

...Ology.com

June 2, 2010

'Double Take' Provides Layered Look at Cold War Paranoia

By NATALIE ZUTTER



Johan Grimmonprez blends satire, capitalism, and history in *Double Take*, his examination on society's dualities and the life and work of Alfred Hitchcock. One man alone cannot properly tell this story—and so it is that Grimmonprez tracks down Ron Burrage, a famous Hitchcock lookalike in his twilight years, and voice artist Mark Perry. The film cuts between Burrage's TV gigs and a

fictional account by novelist Tom McCarthy, in which Hitchcock encounters his older self on the set of *The Birds* in 1962. "If you meet your double," Hitchcock intones, "you should kill him." He and his shadowy doppelganger regard each other with a mixture of revulsion and confusion, both knowing how the encounter must end.

This ambivalence lends itself to the U.S.-Soviet Union relations during the Cold War, as both nations raced to break through the atmosphere and did the nuclear-warfare dance. As chilling as a Hitchcock classic is Grimmonprez's choice to layer dialogue and narration from the auteur himself over footage from the '50s and '60s. First Richard Nixon and Nikita Krushchev are warring doubles; then Nixon and John F. Kennedy in the famous TV debate; then JFK and Krushchev again. This ordering reveals the poetry inherent in the passage of power—and yet the tone of the film is still light-hearted, with numerous funny Folgers coffee commercials spliced with newsreels.

In keeping with the "double" theme, Grimmonprez reminds the audience that there are two perspectives to every story: President versus Premier, husband versus housewife, 1962 Alfred versus 1980 Alfred. To look into your opponent's eyes is to witness a piece of yourself stolen or copied.

Hitchcock's paranoia is the world's paranoia, as evidenced by footage of the launch of Sputnik, the famous "Kitchen Debate", and another set of twins, television versus film. While their contention has not always been documented—people better remember how video killed the radio star—as one who treads the fine line between media, Hitchcock points out (in clips from his 1950s program *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*) that the "child" of film will devour its progenitor.

There can be only one.

Yet despite the cloying paranoia of the time period it examines, *Double Take* is fun. Video footage is manipulated to reveal the presence of doubles and MacGuffins, providing a much more textured experience of not only the politics of that era, not only the entertainment, not only the tragedy—but rather, all combined.

Sum...ology: Although it's hard to follow in parts, *Double Take* is terrifically smart and appropriately wry. It revitalizes all of the historical events involved, granting through their intersections new context, and eliciting more than a few goosebumps.