

## **Average, Rudderless, Dumb. Writing and making films without permission: a user's guide**

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Panel 17 – ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

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### **Abstract**

What if making films was really easy - not a complicated industrial process costing oodles and involving many? What if it was just a thing that you did during the day with other people, like having a picnic or visiting your mum or going to the shops? What if feature films were *not* complicated organisational nightmares or massive money pits, but instead cost whatever you needed or wanted them to. And what if they didn't have to be "great" - average was okay. In fact, what if "average" was the aim, at least to start with. What if screenplays stopped trying to be clever or interesting? What might cinema look like if makers thought less and made more? You think I'm being facetious? I'm deadly serious.

This paper will explore a different way of thinking about film production. Having completed two independent features that have employed highly unorthodox development/writing methods to generate screen content and performance, I have been reminded that there are many ways to skin the cinematic cat. They have also generated in me a proselytizing urge – not to gather disciples for a particular 'new way' of writing and/or developing screen content – but rather, to urge some old-fashioned rule breaking and rebellion within the filmmaking community.

Through selected scenes from my films I will discuss why working from the margins is both a choice and a strategy for productivity, and why subverting assumed rules of cinematic quality can be a 'good thing'. *Average, rudderless, dumb* might just be a manifesto for anyone wanting to *push the boundaries* of cinema.

**Keywords** – independent cinema, micro budget, alternative, improvisation, collaboration

**Siobhan Jackson** (University of Melbourne, Australia) is a screenwriter, director and senior lecturer in the Faculty of Fine Arts & Music, School of Film & Television, Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne. Siobhan's research and practice examines improvising for the screen, contemporary 'silent' cinema, alternative approaches to screenplay and performance generation and collaborative practice. She has written and directed a host of short films and written and directed two feature films, *You Can Say Vagina* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6754320/?ref=tturv>) and *Saltbush* (both in collaboration with Mischa Baka).

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<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1860619/?ref=ttovdr>