

## **SUBMERGED REALITIES: SHARK DOCUMENTARIES AT DEPTH**

*Kathryn Ferguson*

There isn't any symbolism. The sea is the sea. The old man is an old man. The boy is a boy and the fish is a fish. The sharks are all sharks no better and no worse. All the symbolism that people say is shit. What goes beyond is what you see beyond when you know.

Ernest Hemingway (780)

Richard Fitzpatrick caught his first Epaulette shark from the Coral Sea when he was eleven years old. He took it home, put it in his aquarium, and then transported the whole thing to school for show and tell. Some twenty years later, he is still playing show and tell with sharks, but to a much larger audience. His work has been seen on, amongst others, the Discovery Channel, the National Geographic Channel, the ABC, the BBC, the CBC, and Japan's NHK and TBS. As both a marine scientist and a director of Digital Dimensions in Townsville Australia, Fitzpatrick has been a subject of several documentaries, has filming credits on a wide range of documentary, corporate, and mainstream film projects, and has, with his business partner Brett Shorthouse, created a number of award-winning nature documentaries. Fitzpatrick has been senior biologist at Manly Oceanworld and Maui Ocean Center, a biologist at the Great Barrier Reef Aquarium, and has spent well over eight thousand hours underwater, a goodly percentage of that time with sharks. His aquarium has grown into a fully-tended aquatic film studio which includes a sixty cubic-metre tank and four thousand-litre tanks. In both studying and filming sharks, he has navigated through the maze of corporate television expectations, and put them to the use of shark research and conservation.<sup>1</sup> Fitzpatrick's

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<sup>1</sup> The commercial success of Digital Dimensions has also allowed the company to offer stock footage to specific environmental protection groups.

argument is straightforward and pragmatic: “very little is known about the basic biology and ecology of tropical sharks” (Fitzpatrick). We need to know more about sharks’ biology, habits, and haunts before we can implement a successful and responsible preservation strategy for these animals and their environments. His assessment of commercial shark fishing is even more succinct: “shark fishing is just—it’s unsustainable” (Fitzpatrick in Brook). Putting premises into practice, Fitzpatrick and Digital Dimensions have forged a unique relationship with Undersea Explorer, an environmentally responsible charter diving operation, that combines scientific research, documentary production, and eco-tourism: a sustainable shark industry in Australia’s Coral Sea.

What I propose here is an historically contextualised examination of specific segments of the documentary work of Richard Fitzpatrick; Australia’s “Shark Tracker.” Fitzpatrick’s work is a particularly apt point of departure, as he has been both the cameraman and the subject of underwater documentary films. Admittedly, my article looks at only a tiny portion of Fitzpatrick’s documentary work, which is itself only a minute fraction of a vastly under-analysed genre, and thus must be considered as a discrete example rather than as representative of an entire sphere. My discussion stems from Bill Nichols’ notion of an ‘historical reality’ wherein documentary representations of any given reality are understood as ontologically, rather than simply analogically, linked to the ‘real world’ (“The Voice of Documentary”; *Representing Reality*). Understanding any documentary reality as an historically constituted reality—one which is defined by its own contemporaneous positioning, which has, in turn, been shaped by historical forces—is particularly significant to any understanding of underwater documentaries because of the ‘Otherness’ of the environment which is depicted.

In thinking of ‘the environment,’ we too often neglect the vast submerged eco-systems that make up a huge portion of our world. This may be due in part to the fact that we tend to translate ‘the environment’ to ‘our environment’ which is, for the most part, limited to land; we are terrestrial creatures. As Hemingway’s disgruntled comment, which serves as an epigraph to this article, suggests, there is a well-established tradition of reading an oceanic text, not as a descriptive narrative of a unique environment, but as a simplified simulacrum symbolic of our own *a priori* world. Historically, this way of thinking has been mirrored in documentary commentary and theory. For example, in his 1974 otherwise inclusive history of non-fiction films, Erik Barnouw dismissed underwater documentary with a quick nod to the fact that Jacques Cousteau chronicled “a strange world” (210).

I contend that it is precisely *because* of the ostensible ‘Otherness’ and ‘strangeness’ of the underwater environments—our alienation from them and our lack of understanding of them—that we need to recognise the historical bases and biases of our own prejudices and perceptions of that immense underwater bionetwork. As Fitzpatrick notes in *Richard Fitzpatrick and his Sharks*:

Everything is related together.... Biodiversity is very important. There are things out there and inter-relationships we just don’t know anything about at all, and we may not know about for generations. And if we destroy them now, we could be having a *huge* detrimental effect to the eco-system—the whole world.

Keeping in mind John Corner’s warning that theoretical work on documentaries “has often increasingly divorced itself from attention to specific practices and artefacts, setting up as a relatively autonomous discursive activity ‘above’ the level of both practice and practical criticism” (9), my article does not propose to institute a coherent or cohesive theory of underwater or shark documentary. Instead, I will put forward a brief examination of some of the specific elements of the historical reality that lies beyond and beneath a very small sampling of Fitzpatrick’s underwater documentary endeavours. My article is, somewhat ironically, grounded in the water.

Anchor, Bruce, and Chum, Pixar’s cartoon trio of twelve-stepping vegetarian sharks (2003), the internet’s favourite digitally merged photograph of a South African Great White leaping at an American military helicopter in San Francisco Bay (Danielson), and Damien Hirst’s pickled Australian Tiger shark (1991) all point towards the increasing lack of distinction between what is ‘real’ and what is ‘illusion,’ and do so specifically in the world of sharks. Indeed, in a world where eighty percent of shark species may be endangered, and humans still kill up to a hundred million sharks annually; where flavourless shark fin is an illicit gourmet status symbol while the cheapest choice on the menu at the local fish and chip shop is most likely to be flake; and the redolent 1975 soundtrack from *Jaws* still has cultural currency, it is arguable that such a line has been practically erased.<sup>2</sup> The uneasy oscillations of fear and fascination, fact and fiction, art and science that thrum through our contemporary impressions of sharks seem to portend a particularly thorny state of affairs confronting shark documentarists aiming to portray sharks and their underwater environments

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<sup>2</sup> *Jaws*’s lingering ability to contaminate our perceptions of sharks may go even further than imagined. In *Jaws* (1975) a Louisiana licence plate is removed from the belly of a Tiger shark. In *Deep Blue Sea* (1999) the exact same plate is removed from the teeth of a Tiger shark.

realistically. With a market increasingly demanding their nature and wildlife documentaries 'red in tooth and claw' with "higher tempo—much more action" (Landin 16), there seems little space for anything but spectacular scenes showing as much blood, gore, and carnage as possible. Peter Steinhart has labelled the exaggerated emphasis on death and violence in nature films as "eco-porn" ("Ecoporn") or "outdoor porn" ("Wildlife Films" 41), suggesting that 'the kill shot' in nature documentaries has become equivalent to 'the money shot' in pornography. The histrionic combination of blood and bubbles in rigidly segmented timeframes is increasingly being demanded and expected of underwater documentaries. Fitzpatrick sums up the filmic conundrum facing shark documentarists neatly: "we are probably responsible for people's [exaggerated] perceptions of sharks.... Yeah, documentary makers have been responsible for changing people's perceptions of these animals" but adds that if he were "to make a shark documentary about what sharks are doing normally, people would fall asleep" (Fitzpatrick in R. Williams).

The creation of a shark documentary is thus no simple process of relentlessly recording 'what sharks are doing normally': on the contrary, it would seem that the documentary, albeit perhaps reluctantly, reinscribes at least some portion of the exaggerated mythologies and fictions about what sharks are *not* doing normally. With this knowledge, one might glibly conclude that there is no real possibility of any inherent biological or ecological reality to be found in shark documentaries, and consequently the only pertinent questions remaining entail quantifying the value of such documentaries as highly stylised nautical fiction.<sup>3</sup> This line of reasoning, however, would not go far in explaining the long-standing dearth of critical or theoretical discussions, not only about shark documentaries specifically, but about underwater wildlife documentaries as a whole. Theorists have been debating the 'truth' content of documentaries for long enough that critics, such as Brian McIlroy, were confident in claiming over ten years ago that "it is now common to read that, theoretically speaking, documentary and narrative fiction film 'proper' are indistinguishable

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<sup>3</sup> For a history of the truth/fiction debate specifically in terms of wildlife documentary, Bousé offers an excellent recounting in his third chapter, "Science and Storytelling" (86-123). A valuable point to emerge in the truth/fiction debate regarding wildlife documentary is the issue of animal cruelty. George James brought this point to horrifying precedence in 1983 in his own animal documentary *Cruel Camera* on the CBC's *Fifth Estate*. The program showed that many 'natural' events in wildlife films had been ruthlessly staged. The most notorious was Disney's *White Wilderness* (1958) that passed off the intentional herding of pet lemmings off a cliff, several hundred kilometres south of their natural habitat, as natural behaviour. It is important to note here that *not all* animal documentarists practice, condone, or allow these practices.

as constructed realities” (288). Linda Williams, alternatively suggested in 1993, that “an overly simplified dichotomy between truth and fiction is at the root of our difficulty in thinking about the truth in documentary” (20). That same year, Brian Winston argued that, in order to survive, the documentary form needed to once and for all privilege art over science that that, in the end, it would be “necessary for the documentary, to negotiate and escape from the embrace of science” (56-57). Science and storytelling, it would seem, make each other uneasy. Or, as Julian Petley neatly summed it up in 1996: “Fact plus fiction equals friction” (11).

Bill Nichols has noted that although in recent years the linkage of documentary and fictional space within single texts has led to a questioning of the reality of documentary footage, he believes that in documentary films “some quality of the moment persists outside the grip of textual organization” (*Representing Reality* 231). If, as Susan Sontag contends, photographs not only “give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure” (9), it follows that underwater films about sharks might well be construed, especially by those preferring to remain top-side, as the ultimate in psychologically satisfying photography, as they facilitate the comfortable imaginative appropriation of ‘some quality of the moment’ from a largely unknown and particularly precarious space. However, even within the specialised realm of animal documentary, underwater criticism is conspicuous by its scarcity. In 1966, John Warham’s *The Technique of Wildlife Cinematography* justified the fact that it did not include marine animals in its topics by asserting that “those whose subjects are laboratory animals like fish...have available to them techniques and specialized gear generally quite inapplicable in the free world outside of the laboratory” (9). Perhaps that is understandable for an author writing during an era when Jacques Cousteau, Peter Parks, and Hans and Lotte Hass were still trailblazers in the field of openwater underwater film production, and the BBC2’s June 1968 programme on plankton had not yet “astounded viewers, most of whom had no idea that such life forms existed” (Parsons 253). However, some thirty-four years later it is less understandable when Derek Bousé admits in 2000 that, in his historical study of *Wildlife Films*, he had

not dealt with films about underwater creatures—cetaceans, crustaceans, fish, and so on. I see underwater films...operating by somewhat different codes and conventions because of the conditions under which they are made, the behaviour of underwater creatures themselves, and several other factors. (xiii)

Bousé does not explain what the ‘several other factors’ are, but does

go on to suggest that a book, such as his own, “can and should be written about films dealing with underwater life” (xiii). The elision of underwater documentary from critical discourse has meant that we have not thought, to any significant degree, about what exactly it means to film an underwater environment, about the documentary representation of that underwater environment itself, or how we have come to think what we do about that ‘Othered’ space and its inhabitants.

In 1997, Fitzpatrick financed a portion of his ongoing research on the White Tip Reef sharks at Osprey Reef by agreeing to be the subject of *Australie: Les Requins de la Grande Barrière* (1997) as a part of Canal Plus’ Dans la Nature series.<sup>4</sup> In 2002, he similarly agreed to be the subject of *Shark Tracker* (2002) and *Richard Fitzpatrick and his Sharks* (2002) at Raine Island to partially finance the first successful satellite tagging of a Tiger shark in Australian waters.<sup>5</sup> In 2003 he returned to tag three more Tiger sharks and be a part of *Raine Island: Nature’s Warzone* (2003). All of these documentaries highlight the fact that humans and documentary cameras are visitors to the reef rather than inhabitants. The mechanical sound of breathing through a regulator during underwater scenes, an emphasis on means and length of travel, the gear required to get into the water and stay there for a longer than a breath-length, and footage of humans on land all serve as reminders of the very basic differences between living *on* land and living *in* the sea. Fitzpatrick makes the point clear: “we must always remember that in here [the ocean] that’s the sharks’ home—that’s their home—its not ours, and we’re visitors to that.... It’s their world; we have to be respectful when we visit.” In 2004 it seems rather obvious that to represent the lives of sharks accurately and effectively one

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<sup>4</sup> Osprey Reef is an isolated seamount approximately 330 Kilometres northeast of Cairns in the Coral Sea. It is about 70 nautical miles outside of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority’s jurisdiction, and thus extremely vulnerable to raiding by floating fish processing plants. Fitzpatrick has been studying the White Tips at North Horn since 1995, and, to date, has captured and tagged twenty-eight of the thirty identified White Tips. With Andy Dunstan of Undersea Explorer, a database is maintained that monitors the growth and reproductive rate of the population. The data collected thus far clearly indicates that if the resident population of sharks were to be significantly depleted, the slow growth and reproductive rates of sharks would guarantee that the health of the entire reef would be detrimentally affected by the loss of its apex predators.

<sup>5</sup> Raine Island is a thirty-two hectare coral cay six hundred and twenty kilometres northwest of Cairns near the northern tip of Cape York. As the largest green turtle rookery in the world and the most significant tropical seabird nesting site, Raine Island is Australia’s most protected natural space and closed to all except a limited number of researchers. Each year, as thousands of turtles migrate to the island, Tiger sharks (usually solitary and elusive creatures) gather to prey on the turtles.

must get in the water; we must visit their world. There are between 465 and 480 species of sharks in the world, and although some live in fresh water and some live in salt water, they all live in water. For our contemporary sophisticated tastes, any documentary that presented sharks exclusively by looking down on them from the dry perspectives of land or deck would be laughable, and even a documentary shot exclusively in a large aquarium would be disappointing.

What is easy to forget is that, until the last half of the nineteenth century, almost all depictions of sea creatures were conventionally described from the perspective of the shore. Marine animals were usually portrayed either alive at the water's surface or dead and desiccating on land. In 1731, for example, J.J. Scheuchzer published his very successful 750-plate tome depicting a natural science perspective of the Biblical scenes wherein all aquatic animals are depicted on top of or out of the water. When John Singleton Copely painted *Watson and the Shark* in 1778 and showed only the parts of the shark that are above the water line, not only was he creating a dramatic representation of man's struggle against nature, he was also adhering to the 'natural' and naturalists' way of illustrating sharks. Even by 1852, Sir William Jardine's *Fishes of British Guiana* in The Naturalist's Library series has most of its fish posed unconvincingly on dry rocks at the water's edge. There was no underwater perspective to expect or demand from those who took it upon themselves to represent the submerged world. Most people did not know how to swim, and although Aristotle discusses the use of diving bells, it was not until 1535 that the first true diving bell was invented. Even though the first diving suit was tested in the Thames in February of 1715, it was not until 1825 that a workable, yet still dangerous, model for a breathing apparatus was designed.

It would not be until after the English aquarium craze of the 1850s that the 'natural' and 'correct' way of depicting marine life would shift from looking downwards on the subject to an edge-on perspective.<sup>6</sup> Arguably, the 'proper' way of depicting marine life was dependent more upon the lifting of the exorbitant British tax on glass in 1845 and the English middle-classes' obsession with domestic fashion, than it was on a scientifically driven campaign for biological accuracy. Before the English aquarium fad it was close to unthinkable to view marine life face to face, as the only natural perspective hitherto had been from the shore. Although some marine naturalists may well have known exactly what a shark would look like head on or from the side

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Jay Gould discusses this transition in "Seeing Eye to Eye, Through a Glass Clearly" (57-73)

in, say 1806, it simply was not done to illustrate a shark from any perspective but from above; the perspective from which most people would have seen marine life. With the introduction of the domestic aquarium in the last half of the century, everyone came to know that the 'correct' way of viewing sea creatures was up close and eye-to-eye. However, even by the summer of 1922, when E.J. Pratt wrote "The Shark," underwater perspectives of pelagic creatures, those which did not fit in the household tank, were still largely reserved for educated specialists and enthusiastic naturalists.<sup>7</sup> Pratt's 'common man' narrator watches a shark from a Newfoundland wharf on the east coast of Canada, describing only that which is above the surface; the way that sharks would be seen 'naturally':

He seemed to know the harbour,  
So leisurely he swam;  
His fin,  
Like a piece of sheet-iron,  
Three-cornered,  
And with knife-edge,  
Stirred not a bubble  
As it moved  
With its base-line on the water (1-9).

In 1958, all of that would change, at least in Britain, when Hans and Lotte Hass began their *Diving to Adventure* television series for the BBC. Ten years later, Jacques Cousteau was asked to make a television series on underwater life. For the next eight years, *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau* brought the underwater world to countless homes around the world—in colour. Although Cousteau's *The Silent World* (1956) and *World Without Sun* (1966) had both won Academy Awards for best documentary, it was with the paradigm shift, again domestic rather than scientific, of television programming that radically changed the 'correct' and 'common' way to depict sharks.<sup>8</sup> It was not until television brought the ocean into the homes of the western world in the last half of the twentieth century that audiences

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<sup>7</sup> There was a brief period from 1870-1890 where public aquariums were popular. However, as Lynn Barber points out, when experts began to garner better and more sophisticated research facilities, "the public aquaria...sank into mere vulgar amusement" and most public aquariums were re-fitted for other uses (124).

<sup>8</sup> In 1998 it would be admitted that a diver had faked the bends for *The Silent World*. Much more troubling, however, was the revelation that on the *Undersea World* documentaries, Cousteau crew had poured chlorine bleach into a tank containing an octopus to get the famous footage of an octopus climbing out of a tank onboard the *Calypso* and throwing itself back into the ocean. Even more problematic is the death of two sea lions who died because of the amount of time they had been kept out of the water in order to get sufficient footage for *Undersea World*.

generally came to expect to be able to see a shark portrayed in his or her own natural habitat—from a 360-degree perspective in colour.

Obviously, that radically truncated account elides a myriad of detail and a great deal of both naturalist and technological history. However, the argument I would like to draw from that brief recounting is that sharks have, for quite some time now, looked the same. What has changed is the human perspective of what is to be expected when we see sharks represented. Admittedly, something of an obvious pair of statements, but what is implicit in that pairing is a recognition, not only that strategies of sight and thinking arise within social contexts, but that our contemporary notions of what it means to document a shark accurately, truthfully, and even scientifically have a very brief pedigree in the world of natural history. Most of us have taken pleasure in watching the work of underwater documentarists, and it is, for many of us, the only glimpses we have had of submerged worlds beyond the city aquarium. Although we may not have watched a full documentary on the undersea world since grade school, when presented with an underwater documentary, we still fully expect our sharks and other aquatic animals to be presented to us in a certain way, and within their own marine environment.

Fitzpatrick, who has been fascinated with sharks for most of his thirty-four years, and is an articulate and able speaker, could very quickly, easily, and efficiently stand beside a whiteboard and explain to most members of a television audience pretty much all they could understand about shark biology and the importance of apex predators in maintaining a healthy reef ecosystem. He could probably even do it without a whiteboard. But that is not how we want or expect our environmental science to be served; we want real images of the real world showing us things we are not likely to see, ironically, outside of our own lounge rooms. We want our fish and marine scientists in the water, and we want our water bottled. As Susan Sontag points out, “reality has always been interpreted through the reports given by images, but it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century, with the invention of photography, that “the new age of non-belief strengthened the allegiance to images” to the extent that they became a supplement rather than a complement to the real (153). Sontag goes on to argue that, to some extent, we have begun to rely entirely upon images for our perceptions of reality, and that “the primitive notion of the efficacy of images presumes that images possess the qualities of real things, but our inclination is to attribute to real things the qualities of an image” (158). We have begun to interpret reality through the images presented to us by popular media, as much as we interpret those same images from our own experiential reality. This

is particularly true of the underwater environment, which is, for many of us, 'known' and 'experienced' exclusively through filmic mediums. Unfortunately, the highly fictionalised realms of movies such as *Jaws* and *Deep Blue Sea* have tended to eclipse, by simple popular sensationalism, any realistic appreciation of sharks as a natural, indeed necessary, part of a healthy reef ecosystem.

Today, images are premised on a certain epistemology and have an always already authority to dictate our expectations of reality. Our estimations of what is the 'correct' way of seeing marine life have been modified dramatically over the years, as has the experiential weight that we attribute to those images. Watching documentary footage in which Fitzpatrick tail ropes a 3.4 metre Tiger shark, measures her, attaches a tracking device to her dorsal fin, releases her, swims with her to make sure she is fine, and then sends her on her way with a hug and fond pat is quite a different experience than reading this relatively bland sentence. Indeed, what Fitzpatrick actually does with sharks is almost impossible to believe *until* we see the entire process laid out in front of us as a fully explicated and evidenced process of valuable environmental research. The process is not quite believable, intellectually intelligible, or environmentally relevant until we see the practical processes and scientific reasons for tagging a huge fish represented sequentially as part of a coherent whole. The documentary thus emerges as a highly effective way to communicate information that would otherwise be incredible—or, as Fitzpatrick would have it, put us to sleep. Indeed, our alienation from the underwater environment makes, not only the practical physical realities of Fitzpatrick's research almost beyond belief, but leaves much of the everyday moment to moment and mundane realities of the underwater world as inconceivable and unknown. Fish that change sexes, snails with harpoons, curious cod, amiable poisonous snakes, technicolour octopi, and sharks that like a bit of a scratch once they get to know you are just a sampling of those things which have to be seen to be believed; and we want to see them underwater, not from shore and *definitely* not dead and dehydrated on a biologist's bench.

When the *Endeavour's* naturalist, Joseph Banks, sailed the east coast of Australia with Captain Cook in 1770 he paid scant scientific attention to the one-hundred and twenty-three species of sharks that reside on the Great Barrier Reef. A journal entry from earlier in the journey suggests that may have been, at least in part, due to the fact that, at least for that expedition, sharks were more interesting as crew rations than biological subjects:

Up at 5 this morn to examine the shark who proves to be A blew Shark *Squalus glaucus*, while we were doing it 3 more came under the Stern

of which we soon caught 2 which were common grey Sharks *Squalus Carcharias*, on one of whom were some sucking fish *Echinus remora*. The seamen tell us that the blew shark is worst of all sharks to eat, indeed his smell is abominably strong so as we had two of the better sort he was hove overboard (Banks, *Endeavour Journal*).

Banks' interest in sharks as a comestible commodity,<sup>9</sup> rather than an intrinsic part of a fascinating ecosystem has been, thankfully, challenged by contemporary naturalists and scientists who are beginning, albeit slowly, to convince the western world that sharks are worth more alive than dead. This would seem particularly true of the Great Barrier Reef where tourism to the reef in 1998 was estimated to be worth over a billion dollars (*State of the GBR: Tourism*) whilst controlled commercial fishing on the reef in 1996 accounted for the relatively small amount of \$143,000,000 (*State of the GBR: Fisheries*). Dean Miller's ongoing research at James Cook University in Townsville has unequivocally convinced him that, in regard to the responsible and sustainable use of sharks at the Great Barrier Reef, "there is no better avenue than tourism" especially "when compared to extractive industries" (Miller). Live sharks can be re-visited and respected: dead sharks are, per pound, worth half as much as halibut—once.<sup>10</sup>

Many of Fitzpatrick's documentaries are filmed onboard the *Undersea Explorer*, which is a recognized leader in responsible Australian marine eco-tourism. The shark attract dives offered by Undersea Explorer are featured in several shark documentaries, and are, in Miller's estimation, "a great conservation tool for sharks"

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<sup>9</sup> Here, it should also be recalled here that Banks was, in part, the instigator of Australia's disastrous whaling and sealing industries that blunderingly exhausted their resources within fifty years. In 1806, his advice was:

After the seals have been once effectually disturbs their diminished quantities will not then afford sufficient encouragement to induce Americans or Frenchmen to interfere with our colonists; but there can be no doubt that at all times hereafter seals will be attainable in great quantities ... by stationary fishers, who know the course they take in their migrations, and can intercept them in their progress by nets and other contrivances. Thus, if we encourage our new settlers to disturb as speedily as possible every seal station they can discover, we shall receive from them an immense supply of skins and oil, in the first instance; shall prevent the interference of foreign nations in future in the sealing fishery; and secure ourselves a permanent fishery hereafter, because it will be carried out by means which none but stationary fisherman can provide. (Banks, "Remarks").

<sup>10</sup> In *Richard Fitzpatrick and his Sharks*, Brett Shorthouse notes that the same might be said of Fitzpatrick: "He's worth a lot more to me alive and in one piece than he is dead."

as they allow tourists to see firsthand, and television audiences to witness vicariously, that, despite the bad media spin, sharks are not “senseless eating machines with a taste for human flesh, but are amazing animals born from millions of years of evolution” (Miller). Sharks indubitably play a role in attracting tourist, especially diving tourist, dollars to the Great Barrier Reef, and thus are key players as well as primary stakeholders in the success of their own preservation. Digital Dimensions and Undersea Explorer are currently engaged in lobbying to have the perimeters of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park expanded to protect a larger area of the vulnerable world heritage site, and thus protect more of the isolated communities of sharks inhabiting the outer, and so far unprotected, reefs.

In his book *Age of Extremes*, Eric Hobsbawm highlights the difficulty of writing contemporary histories: “If the historian can make sense of this century,” he contends, “it is in large part because of watching and listening” (x). As air-breathing land animals, our own reality-based experience of the underwater world, and particularly the realm of sharks, may well be largely limited to watching and listening to the work of documentarists. Fitzpatrick’s work plays a pivotal role in what is an ongoing process of scientific evaluation and increasing public awareness of an oceanic environment that might otherwise remain a largely misunderstood and concomitantly neglected realm. The ‘otherness’ of the underwater world, renders it an environment more vulnerable than most to misrepresentation and exploitation. As Bill Nichols points out, documentary films have the ability to change the way we see our world, and sometimes to ‘correct’ the erroneous impressions given by popular sensationalism:

Documentary film has a kinship with those other nonfictional systems that together make up what we may call the discourses of sobriety. Science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, welfare—these systems assume they have instrumental power; they can and should alter the world itself, they can effect action and entail consequences (*Representing Reality* 3).

Documentary’s often unique way of directly connecting a reality to an expositional purpose has been brought to good use by Fitzpatrick and others like him.

Rather than expounding upon the ever-popular and unrealistic themes of ‘eco-porn,’ Fitzpatrick leans towards showing us how little we actually know about sharks, and how that ignorance is far more dangerous to us and to the welfare of reef eco-systems than any shark is likely ever to be. It would be very easy to sensationalise what Fitzpatrick does with sharks; there are lots of teeth, thrashing tails, and anxious moments. However, rather than demonstrating how

vulnerable humans are to sharks, we begin to see how vulnerable sharks, and concomitantly the ecologies of the underwater world, are to us. The three species with which Fitzpatrick's research is primarily concerned are unprotected and dangerously exposed not only to commercial over-fishing, sports fishing, and illegal finning, but also to death as discarded bycatch. In *Les Requins De La Grande Barrière*, Fitzpatrick loses Jesabel, a White Tip at Osprey reef. In *Richard Fitzpatrick and His Sharks* Jesabel is still missing, and Nicole, the Tiger shark that is tagged in the documentary, is post-scripted as being found suffocated in Barramundi fishing nets less than four months after she was tagged. A sad reminder of what animal is in peril underwater—it is not human, and it is not a metaphor.

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