



## Deborah Stratman: "What I am trying to say is that we question the way in which history is represented"

Iván Pinto

**B**ased in Chicago, and with about twenty jobs under his arm, Deborah Stratman is heir to the tradition of American experimental cinema that emerged in the 1960s. Moving between the documentary, *the found footage*, the autobiographical record and the structural cinema, the truth is that the retrospective projected in film during the past FicValdivia left wanting to know more about his work. Maybe as three buttons show *The Illinois Parables* (2016), *In Order Not To Be Here* (2002) and *These Blazing Starrs* (2011) can talk about some poles of his work. The first, a feature film about the history of the state of Illinois with a structured assembly around places that function as antimonuments of episodes of historical violence in the city. A landscape thus becomes an unstable topography, where affection and history combine in a corporeal and almost tactile dimension of the image. *In Order Not To Be Here* It is a night-time look at the city and the architecture of residential neighborhoods, centered on the walls and an entire architecture of the property and security. The film ends with a shocking sequence shot of a man running, watched from a helicopter with a night camera, on the plane mounted a series of sounds and words that mark a paranoid climate. A somewhat farockian piece about televigilance, but especially in relation to the social climate. In a very different key *The Blazins Starrs* has in its favor the curiosity and archival fascination around the history of comets and the different readings and charges that have been given throughout history. As in *The Illinois Parables*, the film and the point of view of the camera aim to give a tangible material and concrete form.

**Iván:** To have a little more context, it might be interesting to know how you started to approach cinema, particularly the type of cinema you are developing, which is 16 mm experimental and filmic cinema.

**Deborah Stratman :** In general I was not interested in cinema, except narrative cinema, until college. I didn't have a particular connection with that, I don't feel a natural storytelling, when we were going to watch movies, with my brothers, I

couldn't tell what it was. They had a more causal relationship with the movies and I, meanwhile, could remember the locations, the environments. I had some awareness about the changes within the movie, but not the linear form.

I feel that I have a rather synchronous memory, I can understand the tension between objects rather from their position, in space rather than a more linear thing. Of course I have a time experience. All that prompted me to edit as in the way I do, I told a little of that after yesterday's movie, which has a bit to do with building and then releasing the pressure, working with anticipation and surprise, but rather in a more sculptural way, with the proximity.

Well, the truth is that I had a revelation: I studied physics, and I had a crisis at an early age and I took a sabbatical year. Then I went to study art, and I took a class from Mr. Peter Kubelka, which really blew my mind, and during that class we deconstructed the movie *Our Trip to Africa* (1966): we were watching bits once a week, and that as it opened my mind, and I realized that I can make any kind of cinema that I want. Of course there were other people who have also helped me to open my mind, but that was the first.

**Iván :** One of the first things you pointed out has to do with the theme of space and environment, and that is something that is in the short films that we could see *In Order Not To Be Here* and *The Magician's House* (2007). The first from a deconstruction of the daily space of a neighborhood and the second from something more affective . Also in *The Illinois Parables* , space and environment are very present, at a very descriptive point. When do you know, from this more spatial approach, that you have a movie?

**Deborah :** It is different for each project. For example, *The Magician's House* as if it was done by itself, each shot as it appeared to me spontaneously, then it was a film that formed at the time. In other projects I have a super clear idea, I have a short called *Hacked Circuit* (2014), where I made the whole movie in my head first, and it took me a year to find the location, and once I found it, I did all the choreography before taking it. It is unusual for me to work like this, but sometimes I do. Another way to do it is when I'm attracted to a location or a series of locations that give me the impression that they could work well, but I don't know how the film's shape will be and I'm finding the form during the set up. In others, I enter into a dialogue with the subject I am filming. But basically each of these modes implies a different way of finding the movie I want to make.

**Ivan :** About *The Illinois Parables* yesterday you talked about a certain topographical memory of the place, a kind of historical memory inscribed on the surface of things, and also that it was interesting to work with the material itself, of the film, in 16 mm. I would like you to tell me a little more about *The Illinois Parables* and how you were finally finding the method to tell that story, those 11 parables that appear, those layers of time ...

**Deborah:** It is difficult to decompress everything, but on the one hand, I think, it is a question of time, of temporality. For example, I didn't know that there were going to be 11 parables, but when I finally realized that there were 11, I thought “it's a prime number, it's like unstable, it's a number that doesn't work out, it's a number that's complete, but that it is unbalanced in some way, and that something else may come out ... ” And this lack of resolution seems to me to be an essential thing, regarding history. Many times, when we are told about history, these moments are presented to us as if they were something complete, as if we already knew all the answers, and yet much of the story has to do with interpretation, it is something that is still in flux . I didn't want the 11 to be together as in a line, and then the idea is that it was a kind of puzzle in which if you remember the movie in your mind, those pieces could move and somehow change that order. This story, in this chronological order, is not so so that the way in each of the stories is represented is with material that comes from different eras. So, for example, you have pictures, you have newspaper headlines, film material found. So that breaks linear temporality. film material found. So that breaks linear temporality. film material found. So that breaks linear temporality.

**Iván:** And this seems to have multiple temporalities ...

**Deborah:** An example: Parable 10 is a reactivation, a representation of the murder of Fred Hampton, but it is a representation of a representation, why? Because for the news, the state attorney's office made a representation of the crime and I got that copy, and made a representation of that copy. So many people do not realize, it is made in black and white and we have the original sound. Then with the original sound we made the actors move based on that sound, synchronized with that sound. So, somehow it is like an illusion, but what I am trying to say is that we question the way in which history is represented.

**Ivan:** The main theme of that movie is, of course, the story and its interpretation, how that story of violence has been told. It seems to me that the relationship with violence is also present in another film that we could see yesterday, *In Order Not To Be Here*, which is more about violence but from ways of representing and conceiving the space from surveillance cameras, ways of building spaces, architecture, borders, barriers ... and ends with the final plan that is incredible, where everything is concentrated ... a camera follow-up to a guy who runs, with the speeches that go on. It seems to me that it is not only a surveillance technology, but also the paranoid social climate.

**Deborah:** Yes, of course. At first I remembered those pieces of parliament that seemed like a good neighbor we saw *The Sopranos* together, reminds me of a quote from John Steinbeck, who wrote *East of Eden* (1952), which has to do with this surface that is apparently everyday, but that It is punctuated by something, it can be something extreme, or something monumental, so the quote says something like this: "we *need posts on which to extend the duration, because from nothing to nothing, there is no time* . " Then, it seems that nothing happens and I look for these extreme posts on which to extend this duration. And about the locations of *In Order Not To Be Here*, I have this idea that the sites and places reveal a certain cultural pathology and those are the sites that I was remembering in this movie. And for me this idea is interesting that for many people the suburbs are very safe, and for me they feel oppressive.