

Experiencing the Champs-Élysées Film Festival Outcome Statement

Last summer, I attended the sixth annual Champs-Élysées Film Festival in Paris, France as well as Scotland's Edinburgh International Film Festival, longest continually-running film festival in the world. Over the course of my study, I viewed a dynamic array of short and full length films from American, French, and Canadian filmmakers. My initial proposal focused on only the Champs-Élysées, but due to other funding sources, I expanded my experience to encapsulate both festivals. I exposed myself to film genres that I had previously left unexplored. Every showing promised a new film, impactful in a different way.

For the Champs-Élysées Film Festival, I had the added experience of attending the awards ceremony. Even though I was not able to vote, I decided upon my own rankings to see how my discretion compared to the critics' awards. For the most part, critics recognized my top picks, but there was one winner which thoroughly surprised me. I saw over fifteen films, and I only disliked one: "The Shivering Truth." This piece was a pilot episode for an Adult Swim animated series. It is a stop-motion anthology show similar to *Robot Chicken* that showcases darkly surreal and disturbing plotlines. Upon watching the short, I immediately dismissed it as a grotesque piece not meriting distinction. I was genuinely shocked when it won the critics' award for best American short film at the festival. I spent time unpacking my shock even aggregating opinions from my peers in a [google form](#). This analysis prompted me to consider subjectivity of art. "The Shivering Truth" exemplifies how different viewers can both love and hate the same piece. I took this as an integral lesson to remind myself of before I returned to Grounds and produced original art of my own.

In contrast to Champs-Élysées Film Festival's tighter focus on short films, the Edinburgh International Film Festival showcased a wider breadth of genres. I attended three showings: the European premiere of *Jellyfish*, George Michael's self-directed documentary *Freedom*, and a series of Canadian experimental films. My viewing of *Jellyfish* stands out as the largest teaching moment. Over the course of the film, we watched a young female protagonist experience trauma after trauma to the point where I stopped enjoying the film. I felt as though I was partaking in a violent, voyeuristic experience more than anything else. During a Q&A after the showing, the screenwriter-directors discussed their decision to include so much violence against their female lead. It was a compelling conversation about whether art depicting violence creates more empathy for the survivor or perpetuates violence. Watching *Freedom* brought about interesting question as well. In a time of more biopics than we can count, who has the right to tell a celebrity's life story? Without a doubt, George Michael filled his documentary with biased commentary that contorts some circumstances from his life, but in a way, his narration makes the documentary even more true to his learned experience. Some may argue that autobiographies give authors more power of their narrative than they should have; however, I believe that autobiographies on the whole may have more integrity.

Out of both film festival experiences, “Hair Wolf,” an American short film at the Champs-Élysées Film Festival, had the greatest impact on my screenwriting. Currently, I am a screenwriter-director for Doug Grissom and Paul Wagner’s second annual Overcranked course, in which students write and direct original short films. “Hair Wolf” informed my screenplays’ topics and genres. The short film parodied horror film tropes to comment on the social phenomenon of Caucasian people adopting traditionally black hairstyles. I greatly appreciated the short film’s command of satire, and I entered the Overcranked course intent on writing genre screenplays related to race. My final product was “Visibility Cloak,” a social satire on white progressivism and how it can erase or discount minority experiences. Even though “Hair Wolf” had the most direct impact on screenwriting, all of the films I saw broadened my understanding of filmmaking and art in general.

Expenditures

Item	Cost
Lodging for Paris (5 nights)	1000
Lodging for Edinburgh (2 nights)	400
Edinburgh Film Festival Tickets	73.32
Total	1473.32

Excerpt from Visibility Cloak
Here is an excerpt from my final screenplay for Overcranked.

2.

We hear them before we see them. The sound of JAZMIN's classmates (20s, white) chatting and laughing. White noise.

We can catch soundbites about miscellaneous hot topics like cultural appropriation, living wages, and beauty standards.

TITLE CARD

CUT TO:

1 INT. CLASSROOM 1 - DAY

JAZMIN (20s, black, slightly disheveled) enters her the classroom of incensed students. Her backpack hangs off one shoulder.

Her classmates keep talking to one another without taking notice of JAZMIN entering. She slowly walks around looking for a seat.

JAZMIN picks a desk in the front row. Behind her, GRACE (20s, white, female) and BRAD (20s, white, male) are engrossed in conversation.

MARY (20s, white, female, well-pressed) enters afterwards and picks an empty seat in the third row.

GRACE
Listen, Brad, the fact of the matter is that *Friends* is a homophobic, racist show. I'm ashamed of myself for having ever watched it.

BRAD
Oh no, I agree. Hey, uh, Jazmeen?

BRAD reaches forward to tap JAZMIN on her shoulder. She turns around.

JAZMIN
...yeah?

BRAD
I was just wondering, as a black woman, what's your opinion on *Friends*?

JAZMIN
Oh, I, uh--

GRACE
I want to join the boycott against

Netflix this weekend. We're getting free catering from the Juice Moose.

BRAD
I mean, I only use Netflix for the documentaries' social commentary anyway. Did you see that new Ava Duvernay piece? She's my **queen**.

JAZMIN
I actually don't mind *Friends*.

Beat. BRAD and GRACE give JAZMIN looks of disgust.

GRACE
How can you be okay with *Friends*?

BRAD
I am **appalled** that you don't recognize the violence of that show.

JAZMIN
It's just a show. I don't see--

GRACE
How can you be so **blind** to oppression?

BRAD
Jazmeen! Listen, as a Jewish man, I feel like I have life experiences similar to yours.

JAZMIN
Uh--

GRACE
He struggles with his identity every day.

BRAD
(whispers)
It's such a burden.

SCOTT (O.S)
Hi, class, sorry I'm late.

Conversation ceases when SCOTT (30s, white, manufactured hipster look, pen tucked behind ear) enters. He passes out square fliers.

Photos

Seeing the antique French theaters was a highlight of my abroad experience.





