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Members of the audience voting on what course the film, "I'm Your Man," would take by pressing colored buttons on pistol grips attached to the arms of seats at the Loews Theater, 19th Street and Broadway. Some viewers voted more than once by pressing the buttons at vacant seats.

When the Film Audience Controls the Plot

By WILLIAM GRIMES

On screen, the moment of truth has arrived. In a taut little thriller called "I'm Your Man," the cloddish Jack Beamer has, through a series of mishaps, become the target of a murderous corporate renegade, who has him trapped on the roof of a Manhattan building. Beamer turns to the audience and asks for advice. Should he run for an open door, leap to the roof of the next building, or reveal his identity as a special agent?

In the next 10 seconds, with no interruption in the action, the audi-

ence at the Loews Theater at 19th Street and Broadway in Manhattan votes on what course the film will take. Color-coded cues flash on the screen, matched to three buttons (red, orange and green) on a black pistol grip affixed to the right armrest of each seat. This being New York, the audience screams out in unison "Jump! Jump!" while pressing the buttons. The votes are electronically tallied, and Jack, after deliberating for a few moments, responds to the will of the people. The audience whoops with delight.

For decades, films and television have transmitted their messages to

audiences. Now audiences are discovering the novel sensation of transmitting back. "I'm Your Man," which opened on Dec. 18, is the first theatrical showing of a live-action interactive film, but other companies have already applied the same principle to CD-based video games, in which players manipulate images of human beings rather than computer-generated stick figures. Proponents of the new technology say they are on the way to transforming the passive viewer into an active, creative agent. Skeptics look at interactivity and see a Hula Hoop with digital read-out.

"I'm Your Man" runs for about 20

minutes, with a plot decision every couple of minutes. But because each decision leads to a new plot turn with its own set of problems and decisions, the film makers, Controlled Entropy Entertainment of Manhattan, had to generate about 90 minutes worth of film, the current limit on laser disk storage capacity, with about 68 different scene variations.

"I'm Your Man," which its creators have called an Interfilm, will win no Oscars. It has three main characters: Richard Hewitt, a corporate felon, Leslie Campbell, his beau-

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