

Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader:

Let's say you were preparing to teach an introduction to film studies course: What films would be featured on your syllabus? Numbering no more than a dozen films, your curated picks must represent cinema's history, movements, genres, and artistry. I faced this universal challenge last semester in developing my "Critical Studies in Film" course. Despite the allure of endless possibilities, reality sets in when you realize the number of films you can teach in the space of thirteen weeks is much more constrained.

Eventually, I settled on a playlist of classic and contemporary films: Charlie Chaplin's *The Kid* (1921), Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944), Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Michael Lehmann's *Heathers* (1989), Richard Linklater's *Before Sunrise* (1995), Jon M. Chu's *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), and Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (2019). While these eight filmic texts would fulfill the survey requirement, I wanted to include a neo-noir film to complement *Double Indemnity*. David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) and David Fincher's *Gone Girl* (2014) were the frontrunners until I screened Steven Zaillian's limited series, *Ripley* (2024), a chilling adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's novel, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. A master class in cinematography, Zaillian's black and white film was begging to be analyzed shot-by-shot for its mesmerizing visual storytelling and neo-noir stylings. My students enjoyed recreating and writing about frames from *Ripley* as a mise-en-scène assignment; some created film noir selfies inspired by *Ripley*, which proved to be one of their most discussed films. Unfortunately, we never had the opportunity to study the musical score—an unexpected combination of Sicilian folk music and jazzy instrumentals—that lends such emotional resonance to the story of a homicidal grifter. I recall thinking that a study of *Ripley*'s soundtrack and its composer could be its own topic in the course next time; until then, perhaps it could somehow feature in *Mise-en-scène* if we had a writer ready to take it on.

By sheer coincidence, our mind-reading correspondent Paul Risker submitted an interview with composer Jeff Russo, which you will find within the pages of Issue 9.2. His wide-ranging interview with Russo, the composer behind productions like *Ripley* and *Fargo*, explores the artistry of his trademark sound design. Unifying the theme of the transgressive is the issue's featured article on homoeroticism in *Ben-Hur* by Anne Marie Scholz and a featurette concerning the self-reflexivity of breaking the fourth wall in *Fleabag* by Dora Dombai.

I hope you discover something new in the sights and sounds of our Winter edition.



Greg Chan
Editor-in-Chief