because so much of this type of housing is geared toward first-time buyers or upwardly mobile families, these houses are often bought by people who have no particular connection to the neighborhood that they are moving into, a state of affairs that constitutes a series of local micro-fractures at the level of *continuity*.

While it would certainly be an exaggeration to suggest that all meaning is evacuated from these newer neighborhood developments, using Marc Augé’s concept of the non-place might prove to be of some use here. In *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, Augée explores such spaces as supermarkets, airports, and roadways, as well as the time we spend in front of televisions and computer screens (and now smartphones and tablets), and refers to these as ‘non-places,’ or even ‘non-space.’ Augé theorizes that these are spaces of transience where people remain anonymous. These non-places exist even within the home as the screens that people interact with form a kind of portal of non-place that takes us away from the particularity of the immediate and involves us in the unlocatable everywhere of the virtual. Non-places are those zones where community remains unformed and instead the individual is disconnected from others, subject to the flow of the reifying social forces of late capitalism.

Given that one of the non-places that Augé chooses to investigate is the hotel room, we might ask to what extent contemporary suburban and urban neighborhoods actually function as a kind of long-term hotel for workers and families that locate for fixed periods of time rather than a lifetime.

The living spaces that are taken up by a mobile workforce as more and more jobs in Japan become temporary rather than permanent may pose as houses, but their functionality is much more that of providing for a place to live in relation to work rather than providing the *continuity* associated with a home located at the center of a stable community environment. If workers and families can't expect permanence in their housing situation, surely factors such as price, convenience, and functionality take precedence over any deep commitment to place. In essence, these houses may look like homes, but in terms of functionality they often more closely resemble the non-place of the hotel. Just as hotels exhibit a certain uniformity, so do newly constructed housing units and apartment-based living spaces. As Augé puts it in the introduction to the second edition of *Non-Places*, “the same hotel chains, the same television networks are cinched tightly round the globe, so that we feel constrained by uniformity, by universal sameness [. . .]” (xii).

5. Particularity anchors: Pokémon Go and the repopulation of dead space

As more and more living space comes to resemble non-place, and as urban and suburban green spaces disappear with a concomitant loss of biodiversity, it makes sense to wonder what forms of aesthetic, social, or cultural compensation might come into play to make up for the loss of meaningful connection to community, neighborhood, and biome that this entails. In *The Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram makes the argument, based on a phenomenological reading of the historical relationship between humans and the environment, that human perception itself is profoundly linked with the ways in which human populations have evolved and interrelated with nature over time. Echoing Augé's criticism of the flattening out of experience under the homogenizing forces of supermodernity, Abram writes that we are “Caught up in a mass of abstractions, our attention hypnotized by a host of human-made technologies that only reflect us back to ourselves [. . .]” (22). It's not only the technological network behind the shining screens that bounce us back to ourselves that matters: the flat, colorless, and repetitive surfaces that surround us in the contemporary suburban environment also serve to cut us off from what Abram affirms is the proper relationship our senses should have with the world – one of reciprocation:

[I]t is all too easy for us to forget our carnal inheritance in a more-than-human matrix of sensations and sensibilities. Our bodies have formed themselves in delicate reciprocity with the manifold textures, sounds, and shapes of an animate earth – our eyes have evolved in subtle interaction with other eyes, as our ears are attuned by their very structure to the howling of wolves and the honking of geese. To shut ourselves off from these other voices, to continue by our lifestyle to condemn these other sensibilities to the oblivion of extinction, is to rob our own senses of their integrity, and to rob our minds of their coherence. We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human. (22)

The not-human, for Abram, includes not only wildlife, but also plants and even non-organic natural formations that come to our senses as other, as unique and determinate differences of that world which is heterogeneous to us and thereby generously acts as a kind of alien intelligence that fires our senses, makes us alive to the world, and activates our capacity for imaginative thought.

While I imagine that Augé and Abram would be deeply suspicious of the following claim, I think that in some ways *Pokémon Go* acts in a compensatory manner to fill the void left by the loss of local biodiversity and the erasure of particularizing neighborhood features. In fact, in her essay “Portable monsters and commodity cuteness: *Pokémon* as Japan’s new global power,” Anne Allison points out that Tajiri Satoshi, the designer of the *Pokémon* GameBoy game, hoped that the game would act as a partial substitution for forms of human community and communication that he feels have been lost since his own childhood. Furthermore, the game was explicitly intended to recreate his boyhood experiences in “a town where nature had not yet been overtaken by industrialization” (388). These experiences include the exploration of local natural spaces, as well as the act of collecting small animals, including insects and crayfish. Allison’s own research shows that Satoshi’s desire to recreate the experience of natural exploration and a communal experience based on meaningful interactions has been largely successful in terms of the way in which children experience the world of *Pokémon* gameplay. Children are not only almost universally attracted to the diversity of the creatures made available in the gameworld (384), the complexity of the game and the desire to share detailed information about the creatures encountered results in children gathering together to exchange information, thus forming a kind of impromptu community (388).

Pokémon Go involves the same diversity of creatures as the earlier games, but virtually places them in actual space, recreating Satoshi’s childhood experience of discovery but doing so by expanding the gameworld into real-world locations, effectively erasing the border between the experience of virtual play and the pleasure of actual exploration. Indeed, as a recent essay titled “*Pokémon Go*: Benefits, Costs, and Lessons for the Conservation Movement” points out, it’s possible that the experience of virtual natural exploration allowed by the game could be used to encourage deeper learning about actually existing species and habitats. Published in 2016 in *Conservation Letters*, the essay points out that several of the *Pokémon* creatures are based on actually existing animal species (Dorward *et al*, 161) and are often associated with particular types of natural habitat (162). “Grass *Pokémon*,” for example, are associated with green spaces while water-type creatures tend to inhabit aquatic environments. There are even a few rare *Pokémon* varieties that have habitats restricted to particular continents (162). As the authors point out, “The allure of rarity has been a driving motivation for generations of natural historians to spend long hours outside and explore remote areas, and this clearly applies to the search for unusual *Pokémon* as well” (162). Not only have players of *Pokémon Go* been heading outdoors in droves to “catch them all” (“Gotta Catch ‘Em All” is the slogan

of the English-language version of Pokémon), they have also been encountering actual wild animals and photographing them, identifying them, and sharing information about them through the networked community of *Pokémon Go* players (162).

It's important to remember, however, that to whatever extent *Pokémon Go* can act as a compensatory mechanism for what is sometimes known as Nature Deficit Disorder (a term popularized by Richard Louv¹), the game is still a product of consumer capitalism and as such is embedded in the very system of forces that is responsible for the destruction of the natural environment in the first place, as well as abetting the continuing spread of the homogenization effects that Augé associates with supermodernity. In this sense *Pokémon Go* might best be thought of along the lines of Theodore Adorno's notion of the *promesse de bonheur*, the 'promise of happiness,' that can be located in the work of art as a kind of proleptic vision, at the level of the aesthetic, of an as yet unrealized utopian future. Adorno discusses this notion at length in *Aesthetic Theory*, and my summation greatly oversimplifies what is at stake in Adorno's far more complex and problematized analysis of the *promesse de bonheur* in relation to art. In "The Work of Art and the Promise of Happiness in Adorno," James Gordon Finlayson offers up this succinct formulation of the way the *promesse de bonheur* functions: "Here Adorno unambiguously sets out the social and critical role of art: the happiness it promises serves both as a foil for criticising existing society, and as an ideal for constructing a better one" (2). Though Finlayson's essay explores Adorno's concept much more thoroughly than this early summation suggests, the summation itself is a good jumping off point for thinking through the double valence of *Pokémon Go*. On the one hand it offers the promise of a world replete with natural biodiversity, while on the other it unconsciously criticizes the existing social order that is directly responsible for the eradication of biodiversity and the natural habitat necessary for proper ecosystem integrity.

One of the central problems with *Pokémon Go* when it comes to replicating species biodiversity is, of course, the fact that the creatures in the game have not evolved organically in the real-world habitats in which they appear, nor have they been in a condition of long-term co-inhabitation with the human residents of the areas where they can be found. Because their relation to place is ultimately artificial, the characteristic features of the gameworld animals will always have been inventions of the human mind and will thus lack the kind of truly *alien* intelligence that Abram insists will fire up our perceptual imaginations when we engage reciprocally with the natural environment that surrounds us.

It might seem strangely perverse to invoke the writing of Henry David Thoreau in an essay about *Pokémon Go*, but Thoreau's attitude toward the benefits of local biodiversity are instructive when read alongside the writings of David Abram and in relation to the issues surrounding *Pokémon*

¹ I first encountered this term in the essay "Pokémon Go: Benefits, Costs, and Lessons for the Conservation Movement."

Go that have been discussed so far in this essay. In *Wild Fruits*, a late work that remained unfinished and unpublished in Thoreau's lifetime, Thoreau is especially concerned with the relationship between local flora and adjacent communities and the way in which the interaction between humans and the natural world serves to co-produce meaningful bodies of knowledge and ways of understanding the world. *Wild Fruits* is essentially a catalog of the plant life that Thoreau has encountered across New England, but specifically and especially in the area surrounding Concord, Massachusetts, where he was based. Entries are indexed according to the names of the plants, and each entry includes a detailed physical description of the plant, an account of its uses and place within the local ecosystem, and any literary allusions or local lore that might be associated with the plant. These entries, which often include extended natural/philosophical musings along with descriptions of Thoreau's personal experiences with certain plant species, are an amalgam of scientifically precise natural observation and accumulated cultural understanding that takes the form of a literary project that bridges the nature/culture gap and presents the local environment not as an inert object prone to measurement and observation, but rather as a vital lifeworld co-produced by a human/nature dyad that ultimately inhabits a single ecosystem.

Especially important for Thoreau is the notion that an experientially based knowledge of the local biome is itself a type of formative education. The materiality of place for Thoreau is a kind of local knowledge that involves the affective experience of the body in place. As Thoreau dramatically says of New England's wild fruits, "They educate us and fit us to live there" (5). Fruit here is not some sort of disembodied object that can be approached and analyzed with the raw power of pure reason; instead, fruit acts as a cultivating force that shapes the encountering subject in a such a way that the subject becomes "fit" to live locality itself. The pun on "fit" here is clearly intentional — one's ability to properly engage with a place, to know it intimately, is defined not simply by an intellectual relationship, but by a bodily relationship that is figured in the terms of interlocking puzzle pieces. In the same way that puzzle pieces fit together so that they reveal more of the picture in combination than they could on their own, Thoreau's diction here suggests that a properly interlocking encounter between subject and object is the *sine qui non* for an educated experience of place.²

In stark contrast to the educative qualities that Thoreau associates with regionally sourced wild fruits, is Thoreau's discussion of fruit imported from the tropics, a characterization that invokes both the economics of the marketplace and the way in which global production displaces locality:

The tropical fruits are for those who dwell within the tropics. Their fairest and sweetest parts cannot be imported. Brought here, they chiefly concern those whose walks are through

² The majority of this paragraph and the one that follows has been taken, in slightly modified form, from my still unfinished dissertation, which is titled *Sensations of Capital: Henry David Thoreau, Critical Consciousness, and the Nature of Perception in Nineteenth Century American Literature*.

the marketplace. It is not the orange of Cuba but rather the checkerberry of the neighboring pasture that most delights the eye and the palate of the New England child. For it is not the foreignness or size or nutritive qualities of a fruit that determines its absolute value. (3)

What is at stake here is a question of body, sensation, and context. Thoreau's diction suggests a marketplace circulation of objects that, detached from locality and community, derives its value purely as an economic and cultural fetish. As such, the desires and pleasures associated with these objects remain at the level of abstraction: the "foreignness" of these fruits does not describe a physical quality, but rather the embodiment of an abstract relationship between nation states and economic globalization.

In this metric, tropical fruits can be seen as a kind of equivalent to the delightfully exotic monsters that populate the gameworld of Pokémon Go. While the colorfully bizarre appearance of these creatures is unquestionably attractive, there is no deeper connection to place involved in any encounter with them. Furthermore, the virtual creatures from the Pokémon world can only exist to us in relation to two of our senses so we are denied the pleasure of smelling, touching, or even tasting them. Because of this they must always remain somewhat alien and abstract to us, unable to fully root themselves in place through the grounding circuit of the earthier, more corporeally visceral senses. Finally, because the inhabitants of Pokémon Go have been artificially created they have an ontological status that precludes the possibility of forming any kind of interactive matrix with the ecological system that preexists them within the real world. Pokémon monsters may be remarkably alluring, but like the tropical fruit that Thoreau describes they are not, in fact, "fit" for local habitation.

The creatures of *Pokémon Go* are not, then so much a substitute animal kingdom as they are the aftereffects of a depleted biosphere, ghostly inhabitants of local spaces that have been denuded of both biological and cultural specificity. While these creatures may effectively function as a kind of psychological compensation for this loss, they cannot replace the networks of meaning, connection, and specificity that are a result of the nature/culture nexus of long-term lived experience in place. The nighttime appearance of a virtual Krabby, a river crab Pokémon (identified using the Pokédex), is not a substitute for the experience of catching crayfish that live in the nearby creek, but rather an alternate type of experience that mimics this act at the level of representation without being able to reproduce the fullness of a material experience that finds depth not only in the opulent richness of total sensory experience but also in an interspecies encounter in which *both* species inhabit a distinct lifeworld, an ecosystem formed from interactions that unfold across time as a webwork of interconnectivity. Indeed, the authors of "Pokémon Go: Benefits, Costs, and Lessons for the Conservation Movement" hint at this very dynamic when they make the following warning about some of the possibly negative effects the game might have on conservation efforts: "Indeed, if it is the ostentatiously fictitious nature of Pokémon that explains their appeal to an audience seeking escape from the perceived mundanity of the nonvirtual world, it could be very challenging to inspire interest

in real-world wildlife through the game” (163).

Space constraints have prevented me from fully exploring the ecosystem of ideas that has sprung into existence while thinking about *Pokémon Go* during my suburban saunters. However, were I given the chance to expand this paper in the future I would add two more texts to the mix. The first of these is the *72 Seasons* application, which is produced by Heibonsha. Like Thoreau's “Kalendar,” the detailed account of seasonal change that he was keeping in his notebooks before he died, *72 Seasons* is a way to map the seasons onto a locality, though the locality in question happens to be many orders of magnitude larger than Concord. *72 Seasons* is an application that can be used with either Apple iOS or Android compatible products, and it is essentially a calendar that charts Japan's traditional 72-season cycle, emphasizing seasonal symbols, foods, festivals, and plants. Every week or so a new entry appears within the application for a particular duration, and then when the next week arrives, the old one fades out of existence. There is no way to archive these, but since I've been using the app for over a year I know now that each entry eventually cycles back around. The current week is called 葦始生 (*ashi hajimete shouzu*) - “the first reeds grow.” This week's installment provides a seasonal haiku with an accompanying explanation, information about seasonal foods such as the Japanese red rockfish (*mebaru*), bamboo shoots (*take no ko*) and *wakame* seaweed. As a seasonal activity it recommends wisteria viewing and lists a series of famous wisteria viewing sites in Japan, as well as the time when the wisteria is usually in bloom at various locations. While the ‘locality’ invoked here encompasses Japan as a whole, the application does a good job of highlighting regional differences when it comes to climate, cuisine, and local naming practices.

The second ‘text’ that I'd like to discuss is Osaka's annual Self Matsuri (セルフ祭) festival. As it's name implies, the Self Matsuri is a DIY (‘do it yourself’) event organized by artists, musicians, and community organizers in Osaka's Shinsekai district. The festival is held in autumn – coinciding with the traditional Japanese autumn harvest festival season – in the Shinsekai shopping arcade. Japan's traditional festivals serve to link community and place through ritualistic ceremonies that involve the local gods. Sasayama's autumn festival, for example, is a harvest festival in which ritual floats and palanquins are paraded through the city, finally converging at night at Kasuga-jinja shrine, a shrine dedicated to Inari, the deity associated with rice. Kyoto's famous Gion Matsuri festival, on the other hand, originated as a way to appease the gods who were thought to be bringing plagues down on the city of Kyoto. It has since evolved into a celebration of the history of merchant and court culture in the city, and the ornate floats that parade through the city bear artifacts that are linked to Kyoto's identity as the final stop on the Silk Road trade route. These festivals are not abstract celebrations of national ideals or particular historical dates, but rather cyclical events that through their repetition reinstantiate a particular set of lived relations between people and place.

Osaka's Self Matsuri is a contemporary take on this festival tradition – an attempt to revitalize a local shopping street in danger of disappearing under the onslaught of national and

international chain stores that can offer products at cut-rate prices. Many of the shops that once lined the Shinsekai shopping arcade have been shuttered, and those that remain are threatened by a loss of consumer foot traffic as shoppers that would traditionally have done business in the areas where they live are drawn instead to larger shopping complexes where a greater variety of stores, services, and products are on offer in a condensed area. The artists and activists who organize the Self Matsuri are attempting to bring a new sense of locality to the area by opening new art and event spaces, cafés and restaurants, and most importantly by reviving a particular sense of local identity. In addition to the new signs and artwork that decorate the shopping arcade on a year-round basis, the Self Matsuri has become a focal point for reinvigorating a sense of community and place that had been in danger of disappearing with the shuttering of local businesses. The Self Matsuri itself involves street parades, performances by local musicians, traditional festival events such as wrestling matches and other contests, street stalls selling handmade goods, brightly colored chaotic costumes that often invoke traditional Japanese festival motifs, and – importantly – the ritualistic procession of a palanquin bearing a sacred shrine maiden, or *miko* (this role is played by a local artist). The festival spans several days and is intended in part to invoke ancient deities that might have once inhabited the area and welcome them back in alternative guise, new DIY gods for a new and alternative community based around a local area that has just managed to escape late capitalism’s tendency to eradicate the radically heterogeneous eccentricity of local difference.

I’ve invoked the *72 Seasons* application and the Self Matsuri here at the end of the essay to point toward the attempts that are being made to reinstall the particularism of place as part of a larger nexus of experience, a lifeworld that finds its meaning in the interactions between human communities and the non-human intelligences that inhabit the selfsame geographical coordinates. These non-human intelligences must include the biodiversity of local flora and fauna, but might also include the expressive qualities of prominent topographical features – the rocks, stones, and bones of the earth that allow their shapes to be felt by the welcoming intelligence of the human sensorium. Pokémon’s ghost creatures may act as a kind of compensation for the disappearance of biodiversity in everyday life and in some small way reinvigorate our encounters with place; however, the de-speciation of our planet and the continued demise of locally constituted space can’t be replaced with the fantasies of species diversification that are materialized in the augmented reality of *Pokémon Go*.

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