

New frontiers in Grey Literature

Fourth International Conference on Grey Literature

by Gregory A. Finnegan

GL '99 gathered some 105 people from 22 countries; not quite half were authors or co-authors of presentations. It was the fourth in a series of biennial conferences, alternating between Europe and the United States, founded by Dominic Farace under the aegis of his GreyNet (Grey Literature Network Service).

For librarians, who made up perhaps a quarter of the attendees, it was an exciting opportunity to discuss issues and solutions to what are very much "our" issues with people who have shared concerns but aren't part of our daily interactions. This is especially the case for academic librarians, whose perspectives differed significantly from special librarian's.

The heterogeneity of the conference is suggested by the list of sponsors: BIOSIS, JST (Japan Science and Technology Corporation), MCB University Press, NASA, and the U.S. National Library of Education. Major database producers and consumers, then, along with commercial publishers and producers and consumers of large quantities of what we were soon used to calling "GL."

In formal terms, the conference's definition of Grey Literature was so broad as to include a large part of what college and research libraries hold: that which is produced on all levels of government, academics, busi-

ness and industry in print and electronic formats, but which is not controlled by commercial publishers. Taken literally, that means university press monographs and journals of learned societies (those not sold to megapublishers, at least) would be Grey Literature. In the event, however, the presenters and discussants focused on the concerns that drew academic librarians to attend: material produced by researchers and institutions for limited distribution. Even with a narrower definition, there were a great many issues raised.

The program was organized around three themes:

- "Global Assessment of Grey Literature: A Brave New World of Topics, Formats, and Uses";
- "Publishing and Archiving Electronic Grey Literature: From Production to Full-Text Storage, Retrieval and Distribution"; and
- "Copyright and Grey Literature: Authorship, Ownership, and Property Rights."

Creating buckets of information

Two of the best papers came from systems designers. Michael L. Nelson of NASA's Langley Research Center, writing with Kurt Maly from Old Dominion University, talked about "Preserving the Pyramid of STI Using Buckets." Concerned that even when research is

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formally published, the journal article is at best an abstract of a much larger body of data and programs, Nelson and Maly are developing a metadata system to link, in archivally secure ways, articles, conference papers, technical reports, databases, and project-specific software so that future researchers will be able to retrieve far more of what underlies the scientific literature.

Further, they plan "intelligent-agent" features such that "buckets" will create links to other buckets on the basis of common authorship, shared topics, or shared methods and instruments; researchers will then be led to a wider network of similar works.

Automating link management

Jens Vigen, one of several attendees from CERN, the birthplace of the Web, spoke (wonderfully, without text or illustrations) of his work with Elena Lodi of the University of Siena on "Link Managers for Grey Literature."

CERN works with Los Alamos in handling the great mass of physics preprints. As 200 articles arrive each day, with, say, 20 references each, some 4,000 citations must be input daily. Vigen and Lodi are trying to automate the process of matching and linking published articles to the preprints already online, which raises many questions (most especially of the permanence of URL's for e-journal articles).

Vigen began by observing that the general hype for a Web-based "digital library" overlooks the fact that hard-copy libraries are based on "shelf organization" to co-locate related works, which, of course, facilitates browsing. Vigen quoted a study that found an average of 18 mouse clicks between 2 related Web pages—far too clumsy a method for research, hence the attempt to automate links.

Copyright issues

The international quality of the conference meant that copyright issues were addressed in new and different ways. Most U.S. discussion of current copyright belabors how our library practices are changed and constrained as U.S. law comes into conformity with Europe.

The European presenters, however—and some from the United States!—discussed what kinds of protections are routine there, but

are lacking here—such as the right of a creator to withdraw a work.

Michael Seadle, from Michigan State University Library, gave an excellent talk on "Grey Copyrights for Grey Literature: National Assumptions, International Rights," which, with well-chosen illustrations, made clear many large and unresolved issues regarding control of intellectual property, print and digital.

Dave Davis from the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), which he semi-facetiously styled as "a reproduction rights organization," gave an excellent and witty overview of the many and varied rights contained in what we mistakenly think of as discrete books.

His fantastic and intimidating "bundle of rights" diagram (Jackson Pollock with a law degree!) made it clear that digitizing books, articles, and technical reports is not simple. A novel, for example, will have potentially differently held rights to translate, serialize, dramatize, broadcast and digitize, among others. And even these have multiple facets—movies vs. television, CD-ROM vs. Internet, etc.

The illustrations in a book very likely are "owned" by someone—a "corporation" is a legal person—other than the book's author and publisher. Some "chapters" in Virginia Tech dissertations are previously published articles, and some authors could not obtain rights to post their own work in their dissertation—whose online version may have a citation in place of a chapter!

Davis posed the question of how copying GL—as with CCC license—turns un- or semi-published works into "commercial literature." Could CCC licenses measure an "impact factor" à la ISI's citation indexing?

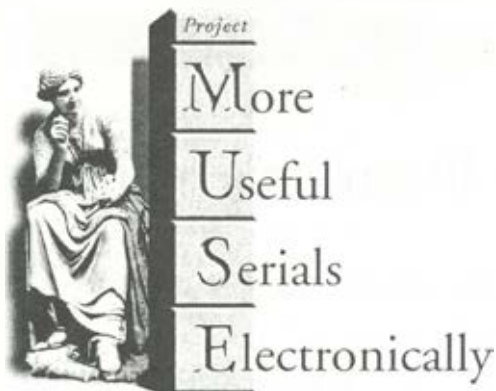
Davis quoted Mark Twain: "Only one thing is impossible for God: to find any sense in any copyright law on the planet. Whenever a copyright law is to be made or altered, then the idiots assemble."¹

Other topics discussed

Beside the formal papers and mini-papers in breakout sessions, GL '99 had product presentations by vendors and lunches grouped by topics.

Librarians were particularly interested in the massive schemes—not least by Farace's own GreyNet—to make it easier and faster

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librarians. Because librarians see and understand where the students are and how far they need to go to become information literate, it is the librarians' responsibility to make the need for this education known.

And we are well qualified to illuminate this need. Who teaches more students every year than the librarians? We are in a unique position to speak about student trends, competencies, and characteristics that can only be seen when working with such large segments of the student population annually. After grading library assignments from every first-year student (whom I've met in their college writing classes at the onset of their research paper), I see where they are and know how much they have to accomplish to become capable lifelong learners. (I am also very tired.) I've met the whole first-year class, so, over time, I will have met the whole undergraduate student body (minus transfers). I will see many of them later when upper-division classes come for one-shots, and when individual students come to the reference desk—so I can see how much they've learned, and what they still need to learn. I also meet with graduate classes, and see where they are.

When these research skills and cognitive developments are overlooked, the library is overlooked, as well. Our teaching function is forgotten . . . our budget requests seem low priority . . . our study carrels are empty . . . people can't remember why they should come to the library.

Perhaps our strongest argument for the library as a place, is no longer, "This is where all the stuff is," but, "This is where the librarians are!"

If you were trying to improve your hookshot, would you take your basketball to the cafeteria and ask an unathletic passerby to critique your form? So when research is the game, why not come to the library, and have a librarian nearby when you get stuck?

The voice of the librarian should be a clarion call that establishes the presence of the library at the center of the university. We must articulate the necessity of this monumental laboratory we call the library. To do it, we must open the discourse with strong claims, and continue it with lucidity. Forget about computers and books for a minute—Why are we *really* here? We are interested in something bigger: *learning*.

And as we all know, "higher learning" does not merely mean acquiring a larger mental store of material. It is about process as well: how to look at something *wisely*; how to solve a *complex* problem; how to put ideas to use. All of these are practiced in the library time and again as part of research. We cannot allow this crucial, sustained, experiential learning to fall by the wayside—forgotten in an age when it is needed most, and too many students are trying to navigate through trees without having any comprehension of forest.

Are professors complaining about the poor quality of student learning as evidenced in papers based on Internet snippets? Tell them to bring their students to the real place for research—the *library*, complete with faculty waiting to coach them. ■

(*"New frontiers . . . continued from page 910*) to gain access to more GL, including self-posted writings by those without institutional affiliations. How would such work—referred to by Sociologist Helmut Artus in his paper as "dirty grey literature" with no bibliographic qualities at all—be filtered by users? This question showed an interesting gap between special librarians—who did the searching themselves to package results for clients—and academic librarians, who could too easily see the impact on uncritical undergraduates of a Web full of good, bad, and ugly research indiscriminately presented by aggregators and engines.

Another distinction that became evident during the conference related to ephemerality and obscurity. How much GL was the larval stage of published research, necessary to identify in the interest of speed and currency, and how much research of enduring value never will be published beyond the original, GL report?

Not addressed was the related question—posed, for example, by U.S. environmental-impact studies, of how much research that used to be published by museum occasional papers and other well-controlled sources is now found in agency branch office contract research reports, far outside the view of libraries?

Note

1. *Mark Twain: Mark Twain's Notebook*, May 23, 1903. ■