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

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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'.