

Sound Montage and Counterpoint Analogies

IN THE LAST CHAPTER WE SAW how music critics have dismissed film music for a number of reasons that are not necessarily completely musical. The strict isolationism of Hans Keller and Theodor Adorno goes beyond mere musicological fussiness. Elitism in the face of dire modern reality is a response to and a defense against that reality. It is also in many ways a refusal of that reality.

This means that these critics, to a degree, are also refusing film itself. Fragmentation, as in musical quotation for instance, is not only the burden of modernism, it is the material fact of the cinema. Films are made from shots and scenes, out of pictures and dialogue, sound and music. They are made by those who produce them, by the infrastructures through which they are disseminated, and by the individuals and communities that receive and transform them. The commercial ideal, which is to see and to sell the film as a complete and untroubled whole, belies all this, and denies the extremely and inescapably piecemeal nature of the medium. Since films are fragmented, we can see that the unwillingness to consider the viability of these basic film properties is precisely where Adorno and Keller, and in part the musical community, fall short in their criticism of film music. In addition to their valuable views, for a more complete picture we need a perspective more accepting of and conversant with this fragmentation.

This chapter will deal with the film tradition—in broad terms, Soviet montage—that most articulately expressed and passionately pursued this idea. In doing so it will present an alternative