Transcript:

Cathy Busby Interview

NSCAD Feminist Collective Oral History Project

Transcribed by

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March 21, 2019
NSCAD University Library Internship

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__*Note:__ Filler words or statements such as ummm, mmhmm or ahhh etc. have not been transcribed.

Satya Miller is the interviewer
Cathy Busby is the interviewee

Interview conducted on February 11th, 2019
Audio recording length: 39:31 min

Transcript

Satya Miller [0:00] Alright. So hello everyone. This is an audio recording of an oral history interview with Cathy Busby for the feminist Collective Oral History Project conducted on February 11th, 2019. I am the interviewer Satya Miller and the interviewee is Cathy Busby. This interview centers on Cathy Busby's time as coordinator of the Feminist Collective's Lifesize: Women and Film series circa 1988-1989. This interview was conducted over the phone at the NSCAD Academy building. This oral history project was conducted as part of the interviewer's internship at NSCAD University Library during which the Feminist Collective Women's File fonds was archived and also partially digitized. Alright Cathy would you like to just state your name.

Cathy Busby [1:03] Hi, I'm Cathy Busby.

Satya [1:04] Wonderful. So I'll start with the first question. So Cathy what is your educational and or professional history with NSCAD University?

Cathy [1:17] I came to NSCAD in June, end of June 1983 after I had graduated from Sheridan College School of Craft and Design where I'd majored in ceramics. And I did a year . . . many of my credits were transferred and I was able to complete a bachelor of fine arts with a minor in art history in a calendar year. So I went straight through the summer and graduated in 1984.

Satya [1:56] Wonderful. So the second question. How would you describe your experience with the Feminist Collective?

Cathy [2:05] Well, I identified myself as a feminist when I came to NSCAD so I was really excited to learn that there was a Feminist Collective at NSCAD. So and when I started meeting women who were involved with it I felt very much at home. And I . . . Though I wasn't someone who went to meetings regularly. I certainly was someone who used the Women's File and knew women who were involved with it and I actually was quite closely, for at least one semester, with Wilma Needham in the studio who was brought on as faculty to NSCAD specifically to kinda fill the feminist gap.

Satya [3:08] Awesome. Okay so how did you become involved with the Lifesize: Women and Film series?

Cathy [3:17] Well, I had attended screenings that the Feminist Collective put on that was through Lifesize: Women and Film. And I was really, it was very uplifting thing to see these films made by women about issues that were of interest and concern to women. And so I guess it was, first as an attendee that I became interested and then somehow I realized in 1988 that there was no one who was planning to kind of lead it that next year, you know to spearhead it. And I was just leaving my job as director of the gallery. I'd been running the Anna Leonowens Gallery at NSCAD for three years and at the time it was a term position. And so I thought that, as I was piecing together what I was going to do next, I thought it would be very interesting to take Lifesize, to expand Lifesize to make it available to more than the NSCAD community but to a broader community. Specifically the broader women's and feminist community in Halifax and Dartmouth.

Satya [5:02] And did you occupy any specific roles while in the Lifesize: Women in Film series?

Cathy [5:11] Well, it was like I said it was a situation where there was no one particularly available and interested in taking it on. And it was the kind of project that required someone puting really putting their shoulders to the wheel. You know like really taking it on because there were many aspects to it. And I mean it could have been a couple of people doing it but it's just that at that time there was a gap in terms of availability of people to do that. So I proposed to whoever it was who had been previously doing it or whoever it was who had the bit of core money to do it. You know that, what about this idea? And I made a proposal. I actually found the proposal in my files. It's about five pages long which I didn't send you but I could make a copy of it. It is a proposal to expand it. And the people who were part of it at the time, you know the [who were] the Feminist Collective, liked the idea and gave me the green light.

Satya [6:24] And so you had other people working with you on the project?

Cathy [6:31] Yeah. I can't remember who the people were initially or who I was consulting with. Because I had quite a bit of experience by that time of coordinating and managing things. I wasn't shy to kind of get going on it on my own. But yeah. But I was certainly reporting back to the Feminist Collective. And then once I got some more money through the training . . . the job training program through the federal government. Then I was able to hire a couple of people. And initially I had . . . There were a couple of people who were hired short term. I felt it was really important to hire people as soon as possible as opposed to relying on people's goodwill and volunteer services. So I was, you know that's why right away. Oh it was CEIC it was called, Canadian Employment something something section 38. And so yeah. I was able to get close to 40,000 dollars from CEIC and so I hired a couple of people to work on the program. So then it was really great because, I mean when you can have a really a progressive program going on. Where the people are also making a living wage. That is really wonderful.

Satya [8:23] Yes

Cathy [8:24] So and that was my goal, you know, was to make it work in that way. So I got the money confirmed sometime, I am not sure when it was confirmed, but it was 37,274 dollars I can see that here in the record. Yeah.

Satya [8:33] Awsome. And so, as the director, can you elaborate on what your responsibilities were and how you organized the Lifesize: Women and Film series?

Cathy [9:10] Yeah. Well we were very fortunate in, well there was a lot of [inaudible]. There was a lot of reaching out to different locations in the community and finding support. Because it had been, as you know, it had all been an internal program before. It had been all within NSCAD. And so there was some obvious places to connect with in order to have community support. And one of them was the National Film Board (NFB) [of Canada]. And so they provided, they agreed, and you know that was the director of the National Film Board who was a woman at the time, I can't remember her name but I remember she was a woman. And they agreed to provide us with space. And the location of the National Film Board was two blocks away on Barrington Street from NSCAD. So it was relatively, you know, relatively convenient for, yeah, just the sort of ease of getting around and communication. And they also provided us with 7,000 dollars. But to have the office at the National Film Board that also provided us with a screening space, because they had a theatre and a full time technicien. So we ordered in films, a lot of films to prescreen and by that time there were three or four of us who were staff. And we screened these films and we talked about them. And then we came up with a preliminary list of what we thought would be good to screen as part of the program. And I imagine we ran that by the group back at NSCAD, the Feminist Collective. I don't exactly remember meeting through the documents. But anyway that would seem logical to me because a big part of doing this was about reaching in and reaching out. So keeping in touch with the legacy of Lifesize and building it out into something bigger and more, more in a larger community. And so yeah. So we devised the program kind of gradually through this process of screening and screening and just saying what we thought would be most relevant and interesting to bring in. And I had a woman working, sort of right hand woman Trish Fish (Patricia Fish) F I S H. And so she was eager to work on organizing the additional program. So I had this vision early on of have a directing and screenwriting workshop for women. Thinking that you know, it is one thing to be a spectator and it is so important to be a participant in the creation of culture, as feminists. Remember this is like a long time ago. So there wasn't so much, there was some, but anyway to support women's engagement and production seemed a very valuable thing to do. So we dreamed up having these week long in residence workshops. And then we gradually confirmed the space at the Tatamagouche Centre in Tatamagouche. And it was a place where different kinds of conferences and so on could be held. It wasn't a fancy place. It was more like a farm type situation that was converted into or maybe it was originally a conference center but anyway it wasn't like a big fancy conference center. It was a, more low key then that. It was the perfect space for this thing to happen. And then there there was a lot of time we spent thinking about who we would like to lead those workshops and the actual material. What did we think would be important to cover, to help these burgeoning writers and directors to succeed better. To be able to be more active screenwriters and directors, film directors, film video directors you know from a feminist perspective. So we devised the program and we . . . And of course that was after we

had found people who would lead them and there was a lot of consultation around that. You know finding Norma Bailey was our directing person and she directed a lot of National Film Board Films and Mireille Dansereau was our writing leader. So, yeah.

Satya [15:08] Awsome. And for the timeline of your time. So you started working on the project about what time of year do you think?

Cathy [15:20] Well I think the whole thing took place over about a year. And I think it was in May, the actual roll out of it. And yeah. [inaudible]. So January to June was when it was really intense organizing. Cause I have the wages here. This is what I spent the CEIC money on. On the wages. I had a workshop coordinator, workshop assistant, publicity coordinator, project manager, bookkeeper and then myself from January to June. But we but there was the pre-organizing like just six months or so before that and I had less money to work with but you know but was just getting the groundwork set for it. Yeah, I see it as kind off, it was like a pop up. Like a one off flash that I think made quite an impact on the women's filmmaking community in Nova Scotia.

Satya [16:47] Yeah and so from what I understand, the Lifesize: Women and Film series had been previously . . . The screening has been happening at NSCAD and hosted by the Feminist Collective which is also known by other names at the time. But the year that you came on as coordinator you decided to bring it out and film the screenings in the city.

Cathy [17:20] Actually I . . . A number of the screenings were still at the Bell and . . . That's a good question of where they, you know, did they all happen there or did they happen also at the National Film Board.

Satya [17:46] There was some at the Dogwood's Cinema [Wormwoods Dog and Monkey Cinema] also?

Cathy [17:49] Oh right!

Satya [17:50] I think.

Cathy [17:52] Dogwood's yeah. What's it called the Dog and Monkey Cinema. Yeah. Yeah that's right. So they were another kind of what we would, you know like a another partner in this.

Satya [18:06] Yeah. Alright so what was your experience like as director of the Lifesize: Women and Film series?

Cathy [18:18] Well, it was really good. I mean it was. It was like kind of a continuation of running the Anna Leonowens Gallery you know. And I think in a way that's what I was hoping to do was to use my experience from that work to do something that was more specifically geared to my feminist commitment and to you know, and specifically to improving the capacity for production in the region by women and also expanding the exposure for people who attended the film. You

know the exposure to a range of what was out there. Because we had the money to do all these pre screenings I feel like the selection of films was maybe more wide ranging, more diverse than what had previously been shown where people were doing it on a shoestring and you know just piecing it together as best as possible. Which had been really good. Not to deny that all. But you know when you have more money and you have more time to put to it you can do more.

Satya [20:02] Certainly. It opens the doors.

Cathy [20:05] Yeah

Satya [20:06] And in terms of selecting films how did you go about that?

Cathy [20:14] It was just through discussion between those who had attended the pre screening. Which was usually the three staff and myself and then there was a guy from the NFB, the projectionist who was also very knowledgeable about film. I think he still, he may still be programing at the Dalhousie Art Gallery. I am trying to think. [inaudible]. But he's very knowledgeable about film. And yeah ok and I do see that it's Wormwood's Dog and Monkey Cinema. I'm just also coming through the documents as we're talking.

Satya [21:04] Nice.

Cathy [21:07] Yeah. So you know it was, it was nice, it was casual in a sense, serious but somewhat casual. It's no like we voted on, you know, it was like we discussed them and then we sorta say yeah yeah let's include that one. Yeah so it was kind of like loosely what we would now call curated. Though at the time the idea of curating was seen as kind of an imposition of a form that wasn't collective. We were trying to do things in a collective manner.

Satya [21:51] That makes sense.

Cathy [21:52] I have a nice list here of the support. I have in my proposal local and regional support/interests. And so of course it's NSCAD and the NFB, the Atlantic New Brunswick and Newfoundland Filmmaker's co-op, Wormwoods Dog and Monkey Cinema, the Center for Art Tapes, Atlantic Independent Media, Media [Fix], Media Watch, Picture Plant and this is a commercial Picture Plant was doing a 35mm film in a commercial manner, Telefilm, The Women's Program at the Secretary of State, The Island Media Arts Co-op, [Felize] magazine, The North End News, Mount Saint-Vincent University Women's Studies Program, Pandora Magazine, Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture, and Atlantic Festival Atlantique. So those people were all . . . Like we were talking with them and we were telling them about what we were doing and to a lesser or greater extent they were supporting us. So instance, the film co-op let all their membership know about our workshop. So that the women who applied . . . Like everyone applied to do those writer and director workshops.

Satya [23:14] In Tatamagouche?

Cathy [23:15] In Tatamagouche.

Satya [23:16] Ok.

Cathy [23:17] Yeah.

Cathy [23:17] And so but how did . . . But they were from all over the region. And how did they hear about it? Well, through the co-op.

Satya [23:25] Okay and this co-op was based in Halifax?

Cathy [23:28] I'm sorry?

Satya [23:29] Was it based in Halifax?

Cathy [23:32] Yeah like out of the offices at the NFB. Is where that was sort of man central. That is where we were based.

Satya [23:41] Okay awesome. And I don't know if you want to speak to you what the . . . How people reacted to the series, like what was the general . . . Any thoughts on the results of it.

Cathy [23:57] Yeah. Oh and I just . . . I just found something here about the scheduling. We were talking earlier about how long a period it took place over. And I see here I have *"During the summer of 1988, a portion of the Challenge 88 grant assisted in the development of project ideas*" That is what I vaguely remembered. That is what I sort of described to you without naming Challenge 88 and so I guess I applied for that and got the money. "*The Planning and development stage of the project is currently taking place with the assistance of Section 38 Grant. This funding covers salaries for three staff until mid December. Anticipated funds for the realization of the project will come from a number of sources. The realization period will be January - April 1989".* So yeah, so and then it happened in May, so yeah it was roughly a year from May 88- to May 89.

Satya [24:51] Oh wonderful.

Satya [24:53] Yeah. I finished my work at NSCAD August 1st 1988. So I would have right after that probably gone right into more heavy work on more consistent. Yeah work on it. Right after I left the position at the Anna Leonowens.

Satya [25:14] Ok

Cathy [25:15] But anyway. Impact. You were asking about.

Satya [25:17] Yeah, yup.

Cathy [25:19] Yeah, so well for years afterwards I was hearing from people who had been part of those workshops. I think the workshops had a more kind of an impact that was different than you know, when people go to screenings its a more superficial kind of touch usually. You know like, your yeah it seems great like a film and then you carry on with your life and maybe it becomes sort of part of your, you know, your internal narrative. But I think it was the workshops that really were a turning point for some people. And I think I mentioned to you about . . . There were several women who went on to . . . I'm just going to name a couple of them Sylvia Hamilton she is a very well known black filmmaker. Now at that time she had just made one film called *Black Mother Black Daughter* and but she came to the workshop and Patricia Fish who also with us. Who was a staff person but she went on to make *New Waterford Girl* which was sort of a hit of a film maybe 15 years ago. And I don't know what she's done since then but I do remember hearing about that film. Oh Pam Gallant is another one, a New Brunswick film video maker who, you know, it was very impactful for her. And there was a woman named Donna and she on on her photo she just put Donna D. L. so I don't remember her last name but I know she went on to make film. Elspeth Tulloch she wrote about . . . She became a big, you know, she was just a big fan of this happening and she wrote about it for a Canadian Cinema in Canada was the name of the publication and she has gone on to, she is a professor is a professor somewhere now. But you know so it really, it was, very meaningful for I think a number of people in that sort of life like commitment kind of sense and skills and skill gathering and support gathering in that sort of sense. And also I think when I am looking through the film that was shown like I went on to teach women and film at Concordia University in the early 90s and in the film studies department and films like Vera Chytilova's [*Daisies*] from 1967 which was one of the films that I programed. I continued to teach that film and it's still a really, I think it is such a great film. And there were a number of films in the series that . . . I don't know they kinda stay with me and I heard people talk about them since. Sue Friedreich's work like *Damned if You Don't.* She also came to . . . We had a few visitors by the way and I had forgotten this. There were a few women filmmakers we brought up to give talks in conjunction with the screening of their films. She was one of them. And that was in conjunction with Eyelevel Gallery and the Orientation Express, [Francy Spreeling's] fantastic short film. But then you know we are showing it next to these giants in the European scene like Marguerite Von Trotta and *Sheer Madness* from 1982. So it was really . . . I feel like it was quite a . . . It was like a broadening experience for people. Like broadening of like oh like what women were doing in film at that time. Kind of like a snap shot but in a big picture sense.

Satya [29:53] That's really nice. And so I think the Tatamagouche, from what I can tell from the documentation, it was the Tatamagouche workshops were over the span of a week?

Cathy [30:05] Yeah, yeah that's right.

Satya [30:08] And you had to rent a space for it?

Cathy [30:10] Can you just hold one a sec Satya.

Satya [30:12] No problem.

Cathy [30:17] (Speaks to another person) I am on an interview and their recording.

[Recording paused]

Cathy [30:17] I am back.

Satya [30:18] No Problem.

Cathy [30:18] Yeah. Yeah.

Satya [30:21] Yeah so I think that . . . So the workshops were over the span of a week we were saying. And you rented a space and people came and stayed in that space who attend workshops and things like that?

Cathy [30:37] Yeah yeah.

Satya [30:39] Interesting.

Cathy [30:39] So yeah. So and again that was about having the money to do it. Yeah. Yeah.

Satya [30:51] Ok. So in terms of your involvement with the Feminist Collective. . . So were you involved with them?

Cathy [31:03] Like peripherally. You know I knew women in the Collective but I wasn't involved knots and bolts of the Feminist Collective. Really my, I did use the Women's File. The pink filing cabinet that was in the photocopy room and was very grateful that I was there.

Satya [31:26] Is this in the library?

Cathy [31:29] Yeah. Yeah.

Satya [31:30] Ok

Cathy [31:30] I was grateful to the women who kept it updated and yeah. But I wasn't involved in the, you know, the meetings. I probably attended some of them when I was interested in doing something with Lifesize: Women and Film but I wasn't involved in any other of the Feminist Collective initiatives.

Satya [32:02] Wonderful. And when you would use the Women's File you would use it for your own. . . For school? For your own purpose? For your own research?

Cathy [32:09] Well when I was in . . . When I was finishing my degree I referred to it for papers and so on. I think when I was running the Anna Leonowens Gallery I referred to it from time to

time and then again when Lifesize was coming up I am pretty sure I would have, you know like . . . Questions would have come up and I would have thought oh maybe there is something in the Women's File. For instance you know I'm thinking I am looking here at this great little film *Outport Lesbian* it was Cathy Jones's film. I was a . . . I might have thought oh yeah yeah she is a local, well she is from Newfoundland and at the time she wasn't you know like it was years before *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* [inaudible]. She was a young, you know, actor sort of activist and yeah I would have thought oh maybe there is some information in the Women's File about this. Same with you know some of the other . . . I would have had the name of particular filmmakers and thought oh maybe there is something in the Women's File about this. You know. It was that kind of a resource. It was actually very comforting to know that there was this resource within the NSCAD library.

Satya [33:46] Because it was catered to women artists.

Cathy [33:50] Yeah and and to politicize women artists. Women artists who were looking to . . . You know who understood the gender gap and who were also thinking critically about how, you know, sexualities are constructed and a who were just thinking critically about our sort of place in the world and specifically our place in the art world. And who were pushing those boundaries you know. Like kind of like the Gorilla Girls but pre Gorilla Girls.

Satya [34:28] Yeah. Alright so my next question is have you ever participated in or attended one of the Feminist Collective annual exhibitions that they had at the Anna Leonowens Gallery?

Cathy [34:42] Well those didn't happen . . . No we did not have . . . No when I was running the gallery it wasn't a thing.

Satya [34:50] Yeah ok.

Cathy [34:51] And then I and then I wasn't at the gallery any more so no.

Satya [34:54] No problem.

Cathy [34:56] I didn't have anything to do with [them].

Satya [34:56] No problem.

Satya [34:58] So I guess what would . . . My last question is sort of what is . . . Do you have like a specific what has motivated you to participate in the Lifesize: Women and Film series?

Cathy [35:13] What motivated me?

Satya [35:16] Yeah

Cathy [35:16] Well in summary. I'd say I was a searching young feminist and understanding power relations as best one could in that time and wanting to you know, I had an activist mentality and I wanted to kind of help to advance the as a possibility. And I also wanted to continue being employed and so this was a way of creating employment for my self and for some others and use the skills that I gained being at NSCAD and specifically being at the Anna Leonowens Gallery for five years. I'd been an assistant there for two years and then I'd ran it for three years. And so it was kind like creating a next step for myself but also picking up something that was sort of available. You know like there was as I said there was nobody really in the Lifesize shoes at that particular time. And so and I have always done that in my life. I have looked out for what the opportunities are at any one time and thought what's the best fit for me. And so . . . And for my skills set and for what I my values. What I hope the world you know can be and yeah.

Satya [37:00] Nice and yeah so.

Cathy [37:04] Is that answering your question?

Satya [37:05] Yeah!

Cathy [37:05] What was that question again?

Satya [37:07] What would motivate you or what was motivating you to participate or what interested you? Yeah I think you answered.

Satya [37:14] Yeah I mean and then I went on to go to graduate school. In 1990 I went to Concordia in communications and did a masters where I was really looking at the way that art institutions worked and that sort of [thing]. We worked in terms of advancing progressive issues and how yeah and how that contributes to being a catalyst for progressive social change. So and then I went on and did a PhD. So that sort of urge of inquiry continued on. You know critical enquiry and sort of hopeful. Looking hopefully at how to contribute to the world.

Satya [38:20] Definitely. Well that was my last question. Is there anything you would like to add?

Cathy [38:29] No. I think that's pretty thorough Satya. I'm really . . . I'm very grateful that this initiative been taken by the NSCAD library and I'm really happy that this little piece of history is being historicized.

Satya [38:45] Me too! I'm really grateful that this could happen and that you know we could record this history. I think it's gonna to be really wonderful to share with the NSCAD community and you know anyone who's interested.

Cathy [39:00] Yeah and I'll send you photos shortly. Of the photos that I have.

Satya [39:07] Wonderful.

Cathy [39:08] And you will receive a package. I just sent it through regular post on Saturday. Of the press package and some other documents.

Satya [39:20] Wonderful. Well thank you so much. So that concludes the interview with Cathy Busby.

Cathy [39:30] Okay.

END [39:31]