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## ***The Corporation as Person and Psychopath: Multimodal Metaphor, Rhetoric and Resistance***

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### **Abstract**

*This article conducts a detailed analysis of multimodal metaphor in the documentary film *The Corporation*, with particular focus on the metaphor *THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON*. The metaphors that make up the film are analysed within the immediate context of the rhetorical structure of the film, the discursive context of the use of *THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON* metaphor by corporations to gain power, and the background context of *THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON* as a ubiquitous conceptual metaphor in everyday cognition. The metaphors in the film are then compared with other multimodal metaphors from two protest videos. The article can be thought of as Positive Discourse Analysis, in that the use of metaphors in the film and videos is held up as an example of how multimodal media can be used to resist hegemonic discourses that harm people and the environment. A practical aim of the analysis is to reveal the detailed workings of the metaphors in order to provide resources that can be drawn on in the construction of effective materials for challenging hegemonic constructions of the corporation in the future.*

**Key words:** multimodal metaphor, corporate personhood, positive discourse analysis, rhetoric

### **1. Introduction**

This is an article about a metaphor, one that plays an important role in the structuring of contemporary industrial society and one which, according to those who resist it, causes great harm to both people and the environment. The metaphor is *THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON*. The theoretical approach combines Conceptual Metaphor Theory's insights into the role of metaphor in human cognition, Critical Discourse Analysis's insights into the role of language in shaping society, and multimodal metaphor theory for the detailed analysis of particular metaphors in context. Under examination is the complex sequence of multimodal metaphors used in the 2003 Canadian documentary *The Corporation: the pathological pursuit of profit and power* (Bakan 2005), examined within the context of the discursive struggle that the documentary takes part in, and against the background of the conceptual structures that form industrial society.

The film itself was written and produced by a professor of law at the University of British Columbia, Joel Bakan. Bakan has a strong interest in

opposing the excesses of corporate power: 'I developed the idea that the corporation, deemed by the law to be a person, had a psychopathic personality, and that there was something quite bizarre, and dangerous, in such an institution wielding so much power' (Bakan 2012). The film contains interviews with a large number of critics who share similar views including Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein, Howard Zinn, and Vandana Shiva, as well as some critics who have very different perspectives, such as Milton Friedman and leaders from the corporate world. Bakan made the film with two co-producers, March Achbar who directed *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media* and Jennifer Abbott, who produced *A Cow at My Table*, a film exposing factory farming and western attitudes to meat.

There are multiple, overlapping aims of this article. The first is to investigate *The Corporation* as a film of importance in its own right, being the first documentary dedicated to questioning the corporate form in general rather than criticising specific corporations. The second is to shed light on the metaphor of THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON as a metaphor of importance in its own right, since it is fundamental to the rise of the corporation as a governing body in society. Jennifer Abbott claims that this is 'probably the most pressing political issue of our day in the sense that, if we keep going on this path, I think life as we know it on this planet is in jeopardy' (in West and West 2004: 29). The aims go beyond Conceptual Metaphor Theory, where metaphors tend to be used as examples to reveal the general workings of the human cognitive system, and beyond Forceville's approach, where practical examples of metaphors are used to illustrate the mechanical workings of multimodal metaphors in context, towards Critical Discourse Analysis's aims of analysing social practice and contributing to social change.

Clearly, in conducting research into pressing social issues such as this the researcher has his or her own interests and agenda. As Fairclough (2001: 4) points out, these need to be taken into account in the analysis to ensure that it is rigorous and scientifically conducted. My own concerns are about the abuse of transnational corporate power at a time when corporation after corporation is exposed as acting against the interests of people and the environment, often illegally, and with very little accountability. At the time of writing, for example, the top headline of *The Guardian* states 'HSBC "sorry" for aiding Mexican drugs lords, rogue states and terrorists' (Rushe 2012, 17 July), with HSBC accused of providing financial services for a drugs trade that has cost 47,000 lives (Rushe 2012, 17 July). Corporations, with their large advertising budgets and media ownership clearly have the power to spread their version of reality widely through society, to the extent that it appears natural (Pedro 2011). I am therefore sympathetic to, and interested in promoting, counter-hegemonic discourses such as that of *The Corporation* which call corporate versions of reality into question and open up alternative ways of conceptualising the place of corporations in society. This could be considered Positive Discourse Analysis (Martin 2006), since it goes beyond Critical Discourse Analysis's usual focus on exposing oppressive discourse, to explore and promote alternative discourses. However, PDA should not be thought of as acting in an uncritical way. In fact, if the researcher is stepping forward and promoting a particular discourse as making a positive contribution to society it is essential they treat it critically, acknowledge any weakness or problems with the discourse, and point out potentially valuable alternative formulations.

Importantly, Positive Discourse Analysis goes beyond just promoting a particular text (in this case, the film *The Corporation*) – it is the discourse that is important, specifically the detailed way that linguistic, visual and audio features come together to form and express a particular worldview. Revealing the detailed workings of the discourse and critiquing any shortcomings provides a resource that can be drawn on in future by those creating materials that oppose the hegemony of corporations.

## **2. *The CORPORATION IS A PERSON Metaphor***

The word ‘corporation’ is in itself a dead metaphor, deriving from the Latin *corporare*, ‘form into a body’, with the metaphor of THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON just one step away when the type of body is specified as a human one. Yeager (2009: 19) describes how when incorporation takes place it becomes very difficult to locate responsibility for behaviour that damages public welfare, and ‘the foundational concept of criminal responsibility – originally located in the wilful minds of offending individuals – has been broadened and (in cases) even nullified’. A central question explored by criminologists and business ethicists is ‘whether corporations are moral agents or moral persons’ (Manning 1984: 77; also Phillips 1992). French (1979) argued that corporations are conglomerate collectivities, and as such are moral persons, while aggregate collectivities such as lynch mobs are not. Pfeiffer (1990), however, claims that the distinction between conglomerates and aggregates is one of degree and can only be decided on pragmatic grounds in individual cases. For Kerlin, it is the people in companies who have evil purposes and who further them, and he claims that ‘There is no sense in challenging, condemning or raging at the corporation as such’ (Kerlin 1997: 1437). Gibson (2011: 71) takes an intermediate position where a corporation both has a ‘moral culture which affects subjective choices’ and ‘morality comes about through shared experience between agents who participate in each other’s lives’. For Geiss (1998: 267), there are advantages of THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON metaphor since it allows corporations to ‘do certain reasonable things, such as to make contracts, to own property, and to be held responsible for crimes, such as the illegal dumping of toxic waste’. However, Brown (2001) shows that while corporations can be held responsible for crimes, they are not subject to the same strong moral condemnation and harsh sanctions as individual criminals responsible for street crime. This may be related to the influence of corporations on the state and law-making process itself, leading to ‘state-corporate crimes’ (Kramer et al. 2002) where ‘it is the corporation that manages and regulates the state through its control over state behaviour’ (Katz 2010: 295).

This section will describe THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON metaphor from three theoretical perspectives: metaphor as *concept*, *discourse* and *instantiation*. These three perspectives correspond to the approaches of conceptual metaphor theory, critical discourse analysis and multimodal metaphor theory respectively, all of which are treated as valid approaches that shine lights on different aspects of metaphor and need to be considered together.

## 2.1 Concept

According to well established Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Kövecses 2010, 2000; Lakoff 2002, 1987, 1993; Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 1980; Lakoff and Turner 1989; Johnson 1993, 1987), abstract domains of life are understood metaphorically using the structures of concrete, easily imaginable domains. It is no surprise, therefore, that the complex and abstract network of interrelated people, buildings and documents that is the corporation is understood using probably the most concrete and imaginable domain of all: the person. THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON metaphor formed part of Lakoff and Johnson's original (1980: 17) collection of examples of pervasive metaphors that led them to conclude that there are certain 'metaphors we live by', which reside permanently in the cognitive system of native speakers.

The results of a British National Corpus (BNC 2012) concordance for the word 'corporation' show the pervasiveness of the metaphor THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON across a range of discourses. Within the corpus, corporations frequently fill the 'agent' or 'senser' position of material and mental processes (using Halliday's 2004 terminology), where selection restrictions would usually place a human or animal. The sentences/clauses below from the BNC show corporations as the agent/senser participant of processes of *rejecting*, *refusing*, *intending*, *wishing*, *feeling*, *wanting*, and *selling* [its soul]:

- East Kilbride development corporation has this morning rejected the planning application
- the Housing Corporation refused to fund this item.
- the corporation intends to spend in the late 1980s and early 1990s some £20 million on education and training
- the Corporation wished to be rid of the fifteen cars that were the property of the B.E.T
- the Corporation at that time felt that the offer made to them was an act of great liberality
- It is based less on where the corporation is at than on where it wants to get.
- The corporation thinks that, by selling its soul to Chris and John, it's saved its life [selected from a concordance of the word 'corporation' in the BNC]

These few examples are sufficient to illustrate the pervasive use of THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON metaphor within the BNC, which can also be traced right across media, political, corporate and every day conversational discourse, both for the abstract word 'corporation' and specific corporations.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 543) draw out the implication of this ubiquitous metaphor: 'what is hidden in the international use of models in which the rational actors are nations or corporations? The answer...is the multiple forms of well-being required by individual people, indigenous cultures and the

environment'. This may well be true, but in terms of social change, the conceptual metaphor is a deeply embedded part of native speaker's knowledge about the world and not something that can be changed easily. As Fairclough (2003) describes, movements which have attempted to change language at a vocabulary level (e.g., insisting on *physically challenged* rather than *disabled*) or grammatical level (e.g., attempts to eliminate the generic *he*) have been labelled 'politically correct' and have faced barrier after barrier. An attempt to stop people talking about corporations as if they were people would be an even harder task since it is so ingrained in everyday ways of thinking and talking. But what is more important when considering social change is how the conceptual (and therefore dead) metaphors are re-activated, reawakened and employed by particular groups to serve particular ideologies. This is the level of discourse, and it is at this level that the connection between language and social change is most apparent (Fairclough 1992).

## 2.2 Discourse

At the discourse level we are less concerned with the general conceptual metaphors that are part of individual native speakers' conceptual systems, and more concerned with metaphors used by particular groups within society. As Stockwell (2000:513) points out, while Conceptual Metaphor Theory 'focuses on making explicit the conceptual metaphors of everyday usage', Critical Discourse Analysis 'focuses on how hegemonic institutions attempt to structure conventional thinking'. This moves us from individual cognition to what van Dijk (2012:24) calls 'social cognition', i.e., 'socially and culturally shared beliefs such as knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms and values...shared by groups and communities'. Fairclough (2001: 100) writes that 'different metaphors have different ideological attachments', where ideologies can be thought of as shared representations of groups that are used to further their ends.

THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON is employed ideologically in legal discourse by a particularly powerful group in society: corporate lawyers, together with legislators who have been influenced by the corporate world. The latest version of the Code of Laws of the United States, produced in 2006, codifies the metaphor through its definition of a person:

Person includes a natural person (including an individual Indian), a corporation, a partnership, an unincorporated association, a trust, or an estate, or any other public or private entity ... (Congress 2006: 18:1349)

Lakoff and Wehling (2012) describe how:

The Supreme Court is a remarkable institution. By a 5-4 vote, it can decide what metaphors we will live - or die - by. It is time to recognize, and speak regularly of, the Metaphor Power of the Court, the power to make metaphors legally binding. It is an awesome power. This is a something the press should be reporting on, legal theorists should be writing about, and all of us should be discussing.

The moment in which corporations became legal 'people' is frequently described as a Supreme Court ruling in 1886 when the Southern Pacific

Railroad claimed rights under the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment (which proclaimed human rights) on the grounds that it is a person. As John Witt, professor of law and history at Yale Law School, pointed out in an interview:

The chief justice of the United States Supreme Court, Morrison Waite, stood up in January of 1886 and said what pretty much everybody in the courthouse thought, which was that corporations were persons for the purposes of the 14th Amendment. (Witt 2011)

The phrase ‘pretty much what everybody in the courthouse thought’ is significant here, because it shows that it was not a sudden shock decision but instead logically drew out the consequences of the background conceptual metaphor. The metaphor, once enshrined in legal code, allowed corporations to use *metaphorical reasoning* (Lakoff 2002; Johnson 1993, 1983) along the lines of ‘People have a right to privacy. Our corporation is a person. Therefore our corporation has a right to privacy’ to gain rights and freedoms that were previously reserved for people. There are an unlimited number of entailments which could be drawn from the source domain of ‘persons’, but clearly entailments which benefit the corporate world are likely to be vigorously pursued by expensive lawyers, while others, like ‘People have responsibilities. Our company is a person. Therefore our company has responsibilities’ are less likely to be pursued. In this way, the metaphor is used ideologically with the result of increasing corporate power.

While the reawakening of the metaphor THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON within legal discourse gives it greater power to shape the world we live in, it also opens the metaphor up to discursive resistance. In fact, one of the main goals of the widespread Occupy movement is to resist the role of the metaphor in legal discourse (Occupy 2012). Occupy Wall Street has a ‘Resolution to End Corporate Personhood’ which states:

one critical threat to authentic democratic self-governance comes from the fact that corporations have been defined as legal persons ... [which has] compromised, or resulted in the destruction of our communities, economy, democracy and natural world in many ways ... [we demand] an Amendment to the Constitution to firmly establish...that human beings, not corporations, are persons entitled to constitutional rights. (Occupy 2012)

The nominalisation of THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON metaphor to ‘corporate personhood’ helps to give a specific target for the counter-discursive action, and the campaign seems to be having some impact on local government. On 1/4/2012 the New York City Council adopted a resolution supporting an amendment to the constitution ‘to provide that corporations are not entitled to the entirety of protections or “rights” of natural persons’ (NYCC 2012), which followed a similar resolution by the City Council of Los Angeles (Linthicum 2011, Dec 6).

Another significant area where the metaphor of THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON is reawakened, activated and ideologically employed is in corporate discourse. Koller (2009: 45) describes how within corporations ‘corporate brands are cognitively structured by the metaphor BRANDS ARE LIVING ORGANISMS, often specifically BRANDS ARE PEOPLE. Following the BRANDS ARE PEOPLE metaphor, individual corporations attempt to shape how the personality of the

corporation is perceived. According to internal documents analysed by Koller across a very wide range of corporations, the most common characteristics that the corporations attempt to associate with their 'brand person' are: 'innovation, respect, excellence, integrity, performance, trust, teamwork, responsibility, growth ... creativity, competitiveness, transparency, professionalism and fairness' (p. 52). These self-descriptions serve various functions: describing the reality of what the company is like, presenting an ideal that employees can aim for that is not yet reality, and disguising the exact opposite traits that do exist in reality to give a false impression to external stakeholders. Naturally the characteristics are all positive, and there are large advertising budgets to spread them, sometimes through multimodal metaphors where the 'brand person' comes to life as, for example, Ronald McDonald, Joe Camel, or the Michelin Man.

However, the BRANDS ARE PEOPLE metaphor is also subject to discursive resistance. The Adbusters organisation promotes what it calls 'culture jamming' through, among other things, the creation of spoof ads that attempt to undermine brands. Reynolds Tobacco's brand person, Joe Camel, for instance, is pictured as 'Joe Chemo' in a hospital bed in a range of images, one with the caption 'Surgeon General's Warning: smoking is a frequent cause of wasted potential and fatal regret' (Adbusters 2012). While 'culture jamming' resists corporate discourse at an individual, company by company level, the documentary *The Corporation* goes one step further, targeting the corporate form itself and characterising all corporations in ways that resist the artificial positivity of corporations' self-created 'brand people'.

The analysis of the specific documentary *The Corporation* takes place in the context of this larger discursive struggle. In fact the film itself may well have been a bridge between the long history of corporate use of THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON metaphor to achieve greater corporate power, which went largely unnoticed, and the Occupy movement's resistance of the metaphor. Certainly the film was watched by a significant number of viewers (Boxoffice 2012), used powerful rhetorical techniques that will be described below, and had an associated website that encouraged viewers to get together, organise events and take action after watching the film.

### 2.3 Instantiation

Forceville (2007: 21) mentions that a 'limitation of the Cognitive Metaphor Theory paradigm is that it has tended to focus on deeply embedded metaphors ... relatively little attention is paid in CMT to the *form* and *appearance* a metaphor can assume'. Forceville's approach is, instead, to analyse naturally occurring metaphors, primarily in advertising, to reveal the detailed workings of actual metaphors in practice. This is the level of instantiation, and the analysis of *The Corporation* in the next section will use Forceville's theory to analyse the instantiations of the metaphor in the film within the larger context of *concept* and *discourse* discussed above. The terminology used will be slightly different from Forceville's, however, and will follow the more widespread terminology used by Lakoff (1993).

In Lakoff's terminology, metaphors are made up of source domains and target domains, which are different areas of life. A metaphor occurs when a target domain is spoken of using words that are borrowed from the source domain.

So in the metaphor THE CORPORATION IS A VAMPIRE, for example, the target domain is the corporation and the source domain is a vampire. The questions that Forceville (2007: 21) asks when analysing metaphors are: which are the two domains of the metaphor? Which is the target domain and which is the source domain? And which features are mapped from source domain to target domain? (see also Forceville 2002, 1996).

The ways that domains are linked with each other are described in different ways by different theorists (Ortiz 2010), but for the purposes of this article, the three key ways are: a) *fusion*, where source and target domains both appear in a sentence/image but are merged together, b) *replacement*, where the source domain replaces the target domain, and c) *juxtaposition*, where both domains are present and separate from each other. Juxtaposition includes temporal, cross-modal, or simultaneous placement of domains within one mode (Schilperoord et al. 2009; Maes and Schilperoord 2008; Phillips and McQuarrie 2004). While some theorists draw a distinction between simile, metaphor and analogy (see Teng and Sun 2002) all will be treated as metaphor in this article because entailments can be drawn from all three, albeit in slightly different ways. While multimodal metaphor theory is usually used to study individual metaphors, this article goes one step further in examining metaphors as part of larger rhetorical structures, where multiple and sometimes incompatible metaphors combine together into a structure designed to persuasively convey an ideological position. In this case, the differing activation and entailments of the metaphors and how they interrelate with each other is the key issue.

The particular instantiation of multimodal metaphor that the remainder of this paper analyses is the representation of the corporation using ‘person’ and other source domains in the film *The Corporation*, and briefly in two other videos. All the metaphors within the film that structure the concept of *The Corporation* were analysed through identification of the source domain, target domain, mappings, entailments and activation levels across relevant modes (text on screen, oral narration, visual images, and music). Analyses such as those of Table 1 (which describes an instance of THE CORPORATION IS A SPORTS TEAM in the film) were produced for each metaphor, along with notes of how the metaphors fit together into the rhetorical structure. The notes were then analysed with a particular focus on the rhetorical structure, the pattern of activation of metaphors and the entailments drawn from them.

<b>Place</b>	2nd in sequence of 8 metaphors. at 3m.16s (from start)
<b>source domain</b>	sports team [explicitly represented orally and visually]
<b>target domain</b>	the corporation [implicit – derivable from context]
<b>Narration</b>	Hank McKinnell: A sports team. Some of us are blocking and tackling. Some of us are running the ball. Some of us are throwing the ball. But we all have a common purpose, which is to succeed as an organization.
<b>Visual</b>	an American football team [specific instantiation of the general source domain of a sports team, adds connotations of toughness]

<b>Music</b>	continues from previous scene, far background, base tones, neutral to slightly threatening
<b>Mappings</b>	sports people = employees, sports team = corporation, winning a sports event = succeeding as an organisation
<b>Entailments</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. some of us employees are performing one work function [blocking and tackling – replacement since football players replace corporate workers]</li> <li>2. some of us employees are performing another work function [throwing the ball]</li> <li>3. some of us employees are performing yet another work function [running the ball]</li> <li>4. but all of us employees have a common purpose which is to succeed as a corporation [organisation – fusion: source domain of ‘team’ and target domain of ‘corporation’ are fused into ‘organisation’]</li> </ol>
<b>Polarity</b>	positive, given the positive connotations of ‘succeed’ and the positive image of sport
<b>the message</b>	Like a sports team, employees perform different roles but are united in the goal of the success of the corporation.

**Table 1.** Analysis of a particular instance of a metaphor in *The Corporation*

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1 Rhetorical structure

The film starts with rapidfire corporate logos – hundreds of them appearing for a fraction of a second, illustrating that this film, uniquely, is focused on the corporate form in general rather than specific corporations. The numerous flashing logos are used metonymically for ‘the corporation’ since it is an abstract concept that cannot be depicted directly in the visual mode (Coëgnarts and Kravanja 2012: 102). Voice-over narration states that ‘00m16s This documentary examines the nature, evolution, impacts, and possible futures of the modern business corporation’. This frames the documentary as an enquiry, with the next scene used to establish the main question to be answered. A rapid sequence of journalists, politicians and other commentators are then shown (from 01m20s), each using the metaphor of CORRUPT CORPORATIONS ARE BAD APPLES in different ways, interrupted suddenly by the narrator ‘02m21s What’s wrong with this picture? Can’t we pick a better metaphor to describe the dominant institution of our time?’ The documentary spends the next 40 minutes exploring this question through a sequence of powerful multimodal metaphors, and then answering it. Firstly, eight metaphors are presented in succession, between 13 and 37 seconds each, by different commentators. The sequence is described in Table 2.

Later on (17m21s) a 9th metaphor, THE CORPORATION IS A SHARK, is presented in similar fashion. In each case the entailments are drawn out for what the metaphors say about the nature of a company, some positive and some highly

negative. After presenting this seemingly open-minded selection of possibilities the documentary focuses on the one metaphor THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON. This is introduced with a description of the 14th amendment which gives rights to natural, human people, followed by the comment ‘Corporations come into court and corporation lawyers are very clever and they say ‘oh, you can’t deprive a person of life, liberty or person. We are a person, a corporation is a person’ (09m21s). It is made clear that the filmmakers strongly disapprove of the metaphor of THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON but they run with it anyway, rather than simply reject it. The narrator asks the rhetorical question ‘Having acquired the legal rights and protections of a ‘person’, the question arises ‘What kind of person is the corporation?’ (12m09s) then a little later ‘we can analyse [the corporation] like a psychiatrist would analyse a patient’ (18m18s). What follows is a series of case studies of destructive corporate behaviour punctuated by ticks on a list of personality characteristics – ‘callous unconcern for the feelings of others’, ‘deceitfulness’, ‘incapacity to experience guilt’ etc. The grand conclusion comes at 40m33s when psychologist Robert Hare, originator of the checklist, reveals that the corporation is a psychopath, answering the question of ‘Can’t we pick a better metaphor...?’.

<b>Metaphor. The corporation is a...</b>	<b>Time</b>
a jigsaw puzzle	03m01s
a sports team	03m16s
a family unit	03m28s
a telephone system	03m37s
an eagle	03m52s
a monster	04m29s
a whale	04m42s
Frankenstein’s monster	04m51s

**Table 2.** Metaphors in the sequence starting at 03m01s

The rest of the film consists of a less well-structured series of case studies of corporate misbehaviour, concluding with some positive examples of resistance to corporate power and a call for the viewer to take action. To summarize: the film is presented as an enquiry into the nature of the corporation; an initial metaphor (bad apples) is presented as ubiquitous but problematic; the film starts a search for a better metaphor, tries out a range of possible metaphors, then settles on THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON; this metaphor is at first problematized but then adopted and transformed into THE CORPORATION IS A PSYCHOPATH. The rhetorical elements are: visual metonymies to bring the abstract notion of ‘the corporation’ to mind, multimodal metaphor with vivid use of images and music to map the corporation to a series of source domains, firstly with positive entailments then negative ones, the use of rhetorical questions and answers, an impression of rational enquiry, the presentation of ‘experts’, punctuated by an all-knowing off-screen narrator, who occasionally disagrees with the experts.

Music too, creates a subtle metaphor that aids the rhetorical structure. A musical theme is associated with ‘the corporation’ by being played over visuals of busy office workers – a fast and clear drum beat showing efficiency and productivity with high synthesiser sounds showing modernness and artificiality, over background base tones. The theme reappears throughout the film, interweaved with a darker theme consisting of strong low base tones suggesting something sinister, and shading into horror music occasionally. The background base tones of the lighter ‘corporation’ theme allow the documentary to slide smoothly from one theme (corporation) to the other (horror) giving a musical metaphor throughout the documentary of THE CORPORATION IS A SINISTER FORCE that chimes with the many other ways that this message is conveyed in the film.

### 3.2 Activation and Balance

The success of a rhetorical strategy depends partly on the level of activation of the metaphors used within it – only through high activation can the metaphors that lie in the background of our conceptual system be brought to light and questioned. The activation of a metaphor is the degree to which the metaphor actively maps a source domain with the target domain in a particular use of a metaphor (Stibbe 1998, 1997; see also Muller 2008 and Kyratzis 2003). This section analyses the activation levels of the series of positive and negative metaphors used in the film to demonstrate the rhetorical use of a semblance of balance combined with a weighting towards a particular ideological perspective.

For this article, activation is estimated by how many modes the source domain and target domain appear in, on repetition, on the degree to which metaphors are extended, and the vividness of the images (see Stibbe 1998, 1997). Deciding on the activation level is not a mechanical process because there is no algorithm to weigh the different factors that give rise to high activation, however it is still an evidence driven process. Table 3 presents a summary of the activation of the metaphors in the film together with some of the evidence used in reaching the judgements. In the table, ‘ext’ refers to extensions of the metaphor using extra details of the source domain, ‘mult’ refers to multiple depictions including repetitions, and blank squares show that the domain does not appear in this mode. The target domain in all cases is ‘the corporation’.

Metaphor	Domain	text on screen	oral narration	visual depiction	music	Activation
<b>bad apple</b>	source		mult mentions of bad apples & ext fruit cart	mult images of apples, some bad	lyrics: people call me a bad apple	extremely high
	target	mult TV text	mult – names of corporations	logos, executives		
<b>jigsaw puzzle</b>	source		mult ext picture	mult images of jigsaw		high
	target		one mention of ‘corporation’			
<b>sport</b>	source		mult ext tackling, ball	mult images of	subdued	high

<b>team</b>				football team	/sinister	
	target		one mention of 'organisation'			
<b>family unit</b>	source		single mention	one sequence	subdued /sinister	high
	target		one mention of 'corporation'			
<b>telephone</b>	source		mult ext reach/power	mult images of telephone sys	subdued /sinister	fairly high
	target		referred to only as 'it'			
<b>eagle</b>	source		mult ext majestic/soar	mult images of eagle	awe - compatible	v. high but undermined
	target		one mention of 'corporation'			
<b>monsters</b>	source		mentioned and ext devour	mult images of monsters	horror music	very high
	target		one mention of 'corporation'	images of executives		
<b>whale</b>	source		mentioned and ext big fish	mult images of whale/victim	sinister - compatible	very high
	target		no mention – assumed			
<b>Frankenstein' monster</b>	source		monster mentioned	image: scary monster	horror music	very high
	target		mention of corporate form			
<b>shark</b>	source		mult 'shark' ext killing	mult images of shark/victim	sinister - compatible	very high
	target		mult corp. enterprise			
<b>person</b>	source	caption: a legal person	mult mention of person	Ronald McDonald etc.		extremely high
	target	caption:	mult mention of corporation	office in a box on chair		

**Table 3.** Indicators of activation.

Table 3 shows that the initial metaphor of CORRUPT CORPORATIONS ARE BAD APPLES, which is used to frame the enquiry, has extremely high activation. It consists of an extraordinary montage of journalists and politicians all saying 'bad apples', interspersed with corporate logos, executives in hand cuffs, TV screens with words like 'corporate greed' written on them, music about apples, and visuals of apples. And the metaphor is extended through mention of 'the fruit basket is getting full', making the image even more vivid. The source and target domain are therefore both depicted multiple times repeatedly across the modes leading to very strong mappings being made in viewers minds between bad apples and corporations, which the narrator suddenly rejects with 'what's wrong...can't we pick a better metaphor...'.

The nine metaphors which follow are all high activation since they involve the depiction of the source domain both through words and simultaneously through vivid visual images. However, some are higher activation than others. Significantly, the metaphors which present positive images (the jigsaw, the football team, the family, the telephone system, the eagle) are lower activation than the negative ones (monsters, whale, Frankenstein's monster, shark). The difference in activation occurs partly due to the music – the dark sinister tones do not match what could be positive images of the corporation as a family or a sports team. The eagle metaphor is an exception – a positive depiction with high activation made higher by an awe-inspiring feel to the music, but the whole metaphor is undermined by the speaker standing up and at the end and saying 'ok guys, enough bullshit'. Then immediately after that, the sudden change to horror music aids the mapping of the corporation to a monster (Godzilla) and then to Frankenstein's monster. The monster depiction is particularly high activation since the target domain is presented visually (images of executives in a meeting as a metonym for the corporation) then juxtaposed with powerful visual images of the source domain: a monster crashes through a town as the narrator says 'they're monsters trying to devour as much profit as possible' with images of the monster crushing a car just as the narrator adds 'at anyone's expense'.

The final metaphor, THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON, is extremely high activation since it extends over time, is repeated in a great number of ways, and both source and target domain are presented across several modes. There are multiple images that represent the target domain of corporations metonymically (logos, buildings, offices, executives etc), along with the frequently repeated musical theme associated with the corporation. At the same time, a series of expressions spoken by the narrator map the corporation onto the source domain of a person, such as: 'we [corporations] are a person', 'a corporation is a person', 'imperial steel, along with thousands of other legal persons...is a member of our society', and 'corporate citizens'. Both domains also appear as text on screen with the caption 'The corporation: a legal person'. This multiple mentioning of source domain and target domain and the visual and musical metonymies of the target domain create high activation, and the activation is boosted with two visual depictions of the source domain (a person). The first is a series of corporate characters: Ronald McDonald smiling, Kellogg's Crackle and Pop characters playing, and the Michelin Man dancing, while the narrator says (at 12m46s) 'the great problem of having corporate citizens is that they aren't like the rest of us...they have no soul to save and no body to incarcerate'. The second visual image is a powerful metaphor where an office scene is shown (at 18m18s), with people walking around, swapping papers and looking efficient, corporate theme music, then the camera pulls out and the whole office is shown as being in a box sitting on a psychiatrist's chair with three giant men peering over and taking notes. This example of 'replacement' is particularly high activation since the source domain (a psychiatric patient) is recoverable through the visual context of the chair, the target domain is depicted visually, through the metonymy of *office is corporation*, and there is a strong visual discordance, an oddity about the scene, which causes viewers to search for the intended meaning.

The rhetorical strategy therefore uses an even mixture of positive and negative metaphors (5 positive and 5 negative, if the person/psychopath metaphor is

included and the framing metaphor of the bad apples is not), giving an impression of balance. However, the activation of the metaphors and the placing of all the negative ones at the end makes the overall, lasting, impression highly negative. There is evidence that this is a deliberate strategy: the producer describes how ‘it was very important...not to alienate business insiders or mainstream people. The way you do that is by not taking a stance...keep it open ended...Through this kind of style we can reach a spectrum of people’ (Abbott in West and West 2004). This could be seen as being manipulative, since the filmmakers clearly have an agenda to oppose the excesses of corporate power, but needs to be seen within the larger context of the huge sums of money spent by corporations to give positive images of themselves as honest and upright corporate citizens. Even if the film gave entirely negative images of the corporation it could be seen as attempting to balance out corporate rhetoric.

The use of multimodal techniques to give such strong activation to so many alternative metaphors for a corporation plays an important role in one of the film’s main aims. As the producer describes, ‘there is a subtext in the entire film, which is that the corporation is a legal and social construct. Even just pointing this out in many ways de-reifies it’ (in West and West 31). The high activation negative and positive metaphors both play a role in showing that the corporation is social construct, that the prevailing metaphor of THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON is not the only way to think about a corporation, and that there may be other, less dangerous, ways to rethink what a corporation is.

### 3.3 Metaphorical Entailments

While activation is important in bringing metaphors to the foreground, the actual message that the metaphors give depends on how metaphorical entailments are drawn out in a process of metaphorical reasoning (Lakoff 2002; Johnson 1993, 1983). Metaphorical reasoning follows the pattern of ‘A corporation is a monster. Monsters destroy people. Therefore corporations destroy people’, with ‘corporations destroy people’ being a *metaphorical entailment*. Note that it is up to the viewer of the metaphor to draw the relevant entailments from the context – e.g., the viewer could equally draw an entailment ‘Monsters are scary. Therefore corporations are scary’. What is interesting for this analysis, however, is how the narrators of the film (helped by visual images) entice or encourage viewers to draw particular entailments from the metaphors presented, as this is essential to the rhetorical strategy. A metaphor like THE CORPORATION IS A WHALE could, for instance, have an unlimited number entailments drawn from it – whales are large, rare, majestic, gentle, social, intelligent and so on, any of which could be translated into ‘therefore corporations are large, rare, majestic, social’ etc. However, the film highlights certain aspects of the source domain of a whale for the audience to draw entailments from. The off-screen narrator (Michael Moore in this case) says ‘I think of a whale, a gentle big fish [pause] which can swallow you in an instant’. This starts with the benign image of a whale then suddenly draws on stories of whales swallowing people to give a much more sinister image. The visual images parallel this by showing a whale followed by a terrified person. This leads the viewer to start with positive entailments ‘corporations are big and gentle’ and suddenly replace them with the negative

one ‘corporations can swallow you in an instant’. What exactly ‘swallow you’ maps onto in the domain of corporations is left unstated, with viewers left to draw the most relevant entailment (for Relevance Theory, see Wilson and Sperber 1993). In this case the entailment is likely to be along the lines of ‘corporations can have a sudden and large negative impact on your life’.

The methodology for extracting entailments starts with identification of the source domain that is being used to structure the concept of the corporation, then determining the mappings between elements in the domains. In the example ‘I see the corporation as part of a jigsaw in society as a whole, which if you remove it, the picture’s incomplete’ the source domain is the jigsaw, the target domain is the corporation, and the mappings are between a) a jigsaw piece and the corporation, and b) the whole puzzle and society. The explicit statement about the source domain is ‘if you remove a part of a jigsaw then the picture’s incomplete’, and the metaphorical entailment can be extracted by swapping over the mapped terms to give ‘if you remove *corporations* then *society* is incomplete’. This method of revealing entailments was carried out for all eleven metaphors (see Table 4), with entailments written with corresponding elements from the source domain in parenthesis, e.g., ‘if you remove corporations [a part of a jigsaw] then society [the picture on a jigsaw] is incomplete’. The contents of the square brackets are not part of the entailment – they are just shown to illustrate how the entailment was derived. The entailments then, are always statements about the target domain in the language of the target domain, although the structure and relation of the elements with each other derives from knowledge about the source domain.

<b>Metaphor: the corporation is a...</b>	<b>Entailments</b>	<b>polarity</b>
bad apple	there are a few bad corporations [bad apples] we’ve gotta get rid of the bad corporations [bad apples]	negative
jigsaw puzzle	1. if you remove the corporation [a piece of the puzzle] then society [the picture] is incomplete 2. if the corporation [a piece of the puzzle] is the only part, society [jigsaw puzzle] is not going to work	positive negative
sport team	1. some of us employees are performing one work function [blocking and tackling] 2. some of us employees are performing another work function [throwing the ball] 3. some of us employees are performing yet another work function [running the ball] 4. but all of us employees have a common purpose which is to succeed as a corporation [organisation]	positive
family unit	people in the corporation [members of a family] work together for a common end	positive
telephone	1. the corporation [the telephone system] reaches almost everywhere 2. the corporation [the telephone system] is extraordinarily powerful	1. neutral 2. neutral 3. neutral

	3. the corporation [the telephone system] is pretty hard to avoid	4. positive
	4. the corporation [telephone system] transforms the lives of people, I think on balance for the better.	
eagle	The principled company [eagle] is powerful* [soaring], well-informed* [clear eyed], competitive, decisive* [prepared to strike], but not dependant* [a vulture]. * <i>due to the vagueness of this metaphor viewers may draw different interpretations of the mappings</i>	highly positive
monsters	corporations [monsters] are trying to obtain [devour] as much profit [food] as possible at anyone's expense	highly negative
whale	1. the corporation seems benign [gentle]	1. positive
	2. the corporation can have a large and negative impact on your life [swallow you whole]	2. highly negative
Frankenstein's monster	the corporate form [monster], created by society [Dr Frankenstein] has overwhelmed and overpowered society [Dr Frankenstein]	highly negative
Shark	the enterprise [shark] has within it those characteristics that enable it to do that for which it was designed [killing]	highly negative
Person	the corporation [person] has legal rights. It can buy and sell property. It can borrow money. It can sue in court, and be sued. It...is a member of our society...it is a citizen  DENIED: corporations are like us...they have feelings...they have politics...they have belief systems. REPLACED BY: corporations really only have one thing: the bottom line	positive
Psychopath	corporation has: [ ] Callous unconcern for the feelings of others [ ] Incapacity to maintain enduring relationships [ ] Reckless disregard for the safety of others [ ] Deceitfulness: repeated lying and conning others for profit [ ] Incapacity to experience guilt [ ] Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviour	highly negative

**Table 4.** Entailments of the metaphors in *The Corporation*

Overall, the pattern of the entailments follows the pattern of the activation – there are about as many positives as negatives, giving an overall impression of balance, but the negative ones (shark, monster, Frankenstein's monster, psychopath) are presented with high modality (certainty). On the other hand the positive ones are qualified: the jigsaw puzzle cancels out the positive entailment of the necessity of corporations for society by the entailment 'But equally, if the corporation is the only part, society is not going to work'. The telephone system entailment 'the corporation transforms the lives of people, I think on balance for the better' is low modality through the use of 'I think' and 'on balance', which implies that there are occasions when corporations do not transform lives for the better. The entailments of the eagle metaphor are

qualified by the aside about ‘enough bullshit’, and the potential positivity of the sports metaphor and family unit entailments are betrayed by the sinister base tones of the background music. As Forceville (2009: 29) points out ‘it is connotations rather than denotations of source domains that get mapped in metaphors’, resulting in a wide range of negative connotations being attached to corporations.

A key entailment of the ‘bad apples’ metaphor, which was not drawn out explicitly in the film but viewers are likely to recognise, is that, in the source domain, if there are a few bad apples then most apples are good. The entailment of this is that ‘most corporations are good’, something that is denied by the narrator saying ‘What’s wrong with this metaphor?’. The entailments of the rapid sequence of metaphors that follow (up to and including the shark metaphor) portray a corporation as: making society dysfunction if other aspects of society are ignored, having a purpose that all employees follow, reaching everywhere, being extraordinarily powerful, hard to avoid, transforming people’s lives for the better (but not always), being powerful, well-informed, majestic, obtaining profit at anyone’s expense, overwhelming and overpowering society, and having within it the characteristics that enable it do that for which it was designed [like a shark killing]. This sets up mixed but overall negative images of the corporation in preparation for the main metaphor.

Having presented THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON metaphor the film lets an archive corporate training video draw the entailments from it. With a proud tone of voice an off-screen narrator states the following over grainy black and white industrial images:

11.28 Imperial Steel Incorporated has many of the legal rights of a person. It can buy and sell property. It can borrow money. It can sue in court, and be sued. It carries on a business. Imperial Steel, along with thousands of other legal persons, is a part of our daily living. It is a member of our society.

The entailments follow the pattern of ‘a person can buy and sell property. Imperial Steel is a person. Therefore Imperial Steel can buy and sell property’. All are positive and in the voice of the corporate world. However, two minutes later other voices are brought in to oppose this ideological use of the metaphor. In a key moment in the film, Michael Moore states:

13.01 I believe the mistake that a lot of people make when they think about corporations, is they think you know, corporations are like us [sequence of people giving their impressions of brand personalities, e.g., McDonalds is ‘fun’] 13.50 Moore: They think they have feelings, they have politics, they have belief systems. They really only have one thing: the bottom line.

Moore is drawing entailments from THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON metaphor ‘People have feelings. A corporation is a person. Therefore corporations have feelings’ but attributing these entailments to ‘a lot of people’ and denying them by calling them a ‘mistake’. He then replaces them with what is represented in high modality as the truth (‘really’): ‘they really only have one thing: the bottom line’.

Unusually, the entailments of the final metaphor, THE CORPORATION IS A PSYCHOPATH are drawn out before the metaphor itself is presented. Each of the statements that are presented about corporations such as ‘callous unconcern for the feelings of others’, ‘deceitfulness’, ‘incapacity to experience guilt’ are, in fact, entailments of THE CORPORATION IS A PSYCHOPATH metaphor (Psychopaths are deceitful. The corporation is a psychopath. Therefore corporations are deceitful). Except that in this case, which we could call ‘reverse metaphorical reasoning’, the entailments are provided first and then used as evidence that the metaphor is an apt one, along the lines of (Corporations are deceitful. Psychopaths are deceitful. Therefore the metaphor of THE CORPORATION IS A PSYCHOPATH is an apt metaphor). This is a powerful form of rhetoric because it presents the answer to the question of ‘Can’t we pick a better metaphor to describe the dominant institution of our time?’ as the result of a rational enquiry that considered a variety of possibilities, considered the evidence, and empirically showed THE CORPORATION IS A PSYCHOPATH to be a suitable, and better, metaphor for the corporation.

#### **4. Metaphor in Two Protest Videos**

This section briefly analyses two protest videos published on Youtube which also employ multimodal metaphorical devices to resist THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON metaphor. The aim is both to demonstrate additional rhetorical techniques that may be useful in creating future similar materials, and demonstrate aspects of the metaphors in the videos that fall short of the effectiveness of the film.

The first video is a protest song by Harvey Taylor (2011), with an evocative metaphor in the title of the song, *I'll Believe "Corporations Are People" When Texas Executes One*. This metaphor is particularly powerful since it both questions the dominant THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON metaphor and forces the listener to make a mapping between corporations and criminals in their own minds. It also forms the chorus of the song, meaning it is repeated six times for additional impact. The opening words of the video quote Abraham Lincoln ‘Corporations have been enthroned and corruption in high places will follow’, which maps corporations onto royalty, then corporations are mapped to monsters at 0m31s with the lyrics ‘something invented by Dr Frankenstein’, backed up by a photo of activists dressed in Frankenstein’s monster costumes. The monster metaphor is given even greater activation at 0m44s when corporate personhood is referred to as a ‘monstrous legal fiction’. The metaphor of THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON is questioned and undermined by pointing out the difference between humans and corporations at 1m03s with ‘human beings live and die, corporations are vampires’, with a drawing of vampire that gets more and more close-up until only the blood dripping teeth visible. This links to the next line of the song ‘got their teeth in the planet’s neck’, which provides a very high activation extension of the metaphor and links later on to ‘we have to deny the vampire the life blood it feeds on’ 3m09s. It is only later at 3m30s that evidence is given for why vampires/monsters are an appropriate metaphor: ‘They pollute the oceans, they foul the sky, they pour poison into the earth. It’s extremely profitable that’s what the world is worth’. The song therefore uses two modes (lyrics and pictures) which

combine together to give high activation for two main metaphors which use the source domains of monsters and vampires. These metaphors justified only tangentially through referring to the harm the corporations cause rather than the direct justification through entailments of the psychopath metaphor in *The Corporation*. Unlike *The Corporation* it does not use musical metaphors – the music is just a normal folk song genre, and there is no attempt to visually portray the target domain (the corporation), e.g., through the metonymy of corporate logos.

The second video is entitled *Corporations Aren't People": Corporate Personhood Protest* (WorldleaderP 2010). Three modes come together to create multimodal metaphors in this video: the music, words on screen, and moving visual images. The music is the largely instrumental track 'The horror' by RJD2 which has an upbeat tempo with sliding high pitch notes associated with sci-fi horror films, particularly Jeff Wayne's 1978 musical adaptation of HG Wells *War of the Worlds*. There are occasional indistinct words in the song: 'monster', 'time', 'tomorrow'. The text on screen appears as short phrases interspersed with images and clips:

Want to hear something scary? / The supreme court. / Just made corporations. / HUMAN !!!! / They are now ALIVE with first amendment rights / Start running / They will CONTROL you / They will BUY you / and they will TAKE OVER Washington / You now belong to...[visual: corporate logos] / Washington is elected by... [corporate logos] / Kiss democracy goodbye / And say hello to Corporate PLUTOCRACY / Fight to keep corporations out of OUR government / Take a stand.

The images and clips align with the screen text: 'They are now ALIVE' is represented by Frankenstein's monster strangling his maker; 'running' shows hundreds of people running in fast motion; 'control you' shows riot police chasing protesters; 'Take over Washington' shows the White House exploding; 'You now belong to' is followed by dozens of corporate logos; and 'Corporate Plutocracy' is accompanied by a ship overwhelmed by a nuclear explosion at sea. All three modes come together to provide intense images - both the source domain (monsters) and target domain (corporations) are represented both visually and in the screen text, with the music backing up the source domain of monsters. However, the overall effect is weakened because of the vagueness of the source domain. At the start, the source domain is given by the word 'HUMAN !!!!', then changes briefly to Frankenstein's monster, but after that the source domain is not directly represented – i.e., the now alive/human/monster created by the supreme court's decision is no longer depicted, just the results of its actions – people run away, but the viewer does not see from what; a nuclear bomb explodes and Washington is bombed but the agent of these actions is not shown. There is also metaphorical dissonance between the screen text of 'Washington is elected by [corporations]' and the image of the White House exploding, since the connection between the images is unclear. This reduces the activation and general coherence of the metaphor. The creator of the film states in comments underneath the video 'My goal was to break down a complex issue (Campaign Finance Reform + Cooperate Personhood) into a quick and engaging video that might help spark a reaction in people to go out and work to change the system'. This video may well spark a reaction with this evocative images but leaves questions about what the

images represent and what action to take. Overall, both videos show some intertextuality with *The Corporation* film (particularly Frankenstein's monster), and both go beyond the film to new, evocative images such as vampires or explosions. However, there were rhetorical techniques in the film that could have been employed in the videos to create an even more persuasive and convincing case.

## **5. Conclusion**

Fairclough (2001: 3) writes that 'Although I shall be painting a somewhat depressing picture of language being increasingly caught up in domination and oppression, this will I hope be offset by my faith in the capacity of human beings to change what human beings have created. Resistance and change are not only possible but continuously happening'. It would have been possible to have focused this article on the important but 'depressing picture' of how corporations use the metaphor of THE CORPORATION IS A PERSON to gain ever increasing freedoms and powers. But instead the article can be considered a form of Positive Discourse Analysis (Martin 2006), analysing an act of resistance to the metaphor that may well have inspired a widespread movement to demand change. The purpose of Positive Discourse Analysis is not just to praise and promote the particular texts that have been analysed, but to reveal the detailed workings of the texts, providing a resource that can be used in the future to help design similar texts. In this case, the workings of the metaphors include the ways that the source domains align across all four modes (screen text, spoken words, images, music) to provide high activation; the way that activation can be further increased through metaphorical extension and repetition; how target domains can be visually realised through metonymy; the way that entailments can be used to show that particular source domains are apt and suitable; and how contradictory metaphors can be juxtaposed to give an air of balance and objectivity.

There are aspects of the film which can be criticised, however. The rhetorical strategy of actively seeking a 'better metaphor for the dominant institution of our time', running through a range of positive and negative possible metaphors before settling on THE CORPORATION IS A PSYCHOPATH is inspiring. However, the film did not run with the psychopath metaphor after setting it up so well. As Batts and Madansky (2008: 594) point out 'What does society do to psychopaths? It puts them in an asylum. Is that the cure that the filmmakers intend for corporations? We are left hanging as the film moves on to another theme'. In asking 'what does society do to psychopaths?' Batts and Madansky are imploring the film to draw more entailments from the metaphor to guide practical action. As Barnett (2004) points out, 'The film...is not effective...at providing workable solutions to put us back on safe and solid ground'. The struggle against the excesses of corporate power are far from over, however, and it is possible to learn from the sophisticated use of multimodal metaphor in *The Corporation* to create future materials that both de-reify hegemonic institutions through multiple, high activation metaphors, and use the rhetorical power of the metaphors to guide practical action.

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