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The Illinois Parables

Deborah Stratman

2016, 16 mm, black/white & color, 60 min., English. **Producer** Deborah Stratman, Steve Badgett. **Production companies** Pythagoras Film (Chicago, USA), Simparch (Chicago, USA). **Written and directed by** Deborah Stratman. **Director of photography** Deborah Stratman. **Sound design** Deborah Stratman. **Editor** Deborah Stratman. **With** C. Felton Jennings II (Ravenwolf), Joshua Frieman (Enrico Fermi), Anna Toborg (Wanet McNeill), José Oubrierie (Jacques Marquette, voice), Daniel Verdier (Alexis de Tocqueville, voice), David Gatten (Ralph Waldo Emerson, voice).

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Eleven parables recount events from the history of the state of Illinois: regional vignettes about faith, force, technology, and exodus. From the violent eviction of the Cherokee to the establishment of a utopian community of French Icarians, the invention of the nuclear reactor, and the murder of Black Panther leader Fred Hampton, the film relays histories of settlement, removal, technological breakthrough, violence, messianism, and resistance. Illinois, here, functions as a convenient structural ruse, allowing its histories to become allegories that explore how societies are shaped by conviction and ideology.

The Illinois Parables suggests links between technological and religious abstraction, placing them in conversation with governance. Its locations are 'thin places' where the distance between heaven and earth has collapsed, or more secularly, any place that bears a heavy past, where desire and displacement have led us into or erased us from the land. Utilizing reenactment, archival footage, observational shooting, intertitles, the film asks who or what we end up blaming or endorsing in our desire to explain the unknown.

I work with film, video, sculpture, sound, photography, drawing, and small press. I'm interested in latent systems of control and the ways our lives become inadvertently shaped by them. My work has explored what we are afraid of, the ways we're policed by architecture and how mundane detail betrays convention, thereby authority. I realize we need governors to live by, or we'd never be able to navigate our lives. What inspires me is when we break free from these various systems of control. Like when someone falls, and they momentarily interrupt the system of things by falling.

My projects often focus on the psychological import of physical environments and human struggles for power, ownership, mastery and control that are played out on the land. They have questioned elemental historical narratives about faith, freedom, expansionism, surveillance, tactical audio, levitation, and sinkholes.

I would like, without relying on language, to achieve an intellectual cinema. I want my work to question its own social function while remaining aesthetically seductive. I make film for the pleasure of creating a temporal universe. I make other types of work to break free from the monologue inherent to the cinematic contract. Film demands a mute viewer, willing to leave her own temporal space in order to enter mine. I love and struggle with the totalitarianism behind this fact. So my non-film work tends to be encountered by accident, requiring participation or collaboration to be activated, approaching something closer to a dialogue. Across my practice, I aim for work that is restrained, distilled down to essentials, but which cedes some control to fate.

I utilize re-enactment, testimonial, found footage, voiceover, on-screen text, and direct observation. I see no hierarchy between these modes, and I'm interested in the poetic sparks created when one style abuts another. Sound as a mode of social control, the ecological effects of vibration, and the subversive, somatic capability of sound design to build and release tension have been central to my art practice. At root is an interest in the way sound both makes and disturbs place, in how its very nothingness seduces us.

I am less interested in making objects than influencing and documenting places and situations. I'd like my work less to mean than do, and to work with subject matter that resists me. To be harrowed by ideas, willing to risk for them, moved by them, is what sustains me. In the end, I make because I don't know.

Deborah Stratman

Deborah Stratman, born in 1967 in Washington D.C., USA, is a Chicago-based artist and filmmaker. In her work she investigates issues of power, control, and belief, exploring how places, ideas, and society are intertwined. Recent projects have addressed freedom, expansionism, surveillance, sonic warfare, public speech, ghosts, sinkholes, levitation, propagation, orthoptera, raptors, comets, and faith. Stratman is the recipient of an Alpert Award, Fulbright, Guggenheim, and USA fellowships and grants from Creative Capital, Graham Foundation, and Wexner Center for the Arts. She teaches at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Films

1990: *My Alchemy* (7 min.). 1991: *Upon a Time* (10 min.). 1992: *A Letter* (7 min.), *Possibilities, Dilemmas* (10 min.), *the train from la to la* (8 min.). 1993: *In Flight: Day No. 2,128* (2 min.), *Palimpsest* (3 min.). 1994: *Waking* (7 min.). 1995: *Iolanthe* (5 min.), *On the Various Nature of Things* (25 min.). 1997: *From Hetty to Nancy* (44 min.). 1999: *the BLVD* (64 min.). 2001: *Untied* (3 min.). 2002: *In Order Not to Be Here* (33 min.). 2003: *Energy Country* (15 min.). 2004: *Kings of the Sky* (68 min.). 2005: *How Among the Frozen Words* (1 min.). 2006: *It Will Die Out in the Mind* (4 min.). 2007: *The Magician's House* (6 min.). 2008: *Butter and Tomatoes* (4 min.), *The Memory* (2 min.). 2009: *O'er the Land* (52 min.). 2010: *Kuyenda N'Kubvina* (40 min.), *FF* (3 min.), *Shrimp Chicken Fish* (5 min.), *Ray's Birds* (7 min.). 2011: *...These Blazeing Starrs!* (14 min.), *A Throb* (1 min.). 2012: *Village, silenced* (7 min.), *The Name is not the Thing named* (11 min.). 2013: *Musical Insects* (7 min.), *Immortal, Suspended* (6 min.). 2014: *Hacked Circuit* (15 min.), *Second Sighted* (5 min.). 2016: *The Illinois Parables*.