

STATEMENT OF PLANS

To continue the project which has been the focus of my attention since 1983, and will continue to be my primary objective until its completion in 1986— an 80 minute 16 mm feature film titled ANTIGONE.

My film is based on the myth of Antigone and on two of Sophocles' plays. Very briefly, in those dramas, Antigone led her blind father, Oedipus, during his exile at the end of his life. Following Oedipus' death, his two sons slaughter each other in a struggle for political power. Antigone then commits a forbidden act—she buries the body of one of her brothers, a man proscribed as a traitor to Thebes. Creon, the King (and her uncle), then condemns her to death. Her death in turn leads to the death of her lover, Haemon (Creon's son), and Creon's own descent into madness.

As a key strategy in reinterpreting the myth through film, I am altering the relationship of words to action, so that what was previously unseen in Sophocles' text will be visually interpreted in the film.

Through choreographic action in relation to voice-over narration, crawl-up titles, and music, the film will get behind the ostensible story to reveal the multiple levels of meaning contained in the classic myth.

Basic structure: a language of human motion for camera, akin to silent film action and dance, will depict a subtext operating in the drama, what psychoanalyst Bennett Simon describes as "a complex choreography of separation and embracing ....a tale of thwarted togetherness and isolation among the living, associated with fantasied togetherness ... with the dead."

Voice-over narration will relate the story, dealing with the complex meanings in which the personal and political, ethical and civic values intersect around the themes of the sanctity of the individual, even at the price of death.

20th century music (avant-garde) will enlarge the emotional dimensions of the work and extend the meaning beyond that articulated by movement and words.

Titles drawn from the Sophocles text (as translated by Robert Fagles) will also advance and underline the drama. In language which is grander than modern language, the words of Sophocles will voice the fundamental nature of its themes. Clothing is an abstraction of modern dress. Principle locations are outdoor, backgrounds of stone and earth. An in-progress section of the film is now being edited (Sept. 1984) and will be available for screening by the end of the year.

The film-maker (Amy Greenfield) is consulting with internationally respected classical scholars (Professors Mary Lefkowitz and Joan O'Brien, and the already cited Dr. Simon) and other advisors (Tom Cole, script; Catherine Tatge, distribution). The cameraperson/lighting director is Hilary Harris (an Academy Award winner and previous Guggenheim Fellow). Principle actors include Bertram Ross (Oedipus/Creon), Holly Fairbank (Ismene), Sean McElroy (Haemon), Greenfield (Antigone in conflict with Creon) and Sandrine Faugeron (Antigone with Oedipus).

Why a film of Antigone? In scholar Bernard Knox' words, "There can never be too many Antigones." There are no English-language films drawn from Antigone (the only film version known is held in a Greek archive). Though Antigone is considered one of the strongest female figures in western drama (see Virginia Woolf's Common Reader) the strength of her actual presence as a complex woman is strangely devalued, from Sophocles to Anouilh. On a more personal level, I am finding that the artist's search to find the intersections between my own aesthetic and vocabulary, and the imagery and vocabulary in the Sophocles text is, on the one hand, turning the myth into an immediate, personal art in the present, and on the other hand freeing me to delve back centuries to enlarge and universalize my own aesthetic. With all these concerns in mind, I do not believe the film will be just "another" Antigone, but an original.

The following is a more detailed (but still incomplete) attempt to describe the "look" of the film I am making:

The film will begin with a crawl-up title from Oedipus Rex:

"Look at me. Born of outrage ... Do you remember what things I did?

And then--I came and did them all again."

Fade up to women, the chorus, lying strewn in a desert-like landscape, as if exhausted or in a coma after a disaster. Camera pans over them, stopping at two little girls curled up together. The girls rise and walk away until they are alone in the desolate landscape. On the soundtrack a woman's voice is heard for the first time:

"This is the story of Antigone. It began before she was born...."

Her words continue as the children walk on, clinging to each other. Then terrified by something outside the frame, they stop. The smaller child drops back, the elder steps forward, reaching two masks partly embedded in the sandy soil. The older girl touches the mask of an intense woman, picks up a red cord lying around it, and ties the cord around her waist. She then picks up the mask of a man whose face shows suffering, with black holes for eyes. Holding the mask in front of her, she walks towards the camera until the dark eye fills the screen. Fade up to a real eye in the face of a man in his sixties or seventies—his face furrowed with suffering, yet calm and unseeing. A young woman leads him: this is Antigone leading Oedipus. The narrator tells us of their strange journey through landscapes both lush and

barren, and we see how their movements ... of leading, following, touching, losing and finding each other ... define their inextricably bound relationship. We do not see Antigone alone until Oedipus dies. Then her sister Ismene appears, and the two embrace in their grief. Fade out, fade up to the chorus, who echo the visual themes of the sisters' reunion in a dance of distracted loss and embraces of support. The camera moves among them, then along the ground. Crawl-up titles relate the events after Oedipus' death: the struggle between and the mutual slaughter of the two brothers; Creon's subsequent ascent to power, and his pronouncement that burial of the "traitor" will be punished by death. During this title the screen is filled with the bodies of two young men in a distorted embrace of hatred. Arms reach in from outside of the screen, separate the two, and drag one away, until only the other remains....

Antigone and Ismene walk out of the distance to the camera, along a kind of pavilion standing against the dawn sky. The two walk with urgency, yet secretively; Antigone whispers with emotion:

"Sister. Sister. Sister. Sister. Ismene.

Ismene, have you heard something unknown?

Something unknown and horrible which concerns us. Concerns us two ....

Have you heard of the outrage? The outrage threatening someone we love?"

As their words become louder they appear descending seemingly endless steps; Antigone asks for help in burying their brother, and Ismene refuses. Finally left alone, Antigone climbs back up the steps. The chorus appears, developing the action of the previous scene in a dance of ascending and descending the steps.... Antigone alone in the desert, walking against the wind until she comes to the body of her brother. She takes his head in her lap, begins to cover him with sand, then disappears. A crawl-up title rises over the empty landscape and sand-covered body:

"There were no pick or shovel marks. The land was smooth and undisturbed...." Antigone, wild and possessed, in a dance of death with the corpse, a dance both fierce and tender. But hands reach out to seize her. As she turns to face her off-screen captors, the image cuts so that she is in the same position (on the steps again) but with no hands restraining her. She faces someone off-screen. Camera pans and reveals a man: Creon. He looks something like her father, but is harsh and arrogant: coldness on the surface with fires of anger underneath. He asks if Antigone is going to deny that she did the act just seen. When she answers that of course, she did it, a series of confrontations begin—between Antigone and Creon, between Antigone and Ismene, then Ismene and Creon, finally between Creon and Haemon, who is Creon's son and Antigone's lover. Following Creon's final death sentence on Antigone—imprisonment in a cave, which is tantamount to a living death—the tragedy moves to a more lyric level. Antigone prepares for her imprisonment. The poetry of Sophocles' words becomes lyrics for passionate song, and the action becomes a choreography between Antigone and the chorus. This section starts on the pavilion, against the sky, and ends with Antigone at the entrance to the cave:

"O city of wealthy men, I am dragged away to remain no more ...."

Antigone enters the cave; a close-up of Creon's face appears over the entrance as if to seal it up. Dissolve into the cave ... the image of Antigone, dangling in mid-air, her face like a primitive death-mask, comes out of the darkness, while a song is heard:

"You will pay ... one dead for those dead ...."

Camera pulls back, revealing Haemon beneath the image. He faces Creon, his father. Creon's arrogance is breaking through to horror. Haemon lunges at him, intending to kill him, but then turns the weapon on himself. Haemon grasps Antigone's body, and falls to earth with her. The two lie dead in the cave, and on the soundtrack a woman sings:

"I heard a voice full of such sadness piercing through my ears,  
I fell back into my women's arms ...."  
Creon, now grief-stricken, stands over his son. Lifting him up, he carries him out of the cave. Cut back to Antigone in the cave: Ismene now stands over her, then lifts her up, and carries her deeper into the cave. The chorus joins them, one by one, until the procession miraculously emerges onto the steps. Holding Antigone above their heads they ascend the flights of steps: when they reach the top she "disappears." Now by the pavilion, against the sky, the procession turns into a dance of violent energy. Dance and music reach their climaxes together in a montage of leaps which seems to burst out of the screen itself.