



Me and You and Memento and Fargo: How Independent Screenplays Work

By J.J. Murphy



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Within the last twenty-five years, an enormous burst of creative production has emerged from independent filmmakers. From *Stranger than Paradise* (1984) and *Slacker* (1991) to Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003) and Miranda July's *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005), indie cinema has become part of mainstream culture. But what makes these films independent? Is it simply a matter of budget and production values? Or are there aesthetic qualities that set them off from ordinary Hollywood entertainment?

In this groundbreaking new study, J.J. Murphy argues that the independent feature film from the 1980s to the present has developed a distinct approach of its own, centering on new and different conceptions of cinematic storytelling. The film script is the heart of the creative originality to be found in the independent movement. Even directors noted for their idiosyncratic visual style or the handling of performers typically originate their material and write their own scripts. By studying the principles underlying the independent screenplay, we gain a direct sense of the originality of this new trend in American cinema.

Me and You and Memento and Fargo also presents a unique vision for the aspiring screenwriter. Most screenwriting manuals and guidebooks on the market rely on formulas believed to generate saleable Hollywood films. Many writers present a "three-act paradigm" as gospel and proceed to lay down very stringent rules for characterization, plotting, timing of climaxes, and so on, while others who appear to be more open about such rules turn out to be just as inflexible in their advice. Through in-depth critical analyses of some of the most significant independent films of recent years, J.J. Murphy emphasizes the crucial role that novelty can play in the screenwriting process.



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Editorial Review

Review

"US academic J.J. Murphy argues that the meteoric rise of indie filmmaking in the last 25 years has necessitated a different style of storytelling. His analysis of a variety of indie scripts will chiefly be of interest to aspiring screenwriters."

—*Empire*

"Lately, we've all been pondering the same question: Are independent films really independent anymore? Author Murphy asserts that independent films are determined more by their missions than their budgets."

—*Script Magazine*

"*Me and You and Memento and Fargo* is absolutely appealing far beyond just being a typical screenwriting "manual" such those written by Syd Field and his ilk. Murphy is clearly zeroing in on the way these films are written, but even those not interested in writing their own screenplays should find this book totally engrossing.

...Hopefully it'll give food for thought to a new generation of screenwriters who truly want to push the storytelling envelope again." -Bad Lit: The Journal of Underground Film

"With J.J. Murphy's insightful look at American independent screenwriting [in] *Me and You and 'Memento' and 'Fargo': How Independent Screenplays Work*...Murphy focuses on independent cinema in clear, engaging prose, tracking how a series of seminal independent features were developed and written and his case studies include scripts and films by Jim Jarmusch, Hal Hartley, Allison Anders, Miranda July, David Lynch and Gus Van Sant.

— Kathryn Millard, *Journal of Screenwriting* 1, 2 (May 2010)

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About the Author

J. J. Murphy is Professor of Film Production and Film Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His films have played at major international film festivals and have been screened at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Austrian Film Museum (Vienna), the Barbican Film Centre (London), and the Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris).

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