

# Thinking about television audiences: Entertainment and reconstruction in nature documentaries

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**José Cabeza San Deogracias**

Rey Juan Carlos University, Spain

**Javier Mateos-Pérez**

Complutense University, Spain

## Abstract

Documentary reconstruction is a creative production decision which involves reconstructing a reality or event rather than filming it as it occurs spontaneously. This article studies the use of the resource in the filming of nature documentaries for the series *El Hombre y la Tierra*. All of the action scenes in the series were reconstructions, which required rehearsals and involved a large amount of editing work. Without documentary reconstruction and the handling of animals it would have been impossible to film the majority of the hunting sequences, and the series never would have achieved the success that it did. Even today *El Hombre y la Tierra* is a point of reference in entertainment in nature documentaries and continues to raise debate about how to communicate the lives of wild animals in a respectful and truthful way to ever more demanding audiences, as well as about the need for, and boundaries of, entertainment in scientific television programmes.

## Keywords

Documentary reconstruction, entertainment, television, television audiences, wildlife documentary

## Introduction: Documentary reconstruction

Despite the fact that reconstruction is a long-established resource in the documentary genre, its use has elicited doubts about its legitimacy as a means of representing reality.

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### Corresponding author:

José Cabeza San Deogracias, University Rey Juan Carlos, Faculty of Communication, Camino del Molino, s/n, Fuenlabrada, 28943, Spain.

Email: jose.cabeza@urjc.es

Reconstructions already existed at the beginning of the twentieth century in the form of pieces which recreated an event, in front of a camera, that had already occurred without anyone being able to capture it live. It was a second chance for reality, which delighted viewers, though at times too much imagination was involved in the representation, leaving it bearing little similarity to the original event (Barnouw, 2005: 28–30). On many occasions, these reconstructions prioritized spectacle over truth, and this was generally the case until the arrival of Flaherty and his film *Nanook of the North* (1922).

Flaherty convinced Nanook that the film should come first, and therefore was able to persuade him to build an igloo which was bigger than normal, so that a camera could be placed inside and record what happened as if it was, in fact, his own igloo. In reality it was not an igloo, but a film set; or rather both things at once. Nanook and his family pretended that they lived in this half-igloo as if it were a whole one, while Flaherty was in the open air filming them (Barnouw, 2005: 39). *Nanook of the North* does not *show* the life of an eskimo, it *reconstructs* the life of an eskimo. Some years later, Joris Ivens (*The Spanish Earth*, 1937) and the documentary makers from Frontier Films (*Native Land*, 1934–1937) resorted to using actors and a script to recover a reality that they had not arrived in time to film. In the face of criticism suggesting that doing something like that was a step too far, i.e. that it involved making fiction, then lies, Ivens insisted on the legitimacy of recomposing this reality and offering it to the spectator as the truth:

If persons opposed to re-enacted scenes consider the fact truthfully that everything must be filmed just as it is, just as it happens, then our films would show people constantly staring into the camera, because that is what really happens when you photograph people and that would be the truth, at least according to our opponents. So can we say that re-enactment starts with the interference of the director or cameraman into the 'natural' behaviour of people by insisting that they 'do not look into the camera'. (Ivens, 1999 [1953]: 265)

Once its commitment to the truth had been reinforced, the objective of documentary reconstruction has not changed in almost a century. This objective involves bringing the present to the viewer; in other words, reconstructing an instant of reality which has already occurred, or which might occur in the future, so that the viewer sees it as though it was happening now, in the ideal timeframe for cinema, the present.

This emphasis on the present led Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente to use documentary reconstruction to produce nature programmes for his series entitled *El Hombre y la Tierra* ('Man and the Earth', Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente, 1974–1981), the most successful popular science series in the history of Spanish television, in terms of both audience and critical acclaim.<sup>1</sup> The documentary maker sought to make people aware of previously unknown facets of the lives of animals in the wild, and to create television entertainment products which would reach a broad and varied audience. Rodríguez de la Fuente convinced ICONA (the Spanish Nature Conservation Institute) to provide all sorts of animals to allow him 'to film close ups and scenes of predation, and to fund the feeding and care of the kind of Noah's Ark that the camp they set up to create an open air film set had become' (Varillas, 2010: 576). This modern Ark was created in Pelegrina (Guadalajara), and filled with endangered species and their prey. It was there, rather than in the additional shooting in the wild, that the most spectacular moments were filmed,

those which became absolutely essential in transforming popular science content into great audiovisual stories.

In the existing bibliography on Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente and his work, the concept of documentary reconstruction in *El Hombre y la Tierra* has passed through all of the different stages possible. Six of the biographical reviews about him feature what could be described as calculated ignorance: the subject is barely broached; perhaps so that a certain amount of *ethical sensationalism* would not eclipse the work that the naturalist carried out throughout the rest of his life. At the other extreme we find *Making off: El Hombre y la Tierra* (Rodríguez Jiménez, 2006): a detailed and bitter explanatory account of how the filming of imprinted animals, or those raised by humans, was prepared, rehearsed and organized in Pelegrina. The best and most recent scientific research into Rodríguez de la Fuente's work and his method of making television documentaries is Miriam Salcedo de Prado's comprehensive dissertation entitled *Popular science documentaries about nature: Narrative-dramatic techniques and rhetoric employed by Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente in the series El Hombre y la Tierra*. It neither tries to conceal the reconstructions nor demonizes them, it simply notes their structural importance in *El Hombre y la Tierra*. Final mention goes to the first publication to be authorized by the Rodríguez de la Fuente Foundation, entitled *Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente: His Life, a Message for the Future*, written by Benigno Varillas. To a certain degree, Varillas's work makes the technique of documentary reconstruction invisible once more: there are just two references to it in 761 pages, and one of them comes outside the chapter dedicated to the production of the series:

The whole of Monte de El Pardo<sup>2</sup> is enclosed by a high stone wall, built in the eighteenth century. It would not be ridiculous to think of it as the ideal place to release wolves which had been reared and trained by humans, like the ones Félix had at Casa de Campo, and film them hunting and running as if they were in the wild. That is exactly what he did ten years later in the río Dulce canyon, in Pelegrina, Guadalajara, and elsewhere, achieving impressive scenes which were broadcast around the world. (Varillas, 2010: 356)

## Animals as entertainment

*El Hombre y la Tierra* was born of a particular historical context, in which there was a growing range of nature documentaries conceived for television, all of which were keenly focused on BBC and National Geographic's new approaches. The BBC first experimented with wildlife programming in 1953, and soon after launched *Look* (1954–1967), a show and tell format with a laid-back tone which was 'more chatty, than action-packed' (Chris, 2006: 53). *Look* quickly found a challenger in the form of another BBC production called *Zoo Quest* (David Attenborough, 1954–1964). Attenborough wanted to break free from the limitations of television formats about animals, which either depicted them 'in the alien studio environment' or on safari, and since they were seldom acting of their own free will in either scenario, footage lacked 'the spice of unpredictability' (Attenborough, 1980: 8). In some ways, *Zoo Quest* heralded a significant change: Attenborough used 16 mm cameras which allowed him to capture events more freely, and employed extreme close up shots which made smaller and less spectacular animals

interesting to watch. This evolution in filming methods was the saving grace of numerous episodes of *Zoo Quest*, since it proved impossible to capture a large number of tele-visually interesting images on expeditions which only lasted around three months (Parsons, 1982: 46).

The BBC's dedication to making television about animals crystallized in the establishment of the BBC Natural History Unit in 1957, which would run for the next 25 years. One of the unit's early successes was *The Unknown Forest* (1961). Though a hit with the audience, the 45-minute programme involved four years' of filming: just 20 seconds of useable footage of the life of a badger could make a whole evening's work worthwhile (Parsons, 1982: 106).

From 1961 onwards, the television department of the National Geographic Society began to produce nature documentaries (León, 1999: 88). The new programmes gained good ratings, which proved that science programmes could be of interest to a broad audience, for whom this type of content was new. The success of this new format was based on two key factors. The first was the selection of animals, with preference given to those thought to be most attractive or striking for the audience. These usually included the best known predators such as lions, tigers, sharks, etc. Second, only spectacular, or 'high impact' (León, 1999: 88), images were chosen, i.e. those deemed capable of surprising the audience, either because of their great visual strength, or because viewers would never have seen them before. Thus a new method of making nature documentaries for television was born. These so called 'blue chip' documentaries had their own 'narrative conventions' which included the depiction of megafauna, and especially large predators, visual splendour and spectacular scenery, dramatic narrative and so on (Bagust, 2008: 219).

Blue chip documentaries were both a reaction and a response to Disney's foray into the natural world. From *Bambi* (1942), the first feature-length animation to focus on the life of a wild animal, to the series of documentary shorts, *True-Life Adventures* (1948–1960), in which it was unusual to see a predator killing its prey, Disney created a fantasy of nature, a place devoid of conflict or death, intended more to entertain than to educate. According to Bagust, the Disney productions shaped the audiences for nature programmes:

The longer the public was exposed to the Disney model of 'documentary' the more, it is reasonable to propose, they came to expect this kind of dramatized behavior and narrative from animal subjects. (Bagust, 2008: 218)

It wasn't just the viewers who learned, but those responsible for making nature documentaries did too. At that time, showing wildlife while respecting the documentary truth, and simultaneously achieving an entertaining television programme was very complicated. For example, each episode of *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau*, (which at approximately 51 minutes was twice as long as an edition of *El Hombre y la Tierra*), entailed an enormous amount of editing to put the images together to create a good film, despite the lack of 'cooperation' from wild animals. Once filming was over, preparing the final cut of a single episode could take more than 10 weeks (Van Dyke, 2006: 254). Documentary series such as *National Geographic*, *Wild Kingdom* (1963–1988), *The*

*Undersea World of Jacques Costeau* (1966–1976), *Wild America* (1982–1994), *Nature* (1982–2011) and *El Hombre y la Tierra* sought a more realistic, less naive representation of nature, but based themselves on the same filming and editing techniques which Disney had incorporated into the popularization of wildlife (King, 1996: 64).

When the first of these documentary series was broadcast in the 1960s, the people who sat down in front of the television to watch were already accustomed to seeing animals of all kinds, both on screen and in real life. First, zoos and circuses had contributed to building a visual relationship between the viewers and the animal kingdom. Each of those two spaces where animals are on display has their own unique characteristics. The function of a zoo revolves around the idea of seeing an elephant or a lion, live and direct, just a few metres away and without the intervention of a camera. Seen exclusively in terms of entertainment, however, the disadvantage of a zoo is that the animals are in a passive state, and don't carry out any of the actions they would usually perform in their own environment, but remain on display simply to be seen (Mills, 2010: 199). By the mid-1950s the limited show-and-tell format, like *Zoo Parade* (1950, NBC), *Saturday at the Zoo* (1950, ABC) and *Meet Me at the Zoo* (1953, CBS) was not enough to hold the audience's attention.

Circuses, on the other hand, are different: the animals are active. A circus is like the Ark from the Bible story, welcoming animals from all around the world, and not just so that their image can be displayed. For the price of a ticket to the show, just seeing the animal is not enough: audience members demand more for their money. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, animal training acts coexisted with those involving fights between creatures. Throughout the century, the number of animal fighting acts declined, and these were replaced on the bill by taming acts (Sánchez, 2005: 122). While the main focus of the show is the animal and what it can do, the courage and power of the human capable of submitting it to his will is also a feature. Interaction with animals, sometimes at the risk of the life of the human being, and seeing the animals in action, but this time roaming free, and in their own habitat, would become the narrative keys to subsequent television programmes about the animal kingdom. Action sequences would be the secret to success.

## **Actions which inform, persuade and entertain**

A database of over 1299 records was compiled for this study, detailing all the actions performed by animals in the Iberia series of *El Hombre y la Tierra*. The objective was to classify everything the animals did, since they are the *characters* in these stories, and make an exclusively narrative study of the influence these actions had on the appeal of the final product. There is no naive anthropomorphism in the *El Hombre y la Tierra* films comparable with that which takes place in the Disney productions. While Disney's approach went against the truthful broadcast of knowledge, *El Hombre y la Tierra* opted for a scientifically acceptable anthropomorphism as an appropriate licence for the genre and the medium (Salcedo de Prado, 2011: 233–241). However, this projection of human qualities on to the animals does not, by itself, explain the series' extraordinary success with different audiences.

The point of departure for this methodology is the concept of action and its growing influence in nature documentaries. A constant feature of popular science documentaries is that they have always tended to focus more on the animal world than on the behaviour of plant life. The reason for this is that it is much easier to tell stories about animals which carry out concrete actions (eating, hunting, walking ...), than about the staticness of the plant world, given the consequent boredom that filming it for an audiovisual format might convey.

Thus the novelty introduced by National Geographic in the 1960s lies in showing animals in action, and in the wild. But it is difficult to access this type of footage (actions) encapsulating the natural activity of a wild animal and defining their way of life in a way which is attractive to the viewer. In the *Planeta Azul* series ('Blue Planet', 1970–1974), for example, Rodríguez de la Fuente had no responsibility for the filming of the visual resources. For this series, the naturalist worked with a collage of images purchased from various production companies. The images were later edited together to provide them with a direction (script) and were commented on by a voice in off. On several occasions, the *Planeta Azul* material demonstrated the limitations the series shared with a number of other science documentaries of that era. In the episode entitled *El Gran Norte* ('The Great North', minute 22), Rodríguez de la Fuente complained that the moose footage was of poor quality: 'It's a world which the nature film maker and his camera cannot normally access.' Rather than reflect the most important part of the animal's life cycle, endless *shots from the zoo* appeared.

Whereas actions define, images without actions merely illustrate, and it is up to the presenter to transmit all of the scientific information about the lives of the animals verbally, despite the fact that what he is describing cannot really be seen in the images. Rodríguez de la Fuente wanted natural history on television to be as much fun as 'science fiction movies or cop films' (Salcedo de Prado, 2008: 237). This desire was at odds with the usual representation, filmed as if in a zoo, where the animals were static, and not doing anything. These images conveyed boredom.

In *Zoo Quest*, Attenborough travels to exotic countries with staff from London Zoo to capture animals which would later be put on display to the public. As we can see, the narrative structure of this famous series is relatively classic in the world of documentaries, as it revolves around a journey. The zoo is just the end of the documentary, because seeing animals on display does not, in itself, provide 30 minutes worth of entertainment, which was the length of an episode of *Zoo Quest*.

Entertainment is an unavoidable feature which is important in any communicative process. Just as geometric facts are defined by their length, depth and height; communicative processes in real life – including a scientific television programme – have three dimensions: to inform, to persuade and to entertain (Montero and Rueda, 2001: 33–38). A priori there is no established hierarchical relationship between the three dimensions; they simply combine and arrange themselves unpredictably for each communicative phenomenon, though none of them is completely cancelled out: 'presence does not imply equality'. From the 1950s and 1960s onwards, the new television documentaries strived to become scientific (informative) so that people could learn about the animal kingdom in its most complete and scientific guise (persuasive), but they also accepted that they had to entertain the viewer (entertainment). Attenborough himself implicitly accepts

these three features and their inevitable influence on each other: 'to inform, teach and entertain is all the same thing. Really it is. You cannot educate without entertaining; that is the first lesson for any teacher' (León, 1999: 114).

The portrayal of activity is key to the integration of these three dimensions; hence every one of the acts carried out by animals in the 91 episodes of the Iberia series are recorded in the database (with the exception of the introductory episode entitled *El Hombre y la Tierra: Serie Ibérica*). In dramatic terms, an action is an attempt to achieve a clear and simple objective: 'anything more difficult to accomplish than opening a window is not and cannot be an action' (Mamet, 2011: 73). The animals' activity has been classified into the following groups: *Eating*, *Hunting*, *Fighting*, *Loving*, *Playing* and *Doing*. Scenes in which an animal is feeding are grouped in the *Eating* category. Sometimes this action is immediately linked to *Hunting*, since the wolf (for example) starts eating straight after he has brought the specimen down, or even whilst doing so. In addition, we must take into account that the category also includes scenes in which a bird gobbles up a fish, or a herbivore is eating leaves. Portrayal of the latter case is insignificant (in percentage terms). Likewise, when woodpeckers appear we do not classify the act of swallowing a larva as *Eating*, because the bird's hunting technique is what dominates visually, as Rodríguez de la Fuente himself pointed out, and we hardly notice the action of *Eating*. *Hunting* groups together all the activity in which one animal captures another in order to eat it. Some hunting scenes are also linked to *Fighting*, and are therefore catalogued as two separate actions. The result of the hunt – whether the prey is actually caught or not – does not matter. Another exception involves the muskrat (*El Río Viviente*, 'The Living River', minute 6 and *La Conquista del Agua*, 'Conquering the Water', minutes 13–17, minutes 23–26), which removes stones from the bed of the stream to look for worms, and this is categorized as *Doing* rather than *Hunting*. *Loving* is a descriptor which encompasses courtship and copulation. *Fighting* has two elements and includes animals who battle for supremacy in the group or to mate with a female, and others who fight for their lives. Explanation of *Playing* is redundant: the animals play, or at least, this is what the voice in off highlights the action as. Finally, *Doing* is the broadest and most heterogeneous category of all: cleaning the nest, scratching, climbing, cleaning their coat/fur (otter), stealing eggs from another animal, airing their wings to dry off, licking themselves or others, drinking, bathing in the mud, transporting branches or dead animals, and so on. Any other activity that the animal carries out, and that comes up infrequently or is difficult to fit into its own thematic group, is also recorded in this section. Anodyne, trivial deeds with little dramatic or visual allure – such as swimming, flying, walking or body movements without any identified purpose – have not been classified.

### Creating actions, creating stories

If we analyse the actions of the animals in *El Hombre y la Tierra* (Table 1) without taking into account production restrictions and the needs of the narrative that it conveys, the results could give rise to false correlations and absurd conclusions. If just 2% of actions are classed as *Loving* (courtship and copulation), does this mean that reproduction is of little interest, or that it rarely occurs in the wild? Does the fact that 4.9% of the scenes

**Table 1.** Actions shown in the Iberia series of *El Hombre y la Tierra*.

Type of action	Number of repetitions	%
Eating	420	32.3
Hunting	418	32.1
Doing	290	22.3
Human intervention <sup>a</sup>	88	6.7
Fighting	64	4.9
Loving	27	2.0
Playing	19	1.4

<sup>a</sup>Actions by humans: capturing animals, feeding them, setting a trap, etc.

Source: Compiled by the author.

involved *Fighting* show that confrontation is rare in the animal kingdom? Don't animals ever play (1.4%)? Can we state as a scientific truth that animals dedicate more time to *Hunting* (32.1%) than to drinking, bathing, scratching, cleaning themselves and other various actions (22.3%)?

What these percentages reveal is that the documentaries which make up *El Hombre y la Tierra* are not made to provide an exact transposition of the lives of animals in the wild, but rather to give an idea of how they live, prioritizing the most spectacular parts and those which best serve the point of the story. In *Pelegrina*, the production team built a swimming pool which simulated the conditions of a river (Pou, 1995: 206–207) and their cameras were able to encroach on the activity of dippers, otters and kingfishers to capture never-before-seen moments. The ease with which the kingfisher could be filmed for as many as three different episodes (*La Conquista del Agua*, 'Conquering the Water [II]', *El Río Viviente*, 'The Living River', and *El Martín Pescador*, 'The Kingfisher') made it possible to collect up to 43 scenes of the bird in action. There is a reproduction scene, in which the kingfishers copulate, a fight scene in which one takes on a bee-eater, and five scenes in which the kingfisher carries out activities such as washing his feathers or giving a fish to the female. However, the majority of the scenes which appear are related to *Eating* (12 scenes) and above all, to *Hunting/Fishing* (24 scenes). The dives into the water, whether successful or not, are spectacular. If we compare these actions to the life of the kingfisher in reality, we can see that the documentary overemphasizes the time spent fishing, particularly if we take into account that the *Eating* category includes shots of the male kingfisher eating, others in which he is feeding the female, and the majority are dedicated to feeding chicks.

In conclusion, the essential purpose of the documentary reconstructions was simply to ensure that the world could see hunting sequences. Although *Eating* was the activity most frequently featured, closely followed by *Hunting*, we must take into account that 40% of the *Eating* scenes involved birds feeding chicks in their nests. Since the location of a nest is fixed, this is infinitely simpler to film than an adult specimen which eats wherever it makes a catch. The difference between the number of scenes of birds feeding their young and the number of equivalent scenes from the life of mammals is striking: suckling accounts for just 4.5% of scenes. The difference between these figures is down



to production criteria. Feeding in nests can be located and filmed much more easily, using canvas hides elevated from the ground.

Thus, although the most filmed activity was *Eating*, undoubtedly the most important element in the programme's attraction to the audience was *Hunting*. In a note to TVE, dictated by Rodríguez de la Fuente in 1975, he makes it clear that the programme includes sequences which 'had never been filmed before in the history of cinema, and we could go so far as to state that they were unknown even to the most expert naturalists in the field'. He goes on to acknowledge the power the images will have: 'surely, as a consequence of the impact of these images, the Iberia series will achieve the highest levels of popularity'. In the letter, Rodríguez de la Fuente mentions four particular scenes, and all of them are related to the action of *Hunting* (Varillas, 2010: 581).

### *The one million dollar action: Hunting*

The vast majority of the episodes of *El Hombre y la Tierra* correspond to the classic narrative line 'life cycle of a species' (Scott, 2003: 31). In other words, they describe how animals live in the wild, but the account provided is a very poor and general one which depends on the narrative organization of the materials. In order for a story to exist, not only does there have to be unity in what is being recounted, but the receiver of the narration also has to be interested in remaining involved with it. Hence footage of herbivores eating berries, seeds, dried fruits, grasses and leaves accounts for just 18.5% of the category, for example, while an animal eating other animals makes up a resounding 81.5%. Filming a herbivore eating might be more accessible for the production team, but it is clearly of less interest than watching images of predators, large and small, devouring other animals.

Conflict captures the viewer's interest as he/she does not know what the outcome of the scene will be. Without conflict there is no story. In nature, three types of conflict occur:

1. When an individual is faced with a hostile habitat.
2. When an individual is faced with a predator.
3. When an individual fights another member of their species to defend their territory or compete for females (León, 1999: 128).

The first type of conflict is very weak in terms of drama. If we eliminate the threat posed by predators (since they are included in the second category), the only remaining situations that an individual might face in a hostile environment are drought or difficulty in finding food or a means of survival. Thus, rather than actions, this type of conflict refers to processes, which are complicated to film. The third type of conflict is difficult to reproduce in a documentary. As we can see from our study of *El Hombre y la Tierra*, *Fighting* scenes account for a small percentage (4.9%) of the total footage because they are difficult to reconstruct. For example, in *Los Roedores* ('Rodents') an edible dormouse was captured in the Pyrenees and dropped as prey for a genet. It hid in a log in the middle of the forest and sheltered there growling, and trying to bite the genet. The genet eventually gave up and went away. The deputy director of *El Hombre y la Tierra*

**Table 2.** Distribution of *Hunting* scenes by acts in the Iberian series of *El Hombre y la Tierra*.

Minutes elapsed	Repetitions	%
Beginning (0–9)	80	19.2
Middle (10–18)	163	38.9
End (19–+27)	175	41.8

Source: Compiled by the author.

acknowledged that this produced ‘an excellent game’, but also that the whole scene was ‘unexpected’ (Rodríguez Jiménez, 2006: 210–211). In other words, the action of *Hunting* becomes the only sustainable way, in terms of production, to achieve conflicts. *Hunting* is a very erratic action which encompasses wide variation: from a green woodpecker eating a larva, to wolves taking down a wild boar after a chase. The time frames are not homogeneous either. The long-eared owl on his perch takes just three seconds to sight a mouse, launch himself after it and catch it in its claws, whereas long wolf chases – which are further stylized in the editing process – can last for several minutes.

What all of these actions do have in common is that they are the most spectacular, the most eye-catching, and the ones people most want to see. In the 1990s, Discovery and other wildlife film-makers faced criticism for what was seen as a trend towards sensationalism. The basis for this criticism was the emphasis placed on hunting scenes when filming large predators (such as tigers, crocodiles, bears) in order to attract a larger audience. For example, Discovery packaged selected episodes from its *Wild Discovery* series to create *Fangs!* (1995–1998), which was described by the *Wall Street Journal* as a ‘bloodbath’ but provided the channel’s biggest ratings hit in 1995 (Chris, 2006: 105).

The hunting scenes are distributed fairly evenly throughout each programme in the Iberia series of *El Hombre y la Tierra*. If we divide an episode into three parts (beginning, middle and end) we find that the proportion of hunting scenes in each one is fairly similar (Table 2).

There is a slight crescendo in the intensity of the narrative from the beginning to the end of each programme, but without question, the main conclusion we can draw is that *Hunting* scenes occur regularly and continuously throughout each episode. This means that the viewer cannot guess when they will appear, and the instances therefore serve as a tacit promise which continues throughout the series. Rodríguez de la Fuente insisted on depicting hunting scenes: ‘I preferred the dramatic, spectacular and powerful sequences’ (Rodríguez Jiménez, 2006: 31). The three animals which appeared most on camera in the series reflect this preference. The various types of eagle were the most filmed species (167 scenes over 27 episodes), and 49.1% of the scenes we see them in involve hunting. In comparison, falcons spent 44.2% of their time on camera hunting. Meanwhile, wolves take second place in terms of number of appearances in the series (83 scenes over 16 episodes), and account for 25.3% of hunting scenes. Although wolves appeared in less scenes of predation, the scenes they starred in were better in qualitative terms.

There are two clearly differentiated types of hunting activity. In the first example, prey is caught almost instantaneously and without narrative development. The second type includes sequences which do feature narrative development, the majority of which

star the wolf. Filming domesticated wolves in partial freedom in *Pelegrina* allowed dozens of continuity shots to be captured, featuring the pack pursuing different prey. On the other hand, the narrative value of these sequences is incomparable to any other action, because they created suspense: i.e. the time which elapses between the image that we see and the images we hope to see, depending on the possible development of the story. The editing process extends the introduction, the music sets the atmosphere and the voice in off disappears to enhance the keyhole effect; the viewer has the privilege of watching, without being seen, an event which occurs in life in the wild and whose outcome is uncertain. The vagueness of the ending creates a logical tension in view of the expectation of resolution and this facilitates the viewer's excitement as he/she does not know what will happen in the end, nor how it will happen. These sequences and their capacity to stun the audience made the wolf the star of the series.

The *Iberia* series often followed normal filming patterns, which meant that the two episodes about the golden eagle (*El Águila Real*) took three years to film. However, almost 60% of the footage from the series as a whole (Pou, 1995: 207), the majority of which featured hunting scenes, was achieved through re-creations. Though Rodríguez de la Fuente never concealed this fact, the public never really became aware of it until 10 years after his death, when an article explaining the 'tricks' used in filming *El Hombre y la Tierra* was published: 'Pelegrina residents reveal Rodríguez de la Fuente's questionable methods' (*El Mundo*, 14 March 1990). The 'harsh and selective' methods (such as making incisions in a rabbit's paw or sewing a pigeon's eyelids shut) which were employed to provide predators with easy prey and thus achieve the most powerful images, greatly disappointed the public (Pou, 1995: 187). Despite this, *El Hombre y la Tierra* still had an audience: RTVE distributed the *Iberia* series to 52 countries in 1992.

## Conclusion

The six-episode documentary mini-series *Walking with Dinosaurs* (Andrew Wilks, 1999) gave rise to reflection on what was called 'postmodernism' in science documentaries, which can be summed up as the supremacy of fascination for spectacle and form (style) over seeking to portray the reality (content). The underlying concept behind this analysis, that you only have to entertain the audience, is a dangerous one (León, 2010: 67). However, seen objectively, the only change introduced by the BBC series was that computer animation not only served to *illustrate*, but it could also help to *build* the science and scientific theories (Van Dijck, 2006: 14). Therefore it was not revolutionary, because *Walking with Dinosaurs* is yet another example of a film which reconstructs reality, and use of this technique is not now, nor has it ever been, limited exclusively to scientific circles. There is no doubt, then, that it is justifiable to reconstruct reality and show it as the present.

Creating stories demands reflection, structure and staging, and that's where scripts come in. The content is thought about in terms of stories, and we ponder the need for different elements in those stories (reflection) in order to control what happens when appropriate (structure) and film it according to what we believe would be best for the story that the viewer will eventually see (staging). All of this does not contradict the documentary's ambition to represent reality. Bagust (2008: 215–216) highlights

Grierson's theories about the necessary presence of creativity in documentaries, whilst at the same time reflecting on its boundaries: 'how much "creative" treatment of "actuality" is possible before the product becomes fiction?'

The process becomes further complicated when we are dealing with nature documentaries. How do we guess what kind of camera shot is best for filming a hunting scene? How many cameras are needed? How long do we have to wait? Where will it happen? Without reconstruction, none of these variables can be controlled, which means that a large percentage of the takes, scenes and days of filming will be ruined. *Winged Migration* (Jacques Perrin et al., 2001), nominated for the Best Documentary Oscar in 2002, was only possible because of imprinting. The birds were deprived of a normal life so they could be raised in captivity with the objective of making a film. This is similar to what Rodríguez de la Fuente did in *El Hombre y el Lobo* ('Man and Wolf'), when he collected some wolf cubs from their den (minute 10) to raise them as impromptu actors; although the programme mentions nothing about starving them, nor about trials with other animals (prey) to awaken and sharpen their lupine instincts. It is true that in *Winged Migration* the animals did not take on the role of prey and predators, there was no death involved, and at certain moments one could appreciate an emotional connection between handlers and animals. In *El Hombre y la Tierra*, however, there were deaths, arousing certain ethical doubts. Today, these doubts are driven by a new environmentalism which is clearly expressed in an ethical maxim established by the BBC as early as 2007 for its filming of wild animals: 'the welfare of the subject is more important than the sequence' (Mills, 2010: 194). However, further doubts about the legitimacy of reconstruction concern how much viewers should know about how documentaries are made. One of *Animal Planet's* (Discovery – BBC) biggest successes in recent years is *The Crocodile Hunter* (1997–2004), in which the Irwins travel around the world to locate and display a sought-after animal, point out some of its physical features and behaviours, and return it to captivity or its natural habitat. One million viewers watched the first night of a *Croc Week* marathon in 2000. Some of the scenes in *The Crocodile Hunter* were reconstructed using footage captured in a swimming pool, or even footage of other times and other animals, with programme makers sometimes going so far as using 'editing tricks when real risk is null' (Chris, 2006: 93).

Viewers are entitled to ask themselves 'am I being deceived?' Whether or not the audience takes a documentary film to be realistic is based on the fact/fiction dichotomy. However, some films do not fit into this framework, yet are still considered documentaries since they are good examples of 'sincere and justifiable reconstruction', a technique that Joris Ivens and Leni Riefenstahl employed in their work when they were not able to film the real thing (Winston, 2000: 137). If a reconstruction is to be deemed acceptable, it must be judged according to the fact/fiction dichotomy, and fulfil the ethical imperative of offering the public (true) stories, despite having used codes from fiction to make the finished product more attractive (Roscoe, 2001: 23). What we can be sure of is that film-makers will continue to use reconstructions, and debate about their boundaries will go on, particularly given the rise of websites, and pressure from amateur content (such as *Battle at Kruger*; almost 70 million views in YouTube since 2007), which give viewers the false impression that it is possible to see everything, and which consequently fuel the producer's desire to achieve this.

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## Notes

1. *El Hombre y la Tierra* is a series of documentaries produced by Televisión Española (TVE) which consists of three parts: the Venezuelan series (1974, 18 episodes), The Iberian series (1975–1979, 91 episodes) and the Canadian series (1979–1981, 14 episodes). Each documentary had an approximate running time of half an hour. *El Hombre y la Tierra* received various international prizes and in 2000 the Spanish Academy of Television Arts and Sciences selected it as Best Production in the History of Spanish Television. TVE even broadcast it again in 2010.
2. A mountain forest in Madrid.

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