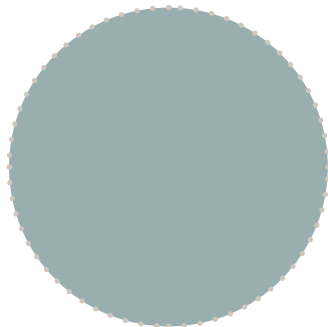


color is ...

BY JUDE STEWART

A Million Shades of Gray Are Still Too Few

Sniffing the economic winds, fashion mavens are pushing gray as The Color Whose Time Has Come—even as the streets crowd with kids wearing a million shades of gray. Gray pops hardest next to bright, clear colors, but on its own, the color gray can seem a disturbing quagmire. Undefined, middling, amoral, gray can bring us low ... even as it colors a secret antechamber where creative energies roam, hidden power is wielded, and a cheerful loopiness blooms.



UNCERTAINTY

"The color of truth is **gray**."

—André Gide, French writer & 1947 Nobel Prize winner for literature



RELATIVITY

"Out of damp and gloomy days, out of solitude, out of loveless words directed at us, conclusions grow up in us like fungus: one morning they are there, we know not how, and they gaze upon us, morose and **gray**. Woe to the thinker who is not the gardener but only the soil of the plants that grow in him."

—Friedrich Nietzsche, German philosopher



EXHAUSTION

"Common sense always speaks too late. Common sense is the guy who tells you you ought to have had your brakes relined last week before you smashed a front end this week. ... Common sense is the little man in a **gray** suit who never makes a mistake in addition. But it's always somebody else's money he's adding up."

—Raymond Chandler, novelist



Roget's International Thesaurus sets the mood for **gray's** range, one that stretches from the mud to the stars. The synonyms bear witness: *Iron. Dun. Drab. Dingy. Leaden. Grizzled. Slate. Mousy. Ashen. Calcareous. Limy. Salt-and-pepper. Dove-colored. Silvery. Chiaroscuro. Grisaille. Pearly. Dappled.*



Doses of radiation are measured in killing units called **grays** (Gy); each gray refers to the absorption of 1 joule of energy per kilogram of absorbing material. Quoth the *New Scientist* cheerily: "After a dose of between 8 and 12 grays, the person would suffer diarrhoea and vomiting, but would die from failure of the bone marrow unless rescued by a bone-marrow transplant." *The Times* whips the jolliness into further frenzy: "A dose of 3-4 Gy will kill 50 percent of any given group of people." Party on grayly!



SUBVERSION

The **Gray Ghost** is the nom de guerre of one Fred Radke. New Orleans' most livid-lipped anti-graffiti vigilante, he canvasses the city with his minions, covering graffiti with thick blankets of gray paint. Radke is so notorious in graffiti circles that Britain's own Banksy came to the Big Easy specifically to do battle with the man.

Radke got his comeuppance last fall with a mistake delectable to street-art fans: He covered up a graffiti-style mural commissioned by the owner of the wall where it appeared. Dripping gray paintbrush in hand, Radke was remanded by National Guard Military Police to authorities, who slapped him with a summons for criminal damage to property; if convicted, he faces \$500 in fines plus restitution, plus up to 90 days in jail. Fade the Gray Ghost to black? The future is murky.

SUBTERFUGE

In a slate-**gray** cubicle, one among millions honey-combing Wall Street's canyons, fingers flash over a cement-colored calculator. Another dour figure passes in gray flannel, flicking a wrist in discreet greeting. In a world erupting with ugly secrets, can two **gray queens**—a term for homosexuals who work in financial services—still cast a pallor of shame?



CLOAKED POWER

Gray goo describes a nanotechnological doomsday scenario in which self-replicating robots consume all matter on Earth. Far from a loopy sci-fi plot—although it's already spawned plenty of those—gray goo is a real worry for nanotechnologists. Nanotech encompasses many concepts, including molecular manufacturing. According to Eric Drexler, author of *Engines of Creation*, tiny "assembler" robots could be trained to "place atoms in almost any reasonable arrangement," thus allowing us to "build almost anything that the laws of nature allow to exist." If assemblers were built to self-replicate, teams of the little buggers could grow faster. A mutation in their activity, however, could actually consume the planet. How easily? A 2003 *New York Times* article reports Drexler's calculations: "In just 10 hours an unchecked self-replicating auto-assembler would spawn 68 billion offspring; in less than two days the auto-assemblers would outweigh the earth." In Dec. 2008 a University of Pittsburgh team unleashed an antidote to nasty nanotube spills. (Carbon nanotubes are the ideal building material for assemblers.) The nightmare scenario will be fought with—pause for effect—horseradish. That a condiment could be a catalyst for counteracting "what if?" dangers should not be a surprise in today's "what next?" world.



"The **gray mare** is the better horse": This chestnut describes a wife who dominates her husband, presumably the milder horse in a two-horse carriage team. Poet Alfred Tennyson (who was married to the exceedingly nice and supportive Emily Sellwood) nailed the gray mare's frustrated will to power in this passage: "The gray mare is ill to live with, when her whinny shrills from tile to scullery."



FREEING YOUR MIND

When little **gray cells** (brains) collide with **gray areas** of inquiry, an agreeable anarchy can be loosed. Not even many gray cells are required. Case in point: In 2001 the alternative paper *Philadelphia Weekly* started publishing the "Macy Gray Quote of the Week," an apparently inexhaustible supply of the singer's half-baked pronouncements, which seem to have begun as semi-understandable thoughts until they wandered straight to the fringe. The result is a daisy chain of found art, a Portrait of Gray: pearlescent, ludicrous ... unconsciously, doubly interesting.

- Gray on her 2001 album *The Id*: "It's like if you were to take a Hershey's kiss and eat it while you're on a roller-coaster ride to the moon. While you're on the moon, you get your nails done, get your hair done and put on your best clothes. That's what my record's like."
- Gray on herself as art: "I have a bronze statue of myself, naked. I have these really big curls and water comes out of every curl. It's hot."
- Gray on stealing: "I do steal on occasion. I stole a painting from the last hotel I was in. But I'll probably be charged for it."
- Gray on chicken: "Say you order roasted chicken and they serve it fried. That's not cool. You have to get it roasted like you want, or you leave. Satisfaction is crucial."
- Gray on the freedom afforded by grayness: "Whatever your image is, it's probably not you, but it affords you the freedom to live up to it."