國立台灣大學教務處教學發展中心

教學改進研究計畫成果報告

Using Films as an Aid for Teaching Greek Tragedy

利用電影輔助希臘悲劇教學

執行單位：文學院外國語文學系

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■ 摘要

本計畫目的在彌補學生在「**索福克勒斯的《安蒂岡妮》**」課程中對於該劇之視聽經驗之不足，期望藉由電影欣賞為學生增添視聽經驗。然而，因自劇本到影片的改編涉及許多符碼轉換，純粹的影片欣賞並不足以引領學生融入文本或影片，故本計畫意圖建構一適切教學方法，使學生對於跨符號系統的意符轉換有更深切的認知。由於傳統課堂教學法則無法應映此需求，本計畫籌辦了「**從電影看希臘悲劇**」系列讀書會與講座：該活動由修課學生參與，並邀集電影與希臘悲劇領域的專家學者主持主講，以收整合各方資源、建立全方位教學方法之效。

與會專家與同學在本系列活動中，統整出在課室中欣賞希臘悲劇改編電影的三大類重要場景，分別為劇本中之：開場景、信使景與歌隊景；開場為劇本之初始並為劇本研究奠定基調，信使及歌隊場景則有助同學釐清戲劇——尤其是古希臘戲劇——的特色。在計畫執行間，我們亦發現影片欣賞對於「索福克勒斯的《安蒂岡妮》」課程之另一助益，即：令讀者更能意會到劇本與本身文化之「文化差異性」。

本報告書於結論處將本學年修課學生之學期報告與前學年學生報告（控制組）依（1）文化感受度 與（2）演出感受度 比較評量，發現100學年度修課學生與99學年度修課學生相比「文化感受度略為深刻、演出感受度大為提高」。因計畫執行狀況特殊（特殊性有二：其一為本計畫伴隨課程教學演進，教學改進要點呈現得較為零散而缺乏統整性；其二為本學年學生對於參與讀書會活動極為積極，未來修課學生未必能展現此等熱誠），我們認為有必要在未來幾學年中繼續試驗此一教學方法。然而，本計畫執行成效極為優良，我們亦期許此優秀成果能在未來更臻完善的課程得到驗證。

■ Abstract

This project addressed the resistance of the students of my course "Sophocles' Antigone" to react to the play as a visual and aural experience. To solve this problem I intended to expose them to film versions of the play. However since this involves an interplay among several semiotic codes, simple exposure to films is not enough. One also needs to build a teaching methodology that exploits appropriately the intersemiotic interplay. Since traditional academic disciplines have not developed these methodologies, I proposed and ran a series of reading group meetings led by specialists (some in film studies, some in Greek Tragedy) and attended by the students alongside our normal classes and to pool specialized knowledge together so as to develop the appropriate teaching methodology.

The conclusion of these meetings was that the introduction of the films in the class should be done in such a way as to focus in three particular areas: the opening scene of the play, the messenger scenes in the play, and the chorus scenes. The rationale for the opening scene was that as it was the initial element of the play and of the class study it sets the tone for all subsequent study, while the focus in the messenger scenes and the chorus would help clarify for the students the issue of theatricality, especially theatricality as understood in ancient Greece. During the execution of the project, we discovered that the use of films could also be used in the same class for an additional purpose, namely to heighten the cultural awareness of the "otherness" of the play.

At the conclusion of the project, the term papers of the students in the current year, as well as those of the year before (control group), were rated in respect to (a) Cultural Sensitivity and (b) Performance Sensitivity. The result showed a marginal improvement in the Cultural Sensitivity Rating for the 2011-12 group as compared to

the 2010-11, and an impressive improvement in the Performance Sensitivity Rating for the current year students. We do feel that these results need to be re-tested in subsequent years, since the circumstances of the ratings for this year are rather peculiar (on the one hand, the project was in progress alongside the classes and the teaching improvements were introduced piecemeal and not as part of a planned and comprehensive teaching plan; on the other hand, this year's students participated to a great extend in the workings of the group and so where in a position that future takers of the course will not be.) However, we do believe that the results are extremely encouraging and we expect that future editions of the class will re-validate them.

■ Problem identification

The challenge facing both the teacher and the student of Ancient Greek Tragedy is most succinctly summarized by Gamel (1997):

> "Reading only the written traces of ancient performance texts is like analyzing a film from the screenplay or an opera from the libretto. In order to comprehend them fully, contemporary readers need to configure the full range of performance possibilities--visual, aural, musical, architectural--as well as their social setting and ideological context."

The problem gets even further intensified by the fact that Ancient Greek Tragedy is usually taught within departments of literature, places in which both instructors and learners are traditionally very adept in dealing with a text, but they lack both the skills and often the motivation to deal adequately with matters of performance. This situation was also faced by my course *Sophocles' Antigone*, taught in the Graduate School of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures since the academic year 2009-10. Despite my concerted efforts to interest the students in trying to take into account the visual semantics of the play, they did not respond and neither their presentations nor their term papers would attempt to involve a discussion of the meanings produced during the performance of the text.

■ Possible solutions

The seemingly obvious solution to this problem, namely exposing students to performances of the tragedies under study, carries with it undesirable side-effects:

> (a) modern theatrical conventions are so very different from the Ancient Greek ones, and as a result modern productions constitute "transcoding" (a term used by Rifkin (1994) in reference to adaptations of prose fiction into film) rather than "recreation" of the original. Regrettably, the fact that both the

ancient and the modern performances are "theatrical" masks the differences and creates huge obstacles into appreciating their "otherness";

(b) as transcoding operations, modern productions inevitably constitute inter-pretations of the original plays and often would focus into issues that were not of concern to the ancients (this point is elaborated by Hardwick, 2000), while at the same time purports (and often feels to the audience) to be an experience extremely close to the original (cf. Hall, 1996); theatre experience in modern times is socially a very different experience than it was in antiquity: whereas in modern times theatre is an elite entertainment, in antiquity it was a form of entertainment addressed to a mass audience (as evidenced by the huge size of the Greek theatres and the great amount of theatres built in fifth century Athens) and we can be very confident that all the surviving plays were seen either in first run or in repetitions by a vast majority of the population of Athens.

If exposure to theatrical performances would have to deal with a number of particularly vexing side-effects, exposure to film versions of the tragedies could, we theorized, provide a better alternative, since the modern art of cinema shares important characteristics with Ancient Greek Tragedy. Like tragedy in fifth century BC, so cinema in the 2000's AD is a relatively new, but equally well-established, medium of narration; it functions similarly as a means of mass-entertainment and at the same time aims to problematize and intellectualize matters of great concern for its society. So cinematic versions of Greek Tragedy would not face the problem outlined in (c) above.

At the same time, while they are also transcoding operations and interpretations of the original productions (the problems outlines in (a) and (b) above), they are transparently so, since they are produced in a very different medium, and consequently their interpretations are likely to encounter more resistance from the students than a theatrical interpretation would, particularly if the process of transcoding is explained in a pedagogically sound way to the students.

■ Designing implementation of the solution

Even if exposure to film adaptations seemed to us the preferred solution, nevertheless it was also absolutely clear that it was just a matter of simple exposure. Instead we thought that the students should be either provided with guidelines on how to approach these films adaptations or to be guided towards establishing a critical stand towards the films they were to watch. Our main concern was that, although the last 50 years or so have seen a keen interest in the reception and influence of classical antiquity as seen by modern cinematographers (for an up-to date review and bibliography see Winkler, 2009), nevertheless neither the issue of transcoding, nor pedagogic approaches to it, have been systematically addressed until now. This problem can be illustrated with McDonald's comparison between Euripides' tragedy *Iphigeneia in Aulis* and Cacoyannis' film adaptation of the play (2001:90-91)

> A film adaptation renders this suffering more concrete than is possible in a production of Euripides' play on the stage. Siegfried Kracauer's claim that film redeems physical reality is applicable here. Cacoyannis's camera allows us first to identify with Iphigenia, the frightened child. Near the opening of the film, the Greeks are hunting a deer, and the camera follows it through the underbrush, focusing on its eye bulging in panic. Later we see the same landscape and similar camera movements when Iphigenia is hunted down. Cacoyannis forces us to identify with the oppressed, especially women and children, perhaps even more than Euripides had done ... With film, our identification with a character or characters is different from the emotional involvement the theater offers its audience. Tragedy on the stage moves us to an emotional and even intellectual pleasure which arises from our watching the play. But in a play it is mainly the language and its delivery that elicit and shape our response, while film gives more emphasis to the visual and, in this way, to a more immediate, visceral experience on the part of the spectator.

While McDonald's interpretation addresses very sensitively the reactions of

modern audiences, nevertheless it does not address the issue of how watching Cacoyannis' film can inform us about the issues that Euripides was working with in the original play, an issue that is extremely important as McDonald's discussion comes in the context of using films as aids for the teaching of Tragedy. It was our understanding that this problem was the result of two facts: on the one hand, usually the people who understand the "code" of tragedy they do not understand sufficiently the "code" of cinema and vice versa; and, on the other hand, where enough knowledge of both "codes" has been sufficiently present, there was not enough interest in pedagogical pursuits.

Consequently, it seemed to us that the intervention should first of all focus towards establishing a pedagogically sound procedure for exposing the students to films. To achieve this result, and in the light of our understanding of the issues detailed above, we thought to bring together experts both in Film Studies and in Greek Tragedy in a series of reading group meetings with the express purpose to discuss not so much the difference between film adaptations and the original, but the way that exposure to film adaptations can sensitize the students towards appreciating the semantic potential of the original performance of the plays. We invited, and we were delighted they accepted the following scholars to participate: Huang Chun-Long, Yu Chang-Min, Ho Wei-Hsien, Hsu Fu-Chih, Hu Zong-Wen, Chesney Duncan. The students taking the course Sophocles' Antigone were also strongly encouraged, in addition to the regular classes of the course, to participate. Half of them attended all meetings, while all of them attended at least five meetings.

Given the time limitations inherent in projects of this kind we thought that we should limit the project to 11 meetings. The opening meeting took the form of a lecture of tragedy within the Athenian society and discussion. It was designed to

provide those participants with not enough knowledge of the social aspects of Greek Tragedy with some background knowledge. The final meeting, meant as a means of summing up the conclusions of the work done in the previous meetings, took again the form of a lecture and discussion, this time on "Adaptation into Film". The nine meetings in between were divided into three cycles of three meetings each on Sophocles' *Antigone* and Euripides' *Medea and Electra*. In each cycle the first meeting was devoted in discussions of the film adaptations selected, the second meeting in a discussion of the original play, and the third meeting was devoted in a discussion of the relationship between the adaptations and the original, as well as on the strategies that could be used to incorporate exposure to the film adaptations in the teaching of Greek Tragedies.

■ Conclusions

Right from the beginning it was absolutely clear that the films to be selected should belong to different schools of cinematography so that it would be absolutely clear for the students that the operations involved as not as simple as just shooting the words of the text, but that it involves an interpretation by the director. This was a very easy task as almost every film adaptation of any given tragedy would belong in a different school of cinematography. Nevertheless, we found that one could productively group them into two main tendencies. One tendency would be mostly made by (modern) Greek versions. Their main characteristic was that mostly they were mainstream films, aiming for a representation as naturalistic as possible, and assuming that the audience would need a very minimum help with the background of each play. The other tendency encompassed films by non-Greek directors. They were mostly art films, addressing an elite, highly educated audience; and audience who would not just tolerate, but also enjoy a stylized, highly conventional

representation of the action depicted; but who also needed a much more extensive grounding in the background of the stories covered.

It was particularly pleasing that this distinction was immediately noticed by the students participating in the meetings, and that they themselves were able to pinpoint the reasons motivating each of the directors to "enlist" oneself in one of these groups: the Greek directors were working with topics that they considered that they were already part of the immediate culture of their audience, as a result they did not feel either the need to provide extensive background information, or the freedom to depart extensively from what would be an acceptable representation of the stories within (modern) Greek culture. The non-Greek directors, on the other hand, they did not have to face as strong a resistance in being innovative.

This particular finding very early in the meetings alerted us to the fact that in addition to the use of the films as guides towards taking into account the visual semiotics of a play, the films could also be used to heighten the cultural sensitivity of the students and to heighten their realization that interpretations are culturally sensitive. As a consequence, throughout the duration of the project we also kept an open eye to the effects of this parameter.

As for the main objective of the project it was thought that it would be best to approach each play and its film adaptations by focusing in one particular aspect at one time, inviting the students to formulate a critical stance towards the choices made by particular film adaptations and then compare them with the choices that would be possible within the conventions of the Classical Greek Theatre, and try to re-create possible stagings in the original play and formulate an interpretation of the different choices.

It was thought that it would be most appropriate to focus on three particular aspects: the opening scene of each play; the representation of the chorus; and the

representation of the messenger-scenes.

Concerning the opening scene, the students should be advised to pay close attention to the camera positions and the perspectives chosen by each of the directors. They are encouraged to compare it with the fixed perspectives that are necessary in theatre productions, and to envisage what possible variations would be effected by the movement of the actors on stage. At that point they should start thinking in terms of the Ancient Greek stage (a narrow and long platform raised three or four steps up above the orchestra), the distance between actors and audience (when the nearest spectator would be around thirty metres away and at a level slightly below the actors, and the furthest about 60 metres and considerably higher than the actors). Furthermore, attention should also be paid on how the initial characters are presented as appearing. The ancient Greek convention would start with an empty scene and each of the characters would make their entrance from one of the following (a) the left hand side, signifying the character is coming from outside the city; (b) the right hand side, signifying the character is coming from the city; (c) from the building represented in the city (usually depicting a palace). Students are to be directed to contrast what was a necessary choice for the ancient performances (since the ancient theatre did not have a curtain) with the choices that are made in modern films where it is perfectly possible (and actually the usual choice) to present the characters already at place in the opening. Also given that ancient Greek society placed different degrees on the appropriateness of presence in different places of different characters (so, for example, ideally unaccompanied women would only be appropriately within the house and its immediate exterior; as a result whether Antigone enters on the stage from any other place rather than the palace entrance would immediately provide significance regarding her character).

The reason that made us reach a consensus that detailed study of the opening scene is important is basically because it comes first. It is the first item to be read by the student, the first item to be seen in a film, the first item to be discussed and lectured upon by the instructor. As such it creates a framework on how to read, think about, and interpret everything that follows. Moreover, as it comes at the beginning of the interaction between instructor and students, it also sets up what are the expectations of the instructor, and it motivates the students to anticipate these expectations of the instructor and prepare themselves in such a way as to be able to respond in future interactions to a similar set of questions.

The messenger-scene is one of the set pieces of Greek Tragedy that has attracted the attention of scholarship for a long time now. At some point during the course of a play a messenger comes on stage and announces and describes to those on stage (and to the audience) events that have happened in some other place. The traditional explanation explains this device as a way of dealing with scenes that it was not within the technical abilities of the ancient theatre to display on stage. So, for example, the spectacular crash of Hippolitus in the tragedy with the same name by Euripides would be extremely challenging to stage even at a modern theatre. However, the suicide of Eurydice in Sophocles' *Antigone* is quite straightforward and there is no need to relegate it into a messenger speech. Here the traditional explanation seeks to refuge to a "fact" that death would not be shown on stage for religious reasons; and yet the on-stage suicide of Ajax, though admittedly the only surviving on-stage depiction of death, seems to point out that this was not an inviolable taboo. Yet again, the visit of Antigone to the body of the already dead Polyneices would not violate this supposed taboo, but nevertheless it is still conveyed through a messenger speech.

It was the consensus reached during our meetings that the messenger speech

is best approach as a set piece that helps clarify what counted as theatricality in ancient Athens, and that juxtaposition with the film versions can help students appreciate this very effect. In particular film renderings of messenger speeches adopt two perspectives: (1) the messenger speech becomes a voice-over, while the described happenings are shown as a flashback; and/or (2) while the messenger is talking the camera focuses on the faces and the reactions of the listeners. Either of these choices, when contrasted with the happenings on stage within the conventions of Athenian Tragedy brings out very vividly what the playwrights were actually aiming at. Choice (2) above would be absolutely irrelevant to the conventions of ancient Tragedy, firstly because the distance between spectators and actors and the use of masks would not allow the facial expressions modern actors work with; but also because it is obvious that the important actor in this scene is the messenger himself and it is the messenger's expressive gestures (which would have to be imagined as exaggerate enough to be perceptible fro a great distance) that would be the focus of attention. Choice (1) has the drawback that the messenger is not simply becoming a "speaking camera" as it would be, but also an active commentator and interpreter of what is described. In other words, the messenger scene is not so much about the depiction of a scene, but much more about the way that what was seen has been understood and has been evaluated, and even more about the way it tries to claim authority by persuading that it is the "right" interpretation; i.e. it becomes a constituent part in a theatre where *mimesis* is not about actions as such, but about speech-acts.

Finally the chorus is another characteristic device of ancient Tragedy that moderns find it extremely difficult to understand and to deal with. In modern theatrical performances, directors often attempt to limit the chorus by moving lines belonging to the chorus to one or another of the characters, and there is almost

never any attempt to stage fully this collective personality with all its dancing and singing, which moreover has its own unique place in the ancient performance space, the *orchestra*, a space positioned in such a way as to bridge the distance between the actors and the audience. Film directors have shown a very similar awkwardness in dealing with the chorus. In naturalistic films, the chorus generally becomes a crowd that often intermingles and almost always occupies the same space as the other characters, never portrayed as dancing and generally not allowed to sing, but simply to recite; while in at least one of the films (Javellas' *Antigone*) is completely eliminated visually in the choral songs and is replaced by a recited voice-over while the camera pans over a landscape that would purport to visually portray the content of the song. In non-naturalistic films, the chorus is often allowed to dance (or at least to move in a choreographed way) and occasionally to sing, however given the nature of these films visually there is not enough contrast between the doings of the chorus and the doings of the characters and their presence often appears inexplicable and almost like an invention of the director, rather than as a constituent of the original that is adapted. In all cases, both the naturalistic and the non-naturalistic adaptations, the chorus acquires the characteristics of either a commentator of the actions portrayed or an interpreter of them. In most cases in order to facilitate this role of the chorus extra lines are given to them, or indeed in some cases their actual lines are completely replaced by utterly different ones.

This utter misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the chorus becomes extremely productive in helping the students appreciate their importance. Their collective personality was not problematic at all for the ancient audiences, especially the Athenian ones, which working within a culture that did not particularly appreciate individual leadership and social identity, but it did privilege

collective authority and was structured around collective leadership ("the ten generals", "the eleven" (commissioners of police), "the council of four-hundred", "the assembly of the people", etc.). While their spatial location in between audience and actors made them as if it were a "representative of the audience on stage". As such, their role is neither that of a commentator nor that of an interpreter, but a representative of the audience, a collective personality that shares in and voices out the understanding of the audience.

■ **Evaluation of the intervention**

As it was stressed in the application for this project, the results will be much more apparent in subsequent sessions of the *Sophocles' Antigone* graduate class, rather than in the one contacted in the current academic year, the reason being that the project was concurrent with the class and while the knowledge acquired during the conduct of the project was immediately applied in the class, nevertheless this application, as always with work-in-progress was applied in a-piece-at-a-time fashion, rather than as a complete and comprehensive teaching plan. Nevertheless. the fact that the students taking the class did also to a great extent also participated in the project and so participated in shaping their own teaching process, provides some kind of compensation and makes it possible to take some initial measure of the success of the intervention attempted.

To evaluate the success of the project I went through the term papers of the students of the 2011-12 class (time of the project) and compared them with those of the 2010-11 class (year before of intervention) and ranked them from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)   along two scales: (a) cultural sensitivity (to capture the initially unintended dimension identified in page 6 of the current report) and (b) sensitivity to performance issues. The sensitivity ratings obtained are summarized on the table

below.

Table: Sensitivity Rating	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Average Score
2010-11 Cultural Sensitivity		1	2	6	1	10	3.7
2011-12 Cultural Sensitivity			1	2	4	7	4.4
2010-11 Performance Sensitivity	9	1				10	1.1
2011-12 Performance Sensitivity			2	3	2	7	4.0

As the table shows the results obtained are extremely encouraging. In respect of both parameters evaluated the 2011-12 group performed better. The improvement in the Cultural Sensitivity Rating is minimal, but this is easily explained by the fact that this is an area in which no deficiency was observed in previous classes, and simply an already good situation became better. However, the improvement in the Performance Sensitivity Rating (the area that did constitute a problem in the past) is extremely impressive, with the worst result (two students showing an average sensitivity) being better than the best result of the previous year (one solitary student showing a rudimentary sensitivity), and the total performance being almost four times better.

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