

nated, or at least alternated. These things constitute, in a literal way, counterpoint.

CONFUSION: SOUND MONTAGE AND THE CONCEPT OF COUNTERPOINT

I have discussed how picture and sound tracks can interact contrapuntally. This interaction, though there are ramifications in the realm of meaning, is also substantially formal. I wish now to show how oppositional, figurative counterpoint has come to dominate the discussion, and how this dominance has had a complicating and even confusing effect.

Given montage precedents, it has been assumed that the “orchestral counterpoint of visual and aural images” would mean a further elaboration of intellectual montage. As with Kuleshov’s original pattern, juxtaposition of sound and image was to create meaning, and then action. This assumption recurs throughout sound/music discourse. Hanns Eisler wrote the following in 1947:

If the concept of montage, so emphatically advocated by Eisenstein, has any justification, it is to be found in the relation between the picture and the music. From the aesthetic point of view, this relation is not one of similarity, but, as a rule, one of question and answer, affirmation and negation, appearance and essence.⁴⁶

This notion has prevailed. Kristin Thompson, writing in 1980, says, “[the Statement on Sound’s] last two paragraphs do suggest that sound will be used to continue the tradition of silent montage, providing an additional material for the creation of ideas and feelings without an excess of words.”⁴⁷

Silent montage created ideas through the collision of images. Similarly Thompson identifies “abrupt sound cutting” as “the most varied, daring, and sustained use of contrapuntal sound” in a sample of eleven early Soviet sound films. Her examples of intellectual sound montage involve the ironic use of music, which stands plainly in opposition to the image.⁴⁸ These conclusions are consistent with common usage, and effective as such, but there is an important inconsistency that should be noted.

As Michel Chion and Claudia Gorbman have both suggested,