

Dirty fashion: Ma Ke's fashion 'Useless', Jia Zhangke's documentary *Useless* and cognitive mapping

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This article is part of my project that engages with visual and media cultures – fashion, cinema and documentary – to address Chinese consumer culture in the socialist and post-socialist periods. Focusing on haute couture, consumption and memory, the first part introduces an aspiring fashion designer, Ma Ke, and her latest fashion line, 'Wuyong'/'Useless' (2007). Ma Ke intends to draw attention to the loss of the emotional bond between the maker and the user of clothes in the age of industrialized mass production and consumption. To help fashion recover this lost memory, Ma Ke buries her garment under dirt for a period of time. When the garment is unearthed, she reasons, it will find itself imbued with the imprint of the time and space of the soil. Presented at the Paris Fashion Week in February 2007, Ma Ke's haute couture exhibit 'Useless' was intended to be a critique of modern consumer culture. The second part engages with Jia Zhangke's documentary *Wuyong/Useless* (2007), a trans-media dialogue with Ma Ke's fashion design 'Useless'. I argue that Jia Zhangke's engagement with Ma Ke's fashion is double-edged: although the director embraces some parts of 'Useless', he critiques other parts of her design. In particular, I show how the director introduces a new level of complexity to the artist's anti-fashion and anti-consumption gesture through the use of montage. The last part suggests that Jia Zhangke's documentary can be regarded as an exercise in what Fredric Jameson calls 'cognitive mapping', which attempts to capture the complexly mediated relationships between cultural representational form (e.g. fashion and documentary) and social totality within the context of global capitalism.

Let us try to imagine that we are resting comfortably in a glamorous and luxurious Louis Vuitton flagship store in the city of Chengdu in China's Sichuan Province. Everything is clean, shiny and polished. Soft-sounding music is being played in the background. Dressed in Lacoste polos, wearing Christian Louboutin shoes and carrying Louis Vuitton handbags, a group of middle-class Chinese women are sipping cocktails and eating hors d'oeuvres in a leisurely manner. Some of them are sitting on a comfortable sofa and have begun to discuss the brand-name fashion that they just purchased. They seem to be very enthusiastic about the commodities.

Announcement:	For those ladies who have joined the 'Friends of Louis Vuitton (LV),' please proceed to the second floor.
Voice 1 (in an annoying voice):	Look at this! This is such a cheapie! Show me something more refined! Show me a distinctive brand!
Voice 2:	Prada?

(continued)

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- Voice 1: Prada? I just mentioned Prada...
- Voice 2: Prada's designs are so philosophical!
- Voice 3: It's more suitable for Europeans.
- Voice 4: What about for young men?
- Voice 2: Paul Smith is good, too. It's an English brand.
The cotton shirts that they made are very comfortable.
- Voice 5: Lacoste has the best colors, I think.
- Voice 2: Since most of the products sold in China are mass-produced in China, they have low quality. They don't feel right.

This exchange is one of the memorable scenes in Jia Zhangke's (賈樟柯) documentary *Wuyong (Useless)* (无用) (2007), a trans-media dialogue with Ma Ke's (馬可) fashion design bearing the same title 'Useless'. The reader may laugh at the somewhat comical conversations among the middle-class Chinese consumers. However, their conversations reflect the problem of conspicuous consumption in China today. In an interview with Tony Rayns, the director Jia Zhangke remarks:

In recent years, 'fashion' has become a buzzword in China. The nouveau-riche class is crazy about brand-name commodities such as Louis Vuitton, Armani, and Prada. But many people buy them because they are famous and expensive, not because they appreciate the designs. Many young people spend way beyond their means to buy these brand-name commodities. This suggests that [in China] wealth has become the most important – maybe the only – index to judge the worth of a human being. (Jia Zhangke 2009, 233)

Without question, fashion consumption has become a symbol of class hierarchies and social distinctions in contemporary China.¹ According to Jia Zhangke, the problem of the conspicuous consumption of brand-name commodities has become prevalent to the extent that what one wears, what one carries, what one uses, what one consumes and what one owns have become the only indicator of one's social value. They have become the only criterion for judging the 'price' of a human being.

Entitled 'Dirty Fashion', this article is part of my project that engages with visual and media cultures – fashion, cinema and documentary – to address Chinese consumer culture in the socialist and post-socialist periods. I am interested in how contemporary Chinese artists such as Ma Ke and Jia Zhangke appropriate the fashion and documentary forms, respectively, to reflect upon the socio-economic and cultural aspects of Chinese consumer culture. In this article, I introduce and examine Ma Ke's fashion design 'Useless' (2007) and Jia Zhangke's documentary *Useless* (2007). By engaging with Marxist cultural criticism, I think alongside Ma Ke and Jia Zhangke and comment on their critical ideas. This article is divided into three major sections. The first part introduces the aspiring Chinese fashion designer Ma Ke – whose name in Chinese pinyin, interestingly, is spelled as 'make' in English. Indeed, 'to make' is 'to fabricate', which is precisely what a fashion designer does. My emphasis is on her recent fashion exhibit 'Wuyong'/'Useless' (无用).² Presented at the Paris Fashion Week in February 2007, Ma Ke's 'Useless' was intended to be a critique of modern consumer culture. Her work intends to draw attention to the loss of the emotional bond between the maker and the user of clothes in the age of industrialized mass production and consumption. To help fashion recover this lost memory, Ma Ke buries her garment under dirt for a period of time. When the garment is unearthed, she reasons, it will find itself imbued with the imprint of the time and space of the soil. The second part of the article engages with Jia Zhangke's documentary *Useless* (2007), which won the Horizons Documentary Prize at

the Venice Film Festival in 2007. My purpose is to show that Jia Zhangke's engagement with Ma Ke's fashion is double-edged: although the director embraces some parts of Ma Ke's 'Useless', he critiques other parts of her design. In particular, I argue that the director introduces a new level of complexity to Ma Ke's anti-fashion and anti-consumption gesture through the use of montage. The last part of the article suggests that Jia Zhangke's documentary *Useless* can be regarded as an exercise in what Fredric Jameson calls 'cognitive mapping', an attempt to capture the complexly mediated relationships between cultural representational form (e.g. fashion and documentary) and social totality within the context of global capitalism.

Part I: Ma Ke's fashion design 'Useless' (2007)

Clothes can cover us. Clothes can convey feelings. Clothes can carry with them stories. As an outer layer in close contact with our skin, clothes can also have memories. (Jia Zhangke 2009, 229)

Ma Ke is one of the few internationally acclaimed fashion designers from mainland China today. Born in Changchun in China's Jilin Province in 1971, she graduated from the Suzhou Institute of Silk Textile Technology in 1992. Then, Ma Ke attended the Central Saint Martin's College of Art in London to receive specialized training in women's wear. After earning her fashion diploma in 1996, she returned to China to establish a business fashion company in the late 1990 s. The company, overseen by Ma Ke herself and her partner Mao Jihong, is called 'Zhuangtai'/'Mixmind' (状态). (While the Chinese characters 'zhuangtai' mean form or state, interestingly, they were translated as 'mixmind' in English.) Frustrated with the excess of mass-produced clothing commodities that looked strikingly identical and boring to her, Ma Ke felt that creativity and originality were lacking in the Chinese fashion world. 'Does clothing really have to be so shallow or superficial?' she asked. This question prompted her to design something completely different, or in her own words, something exceptional to the norm, hence the birth of her first fashion line 'Liwai'/'Exception de Mixmind' (例外) in 1996.³ According to Ma Ke, exceptionality is what defines her brand 'Exception'.⁴ As ready-to-wear, 'Exception' is sold in fashion boutiques and department stores in major Chinese cities, such as Guangzhou. It caters to the demands of the rising middle-class Chinese consumers.

The launch of 'Exception' brought Ma Ke commercial success, enabling her to design for the sake of artistic creativity rather than profit. In the mid-to-late 2000 s, Ma Ke embarked on a purportedly non-commercial collection called 'Wuyong' (Useless) (无用) (2007), or more precisely, 'Wuyong/Tudi' or 'Useless/The Earth' (无用/土地). According to Ma Ke, 'Useless' is an artistic production. Unlike 'Exception', which is ready-to-wear, 'Useless' is haute couture.⁵ 'Useless' is unique in that it cannot be easily copied or purchased in fashion boutiques or department stores. (I explain more about the content and form of 'Useless' below.) Without question, 'Useless' is couture, but it can be regarded as other art forms as well. For example, Stephane Marais, the make-up artist of the 'Useless' fashion show once remarked, 'When I was putting on make-up for the fashion models, I felt I was doing sculpture!' ('Useless' website). 'Useless' also resembles installation art or performance art. For instance, Thierry Dreyfus, the fashion show's lighting specialist once exclaimed, 'This is not a fashion show. I was designing lighting for an installation art!' ('Useless' website). In other words, there is a multi-media, trans-

media or inter-media impulse in Ma Ke's fashion design. Transcending the boundary of fashion to become something else, 'Useless' resembles a performance piece in a theater, or a sculptural exhibition, or an art installation in a museum or art gallery. The boundary between fashion and other art forms is fluid, blurred and ambivalent.

The Western fashion world seemed to endorse Ma Ke's design. In their enthusiastic responses to Ma Ke's artwork, the journalists in *Le Monde* called Ma Ke an 'anti-fashion fashion designer' ('Useless' website). The French and Chinese media also praised the 'anti-fashion' and 'anti-consumption' dimensions of her work ('Useless' website). Because Ma Ke incorporated useless and discarded objects in her creation – for example, she recycled a paint-covered sheet to make a dress, an old tarpaulin to make an over-sized coat, and a paint-splashed, ripped and ragged piece of cloth to create something distinctive – Ma Ke's design was also labeled by the media as an example of 'eco-fashion', 'promoting sustainable environment development' ('Useless' website). In recognition of her achievement and contribution to the fashion industry, Ma Ke was invited to present 'Useless' in the Paris Fashion Week in February 2007, a prestigious honor for a Chinese fashion designer.⁶ Subsequently, Ma Ke was invited to display her 'Useless' fashion in the Joyce Gallery in Paris' Palais-Royal from March to April 2007. She was also invited to showcase 'Useless' in the 'Fashion in Motion' series in London's [Victoria and Albert Museum](#) in 2008. Together with the designs of other Chinese artists, such as Zhang Da and Wang Yiyang, Ma Ke's 'Useless' was featured in the 'China Design Now' exhibition at London's [Victoria and Albert Museum](#) from March to July 2008.⁷ In 2008, Ma Ke's company became a guest member of France's *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture*.⁸ Indeed, the success of 'Useless' helped to establish Ma Ke's reputation as an artist, rather than simply a commercial designer. However, it should be noted that the cultural and symbolic capitals that Ma Ke earned and accumulated as an artist may eventually be converted into economic capital and help with the sale of 'Exception'. In fact, the interplay between economic capital and cultural capital is evident in the manner in which Ma Ke's recent design for China's First Lady Peng Liyuan boosted the sale of 'Exception'.

At this point, the reader may be very curious about Ma Ke's fashion. What exactly is 'Useless'? What does it look like? Why is it called 'Useless'? How 'Useless' is it? What is its theory of fashion? How can it be a reflection of Chinese consumer culture? In the second part of Jia Zhangke's documentary *Useless*, Ma Ke presents her fashion idea in the following way:

Objects made by hands convey emotions. What I mean is that making things by hand is a long and laborious process. So, handmade objects contain emotional elements that are quite different from mass-produced commodities. According to a line in a traditional Chinese poem: "the mother stitches [to make clothes] for her travelling son" (慈母手中线,游子身上衣). That's the kind of emotion I am talking about. It's never there in industrialized production. It's easy to see why. With industrialized production, there is no link between the maker and the user. You don't know who made your clothes. In a materialistic society, handmade objects will obviously never be popular. They go against the principles of business. Handmade objects last longer. People use them continuously. Precisely because they take longer to make, because the maker invests so much in them, even when such things get broken, they are unlikely to be thrown away. [...] But, if we buy a disposable cup, we will use it once and throw it away. There will be no stories to tell about it. It's essentially lifeless.

Ma Ke's fashion idea is so provocative that it warrants a closer scrutiny. Three important points – the handmade object, the industrialized mass-produced commodity and 'Useless' – can be deduced from her narrative. Let us examine them one by one. The first point is the handmade object. According to Ma Ke, the close and intimate relationship

between the maker and the user of the handmade object can be evoked by a line in the famous Tang Dynasty poem, 'The mother stitches to make clothes for her travelling son.' This poetic line conjures a scene in which the mother takes the time and effort to make clothes for her son because he has to travel far away. This is a good example of what Ma Ke means by the emotional connection between the mother and her son and how their relationship is mediated by the clothes that she makes for him. The handmade object is a special and meaningful object, carrying with it the affective investment of the mother in her son. Because maternal love is imbued in the making of it, the garment is a sentimental object. Because time goes into the making of it, the object embodies a unique story. Because it has histories and memories, the handmade object is less likely to be abandoned. In her narrative, Ma Ke offers another example to further elaborate the connection between the handmade object and storytelling. She invites the viewer to imagine a particular scene involving three generations – the grandfather, the father and the son.

A simple household object might be handed down from the grandfather, or maybe he made it by himself, and then he handed it to his son [that is the father]. And the father used it, he would explain to his son where it came from. The whole process of life infuses the object. It has its own story. It becomes a conversation piece.

Ma Ke notes that such an object tends to have a longer life span. If the object is worn out, it will be mended, reused, recycled and preserved. It will not be thrown away reflexively.⁹

Ma Ke's second point refers to the mass-produced commodity in the context of modern industrialization.¹⁰ The manufacturing process involves two primary actors: the factory worker, who is the producer of the commodity, and the consumer of the commodity. Jia Zhangke articulates the issue that Ma Ke raises poetically, 'The assembly line has cut off our emotions.' Undoubtedly, the producer and the consumer are not connected in any meaningful ways. Their emotional bond is severed. The factory worker does not know the consumer; the consumer does not know the factory worker. Their relationship is one of disconnection, or in Marxist parlance, alienation. (However, it should be noted that Marx's emphasis is on the producer whereas Ma Ke's focus is on the consumer. Certainly, Marx's understanding of alienation is more multi-dimensional. While Ma Ke attends to how the consumer is alienated from the producer, Marx also investigates the ways in which the producer is alienated from the product of his or her labor [i.e. the commodity], from his or her own labor, from himself or herself, from his or her fellow producers, and from his or her humanity or 'species-being'.¹¹) Due to the non-existence of a relationship between the consumer and the producer, continues Ma Ke, the mass-produced commodity does not embody any stories, histories and memories. It does not remember. Thus, if the commodity is broken or worn out, it is more likely to be discarded. It will not be reused or recycled. Similar to the disposable cup, Ma Ke says, the mass-produced commodity is essentially lifeless.

Simply put, Ma Ke believes that the handmade object is good and that the mass-produced commodity is bad. Rebelling against the lack of emotional connection between the consumer and the producer, Ma Ke designed 'Useless'. At this point, students of critical theory and cultural studies may recall Walter Benjamin's famous essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1969). Indeed, the story that the handmade object embodies can be analogized to what Benjamin calls the 'aura' of the artwork (e.g. painting) and the meanings associated with it, such as uniqueness, originality, authenticity, tradition, authority and ritualism. Along the same line of thought, the loss of history

and memory in the industrialized mass-produced commodity can be compared to Benjamin's idea of the withering or liquidation of the artwork's aura following the modern invention of mechanical reproduction (e.g. film and photography). However, contrary to Benjamin, who celebrates the progressive and revolutionary potentials of mechanically reproduced art, Ma Ke would like to return to the pre-modern era when 'the mother stitches to make clothes for her travelling son'. Her 'Useless' design intends to recreate the affective connection between individuals or generations before modernity. In other words, Ma Ke is nostalgic and retrospective. She embraces the old and rejects the new. Opposing the mass-produced commodity, she cherishes the handmade object, or in the language of Benjamin, she prefers 'auratic art' rather than 'mechanically reproduced art'. It is in this sense that Ma Ke's fashion was regarded by the media as 'anti-fashion' (understood as 'anti-new'), 'anti-consumption' and, I would add, 'anti-modern'.

In the discussion above, I have attempted to explain the content of Ma Ke's fashion design. However, what about its form? Indeed, the form of 'Useless' is intimately related to its content. A crucial aspect of Ma Ke's exhibit is the emphasis on craftsmanship. 'Useless' is handmade. Rather than being produced by sewing machines, 'Useless' is carefully sewn by female laborers working on handlooms in Ma Ke's workshop in China. This process is shown in the second part of Jia Zhangke's documentary. Without question, the choice of making clothes with one's hands – and the choice of not using machines to produce the garment – is significant. It is part and parcel of Ma Ke's fashion idea. The fashion designer intends to refabricate the situation in which 'the mother stitches to make clothes for her travelling son', or situation in which the object is passed from the grandfather to the father to the son. In short, 'Useless' attempts to reclaim the affective bond between individuals before the rise of market capitalism and its mode of technology.¹²

Moreover, Ma Ke's fashion design is natural and organic, as opposed to mechanical or artificial. Embracing the interactions between human beings and nature, Ma Ke invites nature to perform part of the design. In Jia Zhangke's documentary, she explains her ideas of fashion, nature and history.

Objects that have stories behind them are attractive. A few years back, I thought about making some clothes and burying them, leaving them to change through time. I was wondering if I could interact with nature by surrendering some control of the effect so that nature could do part of the designing. I'd just start by creating the basics and initiating the idea, leaving the rest to nature. So, when the fashion was dug up, I felt it would be imbued with the time and space in which it was buried, not to mention the traces of its history. I think that objects do carry memories.

To resist the loss of the emotional connection between the maker and user of the object and to help the garment regain its lost memory, interestingly, Ma Ke buries the fashion she designed under soil for a period of time.¹³ When the fashion material is unearthed, she reasons, it will find itself imbued with the imprint of the time and space of the soil. The dirt will then endow the fashion object with a sense of history and memory, turning it from a garment that forgets to a garment that remembers. This is the meaning of dirt on Ma Ke's fashion on a micro level. On a macro level, the dirt functions to challenge bourgeois and heteronormative temporality. Having no teleological destination, dirt disrupts and intervenes in the capitalistic narrative of progress, development and modernization. Contrary to the glittery surfaces and shiny reflections of the LV and Prada advertisements (which can be interpreted as metaphors of speed, consumption and disposability) in Jia Zhangke's documentary, the dirt on Ma Ke's artwork represents

slowness, duration, permanence and history. Disrupting the rush toward the future, the dirt attempts to stop, decelerate and defer the narrative of progress in capitalistic modernization.

Indeed, the manner in which Ma Ke presented her fashion exhibit is quite distinct. For example, in terms of venue, Ma Ke did not present 'Useless' in a high-end or luxurious hotel, or in a glamorous exhibition hall in a business convention center. Instead, she presented 'Useless' in a school gymnasium in the suburbs of Paris. Later, the art exhibit was shown in London's Victoria and Albert Museum. If fashion is about the new and the museum is about the old, then Ma Ke's choice of presenting her work in a museum is integral to her anti-fashion (understood as anti-new) idea. In addition, rather than hiring professional models, Ma Ke used amateur models in her fashion show. Compared with professional (super-) models and celebrities, the amateur models looked more natural, human and down-to-earth. This resemblance can be related to the dirt motif in 'Useless'. What is also striking is that there were no runways. Rather than asking the models to saunter down catwalks to display the clothes, Ma Ke instructed her models to stand on tall and illuminated boxes. This arrangement is integral to her anti-fashion idea. If the ephemeral presentation of clothes on a catwalk expresses speed, efficiency, fast consumptive practices, disposability and waste in the age of mass production and consumption, then, the manner in which Ma Ke presented her art exhibit emphasizes permanence, preservation and longevity. Moreover, the seating arrangement of Ma Ke's show is special. In a conventional fashion show, the most important people, such as the patrons and the sponsors, are invited to sit in the front row so that they can see and be seen. However, Ma Ke's fashion show challenged this form of power dynamic. Audience members were encouraged to stand up, leave their seats, walk down the stairs and walk around the fashion models to appreciate her artwork. In this way, the conventional power structure is critiqued, and the hierarchical relationship between the audience and the fashion show is reversed and turned upside down.¹⁴

Part II: Jia Zhangke's documentary *Wuyong (Useless)* (2007)

Dialoguing with Ma Ke's art exhibit, Jia Zhangke made the documentary *Useless* (2007). Judging from the content and form of the documentary, I argue that Jia Zhangke's engagement with Ma Ke's fashion is double-edged: although the director embraces some parts of 'Useless', he critiques other parts of her design. To explore the director's critique, we need to familiarize ourselves with the documentary. *Useless* is composed of three major components. Presented in an observational style (with no voiceovers or interviews), the first part features a group of manual laborers working in a garment factory in the Zhuhai city in Guangdong Province in southern China. These workers produce Ma Ke's first fashion line 'Exception' (ready-to-wear). Three dimensions of their lived experience are featured: the factory where they work, the dining hall where they eat and the clinic where they receive treatments from the doctor when they are sick. To be sure, the representation of the factory workers is a continuation of the director's long-standing interest in the subalterns and underprivileged groups in China's economic reforms. The genealogy of this interest can be traced back to the director's portrayal of the urban wanderers in his first feature film *Xiaowu (Pickpocket)* (小武) (1997), the socialist cultural performers in *Zhantai (Platform)* (站台) (2000), the abandoned youths in *Renxiaoyao (Unknown Pleasures)* (任逍遥) (2002), the migrant workers in *Shijie (The World)* (世界) (2004), the poor and those who were displaced by the Three Gorges Dam project in *Sanxia Haoren (Still Life)* (三峡好人) (2006b), the female sex workers in Bangkok in *Dong (东)* (2006a) and

the factory workers laid off from state-owned enterprises in *Ershisichengji (24 City)* (二十四城记) (2008). Similar to other contemporary documentaries about fashion, such as David Redmon's *Mardi Gras: Made in China* (2005), Micha X. Peled's *China Blue* (2005), Lixin Fan's *Last Train Home* (归途列车) (2009) and Ho Chao-ti's (贺照缙) *My Fancy High Heels* (我爱高跟鞋) (2010), Jia Zhangke explicitly links consumption to production. In *Useless*, the director insists that Ma Ke's first fashion line 'Exception' is produced by the factory workers in southern China. The factory workers should therefore be seen as the historical conditions of possibility, and the fields and forces of production, of Ma Ke's fashion. While the first part focuses on Ma Ke's 'Exception', the second part of the documentary features Ma Ke's fashion narrative and her show in Paris in 2007. (Her ideas have already been articulated in the previous section.)

Focusing on clothes as everyday necessities, the third part of *Useless* turns to the lives of working-class individuals in Fenyang (汾阳) in Shanxi Province in northern China. With the rise of the market economy, the local tailors in Shanxi cannot compete with the factories and department stores in more developed parts of China. In a memorable scene in *Useless*, a tailor-turned-coal miner explains to the interviewer (who, one may presume, is the director himself) that, excluding the cost of labor, it costs him 40 yuan (the Chinese currency RMB) to buy the necessary materials to make a suit. However, the department store sells the suit for only 30 yuan. It is impossible for the local tailor to compete with factories equipped with advanced technologies and department stores furnished with competitive marketing strategies. To make a living, some local tailors have to relinquish their jobs to work as coal miners instead.¹⁵ To that extent, the tailors are the repressed underside of the mass-manufactured suit. Their expertise is rendered 'useless' by the factories and department stores. The third part of Jia Zhangke's *Useless* tells a story of how the petty bourgeoisie is unable to compete with the big bourgeoisie in the competitive market economy.

Montage as ideology critique

The dirt in France is to be put onto the faces. The dirt in Shanxi is to be breathed into the lungs. (Jia Zhangke).

Jia Zhangke's documentary can be interpreted as an ideological critique of Ma Ke's fashion. With the intention of resisting mass production, consumption and commodification, Ma Ke attempts to endow her 'Useless' with stories, histories and memories. However, has she succeeded in recovering or recreating the emotional connection between the producer and the consumer? I am not sure that she has. In the second part of the documentary, which presents Ma Ke's fashion show, there is no evidence showing that the visitors to the fashion show in France or England (the consumers), after appreciating the 'Useless' exhibit, are drawn to the laborers working on the handlooms in Ma Ke's studio in China (the producers). As we see from the critical responses in the media (e.g. *Le Monde*), Ma Ke's 'Useless' exhibit invites the audience to get to know the designer herself, but not the workers who produce her designs. The latter's labor is rendered invisible. Ma Ke's 'Useless' exhibit does not bring the Chinese workers closer to the European viewers either. In other words, Ma Ke has not fulfilled the mission that she set out to achieve in the first place. Although Ma Ke's 'Useless' has not undone the alienation of the audience from the workers, has she managed to rebuild such lost connections through the 'Exception' commodity? Again, I am not sure that she has. According to the first part of

the documentary, there is simply no interaction between the producers and the consumers of Ma Ke's 'Exception'. In the production process, the factory workers do not encounter the consumers; in the consumption process, the consumers do not become acquainted with the laborers. There is no emotional connection between them. If we use Ma Ke's 'Useless' logic to examine her previous design, it is logical to conclude that 'Exception', similar to the disposable cup, is also essentially lifeless. Nevertheless, the task of connecting disparate groups of people is ultimately fulfilled by Jia Zhangke. By juxtaposing the fashion show viewers with the factory workers within the documentary, Jia Zhangke re-presents and re-creates the linkages between the producer and the consumer. Through the image, the director attempts to de-alienate, de-differentiate and relate the consumer to the producer.

Furthermore, Jia Zhangke's documentary enables one to see that some of the claims that Ma Ke makes may not be entirely true. According to the fashion designer, the emotional relationship between the maker and the user is present in the handmade object. Interesting stories about it can be told. Owing to the memories it embodies, the handmade object is typically preserved for a longer period of time. However, with the emergence of industrialized mass production and consumption of commodities, such affective experience is unavoidably lost. Ma Ke insists that the mass-produced commodity does not carry any histories or memories. However, is this actually the case? In the third part of the documentary, the workers, such as the coal miners, do endow meanings in, and create stories for, the mass-produced commodities. Take, for instance, the director's interview with the working-class couple who works as coal miners.

Interviewer:	Where did you buy the clothes you're wearing?
Wife:	In Fenyang.
Interviewer:	Why did you like them?
	[The couple looks embarrassed but happy.]
Husband:	Actually, I chose them for her. She wanted a suit. So, she went to the Jiadeli Superstore to look at some suits. That's a woman's suit. A three-piece suit. At that time, she did not know much about fashion, but she thought that the suits looked good. Anyhow, she saw lots of advertisements on TV. She realized that she already had everything except the suit. So, I chose one for her.

The husband, formerly a tailor, has purchased a pink suit for his wife in a department store. His wife is very fond of the pink suit simply because her husband chose it for her. (Ironically, the couple does not seem to be bothered by the fact that the husband, who used to work as a tailor, does not make the pink suit for her.) This scene can be interpreted as the agency of the consumer: the working-class couple adopts the pink suit and creates stories — in this case, the story of love — for the mass-produced commodity.

Indeed, the middle class individuals also create stories for their commodities. In the second part of the documentary, Ma Ke notes that the commodity, such as the disposable cup, does not embody any stories. Then, Jia Zhangke makes an abrupt cut to show the façade of a Louis Vuitton flagship store in China. This cut seems to suggest that the Louis Vuitton handbag, which is also a commodity, albeit a branded one, can be compared to the disposable cup. If we follow Ma Ke's 'Useless' logic, then, the Louis Vuitton handbag must not embody any stories because it is mass-produced. It must therefore be essentially lifeless. Interestingly, however, the middle-class Chinese consumers, particularly the

female ‘friends of Louis Vuitton’, are genuinely passionate about their Louis Vuitton handbags. The director presents a somewhat comical scene in which a group of middle-class Chinese women, dressed in fashionable clothes, discuss the brand-name products that they have purchased. One of them, in an annoying voice, announces that she likes Louis Vuitton. Another customer likes Paul Smith because his shirts are comfortable. Another one expresses her preference for Prada because ‘Prada is very philosophical!’ By making such a claim, the consumer is actively creating stories – in this case, the philosophical story about the aesthetic object – for the mass-produced commodity. (Indeed, branding is a form of storytelling.) In effect, all of these personal choices are stories created by the middle-class Chinese consumers that end up endowing meanings in the commodity.

I would like to go further to say that even Ma Ke herself is participating in this process of storytelling. This is especially true when she presents the reasoning behind her first fashion line ‘Exception’.

Ma Ke: Back then, there were no Chinese brands. The Chinese manufacturing industry was labor-intensive. Although China was the world’s largest fashion exporter, there was not a single Chinese fashion brand. Nobody thought of us [the Chinese] as being creative. I thought it was really sad and shameful. I felt I had a duty to do something about it.

Dissatisfied with the fact that China can only be a labor-intensive and export-oriented sweatshop that produces cheap and low-quality clothes for Western consumption (made in China), Ma Ke aspires to establish a fashion brand for China (designed in China). She would like Chinese fashion to be recognized by the Chinese and the international fashion worlds. This is the meaning *par excellence* that Ma Ke creates for ‘Exception’ as a branded commodity. Although Ma Ke says that the mass-produced commodity does not embody any stories, she is actively producing one herself.

Jia Zhangke’s documentary shows that individuals create stories for their clothing commodities: the working-class coal miners craft the love story for the pink suit, the middle-class consumers construct the philosophical story for their LV and Prada handbags, and the designer invents the story of national origin for her fashion.¹⁶ Importantly, the behaviors of these groups of people work together to refute Ma Ke’s claim that the mass-produced commodities do not have any stories. *In fact, whether an object can embody stories has less to do with whether it is handmade or mass-produced, but more to do with how people use it. It is the embeddedness of the object in concrete historical situations that is the source of its story.* This idea can be further confirmed if we return to the point that Ma Ke makes with regard to the handmade object and storytelling. According to Ma Ke, stories are created when the object is handed down from the grandfather to the father to the son. However, Ma Ke does not explain where exactly the stories originate. Do the stories come from the handmade quality of the object, or do they come from the transferability of the object from one individual or generation to another? In the latter, the object does not necessarily have to be handmade; it can be mass-produced. Although Ma Ke’s first example (the mother stitches to make clothes for her traveling son) illustrates the idea that the handmade object can embody histories and memories, her second example (the object is handed down from the grandfather to the father to the son) does not specify whether the object is handmade or mass-produced. She notes in passing that ‘*maybe* it is made by the grandfather’ (my emphasis). However, maybe it is not. Maybe it is mass-produced. Indeed, stories can continue to be told about the mass-produced commodity when it is handed down from the grandfather to the father to the son, or when it is purchased

and chosen by the husband for his wife. When the mass-produced commodity is used and appropriated in concrete historical situations, memories are fashioned. The incoherence of Ma Ke's fashion narrative reveals that, contrary to what she proclaims, there is no simple causal relationship between the handmade object and storytelling.

Moreover, Ma Ke claims that, because no stories can be told about the mass-produced commodities, they are disposable. They are less likely to be reused or recycled. However, is this actually the case? The third part of the documentary renders visible the desire on the part of the working-class individuals to prolong their commodities' lifespan. Many of them attempt to preserve their clothes so that they can last longer. Some of the clothes have been worn for such a long time that they have become thoroughly worn out. This can be seen from the clothes hanging outside the house of the coal-mining couples, and the clothes hanging inside the coal miners' bathing areas. The color and texture show that these clothes have been worn and washed many times. Moreover, by the very end of the documentary, the working-class individuals, such as the man in the red vest, the wife in the coal-mining couple and the middle-aged woman, bring their clothes to the local tailors to have them mended. In other words, at odds with Ma Ke's claim that the mass-produced commodities are readily disposable, the clothing commodities tend to be repaired, preserved and ultimately healed by the hands of the working class.

I would like to emphasize that Jia Zhangke uses montage to reveal the double standard of Ma Ke's narrative. To illustrate Jia Zhangke's critique of Ma Ke, I would like to direct the reader to the representation of the coal miners in *Useless*. Indeed, why does the director even include the coal miners in his documentary about fashion and consumption? In the third part of *Useless*, Jia Zhangke focuses on the lived experience of the coal miners. Their uniforms are covered with dirt, and their faces and bodies are also blackened with coal. When we attempt to juxtapose this scene with the scene in which Ma Ke's fashion models are covered with dirt, we can see that the coal miners are dirty due to the nature of their work whereas the fashion models are made to look dirty. The models' uncleanness is artificial. In the second part of the documentary, Jia Zhangke shows the work that goes into the making of the fashion show. During preparation, Ma Ke is meticulous about the type of dirt to be used for her exhibit. In response to her assistant who has just shown her a sample of dirt, Ma Ke comments, 'The mud won't do. It's too damp. We need earth, not this type of fine earth. It should be like the sample that we sent in earlier.' Ma Ke does not want to use just any type of dirt, but a particular type of dirt for her fashion show. Indeed, the same also holds true for the lighting effect. In her conversation with Mao Jihong about the color of the light boxes, Ma Ke notes, 'That color paper won't do [...] It's too yellow!' Ma Ke does not want to use just any type of light, but a particular type of light for her exhibit. Unfortunately, the nature in her 'Useless' design is not natural but naturalized, controlled and contrived.

The montage of the fashion models and the coal miners is a powerful revelation. It allows one to see that the dirty coal miners, who have just exited the coal mines, should be regarded as fashionable as, or even more fashionable than, Ma Ke's models. If we use Ma Ke's logic to view the world, the dirty coal miners should be regarded as the perfect incarnations of her fashion idea! They too must be seen as a new type of fashion model. They too perfectly express Ma Ke's 'Useless' idea. The dirt on the coal miners' clothes suggests the material conditions of coal mining. What is fascinating about Jia Zhangke's documentary is that the director has thoroughly defamiliarized Ma Ke's idea and pushed her claim to such an extreme that the idea may appear uncanny and unbelievable to Ma Ke herself. What is equally interesting is that Ma Ke herself does not recognize it.

However, will Ma Ke acknowledge the fact that the poor coal miners are fashionable? In the transitional scene between the second and third parts of the documentary, Ma Ke is shown driving a van from the city to the countryside. Visiting poor, remote and underdeveloped parts of the country, Ma Ke says, is similar to the recovery of memory for a person who has lost consciousness. (In many ways, her narrative sounds condescending. It resembles the claim made by some nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century European imperialists, who claimed that their colonial experience in Asia, Africa or the Middle East allowed them to see the childhood or the primitive stage of human civilizations). Indeed, there is little evidence to show that Ma Ke will joyfully embrace the idea that these dirty coal miners are fashionable. It is doubtful that she will entertain this idea. Given that Ma Ke considers the countryside to be backward, it is unlikely that she will use her idea to judge the coal miners and conclude that they are fashionable through and through. Jia Zhangke's inclusion of the coal miners reveals Ma Ke's double standard.

Ironically, when we attempt to examine this phenomenon from the perspective of the working class, the coal miners seriously consider their clothes and bodies to be dirty. They do not think that there is anything artistic or philosophical about their dirty uniforms. After a day of hard work, what they want is to take a shower to get rid of the dirt.¹⁷ According to the coal-mining couple, what is fashionable for them is what they see in TV commercials. The wife says that she would like to buy a three-piece suit because she has seen one on television. Indeed, the working-class couple's understanding of fashion is quite different from Ma Ke's. Thanks to Jia Zhangke's montage, such an ironic mismatch can be interpreted as the ideology of Ma Ke's fashion idea. Reflecting on how the industrialized mass production and consumption of clothing commodities has radically transformed the nature and process of human interactions, Ma Ke aestheticizes and romanticizes dirt to provide a diagnosis of modern consumer society. Ironically, however, the coal miners, who should actually be considered the perfect example of Ma Ke's fashion idea, do not idealize how dirt can potentially disrupt capitalistic and bourgeois temporality. For the tailors and the coal miners, dirt is just dirt. It has to be removed after a day of hard work.¹⁸

Part III: Documentary as cognitive mapping

Now, we can turn to the cultural criticisms of Jia Zhangke's work. In his essay 'Market Socialism and its Discontent', the Chinese cultural critic Xudong Zhang comments on Jia Zhangke's oeuvre in the following manner:

The breaking of the ideological totality at the end of the 1980s and the intensified disintegration of the "reform consensus" throughout the 1990s finally resulted in a fragmentation of Chinese society in every dimension and domain such that a "discovery" of reality could no longer meaningfully envisage a new unifying totality. Rather, a search for "reality" must start with a cognitive mapping of the contradictory multiplicity of realities. [...] Jia Zhangke's work can be understood most effectively in this context as a cinematic discursive invention [...] (2013, 141)

Zhang suggests that Jia Zhangke's early films, such as *Xiaowu* (1997), *Platform* (2000) and *Unknown Pleasures* (2002), can be understood as an attempt to cognitively map the convoluted realities of post-socialist China in cinematic terms. Here, Zhang is appropriating Fredric Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping, a theoretical device for capturing the complex mediations between the global capitalistic system (late capitalism) and its dominant cultural and ideological expression (postmodernism).¹⁹ The concept of

cognitive mapping aspires to link representational form to the otherwise un-representable social totality. According to Zhang, the representation of the county-level city ‘xiancheng’ (县城) (the site of a county, governing townships but in turn governed by districts or district-level cities) in Jia Zhangke’s films can be interpreted as a formal perspective or position to visualize the disappearance of an old reality and the emergence of multiple new realities. What characterizes the Chinese ‘xiancheng’, Zhang (2013) explains, is its liminality: ‘between rural and urban, between industrial and agricultural, between “state” and “non-state,” between high culture and low culture, xiancheng becomes a meeting place of all current or anachronistic forces’ (142). The ‘xiancheng’ is a location where ‘all the failings and compromises of socialist industrialization, of post-socialist reforms, and even of the sweeping market forces’ and indeed ‘different modes of production or consumption’ are rendered visible (142, 143). Although I mostly agree with Zhang’s analysis, his argument concerning the ‘xiancheng’ can only explain Jia Zhangke’s early films, at most up to *The World* (2004). However, his observation is unequipped to capture the variety and multiplicity of Jia Zhangke’s more recent works, such as his feature film *Still Life* (2006b), and importantly, his documentaries, such as *Dong* (2006a), *Useless* (2007), *24 City* (2008) and *I Wish I Knew* (2010), in which he experiments with the representation of fiction and reality. Maintaining that Jia Zhangke’s more recent works can also be regarded as examples of what Fredric Jameson calls ‘cognitive mapping’, I suggest that the director’s use of ‘bankuai’ (板塊) (which can be roughly translated as ‘block structure’) is another formal strategy that Jia Zhangke deploys to scan and map social totality. Let me illustrate this point by referencing *Useless*.

In an interview with Tony Rayns, when asked about the significance of the tripartite structure of his documentary *Useless*, Jia Zhangke explains the new representational method that he deploys to grasp the otherwise unrepresentable global capitalistic totality. He says:

Since making *The World*, I have become more interested in using the “bankuai” (板塊) structure to represent more than one group of characters or more than one setting. *Dong*, for example, brings together two Asian cities that are very far apart: Fengjie in the Three Gorges area of China’s Sichuan Province and Bangkok in Thailand. In *Still Life*, I tell two unrelated stories that take place in the same town. As I grow older, I experience life’s complexity and diversity, and it seems difficult to represent these characteristics through a conventional linear narrative, such as a 90-minute story of one man and one woman in a relationship. These days it is no longer unusual to travel, to meet a wide variety of people, and to experience different kinds of relationship. Our sense of the world changes as we travel and cross-reference different realities and lives. Obviously, low-cost air travel, satellite TV, and the Internet all contribute to this changing sense of the world. In most parts of China, it is already the case that most people no longer only know the immediate reality around them. (Jia Zhangke 2009, 231)

Extending the formal experimentation in his hometown trilogy, which showcases a particular group of individuals within a fixed particular locale (xiancheng) in Shanxi Province, Jia Zhangke’s fourth feature film *The World* (2004) traces the dialectic of the mobility and immobility of a cohort of young migrant workers in the World Park – an allegorical figuration of the world – in Beijing. However, beginning in the mid-2000 s, the director begins to adopt a different representational approach in his documentary works. For example, in *Dong* (2006a), Jia Zhangke uses a bipartite structure to trace the footsteps of a contemporary Chinese painter Liu Xiaodong. Liu is shown painting two groups of individuals in two geographical locations: the male migrant workers in the Three Gorges Dam area in China and the female sex workers in Bangkok, Thailand. Similar to the alienation of the consumer from the producer in *Useless*, the Chinese migrant

workers and the Thai sex workers have never encountered each other. What connects these two groups of people is Liu Xiaodong's painting, and we can add, Jia Zhangke's documentary about Liu Xiaodong's artwork. In *Useless* (2007), Jia Zhangke uses a similar structural technique – a tripartite structure – to feature different groups of people located in different geographical regions: the factory workers in Guangdong (China), the fashion models in Paris (France) and the coal miners in Shanxi (China). Although these groups of people do not know one another, the director insists on their intimate socioeconomic relationships and gestures to what lies between these global, regional, national and local realities. The director notes the importance of grasping these invisible connections.

In fact, we are all [economically] related. The tailors in Shanxi are related to the migrant workers in Guangdong. We are all related in this [economic] chain. Regardless of which stratum [or class] you are in, which profession you are in, in reality, we are all related. (Jia Zhangke)

To demonstrate how these disparate groups of people are connected within the same economic chain, Jia Zhangke says:

In the documentary, I show that Ma Ke created her “Wu Yong” [“Useless”] label to protest against the industrialization of garment making on a mass scale. In Shanxi, garment workshops in remote areas are dying out because they cannot compete with the garment factories in Guangzhou. By showing the Guangzhou factories, the fashion show in Paris, and the small tailor's shop in Shanxi in the same documentary, I hope to build a more complex and revealing picture [of how the capitalistic system works in our contemporary reality]. (Jia Zhangke 2009, 231–232)

Importantly, the director notes the necessity of grasping the complex economic and social relationships among seemingly incompatible and contradictory realities through cultural and ideological intervention. In the first and second parts of *Useless*, Jia Zhangke presents the factory workers and the fashion models (as workers). Both groups of individuals work to produce Ma Ke's fashion design – the workers labor to produce the ready-to-wear ‘Exception’ and the fashion models labor to wear and show off the ‘Useless’ exhibit. In the first and third parts of the documentary, the director shows the silent and imperceptible class competition in the market economy. In many ways, the inability of the local tailors in Shanxi to compete with the large-scale factories and department stores in Guangdong is the story of how the petty bourgeoisie (the shopkeeper) is unable to compete with the big bourgeoisie in market capitalism. Indeed, it may be no coincidence that the tailors in Shanxi have to work as coal miners after they have lost their jobs. The coal that they mine may serve as the energy resources for the operation of the factories in Guangdong. Furthermore, it is possible that after the local tailors in Shanxi have lost their jobs, some of them have to move to work in the factories in Guangdong. If so, then, the local tailors have been doubly exploited. Indeed, the first, second and third parts of the documentary are closely intertwined. If, according to Xudong Zhang, the cinematic representations of the ‘xiancheng’ in Jia Zhangke's early works capture the liminality of the urban and the rural, the industrial and the agricultural, the socialist past and the post-socialist present, then, I suggest that the director's use of the ‘block structure’ in his more recent documentaries arrests the historical contradictions of global capitalism in China on a more transnational scale. Indeed, *Useless* visualizes what lies between the local and the global, between the national, the regional and the transnational, between extraction (coal mining), production, design and consumption, and between fashion as ready-to-wear

(Exception), as couture (Useless) and as everyday necessity (the coal miners' clothes). What Jia Zhangke has achieved is to relate, connect, de-alienate and de-differentiate these seemingly fragmented, incoherent and contradictory realities. In addition, he shows us what lies in-between them. *Useless* can therefore be regarded as an exercise in cognitive mapping precisely because the documentary provides a vantage point for telling a more totalizing story of Chinese capitalism within the global and transnational context.

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Notes

1. For fashion and class distinction, see Georg Simmel's (1904), 'Fashion'. See also Thorstein Veblen (2007). For the cultural theories of fashion, see Walter Benjamin's entry on 'Fashion' in *The Arcades Project* (1999, 62–81). For secondary sources on Benjamin, see Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project* (1989). See also Roland Barthes' work on fashion and semiotics, including *The Fashion System* (1983) and *The Language of Fashion* (2006).
2. For the 无用 (Useless) website, see: <http://www.wuyonguseless.com/>. See also London's Victoria and Albert Museum website: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/f/fashion-in-motion-ma-ke-wuyong/>. In this website, a short video of Ma Ke's fashion show held in May 2008 is presented. One can also appreciate the photos of Ma Ke's 'Useless' fashion show.
3. Ma Ke's 'Exception' design can be accessed in this website: <http://www.mixmind.com.cn/>.
4. According to Ma Ke, 'Exception' is defined by its exceptionality. However, she has not explained what is distinctively exceptional about her design, or how 'Exception' is an exception to the norm. It is unclear whether the content or the form is exceptional, and to what 'Exception' is exceptional (and by extension, what the norm is). One should therefore be cautious with regard to how exceptional 'Exception' can be. Can it be that 'Exception' is the opposite of what Ma Ke claims it is? Can it be that 'Exception' is not exceptional but rather normative, banal and ordinary?
5. It is more convincing to regard 'Useless' as haute couture, rather than as ready-to-wear. Interestingly, however, 'Useless' was presented in the Paris Fashion Week's ready-to-wear section. (The latter was composed of three categories – men's wear, haute couture and ready-to-wear.) An *Edelweiss* journalist once asked Ma Ke why she did not choose to present 'Useless' in the couture section. She replied by emphasizing that 'Useless' is neither couture nor ready-to-wear. The existing fashion categories, she insisted, cannot adequately capture the uniqueness of her 'Useless' design. According to Ma Ke:

It is very difficult to define "Wuyong" ("Useless"). It can be everything or nothing. On the one hand, it is about anything related to every individual's life. Thus, it finds wide application in ready-to-wear. On the other hand, its uniqueness and the fact that its design cannot be copied make it more like couture. Anyway, it is what it is. It is not anything that already exists. So, it doesn't matter whether it was shown as haute couture or ready-to-wear. (May 2007)

Although 'Useless' can move between couture and ready-to-wear, 'Exception' is, strictly speaking, ready-to-wear. The latter is not couture. This categorization allows us to see that

fashion is situated between consumer commodity and art, and between mass or popular culture and high culture.

6. In fact, Ma Ke was not the first Chinese fashion designer to present in the Paris Fashion Week. Frankie Xie (谢锋) had presented 'Jefen' (吉芬) in the Paris Fashion Week in 2006. To symbolize the opening up of China to the world of fashion, Xie adopted the sign of the 'Chinese door' in his fashion collection.
7. For contemporary designs from Shenzhen, Shanghai and Beijing, see *China Design Now* (2008). This book catalogs the 'China Design Now' exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in March–July 2007. See website: http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1636_chinadesignnow/.
8. In fact, 'Useless/The Earth' was the first part, and most likely the most famous part, of Ma Ke's 'Useless' series. In July 2008, Ma Ke was invited to present a variation of the same theme 'Wuyong/Qing Ping' (Useless/Frugality) (無用/清貧) at the Jardin du Palais-Royal in Paris, France. Her fashion was similarly regarded as 'anti-fashion' by the Western media. For example, the fashion show was not presented in a private setting but instead in a public arena. It was not held indoors but outdoors. Furthermore, the fashion show was not presented by fashion models, but rather by modern dancers, martial artists and tai-chi practitioners. The dance performance was choreographed by Shen Wei.
9. One should also be attentive to the gender implication of Ma Ke's narrative, which can be politically conservative. In her first example, it is the woman who stays at home to do the stitching and knitting, and it is the man who travels and enjoys the product of woman's manual labor. In her second example, it is the man who has the privilege to participate in the construction of stories. In Ma Ke's narrative, women are not given any opportunities to create histories or memories.
10. Ma Ke does not specify whether she is referring to capitalistic or socialist modernity. There were machines in 'actually existing socialism' as well.
11. Ma Ke's (马可) name, interestingly, sounds like 'Marx', or in Chinese, Ma Ke Si (马克思).
12. Ma Ke takes pain to emphasize that 'Useless' is not a mass-produced commodity. However, one must inquire to what extent her claim is legitimate. When Ma Ke says that 'Useless' is not a commodity, what she means is that 'Useless' is not mass-produced. However, this understanding is not the same as Marx's theorization of the commodity, which emphasizes the qualitative, rather than the quantitative, side of commodification. The fact that 'Useless' is not mass-produced does not in itself mean that it is not a commodity. Because 'Useless' is historically embedded in the context of global capitalism, its handmade dimension is underwritten by the logic of commodification. 'Useless' is the opposite of what Ma Ke claims it is: 'Useless', a commodity that claims that it is not a commodity, is, in fact, a handmade commodity.
13. In fact, Ma Ke is not the first designer to bury the fashion under soil. Hussein Chalayan had already done so in his master's thesis in London's Central St. Martin's College of Art and Design.
14. One must inquire whether Ma Ke's design is genuinely anti-fashion. It seems that her work is less anti-fashion than it is a different type of fashion. Ma Ke's *anti*-fashion is, at most, *alter*-fashion. Its mode of negativity is 'lite' and 'decaffeinated'.
15. See also Li Yang's (李阳) film *Mang Jing/Blind Shaft* (盲井) (2003), which examines the lives of Chinese coal miners.
16. Rather than seeing these individuals' behaviors as an expression of what Karl Marx calls 'commodity fetishism' (the fact that these individuals focus on consumption and endow meanings in their commodities does not necessarily mean that they cannot see how consumption is related to production), it may be more useful to ask how Arjun Appadurai's theory of 'the social life of things' (or commodities) can help one evaluate Ma Ke's idea. For 'commodity fetishism', see the first chapter of Marx's *Capital: The Critique of Political Economy* (Volume 1, 1976–1978); see also David Harvey's *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (2010).
17. In fact, this is also true for the fashion models posing in Ma Ke's 'Useless' show. Before the show begins, the models are busy reading, texting or playing games on their cell phones. One can imagine that after the show, they would like to get rid of the dirt as soon as possible and return home.
18. This section (Montage as Ideology Critique) engages with Jia Zhangke's documentary to unravel the ideology of Ma Ke's fashion theory. I would like to note that this critique echoes

the title of Jia Zhangke's writings. In 2009, Jia Zhangke published a collection of Chinese essays entitled *Jia Xiang/Jia Thinks* (贾想) (2009). Indeed, the Chinese title is a pun. Although the pronunciation of Jia (贾) is the same as that of another word Jia (假), their meanings are different. The former Jia (贾) refers to the surname of the director, whereas the latter Jia (假) means falsehood (or ideology). When 'Jia' is combined with 'Xiang' (想), which means 'to think', 'Jia Xiang' (贾想) can mean 'Jia Thinks', or 'The Reflections of Jia'. However, 'Jia Xiang' (假想) can also mean 'What If' in the subjunctive mood. The book title is filled with utopian longings and imaginings. From the last name 'Jia' (贾) to the falsehood 'Jia' (假), from 'Jia Thinks' (贾想) to 'What If' (假想), it is possible to relate the pun of the book title to Fredric Jameson's theorization of 'the dialectic of ideology (假: falsehood) and utopian desire (假想: what if) in mass culture'. See Jameson's 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture' (1979). In the above section, I show that Jia Zhangke's documentary allows one to see the ideology of Ma Ke's fashion. However, can one also detect traces of utopian impulse in her fashion through the documentary? Such a desire can be observed in the documentary representation of the naked and dirty bodies.

19. For 'cognitive mapping', see Jameson's 'Cognitive Mapping' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988) as well as his *Postmodernism; or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) and *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (1992).

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