

"La Source" (produced by Nolita) : an example for "cause placement" in cinema

With Nolita and Impact Film, partners of l'Observatoire des images. Nolita is a production company and Impact Film a financing company, for both fiction and documentary in cinema, television and platforms.

Summary: Without going to the extent of substantially transforming the film into an openly political production, "cause placement" guarantees that a film's narrative does not convey stereotypical representations. It also makes sure that actors are able to fulfill roles in films and series outside the usual race and gender-based framework.

"The implementation of "cause placement" in a movie is rather simple. Moreover, it helps broaden our imagination, one that is more likely to reflect the contemporary world. It makes the entire movie-making process more creative and the film more interesting"

Romain Rousseau and Maxime Delauney, producers at Nolita

Writing a screenplay constitutes a major step in the making of a film. It is at this level that the ideas, values and representations conveyed in the film are negotiated. This process occurs throughout an ongoing discussion between the production team and the screenwriters.

Within this framework, Impact Film takes hold of a new tool: "cause placement". Where others incorporate commercial products in films, Impact Film is committed to broaden our imagination, particularly regarding the representation of diversity and women empowerment.

"La Source" (Rodolphe Lauga, 2018) is a film produced by Nolita. The film tells the story of Samir, a young man from the Parisian suburbs. Although he is not able to swim, his dream is to become a surfing champion.

Throughout the writing process of the screenplay, the production team has reworked several scenes in order to improve the movie's representations.

This film does not explicitly promote diversity issues, nor is built upon a classic narrative structure. However, the images shift from usual representations in French cinema, at least on three topics: the role of women, homosexuality and social inequality.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Without openly promoting feminism, several scenes in the film feature strong female characters (such as the conflictual relationship of Samir with his sister or his romantic encounter).

The original screenplay, however, portrayed Samir's mother as a secondary character that did not benefit from any particular development.

In this case, "cause placement" consists of strengthening her story arc: instead of merely appearing in the kitchen and cooking for her family, she taught her son to cook. With all the free time she had, Samir's mother eventually followed her own dream and got her driver's license.



Samir's mother driving, La Source, 2019

| INITIAL DRAFT | → SHOT VERSION |
|--|---|
| The main character talks to his mother while she prepares the meal in the kitchen. | <p><u>Séquence 14</u></p> <p>→ The main character asks his mother to teach him to cook.</p> |
| The main character and his mother discuss topics related to the son during a meal. | <p><u>Séquence 67</u></p> <p>→ The main character serves dinner to his mother, who tells him she now has more time for herself. He asks her if she has a dream: indeed, she wishes to learn how to drive.</p> |
| The hero and his mother briefly talk as they see each other in the apartment. | <p><u>Séquence 126</u></p> <p>→ The mother gets her driver's license. All the children living in the neighborhood playfully chase the car. Her daughters sitting in the back seem proud of their mother.</p> |



Tony and Samir, La Source, 2019

HOMOSEXUALITY

Several scenes in the film show how Tony, Samir's coach and a former world bodybuilding champion, is a victim of homophobic slurs.

This stereotypical male attitude is shown for what it is: an unconscious component of an identity repertoire and an automatic generic language.

The cause placement in "La Source" also consists in staging the evolution of the characters on how they position themselves in regards to homophobia. Throughout the movie, several of Samir's friends will progressively defend Tony. One of them will erase homophobic tags on the door of Tony's apartment.

SOCIAL INEQUALITY

In French cinema, the Parisian suburbs are traditionally portrayed as oppressive and wretched. In "La Source", the suburban area is depicted as a simple setting. Furthermore, the film addresses Samir's dream to become a surfer since his job as a plumber starts to feel hopeless. Thanks to cause placement in "La Source", the difficult working conditions for plumbers are more thoroughly addressed than in the original version of the screenplay. In this respect, the issue of class dynamics is further highlighted especially when one of his clients utters condescending remarks to Samir as he repairs her clogged toilets, instead of thanking him for his skills and getting her out of trouble.

CAUSE PLACEMENT : A MULTIFACETED TOOL

Placing causes in a screenplay does not entail distorting its core structure, but it adds a layer of complexity to the film and prevents the perpetuation of gender and racial stereotypes. "Cause placement" can also involve a higher diversity rate within the casting, in which anyone, regardless of their racial background, can be a lawyer, an artist, a banker or a member of parliament, rather than being racially appointed to roles such as offenders or security guards.

Created in 2021, [L'Observatoire des images](https://www.observatoireimages.org), is the first associative body that gather all the actors who are interested in the role of images in cinema, television, video games and advertisements, especially on the Internet.

Whether they work in production, distribution, finance, communication, research or institutions, the partners of l'Observatoire are all convinced that images can either highly restrict representations and lock them into stereotypes, or conversely, allow empowerment and broaden our imagination. These partners have reunited around l'Observatoire to discuss and act together.

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