

The Legacy of CTI Textual Studies for Drama and Theatre Studies

Christie Carson, of Royal Holloway University of London, and Drama representative on the Advisory Committee to the CTI Textual Studies offers a perspective on the passing of the Centre.

My position as the Drama representative on the Advisory Committee to the CTI Centre for Textual Studies has placed me in an interesting position to comment on the close of the current chapter in the life of CTI Textual Studies and to speculate on the movement which is symbolised by the development of the new subject centres. While my contribution to CTI Textual Studies came late on in its history I think that it has been indicative and timely. The developments in computer technology over the last three years can be described as, at the very least, dramatic if not revolutionary. What is interesting about these developments is the extent to which the new digital culture which is developing all around us increasingly includes dramatic elements. The increasing access to and availability of digital time-based materials to support textual studies has put increasing pressure on CTI Textual Studies to expand its area of concern over this period. The difficulties presented to a single service which is charged with the task of covering the interests of the disparate disciplines of Drama, Media and Classics as well as the more traditionally text-based subjects of Literature and Linguistics are amplified when the technology begins to encourage the addition of sound and moving images to straight text.

CTI Textual Studies has, in the period of my involvement, met those challenges admirably and with considerable sensitivity to the needs of the disciplines it represents. I was one of a number of scholars working in the area of Computer-Assisted Film and Drama Studies who was asked to participate in a one day conference set up at St. Anne's College, Oxford in March 1997. This one day event was one of the first national gatherings of scholars working in these fields. Not only did it act to showcase the work of the scholars who were asked to participate it also brought together, in one room, a number of different constituencies who were able to begin to discuss the key issues at stake in this new world. In addition to the work of scholars in this area like myself, Ian Christie, who spoke about the initiatives in Film Studies, and Lizbeth Goodman, who spoke of her work with the Open University, Celia Duffy presented the work of the Performing Arts Data Service and Richard Paterson presented the work of the British Film Institute. The final panel of the day dealt with future issues of concern as well as the problems and challenges currently facing creators of resources in this area. In addition the participants were able to view and trial a number of subject-specific projects in the foyer of the lecturer theatre.

Out of this day came two very significant results. The first was the collaborative discussions which, in my case, continue to carry on today. As a result of the conference I made contact with the Royal Shakespeare Company's Development Director and continue to

correspond fruitfully with their Education Department, keeping one another abreast of current developments. While this kind of collaboration is hard to quantify it is significant in a world where the professional theatre and the academic theatre have long been, at best, suspicious and, at worst, hostile towards each other. Similarly the introduction of the concerns of Computer-Assisted Film and Drama Studies to a wider audience of Humanities Computing specialists helped to instigate an on-going dialogue which has resulted in the continuing growth of, and Film Drama representation at, conferences such as Digital Resources for the Humanities.

The second, perhaps more concrete, outcome of the conference was the special issue of *Literary and Linguistic Computing* that was the result of the day. Not only did this issue of the journal bring the concerns raised that day to a much wider audience it also provided an opportunity for publishing the results of this kind of academic study before the journals which are more specific to these discipline began to take a serious interest in digitally supported Drama Studies. I have recently contributed to two separate journals which have dedicated a special issue to *Theatre and Technology*, therefore I can attest to the fact that this is no longer the case. It is, however, important to remember, given the speed of change in this field, that recognition of the pioneering work going on in this area in 1997 was, if not visionary, then at the very least enlightened and supportive. The two kinds of support which this one day conference offered to scholars working, for the most part, in isolation up to this point helped to engender a spirit of co-operation and collaboration which had not formerly existed.



Fig. 1 The one day conference at St. Anne's College, Oxford in March 1997 was one of the first national gatherings of scholars working in these fields and also brought together a number of different constituencies.

The increasing demands of this kind of research has contributed to some extent to the need for change in the CTI structure. The movement of Drama and Theatre Studies from textual studies to the newly created subject area of Performing Arts duplicates the original movement at the inception of these disciplines from under the wing of English Departments to developing departments in their own right. What is interesting, however, is the placement of Drama and Theatre with Dance and Music. While Music has had a CTI Centre for some time Drama, Theatre and Dance have not. It seems to be no coincidence that this movement comes at the same time that a new panel in the Arts and Humanities Research Board has been created which covers these same subjects. While it is entirely understandable that initiatives of this nature should aim for

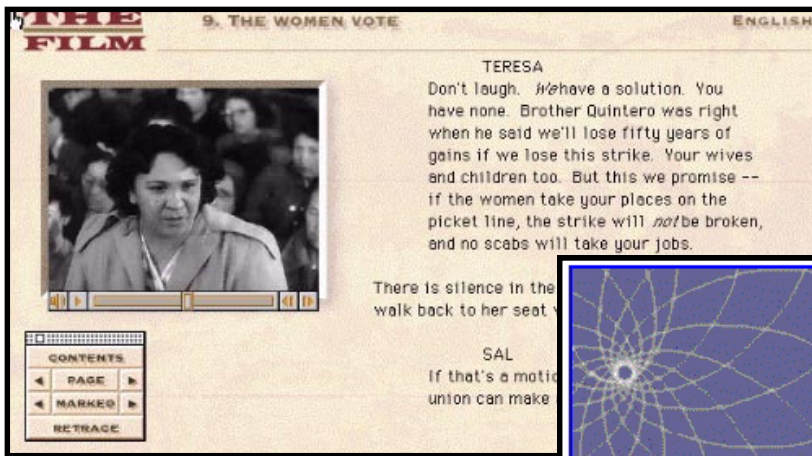


Fig.2 Screenshots from Salt of the Earth CD-ROM from Voyager Company (above), and The LiveArt Archive (right).



consistency it is also a potentially worrying trend for those of us involved in subjects of studies who find themselves being tossed between the old CTI Centres into the hands of new, but not entirely new, subject centres. There can be no doubt that there are similarities between Music and the other performing arts in terms of the methods of approach to their subject. It is important, however, to point out that these disciplines have developed independently and the application of generic formulae to cover all the subjects under the umbrella of the new subject centre of Performing Arts could prove disastrous.

The spirit of careful exposition and support for work already developing in these disciplines which CTI Textual Studies instigated three years ago may now be replaced by a less helpful approach. In no way do I wish to cast doubt on the abilities of the new holders of the subject centre for the Performing Arts. What I would like to question is what may be lost as a result of this new development. I cannot but agree that the work covered by CTI Textual Studies at Oxford has outgrown the capacity and knowledge of the staff provided for this service. What I do question is the loss of knowledge which will take place as a result of this new shift in subject priorities. I think it is important to acknowledge also the effort expended by the staff of CTI Textual Studies, and in particular the work of Dr. Michael Fraser, in trying to influence the process of creating the new subject centres. The decision to move forward under a different model of funding and the new subject centres focus has significant advantages in terms of preventing stagnation and allowing for a reassessment of the new developments in technology and teaching. I worry, however, about the losses and slippages which will result from this restructuring. So while I feel the future may well provide new opportunities, it is essential to acknowledge that these are opportunities which are the legacy of the very good work of CTI Textual Studies and its extremely hardworking staff.

Looking positively towards the future it can be seen to be extremely bright for computer-aided Drama and Theatre Studies. The

development of technologies such as DVD, along with improvements in processor speed, compression and bandwidth, allow for a future which could see an ever-increasing exchange between this subject and technology. In the professional theatre digital technology has long been a tool of the trade. As the academy increasingly incorporates this technology into its teaching and research the potential for real collaboration and interchange between the professional and academic worlds also increases. Digital promptbooks are easily copied and passed from the professional theatre to the academic world. Similarly students creating sound or lighting plots and digital scene designs can test their work in a professional environment if the systems used are compatible. The ease of exchange which digital technology provides does not, of course, ensure that the historical barriers of difference in approach and priorities will be overcome. Just as interdisciplinary study within the academy requires patience and sensitivity so does any exchange with the professional world. If, however, these gaps can be bridged then the student of Drama and Theatre Studies stands to benefit enormously. It is my opinion that the work of CTI Textual Studies at Oxford might be held up as an example of a sensitive and thoughtful way to proceed. It is my hope that the lessons they have learnt, and taught those of us who were fortunate enough to work closely with them, are not forgotten but rather are set up as examples which the rest of us aspire to in our work. Technological advances on their own do not ensure a bright future. It is the intellectual framework which supports these new initiatives which will determine their success, and it is in this area that I would suggest any new initiative would do well to look at the record of those who have come before them.

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