


HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA


**Locarno Critics
Academy**

Experience the Cinema Trance

Documentário and *Abismu* by Rogério Sganzerla

Shown together as a double feature, *Documentário* (1966) and *Abismu* (1977), directed by Rogério Sganzerla, showcase two different moments in the career of a filmmaker who never ceased to discover new forms of plunging into the cinema experience. For him, movies were a way to expand life and inject chaos and creativity into the dull boundaries of common sense and well-worn narrative tropes.

Documentário, which was the Brazilian director's first film, follows two friends who loiter in the streets while they argue about the different movies shown in local theaters. The aimlessness of the ramble contrasts with the passionate and inspired points of view they hold about movies. We never see them watching a film, but the elusive presence of cinema channeled through the

sharp, evocative thoughts expounded by the protagonists amidst an indifferent urban landscape offer a promise: cinema must redeem the tedious and decadent monotony of everyday life.

Made eleven years after *Documentário*, *Abismu* delivers a vivid image of the cinema demon who seems to grip the minds of Sganzerla's protagonists. It is a psychedelic journey that rushes through the tropical cliffs near Rio de Janeiro, rides a wave of rock music all the way from the furious tides of the Atlantic Ocean to far-off regions of outer space teeming with infinite stars and colliding galaxies, gathering symbols and hieroglyphs that summon the existence of a mythical, utopian lost kingdom, and presents a roster of eccentric characters who rave about lavish metaphysical ideas. The all-pervading musical spirit that

carries the overflowing energy of the film finishes up with a blasting concert that invites the viewer to be carried away by unabashed mysticism and immediate aesthetic pleasure. If cinema has ever embodied the desire to be immersed in a state of trance, this is it.

The freedom of style that allowed Sganzerla to conflate shots of unrelated elements of reality to produce a meaningful and expressive synthesis suggests an intuitive approach that reached out to the kernel of cinematic experience. *Abismu* is almost a pure exercise in cinematic improvisation that produces a similar effect to the greatest jam sessions: the feeling of being in tune with the mysterious forces that drive the cosmos.

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