


Notes from Our Editors

Since its inaugural issue in 2016, *MSJ* has carved out a unique space as an open-access, peer-reviewed, international journal under founding editor Greg Chan's dedication, expertise, and passion for filmic narration and storytelling. I am honoured to have been part of *MSJ*'s own story as a reviewer, advisory board member, copyeditor, and sometimes contributor since the beginning. Now, I am honoured to take up the mantle of co-editor alongside Michael Howarth as we carry forward this incredible legacy we've been entrusted with. We are privileged to be at this juncture, and to have Professor Chan's guidance as we step fully behind the curtain, so to speak.

Films are a unique form of storytelling in that they encompass not a singular artistic, narratological, or even technical approach, but rather, they are synergistic creations that rely on the passion and expertise of many hands and minds working in tandem. They sit at the nexus point of history, politics, and the cultural imaginary of people and nations. They offer critique, innovation, and connection and have been noted in early film scholarship to do something not done before in literature or theatre: to connect people across the world through stories visually put before the frame despite language and cultural barriers. *Mise-en-scène* composition offers its own language, one in which its 'words' are carefully selected via blocking, costuming, set design, key and fill lights. This is a language that like any must be learned and practiced; one that demands cultivation and careful, critical attention to both create and critique, but also one that resonates. Without being taught to really 'see' the visual grammar and syntax of visual culture, to speak the language and engage meaningfully as part of a rich discourse with a medium that has a complex history and exciting future, we risk being content with skating on the surface all that film has to teach us and tell us about ourselves and our world.

Our vision at *MSJ* is a synergistic, community-building hub for discourse that reminds us that the image is neither innocent nor accidental. Rather, it creates meaning, bears meaning, and invites engagement. You'll find that engagement and the involvement of many hands and minds in the pieces that follow, as well as the opportunity to embrace the careful, poetic, affective language of the frame. In the attasecond pace of our age, marked increasingly by the Tik-Tokification of the visual, it has never been more important to cultivate a critical understanding of the intentionality and beauty of the moving image, and indeed, to be moved...to action, to thought, to reflection.

We are, after all, the stories we tell.



Kelly Doyle
Editor

Having served on the advisory board for *MSJ* since its inception, I am honored to serve as one of its new editors alongside Kelly Doyle. I would also like to thank Greg Chan for his support and guidance over the years, especially during these last few months as we worked to assemble this current issue, which affirms what *MSJ* stands for: the belief that cinema remains our most complete art form, and that *mise-en-scène* is where meaning crystallizes into experience.

It seems fitting, then, that we open this issue with Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, a film that understands how composition shapes consciousness. Every element Hitchcock places before us—the spiraling forms, the vertiginous angles, Kim Novak's gray suit against San Francisco's cool palette—works in concert to manifest Scottie's psychological unraveling. We don't just observe his obsession; we inhabit it through spatial relationships, color temperatures, and the precise choreography of bodies moving through architectural space. This is what *mise-en-scène* accomplishes when wielded with intention: it transforms the frame into a philosophical argument. In our current moment, so much visual content prioritizes information delivery over formal consideration, and we need to be reminded that cinema's power has always resided in its ability to communicate through the language of space, light, and movement, to say what cannot be spoken.

The pieces in this issue show us that great filmmaking isn't about capturing reality but constructing it. Every frame is a choice, every composition an interpretation. *MSJ* exists to defend that tradition, to argue that how we see matters as much as what we see. As we navigate an era of algorithmic recommendations, returning to films like *Vertigo* isn't nostalgia but necessity. Because cinema, at its highest expression, doesn't just show us stories. It teaches us to see. And in our accelerating visual culture, that type of education has never been more essential. Cinema, at its best, creates worlds where every visual element participates in meaning-making, and in these pages, we'll continue exploring how filmmakers use the total resources of the frame to think through images. Because in an age of increasing visual noise, the disciplined grammar of *mise-en-scène* offers something increasingly rare: precision, intentionality, and the recognition that cinema is not just something we watch, but something we inhabit.

Welcome to the conversation.



Michael Howarth
Editor