

The Feminine Eye: lecture 4: JAPANESE STORY: 2003: 103m:

April 25:
week #4

Women Directors in the Southern Hemisphere:

New Zealand: Jane Campion / Niki Caro

Australia: Gillian Armstrong / Sue Brooks

Screening: **JAPANESE STORY** (Sue Brooks, 2003)

Australia: Gillian Armstrong

b. 1950: Melbourne, Australia:

1968: graduated: Swinburne Technical College:

studied: theatrical costume design & filmmaking

later: graduated: Australian Film Television & Radio School:

directed 2 short films: 1975:

THE SINGER & THE DANCER

SMOKES & LOLLIES

1979: feature film debut as director:

MY BRILLIANT CAREER: from Miles Franklin novel:

1st Australian feature film directed by woman for 46 years

won 6 Australian Film Awards: including Best Director

nominated for Oscar: Best Costume Design

based on true story: set in Australia: early 20th C

headstrong young woman: Judy Davis:

determined to pursue life independently & intelligently

after Sybylla refuses marriage proposal:

grandmother & aunt talk to her:

**clip: MY BRILLIANT CAREER: ch 6 +: 0:34:30 mark:
access thru ch 7: 3.5m**

1992: LAST DAYS OF CHEZ NOUS:

re: relationship between 2 sisters:

Lisa Harrow / Kerry Fox

since: Armstrong: has specialized in period drama:

1994: LITTLE WOMEN: Winona Ryder / Susan Sarandon:

from Alcott book: set during US Civil War

1997: OSCAR & LUCINDA: set in mid-1800s England:

Oscar: young Anglican priest: misfit / outcast

Lucinda: teenaged Australian heiress

2001: CHARLOTTE GRAY: set during WWI: France:

Cate Blanchett: young Scottish woman joins French Resistance:

to rescue her Royal Air Force boyfriend

Armstrong: also directed docs:

1981: FOURTEEN'S GOOD, EIGHTEEN'S BETTER:

film profiling: 3 young Adelaide women

by 2010: 5th film in doc series re: young women

LOVE, LUST & LIES

2006: UNFOLDING FLORENCE:

THE MANY LIVES OF FLORENCE BROADHURST:

based on colorful life:

flamboyant Australian design pioneer:

1977 murder: remains mystery

New Zealand: Jane Campion:

.b. 1954 Wellington, NZ: now lives Sydney, Australia
 1975: BA: Victoria U: Wellington
 1979: BA: with painting major: Sydney College of the Arts
 early 1980s: began making films:
 attended Australian School of Film & Television
 1986: 1st short film: PEEL:
 won Palm D'Or: Cannes Film Festival
 other short films: PASSIONLES MOMENTS
 A GIRL'S OWN STORY
 1989: co-wrote & directed 1st feature film:
 SWEETIE: offbeat story: 2 sisters:
 1: mentally unbalanced: overweight: demanding
 other: weak: obsessive
 their relationship with each other:
 & with parents
 unsettling: sometimes depressing:
 not for all tastes: won many awards
 SSU MMC: DVD 1693
 next film: 1990: AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE:
 bio-pic: Janet Frame: played by Kerry Fox:
 based on autobiographies:
 NZ author: novels, short stories, poems, etc.
 Frame: different when growing up:
 as young woman: locked in mental institution:
 8 years
 scheduled for lobotomy: cancelled:
 when her 1st book won national literary prize
 won Silver Lion: Venice Film Festival:
 many other awards

clip: AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE: ch 16: 3.5m

New Zealand: Jane Campion: continued:

1993: next film: THE PIANO: huge international success:
 won Palm D'Or: Cannes Film Festival:
 Campion: 1st woman ever to win prestigious award
 also: Oscar: Best Original Screenplay:
 Campion: nominated: Best Director
 stars: Holly Hunter / Anna Paquin: Oscars:
 Best Actress / Supporting Actress
 story: mute woman / her young daughter / her prized piano:
 sent to 1850s NZ: for arranged marriage to wealthy landowner:
 soon: becomes involved with local worker on plantation
 PIANO: unusual romance: unsentimental & erotic:
 often shot from unsettling angles
 uses wild landscapes: to parallel:
 banked down emotions of chars:
 uncommunicative
 barely fathomable
 chars: trapped in their own private dreams & needs

clip: THE PIANO: ch 3: 3.5m

Ada McGrath: mute woman: arrives in NZ:
 with daughter
 with precious piano: means of expression

later films: 1996: PORTRAIT OF A LADY: Nicole Kidman:
 from novel by Henry James
 1999: HOLY SMOKE: Kate Winslet / Harvey Keitel:
 written by Campion & sister Anna:
 woman goes on journey of discovery in India:
 falls under influence of charismatic religious guru
 2003: IN THE CUT: Meg Ryan / Mark Ruffalo / Jennifer Jason Leigh
 co-written by Campion:
 lonely NYC woman becomes involved in erotic affair:
 with tough homicide detective:
 as he's investigating series of murders in her neighborhood
 most recent film: 2009: BRIGHT STAR: written by Campion:
 3-year romance: 19th C poet John Keats & Fanny Brawne:
 cut short by Keats' death: age 25
 Campion's protagonists: clumsy, confused:
 but intelligent, deeply determined women:
 yet: her films don't have feminist agenda:
 rather: they allow us to see world with fresh eyes

New Zealand: Niki Caro:

director, producer & screenwriter

b. 1967: Wellington, NZ:

1988: BFA: U of Auckland

MFA: Swinburne University of Technology

1st feature film: 1998: MEMORY & DESIRE

2002: WHALE RIDER: also written by Caro:

her most significant film to date:

contemporary retelling of ancient Maori legend:

young girl must go vs. all odds --- & tradition:

to prove to her grandfather: she's a natural leader

powered by thrilling debut performance:

Keisha Castle-Hughes: never strikes false note

shot on east coast of NZ's north island:

uses legend of Maori people of area:

as basis for story

clip: WHALE RIDER: ch 17: 4.5m

2005: NORTH COUNTRY:

Charlize Theron: Oscar-nominated performance

also in cast: Frances McDormand / Sissy Spacek

dramatization of real life case: 1989:

single mom with 2 kids goes to work in:

Minnesota mine: sexual harassment intense:

no other women willing to rock boat

Jeremy Renner: plays 1 of miners:

clip: NORTH COUNTRY: ch 13: 3m

JAPANESE STORY:**Sue Brooks:**

b. 1953: Victoria, Australia

filmmaking career:

Australian TV: directing series episodes

1st feature: 1997: ROAD TO NHILL

2003: JAPANESE STORY:

JS: story:

Sandy Edwards: geologist:

has to drive Japanese businessman:
thru Australian desert

during trip: they become lovers

up to this point:

everything very predictable / stereotyped:

predictable: because: from start:

in terms of narrative conventions:

obvious: 2 will become intimate

stereotyped: because:

Sandy: brusque / pragmatic:

corresponds to familiar image:

Australian woman: "loud & rude"

Hiro: businessman:

corresponds to Western culture's idea:

of what it means to be Japanese

but: midway thru: story changes course abruptly:

turns into different kind of movie:

inquiry re: experience of human body

Brooks: shoots bodies of protagonists in unconventional ways:

Collette: strong / elegant / extroverted

Gotaro Tsunashima: skinny / pallid / introverted

JS: "cries in torment because of the trauma of the body's absence":

body: what we're all reduced to:

what we all share:

"last outpost of humanity"

many women behind JS:

make it humanist film: rather than feminist film

director: Sue Brooks

writer: Alison Tilson

producer: Sue Maslin

editor: Jill Bilcock

music: Elizabeth Drake

name recognition / "star power": Toni Collette:

MURIEL'S WEDDING / IN HER SHOES / LITTLE MISS
SUNSHINE / DEAD GIRL: Karen Moncrieff

JS: financing:

Collette: early interest: as soon as she read script:

important factor in getting film made:

took long time to get money:

advised to bring down number of locations:

wouldn't do it: money stretched to limit

financing very difficult in Australia:

big deal: getting money to travel to Pilbara region:
where film set

principle location: Pilbara region: western Australia

no film shot before in areas they used:

among oldest places in world

shooting of JS: 35 days & 5 days traveling:

"40 days & 40 nights":

hard: physically, emotionally, psychologically

opening shot: spiraling down into area:

also: spiraling down into story

landscapes: important to film:

all locations chosen before filming began

landscape: made part of story:

affects chars: not just pretty postcard shots

pacing of film: deliberate: going on journey with 2 chars

1:35 pm: break

1:40pm: screening: JAPANESE STORY

take notes: observations:

concentrate on: 2 chars:

Sandy

Hiro how do they change towards each other?
what do they learn?

also: how does where we live affect who we are?

not much dialog in script:

things play out in silences & looks

sex scene: from woman's perspective

post-screening:

- What does the storyline say about women?

whose POV is story told from?

woman drives story: her POV:
 rare for film: most films: still male:
 even when women in stories: there in male way:
 not integral to story:
 used as marketing pitch: sex

cliché: Australian films:

chars go out into desert:
 have life-changing experience:
 come back again
 reality: landscape does affect people:
 can make you feel open, settled, quiet
 lots of people: have connection to landscape / desert:
 clichéd but true: easy to be cynical about it

- What do the actions and/or dialogue of the characters say about women?

Sandy: start of JS: what's she like?

boxed in: story-wise:
 giving Hiro tour of outback
 visually, too:
 her apartment: grays & blues

she has friends:
 not 1st time she's let them down
 going to Pilbara: she's grumpy:
 char defect: her smoking?

Hiro: typical Japanese?

actor: Gotaro Tsunashima: fussy re:
 how char dresses, case he carries, haircut

what is he like at start?

always on cell phone:
 Japanese fascination with technology
 singing "Danny Boy":
 less inhibited: but drunk
 generally: full of ritual, containment

beach scene: start of Sandy looking at Hiro:

usually: other way around:
 man looks at woman

at this point: curiosity:
 no desire yet

- actions and/or dialogue of the characters (continued)?

landscape affects them: brings them closer:

getting stuck in car

having to spend night:

cold: forces them together

also: must work together to get car out

gradual loosening of reserve:

Hiro: pulls shirt out

night in desert: 2 of them:

so desperate for warmth:

snuggling vs. body of stranger:

someone you dislike

2 of them: struggling with language:

trying to communicate

gradually: they learn re: each other:

DEFIANT ONES

sex scene:

from woman's POV:

emphasizing looks / gentle touching:

not explosive passion: more male POV?

why does she put his pants on? why not?

they're miles from anywhere:

millions of reasons why

1. simple exchange of roles?

she's dominant

2. Sandy: getting comfortable in Hiro's shoes:

letting him relax:

let go of male responsibilities:

hanging heavy on him

3. also: moment of exploration / intimacy:

her acceptance / understanding:

of his culture

his clothes: big part of his persona

4. Sandy: crossing boundaries:

crossing over: becoming 1 with him:

trust

morning after: awkwardness:

different ways they eat:

Hiro: 1 bean on fork

Sandy: licking fingers

2 actors: Go: his work: precise, careful, talked thru

Collette: method of working different:

doesn't talk re: it much: just does it

respect for each other:

but working methods very different

- actions and/or dialogue of the characters (continued)?

scene where Sandy has to deal with dead body:

very hard: lifting someone on sand:

sequence rehearsed a lot:

had to work out how it really could be done

Brooks: crew: wanted to solve problem “filmically”:

wanted them not to go there:

let editing cut out awkwardness

Brooks: but: Sandy has to go there: has to deal with it:

rehearsal: Collette couldn’t work out how to do it:

Brooks: “You have to! You have to work it out because
this is the reality of the situation”

thinks it’s a “woman’s thing”:

crew: women: “Let’s work it out”

men: into mechanics:

back truck into water

float body in

would Sandy have done this?

1 of worst things that could happen to you:

only 1 cut: getting body to car:

2 actors: trust in each other

moving body to car:

in end: we’re bodies:

essential thing re: all of us

intimacy she shares with body:

more important than intimacy of sex they share

scene: “heart & soul” of film:

what do you do?

alone: faced with something almost impossible:

if Collette couldn’t have done it:

wouldn’t have been in film:

wanted it to be as real as possible

“reality” of dealing with death in JS:

going thru process:

re: what do you do next:

doctor pronouncing Hiro dead:

putting him in cool room:

all so cut & dried: reality

- actions and/or dialogue of the characters (continued)?

Sandy: return to “normal” life: world we live in:

she’s still in that other place:

like when we go thru grief:

Sandy: a still point in a turning world:

chaos going on around her:

she’s still: not moving

back in city:

everyone: mother, Ben, etc:

wants to pick her up, put her back on feet

the “incident”: “It happened to me, too”:

her being cut out of her own life

funeral ritual: moment when private becomes public:

process of grieving & reconciliation

Sandy: cut out from grief:

put in room apart:

she’s not the real one

boundaries: she shared Hiro’s death:

but now she’s excluded

rock: 3 “bits”: re: reverence:

1. puts rock in pocket

2. looks at it

3. puts it in garden

scene at airport:

Sandy speaks to wife: prepared message:

but: Hiro wouldn’t say these things

Japanese man wouldn’t say these things

letter: a gift back:

that’s when wife decides to give Sandy letter

letter: ending too inconclusive without it:

his voice brought back into film

“Life is short”:

reason for staying

final words of JS: Hiro’s words:

“My heart is open”:

spirit in which film made:

with open heart

final image: looking out airport window with Sandy:

plane goes down tarmac, disappears: landscape

Sandy: at end: she sees:

starts out as blind char

- actions and/or dialogue of the characters (continued)?

char: Yukiko: realizes Sandy had affair with husband:
 deferential behavior: partly: culturally specific:
 Japan: now more Americanized: but still:
 thing re: politeness, being inscrutable:
 being in control: private
 Yukiko: “extraordinary stillness”
 what would your reaction be?
 more extreme reaction?
 slap Sandy’s face, e.g.:
 more like Australian / US woman?

but: what Yukiko’s going thru:
 wants to save face, maintain dignity

Sandy & Yukiko:
 understand each other’s position / pain

char: Sandy: contrast to Yukiko’s poise:
 sloppy / messy:
 Collette: much improvisation:
 not sentimental / not vain:
 lets her body be what it is:
 times she looks ugly: waterhole:
 it’s just what she’s going thru:
 she goes with it

visuels more important than dialog:
 thru photos: Sandy finds out re: Yukiko
 Yukiko finds out re: Sandy:
 no dialog in either scene:
 photos Yukiko looks at: moments we don’t see in JS:
 Hiro: back in film:
 we miss him

- actions and/or dialogue of the characters (continued)?

landscapes:

important to film: wide look: front-on light
mine yards: powerful place: biggest open mine in world:
degradation of earth:
but: major human endeavor
sound: incredible: affects our perception of landscape
driving scenes:
indicate direction of film:
tracking shots: following car:
sense of infinity
start: go from tight shots to long shots:
long shots: expansive:
2 small people in wide landscape
Sandy & Hiro: at distance: so are we
darkest moments: Sandy driving Hiro's body:
we don't see landscape
we see her face: darkness:
near end: Sandy indoors:
no landscape
no natural color / light
last shot: airport: landscape
landscapes affect who / what we are:
Hiro: Japan: many people / no space
Australia: few people / lots of space:
scares him
water: with ferryman on boat: thematically integral:
2 people floating: on water / on land:
floating on preconceptions everyone has re: them
waterhole: "hinge" of film: effects of landscape:
they're "in the moment":
both chars: different from start
they've "landed" in world:
sun on their backs
gorgeous landscape
miles & miles from anyone: liberation
then: Hiro: dives into water:
Australians get it: that it's wrong to dive:
before non-Australians
landscape: gives them both opportunity to experience life:
also: gives her chance to experience death:
not common experience:
we're sheltered from it:
ambulance / undertaker comes

- actions and/or dialogue of the characters (continued)?

mother-daughter relationship:

mother: obsessed with obit scrapbook?

scrapbook: drives Sandy nuts:

typical mother-daughter relationship

early scene: mom & scrapbook:

matched at end:

mom knows at start:

death part of life

Sandy: finds it out

mom: "I've been a wife. I've been a widow.

Some things are the same the world over."

- What stereotypes appear in the film?

up to mid-point of film:

everything very predictable / stereotyped:

predictable: because: from start:

in terms of narrative conventions:

obvious: 2 will become intimate

stereotyped: because:

Sandy: brusque / pragmatic:

corresponds to familiar image:

Australian woman: "loud & rude"

Hiro: businessman:

corresponds to Western culture's idea:

of what it means to be Japanese

how are these stereotypes broken?

we get to know chars:

as chars get to know each other

- What cultural attitudes about women are evident within the world that the film creates?

vanity: big problem with actors:

can affect their work

feminism: can't get beyond it:

but: if you're worried re: how you look:

emphasis on image

how can you even talk: let alone be

Collette: doesn't carry that vanity in her work:

Lucille Ball

- What does the film say about the society that produced it?

films made by women: some progress made:
 still: hard to get work financed
 scene where Sandy has to deal with dead body:
 confrontation with “the Other”: ultimate “Other”:
 on unconscious level:
 something emerges: from images of scene:
 sense of helplessness:
 “settling accounts with the dead”
 feeling for universal trauma of sudden death:
 we all share feelings re: what she has to go thru
 resonate with current events in Australia now:
 conservatives on ascendancy
 media: lots of racist commentary
 “One Nation” movement: popular success
 death: we’re sheltered from it:
 it’s in lots of movies:
 but they don’t deal with reality of death:
 or impact it can have on your life
 in real life: we don’t deal with it directly that much:
 ambulance / undertaker comes
 we can learn re: life thru death:
 mortality: throws life into relief:
 priorities become clear
 start to realize: what’s important
 how to live life
 grief: can make you feel more alive:
 in busy-ness of life
 not distracted from what’s real / important:
 gives perspective

- What does the film say about the society that produced it?

cultural differences: JS talks re: them:

Australia: baby boomers:

grew up thinking Japan the enemy:

WW II: Japan was enemy

don't think that way any more:

but still there under surface:

especially in JS: old guy in boat

younger people: don't have this connection

Australia culture: now: as in US:

lots re: "the Other" & difference:

"swimming in a sea of racism"

fear of cultural difference:

sometimes: can be looked back on:

perspective gained:

people don't feel same later:

as they did during & after WW II

but: in middle of things:

not enough perspective to understand

JS: erotic relationship between Caucasian & Japanese:

possible now between Caucasian & Iraqi?

but: okay to have it with Japanese

next week:

May 2:
week #5

Women Directors from India:

Mira Nair / Deepa Mehta

Screening: **WATER** (Deepa Mehta, 2005)