

# EDITORIAL

That this year's ARLIS/UK & Ireland conference was voted a great success by all suggests that few delegates, if any, had expected too much of the title 'The new art librarianship'. Most of the invited speakers were not art librarians; their papers did not, generally speaking, address the topic of art librarianship; the 'new' was represented primarily by such technological developments as multi-media and virtual reality, and included vivid images of medical subjects which proved altogether too much for your Editor.

New means of coping with visual images are of course both exciting and potentially important; they dazzle, and if initially they seem beyond our grasp, so that we yearn for the kind of practical information which is, or will be, filtered through such bodies as the Visual Resources Association or, in the UK, the new Centre for Image Information featured in this issue, yet they do not of themselves constitute a 'new art librarianship'. However, as Simon Ford argues, the ability of new technology to accommodate information which defies order, and to provide access, through multiple viewpoints, to that information without insisting on an imposed order, does suggest the possibility of a radically new approach to art librarianship and indeed to librarianship in general.

In this issue, then, we take up the challenge of the 'new art librarianship', notably through Simon Ford's demanding but important essay. At the same time, we are proud to publish Jacqueline Viaux's reflections, drawn from a long and distinguished career, which provide an opportunity to remind ourselves of the enduring values of the 'old' art librarianship – values which include a cautious, discriminating approach to new technology.

Of course, when new technology offers a new means of easily and quickly communicating with colleagues even across national boundaries, and of sharing information through an international network, there is every reason to throw caution to the winds and to rejoice. This issue of *Art Libraries Journal* includes not only an article about e-mail, but also, for the first time, articles commissioned and received by e-mail. ARLIS-L, together with VRA-L, perhaps represents the most significant development in international relations for art librarians since the inception of the IFLA Section of Art Libraries. But having said that, we should also remember that

not everyone has ready access to e-mail; that every advance which involves money and/or technology leaves some colleagues behind; that in becoming 'rich', we gain at the expense of the 'information poor'. One way in which the benefits of e-mail can be shared is for colleagues with access to e-mail to offer to network messages on behalf of colleagues without; the *Art Libraries Journal* would be happy – at least on an experimental basis – to offer such a service to any of its readers.