

CHAPTER 2

THE ANATOMY OF THE FILM

The creators of *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) informed audiences that the United States government had recklessly managed its war on communism. President John F. Kennedy's management of the Berlin wall crisis and his administration's response to the alliance between Cuban dictator Fidel Castro and Khrushchev threatened to incite a nuclear war. Stanley Kubrick believed that the government's dependence upon nuclear weapons increased the likelihood of using such weapons during cold war crises. In an essay published in *Films and Filming* in 1963, Kubrick expressed his hope that *Dr. Strangelove* would alter the public's perception of the government and encourage changes in nuclear policies.¹ He utilized all of the tools of filmmaking and storytelling to convey this warning to audiences.

The screenwriting team utilized several characters to mock American officials and explore various themes associated with their cold war policies. All of the film's major characters were based upon well-known figures in America's war on communism, despite the disclaimer stating the opposite at the outset of the film. Although the portrayals seemed absurd, characters' actions and appearances were intended to inspire comparisons to their real-life counterparts. Diplomat and politician Adlai Stevenson served as the model for President Merkin Muffley. Muffley's failure to prevent a nuclear catastrophe warned audiences that a communications breakdown might hinder efforts to avert disaster and that in the world created by Kennedy might face greater crises. General

¹ Stanley Kubrick, "How I learned to stop worrying and Love the Cinema," *Films and Filming* 9 (June 1963): 12-13.

Curtis LeMay, commander of the Strategic Air Command (SAC) and proponent of the use of nuclear weapons, was the model for General “Buck” Turgidson. Kubrick examined the relationship between sexuality and violence through Turgidson. The screenwriting team used LeMay and Robert Welch, founder of the John Birch Society, as the models for General Jack D. Ripper. Kubrick mocked the international communist conspiracy through Ripper and further explored the relationship between sexuality and violence, suggesting man’s equal desire to wage nuclear war and achieve sexual satisfaction. Dr. Strangelove was based upon a composite of scientists Edward Teller, Wernher von Braun, and nuclear strategist Herman Kahn. Strangelove offered audiences evidence of the dangers of man’s overdependence upon technology, particularly during the nuclear age. With each of these characters, Kubrick hinted that a nuclear war was unavoidable if the United States did not alter its cold war policies.

Kubrick and his screenwriting team fashioned Muffley’s character and appearance on that of Adlai Stevenson, who was more liberal than Kennedy in terms of cold war politics.² Determined to win the cold war, Kennedy had narrowly averted nuclear conflicts during the Berlin crisis of 1961 and the Cuban missile crisis.³ Although Kennedy would appear to be the best model for the president in a film about the dangers of nuclear war, Kubrick could not use Kennedy as a model for Muffley without drawing criticism from Columbia Pictures and the audiences that he intended to persuade.

Production Code Administration (PCA) chairman Geoffrey Shurlock’s letters expressed

² Charles Maland, “*Dr. Strangelove* (1964): Nightmare Comedy and the Ideology of Liberal Consensus,” *American Quarterly* 31 (winter 1979): 709.

³ Thomas Paterson, “Fixation with Cuba: The Bay of Pigs, Missile Crisis, and Covert War Against Castro,” in *Kennedy’s Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963*, ed. Thomas Paterson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 148.

concern over Kubrick's treatment of the office of the president, which the audience might have associated with the Kennedy administration.⁴ To avoid criticism, Kubrick selected Stevenson as a symbol of the Kennedy administration, albeit the more liberal faction of the administration.

During Kennedy's presidency, Stevenson often disagreed with the president's determination to win the cold war.⁵ Audiences may have recognized Muffley's less confrontational diplomacy. Despite this posture, Muffley could not prevent Ripper's nuclear strike. One might conclude that Kubrick hoped that audiences would realize that even a peace-minded president could not avoid a nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union in the environment created during Kennedy's presidency.

In the early 1960s, the world witnessed two dangerous crises between the Soviet Union and the United States. The world anxiously watched as German soldiers constructed the Berlin wall in August 1961. In response, the United States made preparations for a military conflict. A year later, in response to the discovery of Soviet missiles in Cuba, President Kennedy threatened to use nuclear weapons in the event of a Soviet attack on the United States. Although these crises ended peacefully, they proved that nuclear disaster had become a real possibility by the early 1960s.

In 1961, the Berlin crisis threatened to escalate into a nuclear conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States. During the summer of 1961, the Soviet Union and the United States prepared for a conflict over Berlin. Each nation increased military

⁴ Letter from Geoffrey M. Shurlock to Stanley Kubrick 21 January 1963, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences Library, *Dr. Strangelove* file.

⁵ Thomas Paterson "Introduction: John F. Kennedy's Quest for Victory and Global Crisis," *Kennedy's Quest*, 19; Michael Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1961-1963* (New York: Edward Burlingame Books, 1991), 32, 145.

spending and openly declared its willingness to wage war over the status of West Berlin. Khrushchev announced that the Soviet Union would end the moratorium on nuclear testing established in 1958. On 25 July, Kennedy declared that the United States would initiate civil defense preparations in order to withstand a Soviet first strike. During the second weekend in August, as the East German army began construction of the Berlin wall, Kennedy and advisor McGeorge Bundy began discussing the possibility of using nuclear weapons. Special advisor Dean Acheson had suggested Kennedy consider this option. On 27 October, tanks under General Lucius Clay's command faced off with Soviet tanks at East Berlin-West Berlin border.⁶ Kennedy and Khrushchev demonstrated their capacities for creating and resolving crises, but *Dr. Strangelove* suggested to audiences that a crisis might not always be averted.

Even though the world avoided a disaster in Berlin, it faced a greater chance of nuclear war when American U-2 surveillance planes photographed Soviet missile installations in Cuba on 14 October 1962. While the world waited, the US established a blockade around the island. In his television address to the world on 22 October, President Kennedy announced that Soviet missiles were in Cuba, an act he labeled an offensive measure exercised by Khrushchev. Kennedy placed US armed forces around the world on alert. He finally promised that he would not invade Cuba in exchange for the removal of the missiles. Throughout the crisis, Kennedy and the Executive Committee (Ex Comm), discussed several possible scenarios that included the blockade, an air strike, an invasion, and nuclear war.⁷ Despite the peaceful resolution, the Cuban

⁶ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 143-148, 254-255; Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, 260, 271, 277.

⁷ Thomas Paterson, "Fixation with Cuba," *Kennedy's Quest*, 148; Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, 447.

missile crisis confirmed Kubrick's concerns that cold war tensions and the superpowers' dependence upon nuclear weapons could incite a nuclear war. Audiences would remember these tense standoffs and realize that Kubrick's scenario was not necessarily fiction.

Whereas Kennedy narrowly avoided a nuclear war during these conflicts, *Dr. Strangelove* warned that cold war crises might not be settled peacefully. Muffley fails to prevent the detonation of the Doomsday Machine. In Kubrick's scenario, the president had approved Wing Attack Plan R in order to give the American deterrent credibility and assure the Soviets that the elimination of the American chain of command would not prevent retaliation. Comically, the security measures of Plan R prevent Muffley from arresting General Ripper, recalling the bombers, and averting disaster. The plan closes all forms of communication between Burpelson Air Force Base, the bombers of the 843rd Bomb Wing, and the president. This situation suggests that a communications breakdown might prevent the peaceful resolution of a crisis, despite the efforts of a peace-minded president.

Kubrick satirized this problem in the phone conversations between Muffley and Premier Kissoff. To prevent communications breakdowns between the leaders of the United States, a hot-line was installed after the Cuban missile crisis, providing a direct phone line between the White House and the Kremlin. In *Dr. Strangelove*, the hot-line provides audiences with little confidence in the security measure. Kissoff's advisors have difficulty locating him, and Muffley struggles to convey the gravity of the situation to his Russian counterpart. During Peter Sellers's mostly improvised conversation with the inaudible Kissoff, his lines resemble a quarrel between young lovers rather than a

conversation between world leaders attempting to avert a nuclear war. After Muffley and Kisseff exchange greetings and the Soviet Premier turns down the music that disrupts their conversation, the president attempts to explain the situation.

Now then Dimitri, you know how we've always talked about the possibility of something going wrong with the bomb...The bomb, Dimitri...The hydrogen bomb...Well, now, what happened is one of our base commanders, he had a sort of—well, he went a little funny in the head. You know, just a little funny. And he went and did a silly thing...Well, I'll tell you what he did...He ordered his planes to attack your country—well, let me finish, Dimitri...Let me finish, Dimitri...Listen, how do you think I feel about it, Dimitri? Can you imagine how I feel about it, Dimitri...Why do you think I'm calling you, just to say hello? Of course I like to speak to you, of course I like to say hello.⁸

This exchange suggests that a breakdown in communications could lead to the loss of important time and a costly conclusion to a cold war crisis. In Kubrick's scenario, every second counts, and Kisseff's apparent drunkenness hinders Muffley's attempts to avert a nuclear catastrophe.

Whereas Kubrick, George, and Terry Southern attempted to illustrate the inevitability of nuclear catastrophe through Muffley, they openly criticized SAC commander General Curtis LeMay as one of the authors of that catastrophe. LeMay seemed more concerned with winning the cold war and displaying the might of the SAC arsenal than preserving peace, a priority shared by Turgidson. During the Suez Crisis in 1956, LeMay advised Eisenhower to launch an all-out nuclear attack against the Soviet Union. LeMay assured the president that SAC could destroy Soviet nuclear capabilities and that losses would not exceed accident rates.⁹ During Kennedy's presidency, LeMay advocated an aggressive stance against communism and supported the research and

⁸ All film quotations have been taken from the Special Edition DVD released by Columbia Home Video in 2001.

⁹ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 236

development of more advanced nuclear weapons. The SAC commander had advised Kennedy to invade Cuba after the Cuban missile crisis had been settled.¹⁰ As George Wallace's running mate on the American Independent Party ticket in 1968, LeMay would advocate the use of nuclear weapons to end the Vietnam conflict.¹¹

Turgidson shares this callous view, advising President Muffley to commit the US nuclear arsenal to Ripper's war: "Mr. President, I'm not saying that we wouldn't get our hair mussed." In an absurd declaration, Turgidson dismisses liberal concerns for human life, guaranteeing Muffley that civilian casualties will be "no more than ten to twenty million killed, tops, depending on the breaks," a loss he considers "modest and acceptable." When the president refuses to order an unprovoked attack against Russia, Turgidson sulks like a child scolded by a parent. Upon hearing Strangelove's plan for an underground nation, Turgidson advises the president, "We cannot afford to allow a mine shaft gap," echoing Kennedy's claims that Eisenhower and the Republican Party had allowed the Soviets to create a "missile gap." The screenwriting team mocked Kennedy's claims as a product of cold war hysteria that ignored the reality of the situation, just as Turgidson's warnings fail to recognize the hopelessness of the situation. The year after Kennedy chastised Eisenhower for permitting the "missile gap," surveillance photographs revealed that the Soviets never possessed superior numbers of missiles. Despite this information, Kennedy continued to increase military spending and expanded the US

¹⁰ Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, 544.

¹¹ Phillip S. Meilinger, "U.S. Air Force Leaders: A Biographical Tour," *The Journal of Military History* 62 (October 1998): 861; "Gen. Curtis LeMay, an Architect of Strategic Air Power, Dies at 83," *New York Times*, 2 October 1990, sect. B, p. 6.

nuclear arsenal.¹² Kubrick suggested that the President's advisors, particularly his military counselors, preferred to wage war rather than prevent it.

Kubrick utilized General Turgidson to explore the relationship between sexuality and violence.¹³ General Turgidson is driven equally by his desire to wage war and satisfy his sexual urges. Turgidson's name is one of the film's many sexual references. "Turgid" means swollen, and the general's nickname suggests his preoccupation with masculine endeavors, particularly making love and war.¹⁴ Turgidson is preparing to sleep with his mistress and secretary, Miss Scott, when he is informed that Ripper has ordered the 843rd Bomb Wing to attack the Soviet Union. Turgidson decides to "mosey over to the War Room" to assess the situation, promising to return before she can say "Blast off," a simultaneous reference to a rocket launch and ejaculation. During a debate in War Room, Turgidson receives a call from Miss Scott, who wants him to return to their suite. She questions his interest in her; he promises that he deeply respects her as a person and promises to marry her. Despite this promise, Turgidson excitedly supports Strangelove's mine-shaft plan, which will require male inhabitants to abandon the practice of monogamy. He does not consider any other ways to avert Ripper's war. Kubrick suggested that men who wielded nuclear weapons were simultaneously driven by their desire to wage war and make love.

General Jack D. Ripper was constructed from the models of LeMay and John Birch Society founder Robert Welch. Ripper displays LeMay's desire to use nuclear weapons in order to win the war on communism. More importantly, Ripper's claims that

¹² Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1990* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991), 213.

¹³ Maland, "Nightmare Comedy," 704.

the process of fluoridation was part of the international communist conspiracy echoed Welch's claims. Welch, a conservative conspiracy theorist, founded the John Birch Society in December 1958. The Society was organized to combat communism in America, reverse liberal political advances of the New Deal and the Fair Deal, and revitalize American morality.¹⁵

Welch assembled a number of prominent businessmen and anti-Communists to discuss the various ways in which the nation could combat the many forms of Communist infiltration and subversion. Citing nine years of research, Welch claimed that he had proof that Communists controlled shipping and communications unions, all forms of mass media, Congress, the Pentagon, and the White House.¹⁶ One can conclude that Kubrick would have heard of the society and its outspoken founder through newspaper reports and Republican Party rhetoric. By the early 1960s, the Republican Party was forced to recognize the demands of the Society in order to secure their votes.¹⁷

Ripper's theory about communist infiltration satirically parallels Welch's comprehensive conspiracy theory.¹⁸ General Ripper informs Group Captain Mandrake that he has ordered the bombers to attack Russia in order to stop Communist infiltration of American society through the process of fluoridation. Ripper claims that the Soviets began poisoning the American water supply in 1946, using chemicals that sapped

¹⁴ Phillip L. Gianos, *Politics and Politicians in American Film* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999), 142.

¹⁵ Robert Welch, *The Blue Book* (Boston: Western Islands, 1961), 1, 149, 155, 160.

¹⁶ Welch, *The Blue Book*, xiv, xv, 12.

¹⁷ Jonathan M. Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 65.

¹⁸ Charles Maland recognized Kubrick's satirical treatment of the many theories of communist subversion, yet he failed to provide any references for Kubrick's ridicule.

“precious bodily fluids,” a blatant reference to semen, and weakened the nation’s resistance to the Communist threat. Ripper warns Mandrake that “salt, flour, fruit juices, soup, sugar, milk, ice cream” are all future targets of fluoridation. By associating Ripper’s actions with organizations such as the John Birch Society, Kubrick suggested that conspiracy theories threatened rather than defended the nation’s interests.

Kubrick intentionally selected 1946 as the starting point of this communist plot. On 9 February 1946, Stalin gave a speech in which he suggested that capitalism caused World War II. He implied that Communism must replace capitalism in order to avoid future wars. One week later, the Canadian government arrested twenty-two people on charges of atomic espionage, evidence that the Soviets had successfully infiltrated the American government. In March, Winston Churchill delivered a speech in which he warned that Communism had begun its advance westward across Europe.¹⁹ In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Americans began developing theories of communist subversion and infiltration. Accusations of espionage mounted against scientist Klaus Fuchs, diplomat Alger Hiss, political analyst Judith Coplon, and Communist Party members Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Testimonies and stolen atomic documents suggested that some of these accusations were valid. Congressional investigations, particularly those conducted by the House Committee on Un-American Activities and Senator Joseph McCarthy, supported the theory that communists were among America’s cultural, financial, and political ranks. Fears of communist plots to sabotage the nation’s water supply, transportation routes, and power supply had accompanied these investigations.²⁰

¹⁹ Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 113, 115.

²⁰ Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1998), 154, 160.

In the late 1950s, conservatives such as Welch became disenchanted with Eisenhower's foreign and domestic politics and began to suggest that communist agents equally controlled Democrats and Republicans.

An early theory of subversion claimed that sexual deviants were susceptible to seduction and blackmail by leftist organizations. This theory suggested that deviants' moral weakness allowed communists to control their actions. As a result, Congress, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the media began investigating homosexuals and promiscuous women for "treasonous" activities.²¹ Kubrick challenged this theory and explored the relationship between sexuality and violence by portraying Ripper, a right-wing conspiracy theorist and author of the world's destruction, as a sexual deviant. Ripper informs Mandrake that in order to avoid communist subversion, he no longer engages in intercourse. The general's abstinence might be considered deviant, yet Ripper believes that his behavior enables him to challenge the communist conspiracy.

Kubrick explored the relationship between sexual desire and violence with General Ripper. His name invokes the memory of the late nineteenth-century serial murderer that stalked and brutally murdered prostitutes in London's White Chapel district. Throughout the film, Ripper smokes a cigar, a phallic symbol that is repeated among many of the film's military officials in the War Room. General Ripper explains to Group Captain Mandrake that he has ordered the 843rd Bomb Wing to attack the Soviet Union in order to halt the communist plot of fluoridation, a process by which Americans' "precious bodily fluids" were being poisoned and sapped. Ripper discovered this plot "during the physical act of love"; he claims that he suddenly became tired—a sign of his

²¹ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 95, 99.

sexual inadequacy rather than a communist plot. Ripper announces that he “denies them (women) his essence,” his semen. Kubrick hinted that Ripper’s sexual dissatisfaction led him to seek pleasure in the next logical avenue—nuclear war. Kubrick suggested that sexual confusion could unleash a brash act of violence, such as Ripper’s unprovoked war on communism, reaffirming the director’s belief that there was a relationship between sexual desire and violence.

The screenwriting team selected Herman Kahn, Edward Teller, and Wernher von Braun to provide the models for Dr. Strangelove, who proves more threatening to the safety of the world than either Turgidson or Ripper.²² Kahn’s *On Thermonuclear War* (1960), commissioned by the RAND Corporation, analyzed the intricacies and scenarios of nuclear war, calculating and predicting the outcomes of various scenarios and strategies. According to longtime producer James Harris, Kubrick devoured the text in order to understand the details of nuclear war.²³ Similarly Strangelove analyzes each situation by assessing possible losses and damage, searching for a favorable option, even though this option might lead to the loss of millions of lives. Kubrick examined several subjects that Kahn raised in this text. In an essay entitled “Conflicting Objectives,” Kahn dismissed the feasibility of a doomsday device, believing that this device was “uncontrollable.” Dr. Strangelove, commissioned by the “Bland Corporation,” believes that the Doomsday Machine is not a practical deterrent “for the very reasons which at this moment must be all too obvious,” the inability to control the device once it is activated.

²² Historian Paul Boyer has suggested nuclear strategist and diplomat Henry Kissinger. In 1957, Kissinger published *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, urging that the United States develop a variety of nuclear weapons to increase the credibility of the nation’s deterrence. Four year later, Kissinger published *The Necessity of Choice*, in which he warned of a growing missile gap that allowed the Soviet Union to achieve certain victories in the cold war.

²³ *Inside the Making of Dr. Strangelove*, dir. by David Naylor, 45 min., 2001, DVD.

He also ponders whether the survivors of a nuclear war would “envy the dead” in a lengthy chapter in *On Thermonuclear War*.²⁴ Muffley poses this same question to Dr. Strangelove, who suggests that those Americans relocated to the mine shafts will be overcome by a feeling of nostalgia for the life they leave above ground. Strangelove’s response is absurd because it lacks any consideration for the sorrow caused by the loss of loved ones or the pain of re-emerging into a world devastated by a nuclear apocalypse.

Edward Teller may have provided the more valuable model for Dr. Strangelove. Teller had immigrated to the United States after fleeing Nazi persecution in 1935. The Hungarian-born scientist joined the Manhattan Project in 1943, participating in the development of the atomic bomb and formulating ideas about a hydrogen bomb. Teller eventually became obsessed with idea of perfecting the hydrogen bomb. After he successfully developed a hydrogen bomb in 1952, Teller continued to actively support the expansion of America’s nuclear arsenal.²⁵ Teller and his fictional counterpart, Strangelove, shared an enthusiasm for the development of weapons of mass destruction, which they believed contributed to the nation’s superior position in the cold war.

Terry Southern told biographer Lee Hill that German rocket scientist Wernher von Braun was the only model used to construct Dr. Strangelove, who had abandoned his Nazi background to work for the United States.²⁶ Von Braun developed rockets for the

²⁴ Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (New York: The Free Press, 1969), 40-95, 147-148.

²⁵ Gregg Herken, “Edward Teller,” in *The Oxford Companion to United States History*, ed. Paul S. Boyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 772.

²⁶ Lee Hill, *A Grand Guy: The Art and Life of Terry Southern* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001), 118.

Nazis. When the Soviets and Americans invaded Germany, he surrendered to the Americans and began developing the US Army's rocketry program.²⁷

Kubrick believed that a precarious bond had been formed between man and the machines.²⁸ In *Dr. Strangelove*, this relationship linked and satisfied man's sexual and violent desires. The film's title implies this bond: man's "strange love" for the machine. Ripper, Strangelove and Turgidson appear determined to witness a nuclear war, despite the consequences. Turgidson and Strangelove become excited when they discuss the possibility of war and the postwar world of sexual gratification that will have to be created. Kubrick's fascination with this subject was evident in his next film, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). In *2001*, Kubrick depicted an ape discovering that a bone could be used to defeat competitors for food. This film suggested that throughout history, man has sought to develop more destructive means to crush his enemies.

The Doomsday Machine, which Kahn had dismissed as uncontrollable, represented the destructive divorce of man and machine. Ambassador de Sadesky claims that a sane man would not detonate the Doomsday Machine, yet the Soviet government decided to build this weapon despite the ambassador's objections. Kubrick argued that sane men should not build such weapons, yet they were forced to do so by their own definitions of situations. The Soviets built the device because they "could not keep up with the expense of the arms race, the space race, and the peace race." Part of this statement referred to the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, which witnessed the birth of the American space program, increased military spending, and the development

²⁷ Paul Boyer, "Dr. Strangelove," in *Past Imperfect: History according to the Movies*, ed. Mark Carnes (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995) 267.

²⁸ Gene Phillips, ed., *Stanley Kubrick: Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 71.

of nuclear weapons. In order to convey man's uncontrollable desire to possess the most powerful weapons, Turgidson wishes that the US possessed a doomsday device, ignoring the dire situation the Soviet device has created. Kubrick further examined this "marriage" in *2001*, in which the supercomputer HAL turns on his creators and murders three of the crewmembers.

Kubrick also portrayed this deadly marriage between man and machine with the internal struggle of Dr. Strangelove. The doctor's mechanical, black-gloved hand attempts to choke him. His human hand and his mechanical hand wrestle for control over his mind and soul. At times, he shouts German phrases meant to represent the voice of his mechanical half. Strangelove frees himself from his wheelchair at the end of the film, announcing that he can walk again just before the Doomsday Machine detonates. Kubrick's message is that man has no hope of controlling the advanced machines he has created. Audiences needed to overturn the government's nuclear policies and abandon the dependence upon weapons of mass destruction in order to prevent a Strangelovean apocalypse.

A number of films challenged the cold war consensus in 1964 and offered audiences different interpretations of the dangers facing the nation. John Frankenheimer's *Seven Days in May* (1964), released weeks after *Dr. Strangelove*, depicted a military plot to capture the president, who had recently signed a nuclear disarmament treaty with the Soviet Union which in turn angered some military officials. The plot is uncovered and the officials involved resign, disgracing the military. Sidney Lumet's *Fail-Safe*, also released in 1964, was so similar to *Dr. Strangelove* that Kubrick and George brought a lawsuit against the producers of *Fail-Safe*, charging that they had violated copyright laws. In this

film, a computer malfunction orders one wing of bombers to attack Moscow. The president (Henry Fonda) instructs the Soviets to shoot down the bombers just as Muffley had ordered to avoid nuclear war. Despite radio orders from the president to return to base, one bomber releases its nuclear bombs over Moscow. The president then orders SAC to destroy New York City to convince the Soviets that the attack was an accident and to avoid nuclear war. *Fail-Safe* vindicated the president for his willingness to sacrifice an American city avoid nuclear war.²⁹ Whereas *Dr. Strangelove* indicted the politicians as well as their military and scientific advisors, *Seven Days in May* indicted the military for warmongering and *Fail-Safe* only questioned the effect of the arms race on the security of the world. *Dr. Strangelove* suggested that the public's faith in America's leaders was misplaced and would ultimately lead to the world's destruction. Kubrick criticized the military officials and scientists who advised the president for their roles in the impending doom. Furthermore, the film's genre, satire, allowed audiences to view their world from a distance not provided by *Fail-Safe* and *Seven Days in May*. As a result, *Dr. Strangelove* inspired public debate about the picture that included participants' discussion of the government's war on communism.

²⁹ Richard P. Krafur, ed., *The American Film Institute Catalog of Motion Pictures Produced in the United States, Feature Films, 1961-1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 321, 964.