

THE CORPORATION

A FEATURE DOCUMENTARY BY MARK ACHBAR, JENNIFER ABBOTT AND JOEL BAKAN



150 years ago, the corporation was a relatively insignificant institution. Today, it is a vivid, dramatic, and pervasive presence in all our lives. Like the Church, the Monarchy and the Communist Party in other times and places, the corporation is today's dominant institution. But history humbles dominant institutions. All have been crushed, belittled or absorbed into some new order. The corporation is unlikely to be the first to defy history.

A timely, critical inquiry, THE CORPORATION invites players, pawns and pundits on a graphic and engaging quest to reveal the corporation's inner workings, curious history, controversial impacts and possible futures.

Case studies, anecdotes and true confessions reveal behind-the-scenes tensions and influences in several corporate and anti-corporate dramas. Each illuminates an aspect of the corporation's complex character.

Among the 42 interview subjects are CEOs and top-level executives from a range of industries: oil, pharmaceutical, computer, tire, manufacturing, public relations, branding, advertizing and undercover marketing; in addition, a Nobel-prize winning economist, the first management guru, a corporate spy, and a range of academics, critics, historians and thinkers. (for details, please see separate file: Who's Who in The Corporation.)

A LEGAL "PERSON"

In the mid-1800s the corporation emerged as a legal "person". Imbued with a "personality" of pure self-interest, the next 100 years saw the corporation's rise to dominance. The corporation created unprecedented wealth. But at what cost? The remorseless rationale of "externalities"—as Milton Friedman explains: the unintended consequences of a transaction between two parties on a third—is responsible for countless cases of illness, death, poverty, pollution, exploitation and lies.

THE PATHOLOGY OF COMMERCE: CASE HISTORIES

To more precisely assess the "personality" of the corporate "person", a checklist is employed, using actual diagnostic criteria of the World Health Organization and DSM IV, the standard diagnostic tool of psychiatrists and psychologists. The operational principles of the corporation give it a highly anti-social "personality": It is self-interested, inherently amoral, callous and deceitful, it breaches social and legal standards to get its way, it does not suffer from guilt, yet it can mimic the human qualities of empathy, caring and altruism. Four case studies, drawn from a universe of corporate activity, clearly demonstrate harm to workers, human health, animals and the biosphere. Concluding this point-by-point analysis, a disturbing diagnosis is delivered: the institutional embodiment of laissez-faire capitalism fully meets the diagnostic criteria of a psychopath.

MINDSET

But what is the ethical mindset of corporate players? Should the institution or the individuals within it be held responsible?

The people who work for corporations may be good people, upstanding citizens in their communities—but none of that matters when they enter the corporation's world. As Sam Gibara, Chairman of Goodyear Tire explains, "If you had really a free hand, if you really did what you wanted to do that suited your personal thoughts and your personal priorities, you'd act differently."

Ray Anderson, CEO of Interface, the world's largest commercial carpet manufacturer, had an environmental epiphany and re-organized his 1.4 billion dollar company on sustainable principles. His company may be a beacon of corporate hope, but is it an exception to the *rule*?

MONSTROUS OBLIGATIONS

A case in point: Sir Mark Moody-Stuart recounts an exchange between himself, at the time Chairman of Royal Dutch Shell, his wife, and a motley crew of Earth First activists who arrived on the doorstep of their country home. The protesters chanted and stretched a banner over their roof that read, "MURDERERS". The response of the surprised couple was not to call the police, but to engage their uninvited guests in a civil dialogue, share concerns about human rights and the environment, and eventually serve them tea on their front lawn. Yet, as the Moody-Stuarts apologize for not being able to provide soya milk for their vegan critics tea, Shell Nigeria is flaring unrivalled amounts of gas, making it one of the world's single worst sources of pollution. And all the professed concerns about the environment do not spare Ken Saro Wiwa, and eight other activists, from being hanged for opposing Shell's environmental practices in the Niger Delta.

The Corporation exists to create wealth and even world disasters can be profit centers. Carlton Brown, a commodities trader, recounts with unabashed honesty, the mindset of gold traders while the twin towers crushed their occupants. The first thing that came to their minds, he tells us, was: "How much is gold up?"

PLANET INC.

You'd think that things like disasters, or the purity of childhood, or even milk, let alone water or air, would be sacred. But no. Corporations have no built-in limits on what, who, or how much they can exploit for profit. In the fifteenth century, the enclosure movement began to put fences around public grazing lands so that they might be privately owned and exploited. Today, every molecule on the planet is up for grabs. In a bid to own it all, corporations are patenting animals, plants, even your DNA.

Around things too precious, or vulnerable, or sacred, or important for the public interest to allow corporations to exploit, governments have, in the past, drawn protective boundaries. Today, governments are inviting corporations into domains from which they were previously barred. Michael Walker of the influential Fraser Institute baldly states that he wants to see the private ownership of every square inch of land, every cubic foot of air and water on the planet. It's the privatization of everything, and now we are facing

the corporate “enclosure” of even our imaginations.

PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT

The Initiative corporation spends \$22 billion worldwide placing its clients’ advertising in every imaginable—and some unimaginable—media. One new medium: very young children. Their “Nag Factor” study dropped jaws in the world of child psychiatry. It was designed not to help parents cope with their children’s nagging, but to help corporations design their ads and promotions so that children would nag for their products more effectively. Initiative Vice President Lucy Hughes elaborates: “You can manipulate consumers into wanting, and therefore buying your products. It’s a game.”

Today people can become brands. And brands can build cities. And university students can pay for their educations by shilling on national television for a credit card company. And a corporation even owns the rights to the popular song “Happy Birthday”. Do you ever get the feeling it’s all a bit much?

Corporations have invested billions to shape public and political opinion. When they own everything, who will stand for the public good?

THE PRICE OF WHISTLEBLOWING

It turns out that standing for the public good is an expensive proposition. Ask Jane Akre and Steve Wilson, two investigative reporters fired by Fox News after they refused to water down a story on rBGH, a synthetic hormone widely used in the United States (but banned in Europe and Canada) to rev up cows’ metabolism and boost their milk production. Because of the increased production, the cows suffer from mastitis, a painful infection of the udders, and antibiotics must be injected, which find their way into the milk, and ultimately reduce people’s resistance to disease.

Monsanto, the manufacturer of rBGH, threatened FOX with “dire consequences” if they let the story run. FOX backed down, and ultimately fired Akre and Wilson, who sued FOX under Florida’s whistle-blower statute. Akre and Wilson proved to a jury that the version of the story FOX would have had them put on the air was false, distorted or slanted and awarded Akre \$425,000. FOX appealed, the verdict was overturned on a technicality, and Akre lost her award. [www.foxbghsuit.com]

DEMOCRACY LTD.

Democracy is a value that the corporation just doesn’t understand. In fact, corporations have often tried to undo democracy if it is an obstacle to their single-minded drive for profit. From a 1934 business-backed plot to install a military dictator in the White House, undone by the integrity of one US Marine Corps General, Smedley Darlington Butler, to present-day drafting of laws by corporations, they have bought military might, political muscle and public opinion.

And corporations do not hesitate to take advantage of democracy’s absence either. One of the most shocking stories of the 20th century is Edwin Black’s story of IBM’s strategic alliance with Nazi Germany — beginning in 1933 in the first weeks that Hitler came to power and continuing well into World War II.

FISSURES

The corporation may be trying to render governments impotent, but since the landmark WTO protest in Seattle, a rising wave of networked individuals and groups have decided to make their voices heard. Movements to challenge the very foundations of the corporation are afoot: The charter revocation movement tried to bring down oil giant Unocal; a ground-breaking ballot initiative in Arcata, California put the corporate agenda in the public spotlight in a series of town hall meetings; in Bolivia, the population fought and won a battle against a huge transnational corporation brought in by their government to privatize the water system.

As global individuals take back local power, a growing re-invigoration of the concept of citizenship is taking root. It has the power to not only strip the corporation of its seeming omnipotence, but to create a feeling and an ideology of democracy that is much more than its mere institutional version.

www.TheCorporation.tv

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Produced by Big Picture Media Corporation in association with TV ONTARIO, Vision TV, Knowledge Network, Saskatchewan Communications Network and ACCESS – The Education Station. Produced with the participation of the Canadian Television Fund, Telefilm Canada: Equity Investment Program, CTF: Licence Fee Program, British Columbia Film, the Canadian Independent Film & Video Fund, Rogers Documentary Fund, Rogers Telefund and the Province of British Columbia Film Incentive BC. Produced with the assistance of The Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit. Produced in part through donations by the Yvonne Tasker-Rothenberg and Martin Rothenberg Fund, Simon Fraser Institute for the Humanities, Boag Foundation and Inter Pares. Special thanks to Rick Prelinger. © BIG PICTURE MEDIA CORPORATION MMIII.

KEY CREDITS

Directed by MARK ACHBAR and JENNIFER ABBOTT
Produced by MARK ACHBAR and BART SIMPSON
Edited by JENNIFER ABBOTT
Written by JOEL BAKAN With Narration Written by HAROLD CROOKS and MARK ACHBAR
Narrator MIKELA J. MIKAEL
Based on the book THE CORPORATION: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power, by JOEL BAKAN
Co-Producers CARI GREEN • NATHAN NEUMER • TOM SHANDEL
TVO Commissioning Editor RUDY BUTTIGNOL
Associate Producers JOEL BAKAN and DAWN BRETT
Archival Researcher PAULA SAWADSKY
Sound Designer & Music Supervisor VELCROW RIPPER
Original Music LEONARD J. PAUL
Music by YO LA TENGO • DAVID WILCOX • UZUME TAIKO • TRANSMO • THIRD EYE TRIBE
SHAWN PINCHBECK • MORGAN/NELKEN • ANDY MCNEILL • THE MAZEGUIDER • LOUD • LOSCIL
JEREMIAH KLEIN • HIGHER INTELLIGENCE AGENCY & BIOSPHERE • INTERMISSION • GRANNY 'ARK
DOMAKESAYTHINK • SEAN D. ANDREWS • MITCHELL AKIYAMA • ACCENT MUSIC PRODUCTIONS
Created by MARK ACHBAR and JOEL BAKAN
Executive Producer MARK ACHBAR

BIOS — KEY CREATIVE

MARK ACHBAR Producer, Director

Having worked on over 50 films, videos and books, Mark Achbar endeavors, through media, to challenge apathy around issues of nuclear lunacy, poverty, media control, East Timor, human rights, the religious right, U.S. hegemony and corporate power.

Achbar is best known for *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*, which he co-directed and co-produced with Peter Wintonick. The film was honoured with 22 awards and distinctions, screened theatrically in 300 cities and aired on 30 national TV networks. The 2 hour-45 minute epic is the top-grossing feature documentary in Canadian history.

Achbar received a Gemini nomination for Best Writer on *The Canadian Conspiracy*, a cultural/political satire for CBC and HBO's Comedy Experiments. It won a Gemini for Best Entertainment Special and was nominated for an International Emmy. In 1999 Achbar worked with editor Jennifer Abbott to direct and produce *Two Brides And A Scalpel: Diary of a Lesbian Marriage*, the comi-tragic story of Canada's first legally-married same-sex couple. The film has played world-wide in festivals and has aired in Canada on PrideVision TV and Knowledge Network.

JENNIFER ABBOTT Director, Editor

Jennifer Abbott is a documentary maker, media artist, cultural activist and editor. She produced, directed & edited *A Cow at My Table*, a feature documentary about the agribusiness vs. animal rights controversy and the battle for the consumer's mind. *A Cow at My Table* was her first feature documentary, with over 12 international awards and nominations including the Gold Special Jury Prize at WorldFest Houston, Best Documentary at the New Jersey International Film Festival and New York's Narrowsburg International Film Festival, the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies Media Commendation Award and the Silver Certificate at Italy's Prix Leonardo International Festival of Film, TV and Multimedia.

Abbott edited and story edited Achbar's *Two Brides And A Scalpel: Diary of a Lesbian Marriage*. Her other past work include the experimental short and video installation about interracial relationships *Skinned* which toured North America and Europe including New York's Museum of Modern Art. She is the editor and a contributing writer for the book *Making Video "In": The Contested Ground of Alternative Video on the West Coast*, and she teaches at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design.

JOEL BAKAN Writer/ Co-Creator

Author of *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*

Joel Bakan, lawyer, professor and writer, has degrees from Oxford, Dalhousie and Harvard, and has received several honours and awards including a Rhodes Scholarship, and a Governor General's medal. His work critically examines the social, economic, and political dimensions of law, and he has published in leading academic journals as well as the popular press. Bakan's book, *Just Words: Constitutional Rights and Social Wrongs*, was characterized as "cutting edge commentary by one of Canada's rising intellectuals."

Bakan's most recent book *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power* will be released by Penguin Canada in March 2004, and in the US by Simon & Schuster. Co-creator (with Mark Achbar) of THE CORPORATION documentary, Bakan's book was written during the making of the documentary and formed the basis of the research and writing for the film.

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