Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb,
directed by Stanley Kubrick (1964)

Film Workshop by Caryn Cline

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written by Kubrick, Terry Southern and Peter George, based on
　　　George's book Red Alert
photographed by Gilbert Taylor
set design by Ken Adam

Group Captain Lionel Mandrake/President Mervin Muffley/
Dr. Strangelove (Peter Sellers)
General Buck Turgidson (George C. Scott)
General Jack D. Ripper (Sterling Hayden)
Colonel "Bat" Guano (Keenan Wynn)
Major T. J. "King" Kong (Slim Pickens)

In *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, Stanley Kubrick uses **satire** to achieve his ends. Discuss the film title, the characters' names, the dialogue, aspects of the set design, and anything else you think contributes to the satire.

Why do you think voice over narration was used in the film? Recall the way v.o. narration is traditionally used in documentaries (for example, in the *Why We Fight* series). How does Kubrick's v.o. play off of such films?

The film is shot in black and white. What does this choice (or necessity) contribute to the film? Kubrick uses different types of black and white filming (and lighting) to differentiate scenes and locations. For example, there are many shots in the film which have a documentary–like quality, and some that are clearly stock footage. Others are quite stylized (the initial phone conversation between Mandrake and Ripper, for example). What are other examples?

Discuss the three major locations in the film. What are the characteristics of each? What do they have in common? How are they different? How does the detail of the set design in each location augment the satire?

Sterling Hayden, who plays Jack D. Ripper, (and had appeared in Kubrick's *The Killing*) was one of the Hollywood actors who went before HUAC and named names. He regretted it afterwards, saying of himself that he was

"a real daddy longlegs of a worm when it came to crawling. . ." [before the committee]. How does his being cast in the role of Ripper enrich the film? How do the choices Kubrick and Taylor make (camera distance, camera angle, lighting) when photographing Ripper convey his paranoia visually?

The British actor Peter Sellers plays three different parts in the film. (Sellers had played Quilty in Kubrick's *Lolita* two years earlier.) What does his being cast in these three roles add to the film? Among his roles is that of the title character, Dr. Strangelove, who only appears toward the end of the film. Why do you think the film is named after this character, even though he has a relatively small role? What nationality is he? How is the President of the United States portrayed? The Russian Premier (whose name is Dimitri Kissov)?

Slim Pickens, who was a character actor in hundreds of westerns, plays "King" Kong. His final scene is perhaps the most famous scene in the film. His portrayal of the renegade pilot allows Kubrick to comment on American post-war mentality. In what way?

How would you describe the music chosen for the opening and closing sequences of the film?   What song is associated with the men in Kong's airplane? Why do you think that particular song is used?

Like all good satire, Kubrick's film is funny, but it has a serious purpose. What do you think Kubrick is saying about the Cold War?

Bibliography:
Walker, Alexander. *Stanley Kubrick, Director: a Visual Analysis*. NY: Norton, 1999.