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# Tugging Diary

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Courtesy of Rotterdam International Film Festival

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**VERDICT:** Yan Wai Yin's diaristic documentary uses the interplay of posters and graffiti on a local footbridge to explore and evoke intense social unrest in Hong Kong.

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Ben Nicholson

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Yan Wai Yin introduces her Hong Kong neighbourhood of North Point via a juddering triptych of images of the footbridge that will become the primary focus of *Tugging Diary*. Daubed on the concrete are slogans like 'A.C.A.B (All Cops Are Bastards)' and 'Freedom Is NOT Free' before a jump cut presents the same scene from a slightly different angle, but now just dark patches of paint remain where the graffiti has been covered. This interplay between commentary scrawled and plastered across the environment, the responses to it, and the protests that recurred throughout the filming period (August 2019-January 2021) are what Yan is interested in documenting.

To do this she utilises aesthetic techniques that themselves echo the subject matter in the way they convey and conceal information on the screen. Different streams of text appear: yellow denotes Yan's own narration, which is often, though not always, heard as well as seen; green is subtitles for the various pamphlets and slogans in the images themselves; white offers additional contextual information. Sometimes multiple colours of text are on screen together and the eye must struggle to catch them all in the same way it flits from poster to graffiti.

On one occasion, the white text explains that a certain phrase – 'Liberate Hong Kong, the revolution in our times' – has been declared illegal, and what looks like black marker adorns the screen redacting the words both in the subtitles and on a wall. As we see more images of posters torn down, covered, or defaced, we become aware of Yan's interest in the modes of repression and renewal that these messages undergo on this architectural communication platform and her own position in the process, the act of making the film, is drawn into consideration. Not least in the film's visceral middle section in which visual abstraction and deafening audio overwhelm the senses in an attempt to convey the fervour and anxiety of protest and violent repercussion.

*Director, producer, cinematography: Yan Wai Yin*

*Sound design: Tsang Hoi Yu, Wblindty*

*Venue: Rotterdam International Film Festival*

*In Cantonese*

*16 minutes*