

Dr.strangelove film analysis

Business



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In 1964, Stanley Kubrick released *Dr. Strangelove or: How I learned to stop worrying and love the bomb* to both critical and commercial praise. The historical context surrounding the film's release was at the height of the Cold War, just over a year after the Cuban Missile Crisis as the Vietnam War was beginning to escalate. While based on a more serious book, *Red Alert* by Peter George, it was soon transformed into a black comedy that parodied the absurdity of global nuclear destruction and the mentality of the Cold War.

While not as overtly anti-war as his third film *Paths of Glory*, Kubrick still manages to show the ridiculousness of nuclear war while linking two basic male instincts together, sex and the desire to kill. The film continuously portrays excessive examples of sexual and gender politics, technology, international politics, the role of communication and the dehumanization of man. Gender and Sexual Politics The politics of gender played out in the film treat women as recreational sex objects for powerful military men and politicians. It is no coincidence that the only female in the film, is a beautiful, bikini-clad woman sun tanning under a lamp at General Turgidson's residence. While he is in the bathroom she answers the red phones as news of the attack comes in. When the General returns, he speaks to her like she is a child.

Later in the film, when she phones him at the Pentagon, he patronizes her by saying, " I deeply respect you as a human being. Someday I'm going to make you Mrs. Buck Turgidson," which further narrows her identity, meaning the best that she can do is to get married to someone like him. It assumes that a women's happiness is routed in being married and possessed by another man. References to women in general are that of objectification and

recreation throughout the film. In the B-52, one of the flight crew takes time out to look at a Playboy magazine.

In the war room, the Russian Ambassador gives the President the Russian Premier's private phone number and explains that “not only is the Premier a man of the people, he is also a man, if you know what I mean.” The President knows exactly what he means as he nods with a grin. Near the end of the film, when Dr. Strangelove proposes his mind shaft plan to preserve the species, he speaks through clenched teeth and under his breath that, “Women selected for breeding must be of a highly stimulating nature, at a ratio of ten women for every man.” The President, General Turgidson and even the Russian Ambassador delight in their approval of this idea.

The tone of voice used by the characters when speaking about females tends to be decidedly different from the loud and clear authoritarian approach taken on the subject of war. Personal threats of violence, acceptable casualty figures of twenty million people and even the prospect of global annihilation are confidently and boldly spoken. However, remarks about women, even in the company of other men, are spoken under the breath with subtle hushed tones and locker room innuendoes. This communicative style suggests that it is easier for men to speak about war than sex. Kubrick shows that the act of war is an activity closely associated with masculine sexual activity.

The weapons of warfare and various props throughout the film convey the image of the phallus. To Kubrick, the bigger the weapon, the bigger the penis and the larger the explosion, the larger the ejaculation has become. The

climax of course being a Texan pilot straddling a long cylindrical nuclear bomb between his legs, while hooting and hollering down from a plane to the intended target and the annihilation of mankind. It would appear that sex is secondary to war on the list of priorities for the characters within the film. In the case of General Ripper, the distinction between women and the enemy has become invisible.

His paranoid rant on fluoridation being a “ Communist plot to sap and impurify our precious bodily fluids” is challenged while the base is under attack. When Mandrake asks him how he developed this theory, Ripper replies that he became aware of it during “ the physical act of love”. Ripper’s paranoia about denying women his ‘ essence” clarifies the connection between war and sex. While Strangelove admits that women are essential to the survival of mankind, the motivations of women are suspicious. Ripper’s decision to attack Russia when he was unprovoked is symbolic of his fear of being attacked.

He has become paranoid that the same infringement he performs on others might fall on him. The constant waiting creates a life of its own within his mind and a sense of deep apprehension that the same people he has abused will take their revenge. In his office, Ripper is usually shot in high contrast lighting. A lighting effect that is shown largely in melodramas and tragedies to show, evil, fear and the unknown, all of which the character embodies. The overbearing masculinity of most of the characters is balanced by Mandrake and the Presidents, who are decidedly feminist when handling the conflicts and attitudes about war. Mandrake plays a passive role when dealing with Ripper.

<https://assignbuster.com/drstrangelove-film-analysis/>

He listens to Rippers outrageous ideas, being careful not to upset him. He is also very reluctant to help fire Rippers machine gun and tries desperately to convince him to recall the planes or hand over the code. The President tries every possible diplomatic solution to quell the military problem. He speaks to the Russian Premier in a feminist manner to try and avoid confrontation. His approach to the infighting within the war room has feminist qualities as he attempts to please both parties, while scorning them with remarks like, ‘ Gentleman, I’ve never seen such behavior in the war room before”.

Technology One of the major themes that Kubrick displays throughout the film is the inherited difficulties of the communication process. Much of the dialogue takes place over the telephone or radio and the major conflicts of the film centre on the shortcomings of both. Ripper’s initial request to have Mandrake issue the go code to the bomber wing takes place over the phone. Ripper then orders Mandrake to impound all personal radios for fear that they might be used to communicate and issue propaganda from the enemy. The attack plan is radioed to the planes, which are holding their fail safe points.

The orders are transmitted over a military radio that which requires a coded three letter prefix for the plane to receive the message. This has become the first of many major conflicts surrounding technological communications. After the recall code is transmitted, things begin to get worse. All but one of the planes has responded to the recall code and returns to base. However, Kong’s B-52 has been damaged and the recall code has not been received.

The plane is unaware of the recall device or the doomsday device which eventually leads to Kong continuing toward the target and subsequent destruction of the world. The use of the telephone throughout the film is displayed in one sided conversations where the audience is not privy to the conversation on the other end of the line. When Miss Scott answers the phone at the beginning of the film, she relays the messages back and forth to General Turgidson, who is in the bathroom. During the course of this quick conversation, she alters the message a number of times. As is one of the current themes throughout the film, the potential problem with communication is that the message can be altered in the process. During the scenes set within the war room, the Premier is contacted by the President over the phone and the audience only receives one side of the conversation.

The President has to ask the Premier to turn the music down and for the People's Air Defense Headquarters, to which the Premier suggests he call Omsk information. Mandrake eventually figures out the recall code but is unable to contact the White House to prevent a nuclear holocaust because the phone lines are down. Eventually he finds a pay phone, but does not have enough change to make the call. After the operator informs him that the Pentagon will not accept a collect call, he is forced to convince a soldier to shoot a coke machine to acquire enough change to make it through to the Pentagon. Although these problems are quite common in terms of technological use by humans, they take on a completely different meaning when the message has become so imperative.

It could be argued that the biggest communication mistake throughout the film is due to human error. If the Russian Premier had announced the

existence of the doomsday machine, then destruction of the world could have been avoided. This was a necessary part of deterrence because it instilled fear of the ultimate retaliation in the minds of an enemy. It could also have prevented any type of attack from the Americans in the first place. Dr.

Strangelove makes this distinction when he tells the Russian Ambassador that, “ the whole point of a doomsday machine is lost if you keep it a secret. Why didn’t you tell the world, eh? International Politics The politics within the film are apparent in the fear and hatred of the Russians. The American crew aboard the B-52 bomber are an eclectic mixed group including a Texan pilot, a Jewish operator and an African American bombardier. When Kong receives orders to bomb the Russian, he makes a speech to the men regarding the mission. He tells them that they will all receive medals and commendations “ regardless of your race, color or creed”. True to the American ideal of masculinity and determination, they overcome missile attacks, fuel leaks and faulty bomb bay doors in order to successfully achieve their objectives.

The prejudices are shown to be abundant when it comes to the enemy. As Ripper states “ Your Commie has no regard for human life, not even his own. ” General Turgidson chides “ I’m beginning to smell a big fat Commie rat,” and later refers to them as “ a bunch of ignorant peons”. Captain Lionel Mandrake, when speaking of his imprisonment and torture by the Japanese during World War Two explains “ I don’t think they wanted me to talk much actually, it was just their way of having a bit of fun, the swine’s. The strange thing is that they make such bloody good cameras”.

Dehumanization of Man Stanley Kubrick films often focus on the dehumanization of man and the dark side of human nature. His first film *Killer's Kiss* dealt with greed, masculinity and the decline in human relationships. His second feature, the superior heist film, *The Killing* dealt with man's inherent goal of greed, while his third feature, *Paths of Glory*, reflected an anti-war sentiment that man was more destructive than any machine. In *Dr. Strangelove*, he concludes that man and his machines will lead to the end of the world. Almost every movie after *Dr.*

Strangelove explored the dark side of human nature. Kubrick's masterpiece *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dealt with similar themes on the perils of technology and the evolution of man. *Clockwork Orange*, *The Shining* and *Full Metal Jacket* all explored the dark side of the human psyche and the violent nature of human beings. Alex is conditionally altered by science and technology to cure his sociopathic behavior. Jack Torrance slowly loses his mind when he is stuck with his family inside a hotel in the winter months and *Private Joker* is systematically conditioned to become a killer within the military hierarchy. Clearly in each of his films, Kubrick was stating that violence does not solve violence.

After a close analysis of his filmography, it becomes more understandable how the process of setting out to do a serious Cold War film could turn into a black comedy. Conclusion Bosley Crowther, writing for the *New York Times*, voiced his frustrations with the film in his review. He protested that 'When virtually everybody turns up stupid or insane-or, what is worse, psychopathic- I want to know what this picture proves' (Crowther). The plausibility of the film rests in its ability to tap into the fears and anxieties

<https://assignbuster.com/drstrangelove-film-analysis/>

that emerge in a society that was fearful of nuclear war. If Kubrick had any intention of sending out an anti-war message, then he chose the best form in which to do it.

The message that is portrayed in Dr. Strangelove is much easier to swallow with laughter than his later works where he delved more deeply into the human psyche that other contemporary directors were unwilling to go. The political system in Dr. Strangelove dehumanizes the characters as paranoid and greatly exaggerated, but not far from the actual political and military clichés that were present during the Cold War period. While trying to adapt a serious novel about nuclear holocaust caused by inflexible military and political policy, Kubrick realized it was impossible to make a straight film of the ridiculous scenario.

A switch to satire proves much more successful and the film treads a fine line between bad taste and powerful comedy. The scene in the war room where President Muffley must attempt to communicate the impending disaster via a telephone call to the drunken Russian Premier at a noisy party is played perfectly. The potentially horrifying confrontation is immediately defused by the Premier's accusation that Muffley never calls for a friendly chat anymore. One of the best lines in the film sums up the absurdity of nuclear arms race and deterrence. Upon seeing General Turgidson wrestle with Soviet ambassador, the President informs them, " You can't fight in here! This is the war room. Kubrick's film is a timeless classic that is still relevant in terms of the United State's foreign policy, the battle against terror and the hunt for weapons of mass destruction.

Almost every Kubrick film incessantly probes the existential questions, “where we going and what is our place in the universe”? Work Cited Crowther, Bosley. “ Dr. Strangelove or: How I learned to stop worrying and love the bomb. ” New York Times Review 31, 1, 1964, print. Dr.

Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (Special Edition). Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Perf. Peter Sellers, George C.

Scott. Sony Pictures, 1964. DVD.