DISORDER | DIR. HUANG WEIKAI
(2010 True/False Film Fest)

Synopsis

Huang Weikai's one-of-a-kind news documentary captures, with remarkable freedom, the anarchy, violence, and seething anxiety animating China's major cities today. As urbanization in China advances at a breakneck pace, Chinese cities teeter on the brink of mayhem. One man dances in the middle of traffic while another attempts to jump from a bridge before dozens of onlookers. Pigs run wild on a highway while dignitaries swim in a polluted river. Unshowable on China's heavily controlled television networks, Disorder reveals an emerging underground media, one that has the potential to truly capture the ground-level upheaval of Chinese society.

Huang Weikai collects footage from a dozen amateur videographers and weaves them into a unique symphony of urban social dysfunction. Huang shatters and reconstructs a world that's barely comprehensible, though with palpable energy - vibrant, dangerous, and terrifying.[1]

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[1] The above synopsis and photo for *Disorder* are courtesy of Icarus Films.

WHAT DID I JUST SEE?

"Assembling footage from a dozen amateur videographers, Huang Weikai presents a unique anti-city symphony of urban dysfunction that is alternately hilarious and horrifying. Pigs racing down a busy highway, government VIPs swimming in a polluted river, a hit-and-run victim being bribed to leave the scene, and an abandoned baby gawked at by passersby are all stranger-than-fiction visions that could never be aired on Chinese state television. These images represent both an alternative media culture of amateur videographers and viral video netizens, and the chaos seething through the cracks of a society in rapid transformation."[2]

> —Museum of Modern Art Program Description, included as a part of *Chinese Realities / Documentary Visions*

"...With Disorder, Huang recontextualizes over a thousand hours of found footage to create jarring juxtapositions and fractured narratives, following a rule that each subsequent sequence must never be taken from the same tape."[3]

> —Lawrence Garcia, *City on Fire: Close-Up on Huang Weikai's "Disorder"* | MUBI

DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING + (CITIZEN) JOURNALISM

Disorder was almost exclusively created through recordings from amateur videographers, often referred to as "citizen journalists". There are no interviews or narration that offers context or explanation for each scene; instead, Weikai lets each scene speak for itself. With the advent of the Internet, social media platforms, and personal cell-phones that not only record video and audio files, but do so with surprising clarity and rather high production value, many people all over the world find themselves documenting their lives (and sometimes the lives of others), every day. When we think about it this way, we're all documentarians, and in some cases, citizen journalists!

For some documentarians, documentary filmmaking and the profession of journalism are so inextricably linked, that it is hard to tell where one ends and the other begins. During a panel at Sundance Film Festival in 2015, filmmaker Laura Poitras (*Citizenfour*, *Risk*) shared that she considers documentary filmmaking as "journalism plus", referring to herself as a "visual journalist" (IndieWire, 2015). Expanding on the concept of "journalism plus", the article states "Documentary filmmaking is journalism (fact finding) plus storytelling that reveals something more about the human condition".[4] However, Poitras and the other panels agreed that there are also lines in which documentary filmmaking and professional journalism depart, namely when it comes to "storytelling technique". An example of this as described in the article is when a documentary filmmaker makes the decision for an actress / actor to play the role of a subject in the film who, due to safety or other concerns, wishes to remain anonymous.

Adding to the dynamic between documentary filmmaking and the profession of journalism is the participation in and use of "citizen journalism", which simply put is engagement by the general public in collecting, sharing, and sometimes analyzing information. Citizen journalism has been taking place since the dawn of time, long before being a journalist was a job one could have.

A famous example of a citizen journalist, even if by accident, is Andrew Zapruder, whose short 8mm film has been referred to widely as the "most important 26 seconds film in history"[5]. On November 22, 1963, Zapruder filmed John F. Kennedy's motorcade as it drove around Dallas, TX, ultimately capturing JFK's assassination in a way no one else did. More recently, citizen journalism has documented the unarmed killings of people of color, war crimes, and the effects of rapid urbanization in China, that we see in *Disorder*.

In the article *CHINESE INDEPENDENT FILMMAKING: Freedom is a State of Mind*, Michele Vicat writes, "China's citizens have taken advantage of digital technology to capture the unofficial scenes of their daily lives. While the explosive growth of China's commercial film market and booming TV production houses have caught the attention of investors in Hong Kong and elsewhere, lesser-known independent documentary filmmakers are discovering a more somber reality. It is a reality experienced by artists, writers, school teachers and peasants, a reality that is riddled with trash, the detritus of demolition, family quarrels, displacement....in short, everything that the Chinese government would like to move to the outskirts of the international consciousness...They unconsciously map the overlooked details that sociologists, political and economic analysts and historians will eventually rely on to understand what has really taken place in China. These documents mirror the collective and individual consciousness on the road to democracy."[6] Weikai's *Disorder* is certainly on the list of visual documentation of the effects of urbanization and treatment of Chinese citizens.

For more information on the intersection of documentary filmmaking and journalism, the increase of citizen journalism, or the myriad of decisions that went into how and when Zapruder's film footage was shared with the public, and more, check out the links below:

Sundance: Is it Documentary or Journalism? | Angelica Das, IndieWire

Power to the People: The rise and rise of citizen journalism | Micha Barban Dangerfield, Tate (UK)

What Does the Zapruder Film Really Tell Us? | Ron Rosenbaum, Smithsonian Magazine

[5]Rosenbaum, R. (2013). *What Does the Zapruder Film Really Tell Us?* Smithsonian Magazine.
[6]Vicat,M. (2012). *Chinese Independent Filmmaking: Freedom is a State of Mind.* 3 Dots Water.

MEDIA & FILM CENSORSHIP IN CHINA

To adequately understand both the context of *Disorder*, and the incredible fortitude of the people who recorded the scenes in the film, it's important to think about China's relationship with media.

According to an article written by Beina Xu and Eleanor Albert for the Council on Foreign Affairs (2017)[7]:

- China has one of the world's most restrictive media environments, relying on censorship to control information in the news, online, and on social media.
- The government uses libel lawsuits, arrests, and other means to force Chinese journalists and media organizations to censor themselves. Thirty-eight journalists were imprisoned in China in 2017.
- China blocks many U.S. websites, including Facebook, Instagram, and some Google services, though the Chinese public has found ways to circumvent the so-called "Great Firewall".

RESOURCES

Xu and Albert's article (link included below) offers excellent context on media censorship in China, including exploring China's official media policy, censorship groups, China's relationship with foreign media, and ways the Chinese public has found to circumvent censorship.

Media Censorship in China | Center for Foreign Relations

For a first person account on what it is like to be a journalist in China, we recommend listening to this Sinica Podcast episode: *Edward Wong on the State of Journalism in China*, hosted by Kaiser Kuo and Jeremy Goldkorn.

This downloadable report from PEN AMERICA provides an extremely thorough examination of how Beijing censorship has gone beyond China to affect the global filmmaking industry, including Hollywood:

Made in America, Censored by Beijing | PEN AMERICA

POST-FILM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Using two sentences or less, describe what you think *Disorder* is about. Is there a central theme or message the filmmaker is trying to communicate to the audience? What is it and what evidence from the film supports your thoughts?

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[7]Xu, B. & Albert, E. (2017). *Media Censorship in China*. Council on Foreign Affairs.

- How did the various scenes throughout the film relate to each other? Taken together, can you find a common theme or thread that weaves them together?

- Let's talk about sound! With the exception of the sound that was captured on video (people talking, the sound of the water spurting from the fire hydrant, the pigs on the highway), there aren't other incidents of spoken word (including interviews or narration). What was your experience like viewing this film? Did you find it difficult to follow along or concentrate? How might the absence of direct narration or interviews and the context they provide actually enhance the images on screen, making them more impactful and leading the audience to form their own conclusions?

- What is urbanization? How does rapid development in highly populated areas affect the people, businesses, and daily lives of the people living there?
    - How do we see the effects of urbanization unfold in Guangzhou, the city featured in *Disorder*?

- The lenses of several videographers and Weikai himself captured a view of Guangzhou that had rarely been shared in such a public way before. What is your impression of life in Guangzhou?
    - Did you feel any perspectives or other views were missing? If so, what are they and how would their inclusion have changed the film?

- In *Disorder*, who holds the power in each scene? How do you know? Why is this important, and how does the role of power—or a lack thereof—affect each person's life? In what ways does power result in control over others' lives? Did you see any examples of this in the film? If so, in what ways?

- Why might watching film credits be important? In addition to recognizing the many people, businesses and organizations it takes to make a film, what other information can the audience learn from watching them?

HUANG WEIKAI: IN HIS OWN WORDS
A hallmark of the True/False experience is watching a film and having the immediate gratification of asking questions / getting answers from the filmmaker(s). While the below resource isn't IRL, it nonetheless will provide students with insight into Weikai's filmmaking process, sources of inspiration, and how those things and more result in what we see on screen during *Disorder*.[8]

ARTICLE: CinemaTalk: Interview with Huang Weikai, Director of *Disorder* | dGenerate Films

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[8] Photo Courtesy of Icarus Films.

Also, be sure to check out our interview with Weikai, available to view during the Hindsight screening window for *Disorder* (April 18-25th)!

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: COMPARE & CONTRAST

Hua Hsu begins his 2010 *Atlantic* article, *Huang Weikai's Absurd New Film*, with the following description:

"China is massive. It is changing, daily, at a staggering pace. A dirt-paved plot of land, lined with children scavenging for spare change: Weeks later, and it's the world's largest sporting goods store, complete with ground-floor cafe. Drop your laundry off on the way to dinner, only to return the following morning and see that the strip of buildings has been reduced to rubble; they moved across town to a fancier location while you were sleeping. These stories, these impressions of narrative, are fairly commonplace, and most people who have spent time in China's cities have experienced something like them…"[9]

READ & DISCUSS

As a class, read Hsu's description of life in China, and discuss specific visual representations of his words that were found in *Disorder*.

While urbanization and censorship are commonplace in China, it is not unique to that country; rather, both take place in many forms around the world, including the U.S., and even in Columbia, MO. One common factor where both urbanization and censorship is found is the commodity of power: who holds it, who doesn't hold it, and the lengths people and governing bodies will go to keep it.

Before moving onto the next part of this activity, ask students to consider and think about the following:

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[9]Hsu, H. (2010). *Huang Weikai's Absurd New Film*. The Atlantic.
Photo Courtesy of Icarus Films.

CENSORSHIP
- How do censorship and fake news relate to each other? How are they different? Does someone who holds power (politicians, journalists, famous people, etc.) telling the public something that isn't true or discrediting factual information as a means to intentionally alter the perspective of an event or reality itself fall on the spectrum of censorship? Why or why not?
- Have you ever seen or experienced a form of censorship? Can you think of any examples of censorship that have occurred in the U.S.?

URBANIZATION
- What are some examples of urbanization in the U.S.? Globally? (Spoiler alert: It has taken place in almost every city or town to some degree since, well, forever.)
- Within those examples, who decided when drastic changes to community infrastructure were made? Who were the people who were the most affected? Are the ones who make the decisions and the people who are the most likely to be affected, the same people? Why does this matter?
- Similar to censorship, urbanization can take on different forms, and be used by those who have power to exert control (or in some cases, extend their power through increasing sources of revenue). Is there an "up side" to urbanization? What arguments have been provided for why an area needs or would benefit from urbanization?

RESEARCH
- Divide students into pairs (or larger groups, depending on class size). Provide them with time in class to research a city or country that has experienced urbanization. Either in class or an out of class assignment, ask students to provide the following details:
  - Where (location of community/city/state/country)?
  - What was life like there before urbanization?
  - How was urbanization presented or explained to the city? What explanations were provided as to why it was needed?
  - When did changes to the infrastructure / landscape of the city change?
  - Who and what was affected? In what ways?
  - What are the lasting effects for that city? Were some people disproportionately more affected than others?
  - Who is benefitting / has benefitted from urbanization in the city you are researching?

PRESENT
- Ask each group to provide an overview of the community/city/state/country they researched, incorporating answers to the above questions, being sure to include specific examples.

BRING IT BACK HOME
- Teachers in Columbia, MO: Introduce students to the Sharp End, a prominent Black business district in Columbia that was razed in the 1960s as a part of what was called "urban renewal". See how many of the questions above listed under "Research" you (as a class) are able to answer.

- The following resources can be used to help students take a deeper look at the Sharp End and Columbia's historic relationship with our Black community:

- [_Columbia's Historic Sharp End_ Booklet](#) | Columbia Tribune (2015)
  - Originally delivered to Columbia Tribune subscribers as an insert in a newspaper in 2015, it has since been transferred online, making it widely accessible. Woven throughout this booklet are invaluable oral histories and archival photos that provide insight and information about the history of Columbia's Black community from the early 1900s through the 1960's, which saw the razing of the Sharp End, an area of Black owned-businesses, restaurants, and house near downtown Columbia.

- [_Remembering the importance and removal of Columbia's Sharp End_](#) | Columbia Daily Tribune (2021)

NOTE: If you're located at a high school beyond Columbia, MO's borders, we suggest diving deep into your own local history (perhaps consulting with community members, local historians, your state's historical society, etc.).

HUANG WEIKAI | FILMOGRAPHY
Laden's Body Could Be Nothing But a Copy (2002)
Floating (2008)
Disorder (2009)
Give Confucius a Break (2014)

RESOURCE LIST FOR *DISORDER*

Film Information & Photos

Icarus Films. (2021). *From the dGenerate Films Collection Disorder.*
http://icarusfilms.com/df-diso

IMDb: Huang Weikai's Filmography https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3628239/

Icarus Films. (2021). http://misc.icarusfilms.com/presskit/diso_pk.html#photos

Supplemental Information

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https://www.indiewire.com/2015/02/sundance-is-it-documentary-or-journalism-248215/

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https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/city-on-fire-close-up-on-huang-weikai-s-disorder?gclid=CjwKCAiAg8OBBhA8EiwAlKw3kvHZSptCfqCvwvN4NrT22tGmUYZoekqxutVejBWFsq7qldmDAiJ7MhoCEy0QAvD_BwE

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Newsome, L. (2021). *Remembering the importance and removal of Columbia's Sharp End*. Columbia Daily Tribune. https://www.columbiatribune.com/story/news/history/2021/02/19/sharp-end-columbia-discussion-black-history-month-boone-county/6799124002/

PEN AMERICA: *Made in America, Censored by Beijing* (2020). https://pen.org/report/made-in-hollywood-censored-by-beijing/

Rosenbaum, R. (2013). *What Does the Zapruder Film Really Tell Us?* Smithsonian Magazine. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/what-does-the-zapruder-film-really-tell-us-14194/

Vicat,M. (2012). *Chinese Independent Filmmaking: Freedom is a State of Mind.* 3 Dots Water. http://www.3dotswater.com/CURRENTS05-dgenerate.html

Xu, B. & Albert, E. (2017). *Media Censorship in China.* Council on Foreign Affairs. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/media-censorship-china