

FILM JOURNAL

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

By Eric Monder
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DOUBLE TAKE(NR)

Kino Video presents a Zap-O-Matik production with Nikovantastic Films and Volya Films/color & b&w/1.78:1/Dolby SR/80 mins.

Credits: Directed and Written by Johan Grimonprez; Story by Tom McCarthy; Executive Producer: Doris Hepp; Producer: Emmy Oost; Cinematography: Martin Testar; Editors: Dieter Diependaele and Tyler Hubby; Original Music: Christian Halten
Cast: Ron Burrage, Mark Perry, Delfine Bafort.

Johan Grimonprez sure knows his Hitchcock! Double Take is a dazzling and dizzying avant garde documentary homage—and then some. Belgian director and media artist Grimonprez takes bits and pieces of Hitchcock films--and the Hitchcock legend--and scatters them against the backdrop of the Cold War, the era when “The Master of Suspense” was at his most prominent in the public consciousness. Much more than a survey of a filmmaker’s canon, Double Take probes the self-reflexive Hall of Mirrors that was essential Hitchcock and relates it to issues of war and peace.

Hitchcock buffs alone should make Double Take an indie hit though others might be curious, if confused, by this postmodern assemblage. While playfully weaving together clips and audio, Gimonprez also introduces us to two individuals involved in continuing the Hitchcock mystique: Ron Burrage, an Alfred Hitchcock impersonator, and Mark Perry, a Hitchcock vocal double. Throughout Double Take, we are treated to Burrage and Perry’s work, although mixed in with the “real” Hitchcock voice and image to a point where we are not always sure who we are hearing or seeing (or even what year we are in—1962 or 1980). And that is part of the game of this film—particularly since Hitchcock himself enjoyed fooling his audiences in a variety of ways, including undercutting generic expectations (speaking of which, Tom McCarthy’s Double Take story was inspired by Jorge Luis Borges’ novella, *The Othera*).

Grimonprez juxtaposes footage from 1950s newsreels and short subjects about Cold War annihilation with Hitchcock’s brand of pop culture terror (using his TV series and “late” features, including *Psycho* and *The Birds*, to maximum effect). There are several vintage Folgers Coffee commercials (the official sponsor of Alfred Hitchcock Presents) that are made ominous either by the having Bernard Herrmann’s *Psycho* themes (reworked by composer Christian Halten) accompany the seemingly benign, through glaringly sexist, domestic moments or by following them with newly-shot “recreations” of the poisoned coffee scenes from Hitchcock’s spy films, *Notorious* and *Topaz*. Add to this footage of Nixon vs. Kruschev debating communism, Nixon vs. Kennedy debating space

exploration, other world leaders grinning at or kissing each other, commercials for color TV sets (and remotes), rocket liftoffs, and A-Bomb mushroom clouds.

About midway through this *mélange*, we hear Hitchcock's observation (or is it Perry speaking?) that "The misfortunes you are already accustomed to will repeat themselves...in time, you will come to see that cinema merely confirms the old language. If we were successful, this is because we showed people what they recognize of themselves—guilt, desire, anxiety, love, death, guilt, above all guilt." Whether this is Hitchcock or Grimonprez's way of saying cinema often reinvents the wheel, they are both also saying what we don't learn from history, we are condemned to repeat. And the film's title, *Double Take*, gains an even more cryptic meaning than what we first might have assumed. Such Cold War texts as *The Birds* and *Topaz* seem more profound and prophetic than ever and, at the climax, a fascinating and little-known connection between Hitchcock and Kennedy is revealed. A classic nonsense quote from Donald Rumsfeld, uttered during the Iraq invasion, caps the film, appropriately.

Surely, Grimonprez could have limited his re-ordering and repetition to Hitchcock bits alone and would have had a Youtube classic (or something akin to his 2005 collage-film, *Looking for Alfred*). But *Double Take* is much more than this—something like a contemporary version of *A MOVIE* (1958), Bruce Conner's beautiful and groundbreaking meditation on movie-watching and the human condition.