

Cinema, Science and Conscience in

Dr. Strangelove: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb, by Stanley Kubrick¹

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Palavras-chave: Stanley Kubrick, *Dr. Strangelove*, cinema norte-americano, comédia, ciência

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1. Introduction: “Nuclear combat toe to toe with the Ruskies”

In the United States of America, the fifties came to be known as the Age of Anxiety. In a climate of mutual suspicion, both the US and the Soviet Union, superpowers that emerged from the carnage of the World War II, had reinforced their atomic arsenal, a process that, theoretically, would dissuade the enemy from a military attack (Tindall 1379).

In practice, the least human or mechanical error would originate a war of unpredictable but certainly catastrophic consequences. The fate of the human species lied in the hands of the two world leaders and any of them could push the fatal button. Many Americans stored survival rations, bought anti-radiation suits that would protect them in the event of a nuclear battle, built nuclear shelters in their gardens. Several enterprises, like Portland Cement Association, offered domiciles for the atomic age: “This blast-resistant house is based on principles learned at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and at Eniwetok and Yucca Falls (...) This shelter area affords protection from radiation, fire and flying debris as well” (Heimann 74).

From celebrities to scientists, from the layman to the atomic expert, everybody lived under the terror of a nuclear conflict. When Marilyn Monroe was asked by the press what her biggest fear was, the diva promptly answered: “The bomb”. Similarly, after the first nuclear device had been tested, Albert Einstein cautioned President Harry S. Truman, in a letter, against the military use of atomic energy: “I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones”. Strangely enough, the world leaders seemed to be the least concerned persons. Mao Tse Tung even told Jawaharlal Nehru: “The atom bomb is nothing to be afraid of (...) China has many people. (...) The death of ten or twenty million people is nothing to be afraid of” (Dillard 56).

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The geopolitics of the Cold War produced mainly two types of movie genre — the *spy thriller* and the *sci-fi movie* — which rocketed after the Cuban and the Berlin wall crises, and would continue to develop until the break-up of the Soviet Union, in the 1990s (Orr 50). During the fifties, several movies focused on the possibility of a nuclear war and its consequences to humankind. *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* (1959), by Ronald McDougall, for instances, explores the theme of the reconstruction of a devastated world, after an atomic holocaust. Also, Stanley Kramer's *On the Beach* (1959) approaches this subject, by narrating the adventures of a submarine that escapes mass destruction, and leaves to Gregory Peck and Ava Gardner the mission of repopulating the planet. However, as British movie critic and author James Howard notices, none of these pictures really shows images of the war horrors, nor gives account of the events that led to it, sparing the audience, and concentrating solely in the effects of the attack (Howard 90-91).

In the sixties, the situation changed. Frequent nuclear test footage on TV, the Soviets' conquer of the space and the Cuban missiles crisis, during the Presidency of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, led Americans to paranoia. These events attracted the interest of the studios and nuclear movies became a profitable subgenre (Newman 166). Movies such as *The Damned* (1961), by Joseph Losey, *Ladybug, Ladybug* (1963), by Frank Perry, *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), by John Frankenheimer, *The Best Man* (1964), by Franklin J. Schaffner, and *Fail Safe* (1964), by Sidney Lumet dealt with the imminent danger of a nuclear war (Neve 212-213). However, none of these movies dared to question the system or adopt a satirical approach to the *status quo*.

Stanley Kubrick had been interested, since the fifties, in politics, strategy, tactics, warfare and power. The director subscribed to *Aviation Weekly* and to *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, and had read approximately seventy war novels (Nelson 79). One of those books, in particular, caught his attention: *Red Alert*, by Peter George, firstly published in England, with the title *Two Hours of Doom*, under the pseudonym Peter Bryant. Kubrick and James Harris bought the rights to the novel for \$3,000, when they felt the potential of the text, and worked for long hours with Peter George, to create the script. However, little by little, they came up with the idea of transforming the original plot in a satire to the cold war paranoia. Harris explains: "Usually at night, when we were giggly, when we used to talk about the humor in the situation: you know, what if everybody in the war room got hungry and had to call down to the deli and we had a guy with an apron come in and take orders, and all these other what ifs" (Howard 91).

When Harris was in California, he received an enthusiastic phone call from Kubrick who had decided to create a cinematographic satire, giving the audience an unexpected and shocking

vision of a nuclear war caused by human stupidity and zeal. With a few reserves, Harris agreed, and they hired Terry Southern, a sensationalist reporter, to write the black comedy *Dr. Strangelove: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964). The title refers to a character played by Peter Sellers that, interestingly enough, doesn't appear in George's original plot, but which corresponds to the stereotyped image of the mad scientist, and becomes one of the most humoristic elements of the movie (Duncan 86).

2. The cruelest satire: "Gentleman, you can't fight here, this is the war room"

In *Dr. Strangelove*, Kubrick's genius reveals itself in at least three aspects. First, with an acute spirit of observation, the director combines, in this pre-apocalyptic movie, the fear of the masses, the ideology of the politicians, the loony fanaticism of the military mind, the pathological hatred towards the communists, and the paranoid rhetoric, to give the viewer an encompassed and ironic vision of the cold war age.

Secondly, Kubrick and the scripter conceived a perfectly logical series of events which lead to a destiny as inevitable as plausible: a nuclear war (Kolker 103). However, each event, *per se*, seems to be taken from a surrealistic nightmare, reinforcing, therefore, the sense of paranoia. The crisis is triggered by General Jack D. Ripper (notice the irony of the name), commander of the Burpelson Air Force base, who, by fooling his subordinates, announces that the Russians had started an attack against the USA. Without delay, he orders his airborne nuclear B52s, only two hours away from the enemy, to retaliate. Ripper's true motive lies in his fanaticism: he believes the Soviets were poisoning his "precious bodily fluid", thanks to the water. It is in this context that the term *Strangelovian* entered our daily language to describe an implausible situation with potentially disastrous consequences (Kolker 103).

Thirdly, in spite of the surrealism that impregnates the plot, this movie warns the audience against the serious possibility of a nuclear war perpetrated by the omnipotence of the military or by a mere electrical-mechanical accident. Before the première of *Dr. Strangelove*, the crew of an American airplane had dropped a nuclear bomb, after having experimented technical difficulties, assuming that it would not explode, since it *probably* had safety devices. In fact, later, it was verified that all the mechanisms had failed with the exception of one, nearly giving rise to a cataclysm (Howard 91). *Dr. Strangelove* is, therefore, an intervention movie, where art appeals to the ethical sense of both the leaders and the masses, and questions the conscience of science, by means of ridicule.

This suspense comedy continues to be the only movie that makes you laugh at the end

of the world. However, the film did not gather the consensus of the critics, due, specially, to its irreverence in the treatment of the theme of a nuclear war, and to its implicit ideological contents. In the British press, for instances, Peregrine Worsthorne qualifies *Dr. Strangelove* as “[a] mammoth sick joke”, while other critics denounce the movie as anti-American propaganda (Howard 97). To be sure, *Dr. Strangelove* is a cruel satire to the political and military institutions of the fifties and sixties. After all, what can be more disturbing than revealing to the public that Democracy has handed the destiny of humankind to individuals who are as mad as zealous?

Moreover, the characters in this movie are similar to well-known personalities of the time. Dr. Strangelove (Peter Sellers), an eccentric German scientist, reminds us of President’s counselor Dr. Henry Kissinger; Merkin Muffley (again, Peter Sellers) resembles physically Adlai Stevenson, a US candidate to the presidential elections; while the mad major Buck Turgidson (George C. Scott) is in the same line of thought as those military who defended a surprise attack to the Soviet Union to ensure American imperialism worldwide (Dirks 2). According to movie critic Paul Duncan, the major is a faithful caricature of General Curtis LeMay, chief of the air strategic command in the fifties, an anti-communist who suggested the US should bomb Vietnam back to stone age (Duncan 89). Similarly, in the first part of *Dr. Strangelove*, Turgidson announces the collapse of the Soviet army by saying: “They are gonna go absolutely ape”.

Still, is not irreverence one of the functions of satire — to denounce and criticize the morals, hypocrisy and madness; to attack the untouchables, making them look pathetic; to make us face our internal demons, by laughter and burlesque? (Gray 255-56). Shortly before the première of the movie, Kubrick told film-maker and reviewer Eugene Archer: “People react, as a rule, when they are directly confronted by events. Here, any direct contact with the bomb would leave very few people to do any reacting. Laughter can only make people a little more thoughtful” (Howard 98).

Dr. Strangelove presents various aspects of satire: situational humor, which frequently upsets audience’s expectations, funny and ironic dialogues, and an inventive use of Jungian archetypes and sexual symbols. In the next pages, I shall only focus the way science is presented and satirized in this movie, through the character of Dr. Strangelove, the significance of the war machines and the technological setting.

3. The scientist in the cave: “They are gonna go absolutely ape”

Kubrick’s secret weapon was Peter Sellers, at the time already a noted actor, who plays the role of nothing less than three important characters in this film: Captain Lionel Mandrake,

President Merkin Muffley and Dr. Strangelove. Strangelove, whose German name is Merkwürdigliebe, mocks the several foreign scientists who, after World War II, contributed to Manhattan project, the code name for the American nuclear program, which started in 1939, consumed two billion dollars and employed tens of thousands of individuals.

Cinema has almost always portrayed scientists as mad and dangerous: Robert Wiene's *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari* (1919), James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), Victor Fleming's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1941), Terence Fisher's *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), Stephen Frears's *Mary Reilly* (1995), etc. Strangelove is refreshingly different from those characters, since he is more humorous than frightening. Sellers brilliantly contributed to the definition and authority of this scientist, by adopting the German accent of Arthur Fellig, a famous crime photographer, whom Kubrick admired and invited to take a few shots during the filming (Duncan 91). Nevertheless, Strangelove has a dark side: he is always surrounded by shadows, isolated from the other characters, portrayed with close up shots, sat in a wheelchair, with his sunglasses, and one mechanical arm with a life of its own, which stretches to give a Hitlerian salute to the American president, treated as *mein Führer*.

As Robert Phillip Kolker explains, all Strangelove's rhetoric points towards the idea of death: "At the peak of the last cold war, at a time when the great, grim myth of communist subversion was (as still is) the operative force in America's ideology, Kubrick suggests that fascism is operating as the ghost in the machine" (Kolker 110). In the original ending, Turgidson announced that Strangelove would be the new world leader, since the President, the only mentally balanced man in the War Room, had gone mad.

In the context of technology, there are two main settings in this movie: the War Room, and the cockpit and bomb bay of a B-52 airplane. The War Room is the center of command of the USA, a space designed by Ken Adam, who worked in several James Bond movies. It is an enormous triangular area, with a metallic floor, surrounded by phosphorescent light, the walls covered with computerized maps. However, because the room is dark and built hundreds of meters below the surface, it becomes similar to a cave, as if the team that works there, composed of the most important political, diplomatic and military leaders of the world, had returned to Pre-History.

The lesson is obvious: in the hands of omnipotent and irresponsible people, science can cause a regression in thought and ethics, the main characteristics that distinguish and mark the superiority of humans over animals. Thomas Allen Nelson goes further and mentions "the primal darkness of the Id" (Nelson 97), associating the obscurity of the room with the thirst of power

and glory hidden inside us.

The other technological space of the movie is also dark and claustrophobic: the cockpit and the bomb bay of a B-52, a plane also known as the flying fortress, capable of carrying fifty megatons of nuclear explosives, sixteen times more potent than the total power of bombs used by all the military forces involved in World War II. The responsible for the control of this technological prodigy is Major T. J. *King Kong* (Slim Pickens), a cow-boy with a Texan accent, who reads an issue of erotic magazine *Playboy*, while waiting for the attack to begin. Kong is a mirror of Ripper, when it comes to zeal and rhetoric. This is the speech he delivers to his men to raise their moral:

Now look, boys. I ain't much of a hand at makin' speeches. But I got a pretty fair idea that somethin' doggoned important's going on back there. And I got a fair idea of the kind of personal emotions that some of you fellas may be thinkin'. Heck, I reckon you wouldn't even be human bein's if you didn't have some pretty strong personal feelings about nuclear combat. But I want you to remember one thing — the folks back home is a countin' on ya, and by golly, we ain't about to let'em down. Tell ya somethin' else — this thing turns out to be half as important as I figure it just might be, I'd say that you're all in line for some important promotions an' personal citations when this thing's over with.

By the end of the movie, Kong sits on the top of the bomb, which he thought to be stuck, like a cowboy riding his horse — a phallic image where fertility and death become inseparable. Flying, the major guides the bomb towards the target, and automatically deploys the Soviet's Doomsday Machine, leading to genocide" (Nelson 84). To ensure that retaliation against an American attack would proceed, even if all the Russians had been annihilated, scientists had created a machine capable of activating itself. Present both at the beginning and at the ending of *Dr. Strangelove*, neither its appearance nor its destructive effects are shown to the audience, an omission that only makes the Doomsday Machine even more fearful, as if it were a God — omnipresent, and above all the human powers.

4. The happy ending

Dr. Strangelove was nominated for four Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Actor (Peter Sellers), Best Director and Best Adapted Screenplay. Though it did not win any Oscar, *Dr. Strangelove* has not lost its actuality — just consider the present situation in Iran and in the possibility of a new Cold War. The satirical tone, the simplicity of the narrative, the concentration of spaces, the creative appropriation of techniques from *cinema vérité*, which provides a great

realism, the recurring sexual symbols, the typified characters, mocking some of the most important politicians and military of the time, and the excellent performances of Peter Sellers, Sterling Hayden and George C. Scott contribute to make this one of the most enduring movies of the nuclear subgenre.

Less speculative but more satirical than other Kubrick's movies, *Dr. Strangelove* makes us question the role of the scientists and politicians in the destiny of humankind and of our planet. However, this movie warns us against an even greater danger: the one of not being able to laugh at ourselves and at the madness of this world as *seriously* as we should.

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Abstract

Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) is the cinematic adaptation of Peter George's novel *Red Alert*. This black comedy and political satire exposes the madness and dangers of the military use of nuclear energy that easily lead to the end of humanity. In this article I examine: a) the tone of the film used by Kubrick to expose the threat of an atomic holocaust during the cold war era; b) the narrative strategies used to represent science: the character of Dr. Strangelove, the significance of the war machines and the technological setting. My objective is to prove that this science fiction film denounces the risk of practicing science without conscience, by constructing a discourse of counterculture where madness, fiction and reality intelligently intermingle.

Resumo

O filme *Dr. Strangelove: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, de Stanley Kubrick, constitui a adaptação cinematográfica do romance *Red Alert*, de Peter George. Esta comédia negra e sátira política expõe a loucura e os perigos do uso militar da energia atômica, que pode facilmente conduzir ao extermínio da humanidade. Neste artigo, examino: a) o tom do filme usado por Kubrick para demonstrar o risco de um holocausto durante a Guerra Fria; b) as estratégias narrativas empregadas para representar a ciência: a personagem de Dr. Strangelove, o significado das máquinas de guerra e dos cenários tecnológicos. O meu objetivo é provar que esta película de ficção científica denuncia o risco de praticar a ciência sem consciência, ao construir um discurso de contracultura, onde a loucura, a ficção e a realidade inteligentemente se misturam.

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1. Introdução: “Nuclear combat toe to toe with the Ruskies”

Nos Estados Unidos da América, a década de cinquenta veio a ser conhecida como a Era da Ansiedade. Num clima de suspeita mútua, tantos os EUA como a União Soviética, superpotências que emergiram da carnificina da Segunda Guerra Mundial, reforçaram o seu arsenal atómico, um processo que, teoricamente, dissuadiria o inimigo de um ataque nuclear (Tindall 1379).

Na prática, o mínimo erro originaria uma guerra com consequências imprevisíveis, mas certamente catastróficas. O futuro da espécie humana repousava nas mãos de dois líderes e qualquer um deles poderia carregar no botão fatal. Numerosos americanos armazenaram rações de sobrevivência, compraram fatos antirradiação, que os protegeriam na eventualidade de uma batalha nuclear, e construíram abrigos nos seus jardins. Várias empresas, como a Portland Cement Association, ofereciam domicílios apropriados à era atómica: “This blast-resistant house is based on principles learned at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and at Eniwetok and Yucca Falls (...) This shelter area affords protection from radiation, fire and flying debris as well” (Heimann 74).

De celebridades a cientistas, do homem comum ao perito em questões atómicas, todos viviam no terror de um conflito nuclear. Quando um jornalista perguntou a Marilyn Monroe qual era o seu maior medo, a diva prontamente respondeu: “The bomb”. Similarmente, após o teste do primeiro engenho nuclear, Albert Einstein advertiu o presidente Harry S. Truman, através de carta, acerca do uso militar da energia atómica: “I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones”. Estranhamente, os líderes mundiais pareciam ser os menos preocupados. Mao Tse Tung até afirmou a Jawaharlal Nehru: “The atom bomb is nothing to be afraid of (...) China has many people. (...) The death of ten or

twenty million people is nothing to be afraid of” (Dillard 56).

A geopolítica da Guerra Fria produziu sobretudo dois géneros cinematográficos, o *thriller* de espionagem e a ficção científica, que se popularizaram principalmente após a crise de Cuba e do muro de Berlim, e continuariam a desenvolver-se até à desagregação da União Soviética, nos anos noventa (Orr 50). Durante a década de cinquenta, numerosos filmes focaram a possibilidade de uma guerra nuclear e as suas consequências para a espécie humana. *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* (1959), de Ronald McDougall, por exemplo, explora o tema da reconstrução de um mundo devastado, após um holocausto atómico. Também *On the Beach* (1959), de Stanley Kramer, aborda este assunto, ao narrar as aventuras de um submarino que escapa à destruição em massa, deixando a Gregory Peck e a Ava Gardner a missão de repovoar o planeta. Contudo, como afirmou o crítico britânico James Howard, nenhuma destas películas mostra realmente imagens dos horrores da guerra, nem dá conta dos eventos que a ela conduziram, poupando a audiência, e concentrando-se apenas no ataque (Howard 90-91).

Nos anos sessenta, a situação mudou. As reportagens televisivas sobre testes nucleares, a conquista soviética do espaço, e a crise dos mísseis de Cuba, durante a presidência de John Fitzgerald Kennedy, levaram os norte-americanos à paranoia. Estes acontecimentos despertaram o interesse dos estúdios e os filmes nucleares tornaram-se num subgénero rentável (Newman 166). Películas como *The Damned* (1961), de Joseph Losey, *Ladybug, Ladybug* (1963), de Frank Perry, *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), de John Frankenheimer, *The Best Man* (1964), de Franklin J. Schaffner, e *Fail Safe* (1964), de Sidney Lumet, abordaram o tema do do perigo iminente de uma guerra nuclear (Neve 212-213). Porém, nenhum destes filmes se atreveu a questionar o sistema ou a adotar uma abordagem satírica ao *status quo*.

Desde a década de cinquenta que Stanley Kubrick se interessara por política, estratégia, táticas, guerra e poder. O realizador era assinante da *Aviation Weekly* e do *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, e lera aproximadamente setenta romances de guerra (Nelson 79). Um desses livros, em particular, chamou-lhe à atenção: *Red Alert*, de Peter George, primeiramente publicado em Inglaterra, com o título *Two Hours of Doom*, sob o pseudónimo de Peter Bryant. Kubrick e James Harris compraram os direitos do romance por 3 mil dólares, quando se aperceberam do potencial do texto, e trabalharam arduamente com Peter George, para criarem o argumento. Pouco a pouco, surgiu a ideia de transformar o enredo original numa sátira à paranoia da Guerra Fria. Harry explica: “Usually at night, when we were giggly, when we used to talk about the humor in the situation: you know, what if everybody in the war room got hungry and had to call down to the deli and we had a guy with an apron come in and take orders, and all these other what ifs” (Howard 91).

Quando Harris se encontrava na Califórnia, recebeu uma chamada telefónica entusiástica de Kubrick, que decidira criar uma sátira cinematográfica, proporcionando à audiência uma visão inesperada e chocante de uma guerra nuclear causada pela estupidez e zelo humanos. Com algumas reservas, Harris concordou, e contrataram Terry Southern, um repórter sensacionalista, para escrever a comédia negra *Dr. Strangelove: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964). O título refere-se a uma personagem interpretada por Peter Sellers que, curiosamente, não surge no argumento original de George, mas que corresponde à imagem estereotipada do cientista louco, e se torna num dos elementos mais humorísticos do filme (Duncan 86).

2. A sátira mais cruel: “Gentleman, you can’t fight here, this is the war room”

Em *Dr. Strangelove*, o génio de Kubrick revela-se pela menos em três aspetos. Primeiro, com um aguçado espírito de observação, o realizador combina, neste filme pré-apocalíptico, o receio das multidões, a ideologia dos políticos, o fanatismo lunático da mente militar, o ódio patológico contra os comunistas, e a retórica paranoide, para proporcionar aos espetadores uma visão concisa e irónica da Guerra Fria.

Em segundo lugar, Kubrick e o guionista conceberam uma série de acontecimentos que conduzem a um destino tão inevitável quanto plausível: uma guerra nuclear (Kolker 103). Porém, cada acontecimento, *per se*, parece ter sido extraído de um pesadelo, reforçando, assim, o ambiente de paranoia. A crise é desencadeada pelo general Jack D. Ripper (note-se a ironia do nome), comandante da base aérea de Burpelson, que, enganando os seus subordinados, anuncia que os russos iniciaram um ataque contra os EUA. Sem demora, ordena aos aviões nucleares B52, a apenas duas horas do inimigo, que retaliem. O verdadeiro motivo reside no fanatismo de Ripper, que acredita que os russos envenenaram o seu “precioso fluido corporal”, através da água. Foi neste contexto que o termo *Strangelovian* entrou na linguagem quotidiana para descrever qualquer situação implausível, com consequências potencialmente desastrosas (Kolker 103).

Em terceiro lugar, apesar do surrealismo que impregna o enredo, o filme adverte as audiências acerca da séria possibilidade de uma guerra nuclear perpetrada pela onipotência dos militares ou por qualquer acidente elétrico ou mecânico. Antes da estreia de *Dr. Strangelove*, os tripulantes de um avião norte-americano lançaram, por negligência, uma bomba nuclear, após experienciarem problemas técnicos, assumindo que não explodiria, porque *provavelmente* tinha um mecanismo de segurança. De facto, mais tarde, verificou-se que todos

os dispositivos tinham falhado, à exceção de um, quase resultando num cataclismo (Howard 91). *Dr. Strangelove* constitui, portanto, um filme interventivo, onde a arte apela ao sentido ético tanto dos líderes como das massas, e questiona a consciência da ciência, através do ridículo.

Esta comédia de suspense continua a ser o único filme que nos faz rir acerca do fim do mundo. No entanto, a película não reuniu consenso junto dos críticos, devido especialmente à sua irreverência ao tratamento do tema da guerra nuclear, num conteúdo implicitamente ideológico. Na imprensa britânica, por exemplo, Peregrine Worsthorne classifica *Dr. Strangelove* como uma monumental piada de mau gosto, enquanto outros críticos denunciam o filme como propaganda antiamericana (Howard 97). Por certo, esta película insurge-se contra as instituições políticas e militares das décadas de cinquenta e sessenta; e, no fim de contas, o que pode ser mais perturbador do que revelar ao público que a democracia entregou o destino da humanidade a pessoas tão loucas quanto zelosas?

Para além disso, as personagens neste filme são semelhantes a indivíduos bem conhecidos na época. Dr. Strangelove (Peter Sellers), um excêntrico cientista alemão, lembra o conselheiro do presidente, Dr. Henry Kissinger; Merkin Muffley (um papel também desempenhado por Peter Sellers) evoca fisicamente Adlai Stevenson, candidato norte-americano às eleições para a Casa Branca; enquanto o tresloucado major *Buck Turgidson* (George C. Scott) representa a mentalidade dos militares que defendiam um ataque surpresa à União Soviética para assegurar o imperialismo norte-americano em todo o mundo (Dirks 2). Segundo o crítico cinematográfico Paul Duncan, o major constitui uma caricatura fiel do general Curtis LeMay, líder do comando estratégico aéreo na década de cinquenta, um anticomunista que sugeriu que os norte-americanos bombardeassem o Vietnam até este regressar à idade da pedra (Duncan 89). Similarmente, na primeira parte de *Dr. Strangelove*, Turgidson anuncia o colapso do exército soviético ao exultar: “They are gonna go absolutely ape”.

Contudo, não será a irreverência uma das funções da sátira, para denunciar e criticar a moral, hipocrisia e loucura; para atacar os intocáveis, fazendo-os parecer patéticos; para nos fazer enfrentar os nossos demónios internos, através do riso e do burlesco? (Gray 255-256). Pouco antes da estreia do filme, Kubrick afirmou ao realizador e crítico Eugene Archer: “People react, as a rule, when they are directly confronted by events. Here, any direct contact with the bomb would leave very few people to do any reacting. Laughter can only make people a little more thoughtful” (Howard 98).

Dr. Strangelove apresenta diversos aspetos da sátira: o cómico de situação, que frequentemente perturba as expectativas do público, diálogos humorísticos e irónicos, e um emprego inventivo dos arquétipos junguianos e símbolos sexuais. Nas próximas páginas,

tenciono apenas concentrar-me na forma como a ciência é apresentada e satirizada neste filme, através da personagem de Dr. Strangelove, e no significado da maquinaria de guerra e do cenário tecnológico.

3. O cientista na cave: “They are gonna go absolutely ape”

A arma secreta de Kubrick foi Peter Sellers, na altura já um ator de renome, que desempenha o papel de nada menos do que três personagens importantes neste filme: o capitão Lionel Mandrake, o presidente Merkin Muffley e o Dr. Strangelove. Este último, cujo apelido alemão é Merkwürdigliebe, goza com os diversos cientistas estrangeiros que, após a Segunda Grande Guerra, contribuíram para o projeto Manhattan, o nome de código para o programa nuclear norte-americano, que principiou em 1939, consumiu dois biliões de dólares e empregou dezenas de milhares de indivíduos.

O cinema quase sempre retratou os cientistas como loucos e perigosos. Penso nos filmes *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari* (1919), de Robert Wiene, *Bride of Frankenstein*, de James Whale (1935), *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1941), de Victor Flemming, *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), de Terence Fisher, *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), de Tim Burton, *Mary Reilly* (1995), de Stephen Frears, etc. Strangelove é bem diferente dessas personagens, apresentando-se mais humorístico do que assustador. Sellers contribui brilhantemente para a definição e autoridade deste cientista, ao adotar o sotaque germânico de Arthur Fellig, um famoso fotógrafo criminal, que Kubrick admirava e que convidou a tirar algumas fotografias durante a filmagem (Duncan 91). Contudo, Strangelove detém uma faceta negra: encontra-se sempre rodeado por sombras, isolados das restantes personagens, apresentado em grande plano, sentado numa cadeira de rodas, com os seus óculos escuros e um braço mecânico que parece ter vida própria e se estende numa saudação hitleriana ao presidente norte-americano, tratado por *mein Führer*.

Como explica Phillip Kolker, toda a retórica de Strangelove aponta para a ideia de morte: “At the peak of the last cold war, at a time when the great, grim myth of communist subversion was (as still is) the operative force in America’s ideology, Kubrick suggests that fascism is operating as the ghost in the machine” (Kolker 110). No epílogo original, Turgidson anuncia que Strangelove será o novo líder do mundo, dado que o presidente, o único homem mentalmente sã no Gabinete de Guerra, enlouqueceu.

No contexto da tecnologia, existem sobretudo dois cenários a assinalar no filme: o Gabinete de Guerra, e o habitáculo do bombardeiro B52. O primeiro constitui o centro de comando dos EUA, um espaço concebido por Ken Adam, que trabalhou em diversos filmes de

James Bond. Trata-se de uma ampla área triangular, com um chão metálico, rodeada por luz fosforescente, e com as paredes cobertas por mapas computadorizados. No entanto, porque a sala é escura e se encontra a várias centenas de metros de profundidade, torna-se semelhante a uma caverna, como se a equipa que ali trabalha, constituída pelos políticos, diplomatas e líderes militares mais importantes do planeta, tivesse regressado à pré-história.

A lição é evidente: nas mãos de indivíduos onnipotentes e irresponsáveis, a ciência pode causar uma regressão no pensamento e na ética, as principais características que distinguem e vinculam a superioridade dos humanos em relação aos animais. Thomas Allan Nelson vai mais longe e refere a escuridão primordial do id, associando a obscuridade da sala à sede de poder e glória ocultas dentro de nós (Nelson 97).

O outro espaço tecnológico do filme é também sombrio e claustrofóbico: o habitáculo do bombardeiro B52, um avião conhecido por fortaleza voadora, capaz de carregar cinquenta megatoneladas de explosivos, dezasseis vezes mais potente do que o poder total das bombas usadas por todas as forças militares envolvidas na Segunda Guerra Mundial. O responsável pelo controlo deste prodígio tecnológico é o Major T. J. *King Kong* (Slim Pickens), um cowboy com pronúncia mexicana, que lê um exemplar da revista erótica *Playboy*, enquanto aguarda o início do ataque. Kong é um espelho de Ripper, no que toca ao zelo e à retórica. Este é o discurso que apresenta aos seus homens, para levantar o ânimo:

Now look, boys. I ain't much of a hand at makin' speeches. But I got a pretty fair idea that somethin' doggoned important's going on back there. And I got a fair idea of the kind of personal emotions that some of you fellas may be thinkin'. Heck, I reckon you wouldn't even be human bein's if you didn't have some pretty strong personal feelings about nuclear combat. But I want you to remember one thing — the folks back home is a countin' on ya, and by golly, we ain't about to let'em down. Tell ya somethin' else — this thing turns out to be half as important as I figure it just might be, I'd say that you're all in line for some important promotions an' personal citations when this thing's over with.

No epílogo do filme, Kong senta-se em cima da bomba, que julgava estar encravada, como um cowboy a montar no seu cavalo — uma imagem fálica onde a fertilidade e a morte se tornam inseparáveis. Voando, o major guia a bomba na direção do alvo e, automaticamente, aciona a Máquina do Destino soviética, conduzindo ao genocídio (Nelson 84). Para garantir que a retaliação contra um ataque norte-americano prosseguiria, mesmo que os russos tivessem sido aniquilados, os cientistas haviam criado um engenho capaz de se ativar sozinho. Presente quer no início, quer no final, de *Dr. Strangelove*, nem a sua aparência nem os efeitos destrutivos são mostrados ao público, uma omissão que torna a Máquina do Destino ainda mais temível,

como se esta fosse uma divindade, omnipresente e acima de todos os humanos poderes.

4. O final feliz

Dr. Strangelove foi nomeado para quatro óscares da Academia: melhor filme, melhor ator (Peter Sellers), melhor realizador e melhor argumento adaptado. Embora não tenha ganho nenhum óscar, esta película não perdeu a sua atualidade — basta pensar na atual situação do Irão e na hipótese de uma nova Guerra Fria. O tom satírico, a simplicidade da narrativa, os espaços concentrados, a apropriação criativa de técnicas do *cinema verité*, que proporcionam uma grande realismo, os símbolos sexuais recorrentes, as personagens tipificadas, que satirizam os mais mediáticos políticos e militares da sua época, e os excelentes desempenhos de Peter Sellers, Sterling Hayden e George C. Scott contribuem para tornar este num dos mais duradouros filmes do subgénero nuclear.

Menos especulativo, mas mais satírico do que outras películas de Kubrick, *Dr. Strangelove* faz-nos questionar o papel dos cientistas e dos políticos no destino da humanidade e do nosso planeta. Contudo, este filme acautela-nos perante um perigo ainda maior: o de não sermos capazes de rir de nós próprios e da loucura deste mundo, como *seriamente* deveríamos.

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Abstract

Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) is the cinematic adaptation of Peter George's novel *Red Alert*. This black comedy and political satire exposes the madness and dangers of the military use of nuclear energy that easily lead to the end of humanity. In this article I examine: a) the tone of the film used by Kubrick to expose the threat of an atomic holocaust during the cold war era; b) the narrative strategies used to represent science: the character of Dr. Strangelove, the significance of the war machines and the technological setting. My objective is to prove that this science fiction film denounces the risk of practicing science without conscience, by constructing a discourse of counterculture where madness, fiction and reality intelligently intermingle.

Resumo

O filme *Dr. Strangelove: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, de Stanley Kubrick, constitui a adaptação cinematográfica do romance *Red Alert*, de Peter George. Esta comédia negra e sátira política expõe a loucura e os perigos do uso militar da energia atômica, que pode facilmente conduzir ao extermínio da humanidade. Neste artigo, examino: a) o tom do filme usado por Kubrick para demonstrar o risco de um holocausto durante a Guerra Fria; b) as estratégias narrativas empregadas para representar a ciência: a personagem de Dr. Strangelove, o significado das máquinas de guerra e dos cenários tecnológicos. O meu objetivo é provar que esta película de ficção científica denuncia o risco de praticar a ciência sem consciência, ao construir um discurso de contracultura, onde a loucura, a ficção e a realidade inteligentemente se misturam.