

Document Citation

Title	Useless
Author(s)	Kevin Lee
Source	<i>Slant</i>
Date	9/22/2007
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Wuyong (Useless), Jia, Zhang ke, 2007

SEARCH SITE

GO



New Directors/New Films, now 37, hopes to push more films toward distribution.

>>>

NEW RELEASES

- ▶ Young@Heart
- ▶ Street Kings
- ▶ Smart People
- ▶ The Visitor
- ▶ Bra Boys
- ▶ Dark Matter
- ▶ Body of War
- ▶ Stalags
- ▶ Young & Restless in China
- ▶ Nana

▶ more



Slant predicts this year's Oscar winners. >>>

NEWSLETTER

your email here

GO



Useless

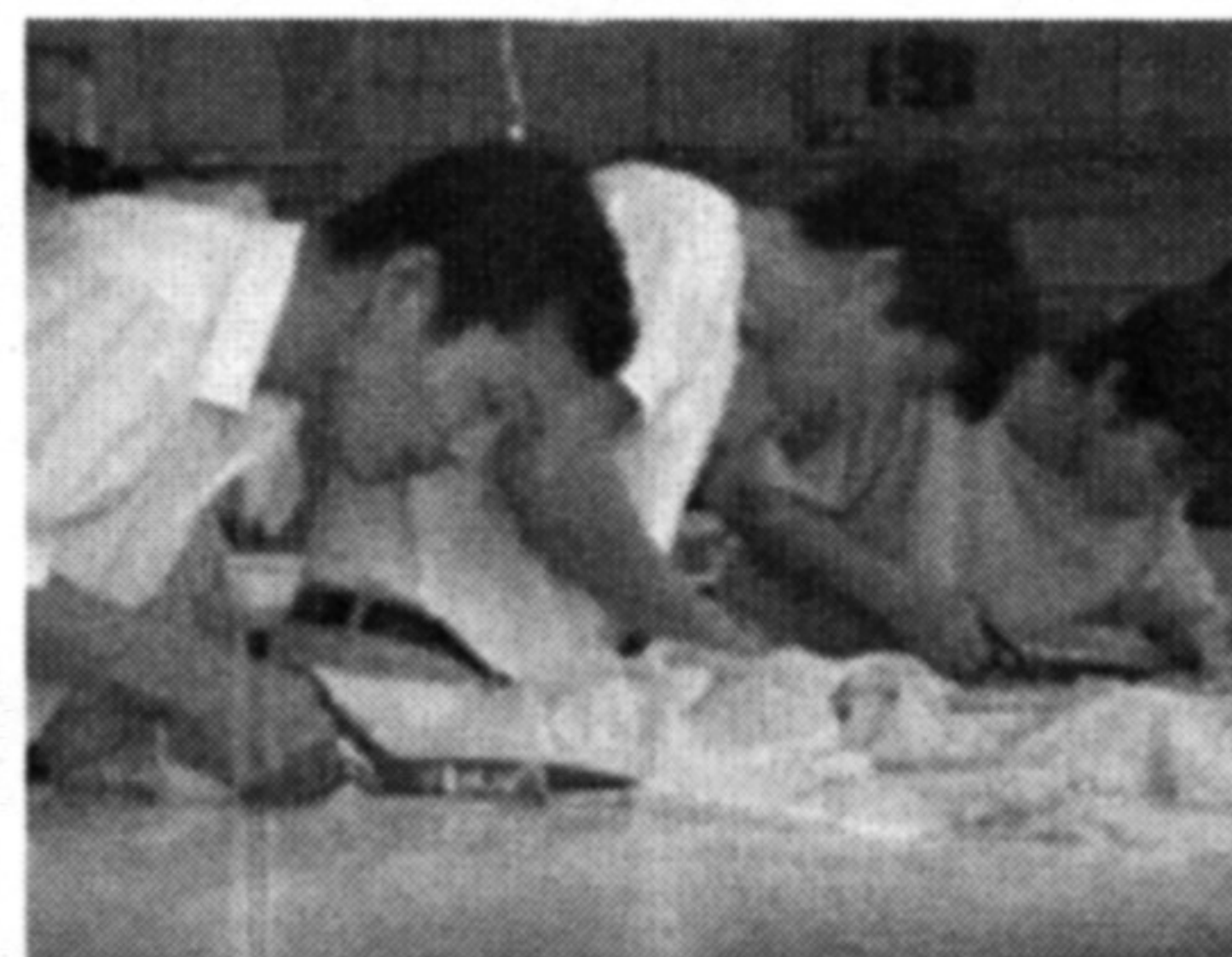
by Kevin B. Lee

Posted: September 22, 2007

It's been 10 years since *Xiao Wu* announced Jia Zhangke as one of Chinese cinema's most exciting new talents, introducing a ground-level view of China both streetwise and lyrical. Jia's open, observant cinema has always been driven—and occasionally undermined—by his unconcealed desire to speak on behalf of his generation as they contend with such headline issues as globalization, commodity culture, migrant labor, and alienation. As much as these preoccupations risk making Jia's films resemble newspaper articles on celluloid (*The World* being the prime example; it even had comics!), they are inseparable to making his work compelling as he perpetually approaches the problem of how to make these issues come alive cinematically. *Useless*, the second part of a planned trilogy on Chinese artists (the first, *Dong*, followed a painter), focuses nominally on haute couture designer Ma Ke as she unveils a new fashion line, but expands in unexpected ways to become a haunting exploration on the many meanings and purposes of clothing in human life.

The film opens with a long, nearly wordless sequence in a southern Chinese factory that invites comparison to a similar opening in the documentary *Manufactured Landscapes*. However, instead of making geometric formations out of factory assembly lines as found in that film, Jia zooms in to capture intimate close-ups of the workers as they sweat over an endless array of fabrics, cuts, and stitches. Their benumbed expressions elide into more glamorous images of Ma Ke in her trendy Shanghai boutique as she laments how industrialized labor has stolen the soul from Chinese fashion: "It is absurd that China is the largest exporter of clothes in the world and doesn't have any well-known brand." Her solution is the introduction of a new brand, *Useless*, featuring hand-made clothes which she infuses with "personal histories" (including burying them in dirt). Jia captures the line's unveiling at Paris Fashion Week (the first footage Jia has ever shot outside China), in a sequence that recalls the absurd *la dolce vita* of vintage Fellini, only now the Chinese have a seat at the decadent table.

At this point it's a challenge to locate Jia's take on all this useless beauty; while his camera (shot brilliantly on HD by Jia stalwart Yu Lik Wai) is laudably objective, it teeters toward complicity, as if he's reduced to doing globetrotting glamour bios



EMAIL

BOOKMARK

PRINT

Director(s): Jia Zhangke.

Runtime: 80 min. Rating: NR.

Year: 2007.

ADVERTISEMENT