

The Corporation

- Writer: Joel Bakan,
- Producer: Mark Achbar
- Directors: Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott
- Based on the book, by Joel Bakan,
The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power
- <http://www.thecorporation.com/>

Awards

- **Best Documentary**
The Genie Awards, 2005
- **Genesis Award for Outstanding Documentary Film**
United States Humane Society
- **Audience Award for Best Feature Length Film**
Ecocinema International Film Festival, Rhodes
- **Best Feature Documentary**
Environmental Media Association Awards
- **NFB Best Documentary Award**
Calgary International Film Festival
- **Top Ten Films of the Year**
Toronto International Film Festival Group
- **Best Screenwriting in a Documentary Program or Series**
Leo Award

Biographies

Joel Bakan

law professor at U.B.C.

B.A., (SFU), Rhodes Scholar (Oxford), LLB (Dalhousie),
LLM (Harvard);

clerked for Chief Justice Brian Dickson of the Supreme Court of
Canada

Mark Achbar

30 years in film, video and text

Co-directed and co-wrote *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky
and the Media*

Bios, cont.

Jennifer Abbott

documentary maker

produced, directed and edited *A Cow At My Table*

“It is truly enough said that a corporation has no conscience; but a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation *with* a conscience.”

Henry David Thoreau –
Civil Disobedience

Debate statement

- The film, *The Corporation*, accurately portrays the nature of the contemporary corporation.

Each side must provide 3 statements in support of their position

Style in The Corporation

- More than one style (eg. Part I vs. psychopathology vs. Part II – “Unsettling Accounts”)
- continuous roll call of corporations at the beginning creates feeling of ubiquity of corporations
- Music is minimalist with heavy percussion; suggests relentless advance of technology and inhuman army
- Uses old film footage, old TV commercials, cartoons, stills

- Montage of images juxtaposed with narrative which is often unrelated to image or for which the image/text relationship is uncertain
- Sometimes the images themselves are in opposition - one related and one unrelated to the topic
- Creates confusion on part of the viewer
- Can't easily process disparate images nor handle the text and narrative disconnect

Style, cont.

- Creates discomfort in the viewer
- builds fear
- Describes through analogy (telephone system, sports team, monsters, whale, hive, monster that has overpowered the creator, a 'well oiled and well-financed machine')
- Narrative voice is female, soothing, yet unemotional
- Appears unbiased
- Viewer may seek out narrative preferentially as means of dealing with confusion of the narrative
- Hooked before we even understand what the problem is

Style, cont.

- Relies on testimony of authorities in the field (Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein, Corporation CEOs)
- Part I utilizes largely sympathetic perspective
- voices in support of corporation are often discredited in subtle ways (eg. Michael Walker)
- Walker's narrative is paired with footage of unidentified workers in an unidentified factory in an unidentified country
- Assumption is made that Walker supports the exploitation of workers in impoverished countries
- Can't verify information given, so we must choose whom to trust
- Walker is discredited, not on the basis of what he says, but on the basis of the images with which his narrative is paired

Style, cont.

- Humour – expert describes corporation in glowing terms and then says, ‘bullshit’; use of song, “Bad Apple”
- Hyperbole – all corporations are guilty of neglect in causing factory fires, union busting, synthesis of teratogenic and carcinogenic compounds
- Flawed logic – Monsanto lied about the health effects of hormones used to increase milk production; therefore, all corporations lie; all corporations are psychotic.
- Footage of children with physical deformities are paired with narratives about various chemicals; but the film offers no epidemiological proof that the chemicals under discussion caused those particular defects

- Satire – synthesis of new chemicals is described using dated 1950s cartoon
- Viewer may miss the irony that such chemistry is responsible for the creation of the computer, the iPod, cellphone, and the technology that made the film itself possible
- Film has its own logo, music, and web page – merchandizing???

Style, cont.

- Entertaining, moves fast, uses pop culture
- fragmentary
- Builds credibility among a particular target audience that feels comfortable with contemporary communication strategies

Style, cont.

- Discussion of psychotherapy uses text + image
- Reinforces difficult concept
- Logically presented and scientifically based (ie. Uses DSM-VI categories established by psychiatry)

Style, cont.

- “Unsettling Account” uses first person testimony
- Relies on linear narrative; events told in chronological order
- Presented unemotionally, factually
- Provides documentation, which while not entirely visible to the viewer, gives pretense of being available somewhere for verification.

Style, cont.

- Can be categorized as **post modern**
- Post modernism: theorizing of culture post 1960
 - argues that society and culture lack meaning and significance
 - Questions of the idea of progress (scientific, historical)
 - Questions construction of nation, gender, race, sexuality
 - No totalizing narrative; instead, see meta narratives (impossible to provide ONE account)
 - Proposes existence of ‘margin’ and ‘centre’ rather than homogeneity
 - Loss of contact with nature and the real
 - Reliance on technology so difficult to find boundaries between technology and human

- Self-reflexivity
- No transcendental ideals that sustain us
- Obsession with media messages and images
- Death of history
- Fascination with nostalgia as means of connecting to the past
- Intertextuality – references to films, texts, music, art of past
- Lack of originality
- Pastiche – old styles referenced, but with irony
- Mixing of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture; interest in effects of mass culture

Content

- Corporation is the dominant institution of our time
- Defined as legal person to avoid personal liability
- Objective is to maximize profits for shareholders
- Has no interest in the common good
- Exhibits signs of psychotic behaviour
- Creates wealth, yet causes great harm
- Controlled largely by white, middle-aged men in the West and Europe
- Movements to privatize resources such as air, water
- Control of media – ‘We’ll tell you what the news is’
- Indifference to democracy; support of fascist regimes to get at resources

Psychotherapies

- You can have an effect
- Advocate for sustainability, rather than plunder
- Democratic regulation – force corporations to be good citizens; human values as well as profit
- Recalls Swift's satire on economic projector who ignores human component

Audience

- Book audience likely quite different than film audience
- Left leaning, young adults familiar with film's style

Form

- Film documentary

Style

- Utilizes variety of techniques
- Post modern in its presentation and concerns

Critique

- Slick, propaganda-like presentation very effective in advocating for social change, but viewer may feel manipulated and reject message
- Difficult to verify position statements since there is no text and no documentation
- Message is more effective in portions that use logic, direct reporting, documentary style (Fox's control of the news, Bechtel's privatization of water in Bolivia)