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Unknown Pleasures: The Films of Jia Zhangke

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Unknown Pleasures: The Films of Jia Zhangke

Wednesday, October 8, 2008
7:00 p.m. The World
Jia Zhangke (China/Japan, 2004)

(*Shi jie*). The world comes to China—but not the other way around—in Jia’s sly parable on globalization’s papier-mâché promises, set in a Beijing Vegas-by-way-of-Epcot Center theme park where the Eiffel Tower, Big Ben, and the Twin Towers (“ours are still standing”) are all within unpaved blocks of one another. “See the world without leaving Beijing!” is the park’s slogan, but for *The World’s* luckless inhabitants—former farm girls and country hicks, now performers or security guards—that promise seems more like a prison sentence. The dancer Tao (Zhao Tao) is the fiery heart of the film; she may play a geisha one day, a Bollywood queen the next, but her true role is always the same: to be left behind. Jia’s most accessible film, complete with Yu Likwai’s inestimable roaming camerawork, a pulsating trance score, and (of course) “continent-spanning” locations, *The World* is also his most pointedly political, and his most heartbreaking. Even amid the fake skyscrapers and neon dance numbers, it’s still one lonely planet.

—Jason Sanders

- Written by Jia. Photographed by Yu Likwai. With Zhao Tao, Chen Taisheng, Wang Xiaoshuai, Liu Xiaodong. (142 mins, In Mandarin with English subtitles, Color, 35mm, From Zeitgeist Films)

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