

**FILM VIEW**/Caryn James

# Look, Ma, I'm an Auteur!

**F**OR MOST PEOPLE, INTERACTIVE movies and television — you talk to the screen and the characters do what you say — still mean clapping to save Tinkerbell. As it happens, I never clapped for Tink, even as a 4-year-old. It was a test. I didn't clap, Tink lived anyway, and I knew the fix was in.

For children growing up in a computer-literate world, talking back to movies is bound to be different. The first inkling of this trend is "I'm Your Man," a low-budget, good-humored, 20-minute "interfilm" (now playing in New York and Lakewood, Calif.) in which the audience directs the plot by pushing green, orange or red buttons connected to the armrest of every seat in the theater.

Will Leslie succeed in turning her corrupt business partner, Richard, over to the F.B.I.? Will Jack, who stumbles across Leslie's path at a party, become a spy or date Leslie, or both?

Who cares? The story means nothing here. Sometimes Jack becomes a spy and gets the girl; sometimes Richard gets away with murder. The still-novel appeal of interactive film is making movie characters do what you want.

This experience is not like watching a real

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**Interactive films ask viewers to choose the plot twists.**

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**Where will it all lead?**

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movie, of course. It is more like rooting for a basketball team. Before each screening, a cheerleader called Art ("I'm Your Man" knows what it's tweaking) warms up the audience, asking viewers to wave their arms and yell. He encourages them to race from seat to seat, voting on as many empty keypads as possible.

"Don't just sit there!" Art shouts. "You got to make as much noise as you can, and you got to move around as much as you can!" Some people actually do this. They punch buttons along whole empty rows and shout, "Run like a scared rabbit" or "Become a special agent," when Jack offers those options for what to do next. At one screening, someone yelled "Dork" at him, but creative name-calling doesn't count.

It may be that you have to be 13 years old

to enjoy this properly. Or it may be that interactive films aren't asking the right questions yet. I can't remember what I told Jack to do, but I would vote early and often for Rhett to return to Scarlett. That wouldn't improve the ending, but it would definitely make me feel better.

Such a thing could happen. Technology will advance, and this dream/nightmare scenario could emerge: in a process that will make colorization look like a gift to the Library of Congress, classic movies will be remade to allow audiences to vote.

Viewers will run through the aisles shouting at Ingrid Bergman, "Don't get on that plane! Ignore him!" They will make Orson Welles say "Tap dance" or "Cream puff" instead of "Rosebud." On a bad day, Tinkerbell could turn into Camille.

Obviously, "I'm Your Man" is just the beginning. Here is a glimpse of what to expect when old movies become interactive and we can reinvent them the way we always thought they should be:

- In "Wuthering Heights," the audience votes to save Cathy's life. How does Heathcliff react?

Green button: Asks her to marry him.

Orange button: Runs like a scared rabbit.