



Pop culture obsessives writing for the pop cult...

Shop

Subscribe

[HOME](#) [LATEST](#) [FILM](#) [TV CLUB](#) [MUSIC](#) [GAMES](#) [VIDEO](#) [TV REVIEWS](#) [REVIEWS](#) [AND MORE](#)[REVIEWS](#) >> [DVD REVIEW](#)

Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One



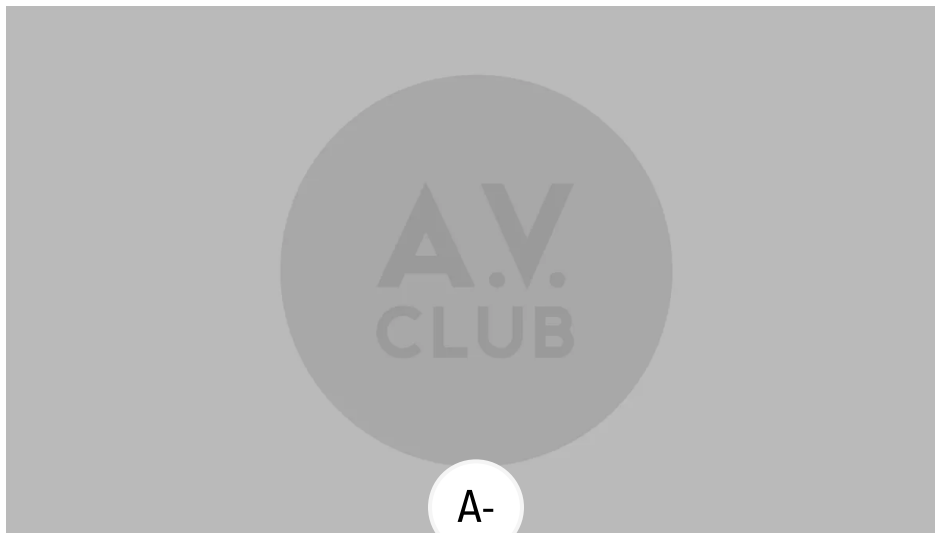
Noel Murray

1/03/07 9:48AM • Filed to: DVD ▾

Save



DVD REVIEW



A-

Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One

On paper, William Greaves' art-film *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One* sounds like the kind of storm-the-doors-of-perception "happening" that made going out to be entertained such a drag back in 1968. Greaves, an accomplished documentary filmmaker and acting coach, shot a badly scripted conversation between a squabbling couple in New York's Central Park, and simultaneously shot himself shooting the conversation. At one point, his crew went off on their own and filmed themselves debating whether Greaves knew what he was doing. Greaves cut all this together, with split-screens and snippets of muffled audio tracks, in order to explore the point where artifice ends and reality begins.

But ironically, what keeps *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One* from being insufferable is that its artifice is so spectacular. The editing is snappy—and the run time is short—and when Greaves' actors really get into a groove with their dopey conversation, they can hold the audience rapt even while Greaves and his cameras are right there with them in the frame. The performances epitomize a film about moments, captured and analyzed as they happen.

Greaves couldn't get much play with *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One* back in 1968, so he went back to documentaries, and the film was largely forgotten until a Greaves retrospective in the early '90s brought it back to light. Since then, it's been revived fairly regularly on the rep circuit, and earned the admiration of Steve Buscemi and Steven Soderbergh, who helped restore the film and finance a semi-sequel, *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take 2 1/2* (included on the second disc of Criterion's DVD set). For *Take 2 1/2*, Greaves cuts together unused footage from the original—mainly of another set of actors rehearsing and performing "the conversation"—with new footage of the same actors 35 years later, still arguing.

The sequel is a bit too much to take on the heels of the original, but it helps clarify what makes *Take One* so special. *Take 2 1/2* includes another sequence of the crew gathering to discuss the movie-in-progress, and as before, they don't get too heavy. They take everything in on a down-to-earth level, and consider how Greaves' direct and indirect intervention—sometimes for good, sometimes not—characterizes the true nature of God. Or at least art.

Key features: An informative documentary on Greaves' career, and an interview with Buscemi about his long-term relationship with this project.