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## Double Take

(Belgium) A Zap-O-Matik presentation, in co-production with Nikovantastic Film, Volya Films. Produced by Emmy Oost. Co-producers, Hanneke van der Tas, Nicole Gerhards, Denis Vaslin. Directed, written by Johan Grimonprez. Story, Tom McCarthy, inspired by Jorge Luis Borges' story "25 August 1983."

**With:** Ron Burrage, Mark Perry.  
(English dialogue)

By [ROBERT KOEHLER](#)

**Belgian filmmaker and media artist Johan Grimonprez provocatively uses Alfred Hitchcock as a filter through which to examine the Cold War -- and its attendant media-generated paranoia -- in his galvanizing, elegant and wildly entertaining "Double Take." Part fiction, part nonfiction and thoroughly inventive in its experimentation with the line between myth and history, the pic is as gripping a suspense movie as one of Hitchcock's own, and shows remarkable breadth of vision. It could cross over from art-oriented fest sidebars to somewhat wider auds with proper handling, with tube sales being the best bet.**

Indeed, watching "Double Take" on TV would be doubly amusing, since it delivers a caustic attack on the medium (frequently intoned by Hitchcock himself) while exploring its facets as delivery box of entertainment, news, advertising, fear and comfort. Connections to the current era's "war on terror" are not coincidental.

Three parallel story tracks, none of them kept in strictly chronological order, form the dazzling core of this suspenseful and witty presentation: author Tom McCarthy's fiction (voiced by actor Mark Perry, doing a spot-on Hitch impersonation) about the director encountering his double in the Universal Studios office building during lensing of "The Birds"; the rising Cold War tension between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. from Sputnik in 1957 to Soviet premiere Nikita Khrushchev's 1964 dethroning by Leonid Brezhnev; and Hitchcock's playful ways with TV during his first skein, "Alfred Hitchcock Presents," whose seasons roughly parallel the selected Cold War period.

CBS eminence grise Walter Cronkite appears at first, reporting on the notorious "kitchen debate" between a feisty Khrushchev and an obviously outsmarted Richard Nixon, whose best retort to the Soviet

leader's critiques of U.S. capitalism is to point to the latest in TV sets. It's the perfect link to Hitch's own show, whose ironic intros are delightfully archived and edited here for brilliant impact. A bonus is a series of ads by the show's sponsor, Folgers Coffee, which reflect American social attitudes from the '50s and early 60s.

The story track about doubles meeting each other, inspired by a Jorge Luis Borges tale and supported by Christian Halten's Bernard Herrmann-like score, develops a haunting, hall-of-mirrors psychological intensity. The section features original color lensing (shot in Belgium, with no camera credit given), much of it framed in suggestive closeups and standing in visual high relief in a film dominated by black-and-white archival footage.

Grimonprez views "The Birds" (a film that has recently emerged as one of Hitchcock's key works, yielding a wide range of interpretations) as a metaphor for nuclear terror and fear-mongering. But the helmer, with ace editors Dieter Diependaele and Tyler Hubby, takes special pleasure in including several funny clips from the elaborate promo campaign for that film, often involving star Tippi Hedren and several actual birds.

Also certain to stir a smile is thesp Ron Burrage's resemblance to Hitchcock; while it isn't absolute, it's close enough for folks to do a, yes, double take -- and further resonates with the film's notion of Hitchcock doubles. Grimonprez's 2005 installation "Looking for Alfred" also concerned itself with this idea. But the current film adds to it a disturbing, apocalyptic insight by Hitchcock: "If you meet your double, you should kill him."

Technically, "Double Take" is elegantly assembled, with Ranko Paukovic's powerful sound design a standout.

Camera (color/B&W); editors, Dieter Diependaele, Tyler Hubby; music, Christian Halten; sound designer (Dolby Digital), Ranko Paukovic; supervising producer, Doris Hepp. Reviewed at Buenos Aires Film Festival, March 26, 2009. (Also in Berlin Film Festival -- Forum Expanded.) Running time: 80 MIN.

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