

Amy Villarejo: Hi. I'm Amy Villarejo. I'm a professor in the Department of Performing and Media Arts at Cornell University. I'm here in Toronto for SCMS 2018 on March 17th, 2018. And I'm here to interview B. Ruby Rich, who is professor in the Department of Film and Media at the University of California at Santa Cruz and also the head of the Social Documentation MFA there. She's known to anyone who's watching this as one of our most cherished critics and cultural activists in the field of cinema and media, the author of *Chick Flicks* from Duke in 1998, and the author of *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut* also from Duke University Press. Ruby, this is a treat.

B. Ruby Rich: Hello, Amy. Great to be here with you.

Amy Villarejo: It's so exciting to get to talk to you. Long-time friend and inspiration to me. When I was starting to think about how to launch this conversation and reading over the questions that they provided to us, I made a list of the roles that I think you've played in our profession over the course of your long career. And while we're addressing you here as a professor at UC Santa Cruz and think of you obviously as an educator training generations of students, both undergraduate and graduate, as many of the other participants in this series have been doing, you're so much more than that.

Amy Villarejo: You've been a programmer, you've been a curator, you've been an arts administrator, you've been a juror, you've been a critic, you've been a journalist, you've been a scholar, you've been a researcher, and there are probably a bunch that I haven't thought about. And so even though the sort of explicit remit for this interview is to think about both the shape of our field of film and media studies, as well as how you've been shaped as a contributor to that field, we may go a little bit outside of the parameters that others would be more comfortable staying within-

B. Ruby Rich: Thanks for the warning.

Amy Villarejo: ... to think about the journey that's taken you from the other kinds of roles you've played in film and media culture more broadly to your current eminence as a professor in the profession. Could you start by talking about some of the formative moments for you in encountering film as a medium you wanted to engage in?

B. Ruby Rich: Well, thanks for that introduction, and thanks for that question. A lot of people involved with film came to film as kind of life-long geeks who were finding everything, watching everything. I wasn't. I was the person in my family that made them turn off the television, and I was really obsessed with books, not with films, not with movies, which is what they were then. And I was child in the days before video, before cable, and before anything Internet.

B. Ruby Rich: So I had much more limited involvement, and I think it was a fairly ambivalent involvement because some of my first experiences with films were of being

terrified by Hitchcock's *Psycho* or some other ... or Polanski's *Repulsion* and wanting to not go near a movie theater again. But nonetheless, I did go near a movie theater again. And in fact, in college, I ended up going to the college film society for an opportunistic reason. I was selling popcorn to make my rent money. So my first engagement-

Amy Villarejo: That I didn't know about you.

B. Ruby Rich: My first engagement with film was really in a social sphere, and I think that actually the sociality of cinema as shown on a big screen in a darkened room with a bunch of people was really key to my getting involved with film. And I think it shapes all of the different perspectives I bring to film as a result. It was never a singular text in a room by myself. It was always being part of a crowd. And it was at that time a major social space, as much as clubs, especially if you were too young to be getting legally into clubs. And so art house theaters, repertory cinemas, college film societies were all really my training ground. Going to see strange films that I know absolutely nothing about and couldn't Google, that was part of what started my journey into film.

Amy Villarejo: It's exciting to learn about those origins but also so helpful to think about the idea of the social as really what grounds these multiple activities that are directed in so many different ways. What was the journey from that college film society experience to becoming an arts administrator, both with the New York State Council on the Arts and with the School of the Art Institute at Chicago?

B. Ruby Rich: Yeah. Well, it was very fast because I got out of college, and I really missed having this constant stream of 16 mm prints going through the house. Because my friends were running the film society, and in the days before video, you couldn't see anything that wasn't on offer at the movie theater. In those days, you couldn't see anything that wasn't on offer at a movie theater or on first release or maybe repertory. So this was the one way, running a film society was the one way that you could get to see things you wanted to see.

B. Ruby Rich: And so what happened was a year out of college, a friend and I started a little film society in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. He was my pal from the college film society, and we got some projectors, and we went to the Woods Hole community board and got the use of the town hall meeting room space on Main Street. And we went to the church and got chairs, and we built a screen, and we made a banner, and we began to order our first films. I wrote the copy. He made the drawings. We handmade posters and colored them and put them up around town.

B. Ruby Rich: And we opened up on a Friday night in June, and to my delight there were long lines of people outside waiting to see the film. And I thought this was something magical, that you could order a film with stationary you invented and get someone to send it to you-

Amy Villarejo: They sent it right to you.

B. Ruby Rich: They would send it, and then you would say you were showing it, and people would believe you. And I thought, I mean, obviously this was a really ordinary thing, but I thought this was like alchemy. I thought this was really magic. And everyone was so excited because Woods Hole had a huge summer institute at the oceanographic center there, and these were all people from cities, from bustling campuses, and there was nothing to do. It was a beach town. And so the big thing to do was to come to us, and we showed a different film every night Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

B. Ruby Rich: We dressed up in costumes to go with the movie. We made mix tapes that had the movie of the period. We went on the local FM station and talked about what we were showing and played clips. And we were just full of ourselves. And we had a fan that drove from Boston, would bring us the popcorn, so we could give out free popcorn. People collected the posters. They would fight in front of the stores to get the posters when the old ones came down.

Amy Villarejo: You were a phenomenon.

B. Ruby Rich: We were a phenomenon for one whole summer, at the end of which we moved to Chicago. And in the next couple of months, I got hired at The Film Center to sell tickets on its opening night and to type its programs.

Amy Villarejo: Oh, you were a secretary.

B. Ruby Rich: Not even. I was working as a bicycle messenger in Chicago, and as my little extra thing I would type up the programs and show up on Monday and Wednesday nights or Wednesday and Friday nights and sell tickets. After a couple of months of this, the woman who had founded The Film Center with an NEA grant got another grant to hire an assistant, and there was no way she was going to hire one of the PhDs from Northwestern or University of Chicago that wanted the job. She was too intimidated by them. But I was this kid who thought this was all wonderful fun, so she hired me, and I quit my job and went to work.

B. Ruby Rich: I actually had an old-fashioned apprenticeship. I went to work at The Film Center. We subscribed to all these journals. I started reading *Film Quarterly*. I started reading *Sight and Sound* and *Film Comment*. We had filmmakers in person. Very quickly I met Kenneth Anger, I met King Vidor, I met George Kuchar, I met Cavalcanti, I met Herzog. And over those five years at what is now the Gene Siskel Film Center, I really got film history and a training in film and film analysis and, to a much lesser extent, film theory.

Amy Villarejo: Yup. In a moment in the academy when arguably we're professionalizing more and more and more and teaching our PhD students what that professionalization should entail, that education that you received was so much more than a PhD in cinema and media studies.

B. Ruby Rich: I would like to think so.

Amy Villarejo: It was an immersion into the art, language, and philosophy of the image.

B. Ruby Rich: At an incredibly vibrant time in film production. And also in terms of film studies, at that exact same moment, these people arrived from London because he was teaching at Northwestern, and she came along. So Peter Wollen arrived to teach at Northwestern, and Laura Mulvey came along. And so I met them. I began to meet lots of other people through them, to read other people through them. So I was getting this education from all directions, and I didn't have any filter telling me that I had to right to this.

B. Ruby Rich: And so for five years, I just soaked it all up, at the end of which I left The Film Center, began writing for the Chicago Reader in a weekly column, began teaching courses at the School of the Art Institute, and began to curate programs from the Walker Art Center or for other places, began to go around and give lectures. Judith Mayne brought to me Ohio State. Other people brought me to other places. I was trying to make my rent money. And it was all a discovery for me. And film festivals were always a very big part of it. So my network really expanded nationally and internationally by going to New York Film Festival, going to Telluride, going to the very last version of Knokke-Heist that ever took place in Belgium.

B. Ruby Rich: And it was thrilling for me. It was a kind of first-hand way of learning that I don't know that people get very often. I was extraordinarily lucky. And flying off of all of that in 1980, I was brought up short by the election of Ronald Reagan, and I thought, "Now what am I going to do?" And I heard about this job at the New York State Council on the Arts in New York City, and I applied for it, and I got it, and in January of 1981 I became the director of a film program at the state arts council.

Amy Villarejo: Footnote about that period of time that you've just been describing in Chicago, the program at the School of the Art Institute went from being a program in film to being a program in film and electronic arts, didn't it?

B. Ruby Rich: Around that time.

Amy Villarejo: Roughly around that time?

B. Ruby Rich: Yeah.

Amy Villarejo: What was your sense of what was emerging in terms of video, TV art as it was sometimes called then, electronic arts practices? Was that also part of your orbit?

B. Ruby Rich: Well, it was not actually. However, my very good friends who lived downstairs in this loft building we all inhabited in the mid-'70s, my friends Kate Horsfield, whose birthday it is today-

Amy Villarejo: Happy Birthday.

B. Ruby Rich: ... and her late partner Lyn Blumenthal founded the Video Data Bank, which continues to be an absolutely pivotal source for video art and video documentary. And I wrote their first grant proposal for them.

Amy Villarejo: One of your talents. Use it to the best you can. Yeah.

B. Ruby Rich: Whatever, whatever. Because of that I actually conducted a video interview with Chantal Akerman in the mid-1970s for the Video Data Bank. So it was a very generative time. It was a time when a lot was being invented and discovered. In terms of video, what happens at that moment is that video really pivots and becomes a more all-encompassing media. Because until then, it was really boys with toys, and preferably a van to bring the girls into, and Lyn and Kate arrived and really changed that.

Amy Villarejo: How long were you at NYSCA?

B. Ruby Rich: I was at NYSCA for 10 years.

Amy Villarejo: 10 years.

B. Ruby Rich: So I spent a decade making decisions or helping to make decisions about the funding of film and eventually film and video in New York City and throughout New York state.

Amy Villarejo: And was that the period of time when you started ... You continued writing. You had been writing in Chicago for the *Reader* and for other publications. What was the kind of trajectory of your work as a critic?

B. Ruby Rich: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, I had a lot of ties to London while I was still in Chicago, partly because of Peter and Laura's having been in Chicago for those years. So I went to the Edinburgh Film Festival while I was still based in Chicago. I was invited to become a programmer for the BFI and turned it down while I was still in Chicago. I went to Cuba for the first time while I was still in Chicago.

B. Ruby Rich: But when I got to New York, what was really a major change for me is that began writing for the *Village Voice*, and that really changed a lot about the way that I saw film, about the influence I could have, but also very much about how I wrote. I really was trained in writing a great deal by those brilliant editors at the *Village Voice* and all the way through the timeframe of the alternative weekly, which is still in my bones. I think till the day I die, I write best on a Tuesday. I always write really, really well on a Tuesday.

Amy Villarejo: Yup, it's that temporality, right?

B. Ruby Rich: Yup.

Amy Villarejo: Yeah, absolutely.

B. Ruby Rich: I would say the very big change was beginning to write regularly for the *Village Voice*. By the time I left New York, I was also writing for *Mirabella* magazine. I was also writing for the *New York Times*, but that was toward the very end. There were some regulations. I could not write about any New York filmmakers because I was funding them. Therefore, my writing changes in the that period seemingly away from what I used to be writing about.

Amy Villarejo: I hadn't even thought of that.

B. Ruby Rich: Yeah. Independent film based in New York. But I still could write about all kinds of other things, and I continued to do that.

Amy Villarejo: Were you writing for *Sight and Sound* at that point, too?

B. Ruby Rich: No. I started writing for *Sight and Sound* around the time I moved to San Francisco and stopped writing for the *Voice*.

Amy Villarejo: Okay. Got it. Okay, yeah.

B. Ruby Rich: And those were wonderful years of writing for *Sight and Sound*. I really enjoyed that.

Amy Villarejo: Yeah. And what was the sort of climate or relationship between academic writing on film in that period when you were writing, say, for the *Village Voice* when you were in New York. You were interacting with all sorts of folks who were academic primarily, and you presumably were continuing to read their work and thinking about the formation that we think of today as film and media studies, but you were an administrator. You were a grants administrator and doing this writing at the same time. So what was the triangulation there with academia?

B. Ruby Rich: Well, it's very funny. My partner likes to say that I'm the only person who ever had academics as a hobby. How I was doing all these other jobs, my friends all tended to be academics. Even when I was still in Chicago just beginning to write, I was living in the same city where this journal called *Jump Cut* was just starting. And what happened was that I was writing program notes for The Film Center, and Chuck and Julia would come to The Film Center, and they would read these program notes, and they began to say to me, "We'd like to publish this in *Jump Cut*. Could we publish this in *Jump Cut*?" And so I began to publish in *Jump Cut* because of their encouragement.

B. Ruby Rich: Patricia Erens was there in Chicago. She was on our board for The Film Center. She was editing an anthology on women's films. She asked me if I'd write the essay on Leni Riefenstahl based on a program note I'd written for The Film Center, so that was my first anthology piece, my first chapter. And this kept happening to me, that these would circulate.

B. Ruby Rich: I was emboldened to write these program notes because I thought nobody paid any attention to them. In fact, at the end of the night, you could see them thrown all over the floor, so I never gave it a second thought. I thought this was ephemera that nobody paid attention to.

Amy Villarejo: Like the posters-

B. Ruby Rich: Yeah, like the posters.

Amy Villarejo: ... which became collector's items.

B. Ruby Rich: Exactly.

Amy Villarejo: Yeah.

B. Ruby Rich: Also, I could never say anything negative about a film because they had just paid to come see it, so I had to find really ingenious ways of analyzing things without saying, "This is outrageous. This is terrible." So it was very good training for what I now try to train students in, namely not resting any argument on "I like this" or "I hate this." And I had to learn that as-

Amy Villarejo: Both rhetorically and in terms of-

B. Ruby Rich: Precisely. Precisely.

Amy Villarejo: ... capitalist enterprise, right?

B. Ruby Rich: Precisely.

Amy Villarejo: Yeah.

B. Ruby Rich: And so that was the early training, but I also began to be asked to write for *Framework*, which at that time was still in the UK, which perversely published on colored paper because they hadn't thought about xeroxing, so you could not xerox any of their articles. They were all published on really dark purples, greens. They were unxeroxable. Collector's items. And I went to my first film conference then.

Amy Villarejo: When was that?

B. Ruby Rich: That was in the mid-'70s. Bruce Jenkins and Bill Horrigan, who were at the time both students of Peter Wollen at Northwestern in the PhD program. Today, Bruce Jenkins teaches at School of the Art Institute, Bill is the curator at the Walker Art Center. They were putting together a panel for a conference at Purdue, and they asked me if I would come do the panel with them. It was going to be called "Naming," and Bill was going to talk about melodrama, and Bruce was going to talk about structuralism, and I was going to talk about feminist film. And out of that came my first sort of theoretical essay on feminist aesthetics.

B. Ruby Rich: So I began crossing over in these worlds, and I didn't understand that you weren't supposed to do that. I really had the benefit of ignorance.

Amy Villarejo: Did they understand that it was okay for you to do that?

B. Ruby Rich: Well, they gave me permission.

Amy Villarejo: Was there gatekeeping?

B. Ruby Rich: They really gave me permission. But I think we were all more or less the same age. I was editing them because I was soliciting program notes from everybody for The Film Center. It was an early editing gig. And so they would say, "Well, since we've all been talking about this, why don't you come do this with us?" And off I went.

Amy Villarejo: And off it went.

B. Ruby Rich: The other key thing at that moment was *New German Critique*, and because of Jump Cut, I was included in this very landmark conversation about women in film that took place at my loft with my iguana running around.

Amy Villarejo: Published in *New German Critique*.

B. Ruby Rich: Published in *New German Critique*.

Amy Villarejo: And forever known.

B. Ruby Rich: Notorious.

Amy Villarejo: Notorious, exactly.

B. Ruby Rich: Notorious.

Amy Villarejo: Let's talk about feminism. What was the climate of the film community that you were moving in? There were so many exciting things happening, but much of the conversation was a struggle about what became most prominent in those moments, the moment of high film theory, the moment of structuralist

filmmaking, heavy influence of white men in the profession, in places of leadership in the academy and so on. What was your experience as a feminist critic, thinker? And what was your experience with feminist filmmaking people, artists, and others in the community? What did that community look like then?

B. Ruby Rich: Yeah. I think it's difficult for people now to understand or believe what was so radical about that moment, but in the days before there was an internet or a Netflix or before there was video, it was extraordinary difficult to see anything but first-run movies. So the women's film festivals that took place in the 1970s were truly revelatory and transformative, and I co-organized one in Chicago in 1974.

B. Ruby Rich: The organizing committee, in fact, included Laura Mulvey. It included many, many other women. It included a branch of video makers who were going to do video workshops. It included a lot of groundbreaking writing. It meant writing letters to people in other parts of the world to try to track down films that we had not seen. You had to show films without seeing them because you couldn't see them.

Amy Villarejo: Yes, exactly.

B. Ruby Rich: So it was a very, very different business back then. And we put on this women's film festival, and I convinced the Chicago Tribune to fund it. Actually, Gene Siskel offered them up. And I would go every week and meet with the marketing department, and I started carrying cigars because I thought I had to prove my worth. I thought I looked ... I was too young, and they wouldn't take me seriously, so I would always bring cigarillos or something. I didn't smoke, but I'd bring cigars and wave them around.

Amy Villarejo: You're a woman who knows her props.

B. Ruby Rich: Yeah. And they funded a full-time staff person. They forced Gene Siskel to review the films when the festival started. They gave us free ads in the paper. They paid for everything. And we got 10,000 people to that festival.

Amy Villarejo: Wow. Wow.

B. Ruby Rich: 10-day festival downtown at the Art Institute, 10,000 people.

Amy Villarejo: My god.

B. Ruby Rich: And for years afterward in Chicago, as long as I stayed there, I would run into women who told me it had changed their life. So it was a very, very powerful movement. It wasn't "Me Too," but it was the Me Too of its moment in a sense because it was this triumphal cultural landmark that united women across all different kinds of categories and interests and generations into a discovery of

subjectivities that had been completely erased, and these films were not even in distribution. These filmmakers were not known.

B. Ruby Rich: And that's when I met Nelly Kaplan, who we brought to Chicago with *A Very Curious Girl*, and who has now been tracked down in Paris by Joan Dupont for me at *Film Quarterly*, which I now edit, and it will be in our next issue. An interview with Nelly Kaplan presumably now in her 80s.

Amy Villarejo: Unbelievable.

B. Ruby Rich: Or 90s. Completely sidetracked in French cinema and French cinema history, and we have found her. We have photographs of her with her mentor and lover Abel Gance-

Amy Villarejo: Yes. My god.

B. Ruby Rich: ... who was in his 60s when she arrived as a young girl in Paris, and all kinds of interesting, fascinating stories. So these moments brought together ... Jill Godmilow came there. That was the first time I ever met her. We had all kinds of people convening, and the ripples went out from that for many, many, many years.

Amy Villarejo: What affected you the most in that moment? What work were you seeing that changed your life?

B. Ruby Rich: Yeah. I think a lot of it, frankly, a lot of what we showed. Certainly *A Very Curious Girl*, which was the first film that I had seen that really addressed female sexuality in an unapologetic way. That to me was very, very important. Jill Godmilow was a key figure even though her documentary was a very normative documentary, which she has since rejected, about a woman-

Amy Villarejo: It just took her awhile.

B. Ruby Rich: It took her a few decades. A woman orchestra conductor who had been the teacher of the singer Judy Collins, and Judy Collins had actually hired Jill Godmilow to make this documentary. And that was when women were not allowed to be conductors of orchestras. So there were all of these films that were about specific grievances, specific histories of erasure, but also that was when we showed Věra Chytilová's *Daisies*. And I would say I've shown that in every class I've ever taught, except for documentary. But I think that a lot of these works were extraordinarily important, and the connections we made with each other, with women on other continents, with women in other places were equally important.

Amy Villarejo: Yup. Who were also doing programming work, who were also intellectuals-

B. Ruby Rich: That's right.

Amy Villarejo: ... who were organizing, who were-

B. Ruby Rich: That's right.

Amy Villarejo: And those circuits have really in fact sustained you over the course of your entire career.

B. Ruby Rich: They absolutely have. Laura Mulvey was not an academic at that time. She was working at Compendium Bookstore. She'd written two articles. They were both about art, very short, for a feminist magazine. She hadn't yet written the grand article. That came later. I still have her letters to me about how difficult it was to write this theoretic piece she was trying to write. It was ...

Amy Villarejo: "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema".

B. Ruby Rich: "Visual Pleasure...". Lynda Myles was a head of the Edinburgh Film Festival. She's the one who put on the women's film theory conference that I attended in the late 1970s that led to all other kinds of engagement and rapprochement and feuds. I think that that way of coming to knowledge through interactions, through almost the osmosis of the times, ideas were in the air. I think *In the Air* is somehow the title of one of the Olivier Assayas films about radicalization.

Amy Villarejo: Yeah, that's true. Yeah.

B. Ruby Rich: And I think there's a reason for that. That these ideas were in the air, and so was feminism.

Amy Villarejo: We're going to flash forward I think. After NYSCA, you went to San Francisco.

B. Ruby Rich: Yes, I spent a decade in New York at the arts council and writing for the *Village Voice*, and then I fled for the West Coast and landed in San Francisco and immediately began teaching part-time at Berkeley.

Amy Villarejo: Okay, so let's talk about that entry into academia and the trajectory that has taken you to now being a full professor at UC Santa Cruz, a key member of art's professional world as the editor of *Film Quarterly*, someone recognized at the peak of your powers with the distinguished career award, which you won 12 years ago I noted. But you are one of our most accomplished and cherished members, and the question is I suppose, how do we move back and now think about your entry into academia? What that has afforded you, what it has constrained in terms of your own practices, how you've sustained some of the things that nourished your early interest in cinema as a social phenomenon into your academic life. So you started teaching at Berkeley. When was that? What was that like?

B. Ruby Rich: I started teaching at Berkeley in January 1992 having just moved there from New York. And I had just taught a course actually in New York at The New

School right before I moved, and they knew that, and so when somebody cancelled at the last minute ... They would have a visiting documentary filmmaker or distributor or non-academic they would have coming to teach a documentary course as an adjunct. And their person cancelled at the last minute because this new thing had happened in the Soviet Union called glasnost and perestroika, and they were afraid to leave. They said if they left, they might not have their job when they came back because everything was changing. So I owe my teaching career to the collapse of the Soviet Union basically.

B. Ruby Rich: But I went there, and I taught this one class in documentary, and it was very successful because I was fresh to academia. I was coming out of a lot of engagement with the filmmakers, with festivals. I had been funding documentary filmmakers. I'd gone to Flaherty. All of these things I had already done. And so that felt very fresh to students, and it was kind of fun for me, and I had a good time with it. Otherwise, I was working journalism, and I was on masthead for *Elle Magazine* in a year or two. And so they said, "Oh, well, this was great. Why don't you come do it again next year?" And so gradually I began to be a contract player for Berkeley, and I was on these two-year renewable contracts, and they treated me very well. I didn't get paid like an adjunct.

B. Ruby Rich: It was a very satisfying situation until suddenly more than a decade later, Santa Cruz announced that they were going to start up a new graduate program in something called social documentation, and was I interested in applying for one of the new positions. And suddenly, after adamantly refusing year after year to do anything more than my one semester, I suddenly decided that maybe it was time to just go full-time into academia. Because I was trying to not do that. I was like, "No, no, no. That's not who I am. That's not what I do. I also do these other things." And so I was always keeping time open to do guest curating. I did the Film and Video Biennale for the ICA in London. I went and worked for the Toronto Film Festival and was the international curator. I liked doing all those other things. I get bored really easily, so that was part of the problem.

B. Ruby Rich: Suddenly, all these people that I knew at Santa Cruz, Renee Tajima-Peña, Rosa Linda Fregoso, Herman Gray all said to me, "Oh, come on down here. It'll be so much fun. We can all help out. We can build this program." And suddenly I thought, "Maybe this is a good time." And so I thought, "Why not?" Because what happened at that moment actually was that Schwarzenegger got elected governor of California, and I was on soft money at Berkeley. And I thought, "This lovely little position could go away"-

Amy Villarejo: Could be imperiled.

B. Ruby Rich: "It could go away tomorrow. I think it's time to get a little more secure." And as a result, I decided that why not join my friends and see what it felt like to be a full-time academic as part of this fledgling new program that seemed to be really exciting. And so in 2004, and do the math who was president in 2004, it was the George W. Bush years. In 2004, I left Berkeley and went to Santa Cruz,

and I've been there since then all along teaching primarily within this evolving documentary graduate program with students who really come there because they sincerely want to change the world, address really, really important issues for them, address communities, often their communities, that have been left out. And it's been really satisfying work on a lot of levels.

Amy Villarejo: Talk a little bit if you would about what the curriculum is in ... What is social documentation as a practice? And what is the role of cinema and media studies in particular in what is a production-driven MFA program? How are they thinking about questions of social justice, of audience, and what are you bringing to those questions from our field?

B. Ruby Rich: Yes. Well, when I taught documentary at Berkeley, it was to undergrads, and they had to take it. They didn't have a choice. I was a required class. They didn't have to take it with me, I think they had one other choice, but they had to take it. And it was really fun to kind of ambush them. So it was the opposite of what I'm doing now where I get students who are already self-selected, and I have to kind of shake some of their assumptions and shake their self-satisfaction and get them to rethink a lot of their approaches.

B. Ruby Rich: There's not enough time for doing the historical theoretical work. It's much more geared toward production and toward social science research methodologies and toward fairly complex post-production strategies. However, one of the things that's been really important to me is that the program did not begin in the Film & Digital Media Department where we now are. The program began in a defunct department called Community Studies, and they named it Social Documentation. I remember going for my job talk and being asked what social documentation was to me, and I had to explain that there was no such thing.

Amy Villarejo: There isn't. It doesn't exist.

B. Ruby Rich: But Santa Cruz is the land of made-up terms-

Amy Villarejo: History of Consciousness, yes.

B. Ruby Rich: So the department isn't called Cultural Studies, it's called History of Consciousness. The political science department is called Politics. Every department is, "We're very special there." So there are all of these very particularized terms. And what they meant by it I'm sure, which is no longer true, is that it didn't have to be a documentary film. It could be oral histories, it could be radio, or it could be installations. They had a very broad social science framework around what documentation meant, and they wanted to encompass that.

B. Ruby Rich: Unfortunately, they had very little understanding of what was involved with actual production. So they didn't seem to think that people needed very much

training in that, let alone in post-production. So there was a bad fit around the actualities of production, but there was a great fit with the assumptions of the department. There were people out of sociology, anthropology, geography, history all teaching in that department and working as mentors to our students. So in exchange we now have people trained in this discipline, in this wonderful discipline of film and media studies, and we no longer have in-house the people with the training in sociology, anthropology. But we build them in as advisors so that we have the same advising structure, and students still have to do extensive research in social sciences and/or history before they ever go out to shoot their projects.

B. Ruby Rich: So we ground them in that kind of training where we don't say the dirty word "interdisciplinary" because that gets you no points on any campus, but it is a deeply, deeply interdisciplinary program, transdisciplinary program. And from my point of view in terms of documentary, I constantly, and so are the people I teach with, talking about documentary ethics, talking about collaborative practices. I talk about Toni Cade Bambara's idea of the authenticating audience and the ways in which they should be working with their subjects and researching their topics.

B. Ruby Rich: One of the absolute mainstays for the program for me is that any work that's produced has to be legible to the people in it. Therefore, I would say we're probably the opposite of a Sensory Ethnography Lab approach. The work has to be deeply contextualized and really situated historically and in terms of location. Are all of the documentaries brilliant? No, of course not. Are all of them successful? No. But I think we've done pretty well in turning out a number of extraordinary young documentary filmmakers out of this combination of who is teaching and how we're teaching.

Amy Villarejo: Mm-hmm (affirmative). In contrast to Harvard Sensory Ethnography Lab, your emphasis on a kind of, let's say responsibility to the other, some responsibility to the subject and a grounded contextual approach, is that what's happening in documentary more broadly as you zoom out and look at the world of documentary? I know you're going to come back here to Toronto to serve on the jury of Hot Docs in not a few weeks time, but what's your sense of how the work that you're asking your students to do fits within the larger context of documentary work?

B. Ruby Rich: Sure. But I'm still moving between worlds, so I'm still in the world of the film festivals and of documentaries. One of the documentaries that's been really important to me this past year is Yance Ford's *Strong Island*, and when Yance came to San Francisco for a preview of that film, I was able to bring some of my students to that, and they were super excited to meet Yance and were very inspired by Yance.

B. Ruby Rich: I found that that was a great example for them of, even though it was grounded in autobiography, which I try to advise students not to do, even though it was, it

was grounded equally in histories of housing segregation, in histories of police violence, in histories of the misuse of the grand jury system and racial injustice. So it was a great example of intersecting issues. You can't say with a responsibility to their subject because the subject after all was Yance's own murdered brother and the deaths of his family, but it was a great, I think, example of a kind of ethical, politically grounded documentary that was just so informative for them.

B. Ruby Rich: In documentary writ large in the field, the two main things anyone talks about in the larger documentary field are either story, which I think is problematic, but it is the only term that people use, so people talk about story, and some of my colleagues talk about story. The other thing is that people talk about impact, and all the funders talk about impact. So between story and impact, somewhere in there, there's documentary aesthetics, okay?

Amy Villarejo: Uh huh. Right.

B. Ruby Rich: And where the academy comes in between those two, which they basically aren't dealing with, is through essay and through questions of hybridity and reenactments and ways of troubling documentary truth. And that's where I'm at odds with some people in my department because for me at this moment of this presidency, I'm not actually interested in troubling documentary truth. I'm more interested in how you certify documentary truth. But my mind isn't made up. I don't know what new strategies we need. I'm just interested in trying to see what students come up with and where they're tracking any of this.

Amy Villarejo: And for that matter, you haven't entirely abandoned talking about either story or impact in your work with the Ford Foundation, for example, and an instance of folks who insist on that word, on both words actually.

B. Ruby Rich: Absolutely.

Amy Villarejo: They're interested in both words.

B. Ruby Rich: Absolutely.

Amy Villarejo: So you-

B. Ruby Rich: No, we've been lucky enough to get Ford Foundation support for *Film Quarterly*, which is how we've been allowed to do a lot of the events we've done and how I was so lucky as to meet Yance and see *Strong Island* before it even had its premier at the office of Ford Foundation quite some time before it even went to Sundance.

Amy Villarejo: Great. Let's scale back again just for a moment and talk about *Film Quarterly*, which has I know occupied an enormous amount of your time over the-

B. Ruby Rich: Well, you're on the board. You should know.

Amy Villarejo: I'm on the board, and right, and have been lucky to be part of that journal's transformation and largely through your vision and hard work. Can we talk about why you were willing to take on such a heavy duty editorial job at this point in your career, what you sought to accomplish through that editorship, what kinds of goals you have had for the journal, and where we are today?

B. Ruby Rich: Wow. I tried not to become the editor. I gave them lots of suggestions of other people to hire. But I finally decided to do it when pressed, when other people had turned it down, actually, I think. In part because I wanted to try to create a different sort of playing field for writing in the discipline. At that time, I don't think there were any journals apart from *Framework* that were edited by a woman. Now that's different now that Caetlin has taken over-

Amy Villarejo: *Cinema Journal*.

B. Ruby Rich: ... *Cinema Journal*. But at that time, *Film Comment*-

Amy Villarejo: Maybe Heather Hendershot was the editor of *Cinema Journal*-

B. Ruby Rich: Oh, that might've been.

Amy Villarejo: ... when you took on *Film Quarterly*.

B. Ruby Rich: Yes, you're right. You're right. That might've been the case. Might've been the-

Amy Villarejo: But surely not a lot of them.

B. Ruby Rich: Well, I think ... No, no, it wasn't. It was Will.

Amy Villarejo: Oh, it was Will.

B. Ruby Rich: Yup.

Amy Villarejo: Okay.

B. Ruby Rich: Yup.

Amy Villarejo: Yup.

B. Ruby Rich: I really wanted to create a space where people who were publishing in so many other different journals, whether that was *GLQ* or that that was the *American Studies Quarterly* or whether that was ... just lots and lots of different places could have an entrée into a shared space. And that's probably out of a nostalgia for the old days of the *Village Voice* or the old days of *Jump Cut*. I don't think it's replicable probably today with so much divided attention and with so many

platforms to choose from and so much competing content, but I think that was part of it. It was kind of this fantasy that if you could bring a lot of different people into the tent, then more folks would start poking their nose in, not the camel but actual people, would start looking inside and enlarging a sense of a shared discourse.

B. Ruby Rich: So that was my fantasy, to try to bring more people on board, to have it be a place where queer and heteronormative and trans people could publish, where Latino writing could go on, where black writing could go on, where Asian American writing ... where people who knew China better than I did could vet articles about the new documentary in China, where people who knew television better than I did could write about *Transparent*, where people who knew black cinema better than I did could come in and co-edit a dossier on "Dimensions in Black". That there could be this kind of brave new world where expertise could be absolutely rigorously located and then shared, and not siloed in the way that seemed to me had become the norm.

Amy Villarejo: And also continuing to try to speak outside of academia to straddle many worlds, but one of the things that you continue to be excited about in terms of the journal's past reputation and possible futures is that reach-

B. Ruby Rich: That's right.

Amy Villarejo: ... that all of these voices that you're collating would then have.

B. Ruby Rich: That's right. And I think that's what interested Ford, was the idea of something that went beyond the university walls, that could raise the level of discussion and understanding and reach out beyond into different communities inside academia and outside academia because there's a lot of smart people out there who are not teaching or in graduate school. And there has to be some way to keep people engaged, to use their skills, to use their intelligence, and to try to move forward this understanding that we have of film and television and evolving platforms because if we don't do something soon, we're sunk.

Amy Villarejo: Yeah. Well, on the sinking of the ship, that theme, you've written editorials for each of the issues that you'd edited of *Film Quarterly*. And one of the things that emerged most profoundly is a set of meditations on the role of cinema and media in the face of racism and violence, neoliberal control, Trumpism, but on an international scale, so we're not just talking about where we sit here in North America but are thinking more broadly. What is your sense of how the cinema and media and other medias, if we think capaciously about that term, are functioning politically and how the voices that you're collecting and disseminating through *Film Quarterly* are participating in a political culture?

B. Ruby Rich: Well, I'm hopeful. I'm hopeful that *Film Quarterly* is part of an international dialogue. I don't know if it is, frankly. But I was very excited recently to be able to publish an article about Syrian cell phone documentary and non-cell phone

documentary, more formal portraits emerging over the different stages of this horrible, horrific slaughter going on in Syria, doing an aesthetic analysis of stylistic tropes in that situation but at the same time enforcing a politics of the image and of the dignity of the image in those circumstances that was very respectful of local values and local trauma. So I think that on occasion we've been able to do that.

B. Ruby Rich: Another easier example perhaps was the web piece that we published by Judith Mayne about the Cinémathèque Française and its egregious behavior when it was finally asked to put on a retrospective of Dorothy Arzner based on the one inspired by Judith Mayne's writing that San Sebastián Film Festival had organized, and the Cinémathèque had rejected Judith's essay because they wanted to commission their own. And when it appeared and when the women co-sponsoring the exhibition came to the Cinémathèque Française and discovered the essay, they discovered, in fact, that it was an essay attacking Dorothy Arzner, talking about her as a mediocre filmmaker and heaping scorn on the feminists and lesbians who had elevated her beyond her rank into being a director of importance. It was completely scandalous. Judith Mayne wrote this wonderful piece for us that was immediately taken up by some of the feminist film websites in France, translated into French, published online in France, and we'll see how that plays out and where it ends.

B. Ruby Rich: So sometimes we get involved in some of these. A similar thing happened with the censorship of the Busan Film Festival in South Korea over the screening of a documentary having to do with the sinking of that ship and the captain of that ship. And the long-time head of the film festival was fired over this, and we did a whole dossier on that with different people who were involved with that film festival weighing in on it. So we've been quite interested in having a voice in some of those international moments, and I hope it's something we can continue.

B. Ruby Rich: I want to do more translations. We did this with the cluster of articles on Encina Paz and with a special dossier on Eduardo Coutinho, one out of Brazil and one out of Uruguay and Paraguay. These, I think, have been wonderful cross-cultural moments. Happen to do something now with Susana de Sousa Dias and her filmmaking and the archives of the dictatorship. I'm limited by what people want to do, what people want to write on, what people ... Oh, I know. We did another piece on *The Battle of Algiers* that actually looks at the architecture of the city, not only at the film as a film but what the film reveals about the built environment and the start of a new kind of architecture that would have really strong racist implications down the line in France itself.

B. Ruby Rich: So I love these different ways of using the journal. And sometimes it's close textual analysis as in the Chantal Akerman dossier, but even then I couldn't resist. I went back to this earlier period in my own life in the 1970s in Chicago, found the video interview that I did with Chantal, had it transcribed, and made a little flip book in the corners of the pages with the image of the young Chantal in

her 20s, barely 20, who came and stayed with me in Chicago and reluctantly agreed to do this interview.

Amy Villarejo: That is a beautiful way to close. Ruby, thank you so much for participating in this Fieldnotes project, and let's go to the next *Film Quarterly* party.

B. Ruby Rich: Okay. Thanks so much, Amy. Thanks for doing this, and thanks for your diligence and for maintaining the standards of the field with the greatest sense of humor of anyone.

Amy Villarejo: Thank you.