

Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One 1968 ★★★★★

Review by Edgar Cochran
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Cannot read the "WTF" title? Repeat with me:

Symbio
Psycho
Taxi-plasm

There you go!

Taxi-plasm

There you go!

Before I proceed, it is important to understand my personal differentiation between a **documentary** and a **film**. A **film** is a work of fiction, not necessarily based on real life. It is something staged, planned and acted. It is NOT reality captured at the moment. A synonym for film is "movie". A **documentary** is not acted nor staged (with extremely rare exceptions). You cannot plan all aspects of a documentary, because it captures reality at the moment. Therefore, the people appearing do not portray any other people, characters or personifications. Finally, the term **meta** refers to any media that portrays the same media within it. Example: 8½ (1963) is a metafilm. When I mention either one term or the other, please take it in its literal form.

Originated from Arthur F. Bentley's book *Inquiry Into Inquiries: Essays in Social Theory*, Greaves redefined the term "Symbiotaxiplasm" as "those events that transpire in the course of anyone's life that have an impact on the consciousness and the psyche of the average human being, and how that human being also controls or effects changes or has an impact on the environment". The purpose of adding "psycho" to the abstract terminology is to emphasize the fact that the perception of reality occurs in the mind of the spectator, and the thoughts and emotions it causes in the audience are random variables.

With these complex scientific foundations, the vision for *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* is born. In short, the documentary features the director William Greaves filming a movie with a pair of actors. The working title is "Over the Cliff". We see how the scenes are shot, but we also see how the scenes are being cut, and then we can appreciate the actual filming crew filming the film (the structure allows me to be intentionally reiterative, so brace yourself). While we see the filming crew filming the film, another third crew **also instructed by William Greaves** is in charge of documenting the documentation of the second crew, which is actually documenting the filming of the first crew. In this sense, therefore, we have the following levels of cinematic reality and suprarality:

- A fictional film, that is, fiction over fiction, because the movie is fictional, and a movie, by definition, is fiction. This is represented by the first film crew. This is not reality. Level 1.
- A documentary about a fictional fiction (that is, the film), which rises us up to a higher level of "reality", because we have already fallen into the concept of documentary. This is represented by the second film crew. This is already reality. Level 2. **The director William Greaves decided to remain at this level.**
- A metadocumentary about the documentary depicting the creative process of making a film. This is the highest level of reality. The crew has several discussions throughout regarding the lack of focus and directing talents of William Greaves they have noticed, and about how everything might actually be a metafilm experiment by Greaves who might be secretly pulling everybody's strings without nobody or just few noticing it, including their own. They are not sure, but they suspect it. Level 3.

For adding to the complexity, we have also more details:

- The fictional film "Over the Cliff" circles around sexual thematic material.
- The documentary about the film (Level 2) has sexual connotations, and **Greaves intentionally films them.**
- The Level 3 crew discusses that Greaves is in the possibility of editing the three different footages in an infinite number of ways, just in case that we were actually dealing with a meta-experiment.
- The Level 3 crew also discusses that, every time that the camera rolled, Greaves would transform to a more extroverted character, but the fact is, he is normally more serious and quiet. He is *clearly* acting. What is he acting for? Why?

This is, beyond all doubt and reason, one of the most brilliant concepts ever applied to the film-making world. The most genius aspect about this experiment, beyond playing with the levels of our perception, is that we are not sure of ANYTHING. What if everything was acted?? What if everything was a film, and we were stuck in a Level 1 fiction all the time? What if the Level 3 crew is acting? They mentioned the possibility themselves. Although very unlikely, there are infinite layers of information filtering. At least three layers separate us from Greaves' directorial mind, but we understood the point.

You see? *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One* might be a good-for-nothing project, because we are not sure of anything, but we are sure of its message, and in that sense, it is a very useful project.

Damn you, Greaves!

99/100

<https://letterboxd.com/elcochran90/film/symbiopsychotaxiplasm-take-one/>