

DEFINING FISHERMEN WITH  
UNDERSEA RHETORIC

by

Hans Peter Glasmann

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## ABSTRACT

Depictions of fishermen in marine filmmaking have varied widely depending on the rhetoric of the filmmaker. As filmmakers apply terrestrial logic to aquatic environments fishermen are subject to the film's cultural and personal perspectives. Because of this fishermen are portrayed as scientists, necessary to understanding aquatic sea life; stewards, necessary for protecting and maintaining the ocean; and predators, preying on the ocean's resources.

Although films define and redefine anglers into different political spheres, fishermen are important to understanding the ocean. They are an invaluable resource for first-hand contact with aquatic environments. Utilizing anglers to construct the filmmaker's argument will only benefit films trying to describe the ocean as a space connected to and defined apart from terrestrial beings.

I use my film, *43 and 80*, as an example of a film that allows its fishermen to be the primary source of information about one species of marine life, namely pacific halibut. Because of their proximity and reliance on the fishing industry, I portray the fishermen of *43 and 80* as instrumental to understanding the need for halibut conservation and the regulations surrounding the pacific halibut industry.

## INTRODUCTION

Undersea environments have been a mystery for the greater part of human history. Scientific research of environments below the surface of the ocean took shape after 1872 with the H.M.S. Challenger, a warship. “[It] had been essentially stripped of its weapons and fitted with every modern scientific instrument of that time... The purpose of the three-year long expedition was to thoroughly explore and catalog the entire depth of the sea” (Keller 3). Despite advancements in technology and scientific exploration, the ocean remained obscure because of its ability to remain ever-changing, camouflaged, and uninhabitable to terrestrial beings.

In Alaska’s coastal waters, like other undersea environments, aquatic life flouts terrestrially defined boundaries. Because Pacific Halibut are migratory fish and camouflaged against the ocean floor by chromatophore in their skin, scientists must rely on catch rate statistics from commercial and charter fishing industries to determine the health of the stock in any given commercial fishing zone and at specific times during the fishing season (Valero and Webster 342). Many variables can impact stock assessments ranging from tidal currents and bait migrations to captain reports and assessment models (Stewart and Martell 163). Because of this, filmmakers who try to argue in favor of or against halibut conservation must engage their audiences through rhetorical devices not strictly reliant on numbers associated with the health of fish stocks.

These rhetorical devices assist the filmmaker in defining and redefining the ocean and the people that exploit marine resources as is fitting to his eco-political perspective. Depictions of anglers involved in the fishing industry are subject to the rhetorical

constructs of the filmmaker. They are often presented either in cohabitation or opposition to the ocean.

Nicole Starosielski, assistant professor of media, culture, and communication at New York University Steinhardt, researches the relationship between aquatic environments and technology. Writing about the ocean she claims, “Like many frontiers, [undersea] environments are often depicted as subversive spaces where it is possible to challenge and reorient existing social conventions...” (149). As perceptions of the ocean have changed, so have undersea films and their representations of fishermen. Since the earliest aquatic films to current marine conservation documentaries, many filmmakers have depicted anglers as early scientists of aquatic ecosystems, as stewards over underwater biology, and as predators opposed to marine conservation.

In my film, *43 and 80* I argue yet another perspective: that fishermen are limited by conservation and impacted by the health of halibut populations and the regulations protecting the stocks. Throughout *43 and 80*, two fishermen describe problems with current regulations to halibut fishing, and they implement argumentative tactics similar to what undersea filmmakers utilize including first hand accounts, personal anecdotes, and data analysis. I engage the fishermen in discourse in favor of halibut conservation. I also explore how some regulations negatively impact the health of the stock as well as businesses reliant on that stock.

## FISHERMEN TO SCIENTISTS TO FILMMAKERS

Before oceanography and marine biology constructed a scientific image of the ocean, how it flows, and the sea life therein, knowledge of the ocean belonged to fishermen and voyagers:

Gathering food, fishing, trading, migrating to more promising regions, etc. [yielded] lots of information about the sea. These early investigations of the sea were motivated by the requirements of daily survival rather than by the reasons driving oceanographic exploration today (Woods 1).

Without technology necessary to physically descend below the surface of the ocean, early fishermen understood undersea environments by what they caught or by what would ascend voluntarily. These early encounters with the ocean and marine biology gave rise to folklore in the form of sirens, mermaids, and Gods.

Fishermen have maintained an ancient relationship with undersea environments. “Since the earliest pictures on rock walls about 40,000 years ago, there is ample evidence that, in addition to serving as food, fish satisfied a wide range of human wants and needs, both physical and spiritual” (Gartside and Kirkegaard 3). Fishermen long relied on the ocean for sustenance, and for the larger portion of human history, our relationship with undersea environments existed exclusively on that reliance.

With the introduction of new technology perceptions of undersea environments were altered and no longer dependent on fishing hooks. Humanity’s relationship with the ocean wasn’t reliant on the context of fishermen’s stories, and marine mythology gave way to oceanography and marine biology. Our relationship with marine life shifted from one of consumption to discovery and education.

The H.M.S. Challenger set sail in 1871 with the goal to collect as much data in as many fields of science as possible from undersea environments.

After circumnavigating the globe, and carrying on deep-sea and other investigations in many regions of the ocean... Numerous scientific observations were successfully recorded in all branches of oceanic research. Large zoological and other collections were sent home from various ports during the voyage, and were brought home in the ship (Murray vii).

Over fifty volumes of information were published; each one outlined a unique objective or finding of the Challenger expedition, from coral reefs and deep-sea fish to ocean temperature and sea depths. Within the volumes are personal accounts of the crew, illustrations of found biology, and scientific recordings. The Challenger's expedition marked the beginning of oceanography and while it was pivotal to reorienting the common then-current beliefs of the ocean, it was not without flaws. Human bias, early technology, and environmental factors all impacted the information extracted from undersea environments. Among the potentials for subjectivity, the method of extracting data on ocean populations had a large impact on the context within which scientists examined marine biology. Despite being for scientific research, the method of gathering under-water species was still through fishing.

Within twenty years after The Challenger's expedition, methods of filmmaking developed. Motion pictures progressed alongside several scientific needs and desires.

Three names are conventionally associated with the first efforts conducted in the 1870s and 1880s to find ways of capturing movement: those of astronomer Jules Janssen, photographer Eadweard Muybridge and physiologist Etienne-Jules Marey. Each of them devised and perfected chronophotographic devices to take sequences of photographs which could then serve to analyse how celestial bodies, humans or animals move (Gouyon 3).

Exploration of how to imitate real life had been ongoing since the realism movement of the 1840s. When motion was added to the photograph, cinema was assumed to have achieved the goal of realism, to capture the world as it is without artistic bias. It was cinema, “that [satisfied], once and for all and in its very essence, our obsession with realism” (Bazin 12). Almost immediately after its beginning, filmmakers blurred the lines between science and art; defining and redefining nature cinematography to their purpose.

Photographers [and cinematographers] did not identify any tension between the rival claims of transparency and aesthetic distancing. Nature photographs were seen simultaneously as scientific facts and works of art, as truth-telling images and objects of beauty. The images presented the objective, minute details of nature; they also evoked a subjective response – feelings of awe before the magnificent scenes, the unspoiled habitats of wondrous creatures (Dunaway 215).

By virtue of its subjective perspective, cinema’s introduction to the ocean was a perfect fit. Filmmakers could depict and showcase the ocean in ways never before seen. They could both portray it as it is and as they wanted it to be. For undersea filmmakers, this meant that they could argue terrestrial politics in a new frontier.

... The ocean in the twentieth-century American imagination took on many of the characteristics that were typically associated with frontier territories... These frontier meanings enjoyed wide circulation in the social imagination of the terrestrial frontier since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Ocean explorers, like many Americans enacted similar attitudes in their interactions with the marine frontier of the twentieth century (Kroll 7-8).

As scientists, fishermen, and filmmakers converged in undersea environments, the earliest cinema depictions of the ocean and its biology were of curiosity and exploration.

Deep sea and ocean floor environments were depicted as the *other* while the scientists as fishermen and filmmakers were depicted as explorers.

## FISHERMEN AS FILMMAKERS

Aquatic filmmaking owes its early development to J. Ernest Williamson and his father's photosphere. Invented in 1912, it was a tube descended from a boat into undersea environments with a watertight space at the end. It was through films shot in the photosphere that the seafloor ascended into the terrestrial realm and became the subject of social, ecological, and environmental discourse.

Beginning with *Thirty Leagues Under the Sea* (1914) and extending to *With Williamson Under the Sea* (1932), the photosphere was used to shoot aquatic cinematography for numerous fiction and nonfiction films. By the 1920s... "undersea photography had spawned its own genre." This early period of underwater filmmaking emerged in relation to the existing social forces extending across the aquatic environment... (Starosielski 152).

From its earliest inception, undersea filmmaking has defined the ocean within the film's historical context and with the filmmaker's partiality. For example, Williamson's aquatic exploration films were impacted by wartime efforts of the era and his bias toward racial *other's*.

In *Thirty Leagues Under the Sea*, Williamson staged one scene by throwing coins into the water and telling the native boys to retrieve them. *In the Tropical Seas* (1914) also tracks an islander as he dives into the sea to catch a turtle. The film then features a full minute sequence of the shirtless man showing off the turtle: the spectacle presented is not only undersea creature, but also the racialized body (Starosielski 154).

The islander from *In the Tropical Seas* is only one of the fishermen featured in the short film. Williamson and his brother both participate in front of the camera fishing for swordfish, cracking open turtle eggs, and fighting sharks. Williamson and the crew of the film don't disguise their fascination with fishing and take part in the spectacle frequently. As the fishermen catch a swordfish a title card displays the text, "A

swordfish is being harpooned. Note the jet from its pointed snout.” After the process of catching the fish and bringing it out of the water onto the boat, the terrestrial extension, a new title card appears reading, “The teeth of its bony snout” (*In the Tropical Seas*). It is through the fishermen that the audience learns about the swordfish, and only after it is removed from its natural habitat into a new context.

A similar moment occurs when Williamson must save a native, the racial *other*, from a shark. After fighting the shark and hooking it, the shark is brought to the surface. Again, once it departs its under-water environment, the audience is allowed to observe some of its traits. The shark is described as 400 pounds and having six rows of teeth. This sequence suggests similarly that it is by fishermen that the audience can learn about marine biology, but takes the metaphor further proposing that without fishermen aquatic life would be too unruly to study.

Williamson’s earliest films treat the ocean as a dangerous *other*, and showcase the need of fishermen to subdue the danger into terrestrial spaces. Not every early marine filmmaker depicted the ocean as treacherous. Jean Painlevé, for example had a more playful perspective of under-water habitats. His aquatic short films of the 1930s focused strictly on the subjects of each short from sea urchins to seahorses, the *other* being the subject for audiences to admire (not to fear) as icons of a netherworld. Painlevé’s films attempted to merge the divisive film-as-art and film-as-science dichotomy.

Indeed, the seemingly separate worlds of science and art would mingle and merge in Painlevé’s films, and the resulting fusion, such as a documentary on a vampire bat set to a jazz sound-track, would at times delight, at other times baffle those who came across it for the first time (Berg 3).

Painlevé's early assemblies of filmmaking and science nearly leaves any aspect of the fisherman out of his films, generally focusing on just marine biology with very little implied human involvement. Nevertheless, his representations of seahorses in the appropriately named *The Seahorse* (1935) reveal the filmmaker as both a filmmaking-scientist *and* a fisherman.

*The Seahorse*'s musical score is whimsical and innocent as images of seahorses effortlessly gliding back and forth are displayed. Narration describes the "medieval" appearance of the fish. Throughout the narration facts and hyperbole are expressed contiguously, while the seahorses swim in and out of the frame referring to Painlevé as scientist and filmmaker. It isn't until the seahorse takes on a new portrayal as a dissected cadaver, that Painlevé takes on the role of fisherman, capturing seahorses for science. The artistic and playful depiction of the seahorses is replaced with hard facts and analysis. The narration returns to its playful nature, comparing the respiratory organs to a powder-puff and the film returns to viewing the living seahorses. This occurs again as the film portrays the dissection of a male seahorse, revealing hundreds of embryos in the seahorse's pouch. During the dissection the narration speaks plainly: "Dissecting the male's pouch, one can see the tissue which maintains the eggs in a network of blood vessels necessary to the life of the embryo." But as the film returns to the living seahorses the narration again returns to use of symbolism and metaphor: "The body takes shape. The mouth appears. It looks like a King Charles spaniel" (*The Seahorse*).

"*The Seahorse* was a popular success—the first and only of Painlevé's films to break even" (Berg 25). Audiences of the 1930s were adapted from generations of fishing

to seeing aquatic life dissected in terrestrial spheres. Painlevé's purpose was to explain the anatomy and reproductive system, but the onscreen dissection of the seahorse builds upon the rhetoric that fishing for science is normal.

Even at the beginning of deep-sea cinematography, however, the filmmaker was searching for new methods of examining aquatic ecology apart from the fisherman. In this way undersea films early on began to abandon fishermen, removing them as the scientist. "...When the simple pressing of a button captured, for all time, the graceful image of the hunted quarry, one becomes conscious of a peculiar mental evolution... that taking a picture was more refined than killing an animal (Dunaway 215-216).

With his photosphere Williamson also rejected the need to extract marine life from their environments, replacing fishing lines with cameras. He spent weeks with his brother in his airtight submersible observing the ocean, fathoms below the surface. "This was an opportunity to study the shark 'under natural conditions that seems never to have been granted before to anyone'" (Fericola xxiv).

By disguising his methods of filming sea life, Jean Painlevé's aquatic films for the most part, besides the anatomical studies, attempted to depict sea life behaving as it naturally would without the fisherman's influence. During the film *Sea Urchins* (1954) macro photography allowed Painlevé to focus the camera's lens on the marine biology, and remove it from any human-influenced domain. Similarly *The Seahorse* was filmed partially in an aquarium, specifically as a featured seahorse gave birth, but the camera's focus removed the depiction of human involvement for those scenes. Despite the fact that Painlevé fished the seahorse from the ocean, he disguises his involvement as a fisherman.

As filmmakers employed new technologies to occupy undersea environments, their reliance on fishing to explore and discover species of fish diminished. It was not necessary to depict fishermen as curators of deep-sea discovery or terrestrial scientists exploring aquatic environments. Instead filmmakers could utilize fishermen and their relationship to the ocean to construct arguments and discourse about aquatic environments. It is through these constructs that fishermen are often portrayed either as stewards or predators over aquatic environments.

*WORLD WITHOUT SUN* - DOMINION OF THE SEA

Jacques Cousteau's earliest films, including *Par dix-huit mètres de fond* (1943) and *Paysage du Silence* (1947), were similar to Williamson's in that they featured fishermen acting as primary explorers and scientists of aquatic environments. *Paysage du Silence* for example shows scuba divers as they navigate the ocean depths. They frequently come across strange and wondrous biology that they as fishermen identify and extract for the camera. While Cousteau's films frequently portrayed a fishing-for-science trope, Cousteau often showcased his crew of fishermen and himself as not just scientists, but also as custodians of undersea environments, having a divine authority to exist in and interact with aquatic environments as is evident in *World Without Sun* (1964).

The opening sequence of *World Without Sun* reveals a submarine as it descends into the ocean. Viewers watch the ship from several angles as it dives toward a sea lab on the ocean floor. Following the ship, Cousteau introduces his audience to a manmade habitable space several meters below the ocean's surface. The ship, the labs, and the scuba gear all direct the viewer's attention toward Cousteau's established dominion several fathoms under the ocean surface. Throughout the film Cousteau's crew treats the surrounding environment as their laboratory, emphasizing that dominance.

Cousteau's perspective of his own dominance was not to plunder and exploit, but to enrich and enhance. His crew of fishermen are instructed the same.

Cousteau cited one scripture in particular as being widely misinterpreted and misapplied: "Replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." All too often, he noted, there is a tendency to focus on the words *dominion* and *subdue* and to use them as

divine permission to exploit the world around us. Cousteau was quick to point out that this verse also instructs men to *replenish* the earth, to care for it and use its resources in a sustainable manner (Capo 15).

Cousteau's stewardship over the ocean is emphasized throughout the film during minor and major sequences. One shot of Cousteau's crew hammering into the ocean floor is juxtaposed against fish quickly adjusting their positions. The crew and sea life interact with one another, but it is the human's action and the fish's reaction that is depicted. Another sequence is accompanied by narration of several fish caught in a net. The narration describes the need to "remove the entangled fish before they injure themselves" (*World Without Sun*). Here again do the fish exist in a reactive position, yielding to the will of Cousteau's crew because it is the human's action of dropping a net and the fish's reaction of entangling themselves that requires the team's caretaking. Cousteau's team then places the rescued fish in under-water glass aquariums to be taken to terrestrial aquariums.

The stewardship depicted in *World Without Sun* is echoed in the film's final narration: "We have lived in the bosom of the sea. But, we have only taken the first steps into our new space" (*World Without Sun*). Describing the environment as *our space* implies humanity's ultimate right to exist in aquatic spaces and to be agents over them.

This is the legacy of Jacques-Yves Cousteau. When it comes to good stewardship and protection of the oceans and marine life, much of what we know stems from the work of this undersea adventurer and his companions (Capo 17).

Despite Cousteau's "lament [of] the shortsightedness of the fishing industry" to "perceive the dangers of depletion," Cousteau's films assisted in defining aquatic conservation movements and helped give rise to a new frontier for filmmakers, one over

which fishermen were depicted as having dominion (Capo 13). Several films have depicted fishermen's dominant relationship to the ocean from television series like *Wicked Tuna* (2012) to documentaries like Ted Caplow's *What We Fish For* (2015).

Caplow's film features a segment about dying coral reefs. During one sequence viewers witness a fisherman spear hook one of the reef's fish. The moment mirrors Cousteau's early work in that it doesn't act as a reference to the need for conservation, but celebrates the strange and often beautiful marine ecology that is there for us to take. The entire film explores, as the title suggests, the reason that various fishermen fish, whether it is for personally caught food or for the thrill of the catch. While Caplow's film takes a conservationist perspective and calls for audiences to consider the need for eating local and why they fish, the film identifies the same relationship to the ocean as Cousteau's *World Without Sun*: humanity acts and the ocean reacts.

*What We Wish For* takes fisherman's dominant relationship even further, implicitly suggesting that the ocean without the fishermen isn't necessarily worth saving. "Preserving biodiversity for its own sake... [does] not work as a conservation strategy. Focusing on protecting ecosystems vital to people's health and material needs makes more sense" (Kareiva 51). In the case of *What We Wish For*, because the ocean provides food and offers a form of *sport* to the fisherman it's importance is validated. This is not a concept specific to aquatic documentaries. Similarly, the television series *Wicked Tuna* defines the ocean's importance as it pertains to the fishermen.

From its very title to its weekly episodic misadventures, *Wicked Tuna* represents the fishermen's relationship to bluefin tuna as a means to make money. The tuna act as a

backdrop for the fishermen to indulge in various dramas for audiences. Throughout the series, tuna are hooked and sold for exorbitant prices with very little reference to the health of the stock. “While viewers of the television show *Wicked Tuna* are entertained by dynamic crew members and the thrill of the Bluefin hunt, they are being given subtle messages regarding the status of Atlantic Bluefin tuna stocks and the complexities of Bluefin management” (Hawkins). The discussion of the health of Bluefin tuna is hidden under the entertainment aspect of the series, however the discussion of conservation exists in multimedia platforms. For example, the website for *Wicked Tuna* reports and warns viewers of the dangers of overfishing and the current negative trend of Bluefin tuna stocks.

Current films and television series frequently explore the need for conservation. Cousteau’s later works also explored in more depth the need to protect aquatic environments. He recalls in his book *The Human, The Orchid, and The Octopus* how he previously treated the ocean:

The sea’s riches seemed so abundant to us during our early years; taking them seemed so natural. We could reach out with our hands and grab a fish, and so we did. We could easily skewer fish with spears, crossbows, harpoons, and so we did. I even used to brag about the time I won a wager with a friend by catching a fish on a knitting needle. And so I continued to deceive myself. If there were no fish to film in one area, I pushed off to another (Cousteau 131).

As conservation films became more prevalent among the aquatic and oceanic genre, fishermen took on a new role as the *other*. A portion of filmmakers who aligned themselves with conservation ethics either labeled fishermen as predators of the ocean as

is the case with *Leviathan* (2012) or abandoned the need for fishermen altogether like in *Mission Blue* (2014).

## OCEAN'S GREATEST PREDATOR

Perhaps the most memorable ocean explorer of the early twentieth century was William Beebe, the eminent naturalist who climbed into a steel ball eight feet in diameter to be submerged to oceanic depths of up to a half mile... One of the most important themes of Beebe's ocean literature was that the planet earth was primarily a water planet, and the ocean affected the lives of landed humans in unpredictable and ubiquitous ways (Kroll 5).

By viewing humanity as relatively insignificant compared to the ocean, Beebe's literary concepts helped restage how undersea environments are viewed and understood. He defined aquatic environments not as an opposition to terrestrial discourse but as a tangible habitat with its own ecological and social challenges, unrelated to fishermen, scientists, or filmmakers. Since then, various environmentalist movements have further shaped a view of the ocean as an invaluable resource.

"Today, we routinely hear reports of ocean pollution and depleted fisheries, exposés on dying coral reefs and endangered whales" (Kroll 7). Marine conservation filmmakers frequently align their views with the ideologies of conservation scientists, depicting *them* as the stewards of the ocean and in turn depicting fishermen as the ocean's antagonists, as is the case with *Mission Blue*. The film focuses on one marine biologist, Sylvia Earle, and her pursuit to protect under-water environments.

Acting as the subject of Nixon and Stevens' film, Earle's passion for the ocean and its needed conservation set her apart from the film's antagonists: consumers and anglers of fish. The filmmaker's focus on making Earle relatable to audiences of fish consumers by exploring her childhood, her adventures, and her perspective of the ocean. During the documentary, when asked if she's a radical Earle responds, "If I seem like a

radical it's because I have seen things that others have not. I am driven by what I know; that the world I love is in trouble" (*Mission Blue*). By engaging viewers to relate with Earle, the film is by correlation inviting viewers to see the ocean as more than the biology extracted from it.

Sylvia Earle, who may know the ocean as well as any human being now alive, helps us cut [the] intimidating vastness [of the ocean] down to size. She does it in two ways... Her first method is to bring the ocean to full life – to remind us of the very nearly infinite abundance of things that live there, some of them things that only a few people besides her have ever laid eyes on... But there's another, much darker, way in which Sylvia Earle helps us understand the size of the ocean. And that's to point out that, vast as it is, it's not so big that we can't screw it up (McKibben 6).

Defining Earle as its protagonist, *Mission Blue* alienates the fishing industry as the ocean's direct antagonist through sequences that pit Earle against the industry on land and at sea. Shots of Earle walking among fish corpses in large industrial buildings and diving near fish trawlers as they net thousands of fish identify the fishing industry as Earle's opposition.

Of the many scenes that represent this opposition, it is during an interview with Stephen Colbert on Comedy Central's *The Colbert Report* (showcased in *Mission Blue*) that the audience is introduced to Earle's perspective of the fishing industry. She explicitly states to Stephen Colbert that she does not eat fish and suggests the viewer's shouldn't eat most fish either. Colbert makes a quip about her comment responding, "well you've been down there in the deep, and you've seen them do the dirty business. Fish is supposed to be the healthy food, right? How else am I supposed to get my mercury?" *Mission Blue's* use of Colbert's humor during this scene softens the otherwise harsh reality of depleted fisheries. The audience is given a moment to laugh about the

otherwise difficult task of changing eating habits (*Mission Blue*). Despite Colbert's humor the message in *Mission Blue* is clear: the fishing industry is destructive and in Earle's view, unnecessary.

*Mission Blue* suggests that with ever increasing technology that grants audiences the ability to inhabit and see first hand the wonders of the ocean, there is no need for fishermen to exploit aquatic environments for science or consumption. Beyond that, what's left for depictions of fishermen are images of them as predators of the ocean and enemies to the sea. During the film *Leviathan*, director Lucien Castaing-Taylor uses observational techniques and a single passage of biblical text to depict one trawling ship as an almost monstrous vessel and a destroyer of surrounding sea life.

The purity of its wordlessly edited images and sounds is... "to make us see timely issues in need of attention." Whether every viewer sees it or not, this vision is fully realized; it is not too difficult to ascertain numerous arguments emerging from its intentionally edited images and sounds. They are left as buried treasure, and in this way *Leviathan*... both call[s] on us to renegotiate perspective and to see and to hear at more subtle frequencies (Durst 6).

Shots of countless lifeless fish and their blood flooding out of the hulls of a ship that is depicted as a monster, tormenting the ocean and damaging marine life call into question the ethics of commercial fishing. Audiences are invited to consider their own consumption as they watch a commercial fishing vessel consume anything that nears it. With the use of action cameras and small DSLRs, the audio and images of *Leviathan* are unrelenting and claustrophobic. The vessel is often depicted at off-axis angles and the fishermen are frequently shown with blurred and distorted lenses and at very close

proximity. The images are purposed to make the vessel and fishermen seem less familiar or relatable.

*Leviathan* further defines its showcased fishermen by contrasting them to the fishermen depicted in shows similar to *Wicked Tuna*. In perhaps one of the most obvious contrasts against widely viewed perception of commercial fishing, audiences watch one of *Leviathan*'s fishermen on a break. The shot is mundane and uneventful as the fisherman eats and watches television. Without seeing the television, the audience listens to an excerpt from Discovery Channel's *Deadliest Catch*. The contrast between the audibly intense and the visibly mundane and the following Dutch-angle shot looking down on seagulls as they follow the ship above the ocean suggests to the viewer that popular media depictions of fishermen as masters of the ocean are skewed by broadcast ratings. It defines its fishermen as ever-consuming predators without the familiar drama of competition or person-to-person relationships.

*Leviathan*, unlike *Mission Blue*, does not directly address its rhetoric as a conservation film. "*Leviathan* adopts a style that attempts to capture an objective reality, where the filmmaker functions as a neutral observer hidden behind the camera." The film's style imitates observation methods to allow the viewer to have "the impression of lived or real time" unobscured by the filmmaker's point of view. The filmmaker's argument is hidden by "the filmmakers influence [over] the interpretive process through their editing decisions" (Durst 3-4).

*Leviathan*'s rhetorical methods cause its depictions of the fishermen to feel at times ambiguous. The anglers during some sequences seem like cogs of the ship working

as relentlessly as the vessel itself. At other times they are more relatable while taking showers, on a breaks, or when talking with each other. In this way *Leviathan* doesn't equate fishermen as *only* the ocean's predators. It recognizes them as workers in their industry, being impacted as much as impacting the current trend of commercial fishing.

“We still wanted to create this multiplicity of perspectives...” Perspectives that “would make the spectator rethink humanity's relationship to nature, in relationship to a plethora of other beings, of other animals, of other kind of inanimate objects – the elements, the earth, the sky, the sea, the boat, mechanization, fish, crustaceans, starfish – everything that is involved in the ecology of what's going on in industrial fishing today” (Dowell 23).

Although *Leviathan* allows the viewer to observe and make some of their own conclusions, the filmmaker's bias is evident in the construction of the images and sounds and how they are juxtaposed off of each other. The fishermen are depicted as predators over marine biology, endangering the lives of fish, crustaceans, and even birds that come in contact with their vessel.

Whether fishermen are portrayed as predators, stewards, or scientists one aspect of the fisherman remains constant: they are the dominating force impacting marine biology. Despite their overarching influence, fishermen too are limited by regulations. In my film, *43 and 80* I argue that local fishermen are invaluable assets to understanding fish stocks. They are also instrumental in constructing effective and biology-reviving regulations that benefit both fish stocks and industries reliant on the stock. I also attempt to recall early depictions of fishermen as firsthand observers of marine ecology.

## FISHERMEN AS SCIENTISTS – 43 AND 80

During the opening sequence of *The End of the Line* (2009), audiences encounter varieties of fish, coral, and other sealife.

An attention to their vibrant colors and detailed textures offers a sense of an intimacy with nonhuman life. No shots or narration locate us in relation to the world above. Cutting to a swarm of sharks, the film leads us to believe that these are their predators. In a series of cuts between sharks and people in silhouette, the film quickly reveals a bloody slaughter of the sharks (Starosielski 163).

The film delivers a quick and hard message similar to *Mission Blue*'s that fishermen and consumers are predators of the ocean, but unlike *Mission Blue* that suggests fishing is unnecessary, *The End of the Line* depicts problems inherent in the fishing industry. It depicts fishermen as submissive to regulations, equally as impacted by diminishing fish stocks as any other social group. As an example, the film references local fisherman, Adama.

Adama is shown on the ocean, capturing very minimal fish when compared to the commercial and industrial trawlers depicted in the film. He returns to his poverty stricken home and to his child as the film's narration describes his financial status: "Today, Adama earns six dollars from his fishing. His fuel costs him four. What is left has to feed his family." Adama describes his fishing as it relates to his culture, "passed on from the tradition of [his] grandparents." He explains his own history with fishing and what he has observed since he was a child. "What I witnessed with my own eyes was a sea full of fish. There used to be fish in abundance. And, our Grandfathers encouraged us to follow in their footsteps. But the sea betrayed us" (*The End of the Line*).

During its introduction of Adama, *The End of the Line* repositions the local fisherman as a dependable observer of ocean biology. Adama's history with fishing makes his perspective of how the industry has changed more valuable. Throughout my film *43 and 80*, I employ the same depictions, relying on fishermen to both describe halibut conservation and suggest regulations that would better protect both the halibut stock and their livelihoods. I focus on one specific issue within halibut conservation: fish size regulation in charter halibut fishing.

In the film, four fishermen discuss the size regulations and how those policies impact their businesses. Both decreases in clients and decreases in halibut populations at different size classes negatively impact the anglers. Among the four fishermen, one is a charter sport captain, another is a charter fishing lodge owner, and two are their clients. Their bias against regulations is apparent in their discussions with one another, however as the documentary progresses, they describe and showcase problems with size regulations that impact the halibut more than their businesses. They become more sympathetic as they identify themselves as having negatively impacted fish stocks, and similar to *The End of the Line's* Adama, they employ their history with fishing to construct their arguments.

I've been fishing a very long time and I started when there were no limits, and I gotta' tell ya' that many days I say to myself that I'm part of the reason there *are* limits. Because there's no doubt about it that, in my neck of the woods, I kept way more than I ever should have... I kept 200 of a fish that now you're only allowed to keep four of (*43 and 80*).

Several first hand accounts from the fishermen construct *43 and 80's* argument, which favors emotional and ethical rhetoric over numerical data as is exemplified

throughout the film. During the introduction, simple text explains what current halibut slot limits are: regulations that prevent guided sport anglers from catching any halibut over forty-three inches or under eighty inches. The script further clarifies that current slot limits are in place solely to regulate weight percentage of halibut caught. The text represents the only written or spoken discussion that is not anecdotal. The four anglers, on the other hand, discuss issues as firsthand observations with little emphasis on statistics or numbers.

By removing all sources of information except for the fishermen, *43 and 80* places its anglers back into the position as direct observers of the ocean, but instead of just dominating the space, they are shown interacting with conservation regulations. It argues that fishermen are a valuable resource when deciding and altering future regulations. During the final scenes of the documentary, two of the fishermen offer alternative suggestions to the current charter regulation model. Rather than being completely against conservation efforts, the fishermen accept that regulations are necessary but through their firsthand experiences have thoughts on how to protect both industries and halibut stocks more effectively.

*43 and 80*'s depiction of fishermen recalls the films of Williamson, in which anglers are the means of introducing undersea environments; of Cousteau, in which the ocean exists as the fishermen's domain; of Castaing-Taylor, where anglers, their ships, and their tools prey upon marine biology; and of Murray, in which the fishermen are impacted by and reliant on conservation regulations. By establishing fishermen as both impacting and impacted by marine ecosystems and by allowing them to take part in the

discussion of marine conservation, filmmakers can utilize their direct experiences to more clearly identify the ocean and its relationship to not just the anglers, but to all people who rely on it for consumption, inspiration, and exploration.

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