

**TECHNIQUES APPLICATION ON CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC  
DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION: A STUDY OF SIMON SCHAMA'S  
POWER OF THE ART**

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**Abstract**

The study objects of this research is Simon Schama's *Power of the Art*, a documentary with 8 sets and of length 430 minutes. This research explores the documentary through content analysis. The study analyzes artistic expressions like theme, audio-visual language, montage technique, space-time structure, and so on. The purpose is to study how BBC creators reappear and restore history and explain artistic work through video language. How they use artistic and aesthetic expressions with ideological implications in showing and leading the viewers to think. This excellent documentary owns great reference which is significant for future creation of documentaries of similar state.

**Keywords:** *documentary, artistic characteristics, narrative, audio-visual language.*

**APLIKASI TEKNIK DALAM PENERBITAN DOKUMENTARI BERTERASKAN  
BUDAYA DAN ARTISTIK: KAJIAN TERHADAP SIMON SCHAMA  
*POWER OF THE ART***

**Abstrak**

Bahan kajian ini adalah terhadap 8 set, sepanjang 430 minit dokumentari Simon Schama "Power of the Art". Kajian ini membuat penelitian terhadap dokumentari tersebut melalui kaedah analisis kandungan. Kajian ini menganalisis pernyataan artistik seperti tema, bahasa audio-visual, teknik montage, struktur ruang-masa dan sebagainya. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk meneliti bagaimana pencipta BBC membuat penonjolan kembali dan pengejalan sejarah dan menerangkan hasil artistik melalui bahasa video. Bagaimana mereka menggunakan pernyataan artistik dan estetika bersama-sama dengan implikasi ideologi dalam memaparkan dan membawa penonton untuk berfikir. Dokumentari yang hebat ini mempunyai petunjuk yang dikagumi, yang mana begitu signifikan kepada penciptaan masa depan dokumentari yang serupa

**Kata kunci:** *dokumentari, ciri-ciri artistik, narrative, bahasa audio-visual.*

## INTRODUCTION

The documentary *Simon Schama's Power of Art* is a documentary series with 8 set launched by BBC in 2008. This series combines dramatic remodeling, grand photography technique and unique, rich and individual narration told by Simon Schama, which lead audiences back to the significant natal moment of eight great artworks, emphasize creation process of eight famous artists like Rembrandt, Van Gogh and Picasso, and completely analyze rarely known and gripping stories of eight artists.

Documentary is a kind of film or video art which takes real life as creation materials, and real people and things as expression object, makes artistic processing and expression, regards truth as the essence, and causes thinking (Hu & Wei, 2014). Documentary is the initial form of film. The first film in history, *Exiting the Factory* (1895) owns documentary characteristic (Liu, 2011).

At that time, film was only recording with only a few and single techniques of expression. Along with the improvement of technology, many techniques of expression are used in creation of documentaries.

In 1923, the public show of *Nanook of the North* (1922) shoot by Flaherty marked a new development stage for documentary in artistic creation. In this film, the director shows a "drama of primitive life" to audiences, and firstly provided an entirely new prototype of methodological practice and narrative structure (Marcus, 2006). This documentary is the pioneer of documentaries.

At an early stage, ordinary people were running for life because of the limitation of material standard. The appreciation and carving of artworks are limited in minority privileged class. For the epoch characteristic, the propaganda and education functions of documentaries were extruded from aspects like material selection and theme.

John Grierson, the first man put forward the concept of documentary, he said that he looks up cinema as a pulpit, and use it as a propagandist (Barsam, 1992). Early

documentaries tried to pursue beauty and poetic sentiment through the combination of artistic frames, modeling, music and narration, while their themes were still about political comment, life and biography. They only had single playing platform, and their output were relatively low. An elitism situation appeared in the whole documentary market.

From 1990s, mass culture rises and spreads rapidly, and consumerism concept permeates into cultural creation and propagation process. People start to pay more and more attention to documentaries. With the appearing of new modern media, such as the popularization of Facebook and YouTube, people have different routes to contact documentary. Moreover, the improvement of communications largely decreases spreading cost. The popularization of storage media like DVD brings a vigorous future for documentary (Nichols, 2010).

The means of expression also gains long-range development when quantity and category of documentary increase. For example, thoughtfully arranged frames, distinct language, scientific knowledge, real emotion, as profound philosophies and arts, all of these improve ornamental value of documentaries, increase its expressive force of audio-visual language, and give documentary more powerful art expressive force.

Cultural and artistic documentary is a new type of documentary developed in this stage. After entering into 21<sup>st</sup> century, the public's demand on culture and art increases day by day along with the improvement of material standard of living. Films and television programs about art appear in people's sight frequently. With its unique expression technique and charm, documentary is especially remarkable among numerous films and television programs for popularization of art knowledge to the public.

Cultural and artistic documentary does not only have high aesthetic and economic value, but also certain cultural and inheritance value, which help to improve national cultural soft power. As is well-known, the increasing of culture soft power

depends on culture export. The historical and cultural value borne by culture arts documentary just caters to this purpose. Therefore, it becomes a tool to export local value in many countries, and draws more and more attention.

This research comes under this background, and selects the cultural and artistic documentary *Simon Schama's Power of Art* made by BBC as the major object of study. Since the premiere in BBC Two in 2006, this documentary has received broad attention and good reputation, and has been separately broadcasted in Iran and Italian TV stations after translated into Persian and Italian.

This documentary has also got multiple international prizes like “Best Art Program in International Emmy” and “Best Cinematography of British Academy Film Awards” (documentary type).

*Simon Schama's Power of Art* is a work about art history which is full of philosophy and enthusiasm. It does not completely explain terms, techniques or schools in drawing or sculpture field in history sequence, or scrupulously analyze life story, creation and influence of artists, but pay more attention to individual happiness or suffering after painting. This kind of manifestation mode helps people to know art and its happiness better, and even attracts their impulsion to learn and take part in art.

## **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Cultural and artistic documentary is a new type of documentary. It combines characteristics of historical documentary and humanity documentary, and owns more artistic connotation for its themes about artists or artworks. With cultural and inheritance value, cultural and artistic documentary performs well in exporting national culture.

The documentary *Simon Schama's Power of Art*, which is selected as the research object in this study, does not only have high historical data value and rich entertainment, but also earns considerable economic income, and provides beneficial reference for televised documentary creation in mass culture context. By studying

*Simon Schama's Power of Art* from creation perspective, this research tries to raise “practical experience” of cultural and artistic documentary, and then guide practice with theories.

The purpose of the study is to, through the analysis of *Simon Schama's Power of Art*, we know how BBC creators reappear and restore history process and explain artistic works through video language, what means they use to give artistic and aesthetic expressions, and the most important, what ideological implication the creators want to show in documentary, as well as how they lead audiences to think.

On this basis, this research starts from realism, the essence of documentary, analyzes what recording means used by directors to restore artistic creation experience and historical fragments on the screen. Secondly, this research studies how creators give artistic expression through audio-visual language.

Finally, this research concludes and teases narrative style and structure of documentary, summarizes specific aesthetic value and art culture.

There have been various creation concepts and genres of documentary in different historical periods since it was created a hundred years ago. Correspondently, theoretical research of documentary has also made some achievements. However, as Bill Nichols (2005) said “documentary film has never had a very precise definition”. Instead, it is more like a changing chameleon with different definitions and classifications as time changes. The creation of documentary will also develop different creation concepts and techniques with the advancing technology and people’s changing taste.

Bill Nichols (2010) has made a conclusion on expression ways of documentary in his *Introduction to Documentary*. He thinks there are mainly four expression ways: 1. describe a development process in poetic way or simply time sequence. 2. Organize story based on an argument about documentary theme. 3. Emphasize producer’s opinion about documentary theme and the opinion can be positive or negative. 4. Tell a special or typical story about documentary theme, and reflect a large theme from

petty things.

By telling stories in the documentary a large number of real cases and precious interview material on professionals, *Documentary Storytelling* made by Sheila Curran Bernard (2007) introduces how to explore and ingeniously set dramatic event in real life, bring audiences unique perspective and experience, how to better arrange film structure, and help readers know every step in documentary shooting.

Michael Rabiger (1987) shares his creation experience of commercial documentary *Directing the Documentary*, introduces creating process of documentary including some specific making steps and techniques, and provides practical basis for documentaries fans.

### **AESTHETIC RESEARCH OF DOCUMENTARY**

John Grierson (1981) thinks that the basic aesthetic characteristic of documentary is authenticity. Capacities of grasping environment, observing life and selecting real scenes learned from movie may be used in a “new and vital art form”. This form is not used in feature film shot in studio but in documentary. By showing animated scenes and stories, documentary is much vivid and moving than stories shown before manual background.

Authenticity is the common aesthetic characteristic of documentary. After 21st century, the making of documentary becomes more exquisite. The adding of new technology greatly improves the viewing value of documentary than that of last century. The research of documentary aesthetics is mainly analyzed from its audio visual elements, including music, commentary and image composition.

Austin Thomas (2007) points out in his *Watching the World* that, from 2002, themes of documentaries are more diversified and humanized. Through experience and observing of real life and describing of personalized details, makers go deep into contemporary era with humanity perspective and humanistic care, pay attention to portray personality characteristics and survival destiny, show living state and spiritual

world. The author has also puts forward that thoughts of middle class have larger and larger influence in documentary.

Chinese scholars Chen Xuguang and Wang Sizhang (2012) also say in their *from New Period to New Century: The Evolvement of Aesthetics Primary Tide of China's Documentaries*, in visual language, documentaries in new century pay more attention to show romantic and newfangled scenes and frames which are not familiar by audiences. The application of lighting, photography angle, using of technique, digital technique, as well as the combining techniques of 3D making and genuine photograph increase ornamental value of documentaries.

### **NARRATOLOGY RESEARCH ON DOCUMENTARY**

For double restriction of realism and subjectivity, the narration of documentary shall be distinguished from that of other narration works like traditional novels or other types of video art. Language elements of film and television include image, voice, music, character, chart and special effects. Audiences will be influence by diverse audio visual images created by organic combining of these elements.

David Bordwell (1985) points out in his *Narration in the Fiction Film*: narration is a system contains story, plot and model. The narration of documentary is also a process of telling a story. It also needs to choose narrative person, opinion and method to complete the story. Being different from feature films, stories in documentary must be real.

Peter Stansky (2009) has studied the narration structure and commentaries of the compere of *A History of Britain*, another history documentary of Simon Schama. He thinks this documentary ingeniously uses a large number of suspense tactics, and gives audiences a perfect aesthetic feeling of voice and image by leading them to imagine the images through commentaries of the compere. These tactics are also used in *Simon Schama's Power of Art*.

## DOCUMENTARY CREATION IN THE UK

The documentary *Simon Schama's Power of Art* selected in this research is made by BBC, and it shows typical characteristics of BBC documentary series in both its film structure and narrative pattern. Therefore, reading research works and literature on British documentary may guide further studies.

In his book *A New History of British Documentary*, British Professor James Chapman (2015) reviews the development of British documentary, summarizes the history of television (TV) documentary from before Grierson till today, and analyzes the creation characteristics of British documentary in different periods through case study, which provides readers with a better way to understand the history of British films and TV documentary.

In 2014, John Corner published his paper called "Re-styling the real: British television documentary in the 1990s" in which the definition and authenticity of documentary is discussed, and the changing characteristics of British documentary in 1990s is analyzed. John Corner observes that in 1990s, the typologies of documentary could be categorized as: observationalism, interview, narratives of inquiry and the implicative. At the same time, this research also discusses the impacts of reality show on the development of documentary. The author believes that the birth of reality show offers documentary a new method of production from the aspects of looks, sounds, intensities, rhythms and moods.

In an article "A Creation Overview of BBC TV Documentary in 2013", the Chinese scholar Yu Ming (2014) sums up the overall situation of documentaries made by BBC in 2013 when the output of factual programs mounted to 2396 hours, with a year-on-year growth of 27%. She also analyzes some new features shown in the BBC documentaries in 2013. For example: 1. More cooperation with Asian countries; 2. A variety of specialist-oriented documentaries; 3. Serious documentaries with challenges still occupying an important position.



## **METHODOLOGY**

This research firstly starts from the nature of the documentary film, with the method of content analysis, analyzes the methods that the director uses to objectively restore the process of art works production for artists on screen; this research then selects the single set and fragment which have features, and specifically study how the creator carries out an art expression through an audio-visual language. Throughout the overall film and combined with documents, this research carries out an induction and collation on the narrative style and structure of this documentary film. Finally, the study summarizes special aesthetic values.

## **FINDINGS**

The researchers will specifically analyze the artistic technique of *Simon Schama's Power of Art* through four aspects— theme setting, the employment of audio-visual language, the use of artistic expression mode and narrative method. It also explores its narrative style and narrative way and interprets the audio-visual language of documentary, trying to provide certain case experience for later production of cultural and artistic documentary.

## **THE AUDIO-VISUAL LANGUAGE**

The audio-visual language is not only the noun of the expression form of the film's art of picture and voice but also the general term of artistic expression manner. In the silent-film era, the expression manner was the combination of pictures, namely, Montage. So the film language is Montage. After the film had voice, the conception of Montage could not able to generalize the whole language of film. Instead, people use "the audio-visual language" as the general term of the expression artistic manner of film. Therefore, two basic elements of the audio-visual language are: active image and synchronous sound, which involve four aspects the content of lens, the form of lens, the law of sub lens and the relationship between voice and picture. The lens with

certain content and the appropriate is the basic unit of the film's audio-visual language. Process the connection of lens and the relationship of voice and picture, and integrate them into a whole of film audio-visual structure. (Gao, 2013).

### **Landscape**

Landscape is an important method of the picture mould and the manner of forming the change of picture's rhythm (Qi & Xia, 2011). In the aspect of landscape, the documentary *Simon Schama's Power of Art* uses a great deal of landscapes, especially the application of big panorama has its own originality. Big panorama expresses the quantity while close-up shows the quality. Big panorama extracts the circumstance while clear-up extracts the spirit.

A big panorama is one landscape between the standard panorama and view, which can express the panorama and involve wider environmental space like long shot. On the basis of involving wider environmental space, big panorama can present the specific figures in the specific environment as much as possible.

In the eighth episode *Rothko*, when the film introduces the story that Rothko creates and decorates painting for Four Seasons Hotel, the director chooses the panoramic shot as the Figure 1. In this shot, the director chooses the style of black-and-white film, which seems to be an authentic image data but is actually played by actors. Besides, in the foreground, the floor in a shaded environment highlights the empty studio, Rothko and canvas in the depth of the shot, light from the left side shines on the body of Rothko, making the main character stand out in the whole shot. Moreover, Whisky in the shadows introduces the life condition of Rothko in a metaphorical way.

In addition, in the fourth episode *Turner*, the shot of the film when it introduces the young Turner at first, in the foreground, golden wild grass and trees in the dark become a dramatic comparison and highlight the young Turner who is played by actor between the former two sides. Moreover, the obscure and swaying wild grass also

adds the shot a sense of fantasy and comfort, just like Turner's inner world at that time.

While in the middle of the documentary, the inner world of Turner also begins to change, he begins to pay more attention on the life of people at the bottom and the director also chooses the shot to express this condition. In this panoramic lens, the left and right of the picture each has three quarters and one half that be shadowed by black objects, which can highlight the narrow and small lane. While the above light shines on the back of Turner, the main character appears especially outstanding in the whole lens and the prostitute who leans against the wall behind Turner presents the condition of life and spirit of people at bottom.

The feature of subject in the close-up is single and distinct, possessing outstanding visual experience and strong visual impact. The close-up shot has narrow visual field and outstanding details. When it is used to perform actions, the shot will bestow the original actions with faster visual experience. Simon Schama's introduces the life of Rembrandt as the apprentice of a painter to the audience in the episode *Rembrandt*, presents the audience the step of making pigments by way of the close-up shot, enlarging the work that is time consuming and requires concentration in a faster perception. The life of apprentice is tedious as well as monotonous, mixing primer, grinding pigment, suspending it in meaty-smelling linseed oil, while it is a must way to become a great painter.

Besides, the close-up shot has the function of highlighting and emphasizing the objects, which can mobilize the audience's imagination, having the function of see big things through small ones and further guides the observers to study the inner connotation of objects. Therefore, in the documentary *Simon Schama's Power of Art*, the director also frequently uses the close-up shot to capture the subjects of artists.

When introduces the famous subject *Death of Marat*, the director uses many close-up shot, present the feature of this picture from various parts. The enlarged picture can make the audience understand the feature of artistic subject more carefully,

such as the gray arm as hard as stone, a serene countenance and a letter full of concern to the public. All of these close-up lenses can present the detail and the artistic aesthetics of the picture in a large degree and guide the audience to consider the meaning behind this piece of “picture full of lie”.

Lastly, while captures information through panoramic lens and grasps details by using close-up shot, *Simon Schama's Power of Art* still pays more emphasis on the expression function of various landscapes and is good at comprehensively utilizing the combine of various landscapes and carry out an overall show of the subject's content in three-dimensional space built by multi-screen, multi position and multi angle. In the second episode *Bernini*, when introduces that Bernini creates *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* for Santa Maria Della Victoria, the director shows the strength of this sculpture by using a series of lenses.

Though it is just a sculpture, by way of the combination of diversified lenses, the director not only shows the audience the integration of the angle and nun in sculpture and the raging emotion of nun but also eliminates the monotony and boredom of the long shot. Moreover, this motion of this group of multi lens makes the stationary sculpture become more vivid and makes people have a sense of immersive.

### **Depth of field**

The depth of field decides the depth range of clear scenery within the shot, which also will influence the information content of lens so that can express the subjective emotion of the author. *Simon Schama's Power of Art* makes a better use of the depth of field, so that narrates the stories of artists from various pictures of depth of field and expresses the emotional demand of the creator hidden in the depth of lens.

The scene that the host is introducing is the living condition of French royal family at that time. In this lens, the houses of the pastoral style in the depth are clearly visible, which are surrounded by green trees and flowing streams. The lens is full of leisure atmosphere of countryside. While the host in the foreground is also very clear,

who leans against the big tree and is very causally and relaxed dressed. Although we have no the evidence of historic video data nor the actor who act that scene authentically, the audience still can, by way of this lens, appreciate the gentle and simple life of French loyal family.

The lens of small depth of field, which is a picture that British colonists sold slaves in America narrated by the director. In the picture of small depth of field, the clear range is very limited and the outside landscapes have all been virtualized. Sometimes, small depth of field virtualizes some useless information so that the main information can become more prominent. While in the small depth of field, the virtualized black slaves is not redundant information, instead, by way of this virtualized process, the creator makes the lens deepen heavy sense and expresses his complaint against the black slave trade, also leaving the audience the space of thinking.

### **Composition**

Whether the lens is beautiful or not will directly influence the audience's affection for the work. Whether the photographing object is showed appropriately or whether the form of picture is elegant both depend on the processing method of the film's composition. *Simon Schama's Power of Art* is very elegant in composition, where every scene is like a picture.

The light and shadow are important elements of the film's composition, light is the foundation and soul of the picture while shadow is an essential element to express the relationship between light and shade. Compared with contextual story drama, the documentary has some limitation in the aspect of processing the light and shadow, however, the utilization of light and the process of color still are very important.

Through careful process in this aspect, *Simon Schama's Power of Art* creates many elegant and delicate scenes. By using Rembrandt Light, aerial perspective and hard tone picture, the photographer makes the main body of the church present an

embossed effect.

In addition, in the documentary *Simon Schama's Power of Art*, the director also makes full use of the method of foreground composition. Foreground is the figure or landscape in front of the subject, helping the subject to directly, accurately and completely express the theme and explain content. The long corridor and the arch of church add the Visual spatial depth, embellish the scene and build the sense of mystery of church.

### **Shooting angle**

Shooting angle is a kind of very special and important shooting language and modeling element, which includes the shooting height, direction and distance. Shooting height is divided into three kinds of flat shot, high angle shot and low angle shot. Shooting direction is divided into the kinds like positive angle, side angle, oblique angle and back angle. The documentary *Simon Schama's Power of Art* contains all of these shooting angles and flexibly uses various these shooting angles by combining the expression object, specific content and various subjective emotion of creator.

In order to show the living condition of Caravaggio at home and create a sense of mystery and suspense, the director adopts the back angle and shines his shadow on the surface of wall, as if Caravaggio is struggling against his own shadow. The low shot angle is used when reappear the circumstance of Van Gogh writing the letter to his brother, in order to highlight the sense of respect and sense of space.

When the host introduces *Death of Marat* of David, the side angle is used so that the angle of perspective effect can be showed and the sense of space and sense of depth of lens can be highlighted. When introduces the church built by Bernini, the director chooses the high angle shot, which expresses the elegance of architecture by delicate form of composition. Thus reverence shows between the lines.

### **Shooting model**

Shooting model is divided into two kinds of fixed shot and motion shot, the fixed shot also contains various forms of push, pull, shake, move, follow, lift, swing and comprehensive movement. *Simon Schama's Power of Art* covers almost all shooting models and uses them flexibly, making them complement and reinforce each other.

In order to show the detail and artistic feature of the subject in lens, the director uses the fixed lens so that the audience can carefully observe the feature of picture's subject in the enclosed space formed in the stationary frame.

When introduces that Bernini creates a sculpture for his mistress, the director utilizes a close-up fixed lens to show the characteristics of the sculpture, slightly opened small mouth and the eyes full of emotion both let the audience feel the passionate and warm emotion of Bernini when he creates this sculpture.

The application of motion shot in this film has its own specialty and the coordination of commentary is also very in place. For example, in the first episode *Caravaggio*, just as the picture 16, when the host introduces that the society of Rome is very chaos and its streets full of various drunkards, thieves, vagabonds and prostitutes, the lens becomes sway with the advance of the host, making the audience feel the uncertainty of Roman society at that time from the shaking of lens.

### **Unstable unconventional lens**

Unconventional lens is a relative term to the conventional term. The so-called conventional lens refers to the shooting lens that adheres to the art law of formal beauty strictly according to the flat, steady, uniform, accurate, true and clear shooting requirements. While unconventional lens breaks this formal law, organizes the lens in the incomplete, skew, non-uniform, extremely unstable structural form and mode of motion and the process of focusing also is recorded truthfully. *Simon Schama's Power of Art* uses repeatedly the extremely unstable unconventional lens so that creates distinctive visual effects.

In the episode *Picasso*, the director applies many unconventional lenses in order to coordinate the feature of Picasso's works like severe deformation, distortion, exaggerated strokes and the accumulation of geometric color blocks. When the host introduces the Picasso's come to Paris, some of lenses are distorted and deformed. Meanwhile, a sense of hazy and fantasy also have been constructed by using the methods like mirror reflection, which also very coordinates the feature of Picasso's works and has a strong visual effect.

### **THE AUDITORY LANGUAGE ANALYSIS**

The famous film theorist of Hungary Béla Balázs (2003) considers that sound film not only adds sound for silent film, but shows the life from totally different perspective. What the emphasis is not how to sound, but how it can express the film's content by using sound. Being an inevitable product of sound film, sound will also become one subject and become the source and cause of motion, which is an essential element of the film.

### **Commentary**

Based on the content of documentary's picture, commentary is the earliest auditory language of documentary (Davies, 2007), which composes through the content of picture and has played a complementary role in the film's picture (Rabiger, 2004). Excellent Voice-over commentary can make the whole story of documentary become more coherently create and grasp the rhythm of the documentary, thus causing the audience better appreciate the plot and strength their visual experience (Zarzynski & Pepe, 2012).

The commentary of *Simon Schama's Power of Art* is composed by the host and producer Simon Schama, who is an English historian, the lecturer of artistic history in Columbia University as well as a literary critic of New Yorker. As a typical scholar documentary, the commentary of *Simon Schama's Power of Art* is filled with



authoritativeness as well as understandable, which increases a lot of highlights for the whole documentary.

The commentary of Simon Schama is good at building suspense in that aspect of narration and attracting the audience's notice. For example, in the beginning of every episode, corresponding with the content of scene, he tends to put forward the main suspense of every episode through commentary.

As a cultural and artistic documentary, *Simon Schama's Power of Art* has an elegant content that is favored by the minority. However, with the understandable commentary of Simon Schama that conforms to the taste of the public to complement and narrate the picture, the whole documentary eliminates the sense of boredom like the traditional cultural and artistic documentaries and is more vivid and full of vitality hence.

In every episode of the documentary, Simon Schama tends to discuss the whole chapter by way of finding a small detail, combine with a piece of classic subject of eight artists, around whom he guides and spread the imagination of audience for the story, and then develops the plot layer upon layer and narrates the ups and downs of the whole story.

For example, in the episode Bernini, when Simon Schama introduces the terrible personality of Bernini and that Bernini gets away with punishment even after he has beat his brother badly, Simon Schama advances the questions from the perspective of the audience and leads the following contents in the form of rhetorical questions.

*And you're thinking, "I don't care how good his sculpture is. I don't care how important his art is. What an absolute bastard! Please tell me he doesn't get off scot-free." Well, strangely enough, it's exactly from this moment of the crime against Costanza that things go swiftly downhill for the Cavaliere Untouchable.*

——Simon Schama (2006) 《Bernini》

Simon Schama is excellent in grasping the rhythm and the question that he puts forward is just the content that the audiences anticipate in the middle of the

documentary. By simulating the thinking of the audience, Simon Schama have shortened the gap between the film and the audiences, this interaction can increase the sense of participation, making people feel as if they are talking to someone.

Besides the excellent feature of grasping the story's rhythm in the commentary of the host Simon Schama, another main feature of this film is his understanding about the subjects of artists. One purpose of the cultural and artistic documentary is to guide the audience to step into the artistic palace that belongs to the majority before by way of the form of mass media. While requiring the commentary of host should involve the understanding about the artistic subjects, the documentary also should arises audiences' interests and guide them to step into the inner world of artists, appreciating the beauty of art.

*Everything Rothko did to these paintings, the column-like forms suggested rather than drawn, the loose staining's, were all meant to make the surface ambiguous. Porous. Perhaps softly penetrable. A space that might be where we came from, or where we will end up. They're meant not to keep us out, but to embrace. From an artist whose highest compliment was to call you a human being.*

——Simon Schama (2006) 《Rothko》

When Simon Schama interprets works of these artists, he not only interprets his own opinion toward the work, but also guides common audiences before TV to enter into a higher aesthetic realm of art, making the audiences realize deeper images contained in art an appreciate its power.

### **Location Sound**

Location Sound refers to sound elements when the living condition is recorded, which includes ambient sound, background sound and the language of interviewees. Among these sound elements of documentary, location sound is an important reflection of Documentary style (Li, 2010).

Ambient sound is very important in the documentary, which can increase the sense of reality of scene and brings audiences into the environment and atmosphere that are reflected by documentary, achieving the restoration of real world and the immersive feeling of people. While making great effort to keep authenticity in the creation of ambient sound, the documentary *Simon Schama's Power of Art* also takes account of the artistic representation of ambient effect.

Such as in the first *Caravaggio*, the film starts with the scene of collapsed Caravaggio running in the beach, meanwhile, the ambient sounds are the sound of the waves crashing on the beach, the sound of Caravaggio's footstep on the beach and the sound of transient metallic clang when the lens points at the sword in his hand. By the cooperation of these sounds, the authenticity of scene can be strengthened, making audiences rapidly enter into the environment that is set by the director in a short time.

Besides, the voice of human is also a common voice element in the documentary's Location Sound. Apart from the commentary in *Simon Schama's Power of Art*, the voice of human is dominated by the dialogue of the characters in the "reproduce reality". For example, in the episode *Bernini*, the monologues of the actor that performs the mother of Bernini and the artistic critic Filippo Baldinucci when they face the lens both belong to this type. Through the evaluation toward Bernini performed by them, the appreciation of the film can be strengthened greatly so that the sense of boredom and sense of weakness can be eliminated which are brought by using commentary in a long time.

## **Music**

Music plays a finishing touch on the role of the documentary, which can strengthen the authenticity of documentary and stress the atmosphere. A piece of excellent music can not only describe a story and highlight the relationship among scenes and stress the correlation between the clue and theme, but also can even the aesthetic sense of the scene and strengthen the influence of documentary (Rogers, 2015).

The director applies a large amount of music related to religion in *Simon Schama's Power of Art*, such as *Stabat Mater*, *Nisi Dominus* and *Lamento Della Ninfa*. Religion plays a significant role in the western artistic history, the artistic creation of Caravaggio, Bernini and David are all closely related to religion. Therefore, when introduces the painting of Caravaggio, the director employs the deep and solemn church music, which shows the sense of divinity in the painting naturally.

Still, when introduces Rothko, the director utilizes the American popular music *Andy Warhol* in 1990s as background music and expresses the characteristic of American society with this relaxed and popular music, which reflects the tolerance of American society toward the elegant art at that time from a side view.

### **ARTISTIC EXPRESSION TECHNIQUE**

Expression technique, as a literary noun, refers to special sentence organization forms used by authors in selecting writing manner and diction and expressing thoughts and feelings. Up to now, documentary has accumulated extremely diversified artistic expression techniques with long-term practice and incorporation with other artistic forms. During the transmission process of artistry, artistic expression techniques have exerted favorable functional effects to add considerable charms for documentaries.

#### **Representing Reality by Montage Technique**

Originated from architecture, montage originally refers to constitution and assembly. Whereas, extension to film artistry, it means film editing of shots (scenes) or syntagmatic relation between sound and scene (Tan & Chen, 2011).

However, documentary has always excluded the adoption of montage expression technique, considering shot editing may violate the reality principle of documentary. With the development of documentary aesthetics, documentary begins to concentrate on artistic manipulation and emotional expression of editors apart from objective reproduction. As a consequence, montage has become an increasingly important and

popular expression technique in documentary (Guo, 2016).

Appropriate adoption of montage technique in cultural and artistic documentary can not only restore the inheritance process of artistry, but also add more visibility to documentary based on its dramatization narrative method. Documentary *Simon Schama's Power of Art* makes full use of montage technique to represent the power of artistry to audiences.

Cross montage puts action scenes or context scenes occurred in different places at the same time together to impress audiences with a sense of compactness in plot and a sense of potentness in story rhythm (Li, 2014). For instance, in *The Death of Marat*, one episode of *David*, the directors put the scene of Marat's bathing and writing, assassin's preparation and host's comment together, ended with a metaphorical drop of blood dispersing in water, to indicate the death of Marat. The cohesion of a series of shots greatly adds the visibility and rhythmicity to the documentary and successfully presents the story hidden behind the legendary painting of *The Death of Marat* to audiences in a vivid and lively manner.

Accumulative montage connects a series of scenes with the same or similar nature but different subject images together according to different actions and modeling features. By way of accumulation of visual images, accumulative montage technique will form compact atmosphere and potent rhythm sensation (Li, 2014). This montage technique is very common in artistic creation.

For instance, in the first episode *Caravaggio*, when Simon Schama introduces the features of Caravaggio's painting created with a religious background, there emerge many other contemporary works. Such accumulation of visual images not only enhances the rhythmicity of the documentary which enables audiences to get rid of boredom from silent scenes, but also deepens audiences' impression about the features of Caravaggio's paintings. Furthermore, audiences could find it easy to perceive emotional pursuit and contained power of his works.

There is also another example, in the episode *Picasso*, the director connects

numerous materials in Picasso's paintings with practical scenes. Rapid scene switch dubbed with intense and slightly horrific background music further sets up suspense, guiding audiences with the thoughts of the directors.

Generally speaking, documentary *Simon Schama's Power of Art* is characterized by abundant usage of montage techniques and few full-length ideographical shots. Its innovation lies in considerable artists' working and living scenes as well as artistic works' scenes during the description of host Simon Schama.

As a result, it naturally comes to the conclusion that directors explicitly intend to weaken the dullness and simultaneously enhance the visibility of cultural and artistic documentary through the development of narrative rhythm pushed forward by intense scene switch.

### **Recording Reality on Document Technique**

Document refers to all authentic materials ranging from words and pictures to videos associated with history. It is but natural that narrative based on "document" has become a common technique in historical document documentary. In the same way, in consideration of its peculiarity of theme, cultural and artistic documentary also adopts document material to narrate the story. In documentary *Simon Schama's Power of Art*, the directors divide the contents of selected document material into three categories as follows.

The first one consists in the fact that life experiences of eight artists related by the host are all summarized by document material. For instance, in the first episode *Caravaggio*, the host cites court records to show the arrogant personality and chaotic living condition of Caravaggio. There is another example in *Bernini* where the host illustrates the records of art critics to indirectly represent the personality and living environment of Bernini. In conclusion, all of these authentic historical materials not only enrich the explanation of the host, but also enhance the reality of the documentary.

The second one is that artistic works represented in the documentary are authentic. In order to make the documentary for eight artists, Simon Schama and his team go to visit decades of artistic galleries, museums and churches in Italy, France, America and Britain to record hundreds of artistic works, and therefore bringing a feast of eyes for audiences.

The third one is that in terms of artists born in relatively recent times, the directors incorporate some historical pictures and video materials to narrative, such as episodes *Van Gogh*, *Picasso* and *Roscoe*. To be specific, in *Picasso*, many pictures of Picasso and videos about the Second World War are adopted to reveal then social context. Moreover, the directors add one video material where the American government forces UN headquarter in New York to cover Picasso's painting *Guernica* when Collin Powell is persuading the world to declare a war against Iraq. In this way, the documentary is endowed with reality and enjoyment.

In essence, reality is the nature of documentary. Whereas, at the same time, documentary is also the subjective product of directors. Regardless of the type, all realistic materials intend to express directors' creation thoughts and objectives. In documentary *Simon Schama's Power of Art*, the directors expect to present impressive power of art by way of these realistic materials.

### **Reproducing Reality by Realistic Presentation Technique**

Among eight artists in *Simon Schama's Power of Art*, the directors could only search available video materials concerning Van Gogh, Picasso and Roscoe. This implies that due to the absence of camera technology or photography technology in previous times, there are no relevant video materials about other artists. Confronted with this issue, the directors adopt realistic representation technique to avoid the dullness potentially brought about by long-time explanation. At last, numerous historical scenes are reproduced with such reenactment method.

For instance, in the first episode *Caravaggio*, when the host introduces painting

*Boy with a Basket of Fruit*, the scenes are switching between the painting and imitated scene performed by actors to present the state and expressions of the character in the painting, in the hope of directly and explicitly reproducing the environment of originally stagnant painting. In this way, audiences are capable of better seizing the connotations of this painting.

In the same way, in the episode *Van Gogh*, the directors demand the actor who plays Van Gogh to loudly read the letter Van Gogh has written to his brother Theo to the shoot. His innocent expressions and unique understanding towards color directly convey to the audiences, avoiding the loss of sensation caused by the third party's account. Moreover, audiences could better discover the inner world of this postmodernism artist.

Likewise, in the episode *David*, realistic reproduction surpasses the limitation of painting contents or artists' living conditions. In this episode, the directors adopt realistic reproduction technique to reproduce several types of living state and historical scenes in then French society. In the beginning, there are a series of living scenes coming into audiences' sight: several nobilities are releasing pigeons in the lawn; Jacobin politicians are enthusiastically making a speech on the stage; royal members are holding a fencing competition in the gorgeous palace; senators are convening the Estates-General meeting and so on. A variety of scenes performed by actors according to history greatly compensate the deficiency of information loss and effectively delineate the image of France during the Great Revolution Period. In this circumstance, the whole narration process becomes more fluent.

In the cultural and artistic documentary *Simon Schama's Power of Art*, some important plot contents go through the process of narration by realistic production technique. Accompanied by the host's explanation and the scene of real artistic work, it adds new contents to documentary scene and in the meanwhile increases the aesthetics and visibility to the documentary without any interference to its objective authenticity.



## **REPRODUCING REALITY BY COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY**

Though *Simon Schama's Power of Art* does not have prominent achievements in the application of post-production, it is worthwhile mentioning that in the episode *Bernini*, the directors adopt post production to represent Bernini's design drawing of bell tower in St. Peter's Basilica.

And in the episode *David*, the scene of ascending fire balloons also belongs to post production. On the one hand, it increases the aesthetics of documentary scenes and on the second hand, it greatly cuts down the cost of documentary recording.

### **Narrative Strategy**

In terms of the research about *Simon Schama's Power of Art*, researchers will deliberately analyze the narrative strategy of *Simon Schama's Power of Art* respectively from three perspectives, namely the construction of suspense, the selection of conflicts and the delineation of details. In adherence to this principle, the researchers will discuss about how narrative strategy maintains the reality of documentary and simultaneously increases the entertainment of documentary.

### **The Construction of Suspense**

The construction of suspense is a common narrative strategy in documentary. Suspense can stimulate audiences' watching desire and curiosity. *Power of art* is brilliant in terms of suspense construction. Perfectly good at commanding the mentality of audiences, the host Simon Schama habitually attracts the attention of audiences with an extremely suspenseful beginning of each episode.

For instance, in the episode *Van Gogh*, the first scene is set in a dark room where Van Gogh (played by actor Andy Serkis), dressed in an old suit and combed hair, is slowly raising his head with a slightly cunning smile. Successively, there appears the background music, accompanied by the voice-over – a word in Van Gogh's letter to

his brother Theo “Theo, what am I in the eyes of most people?”. Closing his eyes, the smile on his face appears to be more genuine and indifferent.

In this way, Simon Schama successfully constructs the first suspense and at the same time, the form of question doubtlessly promotes the communication with audiences. Therefore, audiences will generate a question in the mind after watching this scene “What is Van Gogh like in my mind? Why Van Gogh asks his brother this question? How does Van Gogh view himself?” Bearing such suspense in the mind, audiences will continuously watch the show until discovering the answer to these questions.

Supposing that but for this kind of narrative strategy, audiences will soon get bored with plain narration of the host about the lifetime and assessment of the public. Therefore, on the basis of suspense construction technique, the Hollywood-style beginning of *Simon Schama's Power of Art* avoids the dullness prevailing in cultural and artistic documentary to a large extent.

Suspense in the beginning of *Van Gogh* can be regarded as the overall suspense of the whole documentary. The reason lies in the fact that nearly all contents are developed centering around the answer to the question “What is Van Gogh like”. However, during story narration, a single suspense will easily cause mental fatigue to the audiences. In addition, audiences’ interests are gradually declining from a climax. In this case, in order to maintain audiences’ watching interests, the directors of *Simon Schama's Power of Art* particularly set up other trivial suspenses to interlock story plots. Alternate climaxes will also arouse the nostalgic sentiments in the mind of audiences.

Take the episode *Van Gogh* for example, a series of suspenses are successively put forward by the directors followed by the first overall suspense, including “Why Van Gogh commits suicide one week later since rising to fame? Does Wheat Field with Crows represent the resentment of Van Gogh after being frustrated by setbacks or the rejoicing of Van Gogh after being well recognized?”. The documentary begins

to explore the spiritual world of Van Gogh after he has cut off one of his ears, putting forward one opinion that “all people take it for granted once hearing this suicide.” Whereas, this truth naturally poses another suspense to the audiences and they will wonder “Why all people consider it is natural for Van Gogh to commit suicide?”. Then, according to host’s analysis about Van Gogh’s letter to his brother, Van Gogh is not mad, but smart, wit and diligent in reading. Moreover, he also lives in an imaginary world. During this documentary lasting for 54 minutes, similar suspenses are numerous.

In a word, the whole documentary is finished between the construction and resolution of one’s suspense. The documentary is ended with the suicide of Van Gogh, and in the meanwhile, answer to the first suspense is also revealed from the soliloquy of Van Gogh “A nonentity? An eccentric? An unpleasant person? Somebody who has no position in society and never will. In short, the lowest of the low. Alright then, well, even if that were all absolutely true, then one day, I should like to show by my work what such a nonentity, such a nobody has in his heart.” Emerging suspense attracts audiences to devote themselves into events one by one. Simultaneously, the story is moving forward to the climax in such a progressive mode. In this way, audiences could feel the vitality and power contained in the works of Van Gogh.

### **Description about Details**

The details of a documentary refer to scenes and sound used for propelling plot development, reflecting the nature of event, deepening the theme of program and attracting the attention of audiences. As for the scene, details are partial representation about target object and relevant changes. Therefore, it often adopts a close-up shot (Zhou, 2014) .

Directors of *Simon Schama’s Power of Art* pay much attention to the disposal of details. In the episode David, the directors start from the scar on the face of David to describe his route to artistry. Due to the scar, David could not speak as a normal

person, he then devotes all his enthusiasm and energy to painting and expresses his feelings with art.

In *Caravaggio*, the host introduces a detail. Caravaggio names his dog raven and teaches it to walk with two rear legs. Through it is not associated with plot development, this small detail can fully reveal the obscure and eccentric personality of Caravaggio.

In *Van Gogh*, there is a close-up shot depicting Van Gogh tasting the pigment. With a full-length shot, the directors present all details of this process to audiences. Even from the screen, audiences could still sense the mad and oppressed emotions of Van Gogh from these details.

All of these details greatly enrich the images so that documentary characters become three-dimensional in the mind of audiences. As a cultural and artistic documentary, *Simon Schama's Power of Art* places emphasis on the illustration of details in famous paintings or architecture works. The host Simon Schama almost explains the details of famous artistic works in every episode. For instance, in *Caravaggio*, he elaborately explains the detail about the Christ taking the hand of the skeptic Thomas to dig into the wound as shown in *The incredulity of St Thomas*. This explanation of detail allows audiences to know about and perceive the power of truth contained in this painting, which is exactly the theme of this episode.

Though details of documentary originate from realistic historical materials, they could not be made up and exaggerated as in story films. However, reasonable organization could still extensively impress audiences with the power of art. At the same time, cultural and artistic documentary well represents the beauty of details and reveals the aesthetic value of artistic works from description about detail.

## **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION**

This research based on specific case adopts a way of case study, starting with a narration of content and theme and narrative technique of *Simon Schama's Power of*

*Art*. It analyzes the particularity of subject selection, uniqueness of characterization and plot setting of this documentary. Besides, it also carries on analysis and discussion on the artistic technique of the documentary from the respects of audio-visual language and artistic technique of expression of this documentary.

By a series of researches, it can be seen that the presenter Simon Schama has some insightful views towards artists and artistic works and he owns profound cultural deposits. Meanwhile, the production team has been found to master unique techniques about production of images and sounds.

All of these are critical factors in the process that *Simon Schama's Power of Art* becomes a classic among documentaries of culture and art, which provides a reference direction for documentary productions in other developing countries.

The researchers have gained some research findings through *Simon Schama's Power of Art*. However, this research also faces shortcomings in several aspects due to various reasons.

## CONCLUSION

From the idea of studying *Simon Schama's Power of Art* being conceived to the watching of film, the researcher has gained certain theoretical basis of the artistic technique of cultural and artistic documentary through the research of definition, development, classification and artistic expression method of documentary from the elementary to the profound. The researcher also carries out a specific case study on the artistic technique of cultural and artistic documentary by profound analysis of theme, language, artistic technique and narrative mode of *Simon Schama's Power of Art*.

This kind of documentary embodies the strong points of both historical and cultural documentary and art documentary. When it deeply analyzes the art history, it also interprets detailedly artists and artistic works, being the most culture-valued kind

of all documentaries. It is very important to grasp the authenticity of art production. Due to the lack of historical materials, it is one task for scenarists to consider how to both ensure the observability of documentary and complete the record image. It is especially scenarists' foal point to select appropriate materials among various historical materials to narrate and integrate the story-based narrative mode into documentary.

It is expected that the researcher will bring some inspiration and help to the production and research of cultural and artistic documentary by the research of *Simon Schama's Power of Art*.

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