

# FILM, CLASSICAL RHETORIC, AND VISUAL LITERACY

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Film holds a privileged if somewhat tenuous position in the ongoing cultural literacy wars. While it sometimes suffers the fallout of canonical versus noncanonical shelling of curricula battles, it does so in a peripheral manner. Few would doubt the “serious” aesthetic value of studying Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* or Orson Welles’s *Citizen Kane*, and most would agree that the sentimental populism deliciously mirrored in Frank Capra’s *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* is a useful illustration of the tenor of a particular era in American history. Yet because film has such transdisciplinary appeal—teachers of economics and medical ethics are as likely to show a film to demonstrate a point as teachers of history and literature—it does come under scrutiny. And the question most often asked is what *is* the relevance of studying Disney’s *The Little Mermaid* or Arnold Schwarzenegger’s *True Lies*? More importantly, what is the relevance of such films to the study of writing and literacy?

In part, the criticism against studying film rises from a general resistance to the idea of the *popular* as a “significant pedagogical terrain” (Giroux and Simon 11). This resistance is embedded in the larger debate on the function of culture, be it high, low, mass or popular.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, “conservative” and “liberal” critical stances—from Arnoldians to Adornoian Marxists—tend to view mass culture as oppressive because it dupes the populace. Radical cultural theorists, on the other hand, often privilege popular culture over high culture in an effort to overturn or subvert elitist and/or capitalist impositions. Ironically, as Barry Brummett notes in *Rhetorical*

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*Dimensions of Popular Culture*, each position sustains a hierarchical imperative that presupposes what is good and valuable (xiv). If, however, we situate culture within a rhetorical context, we find it is the site of struggle because we are immersed in it. More specifically, we find, as Henry A. Giroux and Roger I. Simon have noted, that popular culture affords an appropriate ground for study because it speaks to the “symbolic and material transactions of the everyday” (10). I would argue that the critical perspective established on these transactions of the everyday is central to the larger process of teaching students writing and fostering critical literacy.

Yet even if we tacitly accept popular culture as a significant pedagogical terrain, efforts to integrate film texts into composition classes are also thwarted by the “suspect” nature of electronic media, by the belief that “visual texts are inherently inferior to written texts” (Welch 24), and by the persistent desire of teachers and students to privilege print literacy. In short, we resist the idea that consciousness and literacy have been sufficiently altered by electronic technologies. As Kathleen Welch notes in “Electrifying Classical Rhetoric: Ancient Media, Modern Technology, and Contemporary Composition,” we resist acknowledging the presence and power of secondary orality: the ways in which electronic forms of communication have altered the significance of speaking and hearing at the end of the twentieth century (23).<sup>2</sup>

The initial dilemma, then, an inability to conceptualize film as a cultural artifact whose production, structure, and consumption can and should be questioned, rises from this more immediate problem: not having the literacy skills necessary to access the visual text. Since visual texts are often taught as if they were print texts, with specific attention given to explicating standard elements of fiction such as plot or theme, students cannot problematize their viewings so as to query the cultural suppositions upon which the narrative may be built or to question the film as commodity. The same barrier is often noted in literary studies: students often have no way to formulate critical questions to ask of the film because they have no method of investigation (Berthoff 4). Furthermore, they fail to recognize viewing as a productive activity by which the

spectator makes sense of visual inscriptions on the screen because they cannot shift from scribal or print literacy strategies to those appropriate to secondary orality. For example, *Boyz'nHood* can generate significant queries about race and identity in America, just as *Schindler's List* can provoke interest in the Holocaust and post-Holocaust experiences. But written analyses of such films are too often limited to what students know best—and what we have taught them to produce—textual explication. Rather than being critical of visual narratives, they tend to overgeneralize or to confuse descriptive response with analysis. We need to reconceptualize pedagogy and praxis so that students can recognize the play between literacies demanded by the visual rhetorics of electronic discourses such as popular film.

One such reconfiguration introduces students to film theories (such as auteur theory or spectator theory), sometimes in combination with critical approaches from literary studies (such as semiotics or deconstruction); another incorporates vocabularies of film grammars and cinematic syntax (such as montage or shot sequencing) into class discussion. To ignore these approaches as tools for assessing the film is to close off possibilities for critical literacy that afford participants equal access to the rules that order perception, thought, and action (Mukerji and Schudson 20). However, these approaches do not necessarily address film as a type of electronic discourse that engages critical consciousness differently from that of print literacy. Since a film engages us through spoken dialogue and visual images, strategies from classical rhetoric can be reconfigured so as to provide access to its visually discursive patterns. Such study does not seek merely to isolate or to deconstruct ideologies within specific films, revealing, for instance, embedded mythologies about women in *The Little Mermaid* or *True Lies*. Nor does it seek only to determine how viewers organize visual narratives according to their own experiences, though it does both of these. Situating our praxis within a rhetorical context provides the student a system of inquiry that is both dialogic and generative, one that enables her to engage in a critiquing process that sees culture not only as a repository of ideologies and values but as an apparatus for producing meaning.

When I first attempted to problematize the study of film, I asked students to frame their investigations within general rhetorical terms: to identify classical rhetorical appeals, to define the rhetorical situation, to locate images that function as metaphor or metonymy. But this proved too limiting, as students could readily locate a sundry of emotional or ethical appeals made visually, aurally and orally through the film text (e.g. stereotypic constructions of woman) without actually critiquing it. Rather, we had simply moved to another level of interiorized and uncontextualized textual analysis, one still dependent upon a hierarchical understanding of literacy.<sup>3</sup> We neglected to consider the specific nature of the rhetorical exchange between the text and the spectator, and in so doing, neglected to address the ways in which film represents and participates in, and possibly advances, the construction of cultural mythologies and/or hegemonic ideologies.

For example, in a first-semester writing course I naively expected students to competently critique the myth of the West proffered within popular film by comparing the narrative structures and visual styles of George Steven's 1953 classic *Shane* and Simon Wincer's 1990 *Quigley Down Under*. While students easily recognized the ways in which cinematic aspects, such as camera angles, close-up shots, musical score, and lighting made emotional and ethical appeals, few questioned the ways in which the films engaged the spectator in a dialogue on western mythos. Though almost all noted the resemblance between the treatment of the Australian aborigine and Native Americans in *Quigley* (not very difficult, as the villain Marston says as much), no one questioned the subtext in respect to the standing of revisionism, multiculturalism, or political correctness in Hollywood in the late 1980s. Fewer still considered the "context" of the viewing audience: Where did they situate themselves historically? Economically? Politically? What values did they hold? Identifying structural parallels—the expansive landscape, the territorial wars, and the straight-shooting hero—did little to engender a conversation concerning audience complicity in production and reproduction of cultural biases.

Our next attempt to situate and critique the film text within a general rhetorical frame included working with the

stasis theory of classical rhetoric. Historically, stasis was the method by which rhetors in the classical world identified an area of disagreement, the point to be argued, the issue on which a case hinged. Rooted in the works of classical rhetoricians such as Hermagoras, Cicero, and Quintilian, and most commonly used in the courts, its most recognizable feature was the set of questions that established the nature of the issue as fact (*an sit*), definition (*quid sit*), or quality (*quale sit*). By literally seeking a standstill or impasse, rhetors could evaluate an issue from multiple perspectives and decide on the best course of action.<sup>4</sup> Because the stasis questions of fact, definition and quality and/or consequence are recursive—as we work through them, we see how subsequent answers qualify or contradict earlier ones—they create openings in which to investigate the dynamic play between the text and the spectator. The questions disrupt the expected logic and syntax of the film, and initiate a generative dialogue in which we as viewers must become increasingly more skeptical of our own responses.

The explicit charge of a second-semester writing seminar, *Disequilibriums and the Art of the Popular*, was to explore the tensions between surface “images” and latent “realities” in American society and culture during the Cold War, or, as the course description announced,

to investigate the ways in which popular film constructed and communicated, endorsed and refuted domestic and political ideologies of the Cold War period, and the effects of such ideologies on family life and social relations . . . .

We will become cultural archaeologists: part historians, part anthropologists, part literary critics, but primarily detectives of material culture—of visual, aural and oral artifacts, of language and discourse.

After a brief introduction to stasis [see appendix 1], we began investigating the existence of “containment” in a variety of film texts, moved on to construct a definition of the term within the diegesis (the denotative elements of the narrative), and ended by asking what the value, quality or consequences of such a definition would be to both the visual text and the audience.<sup>5</sup>

Our background readings for the class included sections of Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1988), Stephanie Coontz's *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (1992), and select essays on nuclear development.<sup>6</sup> Each reading sought to connect and contextualize foreign and domestic containment policies, illustrating the ways in which professionals in various fields—medicine, education, and entertainment—participated in advancing an ideology that advocated “adaptation rather than resistance,” that made the home responsible for making “inherited values of the past relevant,” for fortifying the country (May 28). And though, as Alan Nagel has argued, the biblical epic might best articulate visually the rhetoric of American policy in the fifties and by “‘spreading’ the American vision globally” (416), any number of genres demonstrate how films replicate political ideologies of the Cold War.<sup>7</sup>

We began our stasis interrogations with Robert Wise's 1951 science fiction classic *The Day the Earth Stood Still* [*TDESS*]. The film opens with alien Klaatu (played by Michael Rennie), alias Mr. Carpenter, and his robot sidekick Gort arriving on Earth to deliver an antinuclear warning from galactic forces greater—and more civilized—than we. Not surprisingly, Klaatu/Carpenter faces resistance from the government and the people who suspect his motives. A tight, well-acted drama, with innovative special effects (the opening shots of the spaceship landing on the Washington, D.C. mall *sans* Spielberg is most memorable), *TDESS* offers a cautionary tale of the moral and political responsibilities the United States bore for technological advances. It also offers us “Klaatu barada nikto!” Again, though students quickly identified the film's implied argument against nuclear weapons and a character's explicit invective against the “them” [communists], they seldom considered the ways in which the film constructs other issues and the predispositions of spectators toward benignly accepting the narrative story line. By combining stasis with a short, overnight writing assignment, we queried the relationship between domestic and sexual containment and the dangers of what Benjamin Shapiro named “unbridled female sexuality and . . . the Other” (109) [see appendix 2].

Our findings from these stasis applications were mixed. Some students rejected the relevance of the assignment out of hand. One wrote, "Call me slow, but I didn't pick up on the 'domestic containment' or the 'sexual containment' in the movie . . . . What really stuck out in my mind were the concepts of fear and curiosity . . . I'm sure [domestic containment] is there, however, since you asked," and another complained that the "movie was a waste of a Thursday morning." Yet when read aloud, the written applications did prompt a standstill that forced us to reconsider the ideology of containment as constructed as well as consumed. The following excerpts from student responses illustrate this point:

#1 **AN SIT**: Does it exist? The question cannot be answered unless it has been identified.

**QUID SIT**: What is it? Sexual/domestic containment.

**QUALE SIT**: What is its value or consequence? Sexual containment was an important practice in the 1950s. People were scared of themselves, and they were able to feel secure by playing psychological tricks on themselves . . . . I saw the idea of domestic containment refuted in *TDESS*. The main character was a single mother. The man who was more or less her fiancée was portrayed as a jerk, and she ends their relationship just before the film ends. In a way, she left him for the alien. That refutes all traditional values.

#2 *The Day the Earth Stood Still* refutes the ideology of domestic containment. . . . In the beginning, women were shown in traditional and stereotypical roles; however, toward the end of the movie, the woman's role develops and she becomes important to the action. In the end, the woman is the hero who "saved the day" . . . .

The only time in the movie when one notices the traditional female role resurface is near the end of the movie, when confronted by Gort, she [the heroine] screams like a defenseless victim. Still, she completes her task . . . .

#3 The movie *The Day the Earth Stood Still* was a waste of a Thursday morning. Maybe it is just because technology has advanced so much since the early 1950s, but this film gave new meaning to the term “B-movie” . . . . The leading woman was single, raising her own son, and even the heroine of the film. She was portrayed as strong and independent. This was definitely different from the usual in the fifties. The idea that she could save the entire city from destruction by uttering several alien words to Gort proved that the woman’s place was not always in the home. In fact, what it did was to disprove the idea of sexual containment.

The *Day the Earth Stood Still* steps out of the boundaries. It shows us that yes, sexual containment did exist (the key word here is did), that it controlled women, and, as a consequence, suppression occurred, but [that it] could be stopped.

Each of these stasis applications argues the film refutes domestic containment and overturns cultural gender roles, though each does so to varying degrees. While excerpt #1 defines domestic containment in terms of sexual containment, excerpts #2 and #3 focus solely on domesticity. All address problems of gender roles: #2 sees woman as subverting stereotypic roles because the woman is the one who utters the magic words and “saves” the day and, not inconsequentially, humankind; #1 and #3 argue the female protagonist, Mrs. Benson (played by Patricia Neal), is consistently nonstereotypic because she is a single mother (none of the students noted that the protagonist is single by virtue of being widowed). Other stasis applications, however, arrive at different though intersecting conclusions, some of which border on resisting readings. For example, Kate wrote:

In *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, sexual containment, to use May’s words, does exist. First, however, to define sexual containment within the context of the film is to say that women have a defined role as woman; they are not to overstep their boundaries into the world of men . . . . the heroine works as a secretary, a job that does not allow her



much freedom to make decisions and her boss is most likely a man. Second, she lives in a house with several other people. The woman in charge seemed to be a mother-figure type and seemed to watch over the heroine and her young son . . . . Third, when Mr. Carpenter, the spaceman, tells the heroine that he will watch her son while she is out on a date, she feels compelled to check it out with her boyfriend . . . .

The consequences of sexual containment within the film reaffirm that notion of strictly defined women's roles. Although the heroine does at one point leave her boyfriend and save the world by uttering the words given to her by Mr. Carpenter, she cannot truly be liberated. In the end, she probably goes back to her role as a woman in the 1950s.

Here Kate interrogates the same situation that Joe, Sarah and Andrew had—Mrs. Benson's job as a secretary—but draws a different conclusion; while the first group equated the job with self-sufficiency, Kate read it as gender restricted and oppressive.

Ultimately, though, the impasse between these findings is superficial, based on cursory examinations and descriptions—a low-level engagement of general literacy skills. None of the writers incorporates specific textual evidence to support general observations, and none questions the spectator's role in the film's production. Consequently, locating ideologies by asking "do they exist" does not assure that students will recognize how popular films in general can extend cultural hegemony, or ways in which film is part of a larger industry that, as Todd Gitlin notes, "organizes entertainment into terms that are, as much as possible, compatible with hegemonic discourses" (242). These applications do, nevertheless, make the student conscious of the ways in which film technology can influence a viewer's decoding process and assures that students are cognizant of the shift in literacy strategies that they bring to bear on media texts. By conflating extratextual and intratextual lines of inquiry, the stasis questions open a space in which students can investigate the play between spectator and text.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the second part of the stasis assignment found students

reassessing the “consequences” of their definitions to a 1950s audience and a 1990s audience, and to question the strategies different audiences bring to different electronic discourses. Subsequently, by the fourth stasis assignment of the semester, students were looking forward to forcefully and actively negotiating their interpretations, analyses, and critiques.

Billy Wilder’s 1959 *Some Like It Hot*, starring Tony Curtis, Jack Lemmon, and Marilyn Monroe, tells the story of two musicians who, after witnessing the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre, try to escape the mob by joining an all-girls band traveling to Florida. Like most popular gender-bending films, *Some Like It Hot* calls us to critique constructions of sexuality and gender both within the context of the historicized moment of the film’s production (1950s) and from the perspective of a 1990s imposition. One student wrote:

#1 . . . Every time the two men presented themselves as women several assumptions were made as to how women look, of their intelligence, and of how they act. This was, of course, the female image at the time; the high heels, the dress and even the stereotypical “party girl” were all characteristics of the female. . . . I think in some ways the film defines gender by sexuality.

In a similar vein, another student, Kim, wrote:

#2 . . . Wilder’s use of sexuality is connected to the role of “men as women” and through the temptations they face by being surrounded by women; however, the role of sexuality is most evident and is nearly defined by Sugar [Marilyn Monroe], the female vocalist. From the moment she makes her entrance, she is filmed from the behind in a tightly fitting outfit that accentuates her full figure and her sexuality.

The film defines sexuality through the ways Sugar holds herself, dresses, dances and speaks; through her face and body, not her intellect. This definition of sexy is endorsed by the male musicians’ lustful reaction to Sugar when they first notice her, or her body, in the train station. . . . It defines gender differences by portraying women as

objects who are searching for men to fulfill their financial needs, such as Sugar searching for a millionaire, and portrays men as sex-crazy, such as the old geezer who chases after a woman who is really a man . . . .

The ways in which *Some Like It Hot* plays with sexuality and gender may have been influenced by American ideologies at large, but it was also swayed by audience expectations of Monroe . . . .

Like Kim, Mark noted the influence of audience training:

#3 In *Some Like It Hot* we are brought face to face with the idea of female sexuality. Marilyn Monroe stars as Sugar Kane, a singer/ukulele player in an all-girl band; but Sugar is clearly not just another girl. As she enters the screen for the first time, at the train station, we hear music that sounds curiously like the song "The Stripper" . . . . throughout the film she is defined by lighting, her body repeatedly shown in shadows while her face is lit up—a bright spot of purity amidst a dark land of sin . . . . We are trained as an audience to keep our eyes on her, either by spotlight, costuming, or narration . . . the same way men and women were trained on the "domestic" front in the '50s, and a similar way in which we are trained today . . . .

Sexuality is not a part of *Some Like It Hot*; sexuality IS the film!

These excerpts differ from the earlier stasis applications in that they are less descriptive, less summarative, and more analytical; they integrate textual examples and evidence; and they are generally more coherent. They also betray an awareness of the power of visual metaphors and rhetoric, hinting at the discursive as well as symbolic functions of the film. More importantly, these stasis applications regard film as cultural production that involves both reaction and interaction. In the class discussions that followed these applications, students tried to reconcile sexist attitudes that they had located not only in the narrative storyline but in Wilder's vision and direction. Working in small groups, they critiqued one

another's written applications, interrogating their own literacy strategies as well as ascribed interpretive strategies and codes.

Students asked, for instance, why female viewers reacted differently to the film than male viewers [recognizing the irony of the narrative but resenting the implications of its subtext, which continuously subordinated females; e.g., how "Josephine" (Tony Curtis's character's female persona) controlled the more effeminate "Daphne" (Jack Lemmon's character's female persona)]. What interpretive strategies did the 1950s audience draw upon? How did the fear of "Momism," the theory that a woman's over-mothering would inevitably result in a male child's deviant behavior (i.e., homosexuality), influence the handling and reception of the film's play within cross-dressing? And how do our experiences in the 1990s shape the strategies and expectations we bring to viewing a film?

By the close of the semester, students' writings revealed a desire to be more critical, and suggested we should now integrate other critical approaches—semiotics or deconstruction—more systematically and formally into our study of popular film. They also belied a stronger grasp on the power of visual rhetorics and literacy *as well as* stronger and clearer writing. The final essay assignment asked students to write a comparative critique of 1950s films of a genre (cross-genres in some cases) of their choice using stasis theory. No longer were the questions considered mere lines of inquiry; they were recognized as generative and situational. For example, one student interrogated horror films of the late 1950s, focusing on character motivations as articulated then and received now. He concluded, to his surprise, that these films did not specularize woman in the same way as horror comics did. He also concluded that the visual rhetorics often undercut the narrative line as presented through the dialogue. Though the consequences to him as a viewer were clear, and though his essay was a well-written, insightful analysis, the student stood baffled in search of yet more sophisticated approaches for interpellating the text.

As Kathleen Welch has argued, when students recognize that electronic media's symbol systems engage us in processes of decoding differently than that of print culture, they can be

empowered. Stasis theory provides an opening for such recognition; it provides a critical pedagogy that attends to the ways in which we “make investments in particular social forms and practices” (Giroux and Simon 3), the ways in which we engage with the material world through popular culture. Stasis illustrates how interpretive strategies and literacies are never isolated and passive, but are rather social and dialectic. Stasis affords a way to question the production and consumption of discourse, the power of visual literacy, and, hopefully, the politics of culture. Or, as one student complained about film stasis at the end of the course: “I’ll never be able to watch a movie the same way again!”

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Whereas mass culture has traditionally referred to the literature, art, or other texts (and their attendant ideologies) consumed by an unsuspecting public, popular culture is usually considered to be created within the general populace. Tania Modleski notes that in the history of mass culture, both the humanist version and the Marxist version “shared a faith in the importance of great art” as redemptive (ix). For an overview of issues and approaches in “popular culture” debates, including contention over the term itself, see the “Introduction” to Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson’s *Rethinking Popular Culture* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Welch maintains that electronic discourse, or “secondary orality,” compels the reappropriation of classical rhetoric as a way of studying media texts and their contexts. Relying on Eric Havelock’s distinctions between primary orality, literacy, and secondary orality, Welch suggests speaking and hearing acquire new significance in secondary orality: “Disembodied communication (literacy) has been re-embodied through visual mechanisms such as video monitors and film screens. The technology of the fifth canon of delivery (medium) takes on the urgency of simultaneous communication. . . . electronic discourse in most of its manifestations appears to be “live” . . . The immediacy of this appearance, the attractiveness of liveliness, holds up part of the power of the symbol of secondary orality” (26).

<sup>3</sup> We had failed to recognize that “[r]egardless of which medium is chosen, primary orality, literacy, and secondary orality will exist in each one; they will inform on another, infuse one another, and create one another . . . they are changes in consciousness, that is in the ways we conceptualize” (Welch 26-27).

<sup>4</sup> Recent research has linked *stasis* to the broader tradition of Greek sophistic rhetoric, hence re-establishing its epistemological possibilities and offering a paradigm for cultural praxis. Rhetoricians such as John Gage and Michael Carter, have noted *stasis* to be generative and situational and have argued that it “illuminates our understanding of the social nature of discourse and knowledge” (Carter 109-10). See John T. Gage’s “An Adequate Epistemology for Composition: Classical and Modern Perspectives,” *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse*, eds. Robert Connors, Lisa Ede and

Andrea Lunsford (IL: Southern Illinois P, 1983), 152–69; Michael Carter's "Stasis and Kairos: Principles of Social Construction in Classical Rhetoric," *Rhetoric Review* 7 (Fall 1988): 96–111; Kathryn Rosser Raign's "Stasis Theory: A Techne for Teaching Critical Thinking," *Focuses: A Journal of Writing Lab Theory and Practice* 1 (1989): 19–26; and Sharon Crowley's *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* (NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1994), 33–47.

<sup>5</sup> *Diegesis* is a term from semiotics which, when applied to film, designates the denotative elements of the film narrative; diegetic elements include all action and dialogue in their normal space and time, which rarely can be given in the film.

<sup>6</sup> Among other films our viewings included *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *The Jackie Robinson Story* (1950), *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), *Some Like It Hot* (1959), and *Imitation of Life* (1959).

<sup>7</sup> Arguing that "large, collaborative commercial film making ventures reflect a consensus about a culture's values, and that commercial success indicates an audience's confirmation of that consensus," Nadel points specifically to the way in which wide screen technology allowed Cecil B. de Mille to construct a series of "gazes in an economy that equates God's perspectives with American interests" (416).

<sup>8</sup> Extra-textual inquiry approaches the film as a physically constructed object; intratextual inquiry focuses on the ideas and structures within the film, approaching it as a self-sustaining construct.

## APPENDIX 1

### The Stasis Theory of Classical Rhetoric

Historically, stasis enabled rhetors in the classical world to identify an area of disagreement, a point to be argued, and the issue on which the case hinged by asking a set of questions that established the nature of the case as fact, definition, or quality (value and consequence): *an sit, quid sit, quale sit*. Because these questions are recursive—as we work through them, we see how subsequent answers qualify or contradict earlier ones—they initiate a generative dialogue in which we must become increasingly more critical in evaluating an issue or topic. That is, by first isolating the point of *impasse*, the point at which conflicting ideas bring an inquiry to a *standstill*, *stasis* forces us to seek a negotiated resolution.

As well as offering a *techne* by which to examine issues or topics, *stasis* theory provides a methodology by which to critique cultural artifacts, such as film. Its questions enable us "to read" the ideologies and/or nuances of the film from either an extratextual position (when was a film made? were the characters based on real people?) and/or an intratextual position (how do characters convince each other to act a certain way? to what extent is an emotion, such as hatred or love, grounded in race, sex, or status? how do camera angles, shot sequencing, music, or cinematography contribute to the narrative?).

For example, we might use stasis to examine the ways in which *How to Marry a Millionaire* (dir. Jean Negulesco, 1953) speaks to issues of gender or consumerism by first asking if either (gender or consumerism) "exists" in the movie. We might then ask

how the film “defines” gender or consumerism, keeping in mind that this definition might be influenced by adherence or resistance to cultural attitudes and/or domestic policies. When we next ask how the film defines gender or consumerism, we immediately begin to question the effects, value and/or consequences of such to the narrative, to the film as a visual text, or to the audience as spectators. (You should note that *stasis* is compatible with a variety of critical film theories, though we use it primarily as a way of interpreting and critiquing the text.)

## APPENDIX 2

### Stasis Application

*The Day the Earth Stood Still* (dir. Robert Wise, 1951)

In “Universal Truths: Cultural Myths and Generic Adaptation in 1950s Science Fiction Films,” Benjamin Shapiro writes:\*

The fall from grace, the divine benefactor, the redemptive power of children and innocence, the dangers of unbridled female sexuality and the concordant civilization-building heterosexual bonding and subduing of the Other, the struggle to preserve humanity against the threat of apocalypse—all these myths and paradigms find their way into the often timeless landscapes of the 1950s science fiction/horror genre. And here, perhaps, lies the real *raison d'être* of the 1950s science fiction/horror film and of the attempt to fuse the myths of the past with the technological and social realms of the imagined future. In the postwar world, the entire landscape, many thinkings previously known and trusted were opened up to new and boundless possibility, much of it terrifying and horrific. What better way to consider this particular historic situation, and to deal with the obvious social problems it engenders, than to link science fiction—the genre of involving imagination—with horror—the genre involving the confrontation of society and the terrifying Other? (109)

Reconsider TDESS Shapiro's comments and chapter 5 of May's *Homeward Bound*, “Brinkmanship: Sexual Containment on the Home Front.”† Asking the *stasis* questions of classical rhetoric, *an sit* (fact—does it exist?), *quid sit* (definition—what is it?), and *quale sit* (quality—what is its value, consequence or effect?), explore the ways in which *The Day the Earth Stood Still* addresses or speaks to the ideology of “domestic containment.” [You may also consider any other philosophy, ideology, issue, or term that garners your attention.]

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\* *Journal of Popular Film and Television* Vol. 18, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 103–11.

† Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (NY: Basic Books, 1988).

## APPENDIX 3

### Stasis Application

*Some Like It Hot* (dir. Billy Wilder, 1959)

Use the stasis questions to examine the ways in which Wilder's *Some Like It Hot* speaks to issues of gender or sexuality by

(1) asking if gender and/or sexuality influenced (existed in the film's narrative) its plot action or characterizations. Give specific examples;

(2) asking how the film defines gender and/or sexuality, keeping in mind that this definition will have been influenced not only by the larger cultural attitudes and domestic "policies" but by resistance to such. Think of May and Coontz readings;\*

(3) asking the effects, value or consequences of such to the film as a narrative, to the film as a visual text, and/or to the spectators of the film.

Your response should be written in the form of a short essay (400–500 words), though it may follow the ordering of the questions; you should make a specific claim about gender and/or sexuality (its ideologies or nuances) in the film; and you should include specific examples from the film

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\* Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (NY: Basic Books, 1988) and Stephanie Coontz's *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (NY: Basic Books, 1992).

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