

The Problems of Grey in the Context of Postmodern Science and Culture

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Introduction

This paper consists of two parts: the first one where a "theoretical" attempt is made to analyse the general situation in the field of grey literature (GL), and the second part illustrating the practical way medical and healthcare GL is being treated in Russia. The second part is quite classical in its content and intent needs no special explanations or excuses: it is just sharing the Russian experience of medical reports and dissertations collection and dissemination. As far as terminology is concerned, both types of existing in Russia scientific degree works – candidate and doctoral – are termed "dissertation" and can be rendered in English as "thesis" as well so the terms "dissertation" and "thesis" as applied to the Russian scientific scene are used synonymously. The first part falls out of the strictly professional GL field since an attempt to explain a certain grey crisis and keep within the subject area failed.

Part 1. A theoretical reasoning

Recent developments in the realm of grey literature arouse alarming sensations. The capital members of the European Association for Grey Literature Exploitation (EAGLE) abandon the organization, many promising initiatives both national and international (like ISRN) fade, public funding shrinks, commercial projects fail to work, some leading GL experts express their scepticism about the grey future.

At this point I would like to set some limits to the subject of discussion and speak about the "mainstream" grey literature that is GL being a source of scientific and technical information (STI) and among such STI sources speak about scientific research and development reports and candidate and doctoral dissertations – most important and informative types of GL documents I deal with at the Scientific and Technical Information Centre of Russia (the Russian acronym – VNTIC), the federal grey literature center situated in Moscow and functioning since 1967. So, I exclude from my consideration "things like instruction manuals for your toaster, bus schedules, tax forms, etc." which in accordance to Gretta E. Siegel [1] terrify many librarians.

Different ideas have been suggested in order to explain the grey literature situation. Important as they are, the most of the suggestions seem to be of particular, "technical" rather than of principal, fundamental significance and most frequently concern the problems of GL definition, the Internet challenge, a new economic model, blurring the boundaries between the grey and the "white" literature.

Indeed, *the definition* of GL is important but the process of giving a more precise GL specification is endless. The classical definitions by Wood & Smith [2] and that adopted at the 3rd International Conference on Grey Literature (Luxembourg, November 1997) in many respects still work and may serve a working definition at least as far as reports and dissertations are concerned. Grey literature is a fuzzy set rather than a deterministic one and it is difficult if possible to define it strictly. The same is with commercially printed literature. Who can give a unique and monosemantic definition of white literature or fiction? But it doesn't prevent it from being published, sold, bought and read.

Next "much ado" is about *the Internet challenge*. There is no menace to GL in the Internet, on the contrary, the web has enhanced the role of GL. Some authors describe the web as the "new classical grey literature" [3]. The Internet did change our information and communication habits, there is a bulk of GL on the web sites but it doesn't mean that we are supposed to quit our traditional activities of collecting, archiving, and disseminating GL. The Internet is just a tool, a technical and technological instrument that solves some problems and raises others but they are not specifically grey, they have much to do with all sorts of information and documents no matter if they are grey or white.

There are both commercial and non-commercial publishers present on the Internet with the information products both free of charge and liable to charge. Helmut M. Artus [4] concludes that in respect to GL there is "no difference between Internet and the Print". Attributing the Internet challenge to the technical problems he writes: "As to the *technical facilities*, things have widely changed (although printed grey literature is not completely out of fashion), but with regard to the *economic structures* and *social functions* of grey literature we can confirm that only little has changed – if anything at all".

At the same time H.M. Artus goes so far as to suppose that Internet technologies could *blur the boundaries between white and grey* literature and "we could expect, this white literature is going to perish in the long run – and grey literature with it. What remains is only "literature" without any further classification as white or grey". It is hard both to prove and to negate such predictions; it all depends on how "long" this "run" will last. The predictions that the Internet will result in the death of print, white or grey literature reminds that about the death of theatre when cinematograph appeared. Anyway, if finally