

Species threatened, corporations ascendant, death discussed

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FULL TEXT

When Sir David Attenborough is doing the talking you know that the title of Serena Davies's **"Extinction –The Facts"** is no joke.

"Biodiversity is vanishing at a rate never seen before in human history," Attenborough says at the film's start. A million of the 8 million species alive today are in danger of extinction. As one of the many scientists interviewed in the documentary puts it, "We are the asteroid," referring to the cataclysmic, cosmic collision that wiped out the dinosaurs 66 million years ago.

The film offers a litany of this terrible toll. A caretaker in an African game reserve presents the last two surviving Northern White Rhinos, a mother and daughter, all that remains of a species that has been endangered by the destruction of their habitats and attrition by hunters. "We have betrayed them," the caretaker says.

It might seem that the loss of such animals is sad but inevitable and ultimately of no consequence. The extinction of some species might even be seen as a positive. Who misses having to clean off the bugs splattered on windshields? But insects feed countless other species and pollinate crops, and their disappearance portends global disaster. Attenborough examines the familiar woes —destruction of the rain forest, the poisoning of the environment, and the intrusion of human activity into wildlife habitats —and shows how they not only destroy animal life and bring misery to impoverished people but have an effect on everyone. These abuses might be responsible for COVID-19 and could bring on future, even worse pandemics.

How did we arrive at this point? The threat to biodiversity has been known to scientists for three decades but the corporations responsible for it have stifled any action. They claim it to be, like climate change, a "manufactured" crisis. As one expert puts it, these companies are more interested in next quarter's profits than in the survival of the next generation. Attenborough does not despair, however, and the film points out measures that can be taken. But time is running out —if it hasn't already.

"Extinction –The Facts" premieres March 31 at 8 p.m. on PBS, PBS.org, and the PBS Video app and will stream simultaneously on Amazon Fire TV, Android TV, and other platforms.

Go to www.pbs.org/show/extinction-facts.

New boss same as the old boss

A useful complement to "Extinction –The Facts" is Joel Bakan and Jennifer Abbott's **"The New Corporation: The Unfortunately Necessary Sequel."**

In their original film "The Corporation" (2003), made around the time of the Enron collapse, the filmmakers took the legal definition of the corporation as a person and analyzed what kind of "person" that might be. Using the World Health Organization's Manual of Mental Health Disorders they found that corporations exhibit such traits as "disregard for the well-being of others," "failure to conform to social norms," "incapacity to experience guilt," and "deceitfulness," which are characteristic of psychopaths.

Bakan and Abbott now return to their subject and find corporations just as toxic, if not more so. Not only does the original psychopathology apply, but corporations have exhibited another symptom recently added to the psychopathic checklist —"the use of seduction, charm, glibness, or ingratiation to achieve one's ends."

Slyly and disingenuously corporations claim to have reinvented themselves as world saviors, willing and able to

clean up the mess that they are responsible for. Hence companies like British Petroleum insist on their commitment to a cleaner environment even as the Deepwater Horizon disaster fills the Gulf of Mexico with oil, or tout natural gas as a better environmental solution than alternative energy sources—a literal kind of gaslighting.

As the Who once warned, don't get fooled again.

"The New Corporation: The Unfortunately Necessary Sequel" can be streamed at Emerson's Bright Lights film series from March 31 at 7 p.m. to April 1 at 8 p.m. A live Q&A with the directors can be streamed on April 1 at 8 p.m. It is a co-presentation of the Boston Women's Film Festival, IFFBoston, the Living on Earth podcast, and SEIU local 888.

Go to bit.ly/3vZGOqf.

Next of kin

If you've seen Frederick Wiseman's six-hour documentary "Near Death" (1989) you should feel right at home with Xue Gu's 65-minute "**The Choice**."

One of the most compelling scenes in Wiseman's film involves relatives gathered to discuss whether or not to take a failing family member off life support. In Xue's film that discussion goes on for the entire film, shot in one take from one camera position, with occasional slow, subtle pans left and right to focus on speakers or listeners or those who have withdrawn, either in grief or indifference, from the conversation.

The patient is the "fifth aunt" (numbered by seniority, she is the youngest), who is comatose with little hope of reviving. Those engaged in deciding her fate are her elderly sisters, her son, an uncle, and other family members, including a pushy man, an apparent in-law, who interrupts people saying, "Don't interrupt!"

Despite or because of this stripped-down style, the relationships among the subjects and the politics of their family and the culture emerge with subtlety and clarity. As is often the case in such situations the outcome seems anti-climactic, except perhaps to the fifth aunt.

"The Choice" can be streamed at the DocYard March 26 to April 1. A live Q&A with the director moderated by DocYard curator Abby Sun can be streamed on March 31 at 8 p.m.

Go to thedocyard.com/2021/03/家庭会议-the-choice.

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