

Das Ich(thys)

A Shark (dis)Orient-ed Onto-Economy/ A Biopolitics of Shark Ethnography

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Abstract

The meaning of sharkness in the West is coloured by many factors. Phenomenological commoditizations of varied sorts ranging from fiction films and TV, ecotourism and curated educational experiences such as aquariums provide locales of sedimentation of the significance that sharks have for human beings in Western society and also act as arenas for the production and reproduction of Western ideals. With respect to the latter, there is a significant degree of arbitrariness of the assemblages mobilized by and mobilizing Western teloi, having often very little to do with the well-being of sharks or even general consideration for the real substance of ideals such as education. The belief that sharks can simply float around in Western imagination according to infinite desire is extremely harmful generally and for sharks. If Western efforts at conservation of sharks are to prove effective, a strong appreciation of truth, equitability and respect must be established and sustained across all forms of media pertaining to sharks, including fiction, diplomacy and the very meaning of subjectivity.

Foreword

Shark Media can be defined in many of its aspects as a radical epistemic community. It is true that it is in large part defined by so-called “harmless entertainment,” and yet the overlap of supposedly educational elements, which often appear as simple embellishments, with projects of entertainment place its *modus operandi* within institutions of knowledge. Furthermore, as means of articulating and producing systems of power, shark metaphor and shark symbolism traceable throughout Western etymology and ontology carry sedimentations of colonial and imperialist projects as well as humanistic teleological norms rooted in the problems of dualism and self actualization. From the first iterations of my Plan of Study to its current form, I’ve been concerned with relationships between human institutional life, environment, epistemology and material approaches to political ecology. Western dualism and humanism are part and parcel with ideological relationships between humans and animals, and given that sharks have been invested with humanism of an exemplary sort rooted in a variety of identity practices leading all the way to participating in the furnishment of neoliberal worldviews as wards of metaphor, I found it appropriate to approach questions of the actual material engagements involved in the production of identity across various Shark Media with attention to the ways the bodies of sharks are positioned in existential constructs. In some cases sharks are conspicuously absent, in others they are distorted and in many overlapping ways they are materially exploited. In what follows you’ll find an effort to appropriate the figurative potential of Shark Media to critique various forms of that institution and to illustrate that its material translations focalized in Western culture are not harmless to sharks, with hope that sharks as real geopolitical figures might achieve some measure of clarity against the backdrop of capitalism and liberalist ideology.

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Introduction

From a young age I've had an aversion to Shark Week specials because the arbitrary voices of authority present in so many of the shows have always seemed to represent a secondary narrative unduly invested with importance. Learning from such programs, about sharks and about science, is a process that felt to me to be a learning "in spite of" the kinds of messages looming in the background, and it would make me feel particularly proud of myself for having learned something from an untrustworthy source—perhaps a roundabout incentive to watch. Taking on the significance of an identity practice, sharks have felt to me to be both vague and definite in a way that provoked me to wonder the self-serving question about what sharks "mean." It's as if a sort of language existed and sharks were the letters, and so when the tide would change and it would become time to conclude "sharks are animals, they don't *mean* anything, let them *be*" I'd find myself resisting. Shark metaphor is also heavily invested in identity practices. In fact, shark metaphor has a lot in common with forms of power that are highly esteemed in contemporary times, even if such is not always consciously the case. In a late capitalist culture, we're trained to want things and idealize things we don't really want at all, and the liquidity of ideals and desires, the power that accompanies that social dynamic make for very generalizable, disembodied and abstract schema. Sharks themselves are threatened by overfishing and by demand for shark fin soup, a delicacy associated with prestige and status that was frowned upon in China by the Mao rulership and whose increasing popularity signified the rising power of Chinese capital. These correlations do not, however, mean that Western-centric preferences and forms of capitalist ideology form ready hermeneutics for the politics of shark fins. Taking shark metaphor in the West—in the Nietzschean sense as carrying something over, and correspondingly metonymy making reference back to a progenitor of inspiration with a shaky association to sharks

themselves—the heavy investment of shark metaphor in identity practices of the West situate the meaning of sharks quite closely with the Western notion of Being itself, making this charge to let sharks *Be* a rather complex one whose universalism begs geopolitical questions.

The etymology of the English word "shark" and its corollaries connects it from opposite directions with both European norms of moral propriety and with colonial histories from long before Shark Week, and both of these elements exist together in discourses of Orientalism. My research of Western shark ethnography (or Anthropology) for this Major Portfolio is divided into three components. The first component: "The Inescapable Sharkness of Being" traces the etymological and ontological elements of Western sharkness through identity practices in the West that have reached certain important developments in educational or so-called educational media that are significantly Orientalist in a number of ways, and I present this as a significant challenge for shark activism and conservation advocacy. The second component: "Phenomenological and Material Productions and the Meaning of Shark Conservation and Education" places shark bodies within bio and geopolitical assemblages—determined by education and by aesthetic experiences of humans—that threaten and harm them according to the workings of capital and human desire. For this component I relate my own experiences as a whale shark ecotourist in Djibouti and as a visitor at the Ripley's Aquarium of Canada, and rely upon these experiences to help illustrate the environments according to certain forms of production of Western subjectivity and related ontology. My third component: "The SharksMart" is a detailed showcase of an art display I had set up in the HNES building at York, which centres upon watercolour paintings I produced throughout my research and writing, and provides probably more than anywhere else an example of self-writing or autobiography critically entangled in the forms of Western imperialism that are both worthy of sustained scrutiny and are actively harmful to sharks, offering a modest path toward engaging in shark conservation dialogues which are more democratic with respect to ideologies and material entanglements of sharks.

The Inescapable Sharkness of Being

Shark Metaphors, Shark Materialities, Shark Imaginaries

Shark! Shark!...

Sharks haunt the production of Western subjectivity. In both metaphors for human affairs and profusely absurd cultural menageries, their radical, paradoxical and metaphorical presences, associated with risk and cunning agency, sharks provide important contexts for understanding the realist sedimentations of media culture around them and their tropic ramifications in politics. Sharks have a multifaceted presence in humanistic and imperialistic imaginaries—for several reasons, as we shall see—and they offer ways of exploring intersectionality under otherwise unarrayed rubrics of imperialism. Rather than arguing that a critical, deconstructive and diffuse exploration of shark anthropology and ontology through a figurative and pseudo-material tableau (a “syncretic fic-ics”) is, for example, inherently ecofeminist or decolonial, I would like to explore the political significance of aesthetic communities more or less closely associated through “sharkness” as what Ludwig Wittgenstein would call *family resemblance* in order to assess the relationships that putatively disparate mechanics of identity and ontology production relating to sharks have with one another and to use this lens to trouble the sense that real sharks are readily recognizable and existentially threatened merely by the most easily identifiable factors. I hope to trouble confidence, in light of a ubiquity of eccentric imaginaries of sharks in Western culture, in the ideas that sharks-as-such are actually represented in discourses about them and, mostly indirectly, that the massively unsustainable exploitation of shark bodies can be addressed without turning critical attention toward the vestiges of certain Western and liberalist worldviews. Far from mere question begging caricature, shark culture is a painful reality of abjection entangled with the root of human being and the continuously offset costs of telluric futurities.

Sharks are above all animals, but in the Anglo-American West, it is not conclusive that even the word “shark” originally denoted these animals first and foremost, and they have continued to share synonymy with various forms of human depravity based on changing normativities of human moral and ontological dominion. The ordering of the latter, as well as sharks’ relationships to them, have had their respective clashes, transformations and mutual developments. Sylvia Wynter has charted the interrelated developments of the overrepresentation of the concept of Man within Truth/Power/Being/Freedom through earlier forms of adaptive knowledge and imaginative topologies relating to the cosmos as a map of right human development, then to the colonizing systems of Christian supernaturalism, and through to neo-Darwinian imaginaries of human self-writing which divide the world according to systems of derivative types and excepted immanent propensities underwritten by the power politics of white Europeans (2003), and the colonizing aspects of these ideals are accented in every recapitulation by shark metaphors as rhetorics of power, telos and dominion. Today, popular use of shark metaphor often serves as a diacritical gesture insinuating the politics, ontology and narratives of liberalism.

When a shark signifies an unseen or un(der)recognized threat, there are a myriad of risk imaginaries which can come to play and contribute to the formation of subjectivity according to a host of aesthetics. This aspect of imagining “sharks” applies both to instances of metaphor and speculative dimensions of sharing space with perceptually dangerous ocean animals. In a world determined (really and supposedly) so much by the workings of capital, a rational egoist and neoliberal subject is expected to recognize and, if need be, contend with the interests of other such agents. Likewise, a “shark” as an agent determined by a neoliberal intersubjective imaginary is a hazard: someone/something who/that has adaptive and/or poetically delimited talent/agency, is opportunistic/goal-oriented, appears to be (perhaps radically) emotionally/sensorially/teleologically other to one’s self, is radically aware, is cunning in general, is (perhaps through some form of self abnegation or mastery) broodingly and/or rapidly and/or

mechanistically deliberative and is (perhaps by virtue of these other characteristics) a paradoxical combination of deception, elusiveness and predictability. These characteristics form a narrow conceptual toolkit with which to conceive agency (including one's own political identity) within certain broadening (albeit unstable) domains. It is a common trope sometimes hyperbolically exaggerated in cult shark movies that a shark can “come out of nowhere” and thus represents a constant menace to the sense of safety and security people desire when swimming or wading waist-deep in water, but this also plays into the usefulness of the metaphor that “sharks” are deceptive or sly—or even represent an agency or propriety of deception/false belief within the realm of human Being/ontology/metaphysics of intersubjectivity—as if they themselves represented the lurking dangers of inadequate world-views and the machinations that result in ontological bruising from situations characterized by dotted relationships between artifactual schema and concrete life. In occupying space for the rhetorics of colonialism, as will be discussed below, sharks also afford special contexts for its contestation. In this sense, there are aspects of sharkdom (the imaginaries pertaining to “sharks” [sharks in quotes emphasizes “sharks, putatively” as well as “sharks, metaphorically”] or those assemblages less consciously tinged by the related tropes) which represent a call to appreciate, as Irigaray put it in her challenge of Nietzsche's will-to-power, the precarious and fleeting “liquid ground” of subjectivity (in Neimanis 2015, p.108/333) and are themselves—as is the dire threat that shark fishing and degrading ocean health pose to the survival of much of what is recognized as valuable and worth fighting for on Earth—challenges to understand the Anthropocene, human individualities and the material lives of sharks in better ways. Harkening back to “sharks themselves” is an environmental issue dealing with some very trodden humanistic entanglements and uniquely messy futurities.

In his documentary *Revolution*, shark activist and oceanographer Rob Stewart, who was posed a difficult and fatalistic question on the value of fostering love for and protection of sharks on an apparently utterly doomed ocean planet, was prompted to affirm that the threat to sharks is

a *human* problem and one of plain survival austerity, taking the opportunity at the time to make a more emphatic appeal to individual and collective humans' stakeholdership in the well-being of sharks (2012), an appeal thoroughly haunted by a demoralized but hopeful understanding of humanist agency which begs the meaning of Anthropocene or, to be more precise, Chthulucene subjectivity (Haraway 2016, p.30-57). I had the opportunity to see him speak a few years earlier in 2006 at a premier for his movie *Sharkwater*, a seminal exposé on shark finning and shark fin soup. I was struck in two important ways by the experience. First, I felt genuine shock and pain as well as a sense of moral revulsion and despair at the wasteful treatment of what for me are utterly amazing and admirable creatures. Second, I also felt that there was something beyond myself that was truly enticing to fight for, a politics which I felt would make me into a true eco-citizen involved in a more-than-human and material-bureaucratic struggle, something which would make me into a real person devoted to meaningful things, who appreciates the *actual* complexity of political environmental issues and who is able to act meaningfully in support of justifiable causes—in short, to *exist*. I think Rob recognized that quality in his quest and work, and he also recognized a certain justifiable near universalism to the impetus to fight for sharks and “be a hero.” I myself didn’t know what to do with this charge however. I didn’t know how to channel my new found energy into the sustained resolve to study law or conservation biology, nor did I know how to translate the feeling of moral impulse entangled in a mysterious underlying set of issues into straightforward actions or feel comfortable screaming bloody murder (though, indeed, that is what I was seeing) when I was confused as to what was actually causing the slaughter of millions of sharks. Could it be merely soup and the prestige that goes with it? What was this prestige anyway? Should I try to speak on behalf of sharks by saying “Shark finning and the consumption of shark fin soup is a wasteful practice, ‘lets’ [those of you who haven’t attained the clear vision of Scientific understanding and/or awareness of the innocent but definitive eco-memorandum co-signed by *sharks themselves*] get over it and move on”? I was troubled also by my own excitement and lack of imaginative temperance at the prospect of being chased by people

with guns and “dirty money,” of doing guerilla journalism, getting to the bottom of things and helping to bring incriminating and politically consequential truths to light. I was about 17 at the time and my desire to “do something real” was met with resistance within myself: those things might have been real for *Rob* but for me they could be nothing but paralyzing fantasy and, totally apparent to my dreamy nature even then, irrelevant aspiration.

Without implicating shark advocates of whatever stripe in political essentialisms and imperial identities, I ask through my own life and explorations of (post)human shark ethnography: What are *heroes* and what is this humanity *we are* which is truly worth saving? What must we give up in order to accomplish this? How much of who we think we are (or/and who I think I am) is cognate with the problem that demands accountability? Whatever at-hand readiness within me for the cultural demonization of Chinese culture in the fight for sharks was thwarted by something that had happened a short while earlier by a lucky strike of fate: *I* had eaten shark fin soup at a wedding whose invitation was extended to me by virtue of “face” (in a warmer sense of my understanding of that term) and so in watching *Sharkwater* in 2006 even the “mere” pedantic-diplomatic capacities for hatred within me began to stink with the seeping and canny pungence of septic hypocrisy. Watching *Sharkwater* I experienced an ebb of virtuousness/righteousness as the ideas of heroism and prestige/status (the latter: those menaces to shark livelihood) seemed to carry tendencies of codependence and even synonymy, even outside the context of concrete commitment to a moral or political cause. Were the aesthetics of heroism but evil commodities used to launder apathy and licence arrogance? I was reminded that validating my own pre-existing identity through some type of adventure was the very opposite of the newly fleshed mutual struggle for political life through which I believed sharks and myself to be bound. If for practical purposes this “Shark-Man” flavour of alliance, this shark figuration and will-to-power (an impulse geared toward myself as a real sort of political subject), were to prove adequate to its apparent politics then its general healthiness or lack thereof in other domains might otherwise be overlooked—but making this sort of distinction is itself likely naive. Part of

what I am asking now, then, is how much of the toolbox of identity practices present in such accessory and vehicular avatars of sharkdom as those constellated by the *Sharknado* series' Fin Shepard—who fights previously unimagined climate changes with a chainsaw, a variety of guns, MacGyverian contraptions and vehicles alongside his android wife, fighting the good fight of the Anthropocene by oh-so-brazenly restoring balance by means of human *geophysical agency* and frequently uttering: “let’s go kill some sharks” (Ferrante 2013)—shares common characteristics with real-world-applied intergenerational ontology concerning and otherwise flavoured by sharks? I hope to show that within the context of their cultural consumption and aspects of “their” political life, sharks are often figuratively implicated in practices of ontology and identity existing far beyond their material lives and actualities normally understood which, to begin with, says nothing for their future existence on earth but could highlight their anthropological political location as a site for revolutionary humanisms tied to their material lives. When it comes to problems of shark representation, I argue that it should not be merely a charge to “stop making sharks look so bad” and so I will basically avoid this and explore shark ontology in a way that draws attention to human subject-making. If in doing this, a feeling of perplexity begins to haunt the gaze directed toward sharks with a renewed appreciation for the fact that there are actually such things as sharks, then I will have achieved what I believe to be my task in that an ontology for the future of sharks might demand new living intensity. However, not without rhyme or reason (with due attention to the rhyme), much of the challenge has to do with how we approach some of the shamelessly humanist, radical subjectivist and, (as we will later see) even Orientalist elements of shark metaphor—the metaphysics and ontology of the false, the fictional, the chaotic, the untrue, the misguided, the ignorant, the absurd, power, depravity, propaganda, authority, moral backwardness, scientism, propriety, chrestomathy, the real and the subjective—which have become part of the territory of that very odd place I call sharkdom.

An Etymological Foray into Sharkness

Shark teeth are constitutively similar to mineral apatite, a form of calcium phosphate. Apatite stones derive their name from the Greek word απατείν (apatein) meaning "to deceive" because of the variety of colours in which they can be found, making them easy to mistake for other minerals. Like sharks themselves, apatite is commonly used in the industrial production of fertilizer.

The current common English word for an animal of the *Selachii* super-order of Elasmobranchs: the word "shark," carries with it a lot of sometimes unquestioned connotations. The ancient Greek terms ῥίνη (rhiny) and γαλέη (galey) both mean shark. The latter term actually means shark or *weasel*, and binomial and common names sometimes create further associations. The genus *Galecerdo*, which includes what is today commonly called the tiger shark (*Galeocardo Cuervi*), on account of the stripe patterning on its side, is derived from the words χερδός (cherdos) which means "cunning" and γαλέη (galey). The thresher shark (*Alopias vulpinus*), with its long tail, was called "vulpes" by the Romans and "alopex" by the Greeks, both of which mean fox. According to Lineaweaver and Backus, this fact is due to the animal being considered to be cunning. They quote Aristotle, who says: "the so-called fox-shark, when it finds it has swallowed the hook, tries to get rid of it...it runs up the fishing-line, and bites it off short..." (in Lineaweaver and Backus 1984, p.139) seemingly as a contextual example of the association, and they claim that it was only later that the analogy between these sharks' long tails and those of foxes became the main point of emphasis. When it comes to the origins of the word "shark" Lineaweaver and Backus write:

Scholars are reasonably certain that before the middle of the sixteenth century the words shark, shirk and sherk were synonymous and applied to human lowlife. The root word may have been Dutch, French or Italian but opinion...favours the German word schurk or schurke...whatever its antecedents, the word shark first appeared in written English in 1569 after the display, in London, of a creature in which seamen must have seen the worst of humankind. "Ther is," an observer made note, "no proper name for it (a

marveilous straunge Fishe) that I knowe, but that sertayne men of Captayne Hawkinse doth call it a sharke.” (Lineaweaver & Backus 1984, p.240,241).

The name "dogfish" (which now refers to sharks of the family *Squalidae*), as well as the term "sea dog" (Crawford 2008, p.153), used to refer generally to sharks (Eilperin 2011, p.25-26), and an old genus of sharks in which the great white (now *Carcharodon Carcharias*) was once included (Civard-Racinais 2012, p.42) was called by the name "*Squalus*." The adjective "squalid" is defined by the *Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (henceforth ODCE) to mean "very dirty and unpleasant" or "highly immoral or dishonest" (2006) and can relate to both places and actions. It is said to have arisen in the late 16th century from the Latin *squalidus*, which is itself derived from *squalere* meaning to "be rough or dirty" (Oxforddictionaries.com 2018).

With some of the “New World” colonial explorations to North America came new European interactions with new types of sharks that seem to have left a variety of impressions upon sailors, missionaries and other explorers (Civard-Racinais 2012, p.42). French clergyman Jean-Baptiste Labat and other explorers frequently described sharks—existing on and perhaps playing metonymic roles as representatives of the dangerous and heathen frontier of Christendom—as "demons," and some claim that the French word *requin* came from the association between great whites (also sometimes called "white death") and the highly religious and providential connotations of "requiem" (Civard-Racinais 2012, p.42 Castro 2002).

Castro notes that large sharks known to the Greeks are conspicuously absent from medieval bestiaries and that explorers began to use the Carib word *tiburón* and the Mayan word "xoc" to refer specifically to large sharks which they encountered on their voyages, and with which they were not previously familiar (Castro 2002). At one point, English sailors were known to use the word *tiburón* for large sharks which, like the pre-existing Spanish word *cazón* which denotes small sharks, is currently an official term used by Spanish speakers. This state of affairs seems to have changed around the time John Hawkins led a large fleet on a slaving expedition in 1567-1568 through Africa and was attacked by the Spanish navy after porting in Veracruz. The

theory goes that at some point afterwards his crew made contact with Mayans in the area and acquired from them their word for shark: *xoc*.¹ The very few who made it home had suffered starvation and disease, and members of Hawkins' crew were shortly after known to use the word "sharke" as per the example above of the thresher shark that they caught and displayed in London, which was an important moment in the word's popularization (ibid.). The actual meaning of the word *xoc* is described as fairly nuanced (Jones 1983). Although it is used as a reference to sharks (and perhaps other fish), it also means "to count" (Jones 1983; Castro 2002) and seems to refer to sharks' teeth especially. While speculations that the word shark was derived from the French word *arracher* (to tear) (Crawford 2008, p.98) or from the Anglo-Saxon *sceran* (to shear or cut) may be discredited (Castro 2002), there might be notional similarities between these words and *xoc* in light of the relationship to counting: perhaps the Mayan word relates to the sharp toothed mouth's role in tearing/dividing pieces from one another, something to do with keeping track of bodies visible in the water, the numerous units of teeth, or something else. It's worth noting that Mayan culture is very quantitative, and in contemporary metaphor in the West the association of "sharks" with hazards in risk imaginaries carry with them a certain impetus for "accounting" and sometimes this notion—at least superficially for ordinary people, or in more conscientious ways for more systematic risk managers—does in fact involve numbers, but often in very strange ways when used to assuage fear (e.g., *don't worry, you're more likely to die in the car on the way home...be killed by dogs, pigs, vending machines, or coconuts than die from a shark attack*).

The German word *schurke*, which generally means a rogue or villain, is the commonly accepted source of the English word "shirk" which has a slightly different meaning: a person who avoids their tasks and is a drain on society or is some kind of social parasite. According to Crawford, terms which derive from shirk: "sharp" and "sharpie" were originally those associated

¹ There was an isolated record of the word "shark" by Thomas Beckington, secretary to Henry VI, in 1442 A.D. referring specifically to a type of fish which casts doubt on the Hawkins theory (University of Michigan/ Middle English Dictionary 2014).

with swindling "pool sharps" and "card sharps" (sharp can mean "quick to take advantage, especially in a dishonest way" (ODCE 2006, p.833)) which later became "card sharks" etc., and he believes that although it is unlikely that "shirk" singularly became "shark" the animal, the transformation from shirk to shark certainly occurred along the parallel context (via sharp) and may coincide with a transformation of emphasis from parasite to predator in the human realm (today such shark terms sometimes have more of an emphasis on natural and/or adaptive talent/skill, sometimes in a positive light) though terms such as "loan shark" seem to have actually originated with the predatorial notion (Crawford 2008). As with squalid (of an action), shirk (noun or verb) represents something morally ungainly, and pestilent further yet, and the moralistic adversarialism felt by many fishermen for sharks as infestuous thieves qualifies a sense of continuity between the two terms. Sharks are known to eat large catches which haven't been pulled aboard (as well as sailors) and the novel *Moby Dick* portrays this violent enmity very vividly as a whaling party aboard the Pequod swings spades in close quarters at hungry sharks in order to secure a whale carcass for itself, putting some of its members in significant danger in the process (Crawford 2008, p.72-74). The fear and abjection of sharks is no doubt connected with the lack of conservation measures for them despite their important roles as predators in the current regime of ecological health in the world's oceans (Myers et al. 2007), an idea whose political clout is not unproblematically continuous with narrow forms of utilitarian rhetoric. Significant data related to sharks' population decline have been overlooked until somewhat recently (Eilperin 2011, p.75) and with widespread avarice toward sharks among Anglo-Western fishermen, sharks caught as bycatch (which usually die) have been significantly underreported, but it remains that broad ecological and/or economic concern is a primary mobilizing factor in responses to such antipathies both in terms of the political rhetoric used and the efforts of scientific research.

Shark Orientations and Phenomenologizing Activist Consumerism

You gotta crack a couple of eggs if you want to make an omelette.

-Crewman aboard Mark Quartiano's sport shark fishing boat in Miami, "consoling" emotionally distraught shark activist Madison Stewart after she filmed a hammerhead from below the surface as it struggled against a fisherman on the boat

The hammerhead was released back into the water, visibly injured and statistically fairly likely to soon after die. This quote was from Rob Stewart's documentary movie *Sharkwater: Extinction* and exemplifies a remarkable political tension present in the lives of many advocates. Mark Quartiano is a well known shark trophy fishing charter operator who claimed (at the time and in the context of the clip) not to believe that hammerhead sharks are endangered—calling the idea “shark week propaganda” (Stewart 2018). In that film he claimed a certain moral neutrality to what he does, saying that if something becomes a trophy and there's money associated with it, then him providing a service scarcely involves his own personal responsibility to anyone but his own customers, who are themselves acting freely and totally of their own accord. Shark advocates sometimes take part in documentations of politically problematic practices such as these in order to contribute to their own political goals but end up in difficult situations which prescribe them with the need to be “neutral” in face of enemy political orientations. Something particularly disturbing about the attempted consolation is that the crewman seems to sympathize with Madison's politics-as-such and so we are made to see this moment as an assemblage of neoliberal agency where the shark and anyone involved in its politics are subsumed, through a “we're all in this together” attitude which sharks are supposed to accommodate. Stewart was determined to understand Quartiano himself—this representative personality and textbook enemy—more personally than one might expect. Remarkably, she eventually befriended him, convinced him to thenceforth tag the majority of sharks he catches, and took his children swimming with sharks in hopes of altering the legacy of his business and family pending his retirement, not without backlash from other shark advocates (M. Stewart 2018).

On the road to Gaansbai

In August of 2014, I was in South Africa on a three week voluntourism trip with a group of people around my age from Canada, the U.S, South Africa and Australia. Having spent two weeks in Cints West working with a Xhosa village and a local school, building infrastructure and learning about local culture, we took a road trip westward along the coast toward Cape Town. The last stop on the way was Gansbaai, a major global site for white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*) tourism. The white shark tourism industry in Gansbaai was pioneered by Kim McLean, who wanted to change the gory sorts of imaginations people had of sharks by instilling a love for and fascination with them through up-close experiences. This campaign followed her witnessing a young Afrikaner diligently and routinely leaving a reeled-in shark on the ground to die as he fished, an act that seemed to result from some sort of unquestioned indoctrination (Eilperin 2011, p.245-246). Since McLean's founding of Shark Lady Adventures in 1991, several tour operators have established themselves. One of the most successful is Marine Dynamics whose founders recognized that sharks are an important economic asset to the municipality, which is otherwise lacking in industry, and are important in and of themselves: worthy of protection through education as well as other means. Shark conservation is understandably important for the success of tour operators working out of Gaansbai, and most of them make their conservation goals, as well as those related to education, clear on their websites. Though education about shark behaviour is important for promoting respect for sharks, much of what attracts visitors to shark cage diving and shark watching, and is in a sense an important aspect of marketing, is a rather limited preconception of sharks as fiercely efficient predators which associates them with rah-rah Darwinian imaginaries and bucket-list prestige.² Much of this excitement has to do with the way that sharks' apparent dangerousness and “perfect design” connotes the *realness* or *extremeness* of interactions with them. This embellishment of an

² Guy Fieri in "Guy Fieri's Feeding Frenzy" after a dive with sharks said that he was scratching the experience off of his bucket list when, in fact, it "wasn't even on the bucket list" (2018).

association can make it very hard to describe or situate oneself within such catered experiences as cage-dives when lifestyle connotations of these experiences may share commodity value with things as radically different, for example, as skydiving.³ Guests and operators alike count on the fact that the experience will somehow "change" those who participate. Patrons may hope that such an experience will create a primal or even mystical understanding of their place in the world that will alter the course of their lives from then onward, rendering them able to *really live* (without fear, for example), while operators may hope to instill some kind of respect and enthusiasm for healthy ocean life. Neither of these is necessarily the case.⁴

I had signed up to go "shark cage diving" and pondered to myself as we approached Gaansbai the existential and moral significance of such an experience. I wondered, if I were to resist sensationalizing or reifying the cage-dive for myself and try to truly immerse myself in it so that I might later take up a critical perspective, how some of the unavoidably exciting elements of it would play out for me. I also wondered about authenticity and ways that I might navigate natural/cultural binaries in an attempt to ask meaningful questions about the extent to which it would be possible for me to learn from and even interact with an animal so different from me in

³ Again, Guy Fieri in "Guy Fieri's Feeding Frenzy" says of an experience interacting with sharks that it was way better than skydiving. The propositional value of skydiving seemed to be latent in his utterance, making it likely that either that he had been talking with someone about skydiving immediately before or that the relation between skydiving and what he was doing was otherwise utterly obvious and given (ibid.).

⁴ Marine Dynamics, in collaboration with the Dyer Island Conservation Trust, holds significant information sessions following their excursions where they attempt to raise money for certain conservation efforts, including their tagging and monitoring programs. It was during one of these sessions that I heard some of the most clear and radical charges for shark conservation: tagging sharks and abstaining from eating shark fin soup is utterly insufficient, only the banning of long-line fishing, shark fishing and tuna fishing will make the difference in what might already be a lost cause considering previous population losses and human non-compliance with laws and conventions, and it is up to a global community of activists to petition their governments to make strong commitments in order for others to be able to follow, something that must be taken up first and foremost in countries with the resources and forms of democracy that expedite such nevertheless difficult campaigns. These sessions are not held for all shark cage charter companies however, and this one was optional, but it is nevertheless where people have to go if they want the video-footage of their experience. For all these well-meaning bait-and-hook tactics, customers may simply not follow these political charges through.

such strange circumstances beyond the elements of indulgent vanity in an enterprise in which the individual sharks might often play highly substitutable roles for some thrill-seekers.⁵

How much would it really matter to the shark that there would be people behind those bars anyway? In what regard, considering but also in a sense notwithstanding the material fact that the presence of smelly food in the water was contingent upon our presence, would we be there for sharks when we would be partially encapsulated a certain distance away—and the food itself was likely to be much more interesting? Would the smell and electrical/chemical signature of my "fear" response convey the sense of greeting, wonder and appreciation in all their rawness that I intended? Would the metal of the cage itself produce a distorting and confusing effect on sharks' senses? Might the sharks, though compelled, be afraid to be there?

One of the most persistent questions was about what right I had to be taking part in this activity to begin with. It's arguable, and the argument is often made (Eilperin 2011, p.249; Jøn Aich 2015), that cage-diving is a way to promote the wellbeing of sharks by provoking admiration for them.⁶ It's not an uncommon point of view that the actual practice of cage-diving be considered in a problematic light by its proponents, yet be considered beneficial for sharks overall. This problematizing stance was also taken up by the Dyer Island Conservation Trust, partnered with our operators at Marine Dynamics. How should I have understood my own justifications, then, when I was not negatively disposed (or so I considered myself to be) toward sharks to begin with, or ignorant of the dire threats to their continued existence? Did I really need to see *firsthand* that, indeed, sharks *are*? If I opted out, would I be able to sustain important personal conflicts about my own entanglements with these animals (assuming that it would even be of consequence) or would they dissipate without me being able to illustrate them in any meaningful way and somehow act? It seemed necessary for me to do something to help sharks because of the fact that I would even *think* of doing something like a cage-dive for its own sake, and, being disoriented by the otherworldliness of shark-human entanglements with which I was somehow implicated on

⁵ Papson notes sharks' roles as "stock signifiers" (1992).

⁶ The first white shark cage-dive was in Australia in 1976, a year after the release of the movie *Jaws*, and was for entertainment purposes (Eilperin 2011, p.244).

an alarming, grand and diffuse scale, it seemed that doing a cage dive was an inevitable if not necessary choice.

On the way into town, one of our group leaders mentioned "Submarine."

What are you talking about?

It's a story people tell about a big shark to get tourists excited...it's called Submarine because it's so big it looks like a submarine.

A big shark!

It's supposedly got a big scar on its one eye...there are sightings in the newspapers and tabloids sometimes.

Shortly before I arrived in South Africa, and, unbeknownst to me at the time, The Discovery Channel ran a special called *Shark of Darkness: Wrath of Submarine* full of references to this calculating, lurking monster with an appetite for human flesh. Get tourists excited? Of course the overwhelming majority of tourists don't want to be maimed, die, or witness such things happening to those around them. So what is the point of getting *excited* in this way? I was interested to see how a shark swims and also how it bites, these things are fascinating to me because they just might give me a glimpse of the shark's person, how it feels to swim without bones and to bite with its mouth, not to mention "taste" electric fields. I couldn't imagine to myself why I would want to crowd out these difficult-to-achieve imaginations with uncommitted, haphazard, and morally questionable aesthetic fictions to get me "excited" when it's hard enough to be accountable to/for the political and practical significance of my own feelings and imaginations to begin with. There's something of a thrill to the attempt at keeping up with "reality" or "beings" in the world with Goethean diligence, in terms worthy of them, in terms that attempt to accommodate their particular and phenomenologically inexhaustible "truths" and so it can be doubly tragic when such baseline imaginaries of doing phenomenology (as I had as my ideal) give blanket licence/validity to the *attempt* to "keep up" with "nature" by way of dwelling

upon and conjecture of one's own failure to understand the reasons for there being people who don't even seem to try, or are otherwise unconcerned with real things and authenticity. I wished to really appreciate the experience, to elucidate it to myself explicitly. That I *knew*. As it happens, I would be setting myself apart from others as a sort of process philosopher in an alien world at the same time that I was trying to situate myself materially.

Heideggerian humanism is characterized by a self-reflective striving for authenticity amidst an apparent dividedness or two-foldness of being that has the propensity to be used in analogy with various "others."⁷ Two problems with it are: 1) the fact that there are ways that this mapping of existential striving across perceivable boundaries represents ontologies that table that very striving for authenticity; and 2) the way that idiosyncrasies of a given striving might be set aside as characteristic/representative, providing undue licence or necessity to certain process-based approaches to ontology. While considering my role as a consumer in the shark cage dive, I found it to be relatively clear that a common justification for this practice from the point of view of the operators—that people attracted to the experience may very well have a poor and distorted understanding of sharks coming into the experience and would more often than not leave with an attitude more conducive (perhaps even if fetishized) to advocacy for sharks' well-being, whatever that entails for them personally—might not apply to me. I didn't think of myself as hating sharks, I didn't think killing sharks was a justified hobby or ecologically responsible thing to do and I didn't think that sharks were particularly interested in eating me. For all this critical rumination, it was also the problematic of my supposed distinctness from historically embedded cultural environments (*Umwelten* coloured by bucket-listing; shark finning as itself likely entangled with ideas about shark awesomeness) which I felt to be somehow lexicographically akin to sharkdom as a consumer enterprise, making the whole thing feel vehicular, unreal and, even at that level of disenchantment, prescribed—a strange thought as it seemed problematic to equate sharkness with

⁷ For critiques of Heidegger's humanism see Agamben (2003) and Turner (in McWhorter and Stenstad ed. 2009), for example.

narratives of individualism generally. *In what way can one justifiably correlate sharkness with the projects of liberalism a such?*

Cage-Diving with Marine Dynamics

After hearing some brief comments about Submarine, and recognizing the sense of danger that people seem to entertain so fantastically around cage-diving, I was beginning to realize just how abject shark bodies, ontologies and even the concrete specific instances of encounters with them were in this assemblage of experiencing, this phenomenological commodity. The Marine Dynamics boat *The Slashfin* is state of the art and holds 40 passengers plus crew (Sharkwatchsa.com). We had a full boat on our trip. Our group (those of us traveling together who elected to do this excursion) went into the cage (the cage sitting against the back of the boat half below the surface with handlebars for us to push ourselves down below the surface of the water with) while there were two sharks, reportedly 3 and 3.5 metres long, in the general vicinity of the boat. The water was chummed and some of the crew were tossing a large bait-tow, a tuna-head, into the water and dragging it around with a pulley. I tried to make an image in my mind of what the shark would look like so that I could give some representational substance to my preconceptions, with which I could compare how it would actually look to me. One thing that left a strong impression on my mind when I finally did see one were the white spotted markings on the bottom part of the shark. I found that this comparison between my imaginations and what I was seeing of the shark helped me to appreciate how mysterious it was for me, how not unexpectedly different it was from those images I had conjured up beforehand, with the help of stylizations from fiction movies and documentaries. The shark was, in a relieving way...just an animal...and no less because of that fact. We only got fleeting glimpses and I continuously found that my sense of inadequate familiarity with this animal was intensified and situated by the self-conscious larkish feeling I had for the after-image of the white underbelly of the shark, somewhat akin to that for the belly of a comfy dog. It felt like there was something beyond satisfaction, an

"ontological thrill" (Hernstein-Smith in Fawcett 2000), an ongoing precarity, a moment-by-moment imaginative deferral to something more, overflowing with the larkish image, with this doggy window of difference, this scar (Sandilands 1999).⁸ And then it appeared to be over. I had spent some time in short glimpses admiring the shark swim and I had been constantly re-evaluating my imaginations of what that particular white shark I saw looked like. We got out of the cage and onto the boat proper, though there were still more sharks swimming around and other turns in the cage to be taken.

We had eaten dinner with the marine dynamics volunteer staff at their compound the night before: we mingled, shared drinks, stories and played pool and ping-pong. Marine Dynamics' volunteer program involves various forms of data collection such as tagging large animals and setting up sensors, rehabilitating injured animals and helping with tour operation. Many of the volunteers had aspirations of conservation and educational work beyond the context of Marine Dynamics. On the boat, after having changed out of our wetsuits, some of the crew told us that there were spots left with another group. There was apparently now a four metre shark tailing and circling the boat, and there was an opportunity to get back into the water with this now much bigger shark. Those of us who weren't seasick got back into the cage once again; one of my group members had a GoPro and it captured parts of the experience. We got a much better view this time around. The bait-tow was being used not only to attract the shark to the boat, but also to steer it in certain directions in order for us to get good views from the cage. It was here that we got something of a glimpse of the shark's "predation behaviour." I had a hard time telling what it was that I saw, seeing a swirl of movement and trying to have a feeling for what was going on: it all happened quite fast. Being a bit overly excited and looking from above the water, every undulating wave was potentially a fin, every crash of water potentially the effect of some particular cause. Below the surface I tried very hard to be able to really *see* what was going on. I didn't want to miss opportunities to notice, and I really wanted to be able to pay attention and take

⁸ To quote Agamben, the lark: "this symbol...of the purest amorous impulse" (2012, p.75).

in what was happening as best as possible. I was trying to narrate to myself what was happening in order to be more attuned to my senses. I noticed that I was taking pleasure in seeing the clouds of yellowtail snapper swimming around, playing roles as parts of the aura of this phenomenon called a shark which we were seeking to experience in much of its multifaceted intensity, myself with a self-styled stoic striving for a meaningful critical and more or less postmodern cultural perspective which I endeavoured to keep to. The shark went in front of the cage some meters away, from our left to our right, and it bit at the bait-tow. The very sight of this biting was intensively accompanied by a series of thoughts and images.

That is a shark. In the course of its life it sometimes bites things, sometimes to eat them, sometimes to feel them, sometimes to speak to them, and perhaps each with a degree of initial indistinctness. The way that a shark moves, the shape of its body and its desires are all integrally related, also with its environments. The organization of this particular shark with its rows of teeth is the result of generations of habits and actions over countless years in a variety of environments similar in some ways and very different in others to this particular instance. This particular shark, however, has likely encountered phenomena like these before and probably has some sense of familiarity with them, alien as they may remain to be. I have desires, and something similar in some way to my sense of desire is active in the shark's biting of the bait-tow, which has fishy water-smells and pieces of fish somewhat different from those living ones swimming around and to other dead ones which themselves don't move around in this strange way. I may be able to consider my own desire in a linear and abstract sense, as pre-existing and fulfilled/not fulfilled in a given instance, but as far as my conception of the shark's desire is concerned, I feel compelled in this particular case to limit myself to my own sense of thrownness within the movements/sensations of biting with desire and deliberation forming a sort of unity. Okay, I suppose what I'm looking at sort of qualifies as "predation behaviour." Strange that it feels so utterly different from my own moralistic imaginaries of villainy, themselves seemingly bound up as they are with a relative harmony of feeling that itself may be bound up with my own physical health. I wonder if the shark feels "moral" well-being when eating a fish or a seal, well that's not what I'm wondering exactly but I don't think a seal or a fish would feel the "opposite."

I really felt as if I had gained some sort of appreciation for the shark's selfhood in that moment. I didn't feel as if I had leapt out from my own material political entanglements in order to situate the shark within them; my sense of being in the cage had already been permeated with the pretty vivid but still glossy notion, again much like a set of images, which felt like a query.

I have a body, it is in this cage. I am a consumer, not definitively distinguishable from an opportunistic generic bucket-lister. I paid money. Money is...people grow food and sell it and some don't but do other things, people trade. People drive these boats with these cages because people give them money that they got from...surplus... People want to see these animals, people like these animals (do they?), people admire these animals (do they?), people idealize these animals (many, probably) a boat is...(combustion, water, floating, steering mechanism) a cage is (the shark body doesn't fit, not from there not from there), what's an experience? I have eyes, light reflecting, absorbing, refracting off bodies...I have a body, it is in this cage. These sharks swim around in water, they don't usually stay still, they are almost always moving and almost always out of sight so how strange it is that in my mind they can seem so still and contained until woken up from a box and pivot of human-centered perspectives lying in wait to be "transcended" through actual experiences with them. Here I am in a box and it's the shark that really moves... Maybe this is the only way for me to safely come close to a white shark, maybe this can be meaningful. Why might people do this? Is it commodity capitalism, representative accountability, a desire for eco-consciousness?

For whatever reason—as if I had needed to get a better view, or that I had needed to "get it"—I now considered myself to be in a better position to be concerned for this shark's and others' well-being through contact with its "person": a phenomenon whose potentially essentialist mechanics I don't regard as negating its usefulness outright.

Near the end of the "dive" the shark ended up directly facing the cage with the bait immediately between us and it. The operators occasionally pull the bait out of the water to entice the sharks to breach or to fix a bad angle and place it back into the water in a better spot. The shark got firm hold of the bait and it wasn't clear if the operators had intended on lifting the tow out of the water beforehand. It went toward the cage, directly toward me in fact, likely with its eyes closed, and collided nearly head-on with the cage, maybe a foot or two from me, before

swimming aside to our left [Image 1, see page 25].⁹ I could not help myself from pushing my back against the back of the cage, having abundant faith in the strength of the cage but also recognizing that the opening in the cage left a bit of room for the shark to stick its face inside (a little less room than I ended up allowing for), which made it clear to me that beyond my unverified feeling of “connection” there was something intensely “exciting” about what was happening that I couldn’t simply get rid of by being cynical of the experience’s pretext. Even if my sense of excitation—my increased heart rate and recognition of my body’s objecthood—was made problematically to flow into or be graspable through a commodity mould and reification process that I was attempting to dampen, I couldn’t deny it. When I lifted myself back above the surface, everyone in the cage was cheering wildly and I was conscious of the fact that it had not even occurred to me in that moment to be yelling and cheering. Silly me I thought, failing at that moment to realize my cynicism in my public despite being inwardly stricken (and not really by fear or amoral elation). Here were these people cheering, and yes we had all just had what can be called an “exciting experience” (my heart was racing after all, and though I was suppressing the feeling of novelty so as to be present to my experience I was well aware that colliding with a shark was *a thing*). I wondered if I could meet my friends and co-experiencers on a different level. There was an element of group love for one another and I wondered if this might actually be the overall tone being expressed: *I’ll never forget this moment spent with all of you, you are the ones here with me when this thing happened* etc. It took me a moment to realize that we were living in totally different worlds and I lacked the ability to feel emotionally engaged (which I otherwise continuously had been throughout my trip) with my friends. Maybe I lacked the moral-aesthetic sophistication (or sophistry) to hold such radical tensions in stable juxtaposition and to live in multiple worlds at once while remaining unscathed (or some rhetorically performative paradox there as). I was unable to perform my cynicism, which up until that collision had merely

⁹ White sharks are known to close their eyes when they are biting down on prey as a protection measure (see Civard-Racinais 2012, p.32), rendering them momentarily unable to see.

been a hermeneutic device, something “inward,” but had ended up transforming into something totally different, something which now felt wedded to the material facts. Should I not be able to say “wow, that was really something” and “I love and respect these animals” simultaneously and be sincere in the process? Effectively, such an ideal is highly problematic insofar as the now (and again) battering of the shark was anything but material (it sure seemed to be anything but material, looking around—it was but a phenomenological and logistical fact of some human beings). I knew I couldn't regard my aesthetic/empathetic experiences—come, gone and reverberating—as morally valuable if I couldn't recognize them as incipient and perhaps infinitely fragile. These moments of empathy didn't make me a better person, nor could they license me to speak of them as anything other than squalid.

It's easy to imagine, in light of the cheering, that such occurrences can bring in extra tip-money from patrons, despite the fact that the avoidance of such "accidents" which risk harming the sharks likely has at least some place of priority with operators, or regulators at very least (white sharks are a protected species in South Africa after all). I left the boat wondering who (if that was a proper way of putting it) on that excursion considered the collision to be an accident, to what extent and in what sense it may or may not matter in light of the imaginaries of agency being enthralled with post-political connotations of the boat's thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) which are thus to some extent fatalistic and of narrow accountability.¹⁰ Whereas imaginaries of sharks' danger to us are carefully tuned and managed, our dangers to them, in the context of our (my) quest for empathy/experience was concerned, were largely written off as lesser evils forming a body of best-practices in a battle to convince the world to love sharks enough to be even nicer to them than *we* had purportedly been.¹¹

¹⁰ *Geworfenheit* can be described as always already existing, the state of being determined as such, to be noted thus, and so in the example bearing a resignation by virtue of being impossible-to-fully-manage-oh-golly-how'd-we-get-here-oh-well.

¹¹ Jøn and Aich consider the possibility that people becoming more concerned with the well-being of sharks and people being exposed to more "positive" imagery from conservation regimes may result in a shift toward a "less demonstrative" paradigm of shark-human interactions that enables meaningful



Image 1. from jankan23, taken from Instagram, 2014. This is a still taken from video right before impact. I was the “lucky one” at the far left of the cage, one spot over from the person who filmed.

engagement with traditional (and less one-dimensional) understandings which place sharks within a broader cultural ethos. They see cage-diving as an important resource, it seems, if temporary, to provide "positive" experiences with sharks, though they do not seem to consider how this supposedly transient practice is leveraged/managed indefinitely as part of commodity capitalism (2015).

Shark of Darkness and Orientalism: A Lexicographic Narrative

The narrative voices of a broad section of nature documentaries, including the general form and editing of their content as well as the way that their audiences are addressed by narration, have been subject to critical scrutiny for their authoritative logics. Nature is often presented as pre-determinate and simply conveyable to the viewer via the guiding voice of the narrator, a voice that facilitates specific natural conclusions discoverable within the neutrally representative audio and video—tacitly normalizing usually characteristically white, modern, male and disembodied perspectives through often very anthropomorphic narratives. There are some important parallels between elements of shark documentaries on The Discovery Channel in particular and the rhetorical and philological style of the general body of Western scholarship critiqued in Edward Said's incisive book *Orientalism* that are worth exploring because of the way they can inform understandings of rhetorical presentation and typological tableaux that have emerged in Shark Media as special examples of identitarian and imperialist forms of consumption often very detached from real sharks. I'll first provide some of Said's descriptive and historical statements as examples and relate them to Stephen Papsen's critique from the early 1990s of the cultural form of documentaries on The Discovery Channel's Shark Week, applying some of these observations to the more recent fictional documentary *Shark of Darkness: Wrath of Submarine*.

Said argues in *Orientalism* that the discipline of Western scholarship of the same name, particularly those branches associated with England and France (and later inherited and transformed by Anglo-Americans), has always been tinged with the desire for some sort of domination (such as economic, cultural, militaristic, religious etc.,) of lands and peoples it represents amorphously and imaginatively, and that such a form of representation plays an important role in the identity production/dissemination of Orientalists themselves and the cultures they embody. Much of Said's critique of Orientalism deals with certain combinations of philology and imaginative geography which have resulted in specific power dynamics and

cultural codes. One important characteristic of Orientalism that Said points out is the “latency” with which the Orient or an Oriental (a person who is from the Orient (the Near/Middle East), whose characteristics may or may not—even for the speaker—be drawn from concrete examples) are made objects of reference and presumed at the outset to have some definite set of general characteristics. The actual mechanics of that phenomenon shares features with the “natural attitude” described by phenomenologists such as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, the fact of which makes “latent Orientalism” subject to critical and psychoanalytic scrutiny as a species of vitalism.

There are three points of Said’s that I’d like to draw on here First, an educationist rhetorical style of presentation in Orientalism is tied to its peculiar form of realism; second, the ontological scope of “authenticity” in this example of imperialist philology exemplifies a narrow, menacing paranoia; and third, rhetorical and narrative movements in Orientalist discourse create significant transformations in the progression of narrative and argumentation that lend certain conclusions (or, as I will argue more specifically, the formation of certain conclusions) an air of inevitability. It is my contention that these points apply also to Shark Media—the name I give to that body of curatorial practices concerning sharks, such as aquariums and (eco)tourism, but in this case with special emphasis on news, fiction and documentary video and the related cultural codes of everyday parlance. I am also arguing that educative cultural forms (re)produced or transfigured by Shark Media themselves exemplify a form of paranoiac ontology and caricatured othered consciousness evoked by quests for truth, and that reference points pertaining to mythic/false subjectivities/perspectives are consonant with the “imaginative geography” critiqued by Said in his description of the tendencies of Orientalism. It is true that Shark Media concerns a different subject matter from Orientalism (for the most part; there are genuine non-figurative intersections), but it continues to be a major arena for the dissemination of those colonizing/universalizing gestures and springboards of White Male and (contiguous with the historical development of Orientalism) Anglo-American identity which might otherwise have become more broadly discredited as rhetorical practices.

One of the significant figures in Said's genealogy is Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy, a philologist, linguist and Orientalist whose work contributed to the discipline of Orientalism his characteristic didactic tone and form. In de Sacy's work, Said argues, the Orient is something conveyed *to* students *by* the teacher and this style contributes to the tone and meaning of the Orientalist's task, something which strongly determines both the form of authority of the field of knowledge it is concerned with and the possibility of its subject matter achieving a distinctive voice (1979, p.125-127). Through a series of representative examples, a tableau is conveyed to students and the absorption of the material takes on a skewed significance: "In time, the reader forgets the Orientalist's effort and takes the restructuring of the Orient signified by a Chrestomathy as the Orient *tout court*" (p. 129 emphasis in original), and this effect has significance for how moments of pre-discursive chaos incidental to the Orientalist's gaze within that field are figured and positioned with respect to the "canon of textual objects" passed on by de Sacy's work, as the ordering and making sense of a subject matter whose ontology is a privileged commodity, is educational and is otherwise a matter of rhetoric (ibid.): the agential scope of chaos (the latter i.e., what is ordered by the Orientalist's work) remains other to the Orientalist and Orient(al) (the subject matter of that particular form of chrestomathic philology) alike but lives in their interchange. The Orient, according to Said, is made to be as if created by the Orientalist, and it is the Orientalist alone whose inherited and legitimizing cultural codes make sense of it. The radical realism of Orientalism is characterized by an ontology that is so vehemently grounded in identity practices and typologies that concrete instances of its subject matter are abjected by it, and its dependence upon specific representative forms such as those characterized by chrestomathic/schematic knowledge quests make it a "form of paranoia" as certain ontologies become imminently referenced where, amongst overly typologized and thus eschewed concrete reality, they are not. The focus of study of one of the particular streams of Orientalism which Said outlines was based on ancient texts at the neglect of the identities of modern people of the Near/Middle East because it was taken as a given that their representatives

(the “real” subject matter of Orientalism) were to be most legitimately found and known through those scholarly channels. I hope to show that elements of the *form* of Orientalism—as didactic discourse, as chrestomathy, as white male identity production, as paranoid/radical realism—have hermeneutic value for the deconstruction of Shark Media due to common characteristics which place the latter more suggestively in the context of colonialism and imperialism. First, I am interested in how the imaginative tableaux of “latent Orientalism” (relating to the “Oriental mind” in particular) relate to latency of another sort: that of Shark Fiction (and *its* othered mind i.e., “myth,” “misconception,” “disbelief” and whatever other naive characteristics it is able to exploit *ad infinitum* on the mount of *Jaws* for the purposes of its various narratives). Second, I’m interested in how the dispensation of factoids over-determines aspects of shark ontology often at the expense of cognition of the real presence of sharks, much like the radical realism of Orientalism.

In “Cross the Fin Line of Terror” Stephen Papson explores textual criticisms of nature documentaries and elaborates them in the context of Shark Week episodes. Written in 1992, this article can be used to interpret later shark documentaries according to earlier trends. Papson argues that while “environmental concerns have grown and become part of the media’s agenda,” and that as a result “audience interest in Nature programming has also grown” nature documentaries on sharks introducing these animals to public viewership still do so against the fictional backdrop of *Jaws* in popular imagination (Papson 1992). Guynn writes, “the fact that documentary text produces itself paradoxically within and against the codes of the fiction film is the clearest sign of the dominance of that cinematic institution” (in Papson 1992). Papson makes clear that the Nature documentaries he examines make use of an aestheticized ontology whereby truth-seeking and fiction are codependent in troubling ways, which can be compared with how the production of Western and/or Orientalist identity depends on the Orient/Oriental, especially when the Orient acts as a theatre for Western imagination and Oriental thought is somehow categorically erroneous, naive, barbaric or what have you. He quotes Baudrillard: “fiction serves

as the reference point from which the documentary makes a claim for its truth-seeking objective. The documentary occupies a place in the chain of signifiers (genre). Its signified 'truthfulness' is a function of the codes it uses rather than a function of its privileged relationship to 'reality'" (ibid.) and Orientalist (or Western) identity is often inadvertently produced via the Oriental, the latter often being characterized according to something other than concrete instances, through established codes such as those passed on from de Sacy's *list-based/educationist* tableaux and typologies. Since misconception about sharks is so patent a "fact," the discourses of such documentaries exploit the management of an imaginary of such misconception (a puppeted and very latent *Jawsian* form of the pre "shark-educated" psyche) and frequently rely upon paradoxical references to it to enhance its effect: "References to inaccurate information about shark behaviour legitimate the film as a learning experience" (ibid.), while at the same time aesthetic techniques are used to preserve and cultivate this shark-erroneous form of consciousness through an array of incongruous scientific factoids which counter-develop the narrative.

Said's description of Edward William Lane's Orientalist work provides a good example of how narrative flow can become disrupted when it is used to merely facilitate a compendium (and, in his case particularly, an admonitory tableau) of strangeness:

Lane's control of his material is not only established through his dramatized double presence (as fake Muslim and genuine Westerner) and his manipulation of narrative voice and subject, but also through his use of detail. Each major section in each chapter is invariably introduced with some unsurprising general observation. For example, "it is generally observed that many of the most remarkable peculiarities in the manners, customs, and character of a nation are attributable to the physical peculiarities of the country." What follows confirms this easily—the Nile, Egypt's "remarkably salubrious" climate, the peasant's "precise" labor. Yet instead of this leading to the next episode in narrative order, the detail is added to, and consequently the narrative fulfillment expected on purely formal grounds is not given. In other words, although the gross outlines of

Lane's text conform to the narrative and causal sequence of birth-life-death, the special detail introduced during the sequence itself foils narrative movement...Lane is always there to *prevent* smooth transitions...Shortly after we hear about Egypt's salubrious climate...Thereafter we are told that the heat "excited the Egyptian [an unqualified generalization] to intemperance in sensual enjoyments," and are soon bogged down in descriptions...of Cairene architecture [etc.]...When a narrative strain re-emerges, it is clearly only as a formality. (1979, p.161-162 emphasis in original)

I'm concerned here with the metanarrative produced by the fact that certain passing remarks that constitute narrative description both acquire a stand-alone facticity isolated from the usual burdens of contextual validation (or anything that qualifies their placement within the overall text) and, already existing as a sort of psychic discharge or identity practice, are impelled to seek such a context through the expectation that they be validated through "narrative fulfillment...on purely formal grounds" (p.162). It's plausible then, and I suggest that it is actually so, that uncontextualized information of this sort can habituate audiences toward arbitrary conclusions and behaviours. One way that this form of conditioning can happen is through the highly elaborately illustrated and ambiguous use of the subjunctive mood which turns tropic familiarity into formality and satisfaction driven ontological practices of iteration, schematization and qualification.¹² While Lane uses one form of double consciousness I suggest that the double consciousness cultivated in the viewers of certain Shark Week documentaries, which relies on the (at times radical) immanence of Jawsian naïveté, takes on a new significance as a form of shark curation tinged by an ontology overdetermined by textual objects.

The curation of action scenes in *The Great Whites of Dangerous Reef* described by Papson relies on certain techniques to keep the viewer excited, but which also cause confusion: "In these shots

¹² Metz comments on the increasing use of computer generated imagery in nature documentaries and the effects on the misuse of the subjunctive (2008).

of the shark neither the line nor the hook can be seen. It is uncertain whether this is actually the hooked shark or other shark footage cut into the scene,” “When there is action, it is the role of the editor to include it. When there is no action, it is the role of the editor to supply it” (Papson 1992) and given the confluence of fact, action and education, we can expect from the sensationalism characteristic of many shark representations (even those which claim on one hand to dispel them) to not limit themselves to aesthetics that apply to fear of bodily harm or the admiration of the grace and fluidity of sharks as such but also make use of the radical realism and paranoia that has been festering in Shark Week’s sensationalism in years *since* Papson’s critique, signifying threats to those parts of the psyche which cling to the unhinged ideals of truth and “right” identity/orientation that are validated by chrestomathic shark quests and their rhetorical forms. While action editing in *The Great Whites of Dangerous Reef* made an exciting ride out of what in some cases was relatively benign material, *Shark of Darkness* makes a ride out of an aesthetic which subtly lays open in a stereotyped way the psyche of those caught up in and/or dissociatively disillusioned by its paradoxically (*Shark of Darkness* is a work of complete fiction) “truth-seeking” narrative: the action is produced with representative forms which bear a certain homology with the viewers’ sense of orientation to “the facts.”

Shark of Darkness

“To create the realist illusion, the fiction film depends on the willingness of the audience to suspend critical judgment. It achieves this by its apparent seamlessness (Fiske, *Television* 25-6). The audience must forget it is watching a film. If the flow is disrupted, the illusion fails. The documentary film, however, does not attempt to appear seamless. In fact, seams in the documentary signify authenticity” (ibid.). *Shark of Darkness* takes this realist device a step further by subordinating audience disorientation to its project of pseudo-realism. It begins with a disclaimer: “Submarine is a *legendary* shark first sighted off the coast of South Africa in 1970; *Eyewitness accounts* say it is 35 feet long; Its existence is highly *controversial*; Events have been *dramatized* but many *believe* submarine exists to this day” (Shark of Darkness 2014 emphasis mine). Each of these statements places a relative burden of contingency not necessarily on facts about Submarine, but on the forms of subjectivity whose standpoints make them valid, all while removing some degree of accountability from The Discovery Channel itself. It is not very reasonable at all to assume that, by reading the above statements, people should be expected to deduce that basically nothing at all in the show, which takes the form of a Shark Week documentary—something long tenured as “non-fiction,” despite the important points brought up by Papsin in the 90s—is reliable except for the fact that “many believe Submarine exists to this day.” The latter is, however, the very propositional hinge (or “scarred homology” if you prefer, see Povinelli 2016, p.37-38) that such statements rest upon and is made to come to life in the consciousness of the viewers themselves. I believe that part of the contract that *Shark of Darkness* sets up with viewers for the kind of dramatic (and radical) realism that it intends to orchestrate is exemplified by the name of the fictional boat introduced in the first scenes: *The Joyride*.¹³ *The*

¹³The Miroshga is the name of a boat that capsized in Hout Bay in 2012, resulting in two deaths (bbc.co.uk 2012). The Discovery Channel has been criticized for capitalizing on this incident by borrowing details from this tragedy (which had nothing discernible to do with sharks) in order to strengthen its aesthetic of legitimacy, perhaps even through the latency afforded by vague memories of it (see Jewell 2015). For

ODCE defines a joyride as: “a fast ride in a stolen vehicle” or “a ride for enjoyment” (2006, p.492), so whereas Lane’s double consciousness as fake Muslim and real Westerner is characterized by a form of discontinuity (Said 1979, p.163-164) I believe *Shark of Darkness*’ Joyride constitutes a sort of invitation to mix into the logics of the latent consciousness of an imminent other which is no longer properly speaking *Jawsian* but through its transformations has become a kind of rhetorical, chrestomathic, radical realism adapted to an evolving series of shark themed tropes and stock signifiers or, to put it more generally, an amoral ontological thrill ride that is particularly vehicular and exemplifies a stereotyped will-to-power. The contract itself is very subliminal. While the pretext of entertainment is already present for *Shark Week* shows, the sense that entertainment and education are conjunct one another harmlessly—even when it involves the misappropriation of educational tropes (though effectively it might be framed as boyish audit-begging)—allow for the kinds of intensely unhinged subjectivism that the show provokes to feel voluntaristically ambiguous.

Part of what makes programs such as *Shark of Darkness* so hard to watch without discomfort is the false sense of argumentative progression. Papson notes that while certain "misconceptions" about sharks are "dispelled" on Shark Week one moment, the next moment might be dedicated to enticing the viewers to believe a similar notion through scientific factoids largely tangential to and/or made irrelevant by earlier critical progression in the narrative, producing some sort of dramatic effect. *Shark of Darkness* begins with the disclaimer that it is a dramatization. Within the program, however, are witnesses, shark attack victims and specialists. Some scenes use surreal shots one might be inclined to associate with dramatized footage, some are in amateur/home-video style, and other footage is explicitly introduced: "...amateur footage seen here" and various cartographical and technological visualizations are used in a patchwork that includes 3D animations and unrelated video clips of sharks, a number of which are repeated

example there were survivors trapped in the hull of the sunken Miroshga, and this theme was a central plot element in *Shark of Darkness*.

many times. There are moments when the switching between different styles of video feels as if moving between phenomenological horizons as "real" footage and the "fake" footage is used to construct a formal narrative which is campy at times but not innocent, as a subtler structuralism furthers species of identity and authority characteristic of Orientalism. In the case of *Shark of Darkness* the two researchers do not represent reliable authority as they themselves frequently contradict information known to many *Shark Week* aficionados, not to mention that they both behave like fanatics. For Conrad Manus, one of the researchers, it is inconceivable that great whites swimming in the water near a shipwreck with rescue boats in the area while a number of survivors bob on the surface would simply leave the area *without eating the survivors*: "the conditions [for feeding] were perfect" and the very idea of such sharks not attacking is itself a mystery that needs to be pursued/explained: the moment acts as a good-as-anywhere incision point for the official thesis of the mock documentary: all of this could *only* be explained by one thing, an even larger predator: *Submarine*.

For Papson, the use of mystery is a way of capturing the audience into a shark documentary's logics: "The enigma is diffuse rather than specific...[it] stands for the mystery of the shark and the lack of accurate knowledge surrounding it. What is important is that we recognize the significance of the quest itself and we vicariously participate in it" (Papson 1992). In the case of *Shark of Darkness* as a meta-narrative, a viewer is prompted not only to ask "is *Submarine* *real*?" but also to solve an immensely challenging phenomenological riddle: *Just what can I take from this? What can I consider "the facts" to be?* When I realized how much habitual ontological license I had been giving to the show, I began to approach it in a more primal phenomenological way. Witnessing a transformation of factoids and infographics into indecipherable sounds and colours while I exerted my orientation toward the content made opaque by so much noise of the special's ontological scribbles, something more comprehensible began to emerge. It is through this visualization that, for me, the tropes and logics of *Shark of Darkness* became a bit more intelligible.

Specialists Melvyn Thurmond and Conrad Manus frequently make totally unrestrained statements, while the narrator comes from a seemingly more neutral stance but one from which tactless factoids unconcerned with distinguishing themselves from the *actually* fantastic nevertheless abound. "Once blood is detected, sharks enter a frenzied state and lash out at anything they come across" (*Shark of Darkness* 2014). Many *Shark Week* fans were undoubtedly upset by this mockumentary (see Beck 2014, for example), but Papson's incisive critiques of *Shark Week* precede this Discovery Channel program by 12 years, and one of the most crucial differences between *Shark of Darkness* and Papson's case-studies is not the ontological aestheticism and chaotic dialectics of authority present in *Shark of Darkness*, but the fact that the concept of authority (where putative fact trumps putative fact etc.) is no longer establishing the mastery of the narrator *per se* but of the form of the documentary's chaotically identitarian truth-seeking narrative, even as the narrative appears to actively discredit itself through its over-the-top campy style.¹⁴ When *Shark of Darkness'* specialists are said to be combining such and such years of research, evidence from boat accidents and videos from Youtube, they are elevating the authority of identification with the documentary's form's quest and extending that quest more noticeably beyond the documentary's instance (making it and consciousness which characterizes it more participatory), rather than simply trivializing some of the means of the specialists.

David Shiffman, a conservation biologist, science communicator, fan and frequent critic of *Shark Week*, has lamented the consequences of specials such as *Shark of Darkness*, including many similar ones on *Shark Week* relating to the prehistoric shark Megalodon (*Carcharocles megalodon*). Specials of interest include: *Megalodon: The Monster Shark Lives* and *Megalodon: The New Evidence* as well as *Mermaid: The Body Found* and *Mermaid: The New Evidence* which were run on Animal Planet, a subsidiary of Discovery. These latter two, Shiffman notes, were (to

¹⁴ I don't mean to downplay that this program certainly represents a shift in the circumstantial/correlational relationships of *Shark Week* specials to reality or that it represents a serious breach of viewer trust, but I do want to emphasize that the phenomenon of *Shark of Darkness* is very much the continuation of a previously existing educational style premised on a highly problematic metaphysics of intersubjectivity and factuality.

put it in my own words) particularly squalid in that scientific opposition to the first one was tied into a narrative of government conspiracy and cover-up in the second and its debunking authority was thus blunted as a result, coinciding with open hostility toward him personally (Shiffman 2015) for not qualifying the *possibility* (which in certain radical epistemic communities characterized by a reductionist subjunctive mood basically amounts to utter speculative license) of a "marine primate" as the special so scientific worded it (Bennett 2013). In an article co-written with ecologist, conservation consultant and oceanographer Andrew Thaler, Shiffman outlines certain tactics for countering the proliferation of factually inaccurate information. Much of what is emphasized in the article is the timing and placement of the right debunking information, and the authors have made use of search-engine optimized titles so that people are more likely to be led directly toward the relevant material. The authors proudly state, for example, that they were able to commission an article on *Shark of Darkness* which was completed within hours of the show's publication and that "as of February 2, 2015, the article 'Shark of Darkness: Wrath of Submarine is a fake documentary' holds the top Google search result for 'shark of darkness,' displacing even Discovery Communications' own promotional material" (Thaler and Shiffman 2015). At the same time, they also draw attention to problem of the scale of their task: "...while our number of unique viewers is exceptionally high for an ocean science audience, they represent a small fraction of those watching Discovery Communications' programming" and so it is up to major media outlets and social media to take up the material and reach larger audiences within a certain window of time (a few days) for the best effect (ibid.). All the same, the "quest for the truth" inaugurated to current levels by *Shark of Darkness* and exemplified by the personage of intrepid YouTubing scientist Melvyn Thurmond (as well as the Conrad Manus and the later megalodon-chasing Collin Drake, played by Darron Meyer—who also has a role in *Deep Blue Sea 2*) paradoxically conjoined with the "debunking" gestures that have littered Shark Week for years and years, is at the same time at odds with a community of debunking-information wielding and at times zealously admonitory scientists and science

advocates. It is here that I would like to iterate that Lane's disruptive use/neglect of narrative was part of, as Said describes it, an admonitory tableau of strangeness and I would now like to suggest through a personal example that certain ambiguous subjectivities and orients/orientations of sharkdom as assemble the embodiment of qualities of radical realism, previously discernible within Orientalism, can be produced within more specifically corporeal shark-related curated educational environments while also being conditioned by identity practices traced through in this section.

Megalodon jaws

Megalodon (*Carcharocles megalodon*) is a prehistoric shark that in recent years has received a lot of media attention and has become an object of fascination and fantasy for a number of people. It has been the subject of many conspiracy-esque internet videos, three Discovery Channel specials (the third being a shirkesome cash-cow, no-fault, glorified *real conversation on the true facts* redemption for the mass proliferation of misinformation from the first two (Johnson 2018)), and the relevant members of the scientific or scientific education community have, as noted above, become involved in debunking the often ill-founded quests of intrepid, inquisitive and/or curious fans of marine biology.

As part of my research on Shark Media, I conducted phenomenological, naturalistic and investigative visits to the Ripley's Aquarium of Canada to achieve an understanding of the multifaceted semiotic significance of sharks in curated environments, the forms of subject-making involved and how this might pan out for sharks generally and within the aquarium itself. Late into my research, I paid a visit to the aquarium after a few months' hiatus and found some changes in the layout. On one of my first visits to the aquarium I learned about a set of megalodon jaws there. These jaws were originally placed, I was told, at the front entrance to the exhibits. They needed to be moved after a short time, however, because the sheer volume of visitors passing by and touching the jaws was resulting in their rapid deterioration (nothing to be said about the white-spotted bamboo sharks and horseshoe crabs housed in the touch tanks, accessible to the hands of patrons—that is discussed in the next section). I was told that they were moved to an area out of reach to guests, but visible behind a railing in the water treatment section of the exhibits. I later had an opportunity to see them up-close when in the area off-limits to regular guests during my "aquarist for a day" experience and, I guess, didn't pay them much mind at the time. Now, several months later, I saw a set of megalodon jaws at the exit of the aquarium exhibits and they were (although behind a small barrier next to a sign that said not to touch them)

much more accessible than before. I noticed that this set was obviously a sort of replica, and so I asked a nearby employee of the aquarium if this was a second set, thinking that there may be an actual set of fossil teeth somewhere.

I asked if this was the same one that was in the back at one point, saying that I recognized it to be a replica. I was wondering if there was a *real* one somewhere. “A *real megalodon?*” he said with a sort of twist of tone. I answered, not unaware of this new orientation insinuating itself, *what? megalodon is real* “Yeah, I was wondering if maybe there was another one, a real set of *megalodon jaws.*” He then went over to ask somebody, having said that he didn’t know. I watched him walk over to someone, witnessing an unfolding of this epistemic community within which I was embedded. I may not have heard her answer, though I may have heard a decisive “no.” I saw her body language toward the question he asked her. I obviously can’t say for certain, but it seemed to me that while his institutional role afforded him a comfortable pocket for his role in pursuing my question, there was something—maybe not within him and maybe not within me per se (*I was just curious I didn’t care*)—which shrunk at these gestures. When he returned he said “it’s not real,” to which I said “is that the only one?,” and he responded yes, adding that he was new and wasn’t the best person to be answering such questions about the history of the aquarium. I thanked him and then went over to a more senior employee who I recognized from other visits, in order to confirm with her (the person who originally told me about the jaws being at the front) whether the aquarium ever had a *real* set of megalodon jaws.¹⁵ She had hopefully been out of earshot of any of the previous conversation but I wasn’t totally sure, I wasn’t interested in infuriating or frustrating her by seeming obsessively bent on somehow qualifying a fanatical quest through a radical subjunctive mood piggybacking on her educational authority in a search that very-well should have ended with a simple no: *I just wanted to make sure*. The answers were decisive and efficient *No, That’s the only one, That was the one at the front before,*

¹⁵ Fossil specimens of megalodon jaws are scaled up replicas of great white jaws with fossilized megalodon teeth inserted, and they help cement the widespread but somewhat contentious idea that megalodons are basically bigger versions of white sharks.

and there was something about the particularly unendearing way these answers were uttered that struck me as significant for understanding sharkdom. Curiously, I felt that though she seemed not to recognize me from one or two other encounters I also felt sort of exposed as if I was inside out, readable and oh-so-typical. I wondered what kind of typical behaviours could be read into my life that exemplify the performance of a figure I felt myself determined (not happy) to be. I had asked questions that entangled me in an identity of now palpably questionable self-worth.

I eventually left the aquarium after a short visit and retained a certain feeling, an aesthetic identity that stayed with me. I could do nothing but experience this discomfort that I was unwilling to shirk and which I was—in a sense—epistemically enthusiastic to experience with some measure of care and cultivation. I had just witnessed the political life of a certain imaginary of inter(even trans)subjectivity, one premised on what I'll call a *sensate fanaticism*: a sort of Merleau-Pontean flesh and visceral experience of squalid shark-themed ontology. I had been prompted by a certain fear of persecution to basically do one of two things: to affirm in vain to myself and a palpably present no-one-in-particular whose gaze was on my stage, through a sort of self-writing within a problematic imaginary of intersubjectivity and social space, that “I am a critical thinker, not to be confused with someone who thinks there's good reason to believe megalodons exist alive today” or to pretend in some arrogant, anger-tinged, pseudo-ironic, troll-like way that I did believe such things, through some sort of giggly performative aesthetic affirmation and bruised eschewal—neither of these supported either my intention to learn or to pursue the demos in sharkdom. The assemblage of the megalodon jaws activated a sort of political identity around me—if rather mild and, due to its theoretical value to me, not purely discomfiting—whose two most apparent propensities betray a lack of self-security that seeks comfort in self-writing. If this kind of phenomenon were to occur in more chaotic circumstances it might be more difficult to discern the intersubjective imaginary I was experiencing as being *radically real*—that is, over-determined, mostly fantastic and habitually shirkable.

The Art of Shark Death

Just as with regard to fish [dagim] in the sea the water covers them and the evil eye therefore has no dominion over them, as they are not seen, so too, with regard to the offspring of Joseph, the evil eye has no dominion over them
-Talmud, Bava Metzia 84a:11

It is indeed impossible to imagine our own death...whenever we attempt to do so we can perceive that we are in fact still present as spectators

In the unconscious every one of us is convinced of his own immortality
-Sigmund Freud

In the book *Darwin's Worms*, Adam Phillips explores the Freudian death instinct—a theoretical impulse within human beings toward the state of raw existence signified by the affectation of the world in perpetuity, as a compensation for the limited and elusive nature of life and according to some norm for dignity—in its relationship with biography (2001). To be led by the death instinct is to be led to die in the way one wishes to die, to pass over into the affectation of the world and to exist according to such. A key component of this instinct is the means by which the form of existence or affectation which death signifies (Povinelli qualifies Nonlife as progenitor of Life, radically reframing the question of Death/Life (2016, p.45)) is objectified. Imaginaries of intersubjectivity (or to borrow from Karen Barad, intraagency, 2007, p.33) in varying degrees of conscious acknowledgement can and have been made into objects. It is common for Western philosophers to talk about tables and chairs in respect to intersubjectivity (see Ahmed 2006, p.25-29) or dust and soil in relation to death, but other objects do come into view that foreground death, more-than-human agency and intersubjectivity. Sharkdom has played a significant role in this respect, including not only the amaterialism of perspectives that fail to recognize the social-communal elements of their own contingency that Ahmed critiques in objects (e.g. the intersubjectivity of a chair as a product of specific labour relations for the phenomenologist who produces an ontology that stands to eclipse the latter; sharkdom compiling tacit but determinative movements of death and knowledge), but also the related teleological and moralist sketches found in b-movies such as *Ozark Sharks* and *Ice Sharks* that provide aesthetic and discrete dimensions

to forces of determinism, such as climate change in the latter being traceable to human agency start to closed-loop finish in shark carnage and ultimate death (2016). Sharks as symbols of death have been invested with a considerable amount of human vanity and ontological arrogance.

The contemporary art piece *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (in Crawford 2008) by Damien Hirst consists of a dead tiger shark floating in water and formaldehyde enclosed within a glass box. The imagery of *Jaws* brought to mind through the menacing appearance of the shark may evoke fear in some viewers. As one reviewer glibly commented: "The shark delivered an atavistic shock, catapulting the viewer back to our Darwinian past even as we stood admiring its artistry" (Salmon in Crawford 2008, p.88). All the while the shark itself was dead and suspended/encapsulated in a box as many people expect themselves to be one day, making the effort to think the object of death a sort of dance coinciding with an artificially preserved shark—killed by the famous shark killer Vic Hislop, who supports killing sharks by virtue of their *danger to humans* (going so far as to say that shark attacks are systematically underreported)—slowly decomposing within its aquarium-like abode.

Crawford notes: "What sets Hirst's shark apart from his other animals is the danger it projects. Without this threat, we feel no awe, only guilt and shock at the carnage" (Crawford 2008, p.90). Whether or not the sense of threat weakens the lamented complicitness felt by some viewers for a trophied animal (in comparison with his other dead animals, for example), or the apparent danger to them spells out a sad irony, the important dialectic of these two elements of sharkdom is cast in a pale stereotyped form when the reality of the piece bleeds through. The title suggests to its audience that death is something beyond their comprehension, yet it is both the provocative challenge gestured by the title and an actual dead shark which bring the subject/object of death into view as something cognitively elusive but nevertheless real and dynamic, though in a campy and token way. Beyond what the piece offers to its audience as scrimpy insight into death and trivial foregrounding of its own scandalousness, the patronization of a man with a deluded ostentatious politics for the purposes of obtaining one his trophies in the

form of a dead shark makes this piece an exemplar of uncharitable human egoism. What I endeavour to call *Das Ich(thys)*, a set of realist and humanist shark-human identities, is at present highly consonant with commodity capitalism from multiple angles (for one, Hirst sold one such piece for \$8 million and another for \$5.7 million, in Crawford 2008, p.88), and is arid and salty as a result of being so out of place in the world and thoroughly half-invested in exploratory and speculative humanisms. The guide quote above from the *Talmud* draws attention to a common idea of contemporary times, that Being is overdetermined by a ubiquitous and opaque representationality, which clashes with a norm contained in traditional symbolism associated with fish and (categorically, presumably enough) sharks. Rather than embracing this idea as normative outright, and/or consider the level of exposure of sharks *tout court* in consumer culture to be an essential sort of insult, in the next component of this portfolio I examine some case examples of shark curation, interaction and representation upon emblematic ends of an “edutainment” spectrum again with attention to the construction of human subjectivity, but with a closer look at some of the related consequences for the sharks concerned.

Interlude: Simulated Fish on the way to Djibouti

My flight out from Toronto on the way to Djibouti was delayed two days due to a fairly significant storm on the eastern seaboard. While settling in at the gate at Pearson International Airport to wait for my Toronto to Boston flight, I passed by a virtual reality display in a showcase of one of the leading video game systems. I asked about it to give it a try as I had not experienced any of the newer, more conspicuously immersive forms of virtual reality. The attendant asked me if I wanted to play a game or if I would prefer "an experience." I chose the latter. I put the visor on and sat down.

The first thing I saw was a sort of "lobby room" that consisted of a shiny crystalline sphere floating in a watery background of indefinite depth. It was simultaneously cozy and expansive. I looked around and tried to adjust myself to this new form of space and I stuck my hand out at the sphere curiously, like a cat, experiencing the odd synaesthetic feeling of reaching out towards something in the spacious expanse of my visual field with an arm I could not see. As Merleau-Ponty might see it this gap in perception, the dimensional *écart* of ontological space, is what provokes in us questions of the meaning of shared space to begin with, through an orientation of deferral of an otherwise apparently encapsulated mutualistic contact (Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.135). I was conscious about how I might look to passers-by but it all felt very playful, and so it was only with mild reservation that I immersed myself in exploratory wonderment, wide-eyed and conscious of the possibility of having spectatorial company watching either my fleshy body's movements or the large screen in front of me sharing my visual feed to anyone compelled enough to chance a look at something colourful moving on a rectangular display (among other such things) while sitting or walking around at the airport—occupied, bored, at rest, rushed, in transit.

When the scene of the narrative simulation emerged in my view I found myself underwater in a fully submerged shark cage. There were fish around and the cage was slowly

lowering down to the sea floor. I saw jellyfish swim by as I passed through a rocky crevice on my way down and was surrounded by their glow. As the cage lowered downward I could see a bunch of steel wreckage at the sea floor. That's when the shark emerged, *a great white*. It looked glossy with red around its mouth, like a mild version of a monster from the survival horror genre of video games, and I was called to think about how Western sharkness is so unrelenting in the ad-infinitum exploitation of the boundaries between Reality and Fiction, as if these things are of no consequence for political accountability. Of course, as this experience with the shark started off with it simply swimming around, save its menacing appearance, this implication (prejudiced and uncertain) wasn't as of yet punctuated here: the simulation looked comparatively innocent enough, considering the calls of hatred and death for sharks to be found elsewhere, doing little more than putting an object of excitement and curiosity on display. If anything this production represented an opportunity for many people to experience a sense of fascination, excitement and wonder that would not be ordinarily accessible to them... Having spent a few moments enjoying a simulation of what some people go good lengths to do, often without success: get a clear close up view of a great white, and feeling myself somewhat content with the experience—hoping that something like this could help inspire people to want to keep sharks alive and healthy in the oceans, rather than license disinterest in those ancient and precarious bodies through abundant archives of digitally administered satisfaction on tap for giddy audiences—I then found it to take a more disappointing turn.

The shark swam to the left side of the cage, bit and started chewing on something hanging over the side. I originally thought it was a bumper buoy or something similar—and this behaviour seemed questionable but a reasonable enough narrative element given the context of entertainment and seemingly inevitable distortions, people do like to be stimulated after all and sharks do sometimes chew on weird human objects. I realized afterwards that it was supposed to be some kind of compressed air tank. The shark crushed it with its jaws and a few air bubbles came out (*apparently the tank was basically empty and made of tin*), which calls to my mind the

iconic scene in the ending of the *Jaws* movie, switching that narrative's absurdity (if you recall, chief Brody shoots an air tank in the shark's mouth with a gun and the shark explodes into a million pieces) for its anti-climactic polar other, exemplifying an enormous appropriability of props subject to sharkdom logics.¹⁶ Shortly afterwards the shark rammed and bit the cage (pop-behaviouristically glossible as “exploratory bites”), and then began shaking the cage back and forth, eventually swimming off with the entire front of the cage sheared off and held in its jaws.

Now what? This is where I imagined a sort of conflict between the designers of the simulation and what I'll call the political agency of the shark. A gruesome death, while common in some video games, might garner opposition from those who consider the realist premises of the simulation to include a sort of responsibility to animals who have already endured so much unfair publicity. It then started swimming around in a way to elicit thrills, neither murderously intent nor accordingly boring like real sharks seen in aquariums which do nothing but meander, startle and only occasionally take anything more than passing interest in humans unless somehow enticed. Then, near the end of the simulation, as the cage was making an emergency ascent back toward the surface amidst falling boulders, the shark finally lined up and determined to attack (this shark: now an enemy), only to have a falling boulder smash into its face from above—enough to probably kill it—knocking it out of sight: the shark lost the conflict and was punished for it by a shirkly sanitized non-human agency: *our hero escaped*.

¹⁶ The tank was supposed to be a spare, so in one respect this was a sort of critical event in the narrative. The amaterialism of that scenario in contrast with *Jaws* is the important point, and draws attention to how dramatic intensity in various forms is a more decisive element than consistency with the material world.

Phenomenological and Material Productions, Capitalist Environments and the Meaning of Shark Conservation and Education

Introduction

As a major part of my research, I took part in an expedition in the Gulf of Tadjoura, Djibouti with the Shark Research Institute collecting data on whale sharks that gather there several times a year. I also paid regular visits to the Ripley's Aquarium of Canada in Toronto, which houses a number of shark species. The remoteness of Djibouti for typical Western tourist consumership and the scientific nature of the expedition placed this trip fairly far along the education and conservation end of the ecotourism spectrum. Conversely, Ripley's, with its for-profit goals and sensational atmosphere is more commonly regarded as so-called "edutainment" in its overall atmosphere and mission. Both of these, it must be noted, contrast quite deeply with the likes of *Sharknado*, but considering that so many shark institutions bleed into and determine one another, I was interested in the subjectivities produced/reproduced across these various exponents of sharkdom in order to understand their mutualistic tendencies in various directions as well as their overall significance for shark-human relationships. For that reason, I employed phenomenological methods to get a clear idea of the related experiences and their effects within different horizons of biopolitical narratives and corporealities which include but are not limited to how the experiences were intentionally curated for those taking part. The studies of Ripley's and whale sharks in Djibouti both pay attention, as does this portfolio as a whole, to human subject making in curated environments and do so in ways that give ode to sharks themselves in concern for consequences faced by them and humans simultaneously. The section of my first portfolio component entitled:

“Shark Orientations and Phenomenologizing Activist Consumerism” could have been included here, but its placement there followed somewhat different intentions, and the actual events of that section predate my deliberate research for this portfolio. Both the section on Ripley’s and that on whale sharks in Djibouti rely upon phenomenologies of subject-making. With the former, I pay closer attention to the confluence of consumer phenomenology and Orientalism and problematize this confluence as a barrier to the appreciation of material circumstances which makes subjects overly comfortable with their political positioning, reflected in the distorted significance of “ambassador animals” as political representatives and tokens of institutional good will, with ugly consequences. With the latter, I outline shark tourism as something that can be very impactful for humans in many respects, but whose costs and benefits even merely for humans are overshadowed by forms of capital whose scalability does not truly countenance shark futures.

Ripley's Aquarium of Canada: Schisms of Comfort and Messages of Entitlement

The main atrium at Ripley's provides an overview of a good portion of the facility, the center of which houses a relatively insignificant looking shallow tank that attracts a truly remarkable crowd during peak hours, full of hands and staffed by two or so people at work trying to police an ongoing flow of curious visitors interested in getting up close and personal with the resident white spotted bamboo sharks (*Chiloscyllium plagiosum*). Behind this tank on the lower level, visible from the railing near the entrance above on the upper floor, is a sort of aquatic themed playground accenting the "Discovery Centre." Beside that is the "Ripley's Cafe" serving, in addition to the usual burgers and fries, seafood items and water in paper boxes to help fight plastic in the Earth's oceans. The exhibits begin with "Canadian Waters." To the left at the entrance to the exhibit is a large window housing fish of the great lakes: Sturgeon, Paddlefish and others. What a beautiful place to start, I thought to myself first seeing this tank. Having lived in Ontario for so long without paying much attention to these things, I was getting a first glimpse of some of my watery neighbour species.

Kin, you're my kin, and those people who come from all around the world to visit the aquarium will get to meet you and know that you're Our fish. They'll see you and know that you are the fish from here. This aquarium introduces those who come from elsewhere to the fish that live here, the fish of this place where we all live, and call home. Isn't that great, fish?

And a sturgeon named Ariel, maybe, [Image 2, page 52] caught my eye because she seemed to be responding to my gaze with curiosity, and interested in seeing *me*.¹⁷ From that tank, I could already hear the audio message coming from further in the exhibit talking about how Canada's

¹⁷ During my "Aquarist for a Day" experience I helped feed the sturgeons and the aquarist I was with told me that a sturgeon that had originally seemed to be especially curious might be the same one that was practically climbing out of the water as I stood there, and that they called this fish "Ariel" because she regularly seemed bent on joining the human world. I have no clue whether the fish, convenient to the name, was female or not, and the gendering of animals in captive environments is an aesthetic element of curation worthy of note.

fishing industry with the support of Cod, Pollock and Halibut allowed the nation to become an economic power on the world stage, one of the first educational messages of the tour.

Yes, our fish have made us strong and have given us power. Canada is a powerful nation, and many people who live here enjoy and share in that power. Our economy got a wonderful start and our fisheries continue to be productive. What else led to Canadian power? Does attributing prosperity to this factor leave other things conspicuously unaddressed? Surely, there is nothing wrong with being proud of fish and fisheries is there? And with all these Cod here, might we not mention the near eradication of one time abundant and healthy populations that have given way to and lifted up the Canadian regime, the collapse of Cod fisheries to give but one example?

Further in, the rest of the Canadian Waters exhibit, often fairly quiet and with dim lighting, has a calming effect that gives the impression that the aquarium as a whole can be moved through at a leisurely pace, that passing it over quickly might be practical in order to not spend all day there, but that there would be things worth seeing left behind in a well-encapsulated next time if not accessible through selfies, videos, souvenirs and physical graspability. Some distance beyond, the “Dangerous Lagoon” exhibit is a tunnel that leads through the aquarium’s largest (2.9 million litre) tank with—I hope this is clear enough—no shortage of sharks. There are sharks everywhere, and the peaceful music along with the slow movements of such sharks that pose such unreal a threat to humans portray a message as dissonant with the exhibit’s title as the utterance “Look, Jaws is coming to eat Mommy” exemplifies the kind of family fun well-to-do with the aquarium’s image, apart—that is—from the occasional slightly feverish rant by education staff on shark ignorance. These rants aimed at no one in particular but probably serving as compensation for lost causes and touchy opportunities not taken or as opportunities to take up the necessary facts with merely mis/uninformed guests. The “Dangerous Lagoon” guest conveyer belt ends square with the “Reef Sharks.” *Wow, they’re more lively, they’re moving much faster.* The music around the reef sharks recedes and is replaced by something more dangerous sounding, and the black tip reef sharks (*Carcharhinus limbatus*) swim in circles around the narrow, modestly ornate tank over and over again to keep the water passing over their gills. A

metre or so wide glass tube running through the tank allows guests to crawl in and be surrounded from all sides, black tip above and white tip reef sharks (*Triaenodon obesus*) below, sitting on the floor of the tank during the day as they would on a reef before hunting as a pack through all the nooks and crannies of rock and coral during night-time—something they can simulate by swimming around a little at certain times.



Image 2. Courtesy of Ripley's staff 2018. That's me crouching at the ledge and "Ariel" poking up from below the water.

The reef sharks mark the halfway point at the aquarium, at the “Discovery Centre,” with touch tanks, food and play areas. The touch tanks are a good place to learn from the educators, but the latter also have the important task of mediating shark-human contacts, occupation with which sometimes diminishes and/or eliminates such possibilities. In continuing on through the exhibits on one of my visits I walked into the middle of a dive show, dealing at the time with addressing myths and misconceptions about sharks. I’ve included my transcription of it below with the staff members’ names changed. I’ve underlined a few interesting points which I think are

important for considering whether ideological or identitarian elements entangled in pro shark discourse over-determine a supposedly conservation minded educational project according to moral-political high ground, and what this means for effecting adequate responses in guests.

Jordan: Plus we've adapted to living on land so we're not ideal food for sharks. Things that sharks eat are fish or seals. Those are good food for sharks, they've got a lot of fat and not a lot of bone. We have a lot of bone and not a lot of fat, so we're not ideal food for sharks.

Frank: Yeah, exactly. So audience, be honest with me. Could you raise your hand if you're afraid of sharks? Be honest.

[one or two hands raised]

Jordan: So if you're swimming in the water and a shark comes by you're not going to scream?

[a few more hands raised]

Frank: Alright so we've got a couple people. So, Jordan!

Jordan: Yeah

Frank: What should people be afraid of instead of sharks?

Jordan: There's a whole bunch of things you could be afraid of. Lightning is pretty scary. My dog Serena she gets really scared and she pees on the bed when she hears lightning. Other things like vending machines, coconuts, ants (not uncles) ants (I'm talking about little ants) [unclear]. What else? Shopping on Black Friday.

Frank: That's true; that's a bad one.

Jordan: All these things kill more people every year than sharks do.

Frank: Yeah exactly. So be more afraid of coconuts. Yeah, it's rough out there with coconuts around. In fact it's sharks that really need to be afraid of humans isn't that right Jordan?

Jordan: Yeah sharks should be scared of people. We're kind of the cold-blooded killers on this planet here.

Frank: So how many sharks do humans kill in a year?

Jordan: It's not going to be the same every single time but approximately 150 million each year.

Frank: Yeah 150 million sharks in a year. So, Jordan, why are humans killing sharks?

Jordan: There's a couple reasons. Some reasons are out of fear. Some people go and hunt a shark down. Other reasons are fins for shark fin soup. So shark fins, people will put them in a soup it's a certain delicacy in some cultures; and shark fin soup is (it's a wasteful culture) and what happens is they'll cut the fins off and put them in soup and the rest of the shark get's wasted so it dies and the shark fin soup isn't actually good for people it's actually really bad for people it can have lots of toxins in that shark meat so not only is it bad for sharks but it's also bad for people.

Frank: Yeah, exactly. So shark finning is a really cruel process whereby, like Jordan mentioned, fishermen would catch our sharks they remove all their fins and then they actually throw the shark back while the shark's still alive. We just mentioned that sharks need to swim in order to breathe. This means they sink to the bottom, bleed out and drown to death—so that's really cruel. Like Jordan mentioned it's also really wasteful because they only use the fins and they're used in shark fin soup just to add texture so they actually don't add any flavour. It's really bad. Plus, if you're eating shark fin soup it's not the greatest for you it's also full of toxins like mercury and other carcinogens (cancer causing agents). It's not the smartest to actually make these food choices. Oh hey Jordan. How can these fine folks conserve sharks?

Along with spreading the word, guests were told that they could eat sustainable seafood with the help of a mobile device application as ways to contribute to the well-being of sharks. There is undoubtedly a sincere attempt here to advance an innocent program: to stop the horrible slaughtering of millions of sharks a year which represents an irreparable loss for this planet, one whose social-economic justification stands by a seemingly vacuous abjection of cost. While saying things like “wasteful culture” (which may very well end up pointing our gaze toward consumer capitalism) and “our sharks” may be mere slips of the tongue rather than conscious ideology, statements like these paint a picture of a world typical of certain Western values of science and stewardship, one that is inept at times to reconcile how it finds itself so inevitably in a position of moral and ontological propriety. The value of warding sharks as genuine moral objects is part and parcel with political commitments to them. Of course, the extensive East Asian shark-fin trade is not merely a convenient reference point for the human menace to sharks, but the deep entanglements of that menace can't be supplanted by a formulaic tableau that coddles Western values and taken-for-granted moral uprightness and deters critical self-reflection. Conservation education in aquariums, as noted by Lloro-Bidart (2014, p.67), generally refrains

from depressing or alienating guests, but as aquatic environments progressively deteriorate, the need to educate in direct and sometimes harsh ways occasionally manifests itself. Traditionally, Orientalism, which is not limited to Said's study of the Near and Middle East (ever Eurocentric reference points) and includes discourses about East Asian cultures, has been party to the neglect of moral/critical self-reflection and material-social situatedness through the creation and curation of fantasy worlds. This state of affairs contrasts significantly with the logistics of the ever-present question "I don't want all these sharks to die, what can I do?" and the utter inadequacy of the safe, fun and positive leitmotif of the Ripley's conservation messages is at best scampily veiled by the completely positive suggestion to "eat sustainable seafood" when beyond the effectiveness of the suggestion (abstinence is not suggested) Ripley Entertainment is part of a mega-conglomerate that owns a "sustainable" seafood company (Ocean Brands) and employees acting in company interests could hardly be expected or allowed to speak against it.

The politics of education at Ripley's is not as simple as employees simply acting on behalf of company interests, and it can be said with concern for candid political opinions or ideological statements (justified and/or politically effective cultural judgements or not) that education staff are frequently muzzled. One staff-member told me that—as could be expected from an institution that depends upon its association with education and does not want to be liable for the political views of its employees within that sphere, but also considering conflicting corporate interests and pervasive underlying consumer ideologies—with respect to issues of environmental change and destruction, agents can be vaguely referred to and responsible consumership could be suggested, but names of specific irresponsible actors cannot be named, even if they were asked for by guests. While some staff seek opportunities to be more candid at risk of facing discipline—"wasteful culture" is not likely to be in the lexicon of approved messages and one employee was written up for comments about Nestle—by and large I think this should be done in a less Orientalist way given the consonance of the latter with a fetishized consumer odditorium educators would be required to subvert in order to fulfill what I contend

their own *personal* commitments to education and conservation would necessarily entail within the realm of politics. For the aquarium itself in a more formal administrative respect, education and conservation take on definite values of a quite different scope.

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums, Animal Welfare and the Meaning of Education and Conservation

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), originally the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums was formed in 1924 as a professional organization to establish and advance professional standards in the management of zoos and aquariums. The organization states in the 2019 Accreditation Guide that:

Throughout their history, zoological parks and aquariums in the Americas have been governed according to varying objectives. Nevertheless, AZA believes that institutions maintaining exotic wildlife must recognize and accept their common goals and seek to advance them by adhering to professional standards for maintaining quality and performance (2019).

Although the AZA maintains that common goals should be accepted by the related institutions, zoos and aquariums of various sorts are able to operate without being members. In 1974 the AZA accredited its first facility (the Vancouver Aquarium) according to a set of standards that have been under regular revision since then. In 1984, accreditation became mandatory for membership and, as a result, membership decreased by 75% the following year. In the preamble to the AZA accreditation, it reads of the purpose of AZA accreditation:

The highest goals of AZA accreditation include exemplary animal care and welfare, and inspiring guest engagement through effective education and conservation...[and results in] the most scrutinized, specialized and dynamic organizations in the world dedicated to animal care, welfare and well-being, public engagement, education, and conservation and science.(AZA Accreditation Standards 2019).

These are ambitious and worthy goals, and members might be thought, in the spirit of these stated goals, to be strongly committed to meeting them as healthy organs of their profession. One member of Ripley's staff told me that the AZA community represents an invaluable resource in caring for and managing aquatic animals, with a constantly accessible and highly active web-

based forum that cross fertilizes the experience of aquarists, educators and veterinarians throughout North America and beyond, which has resulted in a greater possible level of care and attentiveness to the needs of animals beyond the context of single aquariums. Some benefits of accreditation, as they are stated in the AZA accreditation guide include:

- An indicator to private organizations, foundations, and government agencies in connection with contributions, grants, contracts, funding, permitting, and other areas
- Exempts institutions from certain government requirements
- Promoted professional recognition by the top zoological parks and aquariums in the U.S. that current professional standards are being met
- Promotes excellence within the institution by setting in motion continuous self-evaluation in light of ever-rising zoological and aquarium standards and best practices
- Helps distinguish institutions from “roadside collections” and the like (ibid.)

Not all facilities that exhibit animals adhere to common ideals of excellence in animal welfare, guest services, education or conservation, as the note on “roadside collections” addresses, but it must be admitted that many of these benefits are enticing in their own right.

The Ripley empire was started by Robert Ripley, a cartoonist, trivialist, media personality, entrepreneur and a sort of amateur Orientalist known for his “Odditoriums” and “Believe it or Not” shows and books. His travel journals, illustrations and paraphernalia of factoids have made his eccentric presence and eclectic collections of artifacts well-known throughout North America during his lifetime and to this day. While there are *some* educational elements to Ripley’s media empire, the great majority of Ripley’s attractions do not even qualify as edutainment. The Jim Pattison Group acquired the Ripley empire in 1985 (JimPattisonGroup.com 2019) around 25 years after Ripley’s death, and expanded it into what is now known as Ripley Entertainment. To date, Ripley Entertainment operates three aquariums, the latest one completed being the Toronto location. The association with the Ripley name immediately raises suspicions that the aquarium has more in common in spirit (rather than economic resources) with “roadside attractions” than it does with an educational facility. The aquarium itself is state of the art, visually impressive and has a very knowledgeable and well-trained staff. Aspects of the aquarium are typical enough, though with a number of

embellishments and games of no educational value but which do produce guest engagement, the latter an important factor in the AZA's overall philosophy. In 2018, still resembling an ordinary aquarium, Ripley's opened a new exhibit called "Curious Creatures" which is much more in line with the aesthetics and *modus operandi* of a "Believe it or Not" attraction, featuring an "Amazonian Makeover" which takes pictures of guests' faces and makes them into shrunken heads. As one employee remarked during one of my visits, about the aquarium's overall goals: "education is less important than spectacle" in comparison to the Vancouver Aquarium which was accredited by the AZA before accreditation was mandatory, and which itself is public, not-for-profit and responsive to public sentiment (Warkentin 2007, p.149).

Public controversy surrounding the Toronto Ripley Aquarium has historically been associated with animal welfare. Before the aquarium opened, activists opposed the use of captured wild sand tiger sharks (vulnerable species) in addition to those acquired from other aquariums for use in the "Dangerous Reef" exhibit, and which were allowed to be used in the aquarium because they would serve "educational purposes." In addition, the numerous touch tanks in the facility allow guests, without any sanitary requirements (there is nearby hand sanitizer for guests to use to clean their hands off after putting their hands in the tanks), to touch several animals resident there including white spotted bamboo sharks (*Chiloscyllium plagiosum*), horseshoe crabs (*Limulus polyphemus*) and scarlet cleaner shrimp (*Lysmata amboinensis*). The use of so-called "ambassador animals" in zoos and aquariums is part of the AZA's education and conservation arsenal. Lloro-Bidart relates this form of political representation to the "make live" aspect of Foucault's aphoristic "make live/let die" characterization of biopolitics:

[M]icro-populations of animal bodies...serve as ambassadors for their own species, and for the environment more generally, as they are regulated at both the individual and population level in order to "make live." Following Foucault, this sort of "making live" subjects the animals at the Aquarium to a kind of political death, vis-à-vis what I call a unique type of "speciesism." Akin to Foucault's "racism," in *Society Must be Defended*, i.e., "If you want to live the other must die," they are isolated from members of their own species in the natural environment they typically inhabit so that they may be displayed and *touched* for the benefit of the greater conservation good (Lloro-Bidart 2014 emphasis in original)

Section 1.5.4 of the AZA animal welfare guidelines states: “An education, conservation and *welfare* message must be an *integral* component of all programs” (AZA Standards 2019, p.14 emphasis mine) and that:

Although the housing conditions for ambassador animals may look different at times to those provided to exhibit animals, institutions must provide similar social, physical, behavioral and nutritional opportunities to ambassador animals. Regular holding enclosures...for any given ambassador animal species must provide sufficient space for comfort, exercise, *shelter*, and have sufficient complexity...providing ambassador animals with *choices and control* over their environment (e.g., whether they want to participate in a program on a given day and incorporating *time limitations* (including animal rotation and rest periods), where and when appropriate, is essential to ensuring effective care and management (ibid. emphasis mine).

In actual practice, there is a nearly categorical contrast in how the "ambassador animal" program at Ripley's Canada's facility operates. The bamboo sharks were originally held in a tank that allowed them the choice to swim into a no touch zone, in compliance with AZA dictates, but they were moved into a larger tank with much greater guest access. With regular crowds of guests at the tank, two attendants are not able to effectively regulate the interactions or do much as far as education. On Jazz Nights at the aquarium (where alcohol is served) the touch tank sharks are sometimes given unwanted levels of attention and persistence, coinciding with changes in their behaviour in days following. On any given day, guests are told that the sharks are rotated and given rest periods regardless of whether or not this is the case and, beyond that, the touch tanks have been kept open when they've been in need of cleaning and more sharks have been added to the touch tanks, allowing guests greater access regardless of the sharks' apparent unwillingness to consistently participate in their "work" as ambassador animals. Education staff members frequently appear frustrated and ineffective in maintaining a comfortable environment for the animals, and are not supported by management practices which could easily curb the flow of access (and perhaps result in some degree of guest dissatisfaction).

Clearly the animals are not being given choice or control in their environment as per AZA guidelines, and limiting the effectiveness of education staff in upholding those guidelines,

distorts and manipulates the very meaning of animal welfare and education, and has created a sickly aesthetic oriented by a politics of consumer capital that facilitates the production of and complacency with abusive subjectivities. In my visits to the aquarium and frequent observations of touch tank management and patronage, busy times have always been marked with anxiety and lack of agency among staff attendants let alone sharks. The magnitude of guests coming through the aquarium and touching “ambassador animals” is hard to fathom considering that in the summer of 2018 after only 5 years in operation Ripley’s Canada had its 10 millionth guest (RipleyAquariums.com 2018). A few short months afterwards during the aquarium’s monthly jazz night—already noted above for its problematic mix of alcohol and access to shark homes and bodies—a man jumped naked into the “Dangerous Lagoon” exhibit where the sand tiger sharks, sandbar sharks (*Carcharhinus plumbeus*) and various other aquatic animals are kept in a display of recreational adventurousness and showmanship (Global News 2018) and it’s not entirely surprising that he was eventually charged with assault causing bodily harm for an incident earlier that evening which testifies to an overall relative indifference to the well-being and unique lives of others in the assertion of his identity, the latter related above as being deficient in the messages imparted by the Ripley’s Canada touch tank “ambassador animal” (a tragic term) program and which is also, to some extent at least, latent in ontological practices connected with and related to Orientalism. I will now conclude this component with a look at another location on the diverse spectrum of entertainment and education: whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*) tourism in Djibouti, and take up questions of shark welfare there as well.

Whale Shark Ecotourism in Djibouti

In January 2018 I took part in a research expedition in Ghoubet and the Gulf of Tadjoura in Djibouti, a small coastal country on the Horn of Africa and former French colony, as a volunteer lay research assistant and ecotourist. The expedition run by the Shark Research Institute (who I had signed up with) and Sharkwatch Arabia centered for the most part around the collection of data in the form of photos of the characteristic markings found on the sides of whale sharks [see Image 3, page 23] for the purposes of tracking individual sharks over time (without the need for tags) and samples of whale shark food sources (mostly zooplankton and crab spawn) skimmed from the water as a way of studying things such as population and migration dynamics. As far as ecotourism goes, experiences with whale sharks can vary considerably. There are whale shark tours offered in Mexico, Belize, the Philippines, Djibouti and other locations such as the Galapagos. The juvenile congregations of whale sharks in Djibouti, which consist of relatively small sharks at around 2.5m on the low end (adults can grow up to 10 metres long), are probably the most populous of any on earth. In contrast to other shark tourism locations, Djibouti is seldom a location for international recreational travel. The tourism industry there is mostly limited to the whale shark tours with significant patronage by visitors from the numerous foreign military bases nearby from the U.S., Italy, France, China and Japan, and other expats, whose spending has resulted in a skyrocketing cost of living for largely poverty-stricken nationals while an increasing amount of direct investment has come in mainly from China to develop the shipping industry there, which represents a strategic position in global trade focalized by a large free-trade zone. The whale shark tourism industry in Djibouti is by-and-large—for foreign tourists on scientific expeditions and/or less-than-typical vacationists alike—significantly less recreational in scope than the island of Holbox in Mexico, for example, and so carries with it much more of a conscientiously purist connotation as a venture in ecotourism in that it stands apart from typical trinkets and luxuries.

As a research volunteer, my role consisted of taking part in periodic trips from the anchored Turkish Goulet (the “Deli”) on one of several small motorboats, jumping in the water with fins and snorkel near whale sharks to swim by them and take photos of their markings. Anything near adequate phenomenological description of these encounters is largely hard to imagine, and I cannot overstate the difference between my experience of swimming beside a whale shark and merely seeing one, much less the boundary between sitting or standing still gazing at a picture and being tossed about by the waves—slightly nauseated with eyes, lungs and sinuses stinging with salt water, coughing—while trying to propel forward (out of shape, days without much sleep, jet-lagged) toward something vaguely visible, living, beloved, beautiful in the distance and to finally come upon a cloud fish at the center of which were reflected beautiful patterns of undulating beams of light by the auric phenotypic genius of the skin of one of these ocean youths, whose movements betray an unmistakable familiarity and comfort with the surrounding water. In taking in food and oxygen through what look a little bit like gasps and routine but enthusiastic gulps, these sharks’ gills burst open rounded like parachutes before collapsing against them like a sheet pressing against a body by a shift of wind. The whale sharks I met moved slowly, but there were times when my best athletic efforts to keep up meant nothing at all to some ordinary rolls of the tail, and they could dive deep and out of my range easily and effortlessly. Most of them however, most of the time, didn’t. Their invisible food was more abundant at the surface, but incentives aside (I can’t say for certain) there was something about the movements of one of the first ones I encountered close up and the manner with which we shared space that didn’t feel like indifference, or irritation—but more like genuine tolerance. Having done my first excursion without a camera, to get a first impression, I took one with me subsequently and embraced my role as a research assistant, trying to get IDs and work efficiently, discovering layers of etiquette implicit in my presence and actions during the expedition and our daily trips. I wondered about whether I was “chasing” or merely “catching up,” and whether or not there was confluence between my desire to perform well in my gathering of useful data and

the conservation mindset which played such an important role in me being there. More broadly, one thought that came to mind was how I had traveled across such vast geographies and conditions of life in such a short period, I also wondered in what way the sharks' presence in Djibouti had brought me to where I was and how it was even possible for the resources (let alone the incentives) to exist for *me* to so specifically be *there*. I later learned the extraordinarily unsettling statistic that in travelling twelve thousand kilometers from home I had travelled about one kilometer for every shark killed on average each hour by humans which placed me puzzlingly within the economic material entanglements of teleology and politics, giving me a slightly ironic feeling for my own insignificance within a web of inflated agency without which the sharks would no less be there (Worm et al. 2013).

On the boat Dr. Jennifer Schmidt of SRI, the person with whom I had originally signed up with, gave me some background on the whale shark tourism industry in Djibouti and elsewhere. In Mexico, where tours with full-grown adult whale sharks take place regularly, unlicensed operators frequently fail to observe regulations and conventions (though family ties and close community bonds across operators and regulators makes policing poorly effective in many cases), and whale sharks that are normally highly accommodating are affected in their willingness to engage with humans, getting to the point where in the Philippines, in another example—before things turned around, for economic reasons for one—the sound of a boat engine was enough to make whale sharks in the area dive out of reach. Unwanted attention can range from crowding and touching which might interfere with feeding, to boats herding sharks en masse with hordes of tourists, and other such irresponsible boat operation or traffic regulation which leads to propeller injuries and other collisions. Whale shark tourism brings a lot of foreign money to localized economies and has been lauded for its offsetting dependence upon increasingly fragile fisheries, but human nuisance and menace to whale sharks makes of their willingness to engage with humans, too, a commons resource, particularly so in that whale sharks migrate across many tourist locations and are not incapable of remembering human behaviour. Citing marine

biologist and conservationist Rachel Graham on whale shark tourism across Belize, Honduras and Mexico, Eilperin writes: “Graham has been tracking these whale sharks for years, and it’s quite likely that the same individuals are making their way from Belize to Mexico and Honduras, in search of the best available food as tourists gawk at them. ‘This is the same population,’ Graham says. ‘Along the Mesoamerican reef they’re being hit up in three locations. That, to me, is a worry.’” (Eilperin p.235). With so little known about whale shark reproduction, little can be as of yet determined about the fragility of the population. Schmidt, a geneticist, pointed out the fact of low genetic diversity across major ocean populations of whale sharks (Schmidt et al. 2009), and so with a lack of definitive regional genetic markers the fragility of whale shark breeding grounds is difficult to evaluate. The congregation of young whale sharks in Djibouti (again, likely the largest on earth) exists against the backdrop of a shrinking global population and could represent a significant phenomenon in life cycles of that broader population, and so questions about the reasons for them being there and the continuing *possibility* of them being there may be significant for the resilience of whale sharks as a species.

When I initially arrived at the coast in the Djiboutian municipality of Arta to meet up with the live-aboard boat, there were a number of people settled there and small motorboats like the one that ultimately picked me up sitting on the dry volcanic sand by the water. The Djiboutian climate is very dry, and I saw very little vegetation either on the hours-long drive between beige and greyish rocky cliffs, or along the major roadway busy and lined with extensive testaments to the Djiboutian shipping industry. Economic opportunities are hard to come by for many people there, and so while the dry land on the coast and along the nearby roads in Arta was marked by little else of notice to my analytic than some rocky formations, a few vehicles, simple buildings, people resting in the shade and a slow moving but curious dog, just beyond and into the water there were likely encounters with whale sharks swimming there. As soon as we got out of the car to wait for the pickup, several men came to us (myself, a driver/liason from the local company partnered with for the expedition, and the expat South Carolina native manager of that company)

and offered to take us out to see the whale sharks. We already had our arrangements, and I was a little taken aback by the fact that while we had seen evidence of human activity in a number of military training courses set up along the cliffy rock face, the first people we'd seen in over an hour after having made a drive too physically treacherous for night time would find venture enough in waiting by the water for people to simply stop by, and I dwelled for a few moments on the arrogance of my own habits of judgement—conditioned as they were from very different circumstances and stereotyped by this miniscule slice of time I shared with this place. It took a little while for it to settle in that it was more or less an established fact that staying in this arid spot by the water, at this moment, was the best way for those there to make-live.¹⁸ After meeting with my pickup a short while later and setting off toward the Deli, I saw my first whale shark a few minutes into the ride. All I could see was a fin poking above the water, and with the engine cut (for my sake—I was the only one aboard the skiff who was not a member of the crew and for whom this sight was not a regular enough occurrence to consider passing by—though not by any insistence on my part, and I didn't have the initiative to jump in and get some shots before settling in a bit first) I could hear the calm sounds of the surrounding air and waves gently lapping against the boat while this amazing being was so utterly materially there, testified, for me, via such elegantly modest visibility. *No, you're not for me, I'm so lucky, I feel so welcome, thank you. I hope you know that.*

A few days into the expedition, on one of our daily excursions, we came across a shark whose dorsal fin was shredded. It was painful to look at, and was likely caused by the propeller of a small motorboat that wasn't being driven carefully enough. The fin was shredded and half detached, yet likely to heal. Had the shark been full-sized that fin might be worth \$10, 000 USD

¹⁸ The aphoristic: “make live/let die” characterizes Foucault’s biopolitics. To participate in international economy in a way that acknowledges the translation of values is, I believe, to recognize in one’s own livelihood practices an investment in the production of biopolitical orders and forms. Here, beyond the context of more formal institutional “guest services,” there remains in forms of affective labour a constellation of certain teleological imperatives according to which the concept of life is managed, practiced and upon which it depends.

on the black market (Neimanis 2012, p.106) which made it seem, in contrast with sharks' remarkably rapid and coveted healing ability, fragile indeed. On one of our last trips out, having already collected IDs on the sharks we could see around us, we went on an explicitly "selfie dive." I didn't feel particularly inclined to take a picture of myself beside a shark considering I already had extensive video that I knew I could use to relive my experiences, and something felt a little off-key about the idea. Throughout all of the excursions, I never lost consciousness of myself as being a tourist and so while it felt a little strange that we'd be bringing out into the open something that was present the whole time, I was able to invest myself in the appeal—the whole phenomenological and ethnographic focus of my research was, after all, already a sort of gigantic shark selfie. All of it felt very obviously flamboyant for me, which was perfectly fine as noted immediately above, but I didn't know exactly how to acknowledge the intentions of the humans around me: Was cynicism a mutual feeling? Did I think of shark selfies in too strong an association with disembodied tokenism? When I jumped into the water it was exceptionally easy to get up close with the nearby shark. I eventually got my selfie and it was only when reviewing the video that I saw the shark stop and turn, allowing me to cozy up beside it on my first approach, because the boat had circled around the other side of the shark. The driver, who was well-experienced and had not been given any kind of specific instructions on etiquette for the "dive" (I was told that these things are hard to convey) had herded the shark toward us because, it seems, he thought we (scientific researchers, lay people of various persuasions—on a *selfie dive*) wanted him to. We were chasing after it, after all, and wouldn't stand much of a chance of getting near it without dropping into the water at strategic moments to begin with. In the meantime following those drop offs, managing the distance between us and the shark (which need not be due to it actively avoiding us necessarily) was more or less an alternative to frequently circling around and picking us up after failed attempts at getting close enough to make contact.

An Unsure Future for Sharks

The future of the young congregations of whale sharks in the Gulf of Tadjoura is uncertain. Not much is yet known about the sea currents which supply nutrients for the phytoplankton which provide food for zooplankton and, ultimately, crabs and whale sharks. With increased Chinese investment in the shipping industry, including plans to alter the Gulf in order to accommodate greater traffic, the possible effects on marine wildlife by seemingly inevitable progress in the region remains unknown. The key Doraleh Multipurpose Port (DMP), is jointly owned by Dubai's DP World, the Djiboutian government and China Merchant Holdings (though Djibouti has effectively seized the port from DP World's control, part of an ongoing battle (Arabian Business 2018)) and is now flanked by a Chinese naval base with 5000 personnel that is mainly dedicated to fighting piracy in the greater region (The Diplomat 2018). Though the connection does not directly link concrete instances to a singular biopolitical regime or ideal in a straightforward sense, I suggest that the consonance between pirates and the qualities of the word "shirk"—especially in connection with those feelings held by Anglo fishermen towards sharks (=their adversaries in the ocean)—illustrates neoliberal regimes according to which real sharks are also included in those who fall through the cracks into apparent obscurity and non-existence insofar as they fail to live up to their allocated forms of capital. Whether hiding by a rock in a touch tank at a for-profit aquarium or swimming in a geo-politically significant body of water marked by overlapping shades of imperialism which are indifferent to how a given human being outside the most densely conglomerated capitalist teleologies (power, shipping, war, bureaucracy, entertainment) is to make stones into bread, it seems that a shark's just *being there* is somehow unacceptable, because as the example of whale sharks in Djibouti may ultimately prove to be a "let die" scenario, the figurative arrangements of sharkness simply operate according to other ideals than those nested within its material recognition, connecting the shirkly abjection of piracy,

whale shark tourism and whale shark futures.¹⁹ Next, my third and final component tries to convey some of these ideals nested in a monistic dialogic of Shark Media.



Image 3. Taken by me in Djibouti, January 2018. The distinctive patterns on whale sharks from photos like these can be digitized by modified astronomical software and are contributing to a growing database with many contributions coming from lay-tourists.

¹⁹ I'm not connecting piracy and whale shark tourism hand-in-hand with one another as specific economic opportunities theoretically available to any given group of people, but making an ecofeminist observation about the entanglement of shark and human bodies according to the ideology of the word "shirk" according to economic dependence upon the geopolitical and biopolitical breadth and scope of forms of capital validated by neoliberal teleology and materialized by certain forms of liquidity. This assemblage is, I believe, a zenith for the hermeneutical monad of shark humanism and is part of the conversation depicted in particular in a painting for my third component entitled: "Shark Flavoured Constellations," which interpellates sharks in capital and identitarian figurations tracing from Christian imperialism to globalist neo-Darwinism.

The SharksMart Display at ZigZag

Introduction

Throughout my researching of Shark Media, including my visits to the Ripley's aquarium, whale shark expedition in Djibouti, reading works of fiction and natural history on sharks and attempting to make sense of the messages and cultural forms of cult shark movies and *Shark Week* (something I've never been partial to), images have continuously been ringing in my memory with the visceral effects that such experiences have had upon me and have been part of my continuous commitment to affirming juxtapositions of sometimes quite abstract constructs and states of affairs with the living bodies of sharks. The artworks I made have helped me meditate on these problems and hold onto common elements when some of the speculative dimensions of my portfolio as a whole have made it difficult to narrow in on what exactly I have been trying to express. There has been a constant artistic question guiding both my painting and my overall responses to what I've experienced: How does one represent something that one does not wish to see? This is a phenomenological question too, because it often amounts to seeking out and attuning to pain that is already there in some ways and sorely lacking in others, and in a larger cultural context it is sometimes by very virtue of being present as a self-contained individual desiring experience that such pain exists. It takes resolve to seek out disappointing things in environments designed to coddle the senses, and the occasional aesthetic banality of morally outrageous and disappointing facts comes part and parcel with both an abundance of material realities and a seeming lack of social-political agency, but I think this is a reason why moralism has become such a commodity.

There is much to learn and witness in the world that is shocking and revolting, and the first time that I saw video of shark finning was one of my earliest memories of truly *feeling* a shark. Fear, pain, confusion, there are always elements of anthropomorphization, but the reason I

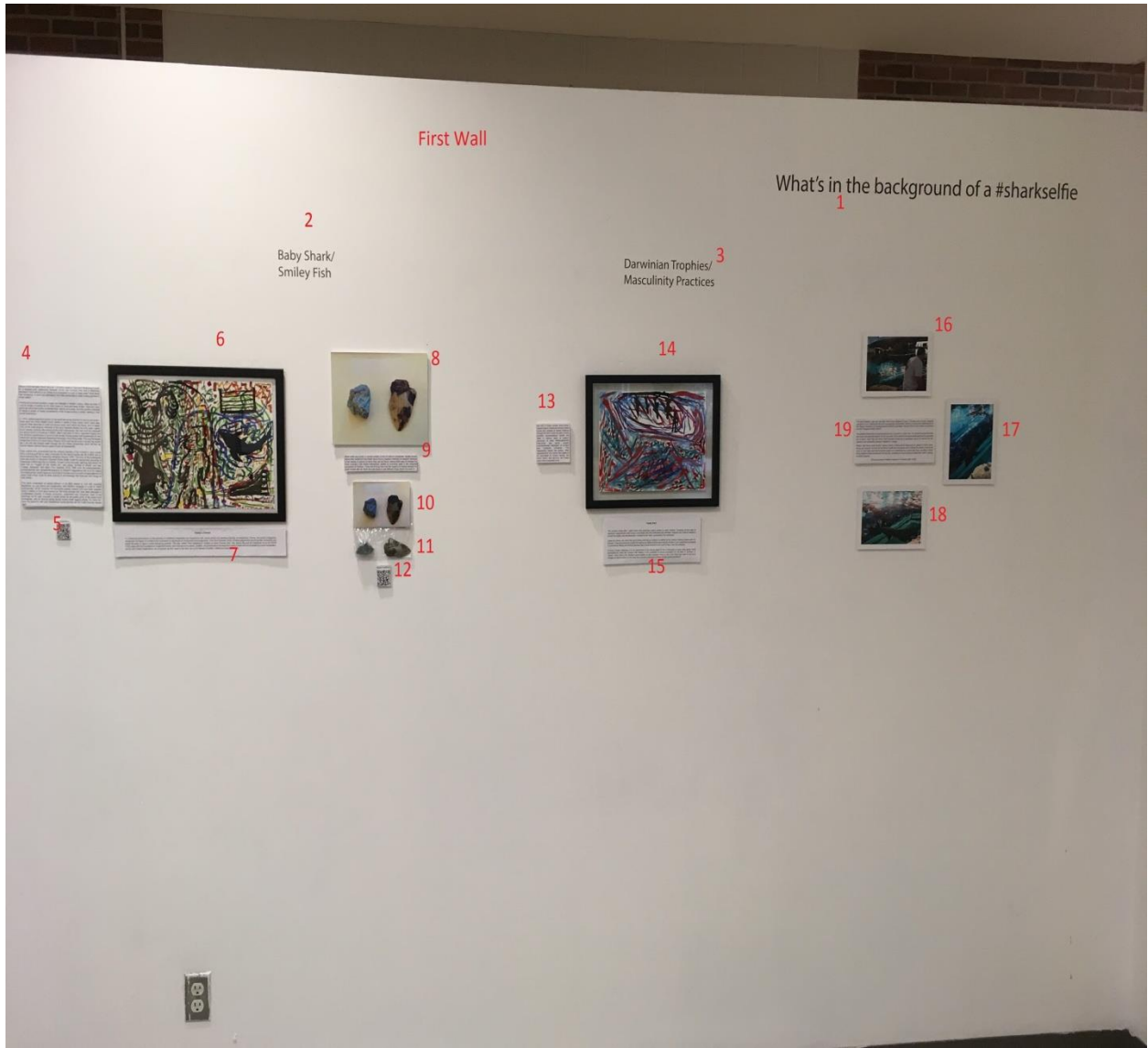
felt them so strongly was because it was clear in that moment that sharks experience the world in ways unique to them, so when an irrecoverably maimed shark which seems so intent upon getting away is thrown into the water the cringe that I can scarcely help but feel doesn't quite match up to the powerful swimming strokes that finalize the extent of their injuries "No! Not so hard!" and I can only imagine myself running toward a concrete wall or a fire hydrant without knowing how much it will hurt or for the reflex to "stop running" to even register in the habitual sense I'm familiar with.

Maybe this is an after-effect of widening my sense of imaginable pain or an analogy called to collaborate with a definite affect whose source is far beyond "my" control, but it's a feeling of self helplessness in a world of interdependence. When I painted the work "Sharks Flee" I'm not sure I could have cried more sincerely as deep feelings returned from previous experiences and lessons with sharks which ended up so clearly before my eyes in brushes of colour if tears had streamed down my face, and every once in a while I'd have something press in "oh, that looks quite beautiful" and I would resolutely focus again rather than cringe at myself. Now I certainly do have an aversion, a fear, of romanticism or mysticism supplanting something genuine, consequential and worthwhile—though I value these things highly—as is the advocacy for actual sharks, and I have no desire to simply dwell upon pain as if it would solve problems that have come up throughout this study, but it has become clear to me that while the image of a sport fisherman hooking and reeling in a shark might not draw much attention to the selfhood of the shark as something one owes a duty to witness the pain of, it often draws a lot of attention to the fisherman. These things, the pain and the glory, are together materially in one assemblage, and the entanglements are far reaching and marked by forms of aversion far too historically diverse to be termed discretely, but to interrogate shark semiotics and material semiotics in light of the so-called "death of Man" (a problematic arrangement from the get go) seemed to me a favourable point of departure in that it would at least be illustrative.

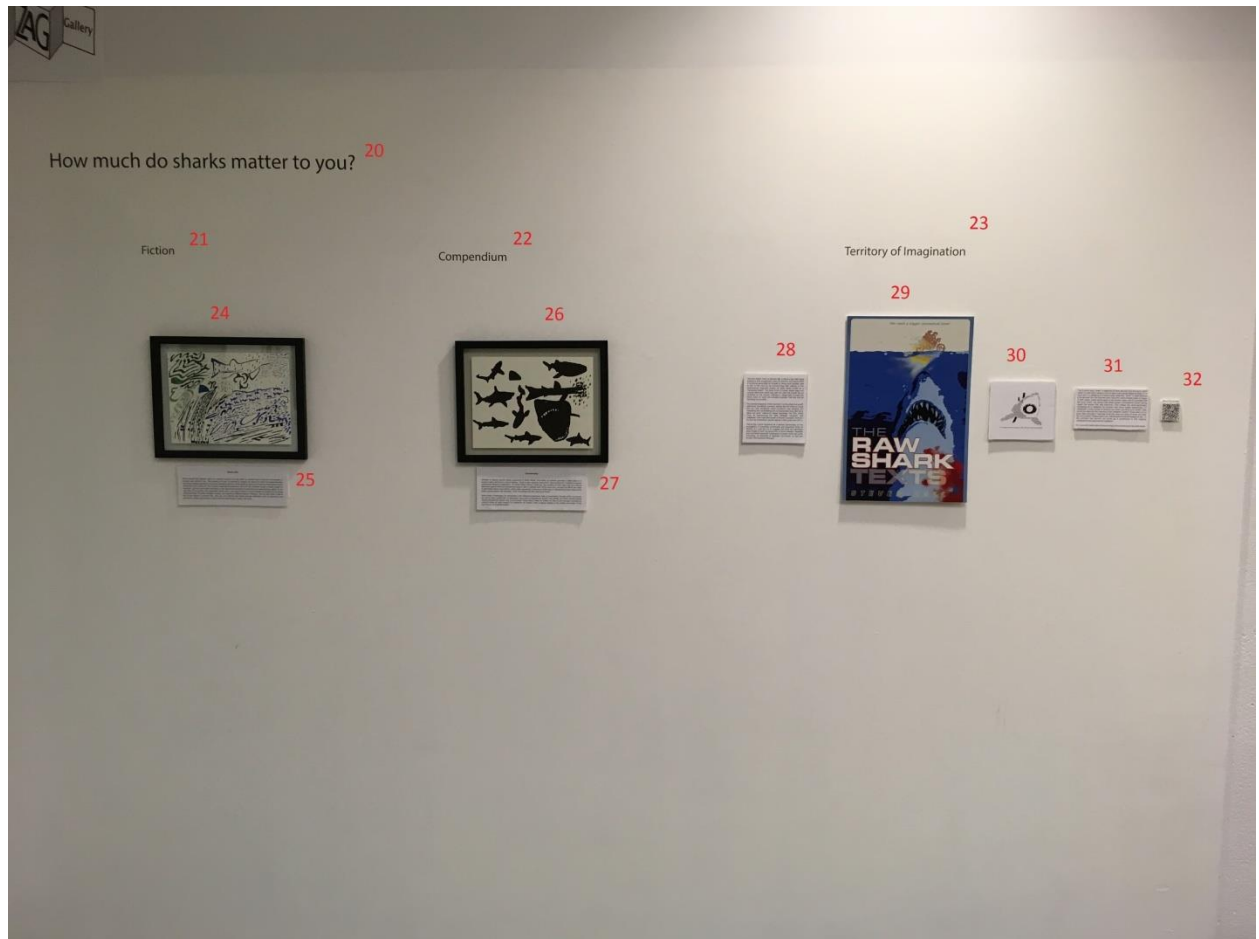
There are all sorts of gestures coloured by sharkness and will-to-power while sharks are routinely ignored, and so why should that neglect simply vanish when *awesome sharks* are all over movies and sleeping bags are made that look like sharks eating the young human toddlers sleeping inside. It's hard to call a single cutesy plush toy especially harmful for sharks but disembodied is more to the point when examining the breadth of the assemblages. My argument is that the disembodied nature of the assemblage I'm depicting in this display is not merely due to a disparate set of concepts called upon to link elements under the banner of sharkness but something more systemic in culture: a telos threaded together by a language of sharks that wants to do all sorts of imperialistic things long established by critics of racism, patriarchy and unchecked technoscience. The point is that this language, embedded and elaborated through The SharksMart display according to a fairly linear sequence from left to right and established more thoroughly especially in "The Inescapable Sharkness of Being," makes it a bit easier to take a step back and wonder who sharks are. If not, then the overall cohesiveness of the work is an interesting testament to humanistic "self writing."

The display, which was up from December 2018 through to the end of February 2019, was set up at the Zig-Zag gallery in York University's HNES building. The artworks were on three walls and one corner post that form the backdrop of a lounge area. Original artworks and prints have been for sale through a web store since the installation of the display with proceeds going to Sharks of the Atlantic Research and Conservation Centre (ShARCC) for shark tagging efforts that will help in the study of population dynamics. Photos of the display walls with the elements itemized by number can be found directly below, followed by the digitized elements themselves. There was a comment box for audience feedback on a table between the second and third walls which is not visible in the photos of the gallery. Some of the text accompaniments to the artworks have been modified.

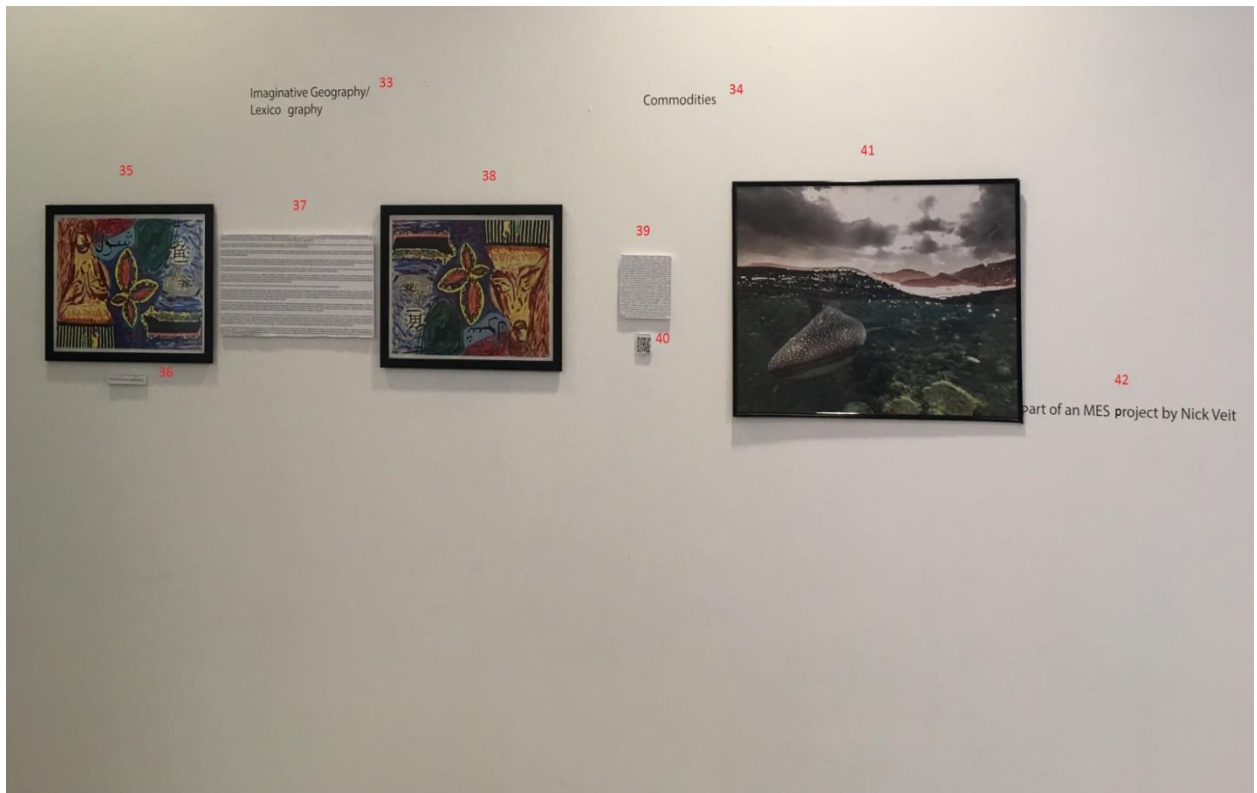
First Wall Layout



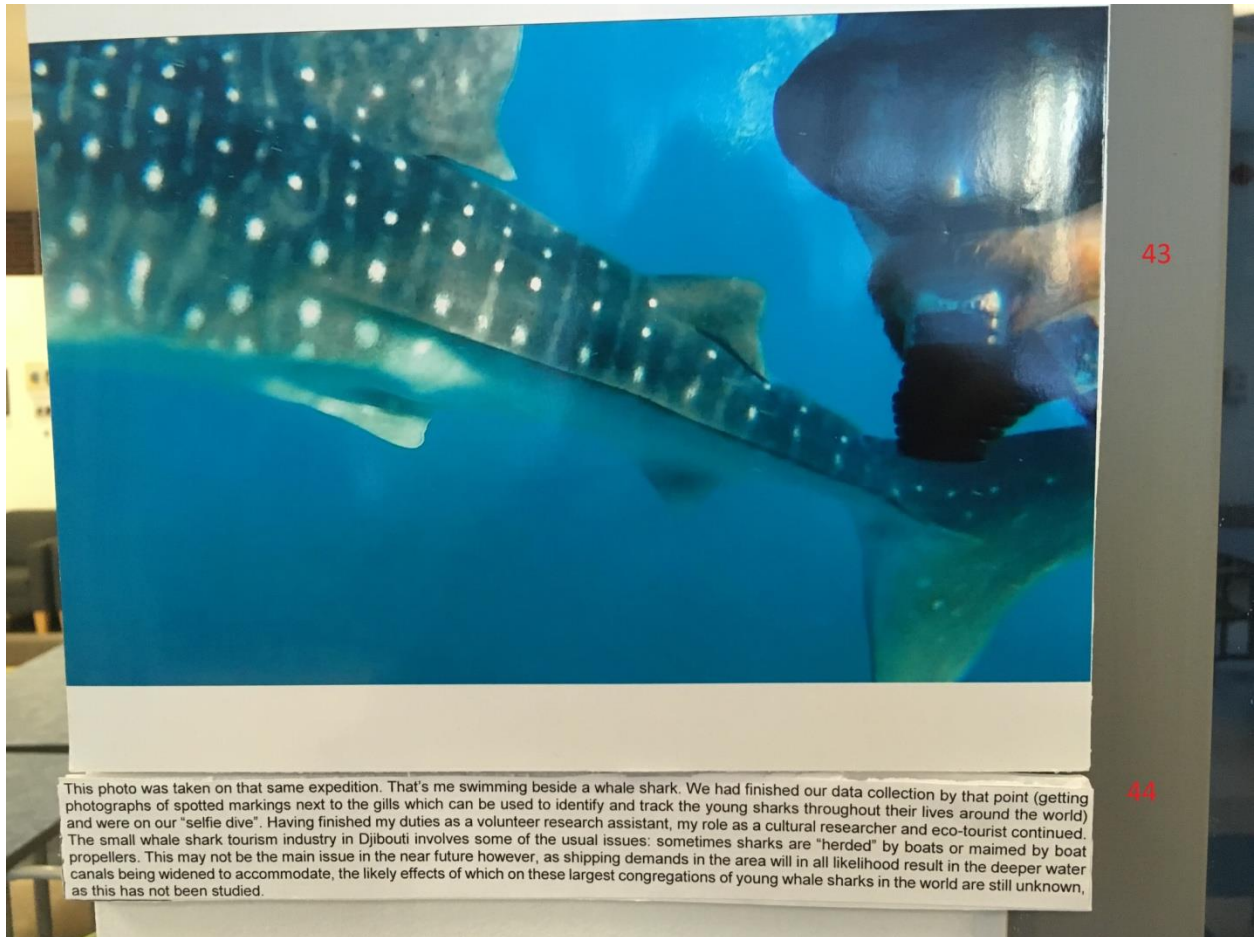
Second Wall Layout



Third Wall Layout



Corner Post Layout



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This photo was taken on that same expedition. That's me swimming beside a whale shark. We had finished our data collection by that point (getting photographs of spotted markings next to the gills which can be used to identify and track the young sharks throughout their lives around the world) and were on our "selfie dive". Having finished my duties as a volunteer research assistant, my role as a cultural researcher and eco-tourist continued. The small whale shark tourism industry in Djibouti involves some of the usual issues: sometimes sharks are "herded" by boats or maimed by boat propellers. This may not be the main issue in the near future however, as shipping demands in the area will in all likelihood result in the deeper water canals being widened to accommodate, the likely effects of which on these largest congregations of young whale sharks in the world are still unknown, as this has not been studied.

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Contents of First Wall

- 1) Title for first wall: “What’s in the background of a #sharkselfie?”
- 2) Heading on left side of first wall: “Baby Shark/Smiley Fish”
- 3) Heading on right side of first wall: “Darwinian Trophies/Masculinity Practices
- 4) Intro/background for display as a whole:

Did you know that “Baby Shark” has over 1.94 billion views on YouTube? What does it mean for a predator-prey relationship between sharks and humans (one that is effectively reversed in pop culture) to be cutified and propagated on such a mass scale? What about fear mongering, or even just admiration? Are there similarities in what is being glorified in these cases?

Sharks are prominent symbols, tropes and vestiges in Western culture. When we think of cultural images of sharks we are often drawn to *Jaws* and ideas of fear. There are many particular ways that sharks constellate fear, identity and power, and this exhibit is intended to depict a variety of these constellations while foregrounding a politics relating to their actual exploitation.

In 1916—while a significant portion of the world was at war and the US had not yet joined—there were four shark-related human deaths in waters of New Jersey which, years later, inspired Peter Benchley to write the famous book upon which the movie *Jaws* is based. One of the most gripping moments of the story happens aboard the Orca when captain Quint gravely recounts the sinking of the USS Indianapolis—the real boat that delivered the atomic bomb to Hiroshima in WW2—after it had been hit with a Japanese torpedo and the terrifying experiences of survivors left amidst circling sharks that occasionally bit and killed them as they helplessly floated and drowned in the chilling water. This was the largest single loss of life in US naval history (Eilperin 2012) and had as much to do with the sharks as it did with the torpedo itself—though the US military bureaucracy which left this top secret mission without rescue support is just as blameworthy.

One cultural critic commented that the ominous intensity of the moment in *Jaws* comes from a strong guilt felt by many Americans for the atomic bombs set off in WW2 and an accompanying fear of impending retribution (Rubey 1976). The story of the Indianapolis was also shown on Discovery Channel’s Shark Week. It was this special that, according to Stephanie Clifford aka Stormy Daniels, Donald Trump had been watching right before he said that he “hope[s] all the sharks die”, was acting “terrified of sharks” and was “riveted...obsessed” with them (The Guardian 2018). With such an overrepresented, misrepresented and sensational presence in Western imaginations that is by no means inconsequential, sharks figure so much that is not them and it is worth bringing attention to what these things might be while aspiring to acknowledge that there are such things as real sharks.

This work—undertaken as partial fulfilment of the MES degree at York, with curatorial assistance by Lisa Myers and collaboration with GESSA—engages in a sort of “shark anthropology” which hopefully will thoroughly perplex viewers and have them question

what it means to think about sharks as real living animals that have been entangled in multifaceted projects of identity production and humanism. Each of the paintings are for sale (originals or poster prints) as are poster prints of the whale shark photograph, with all revenue going directly toward shark tagging efforts. For more info, scan the store link with your smartphone (some phones can do it right from the camera app).

- 5) QR code for The SharksMart online store URL:
the-sharksmart.myshopify.com



- 6) “Tommy’s Friends” framed watercolour painting:



- 7) Extended Label for “Tommy’s Friends”:

“Tommy’s Friends”: In a theatrical performance on the animacy of childhood imagination and experience with nature (which this painting originally accompanied), Tommy, the central protagonist, recognizes the figure of a shark in the enactment of spontaneous movements and judgements. Over time however, some of these judgements around gender normativity and social life begin to figure a more menacing persona. The play, called “Pan’s Baphroom” (written by Carly Thomas, Nick Veit, Sandy McLeod and Sebastian Scrivo for ENV5 5103) plays with the boundaries of imagination/world, and here serves to extend, unsettle and problematize the ways that sharks inhabit and are inhabited by human imagination, and to ask if shark imaginations are as generic as they seem to be when set up by themes of stuffed, cutified and cartoon animals.

8) Print photo of fossilized shark tooth and blue apatite stone:



9) Label for tooth and stone:

Shark teeth are similar to mineral apatite, a form of calcium phosphate. Apatite stones derive their name from the Greek word *απατείν* (apatein) meaning "to deceive" because of the variety of colours in which they can be found, making them easy to mistake for other minerals. Like sharks themselves, apatite is commonly used in the industrial

production of fertilizer. (Those anti-finning laws fuel the creation of market demand for shark bodies after all...).

- 10) Small print photo of fossilized shark tooth and blue apatite stone
- 11) Bag containing fossilized tooth and blue apatite stone
- 12) QR code with link to URL on common shark products:
<http://sharkangels.org/issues-facing-sharks/list-of-shark-products>



- 13) Context for “Trophy Rack”:

Not only in fiction movies about three-headed sharks, sharks swimming in sand dunes and vortexes of sharks crashing through the white house but also in more scientific representations, sharks are used in various ways to support narratives of white heteropatriarchal masculinity and glorify already overrepresented ideologies of territory and modernist humanism. The (apparently) fiercer the sharks, often representative of a nature that needs to be dominated by human identity, the more heroic and glorious are hobby shark killers supposed to be.

- 14) “Trophy Rack” framed watercolour painting:



15) Extended label for “Trophy Rack”:

“Trophy Rack”: This painting arose after I spent some time observing trophy photos by shark hunters. Focusing on the clash of emotions I experienced while trying to empathize with and understand the identities, histories and material situations of both the sharks and the fishermen. I looked for the “who” enmeshed in the narratives in order to emphasize that these are examples of shared spaces and entangled identities.

Aside from those who claim that sport fishing and killing of sharks is justified by the mantra “making oceans safer for humans”, there are those who justify themselves by stating that the sport fishing of sharks is so insignificant compared to commercial fishing and finning practices that it would amount to an insult to deny such recreationalists the simple pleasure.

If Chinese culture, broadly speaking, is demonized by shark activists for a supposedly invalid justification for the continuation of large scale global shark fishing/finning—even as an exemplary ecological menace showcasing the excesses of natural exploitation for the sake of “prestige” or “status” or economic prowess—then what is the Western accountability for this moralism? How do Western shark lovers even begin to live up to charges to reform culture for the sake the continued existence of these ancient ocean predators when sharks have so often been distorted to obscurity in Western pop-culture

and the West continues to be exemplary of identity consumerism and all-around imperialism?

- 16) Print photo of myself at “Dangerous Lagoon” exhibit at Ripley’s Aquarium of Canada, taken by Ripley’s staff during my “Aquarist for a Day” tour (2018), showing a shark swimming near the surface, my back turned toward it:



- 17) Print photo from “Dangerous Lagoon” exhibit at Ripley’s Aquarium of Canada, taken by Ripley’s staff during my “Aquarist for a Day” tour (2018), showing two sharks swimming near the surface and guests standing in the glass tunnel below the surface:



- 18) Print photo from “Dangerous Lagoon” exhibit at Ripley’s Aquarium of Canada, taken by Ripley’s staff during my “Aquarist for a Day” tour (2018), showing sharks swimming and guests below the surface:



19) Text relating an incident at Ripley’s Aquarium of Canada during “Jazz Night”:

This past October a man who had been told to leave Medieval Times in Toronto, and who later allegedly assaulted a man outside that attraction (supposedly unprovoked), went on to pursue his entertainment at the Ripley’s Aquarium of Canada during its monthly Jazz Night. He took off all of his clothes and jumped into the “Dangerous Lagoon” exhibit.

The exhibit is shown here in these photos from my “Aquarist for a Day” tour. The animals avoided the man who swam and splashed around, for the most part, to the *cheers* of onlookers while staff tried to persuade him to leave. Jazz night and other LLBO licensed events are a significant source of revenue for the aquarium and noteworthy settings of nightlife in Toronto.

Ripley’s also keeps white spotted bamboo sharks (*Chiloscyllium plagiosum*) on display in touch tanks during such events. I’ve been told by Ripley’s staff both that guests tend to ignore the sharks in the touch tanks on Jazz night, and that intoxicated guests are sometimes less careful with them, resulting in them being irritable and less complacent the next day, protesting what one employee called their “work” of being touched by guests.

Contents of Second Wall

- 20) Title for second wall: “How much do sharks matter to you?”
- 21) Heading on left side of second wall: “Fiction”
- 22) Heading on middle part of second wall: “Compendium”
- 23) Heading on right side of second wall: “Territory of Imagination”
- 24) “Sharks Flee” framed watercolour painting:

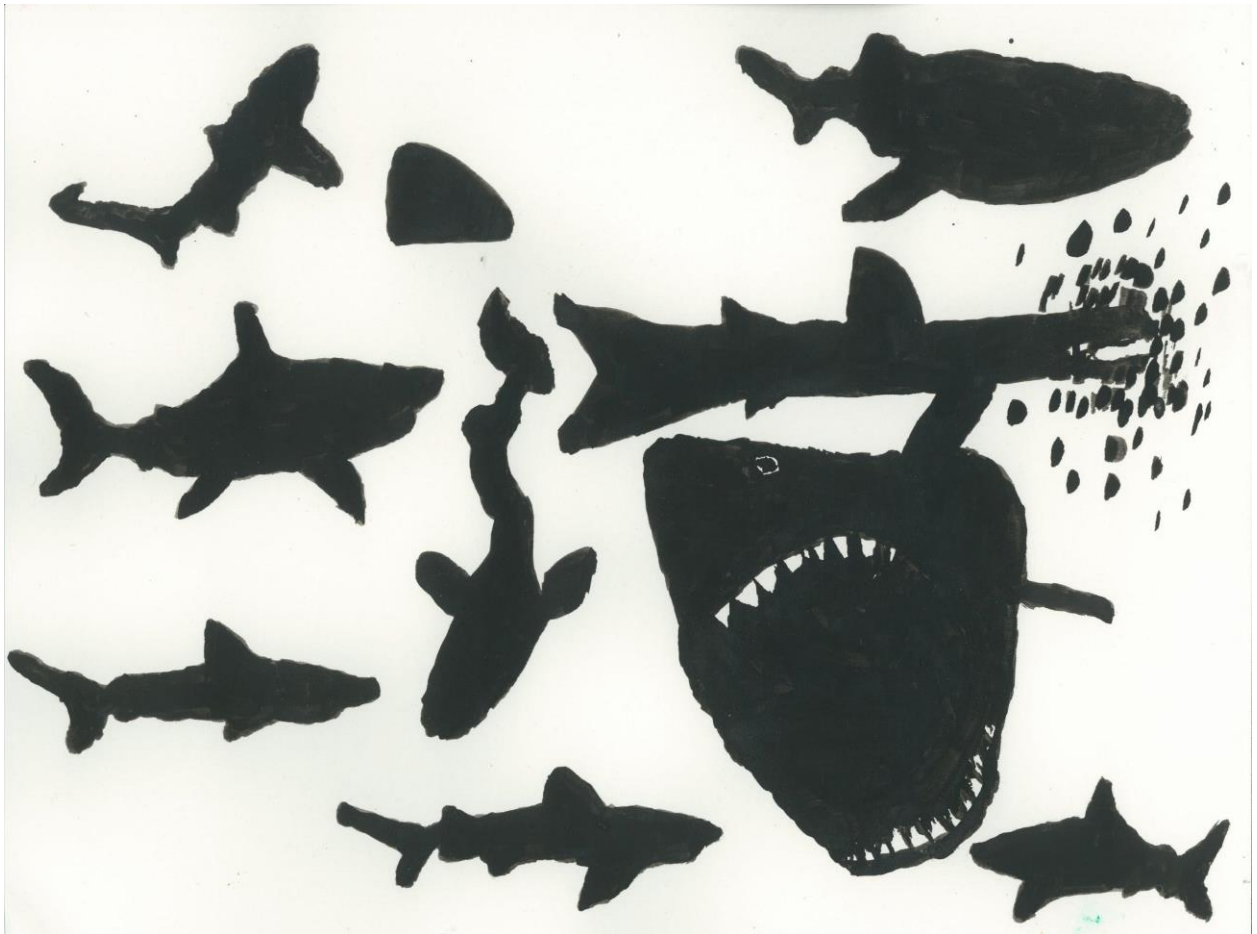


- 25) Extended label for “Sharks Flee”:

“Sharks Flee”: Shark activist Rob Stewart spoke of a pivotal moment in his life when he realized that a shark he encountered on vacation was afraid of *him*. The reversal of the usual narratives of justifiable fear between humans and “man eaters” offers new ways of considering the inner life of sharks, so often used for power and predatory fantasies. This painting is in part an attempt to imagine the desire for shark fins/bodies/identities—including broader questions of economy, identity production and biopolitical orders—as

if it were something that sharks themselves were afraid of. This process involves imagining the perceptual and inner life of sharks caught or nearly caught on long-lines, gill nets and single-line fishing hooks against the backdrop of material forces indentured by capital. On the right side of the painting, the imagination tends more to the elusive nature of these animals for prosaic and everyday understandings of modern life and signifies a different sense of “fleeing.” We can also think of this as the human desire to connect with, seek out, and interact with sharks through institutions such as aquariums and ecotourism, which may involve a (perhaps ill-founded) sense that this elusiveness is being overcome. The aesthetic also borrows from that of the Ripley's Aquarium of Canada in significant ways.

26) “Chrestomathy” framed watercolour painting:



27) Extended label for “Chrestomathy”:

“Chrestomathy”: Whether in natural science books, aquariums or *Shark Week*, information on animals generally is often given in a series of facts which form a sort of tableau. There is often mention made of the “misconceptions” of sharks in popular (particularly Western) imagination. On *Shark Week* in particular the narrative of *Jaws* often acts as a cultural backdrop against which an educationist quest is able to validate itself. At the same time, paradoxical efforts are made to dramatize sharks even further

which often represents a disavowal of the task of representing sharks responsibly while playing games with authority, Truth, knowledge and the meaning of fiction.

What kinds of messages are embedded in the tableau/compendium style of presentation through which consumers are led to learn curated bits of information structured by educational quests? Are sharks and shark themed places merely educational objects and environments? What does it mean for sharks for them to be arranged according to cultural tropes of mass media and other narrative devices? Do metaphors of “sharks” carry a legacy relating to the politics and power of the use/misuse of (mis)information?

The ways that sharks are talked about and used as metaphor/metonymy can swallow them up into abstraction and turn them into mere signifiers or plot elements in conversations that seem nothing especially to do with them as actual beings. When sharks are brought so far into knowledge and identity practices that their essence is abstract onto-politics, how much of a stretch is it to say that their physical annihilation might not be regarded as important?

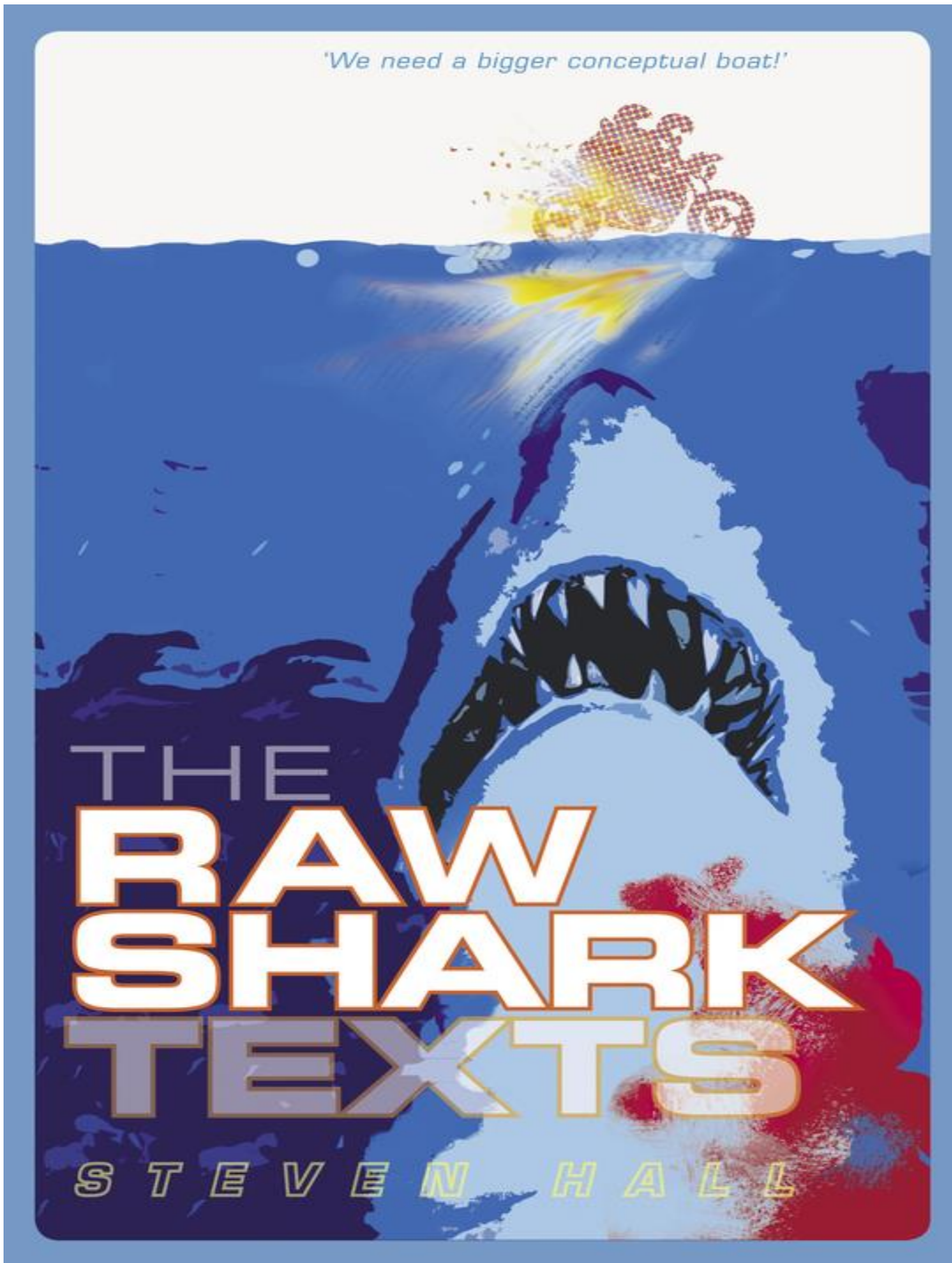
28) Context for *The Raw Shark Texts* book cover poster:

The Raw Shark Texts, by Steven Hall, is about a man with fugue syndrome who occasionally loses his memory and tries to build a functional personality for himself. He does this by doing word and picture cryptographic puzzles, sent to him in the mail by his formerly-lucid self, leading to him remembering important events, all while being hunted by a conceptual shark which “feeds on human memories and the intrinsic sense of self” (2007, p.64). The book is full of tropes, Easter eggs and cultural references that play with the idea that sharks are so conjoined to the cultural institutions inaugurated through the movie *Jaws*, to name one example, that they share a common atmosphere. Rather than problematize the hyper abstraction of sharks as something dangerous to them in real life, *The Raw Shark Texts* asks how sharks as symbols are entangled in the perilous projects of identity and the organization/management of memory, consciousness, and information. Does it make sense to turn attention away from concrete problems, if temporarily, in order to find in a web of abstraction some of the plot devices of Western Being so as, maybe, to leave them behind or to leave sharks out of them, allowing them their own existence?

The central antagonist of this narrative is not the shark but a self-replicating “gentleman scientist” named Mycroft Ward (a visual pun you may recognize) which conditions host subjects into replicating and consolidating his consciousness long after he is dead and gone. Katherine Hayles describes *The Raw Shark Texts* as representing the clash between “narrative” and “database” (one might also speak of Michel Foucault’s “archive”) for the role of dominant cultural regime in the current era (2011). The clash between narrative and database can also be seen in many *Shark Week* specials such as *Monster Hammerhead*—which was centered around a mock quest whose premise was *unknown to the researchers involved in the show*: to investigate a legendary giant hammerhead shark named “Old Hitler”(2018)—in that the authority of scientific research is organized in a way as to tell a different story altogether while on the other hand the very list-based collection of facts on sharks, which contains implicit paradigms about the meaning of knowledge, poses challenges to the use of narration and curation which extend beyond those of mere objectivity and into the realm of politics.

Shark-focused conservation biologists, advocates, and activists have definite goals for the protection of sharks, but the over-the-top phantasmagoria of many shark representations and the compulsion to refute these according to the norms of certain knowledge systems entangles these efforts in certain forms of imperialism. A diversely arrayed but systematic Western academic discipline known as Orientalism has received criticism for both its utilization of “the Orient” as an often fantastic theatre for the imagination of western people and for its consistent voice of assimilative authority regarding the knowledge systems of non-Western peoples to the extent of laying claim to knowledge of people—traditionally associated with the Near-East, but also the Far-East—while at the same time remaining to some extent closed off from their distinctive voices. When it comes to the fantastic stories, list-based information, and the use authoritative gestures, media pertaining to sharks already has much in common with Orientalism as an expression of Western scholarship with fractured voice. Beyond this however, much of the discourse by shark advocates *is* Orientalism. When the fact of everything to do with shark-fin soup being made into an example of barbarism and backwardness is a main point of emphasis, as it often is, in the plight of sharks and shark conservationists, the insinuations and rhetorical devices of Orientalism risk hijacking (or masquerading as) these efforts and heavily supplementing them with identity practices and Western-esque imperialism. The fact that sharks are used so unmistakably in the production of (usually) White Male Western identities of particular sorts while at the same time the works of fiction (e.g., *Shark Night* (2011), *Sharknado* (2013), *Shark Attack 2* (2000)) which do this most markedly also effectively disavow sharks as strongly politicized seems utterly significant. Might there be a connection between ways that Western identity is produced via the Orient as its other and problems of understanding sharks as being necessarily politically situated beings?

- 29) Poster of book cover for *The Raw Shark Texts*:



30) Graphic from *The Raw Shark Texts*:



31) A brief etymology of the word “shark”:

The English word “shark” is believed to have derived from the word “shirk” which (in verb form) means to fail to meet one’s social responsibilities or (in noun form) in reference to a person who does this. “Shirk” is itself believed to be derived from the German word “Schurke” which means villain or rogue. In both cases, these words apply to the human realm and it’s possible that the word “shark” has always had these human connotations (never having meant the animal first and foremost). This makes the word particularly interesting as a metaphor for humans who show certain behaviours. I’m interested in what comes to mind for you when you think of a “shark”. How would you describe the meaning of the metaphor “shark”? Does what you’ve seen here coincide or resonate at all with what you think of when you hear the word shark?

32) QR for shark etymology (redundant excerpt from "The Inescapable Sharkness of Being") URL:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ysricAdPrF84jWA8EmtnlhveiW_hX0XV



Contents of Third Wall

- 33) Heading on left side of third wall: "Imaginative Geography/ Lexicography"
- 34) Heading on right part of third wall: "Commodities"
- 35) "Shark Flavoured Constellations" framed watercolour painting:



- 36) Label for "Shark Flavoured Constellations"
- 37) Context for "Shark Flavoured Constellations":

Here I take to abstract extremes in depicting some of the imaginative geography and lexicography that I consider to be constellated in one way or another with Western shark figures, constituting a sort of "shark anthropology." I am looking for ways of exploring sharks as accessory to Western (+ White + Male etc.) identity narratives, maybe representing unexpected shifts in power and radical subjectivity which have prominence on the world stage. There are many dead ends for sharks-as-such here, but the labyrinth as a whole, with its ebbs and flows, I hope, tells an interesting story.

In line with a knowledge-is-power mood of Western ontology, I see the dispensatory pedagogy and narrowly educational quests of a number of *Shark Week* episodes (see Papson 1992 for many pre-millennial examples) as playing part of a larger narrative that

metaphorizes sharks in the idealization of both “knowing the territory” and dominating there.

I’ve concluded that the metaphor “shark(s)” (humans called sharks) highlights an idealization akin to neoliberal subjectivity that bureaucratizes the “law of the jungle.” Consider the radical sentience/awareness often associated with “business sharks”, for example, which seems to be symbolically drawn from tropes of scientific studies on the shark sensorium, often going beyond mere ruthlessness to something more palatable but not necessarily unproblematic and potentially solipsistic.

Western imperialism has a history of defining the West over and against an “other” rather than having to do so directly, making the essence of Western identity out to be something putatively universal even if it is elusive and inaccessible to many. One of the best examples of this practice is the scholarly discipline of Orientalism which, according to Edward Said’s book of the same name, is a process of integrating and assimilating knowledge systems and power structures of cultures of the Near/Middle East for the purposes of achieving dominance over those cultures, often with little consideration for the everyday lives of contemporary people as legitimate non-Western subjects (1979).

From a deliberately Western-centric perspective—and likewise attempting to bring some of the sharkly machinations of Western identity into view—this painting explores some of the aspects of language and power that play into imaginings of how sharks might be used to depict geopolitical issues, while juxtaposing these to the relationship between the shark fin trade and the Chinese economy.

I start in the center of the painting with an important axis of Western imperialism: Christianity. I draw attention to how, as a form of imperialism, Christianity is figured as the fulfillment of certain historical legacies such as aspects of Semitic culture and Greek culture. Sylvia Wynter, a decolonial and feminist scholar, has traced the development of the figure/concept of “Man” through Christianity to neo-Darwinism, by which the achievement of power through various means is made to seem as if due to a natural order justified by “survival of the fittest” rhetoric (2003). Any form of humanism that considers humanity as being the apex of evolution and eschews historical situatedness should be questioned, as should the kinds of shark figures being used to tell similar stories.

What I have done here is address and situate fish and shark lexicons within this system, and have it projected/mirrored across boundaries in suggestive and provocative ways.

The figure in the middle is composed of 4 sets of shark jaws which, in part, draws attention to the near ubiquity of *Jaws* in references to the problematic nexuses of sharks and Western media. On one side of the jaws is the Greek word for fish ΙΧΘΥΣ (here spelt ICTHYS). This word has been used as an acronym for “Jesus Christ Son God Saviour.” On the other side is the Hebrew word יהושוע which means “Yahshuah” or “Yeshua” (saviour/messiah) and is spelt with the addition of the letter sheen ש to the name “Jehovah” (יהוה), a principal name for God as per Judaism. The adoption of this name by Christianity marks the figure of Christ (as per Christianity) as the fulfillment of Jewish culture via its existing lexicon and exemplifies Christian imperialist textual appropriation. The jaws themselves are also semblant of the “vesica pisces” or “fish bladder” which is associated with the Virgin Mary in Christian iconography—and much has been left unsaid about the directly and specifically feminist implications of shark figures as

accessory in the production of Western male (or even still Western female) white (etc..) identity.

The word “shirk” (from which the word shark is supposedly derived) implies a certain kind of deviation from societal ideals and purposes embedded in notions of responsibility, and has parasitic connotations. In a play of homonymy I’ve placed a challenge to Western (particularly appropriating) discourses of teleology (the doctrine of purposes/ultimate ends) and identity by placing the Arabic word “shirk” (شرك) (širk) (the word for the sin of idolatry) nearby as a challenge to the ideals of Western imperialism, particularly those which rely upon the disfigurement of meaning. This is also a gathering together and meditation on Donald Trump’s simultaneous Islamophobia, anti-immigration stance, protectionist ideology, bullshit machine and, (according to Stephanie Clifford aka Stormy Daniels), fear of sharks.

On one side of the painting you’ll see the Mandarin character 鱼(Yu) which means fish and is a common homonym (more of a pun) for the word 裕(Yù) which means “surplus” or “abundance”. There is a small fishing boat below it and a super tanker below that. This is supposed to call to mind the idea that shark-finning/the mass unsustainable exploitation of sharks is viz-a-viz a product of Chinese culture, as if having nothing to do with historical Western economic imperialism, the resultant global capitalist order and strong Western contributions to identity-based consumerism which themselves still do not incorporate within the Western lexicon a universal absorption of what is often glossed as “status” or “prestige”: those oft-mentioned motives for the consumption of shark fin soup. This is not an attempt to divert efforts away from anti-finning campaigns *tout court*, but to trouble one-sided assumptions about what and who needs to change culturally. Interestingly, one of the major contributions to Chinese global power through the capitalist order is the accumulation of surplus.

On another end is a figure whose forehead is marked with the Hebrew words from which the name of the Faustian antagonist “Mephistopheles” derives: מְפַיֵר (meaning disperser, scatterer or destroyer) and מְפַלֵּא (which together mean “plasterer of lies”). I’m not trying to say that a cultural phenomenon that I depict on the “Western” side of the painting which is horrifyingly foregrounded by Donald Trump is a “shark” or Mephistopheles (the Devil), but I am trying to highlight these characteristics and draw attention to the idea that “sharkness” is potentially already implicitly embedded in “post-truth” political logics, the latter becoming synonymous with the West through the workings of this colossal and volatile cultural icon.

38) "Shark Flavoured Constellations" framed print (inverted):



39) Context for "Whale Shark in Gulf of Tadjoura/Ghoubet, Djibouti":

This photo was taken by Dr. David Robinson, a shark researcher, in the waters off Djibouti in eastern Africa in January 2018. The shark is a young whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*) 3-4 meters long and is one of many juvenile sharks that congregate in that area at certain times of the year. Djibouti is on the eastern coast of Africa and the home of a major shipping port in the area, as well as that of a number of foreign military bases. The congregations are often the result of crab spawns (whale sharks eat crab eggs, zooplankton and other microfauna, as well as small fish) but the waterscape is likely to change in coming years with foreign capital playing a role in the somewhat inevitable intensification of shipping in the area. This being said, the threatened and as-of-yet very small ecotourism industry in Djibouti centering around the presence of these animals is one of the few economic opportunities for people living in a country where around 60% of the population are in absolute poverty while cost of living skyrockets as a result comparatively very wealthy expats living and spending in the area. As sharks' lives and the relationships between people and sharks are often so strongly determined by the workings of capital, part of my intention here is to consciously acknowledge that sharks are figured in significant ways as commodities. As an extension of this display, I am running a fundraising effort in partnership with ShARCC, an NGO that specializes in research based conservation. This photo, as well as all original works and prints of them, is on sale through the webstore for The SharksMart, scan the code below to link to the store or go to the URL www.the-sharksmart.myshopify.com. Orders can be picked up

through GESSA or shipped out and all revenue generated through the sale of each of these works is being donated to ShARCC.

- 40) QR for TheSharksMart webstore URL:
<https://the-sharksmart.myshopify.com/>



- 41) "Whale Shark in Gulf of Tadjoura/Ghoubet, Djibouti" framed photo print



- 42) Display Context and artist name: Part of an MES project by Nick Veit

Contents of Corner Post

- 43) "Whale Shark Selfie" print:



- 44) Extended label for "Whale Shark Selfie":

This photo was taken on that same expedition. That's me swimming beside a whale shark. We had finished our data collection by that point (getting photographs of spotted markings next to the gills which can be used to identify and track the young sharks throughout their lives around the world) and were on our "selfie dive." Having finished my duties as a volunteer research assistant, my role as a cultural researcher and ecotourist continued. The small whale shark tourism industry in Djibouti involves some of the usual issues: sometimes sharks are "herded" by boats and/or maimed by boat propellers and become averse to nearby human presence, which they are normally very tolerant of. This may not be the main issue in the near future however, as shipping demands in the area will in all likelihood result in the deeper water canals being widened to accommodate, the likely effects of which upon the probably largest congregations of young whale sharks in the world are still unknown.

Conclusion

I made an important creative decision early on for my artwork in general and the display. Having explored some of the very textual elements of shark furnishings of Western Being, I concluded that through Shark Media sharks are overdetermined by text much as is the case with the objects of Orientalism. A key problem for representing sharks is not that they are portrayed with too much complexity, but too little, and that many cultural sedimentations of Shark Media are not *adding* to pristine shark environments but are themselves underexamined, in spite of frequent references to false consciousness, and are significant factors that must be addressed in understanding sharks. For these reasons, my work took on dimensions that were similar to Orientalism to make an example out of myself, asking my audience to take a cynical journey through my mind. In an earlier version of one of my written components I coined the term *Squalid Facticity* as a way of illustrating that phenomenology is supposed to be more or less continuously uncomfortable, and that moments of discomfort preceding experiences of the sublime which I believed to be embedded in shark metaphor are worth bringing into the aesthetics of shark conservation. As far as this affected my actual display, the level of investment demanded of audiences not only of personal effort but of somewhat specialized currents of thought seemed to result in the display being more inaccessible than not when taking the very text-heavy aspects of the display into consideration (a simple example being that the headings were in some cases very loose and other times fairly categorical).

My goal to make the display part of a conversation, incorporating feedback from a comment box, wasn't realized in the way I had hoped. Even after putting up posters advertizing the giveaway of a free print of the whale shark photo someone who left a comment in the comment box (reflections on the display, interpretations of shark metaphor etc.) I did not receive a single comment. On the other hand, I did have quite a few more or less lively and enthusiastic

conversations with friends and curious onlookers, and the different elements of the display being visible from multiple angles made unpacking substantial aspects of my research as a whole very easy, non-linear and unique to the people involved. One of the main directions that my political messages took was to question Western practices of identity and East Asian guilt in the context of shark exploitation, and it's possible that the sense of gravity that I desired to convey to Western accountability was overshadowed by the variously enthused connections traced throughout the display.

I think it's okay that the message that shark advocates take a step back from assigning easy blame may have resulted in a sense of not knowing what to do or what to think, which is partly why I had intentionally ominous and moralistically ambiguous tones on the third wall and the corner post which concluded the display. A short time after I had finished setting everything up I received a message which conveyed to me a sort of inner artistic struggle that has overshadowed my entire portfolio work, throughout which it has become obvious that sharks have benefitted *me* quite a bit—this is largely a developmental narrative after all, and uncomfortably autobiographical for anything conservation related. I was doing some reviewing and editing in the library at York when someone sitting at the desk beside me took an interest in what I had written. I told her about where my research had taken me and why I thought sharks were such interesting figures for philology and ethnography, and how this made cultural work for shark conservation difficult and complex. She seemed energized and hopeful, apparently then more confident to make the leap to graduate studies. She said goodbye and left the library, leaving behind two things on the desk: a muffin, which I ate (despite my veganism), and a mandarin orange she had written on. The orange said: "May shark bring you immense joy, prosperity, love, money & health!"

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