

# ■ Reconsidering “Cinéma Vérité” and “Direct Cinema”: The Modes and Strategies of Documentary Filmmaking in Hong Kong Protest Documentaries *Yellowing* and *Inside the Red Brick Wall*\*

Ting-Ying Lin  
National Chengchi University

## Abstract

Shifting the focus from the prevalent issues including the environmental, political, and historical connections that have been extensively explored in the recent scholarship on Hong Kong protest documentaries, this article reconsiders and reevaluates the less-examined domain of documentary filmmaking paradigms, with a particular emphasis on “cinéma vérité” and “direct cinema.” It focuses on the analysis of two pivotal Hong Kong protest documentaries, *Yellowing*, centered on the 2014 Umbrella Movement, and *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, which documents the events during the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement. This article investigates how the two documentaries manifest the distinctive characteristics of cinéma vérité and direct cinema respectively, shedding light on the modes and strategies of documentary filmmaking in these two works. More specifically, the

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**Ting-Ying Lin** is an Assistant Professor in the Master’s and Doctor’s Program in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language at National Chengchi University, Taiwan. She received her PhD in Media and Communications from Goldsmiths, University of London, UK. Her research focuses on contemporary Taiwan cinema, Hong Kong cinema, Sinophone cinema and screen cultures. She has recently published in *East Asian Film Remakes* (Edinburgh University Press), *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, and *Chung-Wai Literary Quarterly*. E-mail: tlin@nccu.edu.tw

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first section of the article critically examines *Yellowing*, illustrating how this documentary embodies the participatory, reflexive, and interventionist dimensions of cinéma vérité, reassessing the problems and limitations of this paradigm in documentary filmmaking. In the second section, the focus shifts to *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, which examines the observational approach of direct cinema employed by the filmmakers and how this documentary transcends the conventions of direct cinema through the documentary filmmakers' editorial and transformative strategies. Ultimately, this article argues that these two representative Hong Kong protest documentaries, *Yellowing* and *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, embody the characteristics of cinéma vérité and direct cinema respectively, offering a perspective through which to analyze the relation between documentary filmmaking techniques and the representation of reality. By explicating these two exemplars of Hong Kong cinema, this article seeks to provide theoretical contributions with critical insights into the paradigms of cinéma vérité and direct cinema.

**Keywords:** Hong Kong cinema, Hong Kong protest documentaries, cinéma vérité, direct cinema, *Yellowing*, *Inside the Red Brick Wall*

## Introduction

After the 2014 Hong Kong Umbrella Movement, a multitude of documentaries related to the social movement emerged, including Kwok Tat Chun and Kong King Chu's *Almost a Revolution* (2015), Evans Chan's *Raise the Umbrellas* (2016), Chan Tze-woon's *Yellowing* (2016), Nora Lam and Samuel Wong's *Road Not Taken* (2016), and others. Scholars and local film critics have also introduced the term "post-Umbrella Movement film," denoting the films and documentaries that concern the Umbrella Movement itself or reflect the contemporary political and social conditions in Hong Kong (Lin 25).<sup>1</sup> As Vivian P. Y. Lee points out, the term "post-Umbrella Movement film" has been used in mass media "to refer to films that make direct or indirect references to the civil disobedience movement in 2014 and Hong Kong's political situation ever since" (77). Subsequently, similar to the phenomenon after the 2014 Umbrella Movement, there has been a considerable production of Hong Kong documentaries on the protests related to the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, and experimental documentaries on this subject matter have appeared in recent years. In addition to Kiwi Chow's renowned documentary *Revolution of Our Times* (2021), which was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in France and the Golden Horse International Film Festival in Taiwan, other protest documentaries, short documentaries, and experimental documentaries related to the Anti-Extradition Movement or based on it have also emerged recently. These include *Taking Back the Legislature* (2020) and *Inside the Red Brick Wall* (2020) by the anonymous group Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers, Chang Kai Jie's *Save Poly U* (2020), and Anson Hoi Shan Mak's *Fear(less) and Dear* (2020), as well as Norwegian director Anders Hammer's *Do Not Split* (2020) and Australian director Sophie McNeill's *Rebellion* (2020) and others.

Amidst the existing literature, scholars have focused on various issues including the environment and local consciousness (Tam, "A Turn" 156-57; Yee 120) and media and politics (Pang, *Sunset Not Yet* 233-44; Pang, *The Appearing Demos* 127-28), as well as trauma, history, and memories (Wan 137-46) embedded in the Hong Kong protest documentaries. However, the modes, strategies, and techniques employed by the documentary filmmakers to make the documentaries and the ways they represent the reality also play a pivotal role but are

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<sup>1</sup> The term "post-Umbrella Movement film" or "post-Umbrella-Revolution cinema" is coined by Hong Kong film scholar Enoch Yee-lok Tam and local film critics Chang Wai-Hung in the special issue "Post-Umbrella-Revolution Cinema" of *HKinema* in 2017 (Tam, "Post-Space-Protest" 2; Chang 1). Hereafter, other Hong Kong film scholars such as Vivian P. Y. Lee also use the term "post-Umbrella Movement film" to denote similar concepts (Lee 77).

rather less examined, evaluated, and reflected upon in the field of Hong Kong documentary studies. Accordingly, this article aims to provide a neglected angle to examine Hong Kong protest documentaries by reconsidering and reevaluating the paradigms of documentary filmmaking, with a specific revisitation and emphasis on the concepts of *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema.

Considering the modes and strategies of documentary filmmaking in Hong Kong protest documentaries, which often reveal the truth and societal reality during the social movements, a revisitation of the two paradigms in documentary history—i.e., *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema—is necessary, particularly in terms of their differing approaches to representing reality. By analyzing the two representative Hong Kong protest documentaries, namely, *Yellowing*, which centers on the 2014 Umbrella Movement, and *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, which documents the events during the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, this article will examine how these two documentaries individually manifest the features of *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema. These two documentaries are significant and worth further analysis because they distinctively and realistically document the acts and actions of different groups of young activists in the protest scenes during the 2014 and 2019 social movements, respectively. Additionally, the filmmaking techniques employed in these two documentaries can be further explored and analyzed in relation to the two varying documentary paradigms.

To be specific, this article begins with an analysis of how the representative Hong Kong protest documentary *Yellowing* on the 2014 Umbrella Movement manifests the participatory, reflexive, and interventionist approaches of *cinéma vérité*. A critical reevaluation on the problematics regarding the approach of *cinéma vérité* used in *Yellowing* will also be provided, focusing on documentary filmmaking techniques and their relationship with the representation of reality. The second section focuses on the other significant Hong Kong protest documentary—*Inside the Red Brick Wall*, which examines the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement. This analysis explores how this protest documentary displays the observational characteristics of direct cinema and showcases the editorial and transformative strategies that transcend the conventional boundaries of direct cinema. A critical reading on this documentary will also be offered in terms of the issues in the direct cinema paradigm. In the end, it is emphasized that in order to examine the studies on Hong Kong documentaries from a new perspective, the strategies and techniques of documentary filmmaking need to be reconsidered and reevaluated. In doing so, this article on the one hand aims to argue that the two representative Hong Kong protest documentaries *Yellowing* and *Inside the Red Brick Wall* exemplify the traits of *cinéma vérité*

and direct cinema paradigms respectively. On the other hand, it also provides a critical assessment of the problematic aspects of the two documentaries, considering the interplay between the modes of documentary filmmaking and the representation of reality. Ultimately, through the elucidation of these two exemplars, this article endeavors to furnish theoretical contributions by offering critical perspectives on the paradigms of *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema.

### **Toward Cinéma Vérité: The Participatory, Reflexive, and Interventionist Approaches in *Yellowing***

Given the modes of Hong Kong protest documentaries, *Yellowing* stands out as a significant work that exemplifies the features of *cinéma vérité* through its filmmaking techniques and strategies. The historical development of documentary aesthetics, techniques, and creative strategies can be traced back to the 1960s. When it comes to the paradigm of *cinéma vérité*, documentary theorist Bill Nichols highlights that the film *Chronicle of a Summer* (*Chronique d'un été*, 1961) by French ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch and sociologist Edgar Morin is generally regarded as the beginning of *cinéma vérité*. In *Chronicle of a Summer*, Rouch and Morin assembled a group of people as the subjects, capturing Paris as the main filming location during the summer of 1960. They followed these subjects, fostering group discussions, and recording their actions and reactions. Notably, within the framework of *cinéma vérité*, documentary filmmakers actively incite the unfolding of events.<sup>2</sup> In this documentary, without the active intervention of the filmmakers through questioning, such dialogues would not have occurred, even though the roles and abilities attributed to the social actors would remain unaltered (*Introduction* 32). Specifically, the creative approach employed by Rouch and Morin in *Chronicle of a Summer* deviates from that of mere passive observational documentary filmmakers, rather resembling the engagement of a participant with a camera on a journey. Analogous to psychoanalytic stimulants, this technique elicits discussions about matters that would otherwise remain untouched. The subjects in *Chronicle of a Summer* were even invited into a screening room to view and discuss the footage, and this process of discussion was also recorded and incor-

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, in *Chronicle of a Summer*, director Rouch poses a question to Landry, a student from the Ivory Coast in the film, regarding the significance of a tattoo on Marceline Lorian's arm. This prompts Lorian to reveal her experiences in concentration camps during World War II (Nichols, *Introduction* 32).

porated as a segment in the entire film (Barnouw 254). In terms of its distinctive techniques and creative strategies, this method of filming which triggers revelations through questioning and discussion defines the concept of *cinéma vérité*, representing one of the earliest instances of documentary filmmaking utilizing a participatory mode (Nichols, *Introduction* 32).<sup>3</sup>

Considering its association with the *cinéma vérité* paradigm in terms of its filmmaking techniques, the following section focuses on the Hong Kong documentary film *Yellowing*, which is directed by Chan Tze-woon and centers around the 2014 Umbrella Movement of Hong Kong. Through a compilation of twenty varying-length documentary memoirs, this documentary chronicles the engagement of several young activists in the social movement. In terms of the thematic subject of the documentary film, through the depiction of a group of young activists' engagement in the social movement, *Yellowing* shows the realization that the younger generation in Hong Kong is now burdened with the responsibility of rectifying the failures attributed to "individualism, subjectivisation, and autonomisation" (Fan 237). Regarding film distribution and reception, *Yellowing* has gained positive recognition at international independent film festivals, such as in Taiwan, Vancouver, and the Czech Republic. However, despite its international recognition, mainstream cinemas in Hong Kong have refrained from screening this protest documentary. Regarding this phenomenon, recent independent films in Hong Kong related to protest movements have encountered challenges in distribution and exhibition due to the pressures from the authorities (Ng 96). Considering this issue, the production team of *Yellowing* has resorted to conducting guerrilla screenings at venues like school lecture halls and local museums, countering the challenge of the marginalization of the documentary film in the framework of film production in Hong Kong. Additionally, the complicity of mainstream media is evident in this mechanism, whereby these channels adhere to official narratives and suppress the voices of protesters. This phenomenon strengthens the director Chan Tze-woon's motivation to manifest the voices of the protesters through the filmmaking of *Yellowing* (Ng 96).

Chan Tze-woon's filmmaking in *Yellowing* echoes what documentary theo-

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<sup>3</sup> The term "*cinéma vérité*" originates from the work of Russian director Dziga Vertov, specifically his notion of "*kino-pravda*" or "film truth." This spirit of filmmaking resonates with Vertov's concept of the "*kino-eye*," and it is evident in his renowned film *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) in which film techniques are used to explore reality (Barnouw 254). However, Bill Nichols emphasizes that despite the foundation of the *cinéma vérité* associated with Vertov's pursuit of capturing reality through the "*kino-eye*," the creative strategy employed in *Chronicle of a Summer* diverges significantly and leans more towards participatory filming intervention (*Introduction* 164).

rist Bill Nichols terms the “participatory mode” of documentary filmmaking,<sup>4</sup> wherein the documentarian establishes direct engagement with the surrounding world and actively records their involvement in it.<sup>5</sup> These techniques also embody the strategies of the *cinéma vérité* documentary paradigm, which involves the documentarian’s participation, intervention, or inquiry during the filmmaking process, further interrogating, prompting, or even instigating the events. In other words, through the director’s participatory and deeply involved approach of *cinéma vérité*, *Yellowing* can be regarded as a coming-of-age narrative for both the young students captured in the film and the documentarist Chan Tze-woon himself. Chan never identifies himself as an activist and does not view *Yellowing* as a political film. Instead, creating the documentary became a journey of introspection for Chan—a quest to provide meanings for the experiences of the subjects, their perceptions of life as depicted, their views on society, and their discourses on social justice. Notably, *Yellowing* serves as a self-inquiry documentary, recounting the emotional and reflective responses of the documentary’s subjects, and pondering how to facilitate understanding of the occurrences for both young activists and those being documented. Chan Tze-woon regards the production of this documentary as a form of self-exploration—a process of young generations engaging in narrating themselves and their experiences in witnessing the movement (Ng 93).

The following section provides a further analysis and critical evaluation of the ways in which *Yellowing* embodies the paradigm of *cinéma vérité* considering its techniques of documentary filmmaking in terms of participatory, reflexive, and interventionist approaches. Through an analysis of *Yellowing*, the problematic aspects in the paradigm of *cinéma vérité* are also highlighted. Notably, in *Yellowing*, the director Chan Tze-woon utilizes several distinct

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to the renowned paradigms of direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* in the history of documentary filmmaking, documentary historian and theorist Bill Nichols has categorized documentary films into seven differing modes, which are “poetic mode, expository mode, observational mode, participatory mode, reflexive mode, performative mode, and interactive mode” (*Introduction* 22–23).

<sup>5</sup> Hong Kong film historian Kenny Kwok Kwan Ng employs a “fly’s-eye view” perspective as an analytical framework to examine *Yellowing*. Ng asserts that while the “bird’s-eye view” perspective connects to a macro-historical overview, the “fly’s-eye view” perspective zooms in on a micro-historical angle, representing a bottom-up approach to observations (91). In contrast to Chan Tze-woon’s *Yellowing*, Ng highlights the other Umbrella Movement documentary *Raise the Umbrellas* by renowned Hong Kong director Evans Chan, who adopts a comprehensive macro-historical viewpoint, aiming to trace the historical origins and impacts of the Umbrella Movement back to the Tiananmen Incident (92). In Kenny Kwok Kwan Ng’s view, comparatively, while *Raise the Umbrellas* provides a comprehensive, “bird’s-eye view” of the mass movement, Chan Tze-woon’s *Yellowing* deliberately omits the voices from the politicians, reflecting the emotional facets of the younger generation and giving voice to the ordinary citizens (93). In other words, *Yellowing* does not focus on interviewing the prominent activists but rather emphasizes the voices of general protesters.

techniques in relation to the cinéma vérité paradigm. First of all, he establishes meaningful connections with young activists who played pivotal roles in the Umbrella Movement. Using one of the distinct strategies of cinéma vérité—through open dialogues and discussions conducted during the filming process—Chan creates a platform for questioning these activists, thereby capturing a broader spectrum of realities and perspectives associated with the movement. Additionally, in *Yellowing*, Chan employs a filmmaking technique closely documenting the experiences of various activists, with a particular emphasis on two Hong Kong University students, Rachel and Keric, by asking them questions about their engagement in the social movement. In these scenes, Chan accompanies one of these young activists to their family residence in Cheung Chau. Here, casual conversations with family members naturally evolve into inquiries that facilitate the exploration of intergenerational dialogues and the underlying realities experienced by these individuals. It is one of the distinct techniques used by Chan involving and inciting casual conversations and frequent questions that embodies the feature of cinéma vérité and unfolds the underlying realities in *Yellowing*.

Furthermore, considering the filmmaking techniques of the director, *Yellowing* features the presence of director Chan Tze-woon himself, who provides narration through voice-over—a departure from the strict adherence to the direct cinema approach, which typically avoids the interference or presence of the director. Instead, Chan's narration is more associated with the spectrum of cinéma vérité. In *Yellowing*, Chan articulates his personal journey, investigates the historical context surrounding the Umbrella Movement, recounts his active involvement in the movement, and even elaborates on his encounters with police attacks during that period. Crucially, in numerous scenes of *Yellowing*, Chan engages in repeated discussions with the young activists of the Umbrella Movement regarding fundamental questions about civic protest and the movement's perceived success or failure. This process serves as a testament to the documentary's self-reflexivity and its exploration of the traumatic experiences intertwined with Chan's own identity and the collective experiences of the activists.

It is crucial to emphasize the filmmaking techniques in relation to the cinéma vérité paradigm employed by the director Chan Tze-woon in *Yellowing*. By establishing genuine friendships and fostering dialogues with the young activists on the streets of Hong Kong, Chan ensures that the documentary captures a diverse range of perspectives and experiences related to the Umbrella Movement. This approach departs from the traditional direct cinema model, which tends to adopt a more observational stance without direct engagement



with the subjects. Rather, Chan actively participates in discussions, thereby allowing for a richer exploration of the multifarious realities and viewpoints regarding the movement. Furthermore, the presence of director Chan Tze-woon himself as a narrator in *Yellowing* signifies a difference from the conventions of direct cinema. While direct cinema typically seeks to maintain objectivity and minimize the director's influence, Chan's cinéma vérité approach and decision to narrate through voice-overs provide the documentary with a personal dimension. Through his narration, Chan shares his own experiences, emotions, and perspectives, creating a sense of shared journey with the audience.

Accordingly, Chan Tze-woon utilizes the cinéma vérité approach in *Yellowing*, encompassing an engagement with the subjects. In doing so, he examines the individual experiences, creates intergenerational dialogues, and incorporates the director's personal narrative. These techniques collectively contribute to a documentary that manifests the features of cinéma vérité and offers a more intimate and comprehensive portrayal of the Umbrella Movement and its impact on both the activists and the filmmaker himself. However, in *Yellowing*, the utilization of the cinéma vérité strategy still displays the restrictions related to the intervention and framing by the director. Chan's active engagement with young activists and his candid discussions with them during the filming process raise questions about the extent to which his presence and interactions influence the unfolding events. Chan's active participation in dialogues, both as a director and a narrator through voice-overs, introduces a degree of subjectivity and intervention.

Crucially, Keith Beattie has shed light on the problems and limitations in the paradigms of cinéma vérité, which stem from the performance elements in the process of representing reality. Through an analysis of *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961), one of the pivotal examples of cinéma vérité, Beattie emphasizes that the film "raise[s] questions concerning the place of performance within observational and interactive modes designed to reveal truth" (85). Since the subjects are aware of the camera, this awareness leads to performative acts in its presence. With regard to the "provocative potential of the camera," in *Chronicle of a Summer*, cinéma vérité operates under the premise that individuals consistently assume roles, constantly engaging in "performing impressions of themselves" (93). Given the aforementioned critical insights provided by Keith Beattie on the paradigm of cinéma vérité, the subjects in *Yellowing* are also aware of the presence of the camera, thereby demonstrating the performative acts in revealing truth. Furthermore, Chan's filmmaking technique to closely document specific young activists and focus on particular individuals inherently shapes the narrative and frames the viewer's perception of the truth. This technique

can unintentionally introduce a directorial bias and impact the documentary's objectivity. Hence, despite the fact that the intention of the *cinéma vérité* approach is to capture the unfolding reality, the limitations regarding intervention, performance, and framing persist in *Yellowing*. As a result, Chan's approach underscores the inherent tension between the pursuit of *vérité* and the inevitable influence of the filmmaker's subjectivity.

### **Almost Direct Cinema: The Observational, Editorial, and Transformative Strategies in *Inside the Red Brick Wall***

Considering the modes of Hong Kong protest documentaries, *Inside the Red Brick Wall* is one of the significant works that embodies the features of direct cinema in terms of its filmmaking techniques and its association with the socio-cultural and political context. The concept of direct cinema was introduced by Albert Maysles in 1964 in order to refer to the documentary practice that utilized synchronous sound and image recording, distinguishing it from the often-conflated concept of *cinéma vérité* (Verano 153). Maysles posits that the essence of direct cinema lies in the filmmaker's need to uphold a conviction that their presence does not influence ongoing or imminent events. For the practitioners of direct cinema, the camera assumes the role of the fly on the wall, as if it were absent from the filming scene. This approach highlights quiet observation and unobtrusive recording, refraining from interference or intervention in the unfolding of events. This silent presence aims to preserve the "authenticity" of visual records (Verano 156). Furthermore, Maysles also emphasizes that his advocacy for the concept of direct cinema revolves around the idea that through documentary practice, audiovisual media endows filmmakers with a unique opportunity to capture reality, thereby aiming to represent authenticity (Verano 158). Dave Saunders further points out that the intellectual contributions of direct cinema involve a significant discourse about the U.S., concerning the socio-cultural and political aspects in the country within the era marked and characterized by turmoil (1), notably the social movements of the 1960s that challenged authority and advocated for civil rights, anti-war sentiments, and social justice.

In comparison with the first section on *Yellowing* wherein the director employed the modes and strategies of *cinéma vérité* in documentary filmmaking, this section elaborates on how the other representative Hong Kong protest documentary *Inside the Red Brick Wall* displays the traits of direct cinema and further transforms it. *Inside the Red Brick Wall* is a collaborative work made by

the anonymous group Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers. This documentary focuses on the large-scale clashes that occurred over multiple days between the protesters and the police during the Anti-Extradition Movement in November 2019 around and inside the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. In contrast to the narrative modes of previous Hong Kong protest documentaries, which centered around individuals, personal narratives, and recorded public debates during the Umbrella Movement period, the filmmakers of *Inside the Red Brick Wall* employed different filming techniques capturing the intensifying 2019 Anti-Extradition Movement.<sup>6</sup>

In *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, the anonymous Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers choose the direct cinema approach to capture the protest scenes. This filming technique involves the use of the camera as a fly on the wall, silently observing from the sidelines, allowing the events to unfold naturally—the filmmakers do not appear in the film themselves, not intervening, interfering, or disrupting the events, which can be associated with the core concept proposed by Albert Maysles, the pioneer of direct cinema. Significantly, considering the protest scenes depicted in *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, the spontaneous and flowing nature of both the protesters and the filmmakers contributes to the presentation of real-time images capturing chases and clashes between the police and the protesters (Pernin). In other words, in the protest scenes where tensions run high between the protesters and the Hong Kong police, the documentary filmmakers employ flexible and rapid-moving cameras. In the filmmaking process of the Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers, the camera maintains a dynamic presence, continuously striving to capture events as they naturally occur on the ground. This active camera captures the motion of a human body, displaying fluctuations, movements, and occasional interactions with other entities (Sia 35). Crucially, *Inside the Red Brick Wall* demonstrates how the filmmakers closely but unobtrusively follow the protesters, providing viewers with an immersive experience that allows them to witness the intensity and conflicts of the protest scenes, embodying the key characteristics of direct cinema.

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, as pointed out by Matt Turner—unlike the filming strategies used in the works such as British documentary filmmaker Matthew Torne's *Lessons in Dissent* (2014) and Nora Lam's *Lost in the Fumes* (2018), which respectively focus on two significant protesters, Joshua Wong and Edward Leung, and explore their individual journeys and turning points during the social movement—the anonymous Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers who shot *Inside the Red Brick Wall* adopt a simpler and more direct narrative form. Notably, *Inside the Red Brick Wall* does not emphasize the multi-stage advocacy of democratic protests as other Hong Kong protest documentaries often do. It refrains from presenting viewpoints through the retrospective analysis of key figures' experiences in the movement. Instead, its narrative strategy can be perceived as an attempt to convey the experience of being present at the protest scenes and to capture the sense of real-time events (Turner).

Furthermore, a distinguishing feature of *Inside the Red Brick Wall* is its composition of moving images filmed by multiple anonymous Hong Kong documentary filmmakers. This collaborative creative approach reflects the decentralized nature of the entire Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, and the anonymity of the filmmakers also to some extent showcases their fearlessness and the agility of camera movements (Turner). The documentary filmmaking technique of *Inside the Red Brick Wall* resembles a news production mode rather than the conventional process associated with traditional documentaries. It aims to capture a sense of immediacy, presenting the real-time scenes of the Hong Kong Anti-Extradition Movement protest sites to a global audience. This documentary filmmaking technique reflects the rapidly changing dynamics of the protests. The filmmakers neither offer commentary on the unfolding events nor speculate about future occurrences. Instead, the anonymous Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers distill materials and present them in a witnessing manner, allowing the viewers to reflect upon and remember the events (Turner).<sup>7</sup> Such documentary filmmaking technique also sheds light on the core concept proposed by direct cinema filmmakers, wherein documentary filmmakers maintain the principle of preserving authenticity through silent and unobtrusive on-site recording, as demonstrated in *Inside the Red Brick Wall*.<sup>8</sup>

Significantly, documentary films like *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, using observational documentary techniques or adhering to the direct cinema paradigm, may not provide comprehensive information like didactic macro documentaries. Instead, their contribution lies in offering the viewers a deeper understanding of the psychological states of the participants in the protests. This film sheds light on how protesters articulate their individuality in the collective intense on-site circumstances. On the other hand, the portrayal of traumatic experiences in *Inside the Red Brick Wall* is also noteworthy. Through the non-interventionist and non-intrusive filming strategy of direct cinema, this

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<sup>7</sup> This perspective resonates with the observation made by Sebastian Veg—*Inside the Red Brick Wall* captures the intense tension of the protest scenes and the immediate anxieties felt by the protesters through the camera's lens. The film carries a strong sense of presence in its filming process, showcasing the "authenticity" of the images (Veg).

<sup>8</sup> Considering the interconnected relationship between the modes of documentary filmmaking in *Inside the Red Brick Wall* and the dynamics of the social movement itself, Judith Pernin further emphasizes her observation that the evolving nature of the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement protests—particularly the use of radical tactics, fluidity, and anonymity—has shaped the production practices of protest-site documentaries. This evolution of protest forms has subsequently influenced the filming techniques of documentaries, thereby influencing the modes of filmmaking and aesthetic outcomes of the final films. Consistent with the nature of the Anti-Extradition Movement, the collaborative or collective approaches taken by the anonymous team of Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers resonate with the horizontal and leaderless fluid structures of the protests (Pernin).

documentary that focuses on the pivotal moments of the Hong Kong Anti-Extradition Movement allows the viewers to examine the individuals committed to this collective action and to share in the anxiety, exhilaration, and dilemmas encountered during the protests (Pernin). As emphasized by Sebastian Veg, *Inside the Red Brick Wall* faithfully documents the clashes and confrontations between the protesters and Hong Kong police, as well as the internal contradictions and debates among the protesters regarding the escalation of actions and the decision to leave the scene. Particularly in the context of the all-in and all-out belief of the protesters depicted in the documentary, the depiction of the young protesters' hesitations and internal conflicts regarding leaving, how to leave, and whether leaving constitutes a betrayal of their comrades intensifies the psychological impact on the audience.<sup>9</sup> Here, it is crucial to emphasize that in one particularly notable scene that captures the concluding stages of the events, the techniques the filmmakers employ embody the principles of direct cinema. The Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers discreetly bear witness without interference as the camera is positioned beside the stairs of the university. In this scene, the viewers can see these young activists naturally react and respond regardless of the presence of the camera. This technique hence captures the genuine reactions, contradictions, and choices of the young protesters facing the dilemma of whether to leave or stay.

However, on the other hand, as in the aforementioned problematic aspects in the *cinéma vérité* paradigm, Keith Beattie raises similar concerns about the paradigm of direct cinema in terms of the subject's awareness of the camera and its performance. Beattie focuses on one of the representative cases in the direct cinema paradigm—*Don't Look Back* (1967), directed by D. A. Pennebaker. In this documentary, the subjects' off-stage "performances" for the camera complicate "the direct cinema rhetoric of detached observationalism and the claim that the presence of a camera does not modify a subject's behaviour" (102). Building upon Beattie's critical insights on the paradigm of direct cinema, it is noteworthy that in *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, when another group of protesters on campus engage in discussions about whether to stay or leave, how to withdraw, and the idea of collective action, the viewers can also see some of the subjects are aware of the presence of the camera. This leads to the perfor-

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<sup>9</sup> According to the account of Sebastian Veg, *Inside the Red Brick Wall* can be regarded as a portrayal of the traumatic experiences of the protesters. In a similar vein, Yuqi Zhang points out that the filming approach taken by the Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers in *Inside the Red Brick Wall* not only allows the audiences to directly engage with the collective memory of the protest scenes but also conveys the shared traumatic feelings experienced by the public in Hong Kong who have collectively endured the societal upheaval.

mance elements in the process of representing truth as the limitations of direct cinema as Beattie critically suggests (85). Hence, this filming approach causes the documentary to deviate from the principles of direct cinema. Moreover, the awareness of the camera by the subjects introduces the issues of inauthenticity in the process of representing reality.

The following section centers around how *Inside the Red Brick Wall* simultaneously embodies and alters the features of direct cinema through its observational, editorial, and transformative techniques. It is worth noting that, as mentioned above, the Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers employ the direct cinema approach regarding the filming techniques in *Inside the Red Brick Wall*. This highlights the use of cameras to quietly observe the subjects, without direct involvement, intervention, or disruption by the filmmakers. The documentary filmmakers patiently await the organic and genuine unfolding of events—this approach of documentary filmmaking, in general terms, can be categorized within the spectrum of direct cinema in documentary filmmaking. However, if we closely analyze how the Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers compose and edit the documentary footage of *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, it becomes evident that they deviate from the pure spectrum of the direct cinema paradigm.

Notably, through the following three techniques, the Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers have further transformed the strategies of direct cinema in *Inside the Red Brick Wall*. Firstly, in contrast to the previous Hong Kong protest documentaries, particularly those centering on the Umbrella Movement, *Inside the Red Brick Wall* does not focus on any specific individuals or characters, nor does it incorporate a distinct narrative framework. However, when closely analyzing the editing and composition strategies of *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, we can figure out that Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers adopt a systematic and conscious approach to the handling of their documentary footage. Using a logical and chronological principle, they reassemble the footage captured at the varying scenes of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University protests, crafting a structure akin to that of a three-act drama—characterized by a setup-conflict-resolution narrative curve. This setup-conflict-resolution structure enables the spectators to experience the rise, development, turning points, and conclusion of the entire social movement through documentary composition. However, it should be emphasized that this technique can also raise debate on the issue of the constructed reality in documentary filmmaking. As Bill Nichols points out, “[documentary narratives] offer introductory lacks, challenges, or dilemmas; they build heightened tensions and dramatically rising conflicts, and they terminate with resolution and closure. They do all this with reference to a ‘reality’

that is a construct" (*Representing Reality* 107). Accordingly, the documentary footage in *Inside the Red Brick Wall* represents the objectivity captured from the on-site protest scenes through the direct cinema strategies employed by the Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers. In doing so, they simultaneously involve the constructed reality using the linear narrative strategy during the stage of film editing. Although the documentary filmmakers follow the principle of direct cinema and uphold the authenticity in *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, the filmmakers employ a linear editing technique, which therefore denotes a certain degree of the filmmaker's intervention in the representation of reality. This further highlights one of the potential limitations of direct cinema in the practice of documentary filmmaking: echoing the aforementioned viewpoint of Bill Nichols, even if the filmmakers initially adhere to the principles of direct cinema and have no intention of intervening, when they employ editing to create a certain documentary narrative, the reality unavoidably becomes both constructed and influenced by their strategies.

In the second place, the strategic deployment of empty shots by the Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers is also pivotal as a transformative method deviating from the pure direct cinema style in *Inside the Red Brick Wall*. To be specific, the Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers not only focus on the tense clashes between the protesters and the police but also further deliberately deploy specific empty shots between these clashes. Some of the empty shots capture the aftermath of the conflicts as the campus resumes its normal appearance after the clashes, while others depict the campus abandoned and deserted after the protests, with only discarded protest signs and objects appearing on the screen. Notably, Yuqi Zhang posits that when the Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers brought the cameras back to the Hong Kong Polytechnic University campus after the siege and captured several empty shots for *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, these meaningful empty shots are a departure from the observational documentary model proposed by Bill Nichols. These empty shots are also deviant from the direct cinema paradigm mentioned above, reflexively breaking down the theoretical fourth wall. Such reflexive scenes not only underscore the presence of the documentary filmmakers but also provide the viewers with a participatory perspective (Zhang). In other words, the strategic deployment of the empty shots in *Inside the Red Brick Wall* serves to differentiate from the original direct cinema strategies. Notably, by enabling the audience to be aware of the filmmakers' presence, with the inclusion of accompanying music in the concluding scene, coupled with the arrangement of empty shots, the filmmakers inevitably display a certain degree of subjective intervention in the process of representing reality, bringing about a lingering impact that is



profound and yet unfinished in *Inside the Red Brick Wall*.

Thirdly, if we revisit the historical context wherein the concept of direct cinema emerged, a crucial factor was the technological innovation of synchronous sound recording in documentary filmmaking. This innovation allowed the filmmakers to present authentic on-site scenes with the integration of synchronized audio and video. However, in *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, although most of the documentary effectively embodies the direct cinema principle that captures authenticity, there are still certain sections that go beyond the approach of direct cinema. In this sequence with the empty littered campus, the Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers choose a mode of representation that deviates from the authenticity-driven direct cinema strategy. Instead, they employ a technique where the synchronization of audio and video is deliberately detached. While the viewers can hear the discussions and dialogues among the protesters, they can see the empty shots capturing various corners of the campus on screen. However, this technique highlights the transformative strategies from the direct cinema style in *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, showcasing a specific level of intervention by the filmmakers. Accordingly, although most of *Inside the Red Brick Wall* embodies the authentic capturing of the direct cinema principles, it is important to note that the Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers further transform the filmmaking mode from the purist direct cinema paradigm through their deployment of linear editing arrangements, empty shots, incorporation of music, and asynchronous audio and video techniques in *Inside the Red Brick Wall*. Through an analysis of *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, this article complements the theoretical paradigm by emphasizing the transformative modes in the practice of direct cinema filmmaking.

## Conclusion

To conclude, considering the modes and strategies of documentary filmmaking, the notions of *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema have been employed to investigate how the two Hong Kong protest documentaries, *Yellowing* and *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, embody the two paradigms respectively. Particular emphasis is also placed on the roles assumed by the documentary filmmakers and how, in *Yellowing*, the filmmaker employs techniques involving participation, reflection, and intervention to represent a specific reality within the socio-political context of the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement. Furthermore, a critical engagement with the problematics of interference, performance, and framing within the filmmaker's approach in the *cinéma vérité* paradigm concerning the narrative



of *Yellowing* has been underscored. On the other hand, the filmmaking strategies of the anonymous Hong Kong Documentary Filmmakers in *Inside the Red Brick Wall* have been examined, as they adopt an observational approach, using the camera as an unobtrusive observer to silently document and bear witness to the protest scenes at Hong Kong Polytechnic University during the Anti-Extradition Movement. This article seeks to investigate and evaluate how this documentary film manifests the characteristics of direct cinema, simultaneously evolving the concept of pure direct cinema through the utilization of a linear editing strategy, empty shots, incorporation of music, and asynchronous audio and video composition in the documentary medium. Through a detailed analysis of *Inside the Red Brick Wall*, this article attempts to supplement the theoretical paradigm by accentuating the transformative modes in the realm of direct cinema filmmaking practice.

In short, this article contributes to the field of Hong Kong documentary studies in the post-Umbrella Movement and post-Anti-Extradition Movement periods from the following aspects: in the first place, shifting the focus from the prevalent issues including the environmental, political, and historical connections that have been explored in the recent scholarship on Hong Kong protest documentaries, this article offers a neglected angle on how the filmmaking techniques employed in the documentaries *Yellowing* and *Inside the Red Brick Wall* embody the paradigms of *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema respectively. By scrutinizing the techniques employed by the filmmakers in these works, this article examines the interplay between documentary styles and the representation of socio-political realities. Furthermore, it critically engages with the problems and limitations in documentary filmmaking, highlighting the complex issues in documentary filmmaking techniques and capturing reality. This essay also explores the filmmakers' roles in documentary filmmaking, either through active participation or unobtrusive observation, making dialogues with the ethics of documentary and the intervention of documentary filmmakers. Crucially, this article offers a reflection on the modes and strategies in documentary filmmaking of Hong Kong protest documentaries, providing an examination of the dynamic interplay between documentary filmmaking techniques and the representation of reality.

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# 重思「真實電影」與「直接電影」： 香港抗爭紀錄片《亂世備忘》和《理大 圍城》的紀錄片模式與策略

林庭瑩

國立政治大學

## 摘要

在既有的香港抗爭紀錄片研究之中，較被廣為探討的議題包括紀錄片與環境、政治和歷史之間的關聯性，本文由此基礎出發，進而轉向重新審視紀錄片攝製的典範，特別聚焦於「真實電影」與「直接電影」紀錄片典範的美學與方法論。本文分析兩部具有代表性的香港抗爭紀錄片：一為以2014年雨傘運動為主題的《亂世備忘》，二為記錄2019年反送中運動期間理大事件的《理大圍城》。本文主要探究上述兩部紀錄片如何分別體現「真實電影」與「直接電影」之特徵，並分析其紀錄片攝製模式及策略。本文的第一部分，將深入探討《亂世備忘》如何體現「真實電影」典範中，具有參與性、反身性與干預性之特質，並重新檢視「真實電影」典範在紀錄片創作中的問題與侷限；第二部分則聚焦於《理大圍城》，探討攝製團隊如何採用「直接電影」典範的觀察性手法，並通過剪輯與轉化策略超越「直接電影」的傳統模式。最終，本文一方面提出這兩部香港紀錄片分別體現了「真實電影」與「直接電影」典範之特質，為分析紀錄片攝製方法與再現真實之關係提供了一個新的視角。另一方面，透過對此二部紀錄片之分析，本文希冀能重新思考「真實電影」與「直接電影」紀錄片典範的美學與方法論，並就紀錄片理論層面提供具批判性之觀點。

**關鍵字：**香港電影、香港抗爭紀錄片、真實電影、直接電影、  
《亂世備忘》、《理大圍城》