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(W)Reading pathways and cyberspace reality in Mark Amerika's *Grammatron*

In "The Literature of Information" Brooks Landon argues that "hypertextual impulse" in the field of literature is definitely not new (213). Throughout the years, it has been visible in the emphasis put upon intertextuality and in the growing demands placed upon readers to actively participate in the creation of literary meaning. However, the actual "hypertextualization" of literature only became possible on a large scale with the advent of the Internet. It was then that the electronic fiction of authors such as Bobby Rabyd, Stuart Moulthrop or Mark Amerika gave new meaning to concepts like authoring and literary reality.

Mark Amerika's *Grammatron* is a text based on alternate-reading choices. Upon entering the novel, readers are instantly presented with multiple hyperlinks and, as the links may be either left unopened or followed in a completely subjective order, "every reader's experience [becomes] just a little different, depending on the links he or she chooses to follow" (Shaviro, "*Grammatron*"). Nonetheless, the production of meaning in the text is not idiosyncratic to each reader. The process of arriving at meaning relies rather upon the ongoing interaction and mutual supplementing taking place between the author and all readers of the text, all of whom are joined into a global network of Hypertextual Consciousness and come in immediate

contact with each other via the Internet. Hence, as Michael R. Allen notes, the readers of Amerika's *Grammatron* are in fact *wreaders*, who not only consume the reality of the text, but also produce it.

The cyberspace reality that the (w)readers produce in *Grammatron* is one of questionable realness, illusions and entrapment. Upon its appearance, cyberspace was to be a part of the American Dream. Over time, however, it turned out that what was to be the land of opportunity with new possibilities looming behind the horizon – "a great American desert," as Amerika puts it (*Grammatron*) – "wasn't real. [Quite the contrary, for] it was [in fact] the desert of the real … that prided itself on its ability to link information" (Amerika, *Grammatron*) while confronting people with nothing more than endless representations. What Mark Amerika pictures in *Grammatron* is exactly this vast cyberspace desert. As the readers go digital, they enter a virtual world that gives them just a sense of contact with others, because real interaction takes place not between them but between their simulated selves. Moreover, behind the nodes and links awaits a labyrinth of intrusive pop-ups, gibberish or random sequences of binary numbers. As each choice necessitates another, Amerika's hypertextual "novel [becomes] a loop that never ends." Its variety can never be exhausted, yet, as Steven Shaviro writes, "once inside it, [the readers] can never hope to get out again. In this way, the cybersphere, or the space of Mark Amerika's novel, has the same structure as the 'real' world it simulates, and of which it is a part" ("*Grammatron*").

As hypertext fiction invites participation, in *Grammatron* the readers invent and follow their own pathways. The process of creation and literary reality become thus, respectively, the author and the readers' joint effort and their shared, self-perpetuating illusion.

Works Cited:

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