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Muito Romântico

Melissa Dullius, Gustavo Jahn

2016, DCP, color & black/white, 72 min., Portuguese, German, English, Japanese. **Producer** Melissa Dullius, Gustavo Jahn, Gustavo Beck, Michel Balagué, Zsuzsanna Király. **Production companies** Distruktur (Berlin, Germany), If You Hold a Stone (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil). **Written and directed by** Melissa Dullius, Gustavo Jahn. **Director of photography** Ville Piippo. **Production design** Melissa Dullius, Gustavo Jahn. **Costumes** Iris Petit. **Make-up** Kana Chiaki. **Sound** Till Röllinghoff, Arne Hector, Pawel Kluth, Dana Dajlis. **Music** Melissa Dullius, Gustavo Jahn. **Sound design** Jochen Jezussek. **Editor** Melissa Dullius, Gustavo Jahn. **With** Melissa Dullius, Gustavo Jahn, Lilja Löffler, Nikolaus Tscheschner, Mei Wright, Steve Nietz, Annika Sörling, Friederike Frerichs, Eckhard Stritzel.

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The adventure of Melissa and Gustavo starts aboard a red cargo ship crossing the Atlantic Ocean. It takes them from Brazil to Berlin, a city of perpetual movement, where the old constantly has to give space to the new. The couple finds a home and transforms it into the center of their own universe. As time passes and seasons change, life and cinema become interchangeable and their apartment evolves into an ever-changing stage, where friends are invited to play their own roles and reality and fiction merge. Until one day a cosmic portal appears in their home, opening connections between the past, the present and the future.

Drawing from autobiography as well as fantasy, Melissa Dullius and Gustavo Jahn weave their experiences in Berlin into a colorful tapestry of memories, encounters, and dreams. The duo poses filmmaking as a communal as well as a personal endeavor, and themselves as travelers between distant places, both geographically and temporally, on a journey transcending space and time.

With very few exceptions, you have been the authors, directors, DoPs, protagonists, and producers on all your films, as you are on Muito Romântico. How do you organize your working process or how does it organize itself in and around your lives?

Melissa Dullius/Gustavo Jahn: The borders between our work and our lives have been blurred for a long time. We even did this consciously. In a way, the work on our films is what directs our lives, it is what we put before all else, even if we recently came to a point where it's important to alternate the order, and to at least sometimes put life before cinema.

It's like a dialogue: Cinema says A, life says B, and at one point you can't tell anymore which gave the impulse. This is the kind of life and process we imagined together and the way we simply can do things. Even *Muito Romântico*, which is a bigger film for our standards, was still largely made among friends. This translates to a production mode where we play multiple roles: film directors, writers, actors, editors, musicians, and lab technicians – when we process the film material ourselves. This self-developed system gives us a lot of freedom to experiment, and it challenges us. Working with very limited financial resources makes it very hard though, and we rely on the support and generosity of many friends and colleagues. This allows us a certain artistic autonomy, but we also know it's almost impossible for us, and in general not sustainable, to continue producing like this on the long term.

Do you always shoot on film? And how does shooting on film play into your particular working style and process?

We began shooting on film back in 1999 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. We made some films in 8mm, not as a duo, but within a collective called Sendero Filmes. And then we kept shooting on film, mainly on 16mm. In Berlin, we are part of a collective too, LaborBerlin, and the way we make films now is not very different from the way we did in the beginning.

When working with film, the artistic process relates to time. Film material is obviously completely influenced by and even dependent on time. Besides the rolls having a definite time limit (3 or 11 min.) and the fact that you need time between shooting and viewing the footage – for processing, printing, or scanning – there are also other time factors that are important in our case. Like for example shooting with expired stock: The ship footage in *Muito Romântico* was transferred to 16mm color negative produced in Mexico in 1982. Or processing images years after they've been shot, almost discovering them for the first time, like the sequence with the bike crossing over the autumn leaves.

What was the freedom and what were the challenges involved in making Muito Romântico?

The images of the ship and other images that we shot in Berlin during our first years in the city existed for a long time, waiting to enter the form of a film. Nevertheless, it took us many years to take the step to complete the film. On one side there's a psychological aspect that is quite obvious: If you tell your own story, you kill it in a way by freezing it. So it's normal to feel a bit terrified about making this decision. On the other side, although we had found the idea for the structure – with the ship crossing, the re-staging in the bedroom and our private archive material – we could still not see the rhythm and tone the film should have. It was only when we began to see it as a collage of images and sounds, as an accumulation

of belongings, people, and thoughts, that the decision was made. Through this essentially hybrid operation, we eventually felt very free and good about organizing and shaping the material that composes this film.

Red and blue, two windows, a duo, a couple: your work and life is a collaboration. What is the philosophy and genesis of your directing-duo Distruktur?

Since we met and started producing films, we have always done editing work together. During the shooting of *Abril* (2002), the second short film Gustavo directed, we fell in love. Then the production paused for a year, a phase of reflection, of research, of watching and presenting films that we liked and of questioning ourselves. When time had come to shoot again, we proposed a challenge to ourselves: How to make the process of filmmaking an experience equally intense for all crew members? As such, the premise of *Éternau* (2006) was an experiment in making a film with the same people, i.e. the technical crew and actors, in front of as well as behind the camera. We all had to change roles continuously and so the responsibility of setting things in movement was shared. We realized that an enormous creative energy resulted from this dialogue and from the exercise of alternating tasks.

In Berlin, we started to conceive and produce works as a duo and invented a name for ourselves, "Distruktur," a play on words that evokes structure, duality and destruction. Our philosophy is anchored in mutual trust and dialogue. An idea is brought up, and if it resonates we feed it and watch it develop until no one remembers exactly where it came from.

Muito Romântico is your first feature-length film and also more narrative and linear in parts than your previous, shorter films. Or do you use these categories yourselves at all?

We always work on creating a narrative, even if we leave pieces open in some films. That can sometimes lead to a sort of disruption: Are our films too narrative to be experimental or too experimental to be called narrative? We feel at ease operating on this border, beyond the comfort zone. Or put differently, we didn't choose it, that's where we found our place.

You didn't only document your private lives and travels with a camera over time, you also opened a stage for re-fictionalizing its symbolic meanings and possibilities. Where do fantasy and reality meet in your film and home?

Staging or fictionalizing has always been our method and beyond that it means for us the key to penetrate reality and the past in a profound way.

It is a key that opens two doors: You have to trust reality enough to understand that everything that you see and hear and feel has a manifest meaning and nothing hidden behind it. But, in order to see things as they really are you also need to reorganize them, play with them, and infuse yourself with a certain amount of fantasy.

We make films to learn more about the world, about ourselves, and, if we do it well, others will also discover new perspectives on the world and themselves. It is a dialogue between life and cinema that produces propositions, enigmas, and directional points to "keep on sailing."

What does the black hole in the film signify to you – a fantasy, a time traveling machine, a dream, something else?

The black hole is essentially a secret. That is what it represented in the script initially, before taking its final form in the film. It is a secret that becomes part of their lives, affecting and transforming them.

It is like when you see a path at night and you feel both attracted and terrified by it at the same time. And with a racing heart, you decide to enter it. You advance just a few steps before realizing that there's no going back, because the place you just left is not there anymore, it ceased to exist as it was. In the film, the black hole is something similar to Borges's "Aleph". It shows what happened, what will happen, what could have happened or still can happen. And all these possibilities crystallize as image-sound layers superimposed to a point that makes it hard to determine what is fact and what is imagination. This distinction is finally not important anymore. The one thing you should keep in mind is that after going in, there's no going back.

Interview by Susanna König with the directors Melissa Dullius & Gustavo Jahn/Distruktur, 2016

Melissa Dullius, born in 1981 in Porto Alegre, and **Gustavo Jahn**, born in 1980 in Florianópolis, have formed the artist duo Distruktur since 2006, when they moved together from South Brazil to Berlin. Distruktur's body of work takes form as films, photographs, film performances, music, text, and graphics. It crosses the borders between art and film, experimental and narrative, photography and moving image. Characteristic of their work is the use of 16mm film, mostly processed using handmade techniques. They are founding members of the analog film association LaborBerlin e.V., a nonprofit, independent film collective. *Muito Romântico* is their first feature film, and, after *Triangulum* in 2008, their second Forum Expanded participation .

Films

2006: *Éternau* (21 min.). 2008: *Triangulum* (Forum Expanded, 22 min.). 2011: *Cat Effekt* (40 min.). 2012: *Fotokino* (3 min.), *Don't Look Back/Labirinto* (6 min.). 2013: *In the Traveler's Heart* (6 min.). 2014: *A Máquina do Tempo* (5 min.). 2016: *Muito Romântico*.