

Merci Ambassador Bouabdallah.

Merci mes amis for joining me this evening.

I am so very honored to receive the Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters. It is an honor that touches me deeply.

At the outset, I must take note of and give special thanks to my French colleagues and friends here in New York and Paris.

**Thank you with much gratitude:**

Mohamed Bouabdallah  
 Judith Roze  
 Vincent Florent  
 Sandrine Neveaux  
 Adeline Monzier  
 Nathalie Charles  
 Cannon Williams  
 Mathieu Fournet  
 Valérie Mouroux  
 Pierre-Alexandre Moreau  
 Christophe Honoré

I am delighted, as well, to be in the company of two distinguished Chevaliers: Edward Baron Turk and Anne Kern.

In 2015, while attending a conference in Strasbourg I was asked by a French colleague: “When did I begin my romanticization with France?”

I thought it strange yet a compelling question. Although her query came out of the blue, it echoed an earlier comment made to me by an American colleague: “Why study ‘old’ France”?

Hmmmm, I thought. Is my attachment to France mere exoticization of the Other? Am I guilty of sappy nostalgia?

Indeed, the cinema is of course a French 19<sup>th</sup>-century invention. But there is surely something more to discover about 21<sup>st</sup>-century France in cinema and otherwise.

In a recent edition of Villa Albertine’s ‘creative magazine,’ *States*, Judith Roze and others tackle a similar concern. They ask: “Are we done with France?” Their response: Not so fast. But with all things France, *c’est très compliqué*. We need only look to the recent political landscape unfolding this month in France to glimpse its ever-shifting contours.

Are we done with France? I don't think so. The stakes are too high to dismiss France and its relationship with other nations—including, especially, the United States. Culturally, politically, 'old France' remains vibrant, dynamic, and significant.

One only need walk the streets of the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, or 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement in Paris, or hang out with the multi-cultural student population that drives the energy of such cities such as Tours to experience something indeed très compliqué, something very much alive, *something very much in process*.

And, for me, it is precisely through the cinema where we come upon a France that cannot easily be reduced to something 'old' and 'done with.'

French and Francophone filmmakers *bring to life at once* the traditions that deeply mark French culture *while* reimagining the purported limitations that these traditions represent.

Whether it be the cinema of twentieth-century filmmakers such as Germaine Dulac, Jean Epstein, Jean Renoir, Jean Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Ousmane Sembène, Patrice Chéreau, Catherine Breillat, *or* those cinematically reimagining 21<sup>st</sup>-century France such as Christophe Honoré, Alice Diop, Julia Ducournau, Bertrand Bonello, Remata-Toulaye Sy, "old France" is at once embraced, challenged, and transformed—*made queer in many instances*.

Also, to study France is to engage in a history of movement (often through cinematic movement). The longstanding creative and intellectual Trans-Atlantic exchanges have involved a commingling, a deep friendship, between France and the United States.

Consider: Balzac, Henry James, the Harlem Renaissance, Josephine Baker, Marcel Duchamp, Existentialism, Deconstruction, Frantz Fanon, Jazz, William Faulkner, Marcel Proust. The list goes on, the *affect* remarkable.

In truth, the most important cultural exchange is that which involves students. It is they who carry their cultures back and forth. It is they who are most generous with their enthusiasm for discovery, and their willingness to share and to learn with others.

To this end, I am most proud of the film programs I lead that brings American students to France and the French students who, in turn, come to the United States. The College of Staten Island partnership, **first**, began with the University of Tours, and **now** works with the International Film and Television School in Paris and Lyon, EICAR. Without the tireless work of Executive Director Stephen Ferst at the helm of the Center for Global Engagement at CSI, my faculty-led program would never have gotten off the ground.

Last week, 14 students from EICAR completed a two-week program in New York through a collaboration with the College of Staten Island and The Feirstein School of Cinema at Brooklyn College. Thanks to Paula Massood and Richard Gladstein for literally facilitating the space for this year's program. Next year, we travel back to Paris when my dear colleague, Mitchell Lovell, will work with me and a new group of American students.

It is difficult to express in words the significance of students in the international scene. In seeing the films they generate, and the new international friendships that make, I believe my faculty-led program between CSI and France is the most important pedagogical project of my career. Robert Wallace, Sarolta Takacs, Cynthis Chris, Michael Steiper, and Timothy Lynch: thank you for your administrative support and endless encouragement.

Perhaps, I do romanticize France through my cinematic lens.

When reflecting on Gustave Flaubert, Edward Said wrote in his magisterial book, *Orientalism*, that Flaubert's romanticization of the Orient was not "impersonal," or guided by "academic rules and procedures"; instead, Said tells us Flaubert, was a *sensualist*, he romanticized the Other as a form of "self-discovery." In doing so, Flaubert imagined and "constructed" new worlds *with* Others. Together, new worlds were imagined and created with, as Said calls it, "verve and style" (189).

I am certainly no Flaubert—although I believe I have a bit of verve and style; nevertheless, I identify with Flaubert's desire to engage intimately, sensually; **to not only to learn about** but to **learn from**, to **participate with**, to **become part of**.

Tonight, many here at Villa Albertine represent the culture and the people of France who have generously allowed me this cultural intimacy, the experience of "self-discovery" through a sharing in a longstanding history of international friendship.

And thank you to my many dear American friends and colleagues—Jeff Harris, Wayne Koestenbaum, Joe McElhaney, Racquel Gates, John Rizzo, Asher Remy-Toledo, and Braulio Amado. And thank you to my dad and my late mom.

And, finally, thank you to my husband Michael who probably never imagined all-things French would infiltrate each and every day of his life. Yet, I am certain he has shared in the Francophilia pleasures just as I have. He now makes baguettes with imported French flour every Saturday morning. How French is that? Merci mon amour.

Merci à tous.