

fishermen lift clothing to reveal massive chunks of flesh missing from the torso and gluteus. The logical science of the previous hour disappears. The shark is but a mindless beast, maiming bodies.

In this ballet of science and horror the message is mystery. Scientists know little about sharks. A bit of research reveals no one has ever witnessed a great white shark mating, birthing or dying of natural causes. We do not know how long they live, how often they feed or how territorial they truly are. Many predators kill more people than sharks, but they are "trained" at the circus and Sea World. The shark, however, mocks the modern assumption that creatures can be domesticated for suburban family entertainment. One must make do with its image captured by a sub aquatic cinematic intrusion. The Discovery Channel website gets millions of hits. *The Sharkcam*, Discovery's trademark video loop of a blue shark nosing an underwater camera, turns a twelve-year old into a shark tourist eye to eye with death from the safety of the lounge.

These documentaries allow humans to see sharks before they see the humans a profound comfort after the resonating terror of *Jaws*. Before the *Sharkcam*, *Jaws* was it. The Spielberg-directed saga tells of a rogue great white wreaking havoc in an island community. Hydrophobic Chief Brody reckons with the deaths, most of which occur when the mayor refuses to close the beaches, mindlessly trading tourist dollars for tourist lives. Brody must eventually conquer his fear and save the innocent town from the lethal man-eater. Why the shark attacked this community was not an issue. In acting terms, the shark lacked motivation. Presumably, the shark's intention was nutrition; accidentally it developed a taste for human flesh. The lack of motivation earned that shark a reputation as an impulsive almost mechanical killer, the embodiment of evil in the public consciousness.

Today, that question of motivation is more troubling as stereotyping any animal as wholly evil is considered unfair. Because no one actually knows why sharks attack humans, recent movie producers have been forced to speculate, to invent a motivation. In Renny Harlin's *Deep Blue Sea* attractive scientists created man-eaters. Believing that sharks harbour a regenerative brain protein that can cure Alzheimer's, the scientists build an underwater research lab to grow sharks with abnormally large brains. The horrific by-product is that the sharks grow smarter. Eventually they "realize" they have been unfairly contained and take over the facility to consume most of the technicians. The motivation of the supersharks is made crystal clear. One actor asks another, "What does a two-ton mako think about?" "Freedom, man." Having toyed with the sharks' chemistry, one feels distinctly like they all deserve death, unlike the innocent tourists of Amity. Harlin's sharks begin their rampage seconds after the cure is proven, confirming a shark's greedy nature. While *Jaws* is a natural if rare killer, the supersharks have been bred to outwit man and so they do. They are thinking about right and wrong, generosity and selfishness, freedom and captivity.

Real sharks were deemed too dangerous for use in filming both movies. As one *Jaws* producer commented, "The performing shark was an enigma since sharks don't perform on cue. Sharks aren't bright enough to be trained however they can be lured, but they will also lurk, pounce and be downright dishonest. Therefore fake sharks had to be used. "The statement indicates both public perception of animal psychology (intelligence=trainability=honesty) as well as the very real problem of how to make a shark film visually credible. *Jaws* was operated from a twelve-ton steel platform by thirteen sub aquatic puppeteers with "a control panel that rivalled the cockpit of a B-29

to control 300 feet of multicoloured intestines - hoses bearing pneumatic pressure to control points." A generation later, the makers of *Deep Blue Sea* were at a greater advantage technologically. But Harlin felt burdened by public expectations of special effects. In *Jaws*, Spielberg revealed very little. "Now," states Harlin, "audiences accustomed to animatronics need to see more." And he is proud of the results. "We are the first team to mimic the multifaceted jaw of the shark. Inside beats the heart of a tiny space shuttle." Both directors employ images of aerospace engineering - the B-29 and the space shuttle - to capture the power of their puppet. Paradoxically, however, advances in computer-generated imaging and a sophomoric understanding of shark biology do not make *Deep Blue Sea* successful, while the lumbering vacuum-hose-powered *Jaws* affected generations of beachcombers. This suggests that the shark itself is not nearly as horrific as the potential for a shark to emerge from the ocean depths - metaphorically the difference between a slow striptease and a porno film. Something intensely provocative dies when everything is exposed. Beyond the visible, when Harlin gave the sharks human emotions such as vengeance and anger, the sharks lost the element of violence driven by irrationality that truly terrifies and simultaneously captivates the public.

Damien Hirst plays to exactly that element of society's perception of large sharks in his 1992 work *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*. A fourteen-foot long tiger shark hangs in formaldehyde encased in steel-framed glass. In this high-art white gallery, people can stare directly at the creature without fear of death and the filter of "low-art" men like Spielberg or Harlin. In writing about Hirst's shark, critics suggest the public's perception of sharks in any setting. Sarah Kent writes that sharks, "are a metaphor for the unknown, the fearful and the repressed - an embodiment of evil whose swift, underwater invisibility engenders visceral paranoia." Charles Hall states, "There are some animals, butterflies for example, - which look the same when they are alive as they do when they are dead. There are others like maggots and flies, which are so heavily bound up in our images of death that we lose our sense of them as living things. Sharks seem to fall into both categories; in popular imagination they exist as a sort of living death." Clearly, Hirst's work revolves around issues of life and death, but it is then interesting that he retains the shark as a whole while cows and sheep must be shredded to engender similar reactions. Hirst is powerfully aware of how well a shark fits into his transgressive aesthetic. "A shark," he writes, "is frightening, bigger than you are, in an environment unknown to you. It looks alive when it's dead and dead when it's alive. And it can kill you and eat you so there is a morbid curiosity in looking at them. You expect it to be looking back at you. I hope at first glance it will look alive." More silently than *Jaws* and *Deep Blue Sea*, *Physical Impossibility* reminds us that we can easily be pulled into the food chain. Yet, I found an inescapable sadness here - forcing the shark into the pseudo-aquarium, liberating us from the cage and yet requiring the shark to return our gaze. The sculpture becomes an icon of human control not the dialectic of life-and-death he sought.

I thought of that sculpture as I struggled to grasp the cage. A five-meter great white swam past. A current hit and I toppled over. I found Death to be a very real Physical possibility in my Living Mind. I cursed Hirst for his pacification of the beast. I was experiencing the inexplicable rush of shark confrontation. Though I had been led here by decades of shark entertainment, nothing prepared me for the steel-grey eyes appearing and recoiling from the abyss and the slow-motion gaping jaw only feet away.