10 *Crows and Sparrows*: Allegory on a Historical Threshold

Yiman Wang

Crows and Sparrows (Zheng Junli, 1949) was produced by the Shanghai-based and left-leaning Kunlun (Peak) Film Company. Production started in April 1949 but did not finish until after the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) overcame the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang: KMT) government in October. The film has been canonised in mainland China's official film history as a masterpiece that realistically reflects the disintegration of the KMT government in the storm of the Communist revolution.

> Armed with exuberant revolutionary zeal, sharp social observation, and masterful skills, the filmmakers created biting political satire. By depicting the gradual transformation of a group of ordinary cityfolk … from pessimism and fantasy to heightened consciousness in their struggle against the oppressive and reactionary KMT government represented by Mr. Hou, the film delivers a realistic and vivid reflection of the social landscape in the KMT-controlled area on the brink of Liberation, a landscape vacillating between chaotic darkness on one hand and brightness on the other.[1]

The screenwriter, Chen Baichen, agrees with this judgment, recalling that all the film-makers were motivated by the desire to act 'as witness to the disintegration of the Chiang Kai-shek dynasty, and an urge to record the last page of its wicked history so as to welcome Liberation'.[2] This agreement has two important implications: first, the film-makers were convinced of the possibility and necessity of a *realistic* cinematic representation of social circumstances; and second, realism was established as a primary criterion for judging good films.

Contrary to the official evaluation that emphasises the film's sympathy with the CCP, Leo Ou-fan Lee seeks to wrest the film from the CCP co-optation by re-evaluating it as a paragon of what he calls 'social realism'. According to Lee, where socialist realism compels ideological conformity to the CCP's radical political agenda and the subjugation of art to politics, social or critical realism represents 'a social stance of discontent' and leads to 'a committed art burdened with ethical and emotional weight but not necessarily with doctrinaire propaganda'.[3] *Crows and Sparrows* demonstrates precisely that:

> … in China artistic creativity prospered on the eve of the revolution … [Committed art] is 'revolutionary' only in the sense that through its exposé ethos it lays bare the darkness before the revolution, rather than glorifies propagandistically the revolutionary victory itself … [Leftist film-makers'] independence of spirit and their critical conscience were given full release precisely because in the last years of the Kuomintang (Guomindang) rule they had to confront the chaos and darkness of a disintegrating society.[4]

Lee's analysis achieves two things for my purpose. First, he demystifies the canonised 'socialist realism' by proposing 'social realism' as a positive counter-term. Second, he usefully emphasises the on-the-eve mentality inscribed in the film diegesis as well as the *ambiguous* political conditions of its production. Nevertheless, his thought-provoking rethinking of realism is limited to a concern with the indexical tie between the film and its *immediate* context.

This begs an important question: if the value of the film exists solely in its indexical tie with its time, whether in a straightforward or an ambiguous manner, why does it remain significant now? To address this question, I re-focus on the other side of realism, that is elements that exceed indexicality, thus making it possible to relocate the work in a different context. These elements remain in the textual substratum as moments of 'excess', defined as 'the random and inexplicable, that which remains ungovernable within a textual regime presided over

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In this essay, I question the orthodox realist discourse by showing how realism is inevitably imbricated with excess. On this basis, I propose an alternative approach to *Crows and Sparrows* as an *allegory*. This allegorical quality, as analysed below, is inscribed in the film's temporal and spatial configurations. However, I will conclude counter to the usual understanding of allegory as utopian by arguing that in this case excess reverses into a dystopic ideology.

My reading of the film as an allegory is premised on Jameson's re-conception of this device as 'an unstable and provisory solution to an aesthetic dilemma which is itself the manifestation of a social and historical contradiction'.[7] The aesthetic dilemma in question is precisely the dilemma of representation. That is, whereas available strategies of representation are necessarily circumscribed by certain conditions, they are nonetheless indispensable for one's speculation on the realm beyond representation. If Nichols considers history as the origin of excess, Jameson similarly sees history as an ultimate term that exceeds representation, but nevertheless is accessible *only through* representation: 'History is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but ... as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and ... our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious.'[8] When history exceeds the extant conceptual categories, it results in a crisis of representation, which in turn demands new representational parameters. This is precisely how Jameson's 'allegory' becomes necessary. Jameson's conceptualisation of history and allegory casts a new light on the signifying system of *Crows and Sparrows*.

Produced at the crucial historical moment of 1949, when KMT control was giving way to the would-be CCP government, *Crows and Sparrows* straddles a historical threshold moment, the complexity and instability of which constituted a representational problem. This problem, following Nichols and Jameson, leads to moments of excess, which can be located in director Zheng Junli's 1979 reflections on the film.

Entitled 'Recording an Outline of the Transitional Moment between the Old Times and the New Era', Zheng's essay displays pronounced reservation, even scepticism, despite surface agreement with the orthodox position on the film. His claim that the film succeeds in recording (*jilu*) its time is bracketed by qualifications such as 'to a certain degree' and 'one aspect' or 'a sidelight'. As a result, realism in the film becomes conditional and partial at the best.[9] Written in 1979 shortly after the end of the Cultural Revolution, Zheng's self-deprecating recount echoes schoolteacher Mr Hua's self-criticism at the end of the film, when he urges all the characters – himself included – *and* the film audience to transform themselves into new people in the new society.

The major 'defects' of the film, according to Zheng, lie in its framework, which was not modified according to the changed situation after the CCP conquered Shanghai. The concentration on the struggle for a two-storey lane house forecloses the possibility of a more penetrating exposé of the KMT in a wider social context. Also, due to KMT censorship and the screenwriter's limitations, the film focuses on the 'sparrows', or narrow-minded urban residents who lease rooms from a domineering KMT official, Mr Hou the 'crow'. Thus, it overlooks the more organised workers and peasants who were named as the masters of the new China. Consequently, the film fails to represent the awakening of the real people – the creators of the new era and the gravediggers of the old dictatorship.[10] Zheng further pinpoints three faulty characterisations. First, the transformation of Mr Hua and the old newspaper editor Mr Kong from weak conciliators to unyielding resistors seems too abrupt and unconvincing. Second, the film fails to highlight Mr Kong's enthusiasm for the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which should be a spontaneous response given his son's CCP affiliation. Third, the film fails to portray Ah Mei, maid of Mr Hou's mistress, as a pivotal figure. As a sheer oppressee, Zheng reasons, Ah Mei should have the strongest sense of justice and the deepest class sympathy, and her good personality should be instrumental for the other characters' transformation.[11]

Zheng's self-criticism is circumscribed by the CCP ideology that dictates who should be the hero, how a hero should behave and why. Ironically, however, his recount carries the CCP terminology overboard, thus undermining the orthodox discourse by converting what the People's Republic official critics have praised as realistic details into subversive moments of excess. These moments undermine the real-to-reel correspondence assumed by the ideology of realism and joins Jameson's 'allegorical spirit'.

To view the film as an allegory entails an emphasis on the temporal-spatial 'edge', which is arguably connected with utopian futures. Allegory thrives at the threshold moment insofar as it provides a provisory solution to the problem of representation by way of a visual projection, that is proffering a figure as proxy for the pre-formed and not-yet-representable realm. The film stemmed precisely from a historical threshold moment, registering a series of images that presumably point toward a desirable future. The film's investment in the future is manifested in three interweaving timelines, all spanning the transition from KMT to CCP control. They are diegetic time, production time and historical time. Diegetic time covers the last two weeks before lunar New Year's Day on 18 January 1949. Production time started in April 1949, was soon suspended by KMT censorship, resumed in May, nearly finished by the end of 1949 and released in early 1950. Historical time includes the CCP conquering north-east China, beating the KMT along the Huai River in the winter of 1948, taking over Shanghai in May 1949 and finally establishing the People's Republic on 1 October 1949. Although diegetic time slightly precedes production time, radical future change is already clearly prefigured in the film. Largely couched in the present tense, indicating contemporariness, diegetic time nevertheless takes on a pronounced forward-looking, or allegorical, dimension. Within the framework of this progressive timeline, diegetic time is strictly chronological. Flashbacks are laboriously eliminated and current happenings consciously extended toward the future – the future delivered by the CCP. The intersection of the film's progress with the pace of CCP victories not only sutured the film into the socio-historical fabric, but was also calculated to visually prefigure the future from this side of the threshold moment.

The investment in the present and the future determines that events that took place fours years ago right after China's victory in the anti-Japanese war (1937–1945) are consigned to mere verbal references, instead of being fleshed out in flashbacks. These events are referred to by Boss Xiao, the American merchandise peddler nicknamed 'Little Broadcast' for his rumour-spreading habit,[12] and Mr Kong, the original house owner. They cover how Hou, the former collaborator with Japan during the anti-Japanese war, was suddenly transformed into an undercover agent, obtaining a high KMT position, subsequently framing Kong's son as a Communist soldier, having him jailed, and usurping Kong's lane house. In the absence of visual flashbacks, these brief verbal allusions in the past tense fill in the background without distracting the audience, so that the present events, fully visualised in the film, can be emphasised and endowed with forward momentum. To modify Winston's comments on pre-war Griersonian documentaries, 'the "problem moment" structure [the problem of housing and class struggle in my context] has an implicit narrative trajectory ... there was a [problematic past]; there is a current problem; there will be a [hopeful] future'.[13] Such a linear and irreversible plot-line implies inevitability, or the 'weight of the temporal axis. The parallel between plot development and temporal progress allows the latter to be perceived and experienced as concrete materiality.'[14] In this light, the chronological narrative in *Crows and Sparrows* implies a specific future-oriented perspective.

In accordance with the weight of the temporal axis, the confrontation between the 'crows' and the 'sparrows' can be viewed as a struggle to control *time* for their individual interests. The film starts with a newspaper advertisement about an urgent house sale. The hasty sale advertised by the 'crow' Hou causes an instant housing problem for the 'sparrow' tenants. The ensuing story describes their unsuccessful struggle to find other housing before the last day of the year, the deadline set down by Hou. Failure forces them to rebel against Hou's timeframe, replacing it with their own simple one: 'We will unite together. None of us will budge. Let's see what he can do.' The ability to determine their own timeframe (which really means frustrating that of Hou) marks the emergence of a certain subaltern agency. Passive as it seems to be, it outlasts Hou, whose timeframe turns out to be determined not by himself but by the larger historical force of the CCP tug-of-war with the

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KMT. This larger force is conveyed through the headlines Little Broadcast disseminates, which serve as a timepiece tolling the knell for Hou and the KMT government.

The tenants' tactic of procrastination implies their vague, sometimes blind, optimism about what the future can bring. For Little Broadcast, the headline news reporting CCP's victory means that peace is coming, that Mr Hua the schoolteacher and Mr Kong's son will be released from prison, and that his business in American goods will prosper. Similarly, Mr Hua tries to ameliorate Mr Kong's pessimism by proclaiming that 'Your account will be settled one day. The forces of evil will be eradicated one day, but the time is not ripe yet ...' Hua's inaction and ostrich-like reliance on the future are largely ineffectual. Nevertheless, he provides a verbal harbinger for future fulfilment. When the calendar in the last sequence turns to the last day of the old lunar year in close-up, the original deadline set up by Hou has become the sparrows' day of celebration. The threshold date finds a perfect visual illustration in the 'happy ending' sequence.

After the fall of Nanking, the base of the KMT government, Hou the crow hurries to leave Shanghai, then a financial centre approximately 400 kilometres to the south of Nanking, reluctantly leaving the house to the sparrow tenants, who represent a wide range of urban classes oppressed by KMT to different degrees. The unexpected resolution of the housing problem, resulting from Hou's hasty escape leads to the final sequence, with all tenants gathering for a joyful lunar New Year. A medium shot toward the end includes all the major characters, significantly positioned on the threshold of the front gate and arranged as in a theatrical tableau, with Mr Kong and Mr Hua – the two intellectuals among the sparrows – delivering clinching remarks for the entire film. After Kong, the original owner, rejoices about regaining his house and looks forward to a promising New Year, Hua, whose consciousness was raised by recent imprisonment, voices his self-criticism and determination to renew himself: 'A new society is coming! We should get rid of our old weaknesses. We must live a new life as new people!'[15] This anticipation of a utopian society merges with the traditional New Year couplet (*duilian*) that Kong pastes on the gate: 'The firecracker sends off the past; a peach wood mascot brings in the new (*baozhu yisheng chujiu, taofu wanbu gengxin*).' This couplet is framed in a close-up at the end, when the tenants-turned-masters go back 'home', closing the gate behind them. A few neighbours run past the gate, setting off firecrackers amid loud festival music. The music track continues long after the image track has turned black. If the gate suggests these characters' on-the-eve and anticipatory mentality,[16] the prolonged music suggests continuation into a utopian future that literally exceeds and lies beyond visual representation. During actual screenings in early 1950, the music track would have accompanied audiences of the New Chinese exiting the theatre after the show, probably around lunar New Year, inspiring them with great expectations for a new year and a new society. By telling an ultimately triumphant story set in the recent past, the film strives toward an undefined yet apparently utopian future.

The encounter between the crows and the sparrows operates not only along the temporal axis, but also on the spatial level. The allegorical dimension of the film accordingly shifts from utopian projection to the spatial reconfiguration of the lane house. Director Zheng recalls that the five-person scriptwriting group (including Zhao Dan who plays Little Broadcast) had to resort to allegory or metaphor (*yingyu*) in order to dodge KMT censorship. As a result, they deployed

> Hou as a figure for the reactionary KMT, and centred the main story on the house. The house is like the nation (*jiangshan*), which had belonged to the people, but was usurped by collaborators and KMT lackeys .... their doomsday is approaching ... and the house is returned to its original owner.[17]

Interestingly, Zheng dismisses this allegory as too obscure to be understood by the audience.

Nevertheless, I argue that spatial allegory structures the central conflict by allowing it to develop in a site orchestrated by elaborate camerawork.

First, the two-storey house epitomises and literalises the social hierarchy of the crows and the sparrows. Hou and his mistress lord it over the tenants and live upstairs, where Kong used to live as the original owner. The tenants divide up the rooms below according to their social positions and professions. As part of 'garret literati' (*tingzijian wenren*) in 1930s and 1940s Shanghai, the schoolteacher Mr Hua and his family live in the garret room to the right of the

stairway landing, an intermediate position between upstairs and downstairs.[18] The peddler Little Broadcast and his relatively better-off family live in the front living room, next to the kitchen. In contrast, the original owner Kong, an old and poor newspaper editor, is crammed into the windowless back room. Besides these 'family rooms', there are two 'communal spaces' – the kitchen downstairs and the clothes-drying terrace on the roof. The sparrows gather here to discuss their tactics against the crow. Also, Little Broadcast and Hua's children play games in these places and sing a satirical song that compares Hou to an ugly and oppressive 'monkey'.[19]

This spatial configuration not only epitomises the social hierarchy, but also inscribes its self-deconstruction. The opening sequence, for example, powerfully illustrates porosity between contrasting worlds. The camera first shows Hou's mistress lighting a cigarette in her room upstairs, then tilts down past the floor to reveal the noisy and messy room of Little Broadcast downstairs. This cross-section shot underlines the co-implicating relationship between the oppressor class and the oppressed class by visualising their simultaneous distance *and* proximity. Such proximity produces porosity that allows the sparrows to monitor the crows, thus facilitating their subversion of social hierarchy. The resultant leaking of information is shown often when the sparrows, especially Little Broadcast and his wife, eavesdrop on the stairs. The porous boundaries in the house both intensify the conflict and render it susceptible to subaltern corrosion.

The camera tilts down vertically from the warlord's mistress (her legs seen in upper part of the frame), across the floor (the black plank running horizontally through the frame), to Little Broadcast's wife (lower part of the frame) taking off her hoarded American goods

As a major site of adjacency and porosity, the stairs constitute an important stage for conflict and struggle as well as connection. Director Zheng emphasises shots at the stairs and the door area in that they help to alleviate the theatrical look resulting from the large quantity of shooting within rooms.[20] The stairs not only diversify the shots, but also imply vertical mobility, thus converting encounters between crows and sparrows into a metaphor for class conflict and renegotiation of social hierarchy, threatening to collapse boundaries and reverse the hierarchy. This is born out in changes in Hou's physical relationship with other characters and the audience.

Hou, referred to as the 'master' from the very beginning, remains mysteriously invisible to the audience for the first third of the film. The audience hears his voice and coughing sound as '*acousmêtre*', a disembodied voice that commands ubiquity, panopticism, omniscience and omnipresence.[21] The authoritative voice is located in a body after a set of deferring shots that whet the audience's desire to see Hou. His final materialisation is couched in satiric terms. The camera first tracks up to a close-up of Little Broadcast announcing with a heavy Zhejiang accent: 'Now we've found a solution [to my housing problem].' A graphic match cuts to a picture of the uniformed Chiang Kai-shek (a Zhejiang native) in Little Broadcast's posture, accompanied by a stern off-screen voice. The camera tracks right, stopping briefly at another picture of an ugly uniformed man, then resumes tracking right until it falls upon the back of a man, subsequently revealed to be Hou – the ugly man in the picture. This scene begins with Little Broadcast parodying the dictator Chiang and ends by satirising Hou as a self-important monkey who ludicrously mimics Chiang, his master. The move to locate the domineering voice in Hou's body, or de-acousmatisation, serves to undermine his power, as Chion argues.[22]

Further demystification takes place in an important stairs sequence, where Hou is forced to literally lower himself to face the united tenants at the bottom of the stairs. Zheng recalls that this scene was shot with a wide-angle camera to elongate the stairs and increase the distance between the two parties, thereby to enhance the tension.[23] Two other

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A wide-angle over-shoulder shot of Mr Hou (the warlord and crow) from the perspective of 'Little Broadcast', his wife and other tenants (sparrows) behind them outside the frame

types of camerawork contribute to building the tension. First, the clash is deferred by focusing on the tenants listening attentively to off-screen steps walking down the stairs, approaching them. Second, the encounter is registered visually by alternating high-angle and low-angle shots that take the positions of Hou and the tenants in turn. This confrontation on the stairs is a transitional point when the crows and the sparrows switch positions. Their confrontation on the stairs begins with Hou's aggressive threat. Then, with Mr Kong visibly animated by Little Broadcast's words, the children starting to chant their satirical song, and the other tenants forcing their way up the stairs, Hou is compelled to retreat and the old social hierarchy is visually subverted.

This trajectory illustrates Zheng's allegorical conception of the house as a nation usurped by dictators but eventually returned to its original owners, who promise to construct a new future. Insofar as the house is poised on the threshold between the old and the new, bearing marks of both, it evokes Benjamin's 'dialectical image'. Benjamin describes the dialectical image as 'that in which the Then and the Now come into a constellation like a flash of lightning .... the image is dialectics at a standstill.'[24] The collapsing of the past and the present serves to liberate the utopian potential buried in the 'prehistory' (*Urgeschichte*) of the object into an 'afterlife' (*Nachleben*).[25] Such liberation depends precisely on an 'allegorical gaze', because allegory is a form of premonition that 'sees the object as it will appear in its "afterlife"'.[26]

In these terms, the house is wrested from its previous context and reconstructed as a home by, of and for the former sparrows. The moment when the maid Ah Mei replaces Hou's picture with one of Mr Kong and his son suggests momentary superimposition of the past, the present and the future in a montage that quickly turns out to be a dissolve, one image giving way to the other. The whole house *and* the wall thus become a palimpsest, inscribed with multiple temporalities and competing meanings, from Kong's home to Hou's loot, and then to the home of Kong *and* the other sparrows.

Having established the forward-looking and promising side of allegory, I now proceed to discuss how this vision is fractured by excessive moments when viewed with historical hindsight. In other words, I show how history is both figured in the film and exceeds its parameters, turning the utopia of the film upside down, thereby complicating the notion of allegory. To recall Zheng's 1979 reflection on the film, the film fails to focus on the broader social landscape and the more politically conscious classes, and instead limits itself to the self-interested petty bourgeoisie. By reconsidering these apparent faults in terms of excess, we can see how allegory entails constant transformation and inversion when placed in a new context.

In order to show how inversion takes place in the film, I refer to Benjamin's comments on the Soviet experiment with socialism in the late 1920s. Regarding the elimination of private space in late 1920s

A close-up shot of a photograph of Mr Kong (the original owner of the lane house) and his son being hung on the wall, replacing the usurper warlord's picture, illustrating Walter Benjamin's notion of the 'dialectical image'

Moscow, Benjamin observes, 'apartments that earlier accommodated single families in their five to eight rooms now often lodge eight'.[27] While he sees the socialist vision as a potential redemption of what he contemptuously calls 'the petty-bourgeois interior' and its de-politicisation, he implicitly voices a concern, even anxiety, about over-emphasis on the 'correct political tendency' to the exclusion of 'free intellect'.[28] This concern was to become prevalent among Chinese intellectuals as socialism unrolled in the post-1949 China. The film's release was to be followed by similar sweep of collectivisation, which was to provoke ambivalence and even alienation among Chinese people, especially intellectuals, as it did in Benjamin.

Ironically, the film itself contains instances that begin with utopic potential only to turn into their own opposites. With the completion of collectivisation by 1952, a private house owner like Mr Kong would have had his house appropriated – again – for public use this time. Peddlers, especially those trading in foreign merchandise like Little Broadcast, would have been phased out due to economic and political reorientations and re-channelled into socialist collective units, instead of being allowed to expand their private business. Mr Hua's voluntary self-criticism in the happy ending would become the staple in the state-sponsored ideological interpellation that constantly prodded the entire intellectual sector toward self-reflection and realignment with the masses. The encouraging vision of becoming masters of a nation offered at the end of the film was soon to flip into something unexpected, even dystopic, to the sparrows. If hope and utopia lie in the provisory and dreamlike quality of the vision, they become disillusioning when realised in the form of an ossifying and imposing ideology. The utopia postulated in the film can be described as Raymond Williams's 'structure of feeling'. Contrary to an ideology more concerned with maintaining the status quo, 'structure of feeling' is 'at the very edge of semantic availability', and therefore characterised by 'pre-formation' or 'intensity of experience'.[29] The choice to focus the film on the so-called self-interested petty bourgeoisie instead of more politically conscious classes tends towards the production of excess that subverts the original vision. The petty bourgeois conviction in private ownership will ultimately clash with the socialist ideology, although it may be temporarily harnessed as a rebellious voice against the KMT government and a demand for social change.[30] Reconsidered with the benefit of historical hindsight, the film becomes a complex allegory, its figures being reversible, and its apparently straightforward narrative closure giving rise to indeterminable excess. In this sense, 'realistic' details take on multiple shifting significations as allegorical nexuses.

NOTES

1. Cheng Jihua, Li Shaobai and Xing Zuwen, eds, *The History of Chinese Film* (*Zhongguo dianying fazhanshi*) (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1963), vol. 2, 248.
2. Chen Baichen, 'Thoughts on the Re-release of *Crows and Sparrows*' ('Cong "Wuya yu Maque" chongying shuoqi'), *People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao*), 11 January 1958. Quoted in Cheng *et al.*, *The History of Chinese Film*, 244.
3. Leo Ou-fan Lee, 'The Tradition of Modern Chinese Cinema: Some Preliminary Explorations and Hypotheses', in *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*, ed. Chris Berry (London: BFI, 1993), 7–8.
4. Ibid., 11.
5. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 141.
6. Ibid., 142.
7. Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 94.
8. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 35.
9. Zheng Junli, 'Recording an Outline of the Transitional Moment between the Old Times and the New Era' ('Jiluxia xinjiu jiaoti shidai de yige ceying'), in *Voiceover* (*Huawai yin*) (Beijing: China Film Press, 1979), 19–38.
10. Ibid., 21.
11. Ibid., 27–8.
12. 'Xiao' functions as a pun referring to 'Xiao', his last name, and 'xiao', meaning small or little.
13. Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited* (London: BFI, 1995), 107.
14. Li Suyuan, 'Narrative Modes in Early Chinese Cinema' ('Zhongguo zaoqi dianying de xushu moshi'), in *Melting National Characteristics into Film – Chinese*

Film–Television and National Culture (*Minfeng hua jing – Zhongguo yingshi yu minzu wenhua*), ed. Zhou Xuan (Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 1999), 238.

15. Interestingly and unfortunately, the reformation of intellectuals through the practice of repeated self-criticism and confession was to become a means of persecution during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Ironically, among the persecuted intellectuals were well-known film workers, including Zhao Dan who plays Little Broadcast.
16. It is significant that the front gate appears in the film only in this sequence. Throughout the film, characters enter and exit through the run-down back door. The implication is that only the legitimate master of the house can use the front door, which is associated with the future and progress.
17. Zheng, 'Recording an Outline', 20.
18. Intellectuals in 1930s and 1940s Shanghai were conventionally known as 'garret literati' because their meagre income could only afford the rent of a garret room in a lane house, a cheap accommodation due to its narrow space and noisy environment.
19. Hou's name and the Chinese character for 'monkey' are homophones.
20. Zheng, 'Recording an Outline', 35.
21. Michael Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 24.
22. Ibid.
23. Zheng, 'Recording an Outline', 38.
24. Quoted in Gary Smith, ed., *Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 49.
25. Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 111.
26. Ibid., 137.
27. Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1985), 187. Quoted in Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis*, 50.
28. Quoted in Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis*, 53.
29. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 134.
30. A similar reversal is mapped out in Jameson's comparative study of *The Godfather I* and *The Godfather II*:

> It is as though the unconscious ideological and Utopian impulses at work in *Godfather I* could in the sequel be observed to work themselves towards the light and towards thematic or reflexive foregrounding in their own right. The first film held the two dimensions of ideology and Utopia together within a single generic structure, whose conventions remained intact. With the second film, however, this structure falls as it were into history itself, which submits it to a patient deconstruction that will in the end leave its ideological content undisguised and its displacements visible to the naked eye. ('Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture', in *Signature of the Visible* [New York: Routledge, 1990], 33.)