
Editor's Note

This is what happened.

In *Faces Places*, the late Agnès Varda's 2017 documentary film, Varda and artist JR go on a road trip around France in a van-cum-photo booth, visit towns and villages, talk to strangers and take pictures of them, then produce gigantic blowups of these photos and paste them on the face of buildings or other big constructions. In one episode, on a beach in the Normandy area, Varda and her partner decide to recreate a picture she took of photographer Guy Bourdin back in 1954 on a beach nearby. The chosen location for the display is a deserted bunker from the WWII days—the Nazi bunker used to stand on the edge of a cliff, and was pushed off by neighborhood residents a few years ago for safety reasons. Varda and JR's team mount the image of young Bourdin, sitting on the sand with legs stretched in front, onto the decaying bunker, taking advantage of its V-shaped angle to create the effect that Bourdin looks securely “cradled” there. It’s breathtaking: the cradle idea, the size of the image, the wartime backstory, and the long arc of the development of contemporary French photography.

The next day, the filmmakers return to the beach, only to find that the photo they put on has been washed away by the tides, with not a single vestige left.

Critics and fans tend to comment on this moment in the film in a melancholic tone, citing Varda and JR's own remarks on how their art is but ephemeral, and how they are never going to finish the film. But there is nothing to be sorrowful about (and the pair's comments should not be taken as sentimentalism, of course, or irony for that matter). The tides have made a final touch on their work, and helped complete it. This is one of the brilliant ways in which time plays a vital part in artistic revelation: yes, everything has been planned and well thought over (the team

discussed other locations and other Bourdin photos), but sometimes it takes the unexpected or chance to really bring forth the life of the work.

This is what happened with this issue of *Ex-position*. As contrived as it may be, the Varda-JR film is the analogy that came to mind watching the wrap-up of the production of our June issue. As that bunker project is about the imprint of time as the quintessential art form, the feature topic of June unfolded as a gift of time in the form of coincidence.

What happened was that we made plans, and carried them out as dutiful housekeepers. We approached target contributors with specific questions, instructions, and in some cases even a reading list. We thought we had rough ideas how things would turn out—we expected each prospective author to respond to one set of questions, or just one question. But as it turned out, the single-pronged homework we assigned each began to multiply and have energy of its own, and then, as pure coincidence, converge into what might eventually look like a concerted effort. Our contributors ended up quoting the same materials, directing their inquiries toward similar concerns. For an issue on unworldliness, we thought the core of the discussion would be the question of (un)translatability. But our contributors show us how the discussion can never bypass the much thornier issue concerning the very practice of translation. Some of them also show us how the idea of “translation” can *translate* into creative ways of rethinking the world, or even an exercise of innovative scholarship where they engage with their subject intimately.

On top of that, a Spanish literature specialist we invited ended up writing not about material from his regular purview but about Taiwan, echoing other authors in the featured section. And while we were processing the research articles, we thought to ourselves, how can there *not* be a piece on Eileen Chang for such a topic—and along came a submission on Eileen Chang at the last minute.

For all this, we thank those who responded to our invitation/request, and those who sent in their research on their initiative (including fellow scholars who submitted work to the general topics section). What should be pointed out, in particular, is that among these scholars there is one serious creative writer and three serious translators altogether. In addition, the featured section could not be possible without the tremendous help of the two professional translators. We salute all for turning out impassioned, engaging work.

While handling the papers, I was reminded of a question that had bothered me for quite a while. For those who work on literature written in Mandarin Chinese by writers residing in Taiwan, regardless of political alignment, and by those who identify themselves as Taiwanese wherever they are, we have been quite undecided about what to call ourselves. The field has been wavering between *Taiwan literature* and *Taiwanese literature*—the former sounds ungrammatical; the latter could be confusing as there is also a group of writers who write in the local language Hokkien, which is often called “Taiwanese.” In this issue, the authors had the liberty to decide on their preferences. But I took the opportunity to consult with Professor Adam Lifshey, the Spanish expert who wrote a piece on Taiwan for us. He gave a rather uplifting answer. With his permission, I am reproducing parts of his response in our email exchange as follows:

[S]ince I'm not a specialist in Taiwanese cultural studies, I don't feel quite qualified to give the most informed opinion. But I am familiar with comparable debates when it comes to Latin America and Spanish-language studies, and my general takeaway from those is that a useful but grammatically odd phrase may sound awkward at first, but if enough scholars and institutions with cultural capital start using it (which seems to be the case with “Taiwan literature”) then it starts sounding completely fine. So it's not that “Taiwan literature” is “correct” or “incorrect” but that it is probably on its way to becoming entirely acceptable and one day will not sound odd or incorrect at all.

At the moment, “Taiwan literature” does sound strange to my American ears in a way that “Taiwan studies” does not, but that would not stop me from using “Taiwan literature” if it made sense to me in a given project. I would just see myself as being one of those people trying to help get a useful phrase into circulation.

By way of an example from my field . . . so the adjective for “United States” is of course “American.” But this is ideologically unacceptable to many, many Latin Americans who also see themselves as part of the Americas and therefore also “American.” [. . .] There are also underlying language issues here (not just political and geographic issues), since “American” literature generally implies English, not Spanish. So in order to be more clear and nuanced and accurate, instead of using a phrase like “American literature,” when I write, I nearly always use “U.S. literature” or “United States literature” unless I have a specific rhetorical rationale for using “American.” Both “U.S.” and “United States” in these phrases are nouns functioning as adjectives (like “Taiwan” in “Taiwan literature”), but the former sounds more normal while the latter sounds clunky

and odd. Yet often abbreviations are frowned upon in anglophone [sic] publications, so I often find myself using “United States literature” instead. And the more I write it and use it, the less clunky and odd it sounds to me, and, I think, to others. It is a better term than “American literature” in any project that also involves literatures from the rest of the Americas, so I’m comfortable with using it despite its marginality as a phrase in anglophone academia.

His feedback, I believe, could help unravel the issue for many people.

Part of the reason for bringing up our discussion over the name question is that this is, I hope, what the journal can do: generate serious dialogue. To that end, when we set out to propose that all our calls for papers are ongoing ones (please refer to the journal’s website), we are serious about it. We can’t imagine putting an expiration date on any worthy discussion.

So, with what we are presenting you in this feature topic, we invite more contributions in the months and years to come on the same topic. The Varda analogy doesn’t seem to hold—there, completion of the work manifests as emptiness (what an omen!). Still, I for one would like to believe that, with time (and probably more instances of coincidence), we shall see layers added to the project, enriching and complicating the conversations.

On behalf of the journal, I thank Yu-lin, the guest editor, for going out of his way to help put together this issue. We also owe a debt of gratitude to our hardworking editorial board members and the incredible external readers.

Chun-yen Chen
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