

tage that Eisenstein posited, but at the time he validated it as the “high[est] category,” and it certainly has received the most attention.³⁵ Intellectual montage went far beyond a mere comprehensible syntax for film construction. For Eisenstein the dynamic juxtaposition of images—montage—actually reflected the conflicts of the class struggle. Equations were inextricably interrelated: one image *plus* a second image *equals* a concept that results from the collision of the two images, just as thesis *plus* antithesis *equals* synthesis, as capital *plus* labor *equals* eventually, the utopian workers’ state. Formal presentation and film content were a mutual expression of the struggles that informed social reality, a reality that was being transformed by the workers’ revolution.

Although “counterpoint” suggests most immediately baroque musical form—an established, classical model—the film version is a modernist formulation, set contrary to the perceived illusions and complacencies of bourgeois narrative. If musical counterpoint played note against note, then montage sets its own innovation against convention, its own constructedness against the perception of things as natural, shock and alienation against comfort.³⁶ “Counter” is the key part of the appropriated musical term.³⁷

This, then, is a kind of musical manifestation of the political avant-garde. Always the artful elaborations of intellectual montage are circumscribed by their social purpose and didactic function.³⁸ As for music, montage was a *figurative* “counterpoint,” where line is played *against* line, and the collision results in a new form, a new thought, a new society. In relation to the famous Statement it was assumed, with some justification, that these same additive, and more often multiplicative, strategies would prevail when sound came on the scene.

FORMAL COUNTERPOINT

In the next sections I will discuss how this figurative, oppositional counterpoint has come to dominate discussions of sound montage, and some of the difficulties connected with this dominance. In preparation for these sections, and as background to a