INTRODUCING
JANE CAMPION

The Anthropological Meets the Artistic
Biography

- Born 1954 in Wellington, New Zealand
- Parents Richard Campion and Edith Hannah, prominent figures in NZ theater, attempted to build national theater and produce plays that articulated distinctly national aesthetic

Image source: Bombsite
Education

- Studied anthropology at Victoria University, graduating with B.A. in 1975

- Campion on anthropology:
  - What interested me about anthropology was to be able to ‘officially’ study what I was curious about anyway: how out thoughts function, their mythic content which has nothing to do with logic, human behaviors. . . . I think that humans believe themselves to be rational beings when they are not, they are governed by something completely different” (Wexman, qtd. in McHugh 5).

- Enrolled at Sydney School of the Arts, receiving BA in painting in 1979
  - Campion viewed SSA program—which emphasized global art—as foundational for filmmaking vision

- Created “story paintings,” images annotated with dialogue and text
Artistic Influences

Joseph Beuys, Sculptor (1921-86)

Socially and politically charged art which negotiated physical and psychological trauma through irrational, mythical imagery

Animal Woman (1949, cast 1984)

Image source: Tate Museum
Artistic Influences

Frida Kahlo, Painter (1907-1954)

- Surrealistic self portraits
- Both Beuys and Kahlo came to art after physical trauma (shot down Luftwaffe pilot, train accident) and used the body to interpret trauma
- Both making recognizable elements strange
- Kahlo’s powerful gaze and tragic romantic history as inspiration for Ada

The Broken Column (1944). Image source: Tate Museum
Kahlo and Ada

Screen shot from The Piano (1993)

Self-Portrait with Monkey (1940).
Image source: Tate ETC.
Short Films

- Enrolled in graduate school at Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS)
- Made four short films while student (1981-1984):
  - *Peel: An Exercise in Discipline* (1982; won Cannes Palme d’Or in 1986)
  - *Passionless Moments* (1983, cowritten and directed with novelist Gerald Lee)
AFTRS and Australian Film Industry

- Reduction in Hollywood output in 1960s making national and art cinemas viable alternatives
- School inaugurated in 1972 as “part of the Commonwealth Government’s strategy to promote the development of Australia’s Cultural Activity” (McHugh 14) in 1970s and 1980s.
  - School’s desire to produce filmmakers with distinct, national aesthetic vision, whose work focused on Australian issues
  - But films had to be commercial enough to be popular at home and abroad
  - “New Australian Cinema”
- Feminism informing endeavors ➔ national cinema
  - Women’s Film Fund, Sydney Women’s Film Group, The Women’s Programme funded, provided workshops/training, distributed and exhibited women’s films
- Campion finding AFTRS nationalist emphasis limiting; her vision dismissed by instructors
- However, Campion met filmmaking collaborators at AFTRS
  - Cinematographer Sally Bongers (Peel, Girl’s Own Story and Sweetie, Campions’s first feature
  - Editor Veronika Haeussler, who has worked on almost all Campion features
Feature Films

- Sweetie (1989)
- An Angel at My Table (1990)
- The Piano (1993)
- Holy Smoke (1999)
- In the Cut (2003)
- Bright Star (2009)
- Television films/ miniseries and anthology film segments

Campion on the set of The Piano. Image source: National Portrait Gallery
Narrative, Thematic, Stylistic Commonalities

- “[P]ower, violence and emotional pain in dysfunctional sexual, familial and social relationships” (McHugh 17-18)
- Ways in which power and violence affect gender roles
- “[C]inematic techniques that represent and blur the differences between objective and subjective narrative states” (McHugh 18)
- Heterosexual romance “represented in the context of, and often dwarfed in importance by, relationships between siblings, parents and children, and friends” (McHugh 18)
- Strong, reckless passions that can foment disaster or death
- “[T]he importance of women’s work, their creative expression, and of sexual desire as a powerful, necessary, and compelling threat to that expression” (McHugh 18)
“I always saw her as someone who had very powerfully removed herself from life. . . . There is no sense of her as a handicapped person, however. It’s almost as though she treats the world as if it were handicapped. At the same time, there is a great deal of suffering from this position. It is a retreat from a lot of what the world offers, which I imagine for women at that time would have been very mundane and boring—insufferable, in fact. There is advantage in retreat, but there’s a great disadvantage in it as well” (Wexman 116)