James Francis Richards and Nancy Keefe Rhodes

A Conversation at NYU: James Francis Richards Talks about Thea St.Omer

On October 20, 2015, filmmaker James Francis Richards talked about his long-time friendship and collaboration with Thea St.Omer. James and Thea were MFA students at New York University's Tisch School for the Arts beginning in the 1990s. They remained close friends afterward and James worked on a number of her films. Besides making his own films, James is Media Archivist at the Tisch School, where this conversation took place.

Speaking with Richards is Nancy Keefe Rhodes, editor of Stone Canoe's Moving Images section, who also did the audio transcription. Brooklyn-based filmmaker Kyle Corea, also an old friend of St.Omer, documented this conversation and edited the sound file.

To listen to this interview, go to https://soundcloud.com/nancy-keefe-rhodes

Nancy Keefe Rhodes (NKR): We're here today at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts in New York City with James Francis Richards, a long-time friend and collaborator of Thea St.Omer. How did you guys meet?

James Francis Richards (JFR): She came to NYU I guess in '94, I think, and at the time, we—there was kind of a coalition of Black film students because there was only a handful of us in the graduate film program. And so, when she would come through the door, one of us would go, "Hey, we do this thing. Why don't you come hang out with us? We're here to support each other, like a support group." And it was a very interesting reaction we got. *[Laughs]* because, uh, Thea was unique and she did not want to acknowledge race, at least not in a direct way. But at the same time, she did come and hang out with us. So we got to know her that way and I got to know her that way. And I think she had a difficult time her first year. And I was, like, "Well, it's a challenge here and that's why we're here, to support each other,

and if there's anything I can do to help, just let me know." And she said, "Well, can you help me with my next project?" So she asked me to shoot her second year film. The program is three years. No one ever graduates in three years. People graduate in four, five, it took me six. I think it took her six. It takes a long time to graduate. So, I said, "Sure, I'll shoot your second year film." And in the process we really got to know one another because it was a process and she was basically driving me crazy the whole time. *[Laughs]* Because I could not figure out what was going on with this girl. Come on, what is up here?

NKR: Why did she drive you crazy?

JFR: Um, because film as taught to us—the pedagogy of NYU film—is very, it's militaristic. There's schedules, and time keeping, and all this process that's based on—I guess it has military origins. It's keeping yourself on schedule, logistics, moving yourself from one place to another. You know, even story boards, shot lists, plans, break-downs, all this stuff. And Thea was like, "Well, y'know, let's see how it feels…" And in your mind you've been trained your whole first year to make a film a certain kind of way and she was rebelling against the process literally from the minute she walked through the door. And I had to kind of unlearn what NYU spent the first two years trying to teach me to work with her to try to help her find her way. And at first—it was always a fun collaboration but it wasn't always easy. And I was trying to encourage her to put some more organization into the process so that we could make the deadlines. And she was kind of trying to not do that. *[Laughs]* And along the way I think kind of found a compromise and that allowed us to keep working together. So it was good. She got me to think about things in a completely different way and to let go. I mean, you need structure and you need the schedule because you can't—you have a location for five hours, you can't just do whatever you want to do, you have to get out in five hours. But within those five hours maybe it could be a little more freedom to find things and let things happen. And she was good at that.

NKR: It seems like everything of hers I've watched, you're part of. So you did find a way to work together.

JFR: Yeah. The thing about working with Thea is that, I had a lot of ideas about how a film should be and she constantly disabused me of all my notions and you have a choice. For me, I thought that was kind of thrilling. It was frustrating but thrilling. And every time I thought I knew what I was doing, she'd open up another door, and I was like, "Oh, this actually—that worked!" We were talking about *Snow? [an unfinished film]*

NKR: Uh-huh.

JRF: And she would just go, "Oh, shoot this thing!" And I'm like, "This has got nothing to do with the story, Thea. Why are we shooting this?" "It's just—it's just lovely." "Yeah, I guess it is…just lovely." And some how, some way, it just kind of worked with the overall thing she was doing. And it was about letting go of the sort of linear, structural narrative and allowing space for a more emotional effect in a work. And it's with me to this very day. To this day I'll just shoot something on my own project and I'm not sure how it's going to relate directly, but I feel like it's something I should do so we just do it. And even my last project —my DP said, "Why are we shooting this?" I said, "Don't worry about it. We'll find a place for it." And it's in the movie. So—that's from Thea.

NKR: So you worked with her on—this was *En Los Ojos?*

JFR: Uh, no—second year film is *A Touch of Tutelage*. *En Los Ojos* was her thesis film and I wasn't available at that point. And she worked with a DP named Seamus, who a really talented guy. Uh, they did not get along, partially because she felt that Seamus didn't do what she asked him to do. What she was asking was very challenging. In the sense that in *Los Ojos,* she had a static frame and asked a person to stand still for at least one minute. And Seamus, being a DP, felt that a static frame for one whole minute would torture an audience, and so he would gently move the frame around and he would find things that were interesting and so forth, and she was livid. Because that's not what she asked for. I thought it was beautiful both ways. Because the times he did it, it's great, and the times he didn't do it, it's great. But it wasn't what she asked for, so that was a struggle. So I tried to talk to talk her off the cliff on that one. It was, you know, "Yeah, you could be disappointed but it looks great. It came out great. Everyone loves it. It's working." So.

NKR: You know, I didn't really understand part of what she was doing—part of where that came from—this notion of a static frame and looking someone in the eye for a very long time apparently came from a childhood game she had with her father.

JFR: I didn't know that.

NKR: There's a place in the *Snow* footage where she asks him to look into the camera and she says, "Daddy, just liked we used to do with our game…"

JFR: Oh yeah….

NKR: "…where I would stare at you as long as I could." And so, he does it. And it's very disconcerting.

JFR: Yeah. Yeah.

NKR: And it's like, oh, that's where that came from!

JFR: Well, you know, I think it's an amazing story. It explains a lot. And also, the idea that at first it's fun, and then it starts becoming disconcerting, and then it's disconcerting because there's nowhere to go, there's nowhere to hide, that sooner or later who you are is gonna start poking through. And I think that's what she was searching for. To let go of what we thought and then just suddenly be who we really are. And she got it. It's an effective movie. I was so upset with her when she decided to give up filmmaking and she, like, trashed all her equipment, and she got rid of everything. And I was, like, "Where's the movie? You can't do this?"

NKR: When did this happen? What happened?

JFR: It was probably right—she was living in the Bronx at the time. I think this was before she came up to Syracuse and she was just, like, "This is not—no one understands what I'm doing. I don't know why I'm doing this. It costs a lot of money. There's no reward. Uh, it's just hard." And she just kinda—sold her computer, her camera, microphone, everything. I don't know, I think she even got rid of a lot of stuff. I mean, I still have a bunch of her movies, she just gave me her DVDs, she was, like, "I'm done with film." I was, like, "This is not acceptable." And I had—at the time I was collecting my classmates' films, the ones that I liked? And I had a copy of her film and I made a DVD of it, a bunch of them, and I sent them to her. I was, like, "You just can't walk away. It's a part of you. Take a break. Even if the break lasts twenty years, but you can't just walk away." And I think that was during the time that she discovered painting. She got the immediate feedback that she wanted. And then, doing painting for a while gave her the strength to go back to film. And that process—I just wanted to encourage her, because she had such a unique voice. And I thought, "Well, yeah, it's hard. It's hard because you're unique and your voice is unique. So, it's gonna be hard.

So, accept that. Accept that there's not an audience waiting for your film. This is not—you're gonna have to make that happen. It's gonna take time."

NKR: I think she—there was a point where she threw a lot of her paintings away too. Then there was a group of them in Syracuse that we discovered. And I know that Kyle said he didn't know she painted, he didn't know anything about that part of her art.

JFR: I mean, I have a couple of her paintings. I'm very fortunate. Yeah, boy, you know—she was an artist.

NKR: Everything. She did everything.

JFR: Yeah.

NKR: You think painting led her back to making films. Because of immediate feed-back? From people or because she could see a finished product?

JFR: No—because she could see a finished product. You have some like of satisfaction. With a film you're going and going and going and going and going and going. And it's two years and you don't know where you are. You screen it for a few folks for feedback and the feedback is not helpful. It can be a confusing and difficult process. So at least with painting—and I know it's true for me because I used to be a painter—you can knock a painting out in a couple hours and have something to look at. You can at least feel like, I did that. Even if it's no good, you can, you say "I did that." But film is sitting in your hard drives for—however long. So it's tough. That's why I was trying say, "It's a process, so it's okay. It's okay."

NKR: I guess she listened to you.

JRF: Sometimes. She listened to me sometimes! She did what she wanted to do.

NKR: So she finished here and she went back out west for a while to Santa Barbara, I guess taught for a couple semesters at UC/Santa Barbara, and then she got to Syracuse. But through all this she was still in touch with you and still working with you on the projects.

JFR: Indirectly. I mean, by this point she had gotten another camera, and we were just, like, "Buy another camera, and just start shooting things, for your own

satisfaction." And out of that, her documentaries started coming. And I think it was very satisfying, on some level. On another level it was tough because it was challenging to get into festivals and such. But it was good for her to get into the process of making stories again, and shooting things, and having control of the process again. There's no mediator—I'm not even involved, except to watch the finished product. She's doing it herself. She's in charge of the whole process. Uh, she can start and stop as she pleases, and discover stuff. And I thought that was really exciting. I was really happy because of that aspect of things.

NKR: You had said you were interested in talking about that she lived in a different world than—this one. Or wanted this one to be different.

JFR: Yeah.

NKR: Could you talk about that?

JFR: One of the big things was that we would always—myself, my peers, my classmates—we were always, like, "Where is Thea from?" Sometimes it felt like she was from somewhere else. And I remember thinking to myself, "Well, California! That explains everything." California's very kind of different. And then she—I met her parents. And they were like my parents. And they were, like, "James, we don't know where Thea comes from either." *[Laughs]* And then it was, like, oh, she's completely unique, her own thing. And even they were, like, "We don't—we didn't teach her this stuff. She found it on her own." And her parents were Caribbean immigrants, like my parents. We got along, like, really well. And I was thinking at times, "Well, now, I'm actually—I'm actually a little scared." Because there was a strong, I guess for lack of—an aggressive naiveté. She just refused to acknowledge the rules of the world. And understandably—things are not right. And she wanted things to be right. So the fear is, how do you, how do you live in a world where you refuse to acknowledge the rules of the world? And the world punishes you over and over again—for not playing by those rules. And at times, you know, I think all three—Garth, Lucy, myself, as much as I could, we'd be, like, "Sometimes you have to play the game a little a little bit to get from A to B." And she just steadfastly refused. And I'm thinking to myself, "Well, how are you going to sustain this? Are you gonna be able to do this forever? Like, how are you going to live?" And sadly, I don't know. Looks like it was impossible. So that fear I carried with me—I was not sure what was going to happen. I was hoping that moving to Syracuse would scale things down a bit, and be an environment, ah, not like New York City. A little smaller, a little bit more personable, that she could create the world she wanted to live in. But the

world that we live in is everywhere, it's not just New York. It's a smaller scale somewhere else, it's just still here. She wasn't willing to compromise. She never compromised, really. And the world is going to do what the world is going to do, so when an irresistible—whatever, an immovable object and an irresistible force collide, that's what happens, something's got to give. Not the world. The world's not gonna give. So that was always the fear of how she was going to make her way.

NKR: Well, I think she had very tough times. But she also had people who really believed in her and were good to her. I know that even after she left Newhouse, she continued to use their facilities, really whenever she wanted. And they just let her use the edit suites and she made a lot of work there.

JFR: Well, you know, she was like magic. Everybody liked her. Everybody loved her. It wasn't even like. She affected everybody she came in contact with. With that being said, is that enough to sustain a person? You still have to make a living. You still have to find a way to develop your relationships. You still have to, uh, connect to the world on some level. And living in your own head and your own ideas may not be enough, as much as we love you, as much as we care about you, there's only so far that can go. And the heart-breaking part is that, because she was such a good person, and such a unique person, and such a creative and talented person, that you wanted her to stay around. And you wanted her to—come on, just a give us a little, so you can still be here, you know? Yeah, but I almost feel she was not of this earth, you know, that's why she can't be here with us right now. She just wasn't meant to live this way. It's a hard thing to think about or say, but I've never come across somebody who thought as uniquely or lived as uniquely as she did. To this day, I mean, in New York – there's eight and a half million people here! There's only been one Thea. So. You know, what can you say after that? I don't know.

NKR: Do people here remember her, people who—?

JFR: Well, we do, our classmates. We remember her, very fondly. It's interesting, the effect her passing had on some people who I had not realized she affected so deeply. One of her teachers remembers her well. A lot of the faculty are not here now or they passed on themselves. So, and it was a transitional time as we were moving from film to digital. So a lot of that process—all that stuff is gone now. It's a new school, it really is. But we remember, our classmates remember her. Very fondly, very well. She affected everybody. That was her nature. She just changed people.

NKR: If there were to be a way to have her filmmaking remembered here, if there were a way to do that, why is it important that we remember her films?

JFR: I think on the most basic level, there's a space to resist the pedagogy of traditional filmmaking techniques. That there's a space for a more poetic approach to telling stories. And that there's a space for a more, for lack of a better word, for a more—I guess, feminine. I don't know how else to describe it. But it's based on different values that are not masculine—a way of constructing a story, of constructing a film. There's a whole other way—a whole other way of shooting it, working with actors, the whole process, editing—that's different and legitimate. That's what she taught me. And I had to let go of what I thought of how a film should be constructed and what's supposed to happen in the frame and just let things happen and embrace moments and create moments on the spot and things of that nature. And to let go of the sort of rigid structures and let things flow like a wave and that has value. That there is not one way to make a film. And yeah, in the beginning you have to learn the rules so that eventually you can get to another place and break the rules. But at that point? There's many different ways to make a film. And Thea freed me of what we were learning and enabled me to think about it differently. To feel it more than think about it.

NKR: It's not that she was undisciplined.

JFR: No, no.

NKR: And in going through the material on the five hard drives that she left in Syracuse—they're extremely well-organized. It looks like she didn't throw anything away. It's all—you can find everything. And I know that her editing was—someone once told her, "Don't get lost in the editing room." Boris Frumin, I think.

JFR: I think we all said that at least once. *[Laughs]* Yeah, definitely Boris!

NKR: She would talk about how, when she was editing a film, she didn't like to be around people because even if she was out walking, or eating a meal, she was thinking about it. And to carry on a conversation was almost torture because it would tear her away from what she was working on in her mind.

JFR: Yeah, Yeah.

NKR: And when we talk about people being poetic, we sometimes—we sometimes mistake that for being imprecise, and I think it's not at all.

JFR: I was gonna say, yeah, poetry is actually the reverse.

NKR: It's very precise!

JFR: It's intensely precise! Exactly. But it's trying to communicate—it has to be precise, because it's communicating on multiple levels. It's the metaphor and simile and you have to pick the right meter, the timing, all that. But still at the same time, the amount of fluidity is built into that. But it's hard. That is hard! That is hard stuff!

NKR: It's the hardest.

JFR: That's why poets struggle for five verses. It takes a week to write a string poem or whatever. That's just one page of twenty-five words. So, imagine ninety minutes of a story and how to find that. It's agonizing. It requires a level of concentration most people can't even imagine. When you don't have a traditional structure, a rigid structure, that you're working from another way of telling stories, so now you kind of have to develop your own syntax your own language from the beginning. Like I said, I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. It's unbearable, it's horrible, but the end result is something unique and beautiful. And confusing—to people who are not used to seeing a project using these tools. They don't know what to think, especially when we've been taught to just consume and not reflect.

NKR: Well, I've thought her films—they are demanding of the viewer.

JFR: Mmm-hmm.

NKR: I think she screened the film *Nigger* down here, didn't she? How was that received here?

JFR: Good and bad. There's a couple versions. I think the first version was, Sam was, like—Sam Pollard—she screened it for myself and Sam Pollard. And that was tough. Mostly because she believed in the integrity of the shot and so she would just screen the whole string-out of the interview with no edits and then the next person, all with no edits, and the next person. Well, you know, an hour and a

half of that is just—you want to put a bullet in your brain. It's just too much. And Sam was, like, "Well, if you want it to be finished, it's finished. Because you're the artist, you're the author of this. But if you don't want it to be finished, I could make suggestions about how to make this…" And it took a while for her to say, "Okay, I can make a stronger film with some edits." And the film started coming alive a little bit. And at that point she actually had something that people were able to connect to a little more. People were either kind of positive about it and the exploration or they were, like, "Why you doin' this?" And there was kind of no in-between.

NKR: I think that a lot of the negative response that I've heard just simply has to do with the title and that a number of people wanted her to...

JFR: Yeah.

NKR: There was someone she taught with at UC Santa Barbara that he refused to look at it unless she changed the title. Of course she wouldn't.

JFR: Yeah, yeah.

NKR: And a lot of people couldn't get past the title, which of course is what the film is about.

JFR: Mmm-hmm. Yeah—I can understand that. I almost wish she was still here and made the film right now. Because I think it was just—it was a conversation that we weren't ready to have.

NKR: We're ready.

JFR: Yeah, now more so than ever. It would have been right. That was Thea, she was a couple heart-beats ahead of us.

NKR: I think so. Yeah. What's something that you remember, just like that?

JFR: *[Laughs]* There's so many, I don't even know where to start. The time she was working at—I think it was Robert DiNiro's restaurant. And they told her—she was bringing back the plates from a table and the family had not eaten the prawns and she thought the prawns were so delicious and she couldn't believe that they hadn't eaten them. So she ate them and the manager saw her eat them. So he said, "If you ever do this again, I gonna fire you." And so, of course, the

next week, another party left the prawns on the plate and she hoped that he didn't see her and she couldn't resist and she ate the prawns and of course he saw her and he fired her on the spot. And I thought to myself, "Why, Thea? Why could you just not eat the prawns? It was a good job, it was paying you well." And she —it was interesting because Thea, I forgot what happened, but she kind of went away for a little while and she came back and—while she was gone she shaved her head, she started doing yoga hard core, she became a vegetarian, she lost all this weight and she came back looking like a super model. And we were all, like —it's kind of like when the girl goes away in high school a junior and comes back a senior and everyone's, like, "Whoa! What happened to so-and-so?" So she was getting all this attention, people were paying all this attention to her everyday, so she walked in to get this job in a restaurant and, you know, the way she walks with her perfect posture, and she spoke with her diction, she's got the shaved head and she's all yoga-toned. I'm, like, "This is perfect! You're gonna make some money and, you know, be able to make your films, take care of your dogs. Why did you eat the prawns? Thea, why, why did you eat the prawns?" But that was Thea. You can't—in her mind it made no sense to throw away perfectly good food. And rightfully so. I understand that. But that's the rule of the organization that you're working for that's paying you. Yes, it's stupid. But that's—they're paying you not to eat the prawns. Don't eat the prawns. What's right is more important than what makes sense.

NKR: Well, nowadays, this might—restaurants are doing differenr things nowadays.

JFR: Yes, that's true.

NKR: They're not throwing food away because they're more aware of people who are hungry.

JFR: Yeah.

NKR: A couple heart-beats ahead.

JFR: A couple heart-beats ahead. As always, as always. Who knows, probably that same manager is probably wrapping up plates as we speak.

NKR: You went to Santa Barbara with her and then shot the film *Snow,* which hasn't been finished, because it appears to lack a sound track. She used her parents as the major actors. I'm in hopes this will eventually be in shape so that

more people can see it. What do you remember about that whole project?
JFR: I remember, uh, mostly how much I really enjoyed being around Garth and Lucy, and how wonderful they are and how—my father had passed away many years ago, so Garth kind of reminded me of my father and Lucy, she reminded me of my mother. I just enjoyed talking to them and hanging around them. *[Laughs]* And we would spend a lot of time talking about Thea. In a good way, you know, with all her quirks and charms and stuff. And I had to—you know, working with Thea could be frustrating, because I had to let go of. I mean, it's not easy, because in my mind, I've gotta get the shot, I've gotta set this up, the sun is going down! But at the same time, I always came back if I could. I would always come back and learn so much and I enjoyed the experience on so many different levels. So I was meeting Garth and Lucy and hanging out with them for an extended period of time. It was a good experience. If you can hear anything I said [on the ambient soundtrack], it's not, "What are you doing?" It's like, "Okay, whatever." So we had a good time. It was a good time. It was great being there—how much I enjoyed them and seeing the three of them interact. I wish there was another camera seeing that. That would've been—but it was good. They're really very interesting people. Her mom's an oceanographer. Her father, a novelist. It's just like—you can't. It's crazy. And they're from St. Lucia and my family's from St. Vincent, those two islands are right next to each other.

NKR: Thea painted and she made films and she, I think, did things we could call sculpture, and she wrote. She was quite a good writer.

JFR: She was a very good writer.

NKR: And I remember her saying, once, when I first knew her, that it was—she had a difficult relationship with writing because her father was a novelist.

JFR: Mmm-hmm.

NKR: Although from what I can tell, he was quite supportive of her.

JFR: Yeah.

NKR: So she settled on film. What do you think about that made film most compatible with her?

JFR: She was a very visual person. And you get to combine all the things that you love, theoretically, in film. You get to have visuals and you get to have the

writing and the dialog and the situations and then music and sound track and things together. So you get to combine those things together. If you are interested in any of those, you can combine them all together into one thing. So it makes sense that she would be drawn into it and she had so many ideas about what to put on-screen, it seemed logical, if there's such a word—the word is appropriate. The word just felt like it was a natural progression of her artistic ambitions to be in motion pictures.

NKR: It's interesting that we call them "motion pictures" and there's so much static—it's as if she is pushing moving images to be as still as they can be on a movie screen.

JFR: Mmm-hmm.

NKR: It's quite interesting to me.

JFR: Well, she was—like the staring game—we just gonna look and look and look until you can't fake it anymore. And she did that for a long—sometimes, oh we did a take of something—it was *Touch of Tutelage*—and it was going and going and going and going, and I'm like, "Okay!" It's like, "We've got it! We've got the shot!" And she's like, "No, no…" And once she realized, this shot has been going on a long time, she liked that. She just liked being in that moment. And more often than not, she could make it work.

NKR: *Vodka in a Glass?* What's your recollection of that film?

JFR: You know, she told me—I had nothing to do with that one. So, she told me she was working on it and, uh…

NKR: She does thank you though, in the credits. She always thanks you. So you had something to do with it, somewhere.

JFR: All I would do is say, "Keep going." You know, don't quit. And she would say, "I have a story," and she would say, it's about such-and-such, and I would say, "Well, okay, if you—maybe, make sure you take care of this part." And that would be about it. When she got to Syracuse, it was a little harder for us, and then I got married and my life got complicated and her life got complicated and there was a whole lot of other stuff going on. And so I wasn't able to participate as much as I would have liked in her Syracuse projects. But if I had time, I always watched them and gave her feedback. And tried to be an honest, because she

was always honest—I tried to be as honest as I could but in a way that's helpful and not painful. Because you know sometimes criticism is designed to bring people down and she didn't want that. So—and I knew, I always felt from the very beginning that she had such a unique voice and I desperately wanted her to keep making things, so if there was any way that I could help. Because you can't really, you can't quit. You just can't. It's not fair to quit because you're doing something that nobody else can do. You know, I was hoping that she would be here longer, to find a bigger audience.

NKR: If you could figure out how to find that bigger audience, what would you do? What should we do to get a bigger audience for her?

JFR: You know, I don't know. I don't know, Nancy. I do not know. Her stuff challenges people in a way that I think most folks do not want to be challenged on such a level of intimacy. Folks are trying to keep their lives mediated, keep things at an arm's length, at a distance. And she wasn't about that. And so we have to find a group of people who are willing to engage at that level, and it's tough because we live in a world that's so superficial. And that was part of the conflict that she was having in her own life. She wanted—she did not want to engage people on a superficial level. She wanted to engage people more deeply. And that comes at a price at times. She made work that is hard for people to absorb at times and the only way—I don't know how to. It's the culture that we live in right now. You have to kind of think out of the intimate and a few other things, stretch out your reach. But I don't know, other than what you're doing right now. Trying to keep the stuff archived and keep it alive so that people can have access to it and see it when they're ready to see it. Let them know, "Hey! When you're ready for this, it's here. You can see it, you can see it. It's here. You should know about it."

NKR: You think there's a place to do something like that here at NYU?

JFR: I don't know. I hope so! I don't know. I mean, we have the space. What happens after that, I don't know. We've already added all her movies into our collection so people can check them out and watch them. So they're here and they'll be archived on our server.

NKR: Good, good.

JFR: But that's—after that, yeah. The stuff that you guys are doing in Syracuse is so important. Well, we'd have to talk to her parents but I don't think it's a bad

thing to have them available so that people could see them online.
NKR: I'm kind of leaning in that direction too. And I think there could be several homes for that—here, probably Newhouse, *Stone Canoe* has a site. I mean, I think it's—obviously her mom and dad have the final say.

JFR: Obviously.

NKR: But I'm thinking that might be a good way to go. I can't see selling DVDs on Amazon. I don't think that's the way to go here.

JFR: I agree. I agree. And just the world that we live in right now, this way people can have access when they want to have access. Some of it is a start and stop experience, you know, so it might be a little too much at times and a little too deep. And you might have to pause and come back to it when you're ready. And having it online makes that kind of…

NKR: It makes that possible.

JFR: Yeah. I'm all for it, whatever Lucy and Garth want. I'm all for it.

NKR: Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you would want someone to ask you about Thea?

JFR: I really can't—she had a very interesting take on race. She had a very interesting take on class. She had a very interesting take on sexuality. All of which were challenging I think to most folks who encountered her on some levels. And when I first met her, she refused to acknowledge race. She would call people "quote-unquote white," "quote unquote black." "He was a person..." "Oh, what kind of person?" "Oh, quote unquote white person." I was like, "Oh, okay. Alright." *[Laughs]* And again, this is part and parcel of the idea that these things should not matter. And refusing to acknowledge that they do in this world in which we live in. And she did everything like that, so the right thing was the most important thing and everything else was just in the way of the right thing. That's an expensive way to live. But when it's beautiful, it's sooo beautiful. But when it's bad, when it's painful, it's so painful. So, yeah—I don't know what else to add to that.

NKR: Okay. Any particular film you'd like to comment on?

JFR: Well, you know, I think the thing in general for me that I took from my

working with Thea was the sort of, kind of idea of alternative cinema. Like, there is this kind of other way. It doesn't even matter if you go Thea's way or you come up with your own way. Whatever. It's just that the tools to tell a story are broader and more diverse than we could ever imagine. And that she was fighting hard to carve out a space to do it in her own terms. And that should be applauded. And that's why I was around for as long as I was around, cuz—what the hell is going on here? There's no way this should work! And you'd watch it, and it's like, "Oh, it worked." Let me let go of what I think should work and not work, and let this process happen, and follow it all the way through. And for me that was a very priceless lesson. Priceless. I have not forgotten. It will be with me forever. Forever.

James Richards is Manager of the Digital Media Library at the Kanbar Institute of Film & TV at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. He has a BFA in Commercial Art and Illustration from St. John's University and a MFA in film production from New York University's Graduate Film Program. He curated the Emerging Black Filmmaker Festival at the Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center in Queens from 1999-2003. He has written for Blackfilm.com and the Poetry on Video series on the Urban Box Office. His short films have screened in numerous festivals including Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame in Oakland, Martha's Flavor Fest, the Pan African Film Festival in Los Angeles and Atlanta, The Martha's Vineyard African American Film Festival, and the Festival de la Cite in Lausanne, Switzerland. With five of his colleagues from NYU's Graduate Film Department, he participated in a group feature film, *6 Things I Never Told You,* which was part of the IFP Rough Cut Lab in 2006 and screened at the Berlin Black Film Festival, the Mid Atlantic Black Film Festival, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Creatively Speaking Film Series at the City College of New York and at BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music) as the inaugural film in the ACT NOW/New Voices in Black Cinema film series in 2009. His recently completed first feature film, *The Bicycle,* screened at The Martha's Vineyard African American Film Festival, The San Diego Black Film Festival, The Pan African Film Festival, the New Voices in Black Cinema series at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and won best feature film at the Newark Black Film Festival 2014.

Kyle Corea's remembrance of Thea St.Omer, "Kissed on the Lips," is available elsewhere in this