

**Bill Nichols**

2E

# **Engaging Cinema**

**an introduction to film studies**

for Legume,  
whose films & other work  
light the world  
with wonder,  
grace, & revelation

Engaging  
Cinema

Rand Michael

drawn into a world but urged to think about and assess our relation to a particular relationship to the real world; in this case, that means assessing both Herzog's and Treadwell's points of view.

Lynne Sachs, in *Film About a Father Who* (2020), speaks to us directly in voice-over comments about her tangled, confused relationship with her father, a man whom she discovers not only had multiple affairs but also had a child outside of wedlock that neither she nor anyone else in her family knew about. Her voice speaks about the complex feelings that revolve around a parental relationship that had a secret underbelly to it. As Herzog's does in *Grizzly Man*, Sachs's voice emerges from her explicit comments and from the choices of sounds and images she assembles.

In *High School* (1968), Frederick Wiseman speaks to us indirectly in his rigorous observation of life in a Philadelphia high school. There is no voice-over, no added (extra-diegetic) music, and no interviews, but the way Wiseman frames and follows students and teachers and then edits scenes together into a mosaic of activities builds a portrait of the school that captures his detached but often judgmental perspective. This is not an academic utopia as much as a disciplinary institution that constrains as well as educates.

Jessica Kingdon turns an observational lens on modern-day China and the nature of work in *Ascension* (2021). Like *High School*, her film speaks to us indirectly. She observes bodyguards as they learn to place their employer's life above their own, young women as they practice the skills needed to become an influencer, and factory workers as they repeat the same motions thousands of times per day. There is no direct address to us but there is clearly a voice conveying a strong sense of how modern Chinese workers are drawn into a system of productivity and achievement with minimal regard for their own fulfillment.

The choice of what voice to adopt—and how direct to be—is a question of what allows a filmmaker to convey their perspective most effectively and what is most fitting for the intended purpose. Classic