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University of the Witwatersrand

Wits School of Arts

MA Dissertation

TITLE:
Queer Entanglements: Postcolonial Intimacies, Spaces and Times in Greyson and Lewis's *Proteus* (2003)

Jacqueline Lee Katz

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Art in Dramatic Arts

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I would like to thank Strand Releasing for allowing me to use images from *Proteus* (2003). Thanks also go to Gabrielle Le Roux for agreeing to let me use photographs of her *Proudly African and Transgender* (2014) exhibition. These images have undoubtedly enhanced the quality of my work.

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Susan Katz, whose unshakeable spirit has seen me through my most difficult days. She receives my deepest gratitude for her unwavering love and support throughout my undergraduate and postgraduate studies. She has made this work both possible and worthwhile.

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted in fulfillment of the degree of Master of Arts in Dramatic Art by Dissertation to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination to any other university.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Abstract

My dissertation presents a textual analysis of John Greyson and Jack Lewis's South African film, *Proteus* (2003), which is based on archival records and plots the never-before-told narrative of an intimacy between two inmates on 16th century Robben Island. Locating this same-sex intimacy in the 1700s Cape Colony has far-reaching implications when considered in relation to the increasingly pervasive twenty-first century discourse which proposes that homosexuality is necessarily 'unAfrican'. The film's social and political commentary is, therefore, significant for how we might think about sexuality, among other subjectivities, in post-apartheid South Africa.

By analysing the film's formal and thematic attributes, I demonstrate that the directors' protean approach to filmmaking has queering effects for the linear notion of time and the cohesive conceptualisation of identity that the colonial archive tends to reinforce. I suggest that commonsense notions of time, space, language and identity that structure the archive have allowed for multiple fissures to develop along the trajectory from past to present. As I show, the aforementioned process has almost effaced from official records narratives, such as the one told in *Proteus*, that would trouble totalising ideas about the intimate orientations of certain individuals. Therefore, I argue that while the record of this same-sex intimacy does appear in the archive, it has been subsumed by other, more dominant, narratives. The film's work, which I replicate in my reading of it, has been to queer this archive by foregrounding what has historically been repressed.

In my first chapter, I argue that by enacting what Halberstam (2005) terms a mode of 'queer temporality', *Proteus* carves out spaces in the archive for alternative renditions of history to come into visibility in ways that demand fluidity and heterogeneity. I propose that the strategic filmic mechanisms employed in *Proteus* necessarily engender nuanced spectatorial procedures, which call on the spectator to engage reflexively with the film. I continue to argue for the spectator's need to be particularly reflexive throughout the dissertation. My second chapter deals with the filmmakers' strategic use of language in order to present a commentary on the material effects that the acts of 'naming' and 'categorising' have on living bodies. The final chapter explores a critical perspective which has not previously been brought to bear on the film. I examine how Greyson and Lewis construct positions for their main characters from which they may assert their subjectivity - what Mirzoeff (2011) describes as 'the right to look'.

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Introduction

> Sooner rather than later the complex issues that we hide… because of our human frailties and fears, will return in more violent and threatening ways. The most we can do is deal with them… the future demands such commitment from all of us.
>
> (Suleman in Stevens et. al., 2013: 27)[1]

This dissertation presents a textual analysis of John Greyson and Jack Lewis's South African film *Proteus* (2003), with a view to examining how the directors construct a protean vision of a narrative that first appears in eighteenth century colonial archival records. I have described the film's qualities as 'protean' because, as I will show, the filmmakers sinuously re-tool the conventional filmic apparatus in a way that mimics the shape-shifting abilities of the ancient Greek God, Proteus[2]. Using the film's polysemic[3] title as a structuring principle and thematic motif, I aim to examine how *Proteus* queers

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[1] Referencing Style: Harvard King's College London

[2] The Greek Sea-God, Proteus, is believed to have been able to shape-shift as a crafty defense against having to tell the future. See Atsma (2000) for a list of sources for the myth.

[3] The film's title may simultaneously refer to multiple events including:

(a) The Greek Sea-God, Proteus.

(b) The resulting adjective (i.e. protean) that alludes to the quality of fluidity, versatility and malleability (Waite, 2012).

(c) The heterogamous plant with a similar genus (King Protea) is a ubiquitous symbol of post-apartheid South Africa. For instance, it is the national flower as well as the name used to identify the national cricket team (Brownell, 1993).

normative conceptualisations of time, space, and language as they operate in the colonial archive. My objective has been to investigate whether the film queers these foundational units of the archive. My assessment is that *Proteus* does have queering effects for the archive and I will, therefore, reflect on what a queer reading of the film might mean for official[4] South African histories and for the formulation of post-apartheid identities in twenty-first century South Africa.

Todd Ramlow describes the act of queering as "a critical practice of reading that points to new ways of being (or of always becoming)… [and], new social arrangements and distributions of power" (Ramlow, 2009: 131). Michael Warner (1993) goes further to suggest that "'queer' represents, among other things, an aggressive impulse of generalization; it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal... 'queer' gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual" (Warner, 1993: xxvi). It is important to also foreground the work of African scholars who have made considerable contributions to the development of queer theory and Sexuality Studies in Africa and internationally as my research is concerned with Critical South African Studies. Sakari Ekine and Hakima

[4] The word 'official' here is to be understood as dominant accounts/versions of South African histories.

Abbas (2013) use the term 'queer' to "denote a political frame rather than a gender identity or sexual behavior... knowing the limitations of the terminology in relation to our African neocolonial realities" (Ekine & Abbas, 2013: 3-4). Some of these African realities include facing challenges such as racism, poverty, limited access to education, overpopulation, underdevelopment in certain areas and dealing with the effects of the HIV AIDS pandemic. This informs my own analysis in that I acknowledge that many South Africans face these issues simultaneously to, or often before, they deal with issues around gender and sexual orientation. Therefore, in this dissertation, I use 'queer' to indicate a radical shift away from fixed commonsense notions of time, space, language, and identity towards more fluid ways of thinking about and around these categories. In order to investigate if and how the film has queering effects for both the archive and how some South Africans might think about identity in the post-apartheid moment, I provide close readings of *Proteus*'s filmic procedures at key points in the dissertation. These discussions are grounded in detailed descriptions of the intricacies of the film's complex narrative system.

Proteus has been described as "a historical epic, a video polemic, a sexual melodrama, and a dark comedy all rolled into one — one of the more intriguing queer films in years" (Hill and Ebiri in Garrett, 2004: 11). It is the result of a directorial collaboration between world-renowned Canadian

filmmaker, John Greyson, who identifies as queer, and seasoned South African "queer filmmaker and activist", Jack Lewis (Lewis, 2004). The film is based on official South African archival records dating back to the eighteenth century when the Cape Colony remained under the rule of the Dutch East India Company. This period is commonly termed the 'early colonial period'. Gabeba Baderoon (2004) notes that this period "began in 1652 with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck, the Dutch commander of the provisioning outpost established at the Cape" (Baderoon, 2004: 1). She explains that what ensued was:

> A rhetorical declaration of settler belonging so profound that nothing existed before... Along with the brute power of war displacement and genocide, it was also realized through a discursive mechanism which named the details of the landscape and people who preceded European settlement as profoundly other, as lacking in fit and significance.
>
> (Baderoon, 2004: 1)

Whilst I refer to some analyses of this historical period, it is not my intention to present a history or counter-history in this dissertation. I am also not concerned with presenting a historical reading of the archive. The emphasis of my dissertation is, rather, on *Proteus* and what the film does with/to the colonial archive.

Proteus's narrative tracks the evolving friendship and intimate relationship between Robben Island prisoners Claas Blank (Rouxnet Brown) and Rijkhart Jacobsz (Neil Sandilands) over a period of ten years. In fact, the records reflect that an intimate relationship continued between the imprisoned sailor and the Khoi[5] herdsman for over twenty years, however the filmmakers condensed this period "in an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of bad aging makeup" (Greyson in Ben-Asher, 2005: 449). Jack Lewis was initially intrigued by the fact that the sexual relationship between the two men remained intact for so long without being revealed by prison authorities. Incorporating Dutch, Afrikaans, Nama[6] and English into its dialogue, the narrative follows the development of Claas and Rijkhart's relationship in an attempt to address what the filmmakers say is the central question: "how did Claas and Rijkhart speak of each other?" at a time when 'homosexuality' was not yet an established identity (Greyson in Ben-Asher, 2005: 449). The film tracks this relationship as Claas and Rijkhart grapple with the task of defining their intimacy.

Claas's relationship with Scottish botanist, Virgil Niven, is also significant in my analysis. I tend to agree with Daniel Garrett's argument that "the botanist

[5] Then classified under the label 'Hottentot'.

[6] Also called Khoekhoe, Nama is a language spoken by the Nama, Damar and Haiom ethnic groups in parts of South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. Although less than a quarter of a million people use the language today, it remains one of the official languages of Namibia (Thompson, 2015).

is probably the most interesting person in the film" (Garrett, 2004: 9). Niven arrives on Robben Island from Amsterdam to collect and analyse plant specimens for his developing monograph. He is, the film establishes, mostly interested in plants of the Protea genus. According to Alice Notten, "the Protea flower is not a flower, but a flowerhead… made up of many individual flowers grouped together on a rounded base or receptacle" (Notten, 2006). Garrett reveals that "many of the Protea plants contain both male and female organs", a quality which, I would venture to suggest, makes this plant a fitting title for the film (Garrett, 2004: 6). The term acts as a framing device, or motif, for a film that deals with the fluid nature of sex, gender, and sexuality, among other vectors, within the colonial archive and the post-apartheid present. After choosing Claas as one of the prisoners who will help him to cultivate his garden on Robben Island, Niven quickly strikes up a deal with Claas as he is able to speak multiple languages including English, Afrikaans and Nama. Greyson reveals that Claas's ability to interpret languages was "based on the linguistic prowess of the famous Robben Island prisoner Autshumato, who in the late seventeenth century served as translator for both the Dutch and the English between terms of imprisonment" (Greyson in Ben-Asher, 2005: 446). The film establishes that if he shares his indigenous knowledge when assisting Niven in naming the plant specimens, Claas will receive a stipend to send home to his mother. Their relationship borders on sexual intimacy at certain moments in the narrative, however it ends abruptly

when Niven leaves the Island to return to Amsterdam. Near the end of the film, Niven comes back to the Cape Colony as we find out that he has been found guilty in absentia for 'sodomy'[7] in Amsterdam. Claas and Rijkhart are also eventually found guilty of 'sodomy'. This is shown in an emotionally charged sequence when *Proteus* returns to the same trial scene with which the film opens. The closing scene adopts Niven's point of view as he witnesses Claas and Rijkhart's final moments before they are put to death by drowning at sea.

My work takes the form of a qualitative textual analysis, aligned with a poststructuralist perspective which has informed the modes of film analysis that I draw on. I have therefore been able to engage with questions around the film's form and content without necessarily imposing any fixed answers onto my investigation. My dissertation aligns itself with critical perspectives drawn from an interdisciplinary scholarship that includes queer theory, Critical Sexuality, and South African Studies in addition to film theory that has been informed by queer epistemological practice. Moreover, my work is informed by perspectives drawn from cultural studies that concern themselves with moving image culture, in particular Nicholas Mirzoeff's (1998; 2000; 2006; 2011a; 2011b) work on 'visuality'.

[7] I use the term 'sodomy' in this context to reference the language that is used in the records and echoed in the film.

Michele Aaron explains that "queer, as a critical concept, encompasses the non-fixity of gender expression and the non-fixity of both straight and gay sexuality" (Aaron, 2004: 5). While Noreen Giffney and Michael O'Rourke's (2009) *Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory* outlines the central concerns of queer theory in a collection of essays. For example, the book explores Judith Butler's theory of performativity, which emphasises that, far from being biologically determined, "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect... constitute[s] the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler, 1990: 140). In other words, gender is always in flux and is not innate, but is, rather, a set of performative acts that, when repeated, result in the misrecognition of the gendered identity as material. Butler suggests that "persons only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility" (Butler, 1993: 168). In a reflection on Butler's work, Patricia Elliot (2010) explains that:

> What we learn from those who do not achieve recognition as intelligible (according to western hegemonic norms)... is that sustaining the category of intelligible, gendered subject requires regulating whatever appears unintelligible, non-gendered, or differently embodied to the realm of the non-human, the monstrous, or the abject.
>
> (Elliot, 2010, 61)

An individual who, for example, attempts to function outside of the normative systems of 'gender' faces isolation and exclusion on the levels of language and official documentation[8]. This understanding may also be applied to concepts of sexuality as Elliot suggests that "becoming legible is believed to require stabilization or fixing of identities which otherwise have managed to escape the normalizing discourses of a gender order that regulates not only gender identities but sexual, racial, ethnic, and class identities as well" (Elliot, 2010: 64). *Proteus*'s main characters grapple with many of these identity categories simultaneously throughout the narrative and spectators may begin to understand how received reified racial categories are queered at the same time as commonsense notions of sexuality are questioned in the film. Also writing from a queer theoretical standpoint on the same topic, Erez Levon (2010) illustrates how language is able to concretise ideologies about sexuality that exist in society (Levon, 2010: 8). Levon provides a detailed history of perspectives on language and sexuality from gay linguistic practices in the 1970s to sexuality as a linguistic practice beginning with the advent of queer theory in the 1990s. Levon's observations on how "people use language to construct social personae" has been useful for my analysis of how Greyson and Lewis interrogate the use of language in the

[8] Butler later emphasises that "there are advantages to remaining less than intelligible, if intelligibility is understood as that which is produced as a consequence of recognition according to prevailing social norms" (Butler, 2004: 3).

colonial archive (Levon, 2010: 63). On the subject of language, I am particularly interested in examining what the consequences are for the fact that Claas and Rijkhart never resort to naming their intimacy. On the contrary, when Rijkhart presses him to define their relationship Claas exclaims, "there is no name!" My examination in this area also covers how the filmmakers use multiple languages in the form of dialogue and subtitles in *Proteus* and to what effect this device works. This includes an analysis of the queering effects that this strategy might have on spectators as well as for the way that we have come to understand identity constructs such as sexuality. Indeed, Kaizaad Kotwal (2002) explains that Greyson "has always been interested in history and how history has defined and redefined sexuality" (Kotwal, 2002: 3). I also look at how the film addresses the way that specific narratives are selected and sanitised on the level of language before being included in the archive.

I acknowledge that queer theory's 'anti-identity' stance has been met with much criticism since its public emergence in a North American context in the 1990s. Writing in the early 2000s, E. Patrick Johnson deduces a "significant theoretical gap" concerning queer theory's failure to sufficiently address issues of race, class, context, and cultural specificity when conceptualising an

individual's possibilities for *being* (Johnson, 2001: 1)[9]. This critique is particularly relevant in a consideration of complexly assembled South African identities that are being renegotiated along the lines of race, sex, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and religion simultaneously within the post-apartheid moment. For this reason, I will conceptualise sexuality in the same way as Roderick A. Ferguson (2005) who examines this category through the lens of queer intersectionality. Like Ferguson, I think of sexuality as a "racialized, classed, and gendered discourse" and I intend to employ this construct as an analytical tool with which to examine queering representations in the film (Ferguson in Eng et al., 2005: 4). Responding to a similar assessment of queer theory, Hiram Perez (2005) examines "attempts to entrench a transparent white subject at the heart of queer studies" by reflecting on how the University of Michigan's *Gay Shame* conference has developed over fifteen years to produce what Perez calls "its own canonical set of proper subjects

[9] Johnson looks to Jose Esteban Muñoz's (1999) notion of 'disidentification' as an alternative mode of subversion and resistance for queer subjects. Muñoz suggests that disidentification demonstrates "a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture" (Muñoz, 1999: 31). Alicia Arrizon (2002) explains that "although disidentification is not necessarily a new theory, in Muñoz's frame of reference the queer-racialized body alters the grounds of the theoretical subject... By centering the performances of "queers of color," the author believes he is developing a theory of subjectivity that would mark the differences between white normativity/heteronormativity and the queer-racialized body" (Arrizon, 2002: 507).

and objects, as well as intellectual methods and institutional spaces" (Perez in Eng et al., 2005: 12). On a similar observation, Judith/Jack Halberstam insists that "the future of queer studies depends absolutely on moving away from white gay male identity politics and learning from the radical critiques offered by a younger generation of queer scholars who draw their intellectual inspiration from feminism and ethnic studies rather than white queer studies" (Halberstam in Eng et al., 2005: 12).

African scholars who are working to alter the terms within which queer theory emerged have done much to resist the kind of framework that Halberstam critiques. For instance, Ekine and Abbas (2013), address this problematic by assembling queer African narratives, scholarship, art and photography from prominent African voices such as South African photographer Zanele Muholi, Senegalese journalist Mouhamadou Tidiane Kassé, South African author and filmmaker Zethu Matebeni and Nigerian poet Mia Nikasimo. Using the example of the world's reaction to the arrest of Malawian transgender Tiwonge Chimbalanga and her partner Steven Monjeza in 2010, Ekine and Abbas explain how Africa was and continues to be vilified by international media as transphobic and homophobic. They argue that as a result, the west has disregarded a wide array of queer African narratives and overshadowed them with a 'progressive west vs. homophobic

east' discourse. They explain that their objective has therefore been to present a collection of queer African texts that:

> Break[…] away from the homogenisation of Africa as the homophobic continent to highlight the complexities of LGBTIQ lives and experiences with contributions that explore issues of identity, resistance, solidarity, pinkwashing, global politics, intersections of struggle, religion and culture community, sex and love... to valorise the complexity of how of queer liberation is framed in Africa and by Africans.
>
> (Ekine & Abbas, 2013: 3)

I would like to signal that my work is happening at the same time as queer African scholarship of this nature is developing. Benita de Robillard (2014) makes the following observations on the progression of queer studies in South Africa:

> Queer Theory, as a critical academic practice, is being re-shaped by scholars and activists across the globe, including those who identify as queer of colour (within and beyond North America), and it is now a far more transnational praxis than was the case when I first encountered it in the mid-1990s. Butler (2004) and Puar (2007) show that this does not mean that there isn't a great deal of critical and reflexive work that still needs to be done. It must be emphasised that in South Africa, Queer Theory and Critical Sexuality Studies have not been institutionalised within the academy to the extent that they have in North America.
>
> (de Robillard, 2014: 20)

This being said, it is interesting to note that many South African universities are starting to incorporate queer hermeneutics into their curricula, including multiple undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in gender studies[10].

I will be using the work of various queer theorists, both African and international, to explore how *Proteus* queers the colonial archive. More specifically, as I have outlined, my investigation attends to the queering effects that *Proteus* has for commonsense conceptualisations of time and space that, I argue, form the basis of a particular conception of the archive. Here, Judith/Jack Halberstam's (2005) theorisation of 'queer time and space' guides my reading of the queer temporality that *Proteus* enunciates through its form and content, as does Jesse Arseneault's work on the film. Arseneault (2013) also uses Halberstam's concept of queer time and space to analyse how *Proteus* moves away from a linear conceptualisation of time towards a sense of time that is more fluid and multiple. That is to say, Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy necessarily allows us to experience a sense of time that is not geared towards the sole purpose of heterosexual reproduction, which, Halberstam explains, is the basis for normative conceptualisations of time. Elizabeth

[10] See for example, UNISA Institute for Gender Studies, University of Cape Town African Gender Institute, University of the Western Cape Women's and Gender Studies department, University of KwaZulu-Natal Gender Studies Programme, University of the Free State Gender Studies Programme, University of Pretoria Institute for Women's and Gender Studies and University of Venda Institute for Gender and Youth Studies.

Freeman's (2007) work on 'chrononormativity' also provides an invaluable critique of linear historicism, as I will show.

Queer time and space in *Proteus* involves memories and fantasies permeating the characters' present moments so that versions of the past, present and future may become entangled in a single moment. Thomas Elsaesser's (2004) understanding of 'temporality' is useful at this point. He argues that "chronology, genealogy, opposition, alternation... are some of the modes of temporal sequence and causal disposition by which historians make sense of the continuities and ruptures, the lines of force and the piles of fragments in the records of human actions and events" (Elsaesser, 2004: 104). I would suggest that it is these ideas about time that the film entangles to queer effect. In a similar vein to Elsaesser, Achille Mbembe's (2001) concept of the 'time of entanglement[11]' advocates for an understanding of time as a complex merging of past, present and future. On the importance of imagining time in this way, Nuttall (2009) draws on Mbembe's assertion that Eurocentric attempts to theorise 'Africa' have lead to an assimilation of "all non-linearity to chaos" (Mbembe in Nuttall, 2009: 4). Against this discourse, Mbembe argues that African indigenous knowledge has always involved a "variety of temporal trajectories and a wide range of swings" (Mbembe in Nuttall, 2009: 4). *Proteus*

[11] As used in this dissertation's title.

may be argued to re-present this form of indigenous knowledge through its presentation of time as what Gilles Deleuze (1989) terms 'duration'. My investigation into the queer temporality that *Proteus* stages distinguishes itself from Arseneault's analysis in that I look to Deleuze's (1989) concept of the 'time-image' to assess how Greyson and Lewis convey an understanding of 'time as duration' in the film. Whilst Deleuze's cinema books have rarely been used to support/sustain a queer agenda, Nick Davis suggests that such a project is indeed possible in his book on *The Desiring Image: Gilles Deleuze and Queer Cinema* (2013). I will elaborate on how Davis employs Deleuze's work in my first chapter.

Another place where I draw on Deleuze's work is in my assessment of how *Proteus* might be useful when thinking through ideas about identity in twenty-first century South Africa. I suggest that the fact that Claas and Rijkhart manage to resist naming or labeling their intimacy throughout the film throws into question the relationship between behavior and discourse. In other words, it is interesting to examine how Claas and Rijkhart do not allow their sexual behavior to be reified into a specific sexual identity. This is why I choose to refer to their relationship as an intimacy - signalling that there is more to their sexual connection than what the normative conception of the term 'sexuality' might encapsulate. Lauren Berlant's (1998) introduction to a special edition of *Critical Inquiry* which focuses on the topic of intimacy,

suggests that, unlike sexuality's tendency to 'fix'/stabilise human bodies, a more fluid understanding of intimacy might be better suited to explain how relationships, interactions and processes work. Moving away from a conceptualisation of intimacy that sees a stark distinction between public and private domains, she looks at the complexities that mark this idea when she argues that intimacy is where "romance and friendship inevitably meet the instabilities of sexuality, money expectation, and exhaustion" (Berlant, 1998: 281). Berlant asks "what kind of (collective, personal) future can be imagined if, for example, sexuality is no longer bound to its narrative, does not lead to stabilizing *something*, something institutional (like patriarchal families, or other kinds of reproduction that prop up the future of persons and nations)?" (Berlant, 1998: 287). This, she argues, is where the concept of intimacy allows a more *protean* understanding of human relations than the label 'sexuality' might allow. Indeed, Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy includes elements of friendship, companionship, camaraderie, competition and rivalry as well as sexual activity that involves elements of fantasy, compassion, and violence. For this reason, the word 'intimacy' replaces, and queers, the term 'sexuality' in my dissertation.

Proteus's production, distribution, and reception history reveals much about the post-apartheid context in which the film was made - what I refer to here as the post-apartheid South African film industry. The term 'post-apartheid' is

employed in this dissertation in the same way that Gunkel uses it, that is "to mark an historically precise moment, that is, the official end of the apartheid regime with the first democratic elections in 1994" (Gunkel, 2010: 17). Cheryl Ann Michael and Sarah Nuttall (2000) observe that many "contemporary analyses assume that South Africa before 1994 was bound to a narrative of political liberation and that from the mid-1990s, new configurations were allowed to emerge" (Michael & Nuttall, 2000: 1). However, Jacqueline Maingard (2007), writing about South African cinema, emphasises that:

> There is no clear division between the apartheid era and postapartheid democracy. While there are moments and events that delineate points in history signifying change or the potential for change, there are ways beyond time in which, in the experience of life in South Africa, the syntagmas of history overlap… lines of these pasts cross through and are entangled with the present.
>
> (Maingard, 2007: 116)

Working from this understanding, I examine how *Proteus* uses strategic filmic mechanisms, such as anachronism, memory/fantasy sequences, *détournement*, Deleuze's (1989) concept of the 'time-image' and Chaudhuri and Finn's (2003) concept of the 'open-image' to articulate how the past, present, and future are inextricably entangled with each other. I show how *Proteus* stages the entanglements that Michael & Nuttall (2000) and Maingard (2007) theorise in

my first chapter, which deals explicitly with how time is imagined in official archives.

It is significant to note at this point that the film was produced almost ten years after the new constitution[12] was introduced but three years before gay marriage was legalised in South Africa in 2006. Therefore, at the time of *Proteus*'s production, the issue of gay marriage was at the forefront of popular discourse in South Africa[13]. Talking about his motivation for making the film, Lewis explains that he "was looking for a story that would relate the need for constitutional guarantees of equality for gays and lesbians to the lives of people today" (Lewis in Ben-Asher, 2005: 438). It is then clear that the filmmakers explicitly wanted to disrupt official history and to construct a link

[12] Botha (2011) notes that "despite a new constitution which prohibits discrimination against gays and lesbians, as well as a strong gay movement, our images of gay men and women are limited and still on the margin of the film industry. One ends up with less than twenty short films, a few documentaries, less than ten features with openly gay and lesbian characters and virtually no television programmes during the past hundred years of South African cinema" (Botha, 2011: 239). Conversely, Philip Harrison suggests that South African "television has gradually become more open over the years, often depicting gay and lesbian life" (Harrison, 2005: 27). He argues that many South African television shows such as popular soaps, *Egoli: Place of Gold* (Marx, 1992-2010) and *Isidingo: The Need (Hofmeyr, 1998-present),* now include openly gay characters.

[13] See Wendy Isaack and Melanie Judge's (2004) article on the issues and debates around same-sex marriage in South Africa at this time.

between this event and their contemporary moment. Significantly, gay civil unions have since been legalised in the country seeing the debate around gay marriage in South Africa replaced by an expanding discourse around the argument that homosexuality is necessarily 'unAfrican'. This dissertation looks to the work of scholars such as Neville Hoad (2007) and Henriette Gunkel (2010) to situate *Proteus* amongst the progressive intellectual work that is being done to resist this discourse. Therefore, aligning myself with other scholars who have made this argument, I propose that the film works as a critical commentary on the major issues that were at the forefront of LGBTIQQAA[14] debates, and debates about post-apartheid nationalism, at the time of its production. Furthermore, I suggest that *Proteus* is able to significantly contribute to more recent debates around sexuality in South Africa and Africa at large. In this way, the film may be said to have implications for the colonial period in which it is set, for the early millennium in which it was produced and for the present moment, twelve years after production.

[14] This acronym refers to the following groups of people respectively: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning, asexual, ally. Whilst this is not an exhaustive list of gender and sexual minorities that exist, I have chosen to use this form of the original 'LGBT' acronym for the purposes of consistency and clarity. Additionally, I believe it is the most inclusive form of the acronym to date as the inclusion of 'questioning' suggests the ambiguity of interrupting these categories. It is, however, important to note that there are other ways to index and express this formulation.

Filmed over a period of eighteen days in Cape Town, South Africa, *Proteus* was initially shot on Pal D-Beta and then transferred to film – "a process that means some scenes are remarkably detailed and others are a little blurry" (Garrett, 2004: 6). Although this effect was unquestionably due to informed stylistic choices, as numerous interviews with the directors have highlighted, the fact that the film had to be shot on video due to funding limitations reveals a link between the South African film industry's current circumstances and what I read as the film's queer form. Though both the National Film and Video Foundation, South Africa and the Canada Council for the Arts were actively involved in funding the film's production and editing, after its successful premiere at the Toronto Film Festival in 2003, *Proteus* was never successfully screened or distributed in South Africa. Lewis and Greyson highlighted this anomaly in a roundtable discussion about the film, which included esteemed filmmakers and scholars such as Noa Ben-Asher, R. Bruce Brasell, Daniel Garrett and Susan Newton-King. In this forum, Lewis expressed his anxiety concerning the fact that "audiences around the world are getting to see this profoundly South African movie, but local audiences are not getting to see it, and that's disturbing" (Lewis in Ben-Asher, 2005: 439). Greyson goes on to describe what he refers to as "the epic struggle to get *Proteus* onto South African screens" (Greyson in Ben-Asher, 2005: 439). Despite being one of the most successfully distributed South African films abroad, local distributor Ster Kinekor refused to screen the film, arguing that

it would not be commercially viable, to which "Lewis publicly accused [the company] of homophobia in its attitude toward *Proteus*" (Writing Studio Point of View in Gittings, 2013: 124). This brief overview of the film's distribution history reveals two important insights that have been helpful in focusing my investigation. Botha sums up the first observation effectively when he explains that "Hollywood product dominates ninety-nine percent of screen time in South African cinemas. Local filmmakers have to compete… for the remaining one percent" (Botha, 2011: 249). It would seem that Greyson and Lewis's *Proteus* has unfortunately become another statistic in this instance. Secondly, and perhaps of more relevance to this dissertation, the film's distribution history and resulting lack of South African audience reception data, is grounds for critical commentary on the contemporary South African film industry in much the same way that the film's narrative and aesthetics are. In other words, the fact that the film was not successfully screened and distributed in South Africa hints at something intriguing about the position of counter-cinema products that deal with issues of racial/sexual/national difference in the post-apartheid moment. It suggests a link to how "the new nation has tried to mask these complex configurations [as seen in *Proteus*] by foregrounding an over-simplified discourse of rainbow nationalism[15]"

[15] The 'rainbow nation' is a metaphor conceived by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and popularised by former President Mandela, to signal the coming together of one non-racial, non-discriminatory, multicultural nation after the end of apartheid in 1994.

(Michael & Nuttall, 2000: 1). Additionally, it implies that the post-apartheid industrial structures that are currently in place obstruct South Africans from engaging with relevant cultural products such as *Proteus*[16].

Therefore, it is important to consider an analysis of *Proteus* under the umbrella of post-apartheid cinema in South Africa – what Haseenah Ebrahim prefers to call, the "South African film *industry* post-1994" (1)[17]. She argues that "acknowledging that the film industry in South Africa has matured does not allow us to conclude that we now have something called a South African cinema; the latter does not constitute a necessary outcome of the former" (4). Although I agree with Ebrahim's assessment, I believe that using the term

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However, this ideal has been met with much criticism from those who argue that rainbow nationalism works to efface difference and neglects to address the complexities of post-apartheid South African identities and realities. Arseneault (2010a) makes use of Gqola's (2004) detailed critique of the concept to suggest that "only by resisting the comfortable idealism of multiculturalism can productive interaction between racialized subjects (both black and white) come about" (Arseneault, 2010a: 6).

[16] I would like to mark here that times have shifted and that, in later years, more narratively driven films dealing with gay and lesbian subject matter, like *Skoonheid* (Hermanus, 2011), have received distribution deals in South Africa. See Arnold Shepperson and Keyan Tomaselli (2002) for a detailed discussion on the organisational structuring of South Africa's film industry.

[17] See Haseenah Ebrahim and Jordache Ellapen's forthcoming book entitled *On the Edge of the National: Cinema and Film Culture in Contemporary South Africa.*

'post-apartheid South African *cinema*' in this dissertation indicates a move towards a more progressive cinema, which culturally relevant South African films, like *Proteus,* bolster.

It is significant to mention that the year 2015 saw the first queer film festival in Johannesburg. The '*not gay as in happy, Queer as in fuck you*' film festival was hosted by queer filmmaker, Dean Hutton, and took place in Johannesburg, South Africa from 28th May to 3rd June 2015 at The Bioscope Independent Cinema. The festival included screenings of a wide range of historical and recent gay and lesbian and queer films ranging from a screening of Richard Oswald's *Different From the Others* (1919) with live piano accompaniment by Tony Bentel to the premiere of South African short film *Just Then* (2014) directed by Jessica Denyschen and Marlé Coetzer. This festival positioned itself as different from previous South African gay and lesbian film festivals as a great deal of the content was highly experimental in form and aesthetics. This, I argue, is one of the characteristics that differentiates gay and lesbian cinema from queer cinema[18]. For example, the difference between these two types of cinema was exemplified at a 'double feature' screening of Denyschen and Coetzer's *Just Then* (2014) and Dean Hutton's *Memoirs of a Killarney Houseboy* (2012). *Just Then* (2014) tells the story of two South African women

[18] See Chris Jones's chapter on *Lesbian and Gay Cinema* in Jill Nelmes's *Introduction to Film Studies* (2012) for a comprehensive overview of what constitutes this genre.

who fall in love and share an intimate relationship until one of the women reveals that she is also in a relationship with another woman and has to make a difficult decision about who she wants to spend the rest of her life with. The narrative deals with significant themes surrounding lesbian life in South Africa such as dating, sex, cheating, and balancing one's love life and career. Apart from the lesbian-themed subject matter that it deals with, the film is presented in a mainstream Hollywood style[19] with a focus on captivating cinematography and seamless editing that strives to achieve the highest level of realism. In stark contrast to *Just Then* (2014), Hutton's *Memoirs of a Killarney Houseboy* (2012) is described in the festival's programme as "an improvised tragi-queer film... shot on iPhone in 8mm app". The film follows a gay man who, after years as the star of the gay rave scene, turns to maintaining the residences of gay men and Jewish women. The film deals with themes such as sex, violence, death, intimacy, and embodiment. However, in contrast to *Just Then*'s linear storyline, Hutton's episodic narrative uses strategies such as montage, juxtaposition, jump-cuts, and superimposition to tell the story. This mode of filmmaking is what, I argue, distinguishes Hutton's queer film from Denyschen and Coetzer's gay and lesbian film. In a similar vein, I argue that

[19] Whilst the film takes the form of a mainstream Hollywood film, its production quality is not necessarily that of a Hollywood film. This might be read as commentary on the limited opportunities and budget constraints that continue to be placed on independent South African lesbian filmmakers.

Proteus is distinguished from South African gay and lesbian films because of the form that the film takes. Brasell explains that "*Proteus* combines mainstream narrative storytelling with just a touch of experimentation—in other words, not enough experimentation to scare off the average viewer, but enough to intrigue those interested in such filmmaking practices" (Brasell in Ben-Asher, 2005: 451).

Whilst the advent of the '*not gay as in happy, queer as in fuck you*' film festival might indicate that the film industry in South Africa is progressively expanding, South African film history pre-1994 was fraught with censorship and structural inequalities. *Proteus* has its roots in what Martin Botha and Adri van Aswegen term 'alternative film' in South Africa, defined as:

> A number of feature films, videos and documentaries that have been made outside the mainstream, mostly with money from progressive organisations both local and foreign… [which] portray the political, social and psychological realities in a recognizable South African milieu… [and], came into being because individuals and groups, who did not uphold the status quo,… found it necessary to establish their own mouthpiece.
>
> (Botha and van Aswegen, 1992: 79-133)

Ricardo Peach (2005) argues that "one of the earliest homoerotic images in South African film can be seen in the first, ten minute experimental Afrikaans

sound picture *Sarie Marais*" where two men are seen waltzing with each other (Peach, 2005: 90). Peach's PhD thesis is a very rare and comprehensive overview of the history of Queer Cinema in South Africa. It is an important text to consult when attempting to locate *Proteus* in a trajectory of films that came before it. More specifically it is useful to establish that *Proteus* is indeed the first feature length queer film produced, shot and distributed in South Africa. In synthesizing Peach's work, it is not my intention to provide a clear trajectory of Queer Cinema in South Africa, especially because it is arguably almost non-existent. Rather, my intention is to locate *Proteus* within a specific time frame within the post-apartheid South African context.

Though Peach performs queer readings of a number of early Afrikaans films such as Pierre de Wet's *Kom Saam Vanaand* (1949) and *Piet se Tante* (1959) as well as Ernst Thorpe's *Faux Pas de Deux* and *Nil Desperandum*[20], it was not until the surge of South African military films in the early 1980s that, he argues, a foundation for contemporary queer South African films was established. To support his argument, Peach cites Mark Gevisser's statement that "whether it was about male bonding in the army, or a response to that, there is a lot of homosexual imaging and positioning happening in the whole white boys and the army thing" (Gevisser in Peach, 2005: 117). Edwin Cameron and Mark

[20] Precise production/distribution dates for Thorpe's films are difficult to deduce but Peach (2005) indicates that they were probably made in the 1960s.

Gevisser (1995) outline the impact that *Mandy's Raid* (1979) had on the development of South African gay and lesbian movements in the 1980s such as the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA), founded in 1982, and its affiliates. Peach suggests that these movements were responsible for the discreet circulation and screening of local and international, mostly banned, gay and lesbian films during movie nights, small braais and discussion groups. He explains that smaller groups such as *The Weekend Theatre*, a group of students from the University of the Witwatersrand, also played a part in the screening and production of short gay South African films in the 1980s such as *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woof* (Wordsdale, 1982). At this point, international gay and lesbian films such as *Another Country* (Kanievska, 1984) and *Kiss of the Spiderwoman* (Babenco, 1985) were beginning to be released at public 'whites only' cinemas in South Africa. However, it was not until openly homosexual HIV/AIDS and apartheid activist Simon Nkoli's arrest that "the first two documentaries on Queer lives in South Africa" were produced (Peach, 2005: 133). These films were *A Moffie Called Simon* (Greyson, 1986) and *Out in Africa* (Chait, 1989) and both dealt with the lives of Nkoli and activist Ivan Toms. One year later, Botha (2011) and Peach (2005) confirm that the first South African film marked as openly gay was publically released. The film in question was called *Quest For Love* (1987). It was directed by Helena Nogueira and starred Jana Cilliers and Sandra Prinsloo as lovers. In 1990, the first African Gay and Lesbian Pride march was held in Johannesburg, South Africa

and Peach suggests that when the first *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, founded by *Proteus* director, Jack Lewis, opened in 1994 "a national, non-racial, heterognotic Queer South African Cinematic Culture evolved for the first time in the country's history" (Peach, 2005: 89). He tells us that Lewis went on to produce pioneering gay themed South African films and television series such as *A Normal Daughter: The Life and Times of Kewpie of District Six* (1997) and *Sando to Samantha, aka The Art of Dikvel* (1998) which both deal with the histories of gay life in the Western Cape. In the same year, Peach elaborates, *The Man Who Drove With Mandela* (Gevisser and Schiller, 1998) was released which followed the life story of openly homosexual theatre practitioner Cecil Williams who was chauffeured by Nelson Mandela before his arrest. The film incorporates excerpts from a one-man play, interviews with colleagues as well as archival footage into its narrative. This is significant as it may be seen as paving the early foundations for *Proteus*'s multi-layered format. Soon after, Lewis and Achmat produced the television series, *Apostils of Civilised Vice* (1999), which addressed 'homosexuality' as it has existed from the colonial period to the present.

Although, as Peach's doctoral thesis demonstrates, the history of gay and lesbian cinema in South Africa is essentially the early history of South African Queer Cinema, like other scholars, I am interested in reading *Proteus* as a contemporary example of what film theorist B. Ruby Rich termed New Queer

Cinema in the early 1990s. Michele Aaron (2004) defines New Queer Cinema as:

> A wave of queer films that gained critical acclaim on the festival circuit in the early 1990s… The films, as Rich pointed out, had few aesthetic or narrative strategies in common, but what they seemed to share was an attitude… best described as defiance…. These films give voice to the marginalised, not simply in terms of focusing on the lesbian and gay community, but on the sub-groups contained within it… They eschew positive imagery… The films defy the sanctity of the past, especially the homophobic past… [and] frequently defy cinematic convention in terms of form, content and genre.
>
> (Aaron, 2004: 3-4)

As I have already mentioned, in a similar vein to Aaron and Rich, I would argue that there is a distinction to be drawn between films that focus on gay and lesbian narratives and films that take a radical queer stand, in content and form, against mainstream conventional cinema (i.e. mainstream Hollywood cinema) and the patriarchal sexual economy and compulsory heterosexuality[21]/heteronormativity that are perpetuated through the majority

[21] An essential component of the patriarchal system is the construct of 'compulsory heterosexuality', defined by Bowden and Mummery as "a system in which heterosexuality is not only accepted as the norm for sexual desire... but is also understood to be innate, inevitable and "natural" to the point that all other orientations and forms of desire are considered deviant and "unnatural"" (Bowden and Mummery, 2009: 26).

of these films. I propose that queer South African films such as *Proteus* break away from these normative conventions to make strong assertions about issues pertaining to race, gender, sexuality, sex, and nationhood in South Africa. Chris Broodryk (2014) signals that Queer Palm Award winning South African film, *Skoonheid* (Hermanus, 2011), is a film that also provides nuanced commentaries on these pertinent issues. *Proteus*, which is an earlier film, is strongly associated with the queer aesthetics[22] and activism of politics that Aaron writes about.

Therefore, I would argue that *Proteus* may be analysed according to Aaron's definition of New Queer Cinema, which incites a dynamic approach to investigating the queering effects that the film might have for its audience. In her discussion on the characteristics of New Queer Cinema (NQC), Aaron (2004) makes reference to one of John Greyson's earlier films, *Zero Patience* (1993), which she argues "offers the unlikely pairing of AIDS and the Musical". Calling him a practitioner of NQC, she notes that "Greyson has been distinguished for his dislocation of traditional film practices" (Aaron, 2004: 4). It is in this sense that the dissertation makes use of Aaron and Rich's

[22] In using the term 'queer aesthetics', I am referring to the "experimental aesthetic in queer films [which] offer[s] queer people the tools to re-imagine themselves in a mainstream that constantly tries to thrust representations onto them" (Hubbard in Peach, 2005: 232).

conceptualisation of New Queer Cinema as an analytical tool - henceforth referred to as queer cinema/queer film. I go further to suggest that not only does *Proteus* bring the narrative of Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy into visibility; it does so in a way that produces a specific technology of 'seeing' within its narrative, content, and form. It is here that I employ Mirzoeff's (2011a) theorisation of the 'right to look' to examine what the film might achieve in terms of creating a system of 'looking' on Robben Island that brings into visibility an alternative rendition of history that is told from the prisoners' point of view. Mirzoeff argues that it is the work of what Thomas Carlyle termed 'visuality' to facilitate a process of visual myth making which aims to naturalise authoritarian powers through a system of strategic visual and non-visual processes. He traces the word 'visuality' back to 1840 when Carlyle used it to describe the ability of the Hero to visualise history. He explains that visuality is undoubtedly the work of empire and manifests today as a systematic and violent war for military control over global communications (see Hardt and Negri in Mirzoeff, 2002: 22). In this sense, visuality is the power of those in authority to construct a rendition of reality that is presented to the masses as authentic and unalterable. According to Mirzoeff, the visual subject is engaging with the mechanisms of visuality, whether they are aware of the ideological implications at play or not. In my third chapter, I suggest that this system of visuality is evidenced in *Proteus* in scenes such as the one in which Nanseb, an incarcerated slave, is tortured in

front of the prisoners in order to construct and reinforce the image of the colonial system/regime as all-powerful and dangerous. I then move on to a unique examination of how *Proteus* might engender a system of "countervisuality" through the system of 'looking relations' that the film establishes on the Island (Mirzoeff, 2011a: 477). Therefore, we may deduce that what is at stake in this dissertation is essentially an examination of how alternative renditions of history may be formulated, and brought into visibility, and the effects that this type of project might have for individuals who are actively constructing identities (queer and otherwise) in post-apartheid South Africa.

Chapter one establishes that although official archives are commonly believed to be the custodians of irrefutable truths, they are in fact formulated on shaky grounds. I argue that archives are positioned to present singular grand narratives, which are read as official histories. However, these narratives, told from the perspective of those in authority at the time, work to exclude alternative renditions of history from official records. I argue that by queering the foundational underpinnings of the archive, time and space, *Proteus* aims to present a dissenting version of history. I go on to investigate how the filmmakers construct a queer temporality, as discussed in this introduction, through a range of strategic filmic mechanisms. These mechanisms work to articulate a sense of time that simultaneously condenses past and future into

the present moment (in the film) and expands this moment to invite the audience to experience time and space differently from how spectators of mainstream Hollywood films often do. At this point, I examine specific scenes in the film that can be analysed in terms of what Deleuze (1989) calls the 'time-image'. This chapter further investigates how queering a linear conceptualisation of time, might open up the archive to create space for dissenting narratives to come into visibility.

Continuing to examine how *Proteus* queers the colonial archive, my second chapter addresses what is, in my view, another structural unit of the archive. I have identified the way that the archive uses language as my area of focus for this chapter. More specifically, I assess how the archive has been 'sanitised' through the way that it uses language. I suggest that the film's opening scene, in which court stenographers attempt to translate Rijkhart's confession, reveals important insights into the practice of labeling and naming that is central to the colonial project. By highlighting Claas and Rijkhart's struggle to define their own intimacy, I address how *Proteus* constructs a critical commentary around the issue of nomenclature, which, as I will demonstrate, has been a sustained concern for queer analysis. This chapter explores what effects the main characters' unnamed intimacy might have for how we imagine sexuality, and other subjectivities, to work in the post-apartheid South African moment. This, as I have mentioned, is especially significant

when considering the film's possible implications for the widespread post-apartheid discourse that homosexuality is 'unAfrican'. As the film has not been widely screened in South Africa, this impact is inevitably located within academic and activist publics that are afforded the opportunity to engage with the scholarship surrounding and leading out of the film.

Building on what I have established about the archive in the first two chapters, the last chapter deals directly with Mirzoeff's (2011a) work on the 'right to look'. I consider how *Proteus* shows how visuality is a central technology of power within the imperial project. I demonstrate that the film simultaneously uses the Robben Island landscape to produce an instance of countervisuality. This chapter includes my examination, through a queer lens, of the system of looking relations that the film establishes. This system operates in resistance to the strict regulations that the colonial regime enforces on the prisoners' bodies. I also argue that Niven's gaze is a site of ambiguity and reflect on why the audience is positioned to view certain scenes through Niven's eyes. The latter include sex scenes between Claas and Rijkhart and the final scene in which the two men are about to be put to death. Finally, with this in mind, I return to a second reading of an image that appears near the beginning of the film in which a coin and a text block are superimposed onto a shot of Table Mountain. I deduce that after we come to understand that *Proteus* is an example of a counter-history to that which has been recorded in

the official archive, the significance of this shot of Table Mountain which is viewed from the prisoners' perspective becomes clearer.

Chapter One

"Some of the things so far told the court are true, and some are not true"

> Until the lions have their historians, tales of history will always glorify the hunter.
>
> (Vosloo, 2005: 391)

> ... a little time in a pure state, is one in which the past itself will be malleable, not fixed and set for all time. In so far as the past is open to change, then so too are the present and the future.
>
> (Rushton, 2012: 6)

> If you look at /Kaggen the moon would get angry and hurl us into the smoke...
>
> (*Proteus*, 2003)

"natural history curiosities..."

A medium close up of a timeworn manuscript shows the words 'Crimineele Regts Rolle'[23] etched in black ink. Underneath is written the date: 1735. A hand moves into frame to open the book and begins to page through the delicate archive. A fast paced cut introduces a close up image of a budding Protea plant. The flower opens in a delicately sped-up time lapse. The sequence cuts back and forth between the turning pages of the manuscript and various shots of budding Protea plants…

[23] Translation: Criminal Court Roll. A record of cases set down for court.



Figure 1.1: The 1735 Crimineele Regts Rolle in which Claas and Rijkhart's 'sodomy' trial is documented.
(Image courtesy Strand Releasing)



Figure 1.2: Close up shot of a budding Protea plant.
(Image courtesy Strand Releasing)

A reading of the abovementioned sequence of shots, which appears at the beginning of *Proteus* is the starting point for my argument about the inconsistent nature of the colonial archive that I introduce in this chapter and develop throughout the dissertation. On watching the abovementioned scene,

Chris E. Gittings (2013) suggests that "the flowering of the King sugarbush and the reopening of the court transcript signal a reopening of a national history of sexual and racial oppression" (Gittings in Longfellow et al., 2013: 123). His analysis of the significance of this sequence is particularly pertinent as I propose that *Proteus*'s narrative works as an example of the kinds of alternative histories that have been effaced from the archive in an effort to present a sanitised version of South African colonial history. This rendition of history works to marginalise certain voices and bodies that have been considered 'deviant' by presenting a carefully constructed linear timeline of events that glibly glosses over dissenting voices. Achille Mbembe (2002) explains that:

> Through archived documents, we are presented with pieces of time to be assembled, fragments of life to be placed in order, one after the other, in an attempt to formulate a story that acquires its coherence through the ability to craft links between the beginning and the end.
>
> (Mbembe, 2002: 21)

It is precisely the structure of this timeline that I find most troubling. As Mbembe argues, a linear notion of time has deemed that history 'naturally' flows from past to present. To delve into one's history is the closest one might come to taking a trip backwards in time. Consequently, like Mbembe, various theorists such as Halberstam (2005) and Deleuze (1989) have proposed that

time is a much more fluid construction than popular imaginaries would suggest. While each theorist takes a different approach to investigating the nature of time, each concludes that time is inherently non-linear and that it moves in multiple directions simultaneously. Mbembe suggests that archival accounts of history attempt to suppress the fluidity of time and in the process disregard countless possibilities for alternative versions of history. I suggest that this has allowed for multiple fissures to develop along the singular linear trajectory.

Garth Stevens et al.'s (2013) work on *The Apartheid Archive Project*[24] demonstrates how power is deeply embedded in South African archival records and how an imbalance of this power has resulted in the circulation of grand narratives that make non-conforming voices invisible or insignificant. Stevens et. al. then contextualise the effects that eliding these narratives has had on notions of identity, nationality, and citizenship in twenty-first century South Africa. It is here that I indicate the restorative value of the work that *Proteus* does in terms of unearthing nonconforming narratives and re-introducing them into South African colonial history. Whilst I note that the

[24] The project aims to "collect, document, analyse and provide access to over 5000 personal or narrative accounts of the impact of apartheid on the lived realities of their authors… particularly 'ordinary' South Africans under the old apartheid order" (apartheidarchive.org).

film could be read as an effort to resurface dissenting voices with which present-day South African's might identify, I will also emphasise that *Proteus* is simultaneously disruptive and troubling in nature and ultimately has significant queering effects for the archive. As previously mentioned, I have set out to examine how *Proteus* sets up a discursive dialogue with the colonial archive in order to address the archive's inconsistent nature. In this chapter I will show how the film does so by filmically 'dismantling' the foundational unit of the archive, which, I suggest, is time itself. For instance, to disrupt the linear notion of time that we have become accustomed to, the filmmakers use devices such as dream and memory sequences, anachronisms, *détournement*, superimposition, rhythmic montage, and experimental cinematography and editing techniques to create what may be read in the film as a queer temporality. Kadji Amin describes the term 'temporality' as "the social patterning of experiences and understandings of time" (Amin, 2014: 219). However, Elizabeth Freeman (2007) tells us that "temporality is a mode of implantation through which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts" (Freeman, 2007: 160). Freeman, a queer-identified scholar, explains how time is linearly organised by naturalised objects such as schedules, calendars, watches and clocks. Time, she suggests, is further organised according to power structures that deem certain hours appropriate for work and others for sleep, for example. She goes on to show how a normative conception of time permeates sexual experiences by providing the example of 'premature

ejaculation'. In this instance, Freeman shows us that "time, then, is not only of the essence; it actually produces "essences"—well-rested bodies, controlled orgasms, and so on" (Freeman, 2007: 160). The result is what she terms 'chrononormativity'. Amin (2014) describes Freeman's conceptualisation of chrononormativity as "a social patterning of experiences of time in conformity with normative frameworks" (Amin, 2014: 219). These frameworks work to exclude the possibility of atypical expressions of existence. Freeman's concept of 'chrononormativity' accounts for the idea of time that Mbembe (2001; 2002) also resists. Working against the normative chronos that archives are meant to index and secure, *Proteus* constructs a queer temporality in order to foreground expressions of intimacies that have queering effects for the archive. In the introduction to their recently published book on Greyson's oeuvre, Longfellow, MacKenzie and Waugh (2013) explain that:

> Greyson's films, in their distinctly queer use of anachronism and in their resistance to conventional narrative with its ideology of duration as progress, adopt a temporality that is both materialist and queer, and it is the movement out of chronological narrative time, the eschewing of time as progress, that allows for an opening, a new sense of time where alternate futures and new possibilities might transpire.
>
> (Longfellow et.al., 2013: 32)

As Longfellow et. al. show, the queering of time, as we know it, allows the filmmakers to pry open and delve into the archive's fissures in order to carve

out spaces in the official records so that alternative and/or dissenting voices can emerge. I would concur with Longfellow et. al.'s analysis of how *Proteus* queers the sanitised grand narratives of the past that are offered in official archives. In order to engage with the questions around time, and consequently space, that *Proteus* presents, I will draw on salient ideas that Nuttall (2009), Mbembe (2001), Freeman (2007), Deleuze (1989) and Halberstam (2005) present. I will use this work to examine how and to what effect a queer temporality operates in the film. Nuttall and Mbembe's work on the concept of 'entanglement' supports my analysis of the effects that dream sequences in *Proteus* have on the film's rendering of time and space and, as a result, the characters' understanding of their shifting and fluid identities. I then use Halberstam's concept of 'queer time' to unpack an instance of spatio-temporal opening in the film's narrative as well as to examine numerous instances of anachronism in *Proteus*. It is interesting to note that Arseneault (2013) also situates his reading of the film "within a framework of "queer time"" (Arseneault, 2013: 43). As I have mentioned previously, Halberstam (2005) has often been associated with queer studies, championing the phrase 'queer temporality', however Deleuze's work has not often been applied to queer projects. His theories on time and space, however, are arguably unparalleled and, if used as I intend to, can facilitate an interesting examination of the construction of time and space in *Proteus*. I will mobilise Deleuze's theories on 'time as duration' and the 'time-image' to analyse a

scene near the beginning of the film in which Claas is seen running across the frame in slow-motion.

As a conventional understanding of time (and consequently space) is probed in this chapter, we may begin to recognise that the basic foundation on which the archive is based – time – is an unstable construct, itself queer in nature, and therefore allows for many gaps to exist in what we have come to know as official South African histories. I suggest that the way the film interrogates ideas of time, space, and identity simultaneously through its content as well as its *form* distinguish *Proteus* from other films that deal with the concept of time and space, such as the more recent mainstream Hollywood film *Interstellar*[25] (Nolan, 2014). These features, I argue, elevate *Proteus* to a point where it may take a distinctly queer approach to addressing the intricate and fluid linkages between constructs of time, space, and identity, which have now been established as major areas of focus in this dissertation.

[25] Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014) explores life in the fifth dimension when a rift in the space-time continuum is discovered by a group of astronauts whose aim is to save the human race.

"It looks very grim indeed"

I would like to suggest that Greyson and Lewis essentially took up the positions of historians when they became interested in unearthing and studying the evidence of Claas Blank and Rijkhart Jacobzs's relationship on Robben Island in the early eighteenth century. It is therefore important to examine the implications that follow from locating their project within the countless *lacunae* that characterise the slippery nature of the South African colonial archive. In a book that confronts the present-day consequences of racial oppression in South Africa, Garth Stevens et. al. (2013) reflect on what may be extrapolated from analysing materials from *The Apartheid Archive Project*. The authors explain that the project is predicated on the following set of ideas about the archive:

> An archive… is fundamentally related to relations of power in deeply personal, psychosocial and sociopolitical ways, as the archive regulates the nature of information, the formats of information, the access to information and the nature and hierarchies of information and knowledge in any given society.
>
> (Stevens et. al., 2013: 29)

As I noted in this chapter's introduction, Stevens et. al. explain that the formulation of archives are profoundly embedded in the politics of power. Among other functions, records of this nature determine whose narratives are included in certain renditions of history and who is ultimately deemed

invisible. This has major implications for persons looking for chronicled images of 'themselves' in official archival records. In my view, historical agency is important in the construction of inclusive, complex and shifting post-apartheid identities and is not easily acquired by those whose personal narratives have been effaced from official records. Following on from this understanding, Derrida's (1995) assertion that the archive does not merely deal with the past but is also "a question of the future, the question of the future itself" becomes clearer (Derrida 1995: 27). On this topic, Cheryl McEwan (2003) investigates how collective memory and notions of citizenship are constructed within the post-apartheid moment based on how historical archives have been configured and continue to be re-figured and interpreted. McEwan addresses the consequences that invisibility in official archives might have for individuals who are actively constructing or deconstructing their identities in twenty-first century South Africa. She emphasises that "the question of who has the power to make, record and interpret history is an important one in contemporary South Africa and one that informs current attempts to build collective memory" (McEwan, 2003: 742). With these implications in mind, Robert Vosloo (2005) explains that the work of the historian is heavily loaded with the responsibility to trouble and probe 'grand narrative' renditions of history. *Proteus* disturbs the dusty archives of the early South African colonial period in the ways that Vosloo and McEwan espouse. By foregrounding the intimacy between Claas and

Rijkhart, the film works to disrupt received 'grand narratives' about sexuality, gender, sex, race and how these relate to South African nationhood. Lewis reflects on the power dynamics involved in this process when explaining how "the burden of representation [in *Proteus*] was pretty enormous. In fact, the question of who represents what and how they represent it is one of the main themes of the film" (Lewis in Ben-Asher, 2005: 438-439). In order to understand the complex interplay between sexuality, race, gender, sex, and nationhood in post-apartheid South Africa, it is essential that we are able to access dissenting narratives, like that told in *Proteus*, in official historiographies. It is also significant to note what these narratives *look like* and how we are positioned to remember them. For example, in the film, Greyson and Lewis use various strategies to draw subtle comparisons between multiple time periods. This is done to produce a socio-political commentary on the power dynamics involved in the acts of writing and re-writing history. In relation to this area of focus, I will show how the filmmakers construct a queer temporality in *Proteus* that allows the main characters to take up actively desiring, yet ambiguous, subject positions. I will further illustrate how the filmmakers encourage the spectator to identify with and interrogate these subject positions.

"Tell me about Amsterdam"

A moment in the film that highlights how the filmmakers draw various time periods together occurs during a sex scene between the two men when Rijkhart tells Claas about an experience he had at a tavern in Amsterdam. At this point the film makes it deliberately unclear if Rijkhart is indeed recalling a memory from his days as a sailor in Amsterdam or if this story is merely a fantasy that has been concocted for Claas's sexual pleasure. As the men become intimate, Claas asks Rijkhart to tell him about his experiences in Amsterdam. Since Rijkhart has alluded to the fact that he witnessed Niven engaging in sexual acts with other men in Amsterdam, he suspects that Claas has ulterior motives for wanting to hear about his past, thinking that he is only interested in finding out more about Niven's sexual experiences. It is clear that Rijkhart is jealous of the relationship Claas has with Niven on the Island. Rijkhart therefore resists Claas's request but Claas soon seduces him into telling the tale. In the sequence in question, once Rijkhart decides to tell the story, the film cuts between Claas and Rijkhart's sex scene and Rijkhart's narrative about an escapade at the Serpent Tavern in Amsterdam. In this memory/fantasy scene, Rijkhart, Laurens and Niven are present. Rijkhart's voice-over describes the festive setting. He explains how the men must have been there before "because they knew what they were doing". The visuals show Niven and a sailor moving into a darker corner as Rijkhart follows slowly behind them. There are men engaging in various sexual activities

around a wharf near the tavern. Some men are kissing, others are having sex. As Rijkhart walks past, he sees Niven having sex with a sailor. He stands close by and watches the scene over his shoulder. The scene cuts vigorously between the film's present in which Claas and Rijkhart are shown having sex and the scene that Rijkhart is narrating in which Niven and the sailor are having sex.



Figure 1.3: Rijkhart narrates a memory/fantasy while having sex with Claas.
(Image courtesy Strand Releasing)



Figure 1.4: Niven is seen having sex with an American sailor in Rijkhart's memory/fantasy sequence.
(Image courtesy Strand Releasing)

As Rijkhart narrates the Amsterdam memory/fantasy for Claas, time and space on eighteenth century Robben Island are disrupted as Rijkhart's prior exposure to what might have already been labeled a 'homosexual' identity in Amsterdam becomes evident. Lewis reveals that "Amsterdam in the 18th century had a thriving gay culture where men did indeed have sex in favoured public toilets, where there were gay bars and where, all in all, things sounded pretty damn gay!" (Lewis in Garrett, 2004: 10). Due to the fact that the scene cuts between the two sequences multiple times, a strong connection is established between what Rijkhart observed in Amsterdam and what is unfolding between Claas and Rijkhart on Robben Island. Lewis is therefore prompted to ask:

> If Foucault was wrong and gay identity had in fact emerged 100 years earlier than he thought, and if Rijkhart had by any chance been part of that Amsterdam gay subculture, how would that have affected his relationship with Claas? How would Claas and Rijkhart have understood their affair, which endured for more than 10 years?
>
> (Lewis in Garrett, 2004: 10)

Similarly, the way that the two scenes are cut together might provoke the spectator into questioning how Rijkhart's previous experience of a gay culture in Amsterdam could have an impact on Claas's understanding of their relationship on eighteenth century Robben Island? Spectators could also be compelled to think about how Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy may be read in twenty-first century South Africa? Time cannot be conceptualised as strictly linear in this instance, just as space in *Proteus* is no longer divided by national and international boundaries. Rijkhart's past experiences in Amsterdam seep through into what, for part of the film, is presented as Rijkhart's present. At the same time, the film's present might have implications for how the spectator conceptualises time, space, and ideas around sex and sexuality in the moment of the film's reception, whenever that might be. Therefore, my sense is that the aforementioned sequence models, in filmic terms, how the past and the present are what Sarah Nuttall (2009) and Achille Mbembe (2001) might term 'entangled'.

To begin thinking about time and space in a more productive way, Nuttall (2009) suggests that critics who work with the South African archive require "a critical approach which can draw present and past more fully together within a compelling analytical lens… [as] a theory of the present requires that we work out how we relate to the past" (Nuttall, 2009: 20). This echoes what I outlined in my introduction as Greyson and Lewis's objective to present the past through the lens of the present. When working to theorise a more fluid way of thinking about past and present, Nuttall employs Mbembe's (2001) concept of the 'time of entanglement' in which he proposes that "the distinction between past, present, and future is only an illusion", that time cannot be thought of as linear but rather as an "interlocking of presents, pasts and futures" (Mbembe, 2001: 16). For Mbembe, the compression of time has been used to articulate an exclusively Eurocentric understanding of how the world is supposed to work. This, he argues, has been to the detriment and exclusion of those who function on the periphery of the linear construction of time. He also explains how "research on Africa has assimilated all non-linearity to chaos and underestimated the fact that one characteristic of African societies over the long durée has been that they follow a great variety of temporal trajectories and a wide range of swings" (Mbembe in Nuttall, 2009: 4). A moment in Javier Fesser's Oscar nominated short film, *Binta and the Great Idea* (2004), exemplifies the effects of what may be thought of as an Eastern/Western 'time rift'. The short film follows Binta, a Senegalese girl, as

she narrates the story of how her father, a fisherman, wants to adopt a white western child to teach his daughter the qualities of tolerance, peace, friendship and fraternity that he believes the western world has forgotten. Uncle Boonmee, one of Binta's father's friends, shows off his brand new Swiss watch which has an alarm that goes off at noon every day. Binta's father does not understand why the alarm goes off at noon. He simply cannot see why it would be desirable to know that it is 12:00pm. This highlights the understanding that this Senegalese community has of how time works. They place a different emphasis on time than might be held in western communities. Though Nuttall does not use this specific film as an example, she does address the issue of a 'western vs. eastern time rift'. Rather than imagining separate ways of 'being' in accordance to time, with a western way deemed correct, rational, and logical and all others signalling anarchy, Nuttall employs Cornelis Kiewiet's (1957) term, "*historical entanglement*", to indicate the interconnected histories of indigenous and colonial knowledge systems which have manifested into complex contemporary South African identities and ways of living. She further outlines Lynn Thomas's (2003) more recent theorisation of "historical entanglement" explaining that "there was an intricate entanglement on the earliest colonial frontiers... whites became dependent on blacks, and blacks on whites... struggles [over wealth, health and power] connected and combined the material and the moral, the indigenous and the imperial, the intimate and the global" (Nuttall, 2009: 2-3).

One year before Nuttall's book on *Entanglement* (2009) was published, Mbembe elaborated on this specific point in an interview on postcolonial thinking where he stated that the concept of entanglement

> ...is opposed to a particular Western illusion, that there can be no subject other than in the circular, permanent referral to oneself, to an essential and inexhaustible singularity. In countering this, postcolonial thinking stresses the fact that identity arises from multiplicity and dispersion... In this situation… the colonized person is a living, talking, conscious, active individual.
>
> (Mbembe in Mongin et. al., 2008: 3)

Just as Rijkhart's past experiences in Amsterdam have consequences for how the two men understand their relationship on Robben Island, Claas and Rijkhart's eighteenth century intimacy, I am proposing, has implications for how we may understand sexuality and intimacy in post-apartheid South Africa. Experiences of and from different time periods permeate our present moment and influence our understanding of how we are constantly negotiating our lived realities. We may, therefore, come to understand that the way we think about time also has material and political implications for conceptualising subjects and how they function in terms of agency, subjectivity and identity.

"But that makes it sound so modern"

In addition to making use of memory/fantasy sequences, Greyson and Lewis use superimposition as a technique to make meaningful connections between different time periods. Superimposition, when two or more separate images are overlaid in one frame, has been used in film as early as Dziga Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929) to articulate connections between different images. In his film, Vertov famously superimposed an image of an eye onto a shot of a camera lens to communicate ideas about subjectivity and reflexivity. I suggest that the use of superimposition achieves two closely aligned objectives in *Proteus*. Firstly, this technique makes it clear that the filmmakers intend to introduce an eighteenth century colonial narrative that has relevant implications for its post-apartheid audience. Secondly, it works to illustrate continuities that exist between what we have come to consider pre-apartheid, apartheid and post-apartheid periods in South Africa. For example, in a masterfully constructed shot near the beginning of the film, the filmmakers superimpose a South African coin that is engraved with a Protea that was minted in 1964[26] onto a block of text that states "Swedish botanist Carolus Linneaus names the King Sugarbush "Protea Cynaroides"". The text block

[26] This date is significant because former South African President and anti-apartheid revolutionary, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, arrived on Robben Island as a prisoner of the apartheid regime in 1964. He was then transferred to Pollsmoor Prison 18 years later in 1982.

foregrounds the year 1735. This visual assemblage is in turn superimposed onto a long shot of what appears to be a handheld semi-underwater wide-angle shot of the view of Table Mountain[27] from present-day Robben Island.



Figure 1.5: A superimposition of a text block, coin and view of Table Mountain from Robben Island.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)

[27] Table Mountain has become one of South Africa's iconic tourist attractions and is described on the official Table Mountain website as "the most iconic landmark of South Africa" (www.tablemountainnationalpark.org). The image of the mountain may therefore signal that the filmmakers are attempting to indicate something significant about South African nationalism and the South African national imaginary. Leon De Kock's (2001) discussion of the place that South Africa holds in the global imaginary is useful for further reading on why South Africa is often thought of as "a country that is neither here nor there... a country of thoroughly interstitial identities" (De Kock, 2001: 272).

When analysing this sequence, it is important to note that the background shot is of the view *from* Robben Island rather than of the Island itself. The scene is constructed in such a way that it implies that there is someone looking out from the Island onto Table Mountain. If the shot of the mountain is read in this way, it might suggest much about how the gaze is structured in *Proteus*. While my third chapter deals extensively with the circuits of vision at play in the film, I will highlight here that this scene in *Proteus* portrays a struggle for the dissenting subject to come into visibility. It is as much a struggle to be seen as it is a struggle to claim, in Mirzoeff's terms, a right to autonomy, to see. As I have signalled in my introduction, this struggle for and from autonomy has spanned centuries of colonial rule and internal subjugation and continues into the twenty-first century where South Africa's comparatively liberal constitution remains obstructive to queer ways of living. South Africa's Bill of Rights has been reified in national and international memory as "one of the most progressive in the world" (Government Communication and Information System, 2011/12: 17) guaranteeing the rights of gay and lesbian individuals as well as foregrounding a demand for equality for men and women. However, both Gunkel (2010) and Hoad (2007) argue that by focusing on the rights of heterosexual and, more recently, homosexual individuals the South African

constitution simultaneously excludes an array of queer sexed and sexual identities from its conception of the South African citizen[28]. I would argue that in seeing multiple time periods existing within each other in the superimposition, rather than placed side by side as they would be in an expression of a linear conceptualisation of time, the continuities that exist between the timeframes are emphasised.

"I have known you my whole life. And now I know you not at all"

Proteus also makes use of *détournement* as a strategic mechanism to, as Scott MacKenzie (2013) would put it, "foreground the ongoing dialectical connection between past and present within the public sphere" (MacKenzie in Longfellow et. al., 2013: 147). Originating from the surrealism of the 1950s Letterist International (later the Situationist International movement in

[28] See Steyn & Van Zyl (2009), McKaiser (2011) and de Robillard (2014) for discussions of the limited efficacy of the South African constitution for LGBTQQAA South African citizens. Political analyst, Eusebius McKaiser, argues that "it is important that antisodomy laws, for example, have been struck down... but constitutionalism is not a magic wand". He continues to suggest that "it takes more than legal fiat to challenge, let alone eliminate deeply entrenched cultural habits and attitudes". He proposes supplementary measures that must be put in place by local government such as integrating "lessons on the importance of respecting differences and the meaning of liberal democracy [in] the school and university curricula" (McKaiser, 2011).

France29) as a visual weapon against the growing capitalist system, *détournement* is a technique of re-appropriation. The Situationist's imperative was to re-assign meaning to well-known and easily recognisable political image-signs to subvert their normative significations. Sadie Plant describes the device as follows:

> [*Détournement*] is a turning around and a reclamation of lost meaning: a way of putting the stasis of the spectacle in motion... set free by their *détournement*, commodified meanings reveal a totality of possible social and discursive relations which exceeds the spectacle's constraints.
>
> (Plant, 1992: 86-87)

In other words, images that have come to represent a specific set of meanings are now re-opened to new interpretations. Plant provides an example of how the Letterists re-appropriated popular comic strips in their journal, *Internationale Situationniste*. She also looks to the artistic works of Letterist Asger Jorn as examples of *détournement* in art. The image of Robben Island in *Proteus* is re-appropriated through the use of *détournement* to illustrate

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[29] Plant (1992), describes the movement as follows: "a revolutionary movement of extraordinary ambition and influence whose reflections on art, everyday life, pleasure, spontaneity, the city, and the spectacle have ensured it a vital, but largely hidden, role in the development of twentieth-century culture and politics" (Plant, 1992: Preface). Twelve journals titled *Internationale Situationniste* were published by the movement between 1957 and 1969 and all may be accessed online at: www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/.

continuities between the colonial period and the post-apartheid moment. Arseneault (2013) explains that "the film both places queerness within South Africa's historical narrative where it has been effaced and queers the landscape of South Africa's history by putting a same-sex interracial romance on a geography crucial to South Africa's post-apartheid national identity (and, I add here, a particularly masculine identity bound up with anti-apartheid heroism): Robben Island" (Arseneault, 2013: 41).

Annie Coombes (2003) explains that Robben Island, a small island near the coast of Bloubergstrand South Africa, has been used as a prison since the Dutch settled in the Cape in the 1600s. Leading up to the time of *Proteus*'s production, one of the dominant post-apartheid discourses was the debate around the part that Robben Island would play in the new national imaginary. Coombes outlines the tension that existed between those who believed that "the significance of Robben Island lies in the triumph of the human spirit over the numerous obstacles placed by human beings upon other human beings" and others who felt that this "should not detract from the main significance of the island as a place of banishment and imprisonment" (Coombes, 2003: 57-58). The final decision after Nelson Mandela came into power in 1994, was to erect a museum on the Island which continues to attract hordes of local and international tourists to South Africa.

However, she outlines the dilemma that arose after the Robben Island Museum was erected. She poses the following questions:

> How is it possible to produce through the exhibiting of material culture a representation of both subjective experience and an acceptable public narrative of the prison experience... of a hitherto invisible aspect of the recent national past for all South Africans and an account that will cement the history of the liberation struggle as a world event on the international stage?
>
> (Coombes, 2003: 94-95)

While these questions require serious engagement, what I am most interested in is her observation that "the focus on Robben Island as the preeminent site of struggle encourages more serious omissions and amnesia" (105). Though Robben Island has come to represent the struggle for political agency in the national imaginary[30], it has also been a site for alternative struggle narratives that have been excluded from official archives. Whereas Coombes focuses on 'women of the struggle' narratives, *Proteus* situates a different kind of struggle narrative on Robben Island – one that had been lost in "the fissures that

[30] Arseneault (2013) argues that the fact that "Mandela spent much of his 27 years in prison in this location marks it as an iconographic site associated with the masculinity represented by figures like him, but the film's setting at this crucial location carries the potential to reorient the terrain of the nation's history in unexpected ways beyond the particular masculinities that have been associated with its traditional geography" (Arseneault, 2013: 41).

develop as soon as there are attempts to integrate personal with national history, private with public memory" (Coombes, 2003: 115). *Proteus* locates its investigation into an historical intimacy in one of these fissures and uses *détournement* to re-appropriate the image of Robben Island which is first and foremost recognisable as a national symbol of triumph over racism. In the film, the Island is made to represent an equally important struggle for the visibility and agency of individuals deemed sexually deviant by colonial powers. This struggle continues into twenty-first century Africa with a homosexuality is 'unAfrican' discourse[31] becoming more and more prevalent throughout the continent. The literature surrounding this discourse will be analysed further in my second chapter.

"They used the wet bag"

In addition to using memory/fantasy sequences, superimposition and *détournement* as strategies to make connections between different time periods, Greyson and Lewis also include multiple instances of anachronism in the eighteenth century narrative. Twenty-first century objects appear throughout the film, queering our sense of both time and space. Gittings

[31] I refer here to the claim that homosexuality is necessarily a western import that has only appeared in Africa in recent history. This claim has become increasingly prevalent among African leaders, including South African President Jacob Zuma. See Neville Hoad (2007) for a comprehensive list of African leaders who have publically expressed this sentiment.

(2013) elaborates, as follows, on the filmmakers' use of anachronism in *Proteus*:

> Confronted with the prison architecture and ghosts of the twentieth-century apartheid past haunting their reconstruction of the Dutch colonial eighteenth-century Robben Island, Greyson and Lewis refuse to shoot around them, but instead translate these anachronistic traces of dehumanizing racial and sexual oppressions into their film. As Greyson explains, this dialectic is complicated by the now of the film's moments of production and reception: "For Jack and me, this way of picturing history made more sense to us – because history is always an exercise in looking back through glasses clouded with the dirt of our present moment".
>
> (Greyson and Lewis in Gittings in Longfellow et.al., 2013: 122)

Greyson and Lewis never lose sight of the implications for their present post-apartheid moment. Anachronisms therefore function in the film in order to communicate powerful political observations about post-apartheid South Africa - specifically that issues around sexuality that existed in the 1700s still exist today, albeit in different forms. Jack Lewis explains that:

> the pristine past of 1735 that we sought to recreate didn't exist, couldn't exist—it would always be haunted by the present, by every image we know from our century, by Biko and Soweto, by whites-only beaches and black townships, and now, by ten years of democracy when South Africa became the first country in the world to enshrine gay

> rights in their constitution. No matter where we looked, there would always be concrete chunks interrupting the view.
>
> (Lewis in Garrett, 2004)

For example, near the end of *Proteus* a guard dressed in an apartheid-era uniform tortures Rijkhart using the wet bag technique[32]. Although the film is set in the early 1700s, this torture technique is characteristic of the later South African apartheid era. Arseneault (2013) explains that as the guard subjects Rijkhart's body to "a punishment made popular in reportage of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we are reminded of the legal suffocation of normative sexuality under apartheid" (Arseneault, 2013: 46). This is not the only example of anachronism in the film. The 1700s Cape Colony narrative is replete with objects from 1960s apartheid South Africa. Claas is chased down with a Jeep in the beginning of the film, the prisoners collect shells in green plastic bags, a portable radio is placed on the dining room table in the Governor's home, Niven uses an HB pencil to sketch his specimens, the prisoners smoke marijuana from Coca-Cola bottles and the

[32] Wilhelm Verwoerd (2003) describes the wet bag technique as follows: "Jeff Benzien, a former captain in the Western Cape security police… became notorious for his highly effective "wet bag" "information-gathering" technique in his dealings with anti-apartheid activists. This method of torture involved sitting on top of a prisoner whose hands were tied behind his back, placing a wet bag over the head of the prisoner and smothering him until he "breaks" and begins to talk (Verwoerd, 2003: 248).

water towers are fenced with barbed wire. The 1700s Robben Island landscape is ornamented with a 1950s lighthouse and the harbor wall is protected with dolosse – protective concrete structures developed in East London, South Africa in the 1960s.



Figure 1.6: A guard dressed in an apartheid-era uniform tortures Claas and Rijkhart.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)



Figure 1.7: Two Dutch men chase Claas through the fields in a Jeep.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)

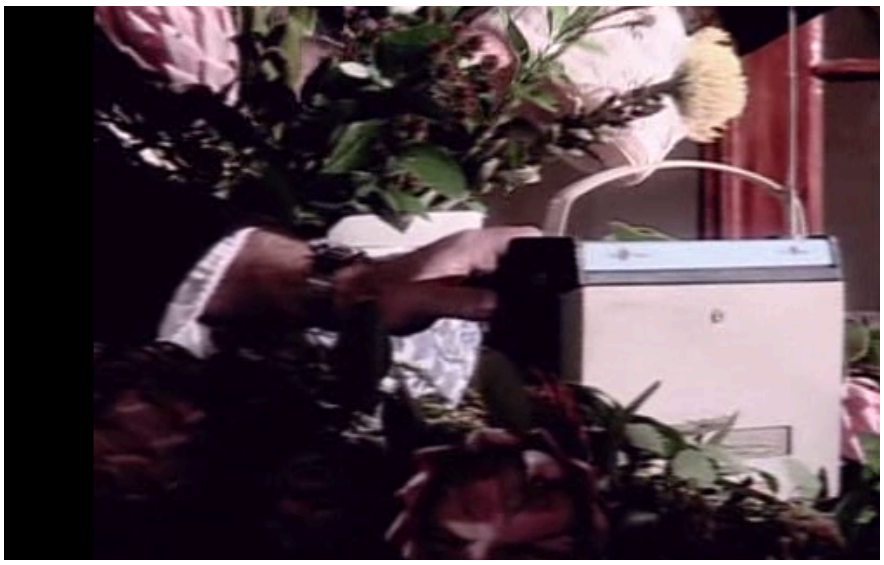


Figure 1.8: A portable radio sits on the Governor's dining room table .
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)

By merging objects signs from two different time periods, the colonial era and the apartheid era, *Proteus* comments on the fact that both eras necessarily signalled a time in which certain individuals were discriminated against for what was understood as their 'sexual orientations'. Furthermore, by introducing objects from post-apartheid South Africa into the film, the filmmakers suggest that this is an ongoing struggle. David Hall explains that "by the deliberate use of anachronisms, the Lewis/Greyson pairing have delivered the stark truth that what was deemed a crime over two centuries

ago, is still a punishable offence in all too many countries[33]" (Hall, 2009). While I would agree with Hall, I think that there are effects that his analysis of this aspect of *Proteus*'s aesthetic and political procedures does not confront. For example, Hall does not address how *Proteus*'s use of anachronisms necessarily elicits a sense of queer time and space. I propose that two of the most intriguing instances in which anachronisms 'interrupt' the *mise-en-scene* are scenes positioned near the beginning and end of the film. In these scenes three female court stenographers attempt to translate Rijkhart's final confession in which he states: "send mij maar op, ik het hom in't gat geneukt". As the women debate the appropriate translation into 1960s English of the eighteenth century Middle Dutch word 'geneukt', it is unclear in which time period the action is taking place. The cross-faded montage that precedes the court scene exemplifies this time-space crossover as the audience sees an image of a Protea plant cross-fading into a shot of the official records which finally cross-fades into the court room scene. While the cross-fading technique sutures the images visually, the sound of the stenographers' typewriters over the last three images, draws them together aurally. Kass Banning (2013)

[33] Current affairs blog, *Erasing 76 crimes*, recently listed 79 countries around the world, which still have "laws against sexual relations between people of the same sex" (Stewart, 2015).

argues that this eighteenth century courtroom *tableau vivant*[34], which features the three female stenographers dressed in full 1960s apparel complete with beehive hairdos and what could easily be read as 1960s Royal Typewriters, stands "as a fragment that has been removed from any particular spatial or temporal context…the tableau is a site of spatio-temporal opening" (Banning in Longfellow et al., 2013: 194). My sense is that the film interrogates questions of identity, history and of time itself in these openings.



Figure 1.9: Court stenographers dressed in 1960s apparel.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)

[34] Banning turns to Brigitte Peucker's (2003) definition of a *tableau vivant* in their discussion on anachronisms in *Proteus*. Peucker suggests that "tableau vivant is a meeting point of several modes of representation constituting a palimpsest of textual overlay simultaneously evocative of painting, drama and sculpture... It involves the "embodiment" of the inanimate image... It figures the introduction of the real into the image - the painting - and thus attempts to collapse the distance between signifier and signified" (Peucker in Longfellow et. al., 2013: 188).

This use of anachronisms to create spatio-temporal openings contributes to what may be identified in *Proteus* as a queer temporality. Halberstam outlines this concept as follows:

> …queer temporality disrupts the normative narratives of time that form the base of nearly every definition of the human in almost all of our modes of understanding… I try to use the concept of queer time to make clear how respectability, and notions of the normal on which it depends, may be upheld by a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality. And so, in Western cultures, we chart the emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation; and we create longevity as the most desirable future, applaud the pursuit of long life (under any circumstances), and pathologize modes of living that show little or no concern for longevity.
>
> (Halberstam, 2005: 4)

Halberstam explains that we have been conditioned to understand the function of time and what is required to use it productively, with reproduction as the goal. Any deviation from this progressive order is seen to be wasteful. They[35] suggest that our understanding of time also has implications for how we conceptualise space. Halberstam applies this

[35] I refer to Halberstam with the gender-neutral pronoun 'they' to signal the queer position that Judith/Jack Halberstam has chosen to occupy. See genderneutralpronoun.wordpress.com/tag/genderqueer/ for a detailed overview of gender-neutral pronouns and their popular usages among queer communities.

understanding to every-day situations of how normative concepts of time affect our use of space. For example, when explaining how the abstract concept of time is used to physically regulate the human body[36], they show how 'family time' is spent in what may be termed domesticated spaces, whilst 'reproductive time' is relegated to the bedroom. Scientifically speaking, this space-time dynamic may also be illustrated using the example of what has now become known as an indispensable tool for human survival - a Global Positioning System (GPS). The GPS device's built-in receiver is in constant data communication with at least four satellites at any given time. The GPS location system is entirely based on time. As the human moves on the earth, the satellites estimate the GPS receiver's deviation from 'true-time' to calculate the exact position of the receiver on earth. In the most basic terms, time becomes a measuring tool to locate a human in space; without this construct we may imagine ourselves 'lost'. As an instance of queer temporality at work Halberstam examines 'queer adolescence' in which "the notion of a stretched-out adolescence" is thought to "challenge[s] the conventional binary formulation of a life narrative divided by a clear break between youth and adulthood; this life narrative charts an obvious transition out of childish dependency through marriage and into adult responsibility through reproduction" (Halberstam, 2005: 153). In using this real-life example,

[36] These insights have been echoed and elaborated upon in Elizabeth Freeman's (2007) work on 'chrononormativity', as I have outlined previously.

Halberstam demonstrates alternative modes of living that are not necessarily in opposition to a conventional understanding of time and space but rather teeter on the periphery of these constructs; constantly challenging normative time/space frameworks through their existence. Therefore, we may come to understand that queering a linear notion of time, and consequently space, allows for different modes of existence in the world that are not necessarily constructed around reproductive purposes. The consequences of queering the notion of time and space for the archive is that these constructs no longer dictate what is worthy of being included in official historiographies and what will ultimately fall by the wayside. Halberstam returns to the idea of the archive near the end of their book to emphasise what a more inclusive archive might look like. They suggest that "in order for the archive to function it requires users, interpreters, and cultural historians to wade through the material and piece together the jigsaw puzzle of queer history in the making" (Halberstam, 2005: 169-170). I have proposed that Greyson and Lewis's cinematic project attempts to achieve this kind of progressive work by locating Claas and Rijkhart's story in a queer time and space.

"He's very mysterious, sir. He's always changing shape"

The final sequence that I want to unpack in this chapter appears near the beginning of the film. We see Claas running across vast expanses of land in an effort to escape from two Dutch men who believe that Claas has stolen their

cattle. While this action sequence might have been conventionally constructed with fast paced cuts and close up shots to exemplify the tension during the chase, in *Proteus* we are presented with two slow-motion, aerial shots of Claas sprinting through the fields. Although it is clear that Claas is sprinting, the shots are edited to play back in slow-motion. The paradox between the fast pace sprinting versus slow-motion editing emphasises the tension in the scene. These slow-motion sprinting shots are then intercut with a sped up time lapse of budding Protea plants. I read the significance of the Protea plant as a marker of a dualistic, multifaceted existence that invites examination and defies simple classification; as a multi-sexed, multilayered organism that exemplifies co-existence in one biological organism; and as a symbol of national heritage. The camera remains focused on the tiny moving image of Claas and then on the Protea plant as if it is pondering the relationship between the two signs.



Figure 1.10: Slow-motion shot of Claas running through the field.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)



Figure 1.11: Sped up time lapse of budding Protea plants.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)

The way that the camera lingers on Claas's body and the Protea plant produces the effect that time has been suspended. This sequence reminded me of a scene in Abbas Kiarostami's Iranian film *Ta'm e guilass* / *Taste of Cherry* (1996), which follows Mr. Badii as he attempts to find a person who will indirectly help him to commit suicide. In a sequence that has been described by Hamish Ford (2012) as being "at the very heart of *Taste of Cherry*", Badii sits down on the rocks of a construction site and begins to contemplate his existence (Ford, 2012: 19). As he sits motionless in the quarry-like setting, shadows of heavy machinery envelop his body. The camera lingers on Badii as he stares off into the distance. The shadows show rocks falling from a construction machine as dust slowly fills the frame. Despite all the action that is unfolding off screen, the camera does not stray from a motionless Badii for

almost six minutes. Ford explains the significance of what is happening in this scene as follows:

> Both space and time are more immediately felt than anywhere else in the film so that Badii and the viewer are faced up close with a distinct and properly vertiginous environment… We are also forced to watch such images, without any ongoing forward movement, for a considerable duration at the slowed-down epicentre of an already very leisurely and narratively miserly film. The sequence thus not only presents a man seemingly at his death-facing nadir and hopelessly detached from humanity, as gazed upon from and within the 'outside', but also the material of both death and film: time.
>
> (Ford, 2012: 19 – 21)

The feeling in this scene that time has slowed down or stopped altogether invites the spectator to meditate on the significance of the moment that is being depicted. The spectator is therefore positioned to experience time in a way that suggests a 'stretching out' or 'opening' of the moment. I would argue that this 'stretching out' of time that is sensed in *Taste of Cherry* is also experienced in the sequence in *Proteus* just described. Like Ford, I find Gilles Deleuze's (1989) theories on 'time as duration' and the 'time-image' productive for a reading of how time is experienced in this sequence. Although, as I have mentioned briefly, Cohen and Ramlow (2006) state that "the evidence for the queerness of Gilles Deleuze is scant", in my view Deleuze's concept of the 'time-image' is clearly evidenced in specific scenes in

Proteus (Cohen & Ramlow, 2006). I suggest that these 'time-images' work to queer time and space in the film. Similarly, Davis successfully uses queer theory, film theory and Deleuzian philosophy to examine David Cronenberg's film, *Dead Ringers*, in his book on *The Desiring Image: Gilles Deleuze and Queer Cinema* (2013). Davis argues that "what results is a mutually beneficial, Fred-and-Ginger swap whereby Deleuze gives queer cinema a firmer theoretical basis, while queer filmmaking incites the *Cinema* books to engage with sexuality and desire—a task for which Deleuze seems ideally qualified but which he avoids" (Davis, 2013: 4). My sense is that there are affinities between how Deleuze (1989) draws on Henri Bergson's conceptualisation of time as non-linear; moving simultaneously in different directions and experienced as duration and the modes of queer/ing temporalities for which Halberstam (2005) advocates. Deleuze's resulting understanding of 'time as duration' may therefore be applied to how the audience might experience the aforementioned sequence in *Proteus* that uses the slow-motion technique. Claire Colebrook (2006) explains that in Deleuze's scheme, "the concept of duration… creates a thought of time that connects creation, memory, differential space, speeds and singularity" (Colebrook, 2006: 19). Deleuze (1989) suggests that our memories (comprised of images from the past) and desires (images from the future) may be thought of as 'virtual images', which penetrate our experience of what we perceive as the present moment ('actual images'). As we experience and interpret 'actual images', 'virtual images' from

the past and future inform our understanding of what we experience in the present. According to Deleuze then, "the present is a dynamic interpenetration of past and future" (Vitale, 2011). This echoes Mbembe's work on the 'time of entanglement'. Furthermore, he explains that although time as we know it has been reduced and fixed to uniform and equal parts, for instance hours, minutes and so on, our experience of time is in fact expanded and compressed in different situations such as leisure and disaster. Christopher Vitale (2011) describes the difference between 'clock time' and 'lived time' as follows:

> When we think of the time captured by clocks, we think of each moment as a self-contained entity, complete unto itself, separate from the others. Time is then best diagrammed as pearls on a string, with each pearl a separate moment. With each tick of the clock, we move from one pearl to the next. [However], lived time, time that endures, is time that flows, time in which the past and future penetrate into the present in the form of memory and desire. Time stretches when it seems to move more slowly (ie: when bored), and compacts during moments of crisis, and we seem to dip deeper into memory at some points (ie: moments of dreaming, fantasy, reverie), and more shallowly during moments of action.
>
> (Vitale, 2011)

While the present ('actual image') cannot be more than what it is in the moment, Deleuze sees great potential in the 'virtual image'. For Deleuze, then, 'virtual images', most often experienced as recognitions, recollections and

dreams, act as signs that inform our reading of the present and allow us to reflect on the difference that was the past, or allow change to take place in what we perceive as the future. 'Virtual images' therefore disrupt purely instinctual present-moment reactions. Leading on from this understanding, Deleuze theorises the concept of 'time-images' as 'virtual images' that are infused with a sense of 'time as duration'. Here, the fixed cause-and-effect rule / motor-sensory process / instinctual reaction that governs conventional conceptualisations of time is essentially broken down. Time is represented as expanding vertically, horizontally and diagonally at once. Colebrook (2006) elaborates on one instance of how Deleuze envisages the 'time-image' functioning in film:

> In the technique of montage, where one movement is set against another movement… one does not see time as that which sets one movement after another. Rather, movements are changes in the whole; time is no longer a series of equivalent moments, but a changing whole…
>
> (Colebrook, 2006: 31-37)

Therefore experiencing time as duration also has consequences for how space and movement are represented in cinema. This ties in to Halberstam's assertion that "a "queer" adjustment in the way in which we think about time, in fact, requires and produces new conceptions of space" (Halberstam, 2005: 6). Returning to the aforementioned sequence in *Proteus*, Deleuze's concept of

the 'time-image' may be employed to examine how time, and subsequently space, are portrayed. With the 'time-image' concept in mind, I would propose that the sequence works to suspend and expand time so that the spectator is encouraged to experience 'time as duration' rather than as a linear sequence of rapidly unfolding events. This may be viewed as a way to open up/expand the narrative to allow space for memory/fantasy sequences, superimpositions and montages. In this way, the film could be seen to model, in visual terms, how it wants to insert itself into, and disrupt, the colonial archive. In terms of the consequences for space in this sequence, it is clear here that Claas is not running towards or away from the Protea plants in a cause and effect manner. The images of the Protea plants are rather 'virtual images' intercut into Claas's perception of the 'real'. The virtual signification of the Protea plants permeate Claas's actual existence and as a result, time and space expand and open up through the use of these 'virtual (past/future) images'. As the camera lingers on the images, the spectator is positioned in such a way that they have nowhere to go but deeper into their significance. This has consequences for the spectator as the 'reality' of the film is infused with 'virtual images', which puts the spectator under pressure to decode and decipher what they see. As we begin to understand how past and future experiences might permeate one's perception of the present moment, the idea of a singular 'reality' is destabilised. Consequently, a notion of multiple realities necessarily has queering effects for the commonsense concept that the official archive

presents the only reliable rendition of reality.

'Virtual images' of Protea plants reappear just before the final scene in which the film alludes to Claas and Rijkhart's deaths. The plants still move in slow-motion, only now the action is also manipulated to play in reverse so that the petals and leaves appear to close in slow-motion rather than open - which they do in the first time-lapse sequence earlier on in the film. This doubling, with a difference, encourages the spectator to become part of the meaning-making process. Oftentimes, spectators will only begin to piece together a meaningful reading much later in the film or after the film has concluded[37]. Repeating a 'time-image' in a film may effectively concrete an image in the audience member's memory long after the film's end. These sequences, that bookend the film, when taken together, might also be viewed as 'crystal images'. For Deleuze, as Vitale explains, a 'crystal image' works as follows:

> If time is generally marked by entities like clocks, which use the physical difference presented by the world around us to mark relative degrees of change in space, what happens when space starts to resemble itself? Mirrors disrupt time. And when there is a hall of mirrors, which Deleuze calls a crystal (for a crystal is little other than an object made of many little shards of reflecting surface), then we have an entity in which notions of before

[37] See Vivian Sobchack (2004) for a discussion of how cognition and sense-making happens in the context of cinematic time.

> and after start to literally break down. Films in which parts of the film mirror each other, which are full of short-circuits of this sort, he calls image crystals, or crystal-images.
>
> (Vitale, 2011)

As Vitale explains, 'crystal images' have the potential to break down notions of 'before and after', therefore contributing to a sense of queer time in *Proteus*. Time is seen to be manipulated on two different levels in the repeated images of Protea plants. Within the frames, the plants are shot at an extremely high frame rate in order to successfully slow down the motion in post-production and then the action is mechanically reversed. When viewed from this perspective, it is possible to read these images that mirror each other, as a critique on time as we have conventionally come to understand it. I would argue, therefore, that they posit, in a cinematic form, a non-normative conception of time, space, and history.

"Read back the statement from the record"

Having examined how a queer temporality is constructed in *Proteus*, I would argue that the film does not merely pry open the archive and fill one of the gaps in the records. It does not enter and leave the archive in tact. Rather, in surfacing this narrative, *Proteus* dismantles the very matter from which the archive is built and leaves a significant mark on how we conceptualise our existence in space and time. Arseneault proposes that "the film encourages us

to rethink history, to rethink what kinds of objects, bodies and histories we reach for as we construct particular orientations or attempt to reorient ourselves" (Arseneault, 2013: 53). In this way, we may begin to understand that the images that are made available to us in archival records necessarily have an impact on the way that we formulate identities in post-apartheid South Africa. Constructing a more progressive post-apartheid archive requires the kind of troubling work that *Proteus* enacts. In order to bring alternative histories into visibility, I have suggested that we need to focus on dismantling the core structuring principles of the archive - principles which have worked to establish grand narratives that efface alternative renditions of history. Building on the insights presented in this chapter, the chapter to follow will address how the film probes language, another foundational unit of the archive.

Chapter Two

"It's just a name"

> Is it possible that centuries ago, when the law named an act but not an experience, and today, when the air is full of names, an experience that goes unnamed is one that has the freedom of anonymity.
>
> (Garrett in Ben-Asher, 2005: 442)

> Identities are minefields, and the mines have been lain by armies that have forgotten the map.
>
> (Sengupta, 2006: 634)

> The moon is red because it's the shoe of Mantis, who is /Kaggen, who threw his shoe up into the sky...
>
> (*Proteus*, 2003)

"What's the name?... Why can't you say it?"

The pages of the Crimineele Regts Rolle of 1735 cross-fade into a medium shot of three court stenographers documenting a court case. As the judge speaks, the subtitles read "a full confession was made with the filthy and abominable words: Send mij maar op, ik het hom in't gat geneukt". The camera zooms into a shot of the archive where Rijkhart's statement has been transcribed. His voice-over echoes through the courtroom…

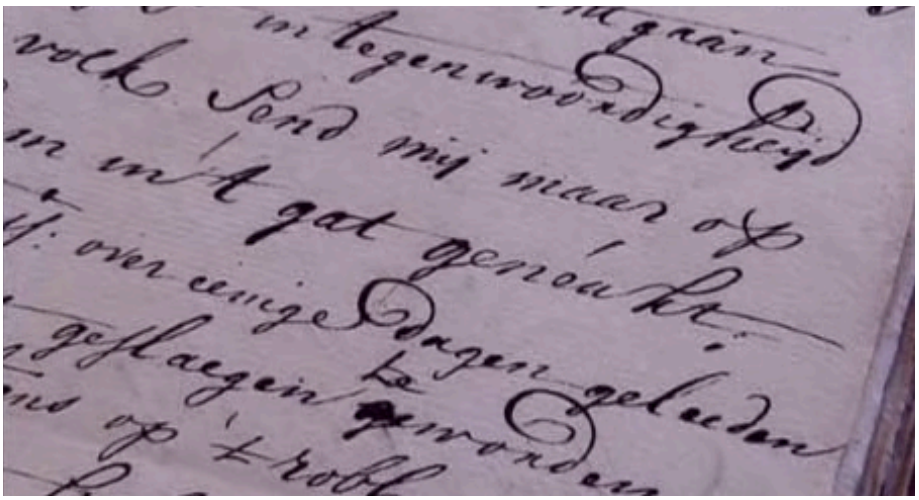


Figure 2.1: A shot of Rijkhart's confession in the official archive.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)

This chapter is organised around an examination of how Greyson and Lewis use language in *Proteus* to achieve multiple ends. I explore the degree to which Claas and Rijkhart manage to resist labeling their intimacy and to what effect their unnamed intimacy works in the film. I argue that locating such an intimate relationship in 1700s colonial South Africa has three significant effects. First, it disrupts the colonial archive by highlighting how official records have been sanitised at the level of language. A more detailed analysis of the 'crystal image' described in chapter one allows further insight into this claim. I then examine how *Proteus* addresses the politics around nomenclature and assess the material effects that the acts of naming and labeling have on living and buried/historical bodies. This leads me to the second claim with which I concur, which is that Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy resists the increasingly widespread twenty-first century discourse that suggests that

homosexuality is necessarily 'unAfrican'. On this observation, Arseneault (2013) proposes the following:

> The film's queering of South African history also responds to the nation's conservative backlash against progressive constitutional protections for sexual minorities in 1996 and the legalization of gay marriage in 2006. Indeed, the notion that homosexuality is "unAfrican" or a Western import is a mantra, exhaustively discussed in South African media and criticism, that pervades many African leaders' derision of queerness.
>
> (Arseneault, 2013: 41)

In this chapter, I suggest that the claim that homosexuality is 'unAfrican' highlights the link between conceptions of sexuality and nationhood that amalgamate in a post-apartheid South African subject and examine where nodes of resistance to this discourse might be located. Finally, I claim that Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy has queering effects on normative conceptions of sexuality. Here, I propose that the concept of 'assemblage', championed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1988) and successfully employed by Jasbir Puar (2007), may be used to address the fluid nature of subjectivities and identities that Claas and Rijkhart's relationship makes evident. The chapter then turns to a focused examination of the spectatorial procedures at work in *Proteus* with regards to how the filmmakers use subtitles and multiple languages in *Proteus* to engage the audience in the act of translation throughout the film.

"send mij maar op, ik het hom in't gat geneukt"

At this point I would like to return to the scene in which the three court stenographers attempt to translate Rijkhart's confession from eighteenth century Middle Dutch to 1960s English. While this scene has been useful in illustrating much about an understanding of time as unfixed and non-linear, for the purposes of the analysis I present in this chapter, the question of how language is employed and to what end takes precedence over other potential analytical co-ordinates. This scene is the first one in which dialogue is used in *Proteus*. Before this moment, the audience has been presented with a minute-long experimental montage in which images of Proteas are juxtaposed with those of the official Crimineele Regts Rolle of 1735. A close up of a page from the records cross fades into this establishing scene. Three court stenographers are seen transcribing the judge's statement as follows -"a full confession was made with the filthy and abominable words: send mij maar op, ik het hom in't gat geneukt"[38]. As the stenographers transcribe the testimony, we are shown an image of the official records where this statement has been written. The image is accompanied by off-screen sound of a man shouting the words "send mij maar op, ik het hom in't gat geneukt". The stenographers seem perplexed. They debate the meaning of the word 'geneukt'. They turn to the dictionary, which suggests that as an eighteenth century Middle Dutch word, 'geneukt'

[38] Translated in the film as: "send me up I used the native against nature"; "I performed an offense against God and man alike"; "I fucked him up the ass".

must have meant 'to strike'. However one of the stenographers maintains that the full translation would be "I fucked him up the ass". The debate then turns to finding a euphemism for 'fucked' such as 'buggered' or the modern Afrikaans slang word 'naai'. It is then suggested that the full confession translates as "Send me up, I used the native against nature" and then "I performed… an offense against God and man alike". The scene cross fades back into an image of the record book and subsequently slowly dissolves into the superimposition of the 1964 coin onto an image of the view from Robben Island and a text block dated 1735.

The fact that this scene is bracketed-off by montages and superimpositions indicates that it is somewhat removed from the main action. The experimental filmmaking conventions that surround this sequence signal that the spectator might read this scene as a moment in which 'anything could happen'. In other words, it suggests that it is not bound by the rules of realism and verisimilitude that a mainstream Hollywood narrative might demand. It may be argued that because the scene is 'suspended' in an imaginary realm, the rules of language might apply as much or as little as the rules of a linear and cohesive understanding of time and space. However, I would suggest that what occurs in this moment is far more complex than 1960s stenographers discussing the translation of an eighteenth century word in an imaginary world. In my view, the fact that the film emphasises that the stenographers

need to find a suitable translation for the word 'geneukt' evidences the cultural imperative to label and define individuals and their behaviors. The stenographers' struggle to find the right words to describe Claas and Rijkhart's sexual behavior signals their desperate attempt to classify, categorise and fix a sexual identity for the men. The fact that they simply cannot find the appropriate words highlights key debates that exist around the nature and effects of language, especially when dealing with concepts such as sex, gender, sexuality and desire. Here, I am most interested in what Erez Levon (2010) highlights as the material consequences that language has for living bodies. Levon emphasises that language is able to "concretely materialize the various ideologies, or normative sets of beliefs, that circulate in a given society" (Levon, 2010: 8). In the case of sex, gender and sexuality this means that, in what Bowden and Mummery (2009) call a 'patriarchal sexual economy', it is commonly assumed that only two sexes exist (labeled 'male' and 'female') and that each sex will consequently take on appropriately gendered behaviors (labeled 'masculine' and 'feminine'). For this patriarchal system to work, it also relies on and prescribes compulsory heterosexuality[39]. Niven alludes to this system of classification when he talks about the "sophistication" of Linneus's system of nomenclature. Whilst dividing the plants into different families, Niven exclaims to Claas, "that's the genius of his

[39] See footnote 20 in introduction.

nomenclature! He sees past the superficial differences… and focuses exclusively on the sexual organs". The narrow focus on sexual organs when classifying humans is, of course, a major concern of Judith Butler's field redefining book, *Gender Trouble* (1990). As I mentioned in my introduction, she argues that the system of human classification that is currently taken as 'commonsense' works on a male/female binary and is problematic in that it ignores the fact that human life may manifest on a wide spectrum between and outside of this binary. Here, Butler briefly interrogates the place of language in effectively materialising these ideologies about sex, gender and even sexuality[40]. An understanding of how language necessarily materialises abstract concepts is not new work in gender studies but is, nonetheless, important to note in considering the effects that language has on human bodies. She explains that categorising an individual's sex according to a male/female binary often results in adopting a set of assumptions about their gender, sexuality and desires. She develops this insight by suggesting that the act of assigning abstract labels to individuals and their behaviors has real-life material and legal consequences for these bodies. For these reasons, Butler (1993) proposes that "persons only become intelligible through becoming

[40] I would suggest that Butler does not engage with the effects of language to the same degree as Levon (2010). Her reflections on this topic in *Gender Trouble* (1990) are more theoretical in nature than Levon's comparatively more structured consideration of gendered language in terms of theory and praxis.

gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility" (Butler, 1993: 168). As she shows, individuals who attempt to function outside of the normative male/female sex binary face isolation and exclusion and these exclusions are rooted in how language is structured and operates. Whilst this relationship between gender studies and language has a longstanding history, Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall (2004) explain that a more recent shift in studying sexuality-language relationships has revealed the importance of a focus on sexuality. They suggest:

> Before the 1990s, the most closely related area of research – language and gender studies – had considered sexuality, construed almost exclusively as heterosexuality, only insofar as it contributed to the understanding of gender; sexuality itself was rarely if ever the overt focus of analysis. Yet because of the close relationship between gender and sexuality, much language and gender research implicitly relied on cultural ideologies of sexuality in analyzing gendered linguistic phenomena. Thus, in this field too, sexuality has been omnipresent if mostly unacknowledged. In the past 15 years, however, theoretical shifts in language and gender have facilitated the study of sexuality as a necessary and equal complement to the study of gender. Where earlier gender research had tended to collapse sexuality into gender, more current work recognizes that these are separate theoretical concepts, while acknowledging that – like race, class, and other dimensions of sociopolitical relations – they cannot be productively discussed independently of one another.
>
> (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004: 470)

Although Bucholtz and Hall explain that gender and sexuality are not mutually constitutive, we may still note similarities in the effects that gendered and sexualised language have on individual experiences of reality. The English language only allows for a certain limited number of possible sexual expressions to be communicated – homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, cissexual and, arguably the new buzzword in the media, transsexual are some of the options available to individuals living in the twenty-first century. Whilst Deborah Cameron (2005) argues that "a paradigm organized around the concept of binary *difference* has been superseded by one that is concerned with the *diversity* of gendered and sexual identities and practices", I would suggest that conceptualising a sexual experience that transcends the classification of 'sexuality' altogether is still extremely difficult to communicate when using a language that arguably does not accommodate such formulations (Cameron, 2005: 482). I recognise that one might struggle to conceptualise how sexual experience could transcend sexuality, especially considering that sexuality is to a large extent a set of sexual experiences. This being said, the endeavor to decouple identities and practices is a typically queer enterprise and I am suggesting that the film attempts to demonstrate that sexual practices are not necessarily reducible to sexual identities through its complex storyline. Herein, lies the troubling power of Claas and Rijkhart's relationship as they refuse to label their intimacy. In doing so, they do not allow their sexual behaviors to be translated into any form of categorised

sexuality. The "unintelligible", to borrow from Butler, and defiant nature of Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy is precisely what, I argue, allows their behavior to have queering consequences for commonsensical formulations of sexuality. Their relationship may be viewed as a response to the question: 'what does an intimacy that exists outside of the category of 'sexuality' look like?'. Similar to the way recent images of Laverne Cox and Caitlyn Jenner[41] on the cover of *Time Magazine* and *Vanity Fair* respectively left readers confused and outraged, Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy is troubling for those around them. It is difficult for the other inmates to make sense of something that they cannot classify. The inmates' confusion is specifically evidenced in scenes where Munster, another prisoner on the Island, struggles to understand their relationship. Eventually he decides to report Claas and Rijkhart for 'sodomy' but this only happens at the end of the film. Munster does not report them for years although the film implies that he has known about their intimacy for the

[41] Self-identified transgender females, Laverne Cox and Caitlyn Jenner were featured on the cover of *Time Magazine* and *Vanity Fair* in 2014 and 2015 respectively. The cover images were met with outrage as consumers of the magazines attempted to grapple with questions around gender and sexuality. Although it is not my intention to elide the significant differences between Jenner and Cox's positions as trans-females, I am using the similarities between the reception of their images to draw a comparison with how Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy troubles the normative conceptions of sexuality that are expressed by other prisoners on the Island. See Ed Pilkington (2015) and Kevin Williamson (2014) for insights into public reactions to media coverage of Jenner and Cox.

greater part of their relationship. Instead, Munster's attitude towards the men for most of film could be described as inquisitive. At one point he even asks Rijkhart, "maybe you can be *my* wifey?". However, Rijkhart aggressively declines Munster's proposition, signalling that his relationship with Claas entails more than sex. This clearly confuses and angers Munster. It is significant to note that his question has a clearly gendered component. The word 'wifey' reveals much about how Munster attempts to comprehend Claas and Rijkhart's relationship through heteronormative role configurations. He automatically assigns stereotypically heterosexual gendered roles to the men suggesting that one man should fill the position of the conventional 'wife', that is to say the role of receiving the phallus during intercourse. This demonstrates Munster's inability to comprehend their intimacy beyond patriarchal heteronormative boundaries. Though Claas and Rijkhart do attempt to define their relationship at moments in the film, their intimacy remains unnamed throughout the narrative and therefore, as I intend to demonstrate in this chapter, Claas and Rijkhart's relationship forms a powerful node of resistance against the normalising effects of nomenclature.

"What's your name for this King Sugarbush?"

When examining how *Proteus* deals with the acts of naming and labeling, I would suggest that it manages to achieve something more than merely resisting a label for Claas and Rijkhart's intimate relationship. Instead, I

propose that in addition to resisting categorisation, the film works to set up moments in which Claas is seen to actively engage in the work of language-making and un-making when he is called upon to categorise and name the flowers himself. This work has liberating effects for Claas, which are compounded when he mocks the system of nomenclature by assigning crude names to the flowers. This is clearly indexed when Claas is asked to help name Niven's plant specimens. The scene follows one in which Niven and his male assistant, Lourens[42], sit in their shared bed and attempt to practice their Nama. At this point, the film flirts with ambiguity. It is unclear whether Niven and Lourens's relationship is sexually intimate because by this time the film has already signalled that Niven leads a secret life in Amsterdam in which he has sex with an American sailor at a Dutch tavern. While Garret (2004) argues that this sex scene between Niven and the sailor is in fact an exercise in fantasy, spectators are nonetheless encouraged to assume that Niven was sexually intimate with other men as he is found guilty of 'sodomy' in Amsterdam near the end of the film. When learning this news his cousin, Kate, mentions his relationship with Lourens. After Kate finds an account of Lourens's execution for 'sodomy' in Amsterdam in Niven's bag she suggests that there was a sexual relationship between the two men. Niven does not

[42] Lourens is played by the late Brett Goldin who was a well-known South African actor. Goldin was hijacked and murdered in April 2006 – see Caryn Dolley and Karyn Maughan (2006).

deny this. She cries, "I can't fathom it… I've known you my whole life and now I know you not at all".

The day after Niven and Lourens practice their Nama in bed, Niven asks Claas if there are any prisoners of 'bushman' descent on the Island. Claas tells Niven that although he is only half 'bushman', he is the only one who knows how to speak Nama, Dutch and English[43]. Niven explains that he wants to record all of the 'bushman' names and uses for his plant specimens. Claas agrees to help Niven for a small fee and explains that he will send the money home to his mother when he is released from prison. Niven shows Claas a picture of one of his specimens and asks Claas to tell him the Nama name for the King Sugarbush Protea. Claas seems to take this responsibility quite seriously and tells him the name for the plant, however when the spectator sees the translation in the subtitles, it becomes clear that Claas is simply taking advantage of Niven's ignorance. He continues to tell Niven the incorrect names for the plants using Nama words for 'cunt' and 'fart'. As Niven repeats and records the incorrect words for the plants, the subtitles include the spectators in the scene's irony. This moment is an example of how the film engages the spectator through the act of translation. It calls on the

[43] I established in my introduction that Claas's character is based on the historical figure, Autshumato, who worked as a translator for both the Dutch and the English in the seventeenth century.

audience to do significant conceptual work by reading the subtitles. It is only through following the narrative and reading the subtitles that the spectator can apprehend and enjoy the irony at work in the scene[44].



Figure 2.2: Claas makes up crude names for Niven's plant specimens.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)

Apart from being humorously engaging for the spectator, I would suggest that this is also a significant moment for the development of Claas's subjectivity. It is important to note that Claas does not necessarily claim subjectivity by labeling the plants but rather asserts his subjectivity by 'showing up' this act. As a consequence, this becomes a scene in which the power dynamics that were previously in place change dramatically through

[44] This strategic mechanism is explored further near the end of this chapter.

the act of naming and the simultaneous subversion of the sanctity of scientific classification and naming practices. Foucault's (1982) memorable description of the nature of power illuminates the examination of this moment in the narrative:

> The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others… Power…, which is assumed to exist universally in a concentrated or diffused form, does not exist. Power exists only when it is put into action. This also means that power is not a function of consent. In itself it is not a renunciation of freedom, a transference of rights, the power of each and all delegated to a few.
>
> (Foucault, 1982: 788)

Foucault conceives of power as a pervasive force, which is constantly being negotiated and transferred. Power does not necessarily only have oppressive features but also has the potential for productivity. Claas's mockery of the naming process shifts the status of his character from 'Hottentot prisoner' to Niven's trusted advisor, in possession of indigenous knowledge, without which the traditional uses of each plant would be inaccessible to Niven. He moves from being a 'sub-species' of human, as Linnaeus describes individuals of Khoi descent, to showing off his superior knowledge in indigenous florae. Niven's interest in Claas's apparent awareness of the uses of plants signals that Claas's indigenous knowledge might be viewed as valuable and useful.

This shows that Claas's behavior is perhaps more significant in addressing issues of colonialism than it might seem at first glance. Indeed, Gabeba Baderoon (2004) illustrates the power located in the act of naming when she argues that as part of the imperial project in colonial South Africa, "the landscape [and its people] was named in a way that enabled it to be claimed" (Baderoon, 2004: 7). As part of a close examination of the origins of the terms 'kaffir'[45] and 'native', Baderoon explains how "Paul Carter (1996) theorizes this use of naming to erase prior meanings and create the space for new, imperial ones as 'the theatricalization of the ground - its transformation into the tabula rasa of space which, by virtue of its emptiness, licenses the colonist's usurpation of it'" (Carter in Baderoon, 2004: 7). The politics of naming, when considered in its connection to colonialism's workings, is foundationally linked to a need for possession and control of indigenous lands and peoples. Therefore, when Claas re-assigns crude names to the plants, this act is significant. It shows how he is disrupting a colonial project that attempts to gain control of lands and peoples through categorisation and labeling. Claas is essentially resisting and perverting the system that is trying to classify and domesticate him. This is the system of classification on which scientific racism

[45] Baderoon says that the term 'kaffir' was "derived from the Arabic word for non-believer or infidel…Exemplary of the violent disavowal during apartheid of Black people's humanity… The most notorious word in South African history, known most pointedly from its license of violence towards Blacks during apartheid, but used and elaborated during the colonial period" (Baderoon, 2004: 1-2).

and the colonial projects with which it was twinned were, and continue to be, based.

This scene sets the tone for a sequence later in the film where Claas is helping Niven name plant specimens in Niven's 'laboratory'. Here, Claas finds a copy of Carl Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae 1735* (1964). In it he notes Linnaeus's taxonomy in which the Hottentot, as Claas is categorised, is listed as a sub-human species. Niven explains to Claas that Linnaeus has "divided mankind into four distinct races" and then, in a condescending tone, reads from the part of the text where each race's attributes are enumerated. In this text, Hottentots are relegated to the realm of the sub-human. Through this scene, Arseneault (2013) says that "the film makes explicit technologies of naturalization taking place as colonial knowledge systems name objects according to biological class", therefore "rendering visible the connection between the naming of the natural world and racial classification" (Arseneault, 2013: 48). The aforementioned scene is ironic because spectators remember how Claas outsmarted Niven at his own naming game earlier in the film. The scene also evidences the serious material and legal consequences for human bodies that naming and categorisation often affect. Because Claas is classified as sub-human, it is believed that his cognitive capabilities are inferior. Poignantly, Niven uses this idea as a defense for Claas in his imagined testimony at Claas and Rijkhart's 'sodomy' trial. At this later point

in the film, Niven pleads with the judge and says that Claas is "incapable of committing the crime of which he is accused. Though he is fluent in both Dutch and English, he would neither know nor comprehend the very name of such a crime". Firstly this assertion reveals how assigning the label 'Hottentot' to Claas results in assumptions about his intelligence. Additionally, it suggests that if Claas could not identify or grasp a name for the relationship, he would not have been able to share this intimacy with Rijkhart, which, as I will demonstrate, is not the case.

"There is no name"

Though Niven suggests that Claas could not know or understand a name for his intimacy with Rijkhart, I suggest that they avoid naming their relationship for reasons other than the fact that they cannot find an appropriate term to use. Drawing upon Foucault's work on the history of sexuality, Tommaso Milani suggests that "it was not until the mid-19th century that same-sex practices… became the terrain on which an identity category, "homosexual", was created in Europe. At [a] specific nexus of time and space, what had in previous centuries been treated as a 'temporary aberration'– sodomy/pederasty – became reified into a long-standing condition: homosexuality" (Milani, 2012: 60). Building on a similar understanding, Lewis explains that *Proteus* "is about what it means to have lived at a time when that identity didn't exist, when it wasn't available, and how you defined yourself

under those circumstances" (Lewis in Ben-Asher, 2005: 439). However, although the concept of homosexuality might not yet have been a commonsense notion in the Cape Colony at the time, I would argue that Claas and Rijkhart actively refuse to align their shared intimacy with any sexual identity whatsoever – be it homosexuality or otherwise. A close reading of the following scene in *Proteus* demonstrates how the two men awkwardly maneuver around the issue of sexual identity.

In a scene where the Claas and Rijkhart have stolen some time to be alone together on the roof of a water tower, they discuss their futures. Rijkhart tells Claas that he will be released from the prison in five years time and that there is a possibility that he will be able to get a farm beyond the Berg River. Rijkhart suggests that they could live together on the farm as 'master and servant'. At that time there would be no other instance in which a white man and a Hottentot could live together beyond the prison walls. Claas insists that this is just a fantasy as they would never be allowed to do this - they would be shot first. Rijkhart becomes emotional and begins to cry. In a poetic exchange of words Rijkhart pleads with Claas to "say it!... what we have". Claas asks desperately "what do we have?... what is it?". Rijkhart replies "what we are" to which Claas asks "what are we?". Rijkhart begs "what is the name?" and finally Claas insists "there is no name". This scene illustrates how the men struggle to find a way to come to terms with their relationship but never

resort to naming it. The spectator is therefore primed to take up a position that attempts to understand Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy in a way that is more complex than the label 'homosexuality' might suggest. The audience is invited to complicate their understanding of how intimacy might work between two men when that relationship is not confined to the metaphorical borders that the label 'homosexuality' might impose. Although their sexual behaviors have severe consequences for their lives when it is read as 'sodomy' by colonial powers, Claas and Rijkhart resist the reification of their desire into a fixed sexual identity. Their intimacy, therefore, exists as an undefined manifestation of desire between two men in what could be thought of as the most difficult of circumstances.



Figure 2.3: Claas tells Rijkhart that there is no name for their relationship.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)

In the same way that Claas finds a place from which to claim his subjectivity when he names Niven's plant specimens, I argue that he and Rijkhart equally assert their subjectivity by resisting sexual classification. I have explained how Claas's mockery of the system of nomenclature disrupts the colonial system in which the two men exist, and I would like to suggest that the location of Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy in early colonial South Africa may also be argued to do significant work in resisting the increasingly widespread homosexuality is 'unAfrican' discourse that exists in the twenty-first century. Neville Hoad (2007) has complicated how the presence of what is now commonly labeled 'homosexuality' in Africa has gradually come to be read as a mark of "an ongoing imperial project" and has therefore been publically condemned by numerous African heads of state as 'unAfrican' (Hoad, 2007: xiii). This viewpoint has been exemplified in the past by statements such as former Namibian President, Sam Nujoma's (1996) assertions that homosexuality is "un-African and unnatural" and that "those who are practicing homosexuality in Namibia are destroying the nation…" (Nujoma in Simo, 2001). Former Kenyan President, Daniel arap Moi, similarly announced that homosexuality "is against African tradition" (Reuters, 1999). A more contemporary illustration of the longstanding ritual of public condemnation of homosexuality as 'unAfrican' is one of Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe's countless fiercely homophobic assertions. At a celebration for his 88th birthday, Mugabe "called [gays] worse than pigs and dogs because pigs

know there are males and females… This kind of insanity is now part of the culture of Europe and the United States" (Mugabe in MacLean, 2012). More recently at the United Nations General Assembly meeting held on 28th September 2015, Mugabe stated: "we reject attempts to prescribe new rights that are contrary to our norms, values, traditions and beliefs. We are not gays" (Mugabe in Justice, 2015). Additionally, a stream of African media flashframes has constructed homosexual African men as 'debaucherous sinners'. For example, in December 2014, twenty-six Egyptian men were arrested in Cairo for engaging in suspected homosexual acts. An article published soon after on foxnews.com read as follows:

> Scenes of half-naked men escorted by policemen out of the bath house in Cairo on 7 December were filmed by a private TV channel and later aired amid criticism from activists. Many in the public were also stunned by the widely circulated pictures of the bathers covering their faces from cameras.
>
> (Associated Press, 2014)

The photographs that were published in print and on online platforms ensure that the men are made visible in a half-naked state as they cover their faces from the camera's gaze thus reinforcing the idea of homosexuals being 'caught in the act'; being 'named and shamed' – paraded without clothing for all to see and then finally being brought to justice for their 'crimes'. These images are closely reminiscent of the infamous Abu Ghraib photographs that

came to light in 2004, which I address in greater detail in chapter three. The 'crime' that the Egyptian men committed is the same 'crime' that is described in *Proteus* as "a crime against man and God alike". I argue here that rather than being a crime against man or God, African same-sex practices and intimacies, whether named as 'homosexual' or 'queer' or neither, are most threatening to nation states that are founded on the basis of white heterosexual monogamy[46]. Ugandan President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni's official statement at the signing of the Ugandan anti-homosexuality bill on 24th February 2014[47], explicitly reveals how the idea of African nationhood that he postulates is configured in sexualised and raced terms, a claim that will be theorised shortly. An extract from Museveni's statement reads:

> It seems the topic of homosexuals was provoked by the arrogant and careless western groups that are fond of coming into our schools and recruiting young children into homosexuality and lesbianism - just as they carelessly handle other issues concerning Africa…. I'm not able to understand the logic of the western culture… If only they could let us alone…

[46] Roosvall and Salovaara-Moring (2010) explain that "the nation as a concept was invented in c. 1300, and originally came from the old French nacion… which literally meant 'that which has been born'…. Political sense has become mixed with this racial and ethnic meaning to create the idea of a 'large group of people with a common ancestry'" (Roosvall & Salovaara-Moring, 2010: 10).

[47] See video of full statement at: NTV Uganda (2014).

> Here we don't do things like that… It's not our culture…
>
> (Museveni in NTV Uganda, 2014)

Henriette Gunkel (2010) provides a detailed argument of how national identity is deeply entangled with concepts of sexuality and race in South Africa. She explains how the apartheid state was essentially figured on racial and sexual grounds. The only way that the state could guarantee white majority rule was if reproduction was encouraged as the ultimate goal. Therefore the all-white nuclear family became the measuring unit of success and any manifestation of sexual intimacy that did not support the aim of white reproduction, such as homosexuality and mixed-race relationships, was deemed deviant and was excluded from the national imaginary. Hoad (2007) explains that after apartheid, other African countries, like Namibia and Zimbabwe, used South Africa's more liberal constitution, in terms of accepted forms of sexuality, to claim that they could boast real 'Africanness' / African authenticity. Hoad explains how, as a result, in the post-apartheid conjuncture, certain African leaders came to believe that an assertion of African authenticity could be demonstrated by aligning homosexuality with imperial agendas and, in turn, denouncing the fact that homosexuality is a

legitimate form of sexual expression that has a long and complex history on the continent[48].

Arseneault (2013) suggests that "given that many leaders' comments construct national communal ideals that decidedly excise queer masculinities from their conception of nationhood, the need to make visible other orientations becomes ever-more prescient" (Arseneault, 2013: 42). It has, therefore, been the work of scholars such as Henriette Gunkel (2010), Neville Hoad (2007), Brenna Munro (2012), Amanda Lock Swaar (2012), Sylvia Tamale (2011) and Vasu Reddy (2009) to both complicate and challenge the claim that homosexuality is necessarily 'unAfrican'. While there are points of divergence among these scholars, a common strategy has been to reveal the inextricable links between the subjectivities of race, sexuality, gender and conceptualisations of African nationhood. Jason Zingsheim (2011) explains that these subjectivities are entwined to the degree that they "fundamentally and continually (re)construct each other" (Zingsheim, 2011: 31). I propose

[48] On this topic, Marc Epprecht (2008) points out that many religious African leaders have taken on this 'anti-homosexuality' stance but he is also careful to note that "not all African religious leaders, for example, have aligned themselves with the homophobic extreme and, on the contrary, have taken big risks to denounce that extreme in unambiguous language (Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak, and Njongonkulu Ngungane, for example, along with a scattering of gay-friendly local churches around the continent)" (Epprecht, 2008: 167).

that these links become apparent in Museveni's statement. With this understanding, Gunkel (2010) refutes the claim that homosexuality is 'unAfrican' by locating a multiplicity of intimacies within African history that do not fit in to the homo/hetero sexual binary that the comparatively liberal post-apartheid South African constitution supposedly reinforces. By proving that African intimacies have historically been conceptualised in much broader terms than a homo/hetero sexual binary, for example mummy-baby relationships in Lesotho, women marriages in Kenya and Nigeria and ancestral wives in South Africa – what Gunkel terms "queer counterintimacy" – she has argued that rather than exposing homosexuality in Africa as a colonial marker, the notion of homosexuality as 'unAfrican' instead works to reinforce a homophobic colonial project, which negotiates the concept of nationhood on compulsory heterosexual, raced and gendered terms (Gunkel, 2010: 114). However, Hoad notes the limitations of this kind of project when he points out that:

> The emergence of an international public sphere dedicated to finding and making "homosexuals" in parts of the world that have not seen public articulations of such persons may further allow "homosexuality" to be seen as an ongoing imperial project…The risk…is that one only lingers long enough to establish "homophobia"… This diversity of experiences subsumed under the sign of homosexuality, sexuality, even pluralized, can never interrogate the terms of the assertion that "there is no homosexuality in African culture." It

> can only answer: "No, but there is, look ..." In this way it precisely reproduces the terms of the debate it wishes to end in a landscape of assertion and counterassertion where finding practices that look "homosexual" to a Western eye has little intellectual or political capital.
>
> (Hoad, 2007: xiii-xxiv)

Hoad's concern is echoed in Marc Epprecht's argument that "digging out select indigenous African words for "homosexuality" that purportedly predate European colonialism, notably, has been a deeply problematic project" (Epprecht, 2008: 166). In light of Hoad's caveat, I would suggest that *Proteus* is not a project in locating an instance of homosexuality in colonial South Africa in order to prove that deviant sexualities existed in historical Africa. Rather, I would propose that Claas and Rijkhart's "male same-sex corporeal intimac[y] in Africa", as Hoad (2007: xxvii) might call it, works to queer the idea that intimacies are always automatically reified into fixed sexual identities and in turn resists the discourse that homosexuality is 'unAfrican' by refocusing the main point of interrogation to questions around how conceptions of nationhood are fundamentally configured around sexuality. In this way, Claas and Rijkhart's relationship does not only problematise the term 'homosexuality', it also probes the construct that is 'Africa' by destabilising commonsense notions of nationhood and sexuality.

While I tend to agree with Hoad's critique that projects which seek to locate instances of historical African 'homosexulities' are limited, I think that Gunkel's (2010) text is useful to investigate the link between nationhood and sexuality that I have begun to investigate in this chapter. Gunkel's book opens with an analysis of Zanele Muholi's photographs displayed at an exhibition entitled *Visual Sexuality: Only Half the Picture* (2004). She then moves on to examine Muholi's short documentary film, *Enraged by a Picture* (2005), in which the artist records public opinions of her work. Gunkel notes that "the responses to Muholi's exhibition... reveal how race and gender operate in the construction of post-apartheid homophobia. One common response to Muholi's exhibition is that her images of the black female body are either degrading for all (black) women or alternatively, are demeaning for the community, the nation or the race" (Gunkel, 2010: 4). When I visited Zanele Muholi and Gabrielle Le Roux's 2014 exhibition at the Wits Art Museum entitled *Queer and Trans Art-iculations*, I read the same type of reactions from the public. Le Roux's part of the exhibition, *Proudly African and Transgender*, documents the lives and thoughts of persons who identify as transgender and intersex people from all over Africa through painted portraits of the individuals, on which they have each written one or two sentences describing themselves. For example, the portrait of the late South African apartheid and

gender activist, Sally Gross[49], reads, "I am an unmutilated whole intersex person". Portraits such as that of Nigerian Madam Jholerina Brina Timbo read, "I am an African woman... I am the modern day Cleopatra... African beauty that I am". Most of the trans[50] and intersex individuals wrote about their connection to their country or to Africa on their portraits. The most telling part of the exhibition was the comment/reflection cards left by audience members that were displayed outside of the exhibition room. Not unlike Gunkel's observation, I noted that the comments revealed a strong

[49] Below is an extract from what late gender activist and intersex person, Sally Gross, wrote under their portrait at Le Roux's exhibition: "activism around intersex has loomed large in my personal life since my return to South Africa and my efforts have raised awareness about the issue both within the gender sector, as it were, of South African civil society, and latterly in government. Two pieces of legislation on South Africa's statute book recognise and reinforce the rights of intersex persons, thanks to amendments which I drafted and lobbied into law". Gross goes on to describe the impact of their organisation 'Intersex South Africa' in Africa.

[50] See Dean Spade (2011) for a historicisation and orientation of the word 'trans'. The term is used in this framework in a similar way to how Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle use it in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (2006). They describe a trans identity as "a variety of experiences. It can encompass discomfort with role expectations, being queer, occasional or more frequent cross-dressing, permanent cross-dressing, and cross-gender living, through to accessing major health interventions such as hormonal therapy and surgical reassignment procedures" (Stryker & Whittle, 2006: xi).

connection between ideas of gender, race, and nationhood[51]. Many of the visitors to the gallery who commented wrote about gender identity and a feeling of 'belonging' in South Africa. For example, an anonymous individual wrote: "South Africa has come so far and much has been done to protect our loved ones and make them feel appreciated... I am still worried about protecting those who have not yet come out and shared their sexuality". Mix's comment read: "We are the rainbow nation!!! We are G-d's children!!!". Raylene Leigh-Ann Emanuel commented, "I am a proudly South African, love is power, so is knowledge. So why rape, kill, violence....". Another anonymous individual commented, "South Africa does not need rape or violence. We are a beautiful country filled with beautiful people. Be who you are. Be the beautiful South-African". Clearly outraged at Museveni's new Ugandan anti-homosexuality bill, one individual wrote: "Fuck Uganda (x2), Yeah Fuck Uganda". Ndou Ratelani's poetic comment read: "... the sons and daughters of this soil have lost their destiny. It is no longer about man or woman but it is all about power and might... Oh I cry for my beautiful Africa". Raphaphula wrote in capital letters: "I LOVE AFRICA, ESPECIALLY SOUTH AFRICA. THE COUNTRY THAT UNITED BLACK AND WHITE TOGETHER... THE COUNTRY OF ALL BEAUTIFUL RACES AND A

[51] See Blanckenberg and McEwen (2014) for an in-depth analysis of the audience feedback on the comments wall at Muholi and Le Roux's *queer & trans Art-iculations: Collaborative Art for Social Change* exhibition.

FREELY DEMOCRACY". B. Kolose (name subsequently scratched out) writes "Whether I am Xhosa or what, in this rainbow nation, that doesn't change who I am... All I know is that, in this country, the place I am living in belongs to all who live in it". Finally, Jasper quotes former South African President Nelson Mandela: "For to be free is not merely to cast off ones chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others". Significantly, the connection between Mandela, 'the father of the rainbow nation', and sexual freedoms is also made in *Proteus* when Greyson and Lewis insert one of Mandela's most famous quotations at the end of the film – "Some of the things so far told the court are true, and some are not true: Nelson Madela on being sentenced to life imprisonment on Robben Island, 1964". I suggest that by referring to Nelson Mandela, who has been dubbed 'father of the nation', at such a crucial point in the film, *Proteus* further serves as commentary on the entanglement of race, gender, sexuality, and nationhood that exists in South Africa. It also destabilises the image of Mandela as just a symbol of racial freedom and starts to question how his image may be read intersectionally in terms of nationhood and sexuality as well.

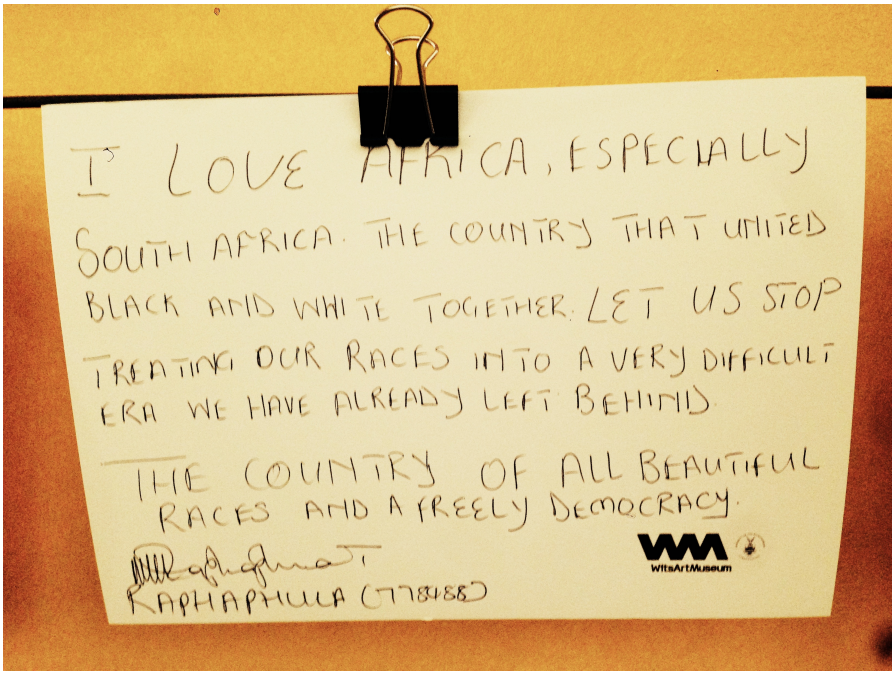


Figure 2.4: Audience comment card displayed outside Gabrielle Le Roux's *Proudly African and Transgender* exhibition (2014). (Image courtesy of Gabrielle Le Roux)



Figure 2.5: A portrait of Madam Jholerina Brina Timbo from Gabrielle Le Roux's *Proudly African and Transgender* exhibition (2014). (Image courtesy of Gabrielle Le Roux)

"Oh my dear, all the names gone..."

I find Puar's (2007) work on reading through 'assemblage' helpful to address this entanglement of subjectivities that *Proteus* makes evident through its complex and troubling character constructions. I make use of the word 'troubling' here to indicate the disruptive effect that *Proteus*'s main characters have on commonsense notions of identity and subjectivities[52]. While the concept of intersectionality, an analytical strategy associated most commonly with black American postcolonial feminists of the late 1980s, allows us to imagine identity categories as intersecting axes on a fixed grid, Puar's (2007) work on the idea of intersectionality in conjunction with assemblage suggests a more productive and fluid way of conceptualising how bodies might be read. Puar turns to Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) concept of 'assemblage' which, she explains, is in tension with the theory of intersectionality in her book. She does not jettison the concept of intersectionality altogether as she acknowledges that categories such as gender, sex, and sexuality as well as race, class, and ethnicity are important on the grounds that they have tangible

[52] Zingsheim (2011) clarifies the distinction between 'subjectivities' and 'identity': "Subjectivities are 'the vectors that shape our relation to ourselves' the positions we recognize as intelligible and offer as discursively possible within the current conjuncture" (Rabinow & Rose in Zingsheim, 2011: 24). Zingsheim goes on to explain that 'identity', on the other hand, "is where our sense of self is continually (re)constructed among, over, and through various (and variously shifting) subjectivities" (Zingsheim, 2011: 25).

legal and material consequences for individuals – we see this when Claas and Rijkhart speak about how they could never live together after they are released from the Island because of their respective races and again when Claas and Rijkhart are ultimately put to death for what is arguably read as a sexual identity by the court. Puar makes it clear, therefore, that she does not claim that we can discard the idea that there are systems, practices and regimes that fix bodies in place and that have oppressive effects for these bodies. In her more recent work (2013), she explains that "on the one hand I have been a staunch advocate of what is now commonly known as an intersectional approach" however, she emphasises that "intersectionality as an intellectual rubric and a tool for political intervention must be supplemented - if not complicated and reconceptualized - by a notion of assemblage" (Puar, 2013: 49-50). She attempts to foreground the critical practice of assemblage as a way of addressing the fluid nature of these categories and to allow us to ask different questions about life and its manifestations. For example, instead of asking what queer bodies *are*, we may ask what they *give rise to* and what kinds of contradictions are manifested around these bodies? This understanding is important when analysing Claas and Rijkhart's relationship as it encourages one to focus on the effects of their intimacy rather than attempting to analyse and label it. On this point, Denike asserts that:

> Unlike the visual, representational, identitarian frameworks that position seemingly queer bodies in a 'cultural freeze frame' of sorts, assemblages... attend to movements, intensities, emotions... as they inhabit events spatiality and corporealities to the shifts, realignments and complicities that queerness moves within.
>
> (Denike, 2010: 97)

This allows the focus on the material body that intersectionality prescribes to be shifted to a focus on experiential events and their consequences in these bodies' lives. Puar explains that "a focus on queerness as assemblage enables attention to ontology in tandem with epistemology, affect in conjunction with representational economies, within which bodies... interpenetrate, swirl together, and transmit affects to each other" (Puar, 2007: 122). I would like to suggest that reading Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy through assemblage in conjunction with intersectionality has allowed me to understand how their relationship could essentially be said to exist outside of the concept of sexuality whilst still having material consequences for their bodies, which have been labeled as 'sexed' and 'raced' by the colonial regime.

Zingsheim notes the limitations of reading through assemblage when he comments that "assemblages make little distinction between the social and material antecedents of disparate forces, flows, energies, and lines of flight"

(Zingsheim, 2011: 26)[53]. I would argue, however, that adopting this approach allows me to analyse the fluid ways in which the subjectivities of sex, gender and sexuality are shown to be linked to each other in *Proteus.* Instead of a rigid grid of subjectivities that only allow a limited possibility of combinations, thinking about identities through assemblage in tandem with concepts of intersectionality allows a myriad of different and ever-changing possibilities to manifest - even the possibility of existing outside of stifling social constructs such as the category of sexuality, while still emphasising the material constraints that abstract identity categories have on living bodies. Returning to the main focus of this chapter, which is language and sexuality, I propose that thinking and reading through the concept of assemblage allows us to begin to develop a new language with which to express different manifestations of intimacy and desire without resorting to the oppressive commonsensical language that riddles archives and official records.

"Wat raaktjaan dat?"

An understanding of what reading through assemblage can achieve in terms of a relatively fluid comprehension of how human expressions of sexuality

[53] On this point black feminist theorist, Valerie Smith (1998), maintains that "by addressing the multifarious ways in which ideologies of race, gender, class and sexuality reinforce one another, reading intersectionally can illuminate the diverse ways in which relations of domination and subordination are produced" (Smith, 1998: xxiii).

might manifest and be read may cause one to ask how the spectator is necessarily positioned in *Proteus* to engage with the queering consequences that Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy necessarily affects? At this point, I would like to return to the scene with which this chapter opened in order to demonstrate further how *Proteus* engages the spectator through the act of translation via subtitles.

At the end of the film, Claas and Rijkhart appear in court on a 'sodomy' charge. This is where the film comes full circle and the opening scene is contextualised, repeated and then continues. After hours of torture, Rijkhart has confessed to having sex with Claas with the words "send mij maar op, ik het hom in't gat geneukt"[54]. Returning to the opening scene of the film, the stenographers then debate an appropriate translation of Rijkhart's confession at Claas and Rijkhart's 'sodomy' trial. At this trial, both men choose not to make statements so the evidence is declared closed. In reality, the men would never have been allowed the opportunity to make statements in the court so it is fitting to ask why Greyson and Lewis felt it necessary to emphasise that they chose to say nothing in their own defense. In order to address this

[54] In a roundtable discussion on *Proteus*, Susan Newton-King argues that the words 'send mij maar op ik het hom in't gat geneukt' "are among the few utterances in the court record that are presented as direct quotations. As such, they are very valuable to anyone wanting to lift the veil of legal language, which obscures the motives and feelings of the protagonists" (Newton-King in Ben-Asher, 2005: 444).

question, I look to a telling moment earlier on when Claas and Rijkhart's fellow inmate, Munster, stands up as a witness in their trial. Munster explains that when he had asked Rijkhart "why he did these things with the Hottentot", Rijkhart's answer was "wat raaktjaan dat?". The stenographers are astonished at Rijkhart's answer as one of the women exclaims "what a silly thing to say!". Again the women debate the appropriate translation of the phrase suggesting translations such as "keep the hell out of it", "mind your own business" and "it's no concern to you". Eventually one of the stenographers voices her complete confusion at the statement saying, "He says it like it's a small thing, like it doesn't matter… like he's not ashamed". This indicates that Rijkhart is repudiating the shame that he is being made to feel. He would rather choose the dignity in holding his silence than have his words further distorted by the stenographers. The court stenographers' difficulty in finding an appropriate word for the men's sexual act signals something important about the way that official archives are figured. As the women begin to understand that the word 'geneukt' does not indicate a violent brawl between the men, they become intent on finding an appropriate word for the sexual act that has been committed. They assume that it is unfitting to write the word 'fucked' in the official archive so they suggest alternative, more 'respectable' words such as 'buggered' or 'naai'. This illustrates how the archive has been further sanitised through the way that it uses language. Therefore, in an attempt to avoid their statements being

skewed in this manner, Claas and Rijkhart refuse to provide lengthy accounts of their experiences at their hearing.



Figure 2.6: Stenographers struggle to translate Rijkhart's confession.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)

The scene continues to show how Rijkhart is found guilty after his earlier confession that was secured through torture, however Claas cannot be found guilty as he has not confessed. The judge demands that in the absence of a confession Claas should be returned to Robben Island. In this scene, the judge speaks Middle Dutch which is translated into English subtitles on screen. As the judge proceeds to deliver Rijkhart's sentence, Claas begins to panic. A close-up of his face shows his obvious anxiety. He exchanges a desperate glance with Niven who is also in the courtroom but has not spoken on behalf of the men apart from a lengthy speech during a dream sequence in which

Niven imagines what his testimony might have been. In this dream sequence Niven testifies that Munster was mistaken and that "the two prisoners were merely wrestling – a dispute over some fishing tackle".

After a long and chilling silence in the court, Claas finally exclaims the words "Di ta go"[55]. The subtitles mirror his words - "Di ta go". The judge asks what Claas said. Claas replies, "ons het dit gedoen". Again the subtitles are not in English – "ons het dit gedoen". The judge asks again, "wat het u gesê? Het jy ń verklaaring te maak?". This time the subtitles are in English – "what did you say? Do you have a statement to make?". However, Claas cannot speak because he realises the gravity of his words. The judge asks for the statement to be read back from the records. The stenographers read back the confession "Di ta go. Ons het dit gedoen". The subtitles are not in English – "Di ta go. Ons het dit gedoen". Finally one of the stenographers takes it upon herself to translate the statement – "we did it". In light of their statements, Claas and Rijkhart are sentenced to "be bound together with chains and executed by drowning in Table Bay".

[55] Translated in the film as: "we did it".



Figure 2.7: After a lengthy silence, Claas confesses with the words "di ta go".
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)

Although subtitles in a film are conventionally employed to aid the spectator's viewing experience, Greyson and Lewis use subtitles to disrupt their audiences' cinematic experience. The subtitles assist an English speaking audience in some instances, for example when the judge is speaking, but in other crucial moments the spectators are left to deduce the translation for themselves. This ensures that the spectator is always engaged in the translation process and has to use their own agency to come to conclusions for themselves about the ambiguity of the dialogue before they are shown how other characters in the film translate certain statements. For example, when Munster explains Rijkhart's reaction to his question by saying the words "wat raaktjaan dat?", the spectator must take up the position of

translator before the stenographers explain what the statement means. This allows the spectator to come to their own conclusion about the statement's connotations before the stenographers express their shock and confusion. Hence the film invites the spectator to develop their own opinion on the matter before they are exposed to the stenographers' reactions. In my view, this device also works reflexively to emphasise the tenuous way that archives and official records are formulated. Just as a spectator comes to their own conclusion about what the characters are saying, so too do the official court stenographers. The spectator may then come to understand that the act of transcription and translation that is part of formulating an archive might not be as objective or 'sterile' as it is made out to be and that opinion and emotion cannot be left out of the process[56]. Another example of this device in action may be found in the scene described above when Claas exclaims the words "di ta go" at the 'sodomy' trial. The subtitles are simply "di ta go". For a few seconds the spectator is afforded the opportunity to put themselves in a stenographer's position and attempt to translate not only what this means in English but also what this means for Claas's life. The spectator may contemplate the consequences that these words could potentially have for the

[56] See Foucault's lecture on *Subjectivity and Truth* (2000) for a discussion of "the way in which one inserts one's own liberty, one's own ends, one's own project in things themselves, the manner in which one puts them in perspective and uses them" (Stocker, 2014).

men involved. The final symbolic gesture of the scene, when one of the stenographers eventually translates the confession, – "we did it" – reveals the power dynamics at play in this moment. Claas is reduced to silence, he can say nothing more, however it is the stenographer who says the final words that seal Claas's future. Significantly, the judge does not rely on Claas's confession alone. He must have the records read back to him to finally believe that the words have been said. In this moment the film is commenting on how society depends on archival records as the ultimate evidence of 'truth'.

Due to the fact that an exploration of the politics of language practices is such an essential part of the film, it is also important to perform a close examination of Claas's final confession. Although Rijkhart's confession was made under duress, Claas chose to confess with the words "di ta go" even though he was about to be sent back to Robben Island. Doubtless the thought of returning to hard labor on the Island for the foreseeable future terrified Claas, I would venture to suggest that this was not the only reason why he 'confessed'. I take the view that he would not have chosen death over returning to the Island if there was not an underlying reason for his actions other than a fear of hard labor. Defined under colonial law as a Hottentot slave, Claas would have to perform this kind of work whether he was on the Island or not. Here, I would argue that aspects of Claas's confession could be compared to the act of 'coming out' - a practice that has been problematised

and critiqued in the literature surrounding it[57]. Gunkel (2010) explains how Foucault "pointed out that the sexuality apparatus is directly linked to the practice of confession which… is incorporated in the process of 'coming out'" (Gunkel, 2010: 133). On this point, Deborah Chirrey (2003) suggests that "coming out need not be interpreted only as a political action. It may also be theorised as a fundamental means by which an individual undertakes the process of constructing a sexual identity that is non-heterosexual" (Chirrey, 2003: 25). Gunkel also explains how "Sedgwick links the moment of 'speaking out' with 'having an identity' which relates back to the Ancient Greek where the right to speak in an assembly was directly linked to citizenship and citizenship rights" (133). However, I want to propose that Claas's confession might have the liberating advantages of the act of coming out in that he no longer has to hide his sexual behaviors, except there is one major difference. In the sequence just described, Claas does not 'come out' with a specific sexual identity. He resists categorising himself even in this moment of sheer desperation. The film wants to encode this ambiguous posture in the way that it frames this sequence. The spectator, therefore, witnesses a kind of 'coming

[57] See Yong Wang (2007) for an outline of current debates around 'coming out' as a political act. Additionally, Rachel Edidin (2015) makes a particularly interesting argument about the significance of Iceman in Marvel comic, X-men, coming out. Edidin complicates the act of 'coming out' by suggesting that Iceman's 'coming out' is "messy and painful and complicated" and signals sexual ambiguity rather than a static homosexual identity (Edidin, 2015).

out' that is a refusal to 'come out'. We see this ambiguity on the stage that is the courtroom. Claas says simply "di ta go" which is translated by the stenographers as "we did it". Ben-Asher (2005) suggests that at this point the film "addresses the problematic distinction between act and discourse" (Ben-Asher, 2005: 447). I would like to highlight the queerness of this pronouncement. Claas refers to sexual practices, never to a sexual identity. He avoids saying "we *are* sodomites". Rather, he confesses to the act saying "we did it" and refuses to elaborate. This leaves the job of embellishment, judgment, and finally, classification, up to the judge.

Ultimately Claas and Rijkhart are both sentenced to death but it is significant that they are tied together before they are made to jump to their deaths. Arseneault (2010a) poses interesting questions about this scene when asking "what does it mean that the film focuses on this moment in which Claas and Rijkhart's bodies are literally joined together under the sovereignty of the law?" (Arseneault, 2010a: 40). The fact that the men may only be legally joined in death might reflect the filmmakers' nihilistic outlook regarding the position of individuals who have chosen to be identified as 'queer' in contemporary South Africa. However, I would argue that while this is a valid reading, this scene has other implications for dissenting bodies in the twenty-first century. In chapter three, I will analyse this moment further in order to suggest that this final scene works to locate dissenting bodies and intimacies in the official

archives. In doing so, it brings into visibility and preserves images of these bodies within the national imaginary.

"I can't think of the name"

While the common phrase "lost in translation" hints at the slippage that might occur during the process of translating one phrase or word into another language, I would say that the spectator's agency is in fact *found* through the act of translation in *Proteus*. Furthermore, there is an underlying process of growing/increasing agency, based on the use of language, that slowly builds throughout the film which ends in the spectator being called upon to decide what Claas's words "di ta go" essentially mean. This process begins with the first scene in the film that includes dialogue, when the three court stenographers attempt to translate the word 'geneukt', hoping to label and classify Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy. Here, the spectator is introduced to how language may be used as a tool for an oppressive system of classification. This system is then ridiculed when Claas is afforded the empowering opportunity to name Niven's plant specimens using crude Nama words. Arseneault (2013) suggests that Claas's "intervention in the act of naming renders him an active figure in building South Africa's national identity" (Arseneault, 2013: 49). Claas simultaneously names the plant that will later become the official South African national flower while at the same time he ridicules the system of nomenclature that makes this act possible. It is

important to remember that Claas must first receive permission from Niven to name the plants – revealing the complex power dynamics that are always involved in the act of naming. After Claas mocks the system of nomenclature, the use of language, or lack thereof, enables the next level of agency in a scene where Claas and Rijkhart refuse to classify their own relationship. I would suggest that this important scene demonstrates one of the greatest levels of agency that may be acquired from within the prison walls. The two men are able to negotiate the terms of their relationship by refusing to name it. It is a messy negotiation; the men fumble for words; the scene is filled with pregnant pauses; and then they eventually concede that this is because there are simply no words to describe their intimacy. They ultimately resist using language to classify and legitimise their relationship. Finally, in the men's 'sodomy' trial, the spectator is fully engaged in the act of translation when Claas's confession is not translated into subtitles and is rather left for the spectator to decipher. It is now the spectator's opportunity to name, or to resist naming, the men's intimacy. They may choose to read Claas's confession, "di ta go", as an admission of a sexual act or as a confession of a sexual identity. The audience must grapple with this internal dialogue for approximately a minute before the men's fate is decided. Although the film allows a moment for the spectator to engage with the dialogue, I would argue that the question outlives the moment of narrative resolution. The process spans the length of the film and includes four clear steps – that is to say,

others naming Claas and Rijkhart's relationship, Claas naming Niven's specimens, Claas and Rijkhart attempting to name themselves and finally the spectator being called upon to name, or to resist naming, the men's intimacy.

Just as this process forms an underlying layer of the film, this chapter has demonstrated how language is used on multiple levels throughout the narrative – what is said, what is never said, what is heard, what is written and what is read. Each layer is important to narrative development and stresses the overall connection between language and sexuality that I have emphasised in the introduction to this chapter. Additionally, the way that each character uses, or is permitted to use, language is crucial for an examination of how Greyson and Lewis make their characters visible on screen. In keeping with the theme of agency in *Proteus*, the next chapter investigates how the film's aesthetic strategies work to present a network of looking relations on the Island that allow the main characters to claim what Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011a) terms the 'right to look'.

Chapter Three

"I've seen you!"

> A whole army of technicians took over from the executioner, the immediate anatomist of pain: warders, doctors, chaplains, psychiatrists, psychologists, educationalists...
>
> (Foucault, 1975: 11)

> The right to look is, then, the claim to a right to the real.
>
> (Mirzoeff, 2011a: 477)

> When our bodies are exhausted, when the earth is wet and red, then the smoke from our blood will come out and hide us...
>
> (*Proteus*, 2003)

"Jaktie, teach him the routine"

As the camera pans down to reveal a gruesome scene, the Robben Island prisoners stand in shock and watch as Nanseb, a fellow inmate, is flogged mercilessly for stealing eggs. The next morning the men are marched past Nanseb's bloody corpse on their way to work – his lifeless body still hangs from the flogging pole. As the men walk past in shock, an officer shouts out "Move yourselves… daar is niks om te sien nie[58]". But there most definitely is something to see and the gory image has been constructed by prison officials

[58] Translation: "There is nothing to see"

exactly for that purpose – to be seen – as a clear warning to anyone who is thinking of breaking prison rules.



Figure 3.1: The prisoners are told not to look as they are lead past Nanseb's tortured body.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)

I would argue that this chilling scene is reminiscent of Nicholas Mirzoeff's (2011a) metonym of a policeman telling the masses to, "Move on there is nothing to see here" in which he theorises the 'right to look' (2011a)[59]. Mirzoeff's formulation of *The Right To Look* (2011b) begins with a reflection on

[59] Mirzoeff notes that this metonym was inspired by Jacques Rancière's, *Ten Theses on Politics* (2001), originally published as *Dix thèses sur la politique* (1998). In Mirzoeff's metonym, the policeman stands in place of any authority that attempts to control the mass's 'right to look'.

the phrase "the ineluctable modality of the ineluctable visuality", which appears in Stephen Dedalus's monologue on the beach in James Joyce's third chapter of *Ulysses* (1922). This chapter is entitled *Proteus*. Here, Mirzoeff, influenced by both Jacques Rancière (2001; 2004) and Michel Foucault (1970; 1975), expands the frontiers of what has come to be called the study of visual culture. In a large and growing body of work, Mirzoeff employs the term 'visuality' to describe a set of visual and non-visual processes that have induced a form of authority which polices and regulates how society functions. This authority decides which types of bodies are deemed more important than others. Consequently, some individuals are allowed the 'right to look' and be seen while others are denied this right and essentially remain invisible. Visuality, therefore, shapes reality to the advantage of those in authority at the time. In this chapter, I will explore an aspect of the film that other literature about *Proteus* does not seem to address. I will argue that Mirzoeff's analysis lends itself to a discussion of how colonial authorities operate in *Proteus* to construct and naturalise a specific rendition of reality. Although he does not attribute agency to visuality itself, Mirzoeff does emphasise that it is about much more than merely 'seeing' and defines visuality as "a discursive practice for rendering and regulating the real that has material effects" for living bodies (Mirzoeff, 2011a: 476). This hypothesis will guide my investigation into the effects that visuality might have on the prisoners' bodies in the film. It is with this focus in mind that I will examine

the gruesome scene that I have described in this chapter's opening moments. In this sequence, Robben Island prisoner, Nanseb, referred to as Jaktie by the prison guards, is flogged to death. I will analyse this part of the film in contrast to the final scene in which Claas and Rijkhart's deaths are alluded to. The two scenes, I will show, work to different ends in that Nanseb's tortured body essentially becomes an example of visuality at work while Claas and Rijkhart manage to avoid the same fate through tactics that are tantamount to what Mirzoeff calls 'countervisuality' (Mirzoeff, 2011a). Therefore, Mirzoeff's work on the 'right to look' forms the theoretical armature for my examination of the complex system of looking relations that is produced through the colonial optics in *Proteus*.

"As they say, what's good for the motherland is good for the colony. Or rather vice versa"

After mapping how it operated on the early American slave plantations (1660 – 1865)[60], Mirzoeff explains that at its core visuality is driven by imperialist ideologies. He clarifies that 'visuality' is not a new word and provides a detailed account of the concept as it has functioned throughout history over

[60] Mirzoeff explains that Thomas Carlye first used the term 'visuality' in 1840, however at the time of the transatlantic slave trade, beginning in the mid 1600s, the process of visualisation that is central to 'visuality' was already at work on the American plantations.

three domains - what he terms the plantation complex (1660-1865), the imperial complex (1857-1947) and the military industrial complex (1945 – present) where he notes a certain intensification of the practices surrounding visuality. He explains the term 'complex' as follows:

> ...the production of a set of social organizations and processes that form a given complex, such as the plantation complex,…The resulting imbrication of mentality and organization produces a visualized deployment of bodies and a training of minds, organized to sustain physical segregation between rulers and ruled and mental compliance with those arrangements.
>
> (Mirzoeff, 2011a: 480)

The thread that runs through all three domains, he elaborates, is the practice of visualisation that those in authority perform in order to create a rendition of reality that is then naturalised through a range of visual and non-visual processes. These processes include the classification and segregation of certain groups of bodies that have been imagined to be expendable. To illustrate his argument, he offers the example of slaves during the transatlantic plantation complex, Africans during the British imperial complex and Afghan and Iraqi people in what he calls the military industrial complex[61]. It is the work of visuality, then, to efface these individuals' 'right to

[61] Mirzoeff (2011a) explains that the military industrial complex, identified as such by former American President Dwight Eisenhower, began in 1945 and spans until

look', which may essentially be understood as their right to confront authority by claiming political subjectivity and autonomy. Mirzoeff describes the transatlantic slave plantation on which a single 'overseer' ruled over thousands of slaves with the mere threat of surveillance. In this case, he explains that the only way for slaves to claim subjectivity was through 'looking back' at the overseer. Later in this chapter, I will highlight that what he refers to as the "plantation complex" may be compared to the authoritative procedures that are at play on Robben Island in *Proteus* (Mirzoeff, 2011a: 480). More importantly, I will show how the history which the film invokes is a history of slavery[62]. At stake is essentially "who we see and who we do not see; who is privileged within the regime of specularity [and] which aspects of the historical past actually have circulating visual representations and which do not" (Rogoff in Mirzoeff, 1998: 15). I have argued up until this point that what is at stake in *Proteus* is, partly, the visibility of certain kinds of bodies that have been marked as sexually and racially deviant by colonial authorities and whose narratives have consequently been excluded from the colonial archive. I propose that this politics of effacement has been realised through

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today, including the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He argues that with the advent of this complex there has been an intensification of the practices surrounding visuality which now work to effectively efface any trace of the 'seer' / 'overseer' through the use of digital surveillance machinery such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and satellite cameras.

[62] See Gabeba Baderoon (2004) and Pumla Gqola (2010).

the work of visuality and that *Proteus* allows a new rendition of history to be effected by, in a sense, giving Claas and Rijkhart the 'right to look'.

To theorise the abovementioned claim further, I will introduce Mirzoeff's formulation of 'countervisuality'. Visuality, Mirzoeff says, is far from being an unalterable fact. The individual's 'right to look' may disrupt the work of visuality to produce a countervisuality that allows one to imagine a different organisation of bodies, spaces and matter to those that are in authority. He explains that countervisuality is not only concerned with images, but rather, with re-assigning the 'right to look' to those who he calls 'the mobility' (Mirzoeff, 2011a: 475). 'The mobility' is derived from Thomas Carlyle's conceptualisation of the masses as a 'mob' "except where subject to leadership" (Mirzoeff, 2011a, 475). Mirzoeff describes how "in nineteenth century British politics, any part of the mob that claimed a place in politics was satirically deemed to be the mobility, a pun on nobility that also indicates that the people were out of place" (475). He goes on to show how, later in this period, the term was reclaimed to indicate "a modern form of multitude" (475). Therefore we may come to understand 'the mobility' as the masses of bodies that are deemed expendable by authorities. These masses must either 'bend the proverbial knee' to those few in power at the time, or face often fatal consequences. In *Proteus*, Claas, Rijkhart and the enslaved subjects index 'the mobility' in South African history.

I will show how the film both stages and disrupts the work of visuality by producing an instance of countervisuality on the Island. The tactics of countervisuality that Mirzoeff describes have destabilising/queering effects for dominant accounts of reality at a given time. For example, I will show how *Proteus*'s system of visual processes queer an imperial system of looking relations that is inscribed in the colonial archive and, in this respect, how they operate as a mode of countervisuality.

This dimension of *Proteus* has yet to be fully recognised by the existing literature about the film and therefore acts as a distinctive analytical focus of this dissertation. Richard Fung (2013) briefly explores how Niven's gaze functions in *Proteus* but quickly resorts to labeling it an "exoticizing gaze" that sexually objectifies Claas whilst working to relegate him to a sub-human species (Fung in Longfellow et. al., 2013: 112). I think that this assessment is too reductive because it ignores the nuanced sets of looking relations that are constructed in the film. When closely examined, it becomes evident that 'the look' / 'the gaze' functions as a form of countervisuality. In my view, what is at stake in the film is more complex than Fung suggests. Niven's gaze, as I will illustrate, operates as both a colonial marker of white male supremacy and a look that is complicated within Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy as well as positioned as an onlooker from outside their relationship. I would propose that Niven's position in the film is, therefore, ambiguous.

Therefore, I will move from an examination of language and dialogue in *Proteus*, which concerned me in the previous chapter, to analyse the scenes in the film in which dialogue is scant, if present at all, in order to focus on the complex networks of looking relations that exist on the Island. By turning to scenes in which dialogue does not take precedence over action, I suggest that the filmmakers further solidify their commentary on the unreliable nature of spoken (and written) language, which I began to illustrate in the previous chapter. In such scenes, the filmmakers establish a set of looking relations between Claas, Rijkhart and Niven that arguably operates more effectively than spoken dialogue as a communication technique under the strict limitations that colonial authorities imposed on all three men's bodies. It is worth quoting at some length how Mirzoeff describes the plantation complex because, as I have signalled, a connection may be drawn between the circumstances that Mirzoeff outlines in his description of the plantation complex and the severe conditions on Robben Island in *Proteus*.

> This archetype of the [literal] blindness of slavery was transformed by the formal practice of visualized surveillance in the plantation complex. The slave was a person so classified by law and natural history, relegated to the plantation, where she or he was under the surveillance of the overseer… The transatlantic slave traders did not physically blind the enslaved, knowing that their labor required visual engagement… However, the

> legal authority of slavery now policed slaves' imagination. For example, in the British colony of Jamaica the enslaved were forbidden even to "imagine the Death of any white Person"… after the Haitian revolution and the dramas of abolition and Reconstruction, "reckless eyeballing," a simple looking at a white person, especially a white woman or person in authority, was forbidden to those classified as "colored" under Jim Crow… This monitoring of the look was retained in the Abu Ghraib phase of the war in Iraq (2003–4), when detainees were forcefully told "don't eyeball me!".
>
> (Mirzoeff, 2011a: 481-483)

From this description we may see how the 'right to look' in terms of slavery has evolved over centuries. The segregation between "rulers and ruled" that Mirzoeff speaks about manifests as the divide between 'officer' and 'prisoner' on Robben Island (Mirzoeff, 2011a: 480). The prisoners' 'look' is policed to such a degree that the spectator must become highly attuned to reading and dissecting their glances, stares and squints to interpret what they might be communicating to each other. This form of ocular communication works to undermine the work of visuality on the Island. For example, in a scene set in Niven's makeshift garden, a handful of prisoners have been selected to collect plant specimens and maintain the florae with Niven and Lourens. Claas and Rijkhart are part of this small team and are in the very early stages of developing a relationship. The camera pans down to an aerial shot of the scene to reveal a group of men working on the garden. The next shot shows Rijkhart in the foreground with Claas not far behind him and in the

background Lourens and Niven can be seen working with the plants. A guard trails between the two men and the proximity between the prisoners, the guards and the botanist is now established. It is clearly very difficult for the prisoners to speak to one another freely as they are closely monitored. A somewhat melancholic violin plays softly off-screen. Rijkhart glances backwards towards Claas who seems to be occupied with his work. Without a look of confirmation in return, Rijkhart looks back down at the ground. A medium close up of Niven then shows the botanist staring at Claas and Rijkhart as they work. A reverse angle shot reveals Claas taking a quick glimpse of an unsuspecting Rijkhart as the men continue to dig in the garden. A seamless transition into a new scene shows Claas and Rijkhart pushing wheelbarrows up the hill towards the water tower. The off-screen violin continues to play, aiding in the smooth transition between scenes. Another aerial shot of the men shows that they are now alone. As Claas pours water from the tower into his empty barrel, a close up shot of Rijkhart's face shows him now glaring at Claas who simply looks down at the water pump. Though the men are forced to resort to communicating via 'looks' in the garden for fear of being caught by the guards, when they are alone at the water tower they choose not to speak. While the prison guards are not present at the water tower, Claas and Rijkhart continue to communicate using subtle glances as the image of the colonial authority as 'all-knowing and all-seeing' haunts them even in the physical absence of authority figures. Their bodies are

policed even when there is no sign of the prison guards in their vicinity.



Figure 3.2: Claas and Rijkhart make subtle eye contact while they work in Niven's garden.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)



Figure 3.3: Claas and Rijkhart continue to communicate through eye contact even when they are alone.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)

There is a strong connection here to Rijkhart's story about the drowning cell in the orphanage where he grew up. He tells Claas that even though the children never saw the drowning cell, the horrific torture stories that they were told meant that they never broke a rule in fear of being drowned as punishment. Again, this may be linked to Mirzoeff's explanation about how visuality functioned as a threat of surveillance rather than a physical blinding of the slaves during the plantation complex. This sequence also invites comparisons with Foucault's (1975) discussion of Jeremy Bentham's eighteenth century panopticon. Foucault explains that Bentham's panopticon is a building with a large inspection tower in its centre. From the tower it is possible for authorities to see into every cell in a prison complex. In this way, surveillance functions at optimum efficiency as prisoners are never sure if they are being watched or from where in the tower they are being observed. The same effect can be noted in the aforementioned scene in *Proteus* - prisoners are constantly faced with the threat of surveillance even when a guard or authority figure is present. For these reasons, the prisoners in *Proteus* are forced to resort to alternative means of communication. The subtlety with which the men communicate in scenes such as the one described above must be read with sensitivity to detail. The spectator is consequently called upon to watch closely and interpret what the men are trying to communicate as the film progresses. In this way, the spectator becomes implicated in establishing a countervisuality through detecting and deciphering the looking relations

between the prisoners. Just as the spectator is engaged in the act of translation throughout the film, they must also pay attention to how the characters look at each other and must decide what these looks mean.

While I have demonstrated how the prisoners on the Island are seen to have developed a system of ocular communication in order to evade surveillance, I would like to further illustrate how 'the look' is employed in a literal sense by Claas, Rijkhart and Niven and to what end this circuit of vision works. I would say that this choreography of glances marks the beginning of what I have referred to in this dissertation as an 'intimacy'. In order to substantiate this argument it is necessary to examine how Claas, Rijkhart and Niven develop a way of communicating with each other that employs 'the look' to resist the power structures that police their bodies even when they are alone with each other. Throughout the gardening and water tower scenes, there is no dialogue; only a chain of glances. Significantly, however, although Claas and Rijkhart glance at each other frequently during this scene, they never actually make eye contact. Likewise, Niven looks at the two men but they do not see him. Rijkhart attempts to look directly into Claas's eyes when they are alone at the water tower but Claas, the film suggests, is not yet ready to open himself up to an intimate relationship with Rijkhart. This is signalled when he averts his gaze towards the water barrel. However, Claas, the film tells us, hints that he might be interested in Rijkhart when he glances at him during

the gardening scene. It is not until later, when the prisoners are out fishing, that their glances are finally reciprocated. Claas looks over his shoulder to Rijkhart who is fishing from a nearby rock. Rijkhart looks up and their eyes meet. Rijkhart gives a half-hearted smile so as not to make his advances obvious to the other prisoners. Claas returns the gesture with a very slight grin. Again, this heavily loaded scene begins and ends without one word of dialogue being spoken. Over these three scenes, the spectator watches a budding relationship – a courting sequence of sorts. However, if the men communicate via eye contact, then in these early scenes the chain of communication has not yet been honed. The men are still learning how to look at each other and if looking at each other is even possible. Over time, a system of looking relations is slowly established that eventually amounts to Claas and Rijkhart's intimate relationship. Niven is implicated in this intimacy through the ambiguous positioning of his gaze. Niven's gaze is much less overtly flirtatious than what we observe between Claas and Rijkhart although his looks occasionally hint at a certain attentiveness to Claas. At one point, a clearly jealous Rijkhart tells Claas, "[Niven] wants to fuck you". Later, when Niven informs Claas that he will be leaving for Amsterdam, Claas pleads with Niven to take him with. When he refuses, Claas confronts him shouting "I know what you did in Amsterdam! I've seen the way you look at me, I know what it means" but Niven refuses to engage in the conversation and becomes violent with Claas. While moments like this

signal that Niven is possibly interested in Claas in a sexual way, the film rather positions him as a peeping tom during intimate scenes between Claas and Rijkhart. This position allows Niven to watch Claas and Rijkhart's budding intimacy as a captivated onlooker who can observe the men from a 'safe' distance. As I will demonstrate in due course, Niven's role as the peeping tom allows the spectator to witness Claas and Rijkhart's final moments before they are put to death through the eyes of an affected witness rather than through a violently objectifying gaze. The subversive effects of Niven's gaze are therefore important for a reading of the final scene and will be addressed later in this chapter. At this point, I would like to flag that much is invested in the visual communication that takes place between Claas and Rijkhart. What is at stake goes beyond the destabilising effects that this has on the way that the slave-like labourers on the Island are policed. I would suggest that the intimacy that begins as a glance between Claas and Rijkhart and ends as a sexual encounter/relationship between the men may also be regarded as a strategy for evading the surveillance that Mirzoeff so poignantly describes when he explains how visuality works within the plantation.

This mode of ocular communication between Claas, Rijkhart and Niven develops throughout the film and culminates during Claas and Rijkhart's trial scene. The scene is preceded by a sequence in which Claas dreams that he and

Niven are naked together in an imaginary drowning cell. This dream sequence is shot in a single take, which continuously rotates in a 360-degree movement. It is as if the men are trapped in a melting pot of sorts. In the next shot, the three men appear together again but this time Claas and Rijkhart face the judge for 'sodomy' charges and Niven is present as the sole witness to their trial. Claas glances desperately at Niven, who looks back up at him in sympathy. Niven's testimony could be Claas and Rijkhart's last hope of being absolved of the crime that they have been accused of but it is too late for this and a despondent Niven breaks eye contact with Claas to look down at his lap. A fearful Claas looks away from Niven to face the judge. After the initial verdict, Rijkhart and Claas look at each other in despair. Rijkhart will be put to death, while Claas will return to Robben Island. Claas turns from Rijkhart to Niven, frantically searching for guidance and support. Niven stares helplessly back into Claas's eyes. Claas looks back at Rijkhart and finally finding his answer, confesses with the words "di ta go"[63]. This is where I would argue that Claas takes the final and most effective step in deciding how he will ultimately become visible to the public and the archives in a literal and figurative sense. The fact that Claas eventually decides to confess means that he will die on his own terms. This is perhaps the only way that he is able to assert his own agency, given the circumstances in which he is

[63] Let me remind the reader that I have discussed the implications of the words that Claas uses for his confession in chapter two.

placed. As I have noted earlier, Arseneault (2013) proposes that "Claas's decision to use the vague pronoun "it" in "we did *it*" enables him to resist categorizing their relationship into lexicons of sodomy or "deviant" interracial sexuality employed by the prosecutors" and by the regulatory regimes that prescribe hetero/homonormativity (Arseneault, 2013: 51). In this way, Claas comes into visibility through the looking practices that the film so carefully stages – practices which, as I have argued, constitute a form of countervisuality.



Figure 3.4: Claas dreams that he is in a drowning cell with Niven and Rijkhart.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)



Figure 3.5: Claas glances at Rijkhart in desperation at their 'sodomy' trial.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)

"Hang me instead!"

By staging circuits of vision in certain scenes, *Proteus* enacts what Mirzoeff would call "conflict between visuality and countervisuality" by revealing how countervisuality resists the colonial system of visuality that structures life on the Island (Mirzoeff, 2011a: 485). On the concept of countervisuality, Mirzoeff emphasises that:

> The "realism" of countervisuality is the means by which one tries to make sense of the unreality created by visuality's authority while at the same time proposing a real alternative. It is by no means a simple or mimetic depiction of lived experience

> but one that depicts existing realities and counters them with a different realism.
>
> (Mirzoeff, 2011a: 485)

What Mirzoeff means is that countervisuality does not simply arise in opposition to visuality but is rather a means by which the work of visuality is exposed and then resisted by producing a different rendering of the 'real'. To illustrate how this framework functions, I will analyse two scenes, namely the scene in which Nanseb is flogged to death and the scene in which Claas and Rijkhart appear to jump to their deaths.

Recalling the scene which initiated discussion in this chapter, Nanseb, one of the prisoners on the Island, has been found guilty of stealing food. He is sentenced to be flogged – "fifteen strokes for stealing food, ten strokes for conspiracy, fifteen for insubordination and twenty for insulting an official". He begs to be hanged instead but the officers continue to flog him as the other prisoners gather round to watch. As night falls, the prisoners are sent to their sleeping quarters but the officers ensure that Nanseb's screams are heard through the night when they throw salt over his wounds. In the morning, the prisoners are made to march past Nanseb's severely wounded body on their way to work. He is still tied to the flogging pole and it is not clear if he is alive – although we find out later that he has passed away as a result of this torture. As the prisoners stare at Nanseb's body in shock, an officer shouts "March!....

Move yourselves… Daar is niks om te sien nie". This scene exemplifies how visuality functions to obscure the prisoners' 'right to look' on eighteenth century Robben Island. The officers may be read as signifiers and enforcers of the colonial regime that deploys a mode of visuality to exercise control over the prisoners – who Mirzoeff would call "the mobility". In this case, they have constructed the gruesome image of Nanseb's bloody body specifically for the prisoners to see. His tortured body, then, operates as a spectacle and effectively serves as a warning which is staged as if to say: 'this is what happens to those who disobey the prison rules'. Invoking the word 'spectacle' when describing Nanseb's torture brings to mind Foucault's analysis of torture in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) in which he examines "torture as a public spectacle" (Foucault, 1975: 7). Foucault argues that pre-modern[64] practices of "punishment-as-spectacle" relied on the presence of an audience to be 'successfully' carried out (Foucault, 1975: 9). In watching an execution, for example, Foucault demonstrates that the audience validated "the theatrical representation of pain" (Foucault, 1975: 14). Through the ritual of torture, the King's or Church's power was displayed and embedded onto the bodies of prisoners. The spectacle of the torture or execution stood as a way to publically restore the balance of power after a criminal threatened to overturn the system and to visibly display the violent

[64] In this context 'pre-modern' torture practices refers to public torture proceedings before the end of the eighteenth century.

consequences of such actions. Foucault describes the spectacular element of torture as follows:

> ...public torture and execution must be spectacular, it must be seen by all almost as its triumph. The very excess of the violence employed is one of the elements of its glory: the fact that the guilty man should moan and cry out under the blows is not a shameful side-effect, it is the very ceremonial of justice being expressed in all its force.
>
> (Foucault, 1975: 34)

Viewed from this perspective then, Nanseb's tortured body signifies the restoration of colonial power after he had essentially made an attempt to challenge their authority by stealing extra eggs. His body is publically tortured and then left outside as a reminder to the other prisoners on the Island of the consequences of delinquency. The fact that the prison guard shouts "move on..." as the inmates march past Nanseb's body signals an attempt to further obscure the prisoners' 'right to look' at the gruesome image of Nanseb's body even though the spectacle has been constructed with the purpose of being seen. The prisoners are allowed to watch the flogging process but are then prohibited from looking at Nanseb's dead body the next day. This encourages them to imagine what has become of their fellow inmate. The image of the colonial regime as an all-powerful authority whose wrath may only be imagined is therefore forged in the prisoners' minds as

they walk past Nanseb's body. The colonial visuality that prohibits the prisoners from looking at Nanseb's body is the same visuality that has kept tortured racially marked bodies invisible in the official archive. On the one hand, these instances of torture functioned as a public warning message about what colonial power was capable of and on the other, the suffering to which dissenting bodies were subjected was effaced in official archives. This has worked to obscure the public's 'right to look' at such issues of significance.

The aforementioned being said, I will emphasise that *Proteus* does not simply expose how visuality operates. The film also constitutes a practice of countervisuality. In contrast to the scene in which Nanseb is flogged to death, I would say that the final sequence in which Claas and Rijkhart are prepared for their deaths acts as a tactic that counters the visuality evident earlier in the film. This scene is preceded by a digitally sped up montage of extreme close up shots of closing Protea flowers. These shots are in fact a reverse of the montage that appears at the beginning of the film, which depicts Protea flowers opening. As I have previously demonstrated, these sequences bookend the film and therefore this moment near the end of *Proteus* signals a symbolic 'closing' or ending of a complex plot. Leading out of the Protea images, a horn sounds as we are shown an image of a ship at sea. We see Niven back on the Island watching the ship through a telescope. The next shot is of Claas and Rijkhart on the ship. The men are framed in a point of view

shot which is positioned as if it is the perspective from Niven's telescope. We see Claas and Rijkhart as they have been hooded, handcuffed and tied together with rope.



Figure 3.6: Extreme close up of a Protea plant closing.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)



Figure 3.7: Niven watches through a telescope as Claas and Rijkhart are drowned.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)



Figure 3.8: Claas and Rijkhart are hooded and handcuffed. The shot is framed by Niven's telescope.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)

It is significant that Claas and Rijkhart are hooded at the beginning of this scene. Foucault reflects on the introduction of a veil into the execution process:

> ...the last addition to penal death was a mourning veil. The condemned man was no longer to be seen. Only the reading of the sentence on the scaffold announced the crime - and that crime must be faceless. (The more monstrous a criminal was, the more he must be deprived of light: he must not see, or be seen...).
>
> (Foucault, 1975: 13-14)

In a similar vein, Mirzoeff's analysis explores the significance of the image of the hooded prisoner when he examines the photographs of torture that took place in the Abu Ghraib[65] prison in Iraq. Mirzoeff (2006) investigates the role of visuality in this event as well as the dissemination of photographs of torture after they were publically released on CBS's *60 minutes II* on 28 April 2004. On this topic, Mary Ann Tétreault (2006) explains that in the infamous Abu Ghraib photographs, "the prisoners are hooded, physically prevented from returning their captors' gaze; hooding literally makes the prisoners faceless, preventing guards and interrogators from seeing them as people" (Tétreault, 2006: 39). On the same topic, Joseph Pugliese (2007) explains that "in foreclosing the possibility for the victim of torture to return the gaze, a univocal relation of scopic power is preserved, whilst the victim is positioned as an emblematic figure of Orientalist capture" (Pugliese, 2007: 256 – 257). Tetreault and Pugliese are analysing the scopic regimes of power that are at stake in the ritualistic hooding or veiling of prisoners. Both argue that the effects of masking the prisoner's gaze are twofold. Firstly, by covering the

[65] In 2004, photographs of American soldiers violently torturing Iraqi prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison, west of Baghdad, came to light. Photographs included shots of American soldiers posing with naked prisoners who were hooded and made to stand or sit in sexually suggestive positions. Images included American soldiers smiling next to deceased prisoners' corpses after they had succumbed to unbearable torture. It was later revealed that Iraqi prisoners held at Abu Ghraib were tortured at the hands of American soldiers. The methods of torture used included rape, electric shocks and starvation. See Bruce (2015).

prisoner's face, they are immediately conceived of as 'less than human'. Therefore, the captor's task of torturing the prisoner 'becomes easier' as the prisoner is no longer associated with stereotypical human qualities such as emotion and intellect. Secondly, prohibiting the prisoner's sight simultaneously denies them their 'right to look' back at the captor. It blocks their ability to claim a position of subjectivity. In other words, by refusing them their 'right to look' back, visuality prevents the prisoner from being viewed as an autonomous subject. The captor is positioned as the all-seeing symbol of imperial rule and the prisoner is positioned as sub-human. It is therefore noteworthy that in the film, Claas and Rijkhart's hoods are removed before they are pushed overboard. In one of the film's most poetic frames, Claas and Rijkhart face each other one last time. By removing their hoods they are able to look at each other, the prison officials and their surroundings before their deaths. Therefore, I propose that the imperial system of looking relations is queered in this moment. This scene echoes an earlier one in the courtroom in which Claas and Niven stand before an official in a tableau reminiscent of a typical wedding scene. In their final moments, Claas and Rijkhart are physically bound together as the law indirectly recognises their intimate relationship and shared fate. They implicitly become visible as partners even though the only witness to this image is, again, Niven. While this scene operates as an instance that disrupts the colonial system of looking relations, it is also noteworthy that the work of visuality ensures that the men

on the Island will only hear of Claas and Rijkhart's violent deaths and will not be able to witness the courageous way that this scene plays out. The final moments of the scene in which the two men are about to jump into the sea are, once again, framed in a point of view shot from Niven's telescope. It is important to note that the spectator does not witness Claas and Rijkhart's deaths because the frame's focus is blurred just as the men are about to jump into the water. We are denied what might have been the most compelling moments of the film, which causes the spectator to reflect on the significance of this suspenseful ending.



Figure 3.9: Claas and Rijkhart look into each other's eyes in the courtroom after they are both sentenced to death.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)



Figure 3.10: Claas and Rijkhart's hoods are removed which allows them to look into each other's eyes before they face their deaths. (Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)

"I am the only witness"

The aforementioned sequence reflexively foregrounds the act, and politics, of looking and it therefore begs the question: what does it mean that the spectator views this scene through Niven's eyes? I would argue that although he is a colonial figure of authority, Niven does not hold the precisely same position as do the judge or the prison guards. Niven's gaze takes up a more ambiguous position because he is at once seen to be implicated in Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy as well as imagined to be outside of this intimacy as a bearer of what E. Ann Kaplan (1997) terms the 'imperial gaze'. Kaplan explains that "the imperial gaze reflects the assumption that the white western subject is central, much as the male gaze assumes the centrality of the

male subject" (Kaplan, 1997: 78). In theorising the imperial gaze, she explains that she is interested in investigating "what happens when white people look at non-whites?" (Kaplan, 1997: 4). She suggests that, like gendered looking relations, raced looking relations operate on an active/passive binary. Kaplan proposes that the imperial gaze has determined that white individuals are placed in a position of power in that they are able to see without necessarily being seen and that this form of the 'look' has worked to regulate black 'looks' since early slavery. With Kaplan's suggestion in mind it could be argued that Niven bears the imperial gaze in certain instances. As a Dutch botanist, Niven is placed in a position of considerable power on the Island. He is able to choose which prisoners he would like to use as labourers in his garden and 'laboratory' and consequently takes up the position as their master. He overtly exerts an imperial gaze when he labels Claas a 'Hottentot' and explains that, as a white male, he is intellectually and genetically superior to Claas. A less overt display of the imperial gaze at work is when Niven makes Claas pose for a portrait. Niven gazes at Claas's body as he sketches his portrait in an attempt to capture Claas's 'exotic charm' on paper. In my judgment, Niven's gaze is compromised because, as the film establishes earlier on, he is also implicated in Claas and Rijkhart's intimate relationship. As I have outlined previously, Niven witnesses them having sex on multiple occasions. In this way, the audience is aligned with Niven's point of view when watching these intimate moments. While it would be plausible to argue that Niven's position

as a colonial figure of authority might result in a violently objectifying gaze during Claas and Rijkhart's sex scenes, in my view, Niven's gaze does much more than exoticise Claas's body as Fung (2013) suggests. My sense is that although Niven's gaze is oftentimes saturated with desire, it does not work to objectify its subjects in these moments but rather suggests a yearning for the sexual freedom that Claas and Rijkhart experience on the Island. In this sense, I would propose that Niven does not so much desire Claas, (though the film does make clear that he is attracted to him in earlier scenes) as yearn for Claas's ability to physically express his sexual desires with Rijkhart. This is something that we know Niven is not able to do on the Island as he has done previously in Amsterdam. As he watches Claas and Rijkhart having sex on the Island, the spectator might be provoked to remember Rijkhart's 'memory/fantasy' sequence in which he recalls Niven having sex with a sailor at a tavern in Amsterdam. Though it is unclear whether Niven and Lourens are in fact sexually intimate, the spectator can, for the most part, assume that Niven's sexual activity has been under strict regulation on the Island. For these reasons, I would say that Niven finds a certain sense of liberation in watching Claas and Rijkhart engage in sexual activity. This is evidenced by his choice not to expose the men, although he has many chances to do so. Indeed Niven's silence is one of the reasons why Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy is allowed to develop over a number of years.

As I have previously discussed, although Claas and Niven are never sexually intimate, their relationship borders on a sexually charged intimacy in certain moments during the film. This being said, I should also underscore that in those earlier scenes, Niven, once again, occupies an ambiguous position as he embodies both the roles of colonial master as well as friend and companion to Claas. Niven could easily take advantage of Claas and force him into a sexual encounter as he is in a position of considerable power compared to the prisoner, however he never allows their relationship to develop in a sexual manner. Even when Claas begs Niven to take him back to Amsterdam as his personal slave, Niven refuses. This results in a subversive gaze that does not objectify Claas and Rijkhart during their most private moments. Rather, it engenders an ambiguously coded gaze structure that works in more than one direction at a time which, I would propose, queers the *implied* spectator. That is to say, it places the spectator in an ambiguous position in relation to Niven. The spectator is then encouraged to negotiate this position throughout the film. For example, Niven watches Claas and Rijkhart from a distance as they spend time together in the water tower discussing their past lives and their hopes for the future. He closely monitors the budding relationship from his vantage point as a Dutch botanist on the Island. As Claas and Rijkhart begin to become physically intimate, Niven approaches the deserted area near the

water tower where the men lie hand-in-hand. A sense of secrecy and danger becomes apparent as Claas pulls the wooden doors shut[66]. As Niven climbs onto a rock to peer into the room through a tiny air vent, Claas and Rijkhart are framed by what seems to be a handheld camera. This indicates that the scene of the naked Claas and Rijkhart becoming intimate is shot from a specific point of view. It is at this point when Niven becomes the spectators' agent of sight as they are positioned to watch this sex scene through the botanist's eyes. Niven watches the scene from a position of (colonial) power but rather than only working to objectify the men, the way in which this scene is structured produces an ambiguous gaze that queers the position that the film makes available to the spectator. In this way, Claas and Rijkhart's sexually intimate moments become visible to the spectator through what may on one hand be described as an imperial gaze. We may therefore hypothesise that the colonial gaze is at once staged and troubled through Niven's 'right to look'.

Niven's position as an agent of sight also comments on how the colonial legal system works. It is noteworthy that official archives have been manufactured as part of this system. Later on in the film when Claas and Rijkhart are

[66] See Straayer's (1996) discussion on "the relation between desire and danger" as a trope in gay male art and independent cinema (Straayer in Longfellow et. al., 2013: 332).

brought to trial, Niven becomes visible once again as the 'sole witness'. His position as a colonial authority allows him to sit in on the trial. The judge announces that "in the presence of the witnesses gathered in this court, we have heard and accepted full confessions", however the stenographers and the jury aside, Niven is the only witness present. This speaks to the work of visuality as we observe how only specific people are granted the right to become witnesses in the judicial process. This scene shows how the courtroom becomes visible as a 'sacred' space in which only specific members of the public are allowed to enter. In the historical period that *Proteus* represents, the courtroom becomes a space in which visuality may function with no or very little resistance or oversight from the public. Claas and Rijkhart are charged with 'sodomy' and then publically paraded in the town square after which they disappear into the courtroom, never to be seen in public again. In a similar vein to the scene in which Nanseb is killed, the moment when Claas and Rijkhart are paraded in front of the town serves as a warning to the public whose 'right to look' is obscured when they are not allowed into the courtroom to witness how the case plays out. When Claas and Rijkhart turn to leave the courtroom after the trial we are given an idea of how the space is constructed. The judge and jury sit on one side of the room; the stenographers and Niven are not far away from them. A hollow echo rings from the bare room. Sounds reverberate off the walls as the men's chains clang together. An eerie air of sanctity fills this space and the audience is

filled with dread as Claas and Rijkhart are escorted out of the room. Linda Mulcahy (2007) suggests that the courtroom is a contested space:

> Current ways of thinking about how and why the courtroom should be partitioned into zones, and movement within it restricted, have come about as a result of turf wars about who can legitimately participate in the legal arena and call the judiciary to account… the shape of a courtroom, the configuration of walls and barriers, the height of partitions within it, the positioning of tables, and even the choice of materials are crucial to a broader and more nuanced understanding of judgecraft... [Consequently] the role of the spectator has been marginalized within the court and led to the demise of the notion of 'public' trial… The distribution of bodies, walls, lights and gazes into particular arrangements reveals conceptualizations of the relationship between the spectator and the judicial system which are better characterized by the notions of segregation and surveillance than they are ideas about participatory justice.
>
> (Mulcahy, 2007: 383-392)

Mulcahy's insights shed light on the effects that the restrictive organisation of the courtroom has on public participation in the judicial system. In contrast to the town square, the courtroom becomes a 'sanctified' space in which the highest perceived authority may exercise its power with complete autonomy, away from the eyes of the public / body politic. In fact the contrast between the courtroom and the town square is exactly what allows the town square to function in the way that it does. Due to the fact that the public is not

permitted to see what occurs inside the courtroom, they gather in the town square to immerse themselves in any form of information that is made available to them. The square therefore becomes an ideal space for the authorities to communicate their version of reality to the public on a large scale. The fact that Niven is the only witness at Claas and Rijkhart's trial in *Proteus* is a direct commentary on the exclusive nature of the judicial system. Furthermore, I would propose that Niven is placed as a witness in scenes such as those described above to establish his position as 'an agent of sight' so that the spectator can see Claas and Rijkhart's final moments from a point of view that has been following their intimacy from the beginning of the film and that is compassionate to their circumstances.



Figure 3.11: Niven is the only witness present at Claas and Rijkhart's 'sodomy' trial.
(Image courtesy of Strand Releasing)

"I've seen the way you look at me. I know what it means"

In order to substantiate my claim that Niven's gaze allows the audience to view Claas and Rijkhart's deaths through the eyes of an affected observer, I return now to an analysis of the sequence with which the film concludes. The fact that Niven's gaze essentially structures the spectator's gaze at key moments in this scene, allows Claas and Rijkhart's deaths to be read differently to Nanseb's death, which ultimately became a warning to other prisoners. It is significant to note that death has become a characteristic trope in films that deal with gay and lesbian content. Looking at films from the 2010 *UK Gay and Lesbian Film Festival*, Dee Rudebeck (2010) notes that in gay cinema, "the gay character usually winds up dead". James Rawson (2013) has analysed recent Hollywood films such as *Behind the Candelabra* (Soderbergh, 2013), *Milk* (Van Sant, 2008), *The Hours* (Daldry, 2002), *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005), *Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2010), *A Single Man* (Ford, 2009), and *Monster* (Jenkins, 2003) and has noted that all of these films may be described in the same way - "a film about an lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender character who suffers and dies" (Rawson, 2013). Rawson goes on to explain that "whether it's suicide, Aids... being beaten to death, state execution, getting shot, or getting raped and then shot, LGBT characters are just not allowed the happy endings that their straight counterparts enjoy" (Rawson, 2013). It has often been hypothesised that the theme of death in many films that deal with gay and lesbian subject matter is due to "the relationship of

AIDS discourse to homosexual identity" (Potter, 2004: 147). For instance, in her assessment of Todd Haynes' film *Safe* (1995), Susan Potter (2004) explains that:

> The AIDS crisis forced queer filmmakers to consider carefully how to represent gay men in order to avoid a representational double bind: presenting the gay male body as diseased, and therefore susceptible to conservative, moralizing discourses, or presenting the gay male body as perfectly intact, anodyne, asexual, and therefore unthreatening.
>
> (Potter, 2004: 147)

I would not classify *Proteus* as gay cinema, for reasons which I have previously made clear. The film also does not overtly deal with the subject of AIDS. Having said this, the scene in which the film alludes to Claas and Rijkhart's deaths could easily have allowed the spectator to take up a voyeuristic point of view, such as the surveillance position of the masses who gather in the town square to glare and gawk at the 'town-criminals'. The filmmakers avoid constructing this type of voyeuristic position and offer spectators a different kind of viewing position. Although we may assume that this scene does ultimately end in their deaths, on the one hand the spectator is positioned to view the event through empathetic eyes and, on the other, they are not permitted to actually see the protagonists' dead bodies. There is an interesting tension here between what the audience is permitted to see and

what is not shown. The scene is reflexively structured to draw attention to this tension. Niven, once again the sole witness of the scene, acts as a looking glass through which the audience is able to witness an event that they would otherwise not have been able to watch. However, he loses focus in his telescope just as Claas and Rijkhart are about to jump into the water and, as a consequence, the spectator is denied the opportunity to see the last few seconds of what ultimately transpires. The spectator is therefore placed in a privileged position in that they are allowed to view the events leading up to Claas and Rijkhart's final moments but they are also denied access to what might have been the most climatic moment within the scene.

I would argue that this series of densely coded events achieves much more than just allowing the spectator to take up Niven's empathetic viewpoint in watching Claas and Rijkhart's deaths. Firstly, I have suggested that this aesthetic strategy prevents Claas and Rijkhart's bodies from becoming visible in death and as a consequence the film refuses to enact the 'dead gay character' trope in a straightforward way. Unlike Nanseb, Claas and Rijkhart never become visible as 'dead' and therefore do not share the same fate as Nanseb whose tortured body serves as a warning to other prisoners. Instead, the film's procedures in this sequence produce queering effects beyond the moment of narrative resolution. For example, as I have already indicated, the spectator's omnipotence is thrown into question when they are refused access

to the last moments of the film. In being denied by the camera, the spectator might be jolted into an awareness of their own positionality with regard to matters of visuality and censorship. This, in turn, reveals an attempt to queer a commonsense understanding of what spectatorship necessarily entails. I would also suggest that the questions about sexuality and the legitimacy of the archive that I have explored in previous chapters are embodied by the two protagonists and by leaving the final moment of the film open-ended, these questions are more likely to play on the spectator's mind long after the film ends. In this sense, one may essentially argue that the film's conclusion is not a conclusion at all. In this respect, the film resonates with aesthetic strategies that characterise New Iranian Cinema. *Proteus*'s final scene functions as what Shohini Chaudhuri and Howard Finn (2003) call an 'open image'. Chaudhuri and Finn describe the open image as "a certain type of ambiguous epiphanic image... [which has] the property of producing virtual after-images in the mind" (Chaudhuri and Finn, 2003: 38). To further illustrate this concept, they explain that "open images are a feature of film endings, closing scenes which try not to close down a narrative but rather open it out to the viewer's consideration, to 'live on' after the film itself has finished" (52). In this way, we may view *Proteus*'s ambiguous ending as a way to reflexively incorporate the spectator into the meaning making process. Additionally, the open image at the end of the film signals a permanent 'opening' of the official archive where questions about the power that the archive holds in the popular imaginary

might linger in the spectator's mind long after the pages of the Crimineele Regts Rolle have been closed. Richard Rushton (2012) further explains how the 'open image' and Deleuze's concept of the 'crystal image' are very similar in that they both involve and induce a certain degree of reflexivity. I would highlight that in *Proteus* this device illuminates the strategic mechanisms involved in visuality's work. The film's ending in *media res* may shock the spectator into awareness of their own 'right to look'. At this point, sound also plays an integral part in distanciating the spectator. Instead of lulling the audience into a false sense of reality, the sharp recurring sound of the ships' horn accosts the image, signalling that the audience's suspension of disbelief has been disrupted. I would argue that the awareness of one's own 'right to look' that this scene engenders exemplifies the effects of countervisuality at work.

"Just think... The Cape overrun by a tribe of titless Hottentots"

The crux of my argument thus far has been to illustrate what Kaplan synthesises so aptly: "Looking is power... Like everything in culture, looking relations are determined by history, tradition, power hierarchies, politics, economics" (Kaplan, 1997: 4). After I examine how countervisuality is constructed in *Proteus*, the meaning of the shot of Table Mountain from Robben Island at the beginning of the film comes into clearer focus. The shot is included in a carefully composed superimposition of a 1964 South African

coin and a text block foregrounding the year 1735, which I have described in chapter one. It is immediately apparent that the coin and text block are two symbols of great significance. The connotation of the shot from Robben Island, however, is only evident after we come to understand how countervisuality operates in the film to facilitate a dissenting view of history from a prisoner's point of view. The shot is notably not *of* Robben Island but *from* the Island. It may then be analysed as a point of view shot belonging to one of the prisoners. This invites the spectator to view history from an alternative position that is not aligned with those captured in archival records. The prisoners' 'right to look' combats visuality's imperial objectives, which efface dissenting views and 'deviant' behaviors from official accounts of reality. In doing so, *Proteus* essentially redefines "whose histories will count" (Mirzoeff, 2011a: 496). Therefore, through the devices analysed in this chapter, it is clear how the film enunciates a queer perspective on the colonial archive, which has been a major focus and through-line in this dissertation.

Conclusion

> This is, always has been, a cruel society, hardened by conflict, but it now has a human core; being human lies at its centre, and even if the centre cannot hold, it will not easily fold.
>
> (Nuttall, 2009: 151)

> We often forget that not all documents are destined to be archives.
>
> (Mbembe, 2002)

This dissertation draws parallels with Neville Hoad's (2007) work in that, like Hoad, I have refused to locate instances of 'African homosexualities' in colonial history. Rather, I have chosen to examine Claas and Rijkhart's relationship as an 'intimacy' in an attempt to escape the limitations that the western category 'homosexuality' enacts. I have located my investigation in the field of visual culture by considering how Mirzoeff's theorisation of visuality and countervisuality is employed in the film in order to allow a counter-history to be told from the prisoners' perspective. By performing a close reading of *Proteus*, through the lens of Critical Sexuality and South African Studies in conjunction with Queer Theory, it has become apparent that what is at stake in the film is much more than simply narrating an eighteenth century 'sodomy' trial record. On the contrary, Claas and Rijkhart's story brings to light complex issues about how archival records are positioned as 'irrefutable truths' and suggests that these renditions of history may in fact

be contested and re-formulated. As a result, the central question explored in this dissertation is how and to what effect the film queers the colonial archive. This question is important when one considers the many other unknown alternative histories that have been excluded from the archive through the work of visuality. I have described visuality as a process through which those in authority seek to shape reality to their advantage by controlling the masses' 'right to look'. Similarly, Mbembe (2002) reminds us that:

> It seems clear that the archive is primarily the product of a judgement, the result of the exercise of a specific power and authority, which involves placing certain documents in an archive at the same time as others are discarded. The archive, therefore, is fundamentally a matter of discrimination and of selection, which, in the end, results in the granting of a privileged status to certain written documents, and the refusal of that same status to others, thereby judged 'unarchivable'.
>
> (Mbembe, 2002: 20)

Mbembe is highlighting the power dynamics that are involved in formulating archives. He emphasises how some narratives are deemed suitable for archival purposes while others fall to the wayside. This has been the focus of my first chapter where I have explained how the archive has been formulated according to a linear temporal trajectory. As a result, I have argued that dissenting narratives have essentially 'disappeared through the cracks' at the hands of colonial authorities. Drawing on, but also deepening and extending

existing scholarship, I have discussed how *Proteus* critiques the way that certain bodies that have been sexually and racially marked have been elided from the archive. I have signalled that this has consequences for individuals living in the present who look to the archive for images of themselves. Arseneault (2013) proposes that *Proteus* "places a queer historical narrative within reach as an orientation device, facilitating different understandings of "culture" that might allow variously racialized bodies to live queerly" (Arseneault, 2013: 43). The film, therefore, provides an example of what an alternative version of history might look like. A history that brings into visibility bodies that have previously been absent from popular memory and the national imaginary. This alternative history imagines time as an entanglement of past, present and future, space as a fluid construct that may be appropriated and re-appropriated according to the changing needs of different communities, and language as slippery and malleable, even able to take a visual form when strictly constrained.

I would like to conclude by reflecting on Marc Epprecht's heartening assertion that "same-sex sexuality matters in Africa" (Epprecht, 2008: 167). He strongly emphasises that African scholars need to be focusing on historical and present same-sex intimacies (what he terms 'sexualities'), providing the following reasoning:

> Carefully unraveling some of the strands in the history of ideas about same-sex sexuality can help us move forward from an obvious impasse on very important issues, namely, sexual health, human rights, and the empowerment of women and youth... Indeed, if African sexuality is a misleading concept, it is also a deeply harmful concept. The harm is not just to those individuals whose existence is directly denied. It extends to the majority of African citizens and, I would argue, to people in the West as well... Same-sex sexuality matters (verb), therefore, in the sense that research into seemingly marginal issues can shed light on and hence contribute constructively to addressing the broader issues, struggles, and other same-sex sexuality matters (noun).
>
> (Epprecht, 2008: 167-170)

As Epprecht highlights, investigating historical accounts of same-sex African intimacies might lead to complex observations and understandings about broader discourses such as health and human rights. I have dealt with some of these areas in my dissertation such as commonsense notions of time, space and language, visuality and countervisuality, and how the film works in resistance to a homosexuality is 'unAfrican' discourse. But this also leads me to consider how my central questions might work with other vectors. For example, the film's narrative has lead me to focus solely on male-male intimacy, which has meant that same-sex female intimacy has fallen outside of the scope of this project. This is not to say that much work has not already been done in terms of examining narratives of same-sex female intimacies. Leila Rupp's *Sapphistries* (2009) provides a historiography of same-sex female

relationships over a remarkable period of time - what she terms "a short, accessible, synthetic global history of love between women from the beginning of time to the present" (Rupp, 2009: ix). Closer to home, as I have mentioned in my second chapter, Gunkel (2010) touches on a few instances of same-sex African female intimacies such as mummy-baby relationships in Lesotho, women marriages in Kenya and Nigeria and ancestral wives in South Africa. She makes explicit linkages between African female same-sex intimacies and the formulation of the nation-state along the lines of white Afrikaner heterosexuality. This, I propose, makes for an interesting avenue to be explored in future work around same-sex African intimacies and the construction of ideas around nationhood and citizenship in South Africa. Leading out of my analysis of how *Proteus* interrupts the increasingly widespread homosexuality is 'unAfrican' discourse, there is room for further investigation into how South African citizenship and concepts of nationhood are figured around the constructs of race, sex, gender, and sexuality. Hoad (2007) begins to address this area of focus but there is scope for further inquiry into this topic, especially from a queer standpoint[67].

[67] Whilst Epprecht (2008) notes that queer theory might offer a nuanced way to examine issues of same-sex African intimacies, he warns that "queer theory could unwittingly deny or submerge African perspectives within a falsely homogenizing or "homonormative" paradigm... As such, queer theory awaits a rigorously theorized indigenous term or terms grounded in African culture and contemporary struggles,

This brings me to another place where there is space for additional research - that is an examination of the construction of white Afrikaner heteromasculinity in *Proteus*. I have demonstrated how Niven is an ambiguous marker in the film. On the one hand he is seen to be implicit in Claas and Rijkhart's intimacy and on the other hand he is a marker of colonial authority. An extensive examination of both sides of this position fell beyond the scope and limits of this dissertation. Therefore, whilst I have gone into considerable detail into how Niven is seen to play a significant part in the men's intimacy, I have not necessarily provided an in depth analysis of his position as a white Dutch male on eighteenth century Robben Island and how this might resonate for the construction of contemporary Afrikaner masculinities. I have also not had the space to consider the positions that the officers and wardens hold on the Island. While a complex same-sex intimacy is allowed to flourish on the Island over decades under the wardens' watch, a certain type of heteromasculinity[68] is required from the Dutch authorities at the same time. It is also interesting to note how a sense of violence is inscribed

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sensitive to lessons learned through decades of Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial critiques of power and the sociology of science" (Epprecht, 2008: 171).

[68] In his Masters dissertation on *Reading Heteromasculinity and Orgasm in Basic Instinct 2* (2015), Dumisani Zungu turns to Robert Hanke's (1992) outline of the hierarchy of masculinities in society, which reinforces patriarchal norms. Hanke outlines the three-part hierarchy as including "hegemonic masculinity, conservative masculinity and subordinated masculinities" (Hanke, 1992: 190).

in the hyper-masculinity that is demanded from these men. For example, Sgt. Willer is reprimanded for not imposing a harsh enough punishment on Claas and Rijkhart, Lourens is violently hanged for 'sodomy' in Amsterdam, Claas's mother is murdered by Dutch men and her skin is used to make a purse, violence and brutality are common character traits of the wardens on the Island. These details could be viewed as comments on the construction of Afrikaner nationalism - said to begin in the late 19th century, continuing into the apartheid era and persisting today. Christi van der Westhuizen (2015) proposes that " the historical conditions of the construction of 'the Afrikaner' are the violences of colonialism and apartheid" (van der Westhuizen, 2015). This would be one of the areas in which the analysis presented in this dissertation could be extended. I also think that a project centred around an examination of *Proteus* and constructions of whiteness would demand a rigorous analysis of the implications that having two white male filmmakers might have for the film.

In the same vein, I have argued that the film's evocation of former South African President Mandela hints at the kind of heterosexual African male figure imagined as a 'hero' in the popular post-apartheid South African imaginary. This, I have suggested, works to exclude many other queer African masculinities from the national imaginary. Arseneault (2013) argues that "*Proteus*'s unearthing of an actual historical trial is significant in that the

film disrupts official narratives of South African history and redraws the lines of national identification that have privileged particularly hypermasculine modes of orientation, even in antiapartheid activism" (Arseneault, 2013: 41). I propose that the same theoretical framework that I have used to address issues around sexuality in *Proteus*, may be used to examine if and how ideas around heteronormative African masculinities are queered in the film.

An additional area of focus that I have not addressed at length in my dissertation, but that I believe would make for important research, is the topic of *Proteus* and HIV/AIDS. I have focused a great deal on how Claas and Rijkhart's unnamed intimacy has an impact on how we might negotiate identities in post-apartheid South Africa but Hoad (2007) prompts us to remember that the "HIV/AIDS pandemic's impact on the renegotiation of South African identity" is also a critical factor to consider (Hoad, 2007). In my third chapter, I have briefly explored the significance of 'death' in gay and lesbian cinema and how this is often linked to HIV/AIDS discourse. I have shown how *Proteus*'s ending in *media res* allows the film to escape presenting the protagonists' dead bodies to the audience. This, I have suggested, works against the mainstream cinematic convention of linking HIV/AIDS to homosexuality by affecting the death of homosexual or sexually deviant characters at the end of the film. This is not to say that *Proteus* does not indirectly deal with the issue of HIV/AIDS in Africa. Indeed, it might just as

easily be argued that although Claas and Rijkhart's deceased bodies are never shown, 'death' is most certainly a motif in *Proteus*. This might point to an underlying commentary on how present-day South Africans must face the reality of HIV/AIDS and death as a very real consequence, when negotiating their identities. Epprecht (2008) notes that "it is sobering to recall that at the time of writing, [2008], there are an estimated 27 million Africans with HIV or AIDS" (Epprecht, 2008: 168). He goes on to argue that

> Taking the lowest reasonable estimations of male-male transmission of HIV, and disregarding all the indirect effects of homophobia or male-male transmission of other sexually transmitted infections or issues arising from female-female sexual relationships, this still means the blind spot toward same-sex sexuality in Africa is costing a lot of lives. Even if only 2 percent of infections can in any way be attributed to [male-male sex], that translates into over a half a million people who are already sick and dying from an easily preventable disease.
>
> (Epprecht, 2008: 168)

An investigation into this "blind spot" and how it is indexed in *Proteus* is therefore important when considering what the film has to offer to twenty-first century South Africans - both those who are not HIV positive as well as those individuals and communities who are directly and indirectly affected by this pandemic.

In this brief reflection on my work and the above consideration of the limitations of my research and possibilities for future avenues of inquiry, it has become increasingly apparent that *Proteus* opens up numerous pathways of investigation into a wide array of important subjects. One of this dissertation's main objectives has been to attempt to answer the question that Arseneault (2013) poses in his article on *Proteus*, which is "what does the narrative bring to bear on South Africa's contemporary history?" (Arseneault, 2013: 53). The dissertation has specifically focused on the consequences that *Proteus* has for how we imagine and construct both archival records as well as identities, sexual or otherwise, in 21st century post-apartheid South Africa. As a result, I have hypothesised that a link exists between these two aspects of the film. I suggest that *Proteus* encourages its audience to conceive of identities in the same way as archival records - as fluid, multiple and historically, culturally and socially specific but not exclusive.

In this way, *Proteus* offers the spectator an opportunity to revisit the past and to contemplate how this history might inform present and future ways of being/living in South Africa. The filmmakers examine and reconstruct the past in *Proteus* using an array of strategic filmic devices, which I have described and illustrated in detail. My first chapter outlined how this history is imagined along the lines of what Halberstam (2005) terms a 'queer temporality', which troubles the notion that the past is necessarily unalterable

and for the large part inaccessible. This sense of time proposes that history may be re-imagined from different perspectives and, perhaps more importantly, that like the past, "the future remains open to change" (Rushton, 2012: 6). The film facilitates a re-vision of a history fraught with oppression and invisibility and allows Claas and Rijkhart's story to be told from a new perspective. However, in doing this, *Proteus* does not suggest that this is the only version, or the only legitimate version of the story. Rather it suggests that there are many renditions of history that have yet to be surfaced. They are not necessarily separate from one another. History, as *Proteus* imagines it, is therefore a myriad of versions of the same narrative which are inseparably entangled and endlessly changing in ever shifting, protean ways.

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