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Back Talk: Silence is Golden if You are in the Market for a Dead Library

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I Hear the Train A Comin'
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Download counts and other metrics tell us there is an audience for informal works and for impermanent works. Is there an audience for informal *and* impermanent works, and, if so, how are these materials best captured, categorized, organized, and preserved? Or are some forms of scholarly communication simply too off-the-cuff and evanescent to be of widespread and/or long-term value?

This is but one of the questions we will encounter looking forward. Institutional repositories face many interesting challenges and opportunities as they approach adolescence. Common deposit mechanisms such as those envisioned by **NISO**, **SWORD**, and other initiatives may expose scholarly objects to their creator's choice of multiple deposit domains, such as journals, content management systems, subject matter repositories, learning object repositories and, of course, IRs. The current reality that a scholar creates something and then must follow several submission paths to give it life in all the places where it could have life certainly impedes the success of the IR. The consolidation of effort, in which the institutional repository deposit is no harder than checking another box, seems like a promising way to clear this hurdle.

Web 2.0 considerations will also continue to impact institutional repositories. The emerging generation of scholars spends its time on the Internet sharing things — pictures, videos, theories, gripes, thoughts, and so forth. Looking ahead, it seems likely that scholars, especially students and younger professionals, will want access to more real-time information and more unfettered communication. And they will want it with lower barriers — quicker, at less expense, delivered in a format and medium of their choosing to a device of their choosing. IR infrastructures and services will need to grow more flexible and nimble to meet these expectations.

Another potential game-changer for the IR is the proliferation of funding mandates. We have seen with **Harvard** that institutions may decide to use the institutional repository as a tool to execute broader policies and strategies. As yet the list of schools that has followed suit in mandating faculty deposits of their research has been small. **Stanford's School of Education** and **Macquarie University** are two of the notable mandators. Should other institutions begin requiring their faculty to archive copies of their funded research, the IR would no doubt increase in prominence.

Institutional repositories have had an interesting trajectory. They have not been the next course management system, a ubiquitous utility permanently enmeshed in the communication protocols of nearly every college and university. Nor have they been a white elephant along the lines of multimedia CD-ROMs, a product category heralded with great fanfare but ultimately adding little to the long-term fabric of scholarly communication. The jury is still out on the long-term impact of institutional repositories. I look forward to revisiting this fascinating issue in the years to come. 🌱



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Rumors
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The **University** then made available online files for each of the digitized works. The bibliographic records were acquired and enhanced by librarians at the **Auraria Library** in Denver. After the records were loaded into Skyline, the Auraria Library online catalog, they were uploaded to Prospector, the union catalog of the **Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries**. Now library patrons from across Colorado have access to the online books via the **Prospector catalog**. Except for the **University of Michigan** where the books originated, the **Auraria Library** was the first library in the nation to make these books available to its users. For more

information about Skyline and these records contact: **Jeffrey Beall** at **Auraria Library** <Jeffrey.Beall@ucdenver.edu> or for more information about **Prospector** contact **George Machovec** <george@coalliance.org> www.coalliance.org

Just back from a fabulous trip to Oxford, England where I attended a conference: "Exploring Acquisitions" from April 15-17. Wonderful. Ran into all kinds of great people from all over the world. More information coming on the **ATG NewsChannel** and in the June 2009 issue of **ATG!**

Guess we're out of space. More **Rumors** on the **ATG NewsChannel!** See you there! www.against-the-grain.com. 🌱

Back Talk
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I have an idea that **Francis Bacon** probably wanted his libraries deathly quiet but I fear that unless we loosen up our rules about the need for silence and stop shushing people, our libraries will be dead to the world. I probably also agree with **Plotnick** who in another part of his essay said:

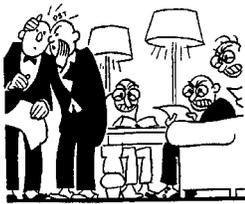
When I am working in a library, I much prefer a general hub-bub to the sound of my own breathing or of catalog trays slapping closed or of somebody's acid indigestion. Oh, once in a while I might enjoy a brief period of near-perfect silence during a particularly meditative study. But I will gladly sacrifice that occasional pleasure for the privilege of, say, reading a good passage aloud to a companion across the table or breaking

the tedium of study with a joke and with funky laughter, and so on.

If you have time and want more about the value of silence, click to **Youtube's** rendition of Silence Is Golden by the Tremeloes <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wP3YCZvuB6A>. 🌱

Endnotes

1. **Plotnick, Art**. The liberation of sweet library lips. In **Celest West, Elizabeth West, et al** (Eds.) *Revolting Libraries*. San Francisco: Bookleggers Press, 1972. Retrieved April 7, 2009 from <http://owen.massey.net/libraries/revolting/lips.html>.
2. **Sexton, David**. (April 7, 2009). The sound of silence is all we want in our libraries. *Evening Standard* (standard.co.uk). Retrieved April 7, 2009 from <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23560632-details/The+sound+of+silence+is+all+we+want+in+our+libraries/article.do>.



Back Talk — Silence is Golden if You are in the Market for a Dead Library

Column Editor: **Anthony (Tony) W. Ferguson** (Library Director, University of Hong Kong; Phone: 852 2859 2200; Fax: 852 2858 9420) <ferguson@hkucc.hku.hk>

Silence is golden, or so it is said. However, living in a city of 7+ million provides few opportunities for silence or the gold it is to produce. We live on Hong Kong Island in an area known as the mid levels — that is, an area in the middle between the harbor and the mountains. Hong Kong is mostly mountains with few if any people living in what might be seen as jungle. But in the 20 or so percent of the territory where people do live, we live cheek-to-jowl in apartment houses. Trucks seem to be banned from our street between midnight and 6 AM so there is a bit less noise during these hours but you can always hear cars and people down on the street, or at times the crying of children through the concrete walls above and below our flat. Last summer I did have a total silence experience. I took a trip to Mongolia which included two nights at a *Ger* camp, that is, a camp where tourists live in felt yurts in order to pretend they are sheep herders. Out on the rolling hills of Mongolia it is so quiet you can seemingly hear the beating of your own heart — excited by the occasional howl of wolves in search of wandering sheep.

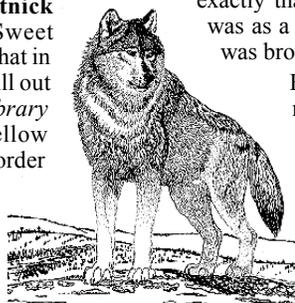
Well, enough of this tourist nostalgia about silence in Hong Kong and Mongolia. My plan for this column was to deal with the topic of silence in libraries, specifically, to look at the value of having silent areas in the library. My motivation for thinking about this stemmed from a few patron complaints



that our new food, drink, and conversation ambiance was getting in the way of their getting their research work completed.

I thought that if I surfed the Web/library literature to find the pros and cons for silence in the library, I would get enough to finish this essay (and silence **Katina's** nagging me to finish). What I found, however, was a hornet's nest of anger and words about the topic.

For example, I found an enormously entertaining essay by **Art Plotnick** entitled "The Liberation of Sweet Library Lips."¹ **Plotnick** noted that in 1967 he was responsible for a pull out centerfold sign in the *Wilson Library Bulletin* "printed on heavy yellow stock and framed in an antique border [with] . . . the hot pink words, NO SILENCE" inscribed. He goes on to say "I've got nothing against silence. Some of my best friends are silent. I've got nothing against it except what it's done to the image of libraries and librarians: it has WASTED us!" By this he means that by requiring librarians to go around "shushing" people we have marginalized ourselves and made librarians archaic symbols of musty archives worthy only of ridicule.



Traditionally we have had of course a number of fans who have encouraged us/demanded that we to stick to shushing people. **Plotnick**

provides two excellent quotes from those who truly believed in the value of quiet libraries:

- **John Ciardi** called for libraries to be "a place for the soft rustle of pages and the quiet stir of thoughts over the reading tables."
- **Jesse Shera** said that the library "is almost the last outpost of silence ... There is nothing wrong with the library as a 'quiet storage place'; indeed, it has been exactly that from its beginnings, for it was as a storage place that the library was brought into being."

But libraries have changed and most of us have listened to

Plotnick's call for an end to silence in at least parts of our libraries. At the **University of Hong Kong** we now have green (food, drink and conversation); yellow (water but no food or conversation), and red (nothing to eat or drink

and no conversation) zones. Since we have an aversion to police state tactics we don't heavily enforce these restrictions but most people seem to follow the rules. But where those demanding silence wander into the green zones or when noisy eat and drink patrons insist on taking up residence in a yellow or red zone, we do have trouble.

Apparently my library isn't the only place with this problem. A non librarian columnist in the UK recently noted,

Libraries have long provided silence to those without enough of it elsewhere in their lives. That's an essential provision, not any sort of discrimination. Now our librarians want to put a stop to it, making libraries too participate in the noise of urban life, the "fun." They should hold their silence. Or cease to dishonour the name of librarian.²

So what are we to do? For our library I think we will stick with our zoning system but work to make it clearer where noise is and is not appropriate. A few years ago during a tour of Australian academic libraries I noticed some libraries with glass walled off "deep silence" areas. Etched in the glass were quotations about the value of silence, e.g., Silence is golden, let us be silent that we may hear the whispers of the gods. I found this to be a nice touch though a bit smaltzy. I have an idea if I were a student at these schools I would want to paste post-it-notes with contrary views:

- **Francis Bacon:** Silence is the virtue of fools.
- **Abraham Lincoln:** To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards of men.

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