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Report of the Workshop of the 9th of October 2021

REPRESENTATION OF DIVERSITY IN WRITING : FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY ?



Participants

The **55 scriptwriters** of which 20 are international present within the scope of the CANNESERIES Writers Club.

With the participation of **Aline Marrache**, Vice President of PFDM, of **Vanessa Djian** and **Karolyne Leibovici**, co-founders of « Girls support girls ».

Coach and facilitator

Fabienne Silvestre, Head of Institutional Relations and Diversity at CANNESERIES, Coach and Co-founder of the Lab.

Sandrine Brauer co-president of The Collectif 5050

Observers

Mathilde Bollet, Institutional Relations and Diversity assistant at CANNESERIES.

Philippe Gray, Actor and Director.

Shirin Rashidian, Organiser of the CANNESERIES Writers Club.

Camille Bonvallet, CANNESERIES



The importance of the representation of diversity in writing

The first observation that emerged from this workshop is that all the scriptwriters participating to the workshop naturally feel concerned by the question of the representation of diversity in their work. They have already thought about it : **it is a subject that motivates them, and on which they keep by asking themselves some questions and seeking some answers.** They feel that they have a real responsibility in this area.

For the authors, **representing diversity is of paramount importance because what we see on screen also has an importance and an impact on reality.** The way we see ourselves, the way we feel represented on screen has an influence on the way we see ourselves in real life. This is why we need to be very clear that clichés, stereotypes and labels are terribly limiting and unhealthy.

The representation of diversity on screen and therefore in writing **is now a necessity and a duty for scriptwriters**, a way to fight persistent stereotypes. This necessity and this intention come up against the fact that their inspirations and influences rarely come from diversity, which pushes them to have the desire to broaden their field of vision, and to enrich their knowledge. They seek to discover what is done elsewhere.

In addition, most authors and creators are not themselves from the diversity and when they portray female or gay or racialised characters, or even characters who are far from their reality, it often becomes a subject by itself. **Diversity on screen is unfortunately the same as diversity among writers. Writers should be as diverse as the characters.**

Then, authors today have to face a reluctance that comes from above, the mistrust and resistance of broadcasters and decision-makers on subjects representing diversity. This is what they have to fight against today. **Broadcasters and producers are the ones who have the power to turn things around, and they seem to be more reluctant than the writers to put diversity in the shows.**

Some scriptwriters also make a more personal point to encourage others to put diversity into their characters and their work : avoiding the danger of clichés, writing from another point of view, **writing a character different from oneself is a very exciting and rewarding process.** Of course, being concerned with the issue of diversity does not preclude the complexity of the subject, and it therefore raises both personal and universal issues for today's fiction writers.



The challenge of portraying diversity for screenwriters

The question of freedom is central to the writing and representation of diversity. According to the authors, there is the freedom they are given and the freedom they give themselves. First of all, if an author feels free, or has the desire of freedom in their writing, diversity becomes a problem for broadcasters. Diversity is an issue at various scales, it reflects the reality of an entire industry. For writers, it means that feeling free, is taking a risk.

For writers, freedom in the representation of diversity is often a question of legitimacy : must I be a black man to write a story about a black man? Can I write about a lesbian woman if I am not a lesbian myself ? **The difference between their reality and the reality of potentially diverse characters, as well as the fear of misrepresenting is a barrier to representing diversity in their writing.**

An obvious first solution would be **to have more writers from diversity to write diverse characters**. There is a need of increasing diversity within the writers themselves, so that they can challenge the majority. It was also said that sometimes writing about yourself when you are from a minority can be complicated, there is the fear of exposing themselves, of presenting something different, the fear of being rejected or misunderstood; which is very difficult to endure when you are writing with your personal experience, your intimate life.

From these discussions emerged that exchange, contact and open-mindedness are ways to overcome these obstacles to diversity in writing. **The important thing is to surround yourself with people who are connected to your subject, to know how to inform yourself**, to do research, to have the right information, to ask the right questions. It is also essential to remain humble and above all authentic, to remain passionate about what you write, about your subject.

The aim is to naturally achieve diversity in projects that are not only about diversity. Diversity is needed everywhere. It is also a question of creativity and curiosity. You have to know how to question yourself and your work on diversity.

What can be changed to improve this situation?

ACT CONCRETELY

Talking and exchanging about diversity issues is a way to question one's work, to open up and to ask the right questions. But it also shows that every statement made must give rise to concrete action. The word is a first thing and it is important, but the action must follow. CANNESERIES must also apply this rule, and not limit its action in favor of diversity to the organization of screenwriters' workshops on the issue. What about doing its part by involving at least people who do not have natural access to it?



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INCLUDE DIVERSITY IN THE CASTING

Each author must take responsibility and try to influence the casting as much as possible, because this is also where the issue of diversity is at stake.

USING EXISTING TOOLS

Writers should use the tools and actions that already exist, such as the Collectif 5050 mentoring program. More workshops should be held with broadcasters and producers, so that authors can defend their position. The point could simply be, to get out of one's world, one's comfort zone and give opportunities to those who do not have privileges, to find them to let them express themselves and tell their experience, their reality, their difference.

RAISE AWARENESS OF DIFFUSERS

It is necessary to educate broadcasters, to reverse the balance of power. To do this, we need to put more emphasis on successes that represent diversity, such as *Sex Education*, to have real examples of diversity in writing and on the screen, to change our references and inspirations.

MAKE DIVERSITY THE STANDARD

In writing, we must ask ourselves for the choice of each character, both the leading roles and the secondary characters : diversity must be diffuse. The question of diversity on screen must be overcome, so that it is no longer a subject in itself but the norm.

ENCOURAGE MORE SCREENWRITERS FROM DIVERSITY

A new generation of screenwriters with a more diverse background who feel free and able to represent diversity with sincerity will be able to move the lines and meet the needs of a new, and wider audience, that is more in demand of diversity and thus make change the mindset of broadcasters.

Nugget quotes

“We have missing stories, we have missing faces.”

“Writers should be as diverse as their characters.”

“Writers are asked what is the purpose of some diversity for the story, some people don't understand that that it is just characterization”

“Writing diversity but being accurate and honest.”

“Let the older broadcasters who don't want diversity die with their audience.”