



Faces Places Discussion Guide

Director: Agnès Varda & JR

Year: 2017

Time: 89 min

This is the debut feature film from this directorial team, though you might know Agnès Varda from:

Daguerréotypes (1976)

Mur Murs (1981)

Les demoiselles ont eu 25 ans (1993)

The World of Jacques Demy (1995)

The Gleaners & I (2000)

Cinévardaphoto (2004)

Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier (2006)

The Beaches of Agnès (2008)

FILM SUMMARY

At age 89, one might assume Agnès Varda, French cinema legend and godmother of French New Wave, would settle down and put away the camera after more than 60 years in the business. Instead, she's managed to form an unlikely friendship with acclaimed 33-year-old photographer and muralist JR. And off they go, setting out into the rural French countryside sharing a passion for images and a deeply felt empathy for people of all walks of life. The result of this beautiful partnership is *FACES PLACES*, a poetic road trip that effortlessly feels light and breezy in tone, democratic in its flighty pursuit of ideas, and stuffed to the apertures with stirring images and profound emotion—all in the style of Varda's previous essayistic masterpieces *THE GLEANERS & I* and *THE BEACHES OF AGNÈS*.

Together, they embark in JR's custom-built box truck, complete with all the fixings of a mobile portrait studio and the means necessary for his signature large-format, wheat paste photomurals. Along their journey, as if by complete happenstance, they encounter country folk like Jeanine, an old soul living with the ghosts of a former mining community. Culling old photos while shooting new ones, JR and Varda plaster the now towering images over the entire facade of the row houses in which Jeanine resides, paying homage to the working class who made this place home.

As the road trip rolls though one village to the next, new encounters spark self-reflection, allowing this most unexpected of friends to burrow into the past by creating anew in the present. For all its fancy-free feeling, *FACES PLACES* reveals itself to be a remarkable meditation on the power of images: how they can act as a portal through memories thought lost; how the working class is often absent from imagery in the public eye; and how warm, genuine friendships can form in the most unexpected of places.

FILM THEMES

Separately, Agnès Varda and JR have been creating and collecting images throughout their entire careers. Their shared interest in images and how they affect people bring them together for an incredible road trip across rural France.

THE INERTIA OF CREATIVE ENERGY

Prior to meeting JR, Agnès Varda had spoken about the possibility of finally retiring from filmmaking. Yet, their shared interest in image making inspired them both to plan some sort of cinematic collaboration. The resulting creative experiment unfurls on screen with such joy and genuine affection that it's utterly contagious. When they reach out for participants in small towns across France, they are met with enthusiasm, excitement, and a profound sense of communal spirit.

THE POWER OF IMAGES

Both Varda and JR's images have been seen the world over and have deeply affected the people who have had the pleasure of bearing witness to them. The artists themselves only met after discovering their mutual admiration for each other's work. In the case of *FACES PLACES*, size does in fact matter, with JR's giant murals depicting people unguarded, revealing not just their faces, but also a part of themselves. As the murals are revealed to the people within them, Varda creates her own images of their varied reactions, from being awestruck or moved to tears to being proud or slightly embarrassed. Varda's images are the ones to which audiences most directly react, and react we inevitably do.

ART IN THE PUBLIC EYE

One of the beautiful things about public art and guerrilla-style street art is that it is encountered by the greatest number of people possible and (most often) without context. Thus people are forced to think for themselves about what the art is supposed to mean or what the artist intended. Imagine driving through the countryside and stopping at a railroad crossing as a giant pair of Agnès Varda's eyes, plastered on the side of the boxcar, rushes by—a stunning image in itself, but one that leaves an impression for days to come.

HONORING THE WORKING CLASS

JR and Varda have a history of giving voice to those who may not often have one. Take as examples, JR's portrait of one-year-old [Tecade](#) on the Mexican side of the border between the United States and Mexico, or the many gleaners at the heart of Varda's masterpiece [THE GLEANERS AND I](#). *FACES PLACES* continues in this lineage, focusing its attention on the hardworking folks in the French countryside—miners, teachers, spouses of dockworkers, factory workers, and more—revealing a warmly felt pride of place and a way of life. These stories would go untold, but Varda and JR are happy to follow them down the rabbit hole whenever the opportunity presents itself.

“JR is fulfilling my greatest desire—to meet new faces and photograph them, so they don't fall down the holes in my memory.”

Agnès Varda

“In the street, we reach people who never go to museums.”

JR

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS

1. Before seeing *FACES PLACES*, what did you know about Agnès Varda or JR?
2. Why do you think the film centers so much around the working class?
3. JR and Varda bond over their shared interest in creating and sharing images. Have you ever had this experience with someone else?
4. How do you feel about public art? How about guerrilla-style street art?
5. Both filmmakers appear on screen as a filmic personality. Which do you identify with more? Why?
6. Within the film, images are often used to conjure memories to further explore. How did this aspect of the film affect you?
7. Varda makes no bones about the fact that she is a woman advancing in age, mentioning it in various ways throughout the film. How did you feel about this?
8. Even at Varda's request, JR refuses to remove his sunglasses for much of the movie. In retrospect, how did you feel when he finally removes them as a genuine way to console Varda in a moment of weakness?
9. This film has a very breezy feel to it, moving from one subject to the next without any drastic tonal shifts or awkward transitions. How do you think this feeling is achieved?
10. What aspect of *FACES PLACES* did you find most memorable and why?

NOTES:

FILM FACTS

- **FACES PLACES** had its world premiere on May 19, 2017, at the Cannes Film Festival where it won the L'Œil d'or for Best Documentary. In the following months, the film went on to screen at nearly every major festival, including Telluride, Toronto, Helsinki, New York, London, Amsterdam and beyond, collecting all sorts of awards and accolades along the way, most impressively, an Oscar nomination.
- On November 11, 2017, Agnès Varda was an honorary Oscar award for lifetime achievement in filmmaking, becoming the first woman filmmaker to receive the prize. Upon the announcement, Varda [joked](#), "It's ridiculous. I'm well-known but still remain poor, with poor audiences and poor box office. It's like a consolation. My daughter says I should go. But it's the side Oscar. It's not even in February. It's in November. I think it's the Oscar of the poor. I'm flattered but not that much."
- The film was backed by Canal+, but was partially funded through crowdsourcing. More than 600 people contributed funds for the film's production through crowdsourcing—EUR 55,000 (\$61,600).
- JR began his artistic career creating graffiti on the streets and roofs of Paris, before expanding to photography and large-format wheat pasted portraiture. In 2006, his work was sanctioned by the City of Paris, and he subsequently began to work internationally, eventually winning the 2011 TED Prize of \$100,000 to start the [Inside Out Project](#), a global participatory art project centering around creating black-and-white portraits, documenting the process, and sharing the stories behind the photos.
- The 34-year-old photographer JR and the 89-year-old filmmaker Varda bridge generations through their friendship with a 55-year age gap between them.
- In January 2018, it was announced that Varda has a new film in production to be co-directed with Didier Rouget, who served as the cinematographer on her earlier work **THE GLEANERS AND I**. According to [Variety](#), the project "will shed light on her own experience as a director, bringing a very personal insight on what she calls 'cine-writing,' traveling from rue Daguerre in Paris to Los Angeles and Beijing."

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Donate** to [Women In Film](#), an organization that "advocates for and advances the careers of women working in the screen industries—to achieve parity and transform culture."
2. **Participate** in JR's international [Inside Out Project](#), which encourages people "to share their untold stories and transform messages of personal identity into works of public art."
3. **Meet** new people. [Get out and engage](#) with those you've never met. We could all make use of new perspectives once in a while.
4. **Support** the creation of documentary films through the non-profit, crowd sourcing platform [CineCrowd](#), where filmmakers and creatives present and pitch their ideas to the public.

We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.