

# BBC Documentary “Green Planet” from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics

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## Abstract

Nowadays, the creation of documentaries is too homogenized, and its difficulty is far greater than that of feature films, and most of the directors of nature documentaries are seldom involved. In this paper, we will start from the nature documentary “Green Planet”, and dig deeper into its director’s narrative strategy from the perspective of acceptance aesthetics: from the audience’s expectation vision; interactive creation with “implied audience”; and intentional setup of textual blanks to summon the potential audience in depth. In this way, it points out the creation method of nature documentaries for today’s documentary directors.

## Keywords

Aesthetics of Reception, Documentary, Green Planet

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## 1. Introduction

Nature documentaries usually refer to documentaries with the original appearance of the natural environment and the survival and growth of wild animals and plants as the theme and content (Liu & Jin, 2020). These documentaries usually show the wonders of nature by observing and recording the behavior of wild animals, the beauty and grandeur of natural landscapes, and biodiversity, etc. Nature documentaries occupy an important position in the film and television industry, as they not only show viewers the beauty and grandeur of natural landscapes, but also guide the public to pay attention to nature conservation and environmental issues to a certain extent. With the continuous development of technology and the increasing interest of viewers in the natural environment, this type of documentary is expected to continue to thrive. Natural documentaries also have the problems of high difficulty and homogenization, therefore, this paper is based on the acceptance of aesthetics perspective, acceptance of aesthet-

ics of the three aspects involved in the above to analyze, explore the aesthetic value and significance of the BBC's "Green Planet," to provide a strategy for the documentary director to refer to.

## **2. Development and Research of Nature Documentaries**

### **2.1. History of Nature Documentaries**

TV documentaries can be traced back to the era of early movie documentaries, and people have long reached a consensus on their authenticity and objectivity (Huang, 2019). The history of nature documentaries, one of the types of TV documentaries, can be traced back to the early days of the movie and television industry. In the early 20th century, with the development of photographic technology, a number of intrepid explorers and cameramen began to record wild animals and natural landscapes. The most famous of these was British photographer and explorer David Attenborough, who first introduced the genre in the 1950s and 1960s with his Zoo Quest series. In the 1960s and 1970s, wildlife photography became easier with advances in technology that allowing the production of nature documentaries to advance further. Series such as David Attenborough's The Blue Planet and Planet Earth became iconic nature documentaries and won the genre worldwide attention and acclaim.

### **2.2. Status of Nature Documentaries**

Nature documentaries are still very popular in modern times and are widely supported and distributed by various platforms. With the popularization of technologies such as HD, UHD and 4K, documentary production teams are able to present more stunning and detailed nature images, immersing viewers in the beauty of nature. Meanwhile, the rise of online streaming platforms has also provided new opportunities for the development of nature documentaries. Platforms such as Netflix, Disney+, Apple TV+, etc. have launched a large number of original nature documentaries to meet the audience's demand for this type of content. These platforms are not only investing in high-quality productions, but also promoting a focus on topics such as environmental protection and wildlife conservation. In addition, as global issues such as climate change become increasingly serious, nature documentaries have focused more on the impact of human activities on the natural environment, emphasizing the importance of environmental awareness and sustainable development. Through in-depth research and shocking images, these documentaries urge viewers to realize the urgency of protecting the earth.

### **2.3. Nature Documentary Studies**

There is not much research on nature documentaries in the field today, but "Blue Planet, Blue Movie: Deep Blue Sea and the Wildlife Documentary" explores the reasons behind the success of the nature documentary Deep Blue Sea and how it has gained popularity and awareness of environmental issues among

viewers around the world. It explores the reasons behind the success of the nature documentary *Deep Blue Sea* and how it has gained worldwide popularity and raised awareness of environmental issues. The literature: “Impact of Wildlife Documentary Film on Wildlife Conservation: A Review” reviews research on the impact of wildlife documentaries on wildlife conservation over the past several decades. The article summarizes key findings in terms of production, distribution, and audience feedback, and discusses the potential role of documentaries in raising environmental awareness. The article summarizes key findings on film production, distribution, and audience feedback, and discusses the potential role of documentaries in raising environmental awareness. The *Power of Wildlife Documentaries: A Global Survey of Audience Perceptions of Environmental Conservation* investigates audience viewing habits and the impact of wildlife documentaries on environmental awareness worldwide. This paper will examine the impact of the American audience’s viewing habits on wildlife documentaries on environmental awareness. Based on this, this paper will study how the nature documentary “*Green Planet*” can be useful for directors from the perspective of aesthetics of acceptance.

### 3. Analyzing *Green Planet* Based on Reception Aesthetics Theory

*Green Planet* is the world’s first 4K documentary to focus on plants through an immersive presentation, unveiling the hidden world that is unknown to the audience but closely related to human beings. David Attenborough, as the “Father of World Nature Documentaries”, has a wealth of creative experience, and his nature documentaries are still loved by the world after decades of development, which is inseparable from his relentless pursuit of ecological aesthetics (Sun, 2023). He will travel to the United States, Costa Rica, Croatia and Scandinavia, from deserts to mountains, from rainforests to the icy North Pole, to lead viewers into a world beyond human imagination. Five episodes in total, mainly from the environment, species and these different perspectives to show the different plants: tropical rainforests are filled with hundreds of plants, microbial communities, the coldness of snowy areas or the pessimistic despair of deserts, the different water forms in rivers and streams. This paper will study *Green Planet* through the theory of receptive aesthetics, as a literary theory that studies the aesthetic reception of the audience, Western scholar Yao Si’s book “*Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory*” first defined receptive aesthetics, that is, the creator has to focus on the reader’s reception, response, reading process and aesthetic experience by focusing on the reader’s reception, response, reading process and aesthetic experience, which Yao Si categorized in the range of literary theories, and the series of theoretical perceptions, such as receptive aesthetics, with the communication audience theory advocated by communication theorist Lasswell is basically the same, which is of great significance to the audience research of today’s film and television works.

### 3.1. Subtle Conceptualization to Meet the Audience's Expectation of Vision

Including readers in the process of work creation, so as to finally create works in line with the acceptance psychology and aesthetic interest of the audience. The core theories of acceptance aesthetics, such as Horizon of Expectation, have a profound impact on the narrative of Chinese contemporary documentary (Chen, 2019). The so-called "Horizon of Expectation" (Horizon of Expectation) is a kind of directional psychological expectation of the audience on the text according to their own past experience, way of thinking, cultural level and psychological cognition before receiving the text. The battlefield-like tropical rainforest of "Green Planet" attracts the audience's horizons of expectation by showing the way of living creatures' survival. In addition, the director himself has a certain fan base, which also contributes to the attractiveness of this documentary.

Firstly, the environment and footage combine to satisfy the audience, the documentary wants to show that although life blooms endlessly here, the law of survival of the fittest also applies. In the rainforest, sunlight is a rare capital. The leaves of the turtleback bamboos spread out and absorb the sunlight to their heart's content, while at the same time blocking the other plants, which will lead to their demise. In order to survive and develop, all plants are trying to take advantage of their own conditions as much as possible (Cao et al., 2011). In the rainforest there is a plant whose vines cling to other plants as much as possible. Through the camera you can see their swaying tendrils, waiting for an opportunity to move in the air, and when you think it may not have a target, it may have already found one. It's not easy to tell the winners from the losers in this competition; the leaves of the balsa wood are covered in fuzz, and the vines' thin tentacles keep trying but never manage to climb. They do their best to camouflage themselves, and within a year they can grow ten meters and have become the winners at this stage. These clever ideas, which are undoubtedly what the creators wanted to convey, together with the audience's expectations, are enough to make it an excellent documentary.

Secondly, the director's own IP foundation, in the Costa Rican rainforest in the rough and tumble of the sun, David Attenborough said to the audience, "Welcome to Planet Green." Nearly 100 years old, full of gray hair, Attenborough traveled thousands of miles to Costa Rica, in the rainforest to shoot the "Green Planet", which has undoubtedly fished up the audience's "expectations of the field of vision", the camera's rapid capture, so that the original human eye can not see the competition, become like a wild grassland competition between the lions, full of suspense and tension. The camera's rapidity makes these rivalries, which would otherwise be invisible to the human eye, become like those between lions in the wild grasslands, full of suspense and tension. David Attenborough describes these as being the battlefield. Based on the creative ability of this director himself, the viewer is already highly interested in watching this documentary without having watched it.

### 3.2. “Dialogue” Creation to Tap into a Wider Potential Audience

Yao Si puts forward the concept of “acceptance aesthetics”, so that the author in the process of creation pay more attention to the reader’s experience, which also involves the reader’s personal aesthetic experience, which is from the transmitter to the audience; then the German aesthetician Wolfgang Iser is different from him is to advocate the feedback, defined as interactive, at the same time he also put forward the recognition of the “implied reader”, as the name suggests, is a potential reader, with whom the dialogue and communication can be completed creation. “Implied reader”, as the name suggests, is a potential reader, whom the author anticipates, with whom he or she converses and communicates, thus completing the creation. Its essence is just a fictional character envisioned to facilitate the creator’s understanding of the reader’s aesthetics and to meet the reader’s expectations (Qian, 2019). This documentary is created through the narration “dialog” and the camera “dialog”, thus tapping into the audience and retaining them.

The first is the use of narration “dialog” creation, a large number of narration in the film is to attract the audience, the narration can not only objectively expound the facts, to carry on the next, to enhance the significance of the narration, but also can pull the audience from the boring picture narrative back to the documentary. “The light wood flower is able to fill with nectar over and over again seven times in one night, mainly to attract bees for the purpose of pollination, the Kay’s dahlia also unfolds its red petals, which are so huge that flies sting on them decisively; the fungus glows in the night as it sprays an endless number of spores into the air.....The nectar of the balsam flower, even if it is eaten, fills it up again, seven times over.” These “conversational” creations are meant to keep the audience engaged while watching, and the narrator’s open narration actually leaves space for the audience to think, to have a “conversation” with them, to keep them in the film, and to stimulate their desire to continue watching.

The second is the creation of a “dialogue” between the camera and the screen. Whenever the viewer feels bored in the screen, the next shot will be very exciting, a few meters below the ground, endless darkness, a world of fungi that is invisible to the human eye. Here, too, the fungi are engaged in a never-ending war, driving the leaf-cutting ants to bring them food—armies of leaf-cutting ants walk through the rainforest, the sound of their jaws cutting through the leaves of redwoods is amplified, and even when the redwoods release their toxins, the ants run off in search of a food source. Every shot moves and breathes, leaving more than enough for the viewer to be tapped into. At the same time, there is suspense, so that the viewer will wonder how these vision-opening, jaw-dropping images were captured. Beyond the film, we meet Triangle Tree, the biggest contributor to the shoot behind the scenes. The vividness of the camera is like having a conversation with a person, and it is through these “conversations” that more viewers are left behind, and at the same time, more viewers are discovered, so that people will be interested enough to watch this documentary and get a better evaluation of it.

### 3.3. Setting up Gaps to Realize Deep Audience Summoning

The reader's response is what reception aesthetics cares most about, and not only that, but creators should also be studied in the context of reception aesthetics. In *The Calling Layout of the Text*, Ethel explains the definition of "calling layout". He argues that the creator's "uncertainties" and "gaps" are consciously left in the text in order to allow the reader to participate creatively in the reading, thus realizing the interaction and achieving a deeper personal understanding. For this reason, "the structure of summoning is the main motivating factor to stimulate readers to actively participate in the creation of the work and fill in the aesthetic value of the work" (Liu, 2016). The film is punctuated by a number of gaps set in the middle of the piece and the gaps at the end of the piece.

The first is the use of time-lapse photography to set up the blank, the film a large number of animal behavior to account for the time of the time sequence of shots is the use of time-lapse photography to show. Decades ago, the director saw the nature documentary time-lapse photography technology, ready to start the film, but also has been using his free time to combine the right camera with motion control, invented the "triangle tree"—can be used as a remote control time-lapse photography! The "Triangle Tree" can be used as a remote-controlled time-lapse robot, with a barrel lens that can travel back and forth through small holes to shoot freely. It was used to shoot so many of the shocking breath-taking shots in the documentary. Machines can't solve everything, and the team behind it put in a lot of effort, squatting in the same place for two weeks and using nearly 10,000 camera positions just to shoot footage of the ants falling asleep, even though it's just a few seconds in the movie. These are undoubtedly so that the audience can evoke the aesthetic, only to make the picture more beautiful, in order to let more people into it, so that the audience due to the picture to play the imagination.

Secondly, the ending sets up a gap to construct meaning, and at the end, it also leaves a gap. David Attenborough still has as much passion and struggle for nature still as he did when he was younger and just getting into documentary filmmaking. When he filmed the long-tongued bats at the end of this episode, he also left a big gap, in the rainforest cable car, to show the biodiversity, towards the camera to call on the countries of the world to unite to protect the rainforests, and at the same time the protection of all the creatures of the earth, to arouse people's empathy, but also aroused the audience's imagination, the viewers in the audience to speak of the creatures of the whereabouts and how the results of the, the viewers to think about the problem, which is the biggest social value of this documentary. This is also the greatest social value of this documentary, to construct a meaning of environmental protection.

### 4. Summary

The homogenization of documentary narrative content leads to aesthetic fatigue of the audience (Bin, 2021). As a nature documentary, its purpose is not only to

show the nature, but also to consciously protect the environment when the viewer's interest and reverence are aroused, which is the significance of the great social value it shows. From the perspective of aesthetics, this documentary is of great aesthetic significance, no matter its conception, time-lapse photography technology, anticipation vision, and textual gaps, it has a great reference value for today's directors, and it is worthwhile for every documentary director to study it in depth.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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