

House Arrest

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I have always been interested in doing what Godard once described as ‘re-search in the form of a spectacle’. Even in my writing, I begin by collecting images and quotes, treating the latter as passages (walkways), visible points of entry into a world (of ideas) that for me always maintains a sensorial, flesh-like quality. The film-video essay enables me to work with audiovisual texts ‘from the inside’, as if I could relinquish the scholar’s external viewpoint and maintain myself in between critical reflection and artistic experimentation. It also enables me to pursue certain narrative trajectories without having to realise them – because of the essay’s plasticity and self-reflexivity, I can leave them open to future, unexpected interventions. I believe this suspended or fragmented narrative component holds crucial importance. Cinema has developed largely as a narrative medium and we should neither expunge narrativity from our theoretical efforts nor incorporate it as a mere object of study. In other words, if we attempt to translate

Schlegel's dictum that the 'theory of the novel should be a novel' we find ourselves making films, and these films cannot avoid un-working and re-working cinema's own narrative past.

In my recent video pieces (*Philosophy in the Kitchen*, *House Arrest*, *Sunken Gardens*) I have employed the split screen as a compositional and conceptual strategy. When Harun Farocki speaks of soft montage in relation to Jean-Luc Godard's cinema and, later, to his own installation practice, he speaks of the desire to engender a new 'general relatedness, rather than a strict opposition or equation'. By letting one image comment upon the other the filmmaker rejects the constraints of an either-or logic and comes to operate under the sign of the conjunction 'and'. The split screen brings the spectator closer to the editing console, enabling her to engage in a more active process of comparison, association, and assemblage. Still, the cut dis-joining two simultaneous images can operate according to a variety of principles. Soft montage is not one.

I began to experiment with the split screen as I was editing *Philosophy in the Kitchen* (http://worldpicturejournal.com/WP_11/Torlasco_11.html) and attempting to produce the sense of a shared history of labor, to show that there is always more than one woman even when one is alone in the kitchen. In cinematic terms I wanted to show that every image I was gleaning from pre-existing films already contained other invisible images within itself – that an image persists as a constellation of times and places rather than a self-identical bloc. So, in turn, each split-screen image I ended up creating is really one image for me, an image that is self-differing and thus also always open to unpredictable mutations. Perhaps I was attempting to show the performance of a certain folding and unfolding of vision, which is also a performance of thought. In this respect, I consider the black portions of the frame as part and parcel of the image itself – constitutive intervals, if you will, capable of holding the image together while also splitting it and multiplying it from within. They point to the fact that there is always more to see, outside and inside the overt frame, in space as well as time. Indeed, my hope was and still is that they might function as lines of flight.

In *House Arrest*, I was interested in exploring how something quite big – the power over life, the power that takes populations as its object – also passes through things that are very small, the details. Because of their role these details can in turn provide us with points of resistance. 'What do you see?', I began. 'What do you see as you look at and not merely out of these windows?' Of the many decisions I made in order to reformulate and ex-

pand this question two were quite deliberate. While editing I kept most of the documentary shots as closely related to one another as possible, in both subject matter and timing, whether they were appearing simultaneously or sequentially. In other words, I reduced the distance between them, while I normally work in the opposite direction (I tend to create larger and more intricate clusters of images by separating, disjoining shots that I could simply juxtapose, very much in the vein of Artavazd Peleshyan's distance montage). Here, I subtracted a number of potentially distancing elements in order to produce a transition that the viewers could register as big and wild and, at the same time, small and precise. One could say that I was attempting to make visible the recto and the verso of the same image. The other decision I made to this end was at the level of cinematography. I opted to film the documentary footage in HD video rather than 16mm (which would have given it a Stasi-era look), and yet to film it with a cinematic eye, an eye trained to build images out of the materiality of things. Collaborating with German filmmaker Ingo Kratisch, who was also Farocki's cinematographer, enabled me to realise this hybrid of technology and style, and to meet the digitised film clips of *My Darling Clementine*, *Touch of Evil*, and *Zabriskie Point* in an uncertain zone between past and present, a technological uncanny of sorts. I only regret not having found a way to bring in Henry Fox Talbot's photographs of industrial lace.

Author

Domietta Torlasco is a critical theorist, filmmaker, and associate professor of Italian and comparative literature at Northwestern University. She is the author of two books: *The Time of the Crime: Phenomenology, Psychoanalysis, Italian Film* (Stanford University Press, 2008) and *The Heretical Archive: Digital Memory at the End of Film* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013). Her video essays have screened at national and international venues, including the *Galerie Campagne Première* in Berlin.