

# ON THE POSSIBLE POWER OF MOVIES

22 May 1994  
on Salt Spring Island (wee hours)

It occurred to me more than ever last night while watching Schindler's List - the power of the movie medium. When the lights go down and the images start the splash across the screen and sounds blast or tinkle through the sound system, that director, if he wields any control at all of the medium, has you to do with what he wills 'till the credits roll. It's a tremendous amount of power to grant when we walk up and pay our money at the ticket booth.

If we are watching the same material on TV we can keep some distance, put 'er on pause, shut 'er down, surf away, physically disengage. But in a movie theatre we're booked in for the whole ride. It's a group experience. The audience is bound together and to disengage, get up and walk out is a major, difficult choice - an affront and a disruption to the group (but probably one we should make more often). So you're there being dragged along that director's mind path.

Some movies don't attempt to control so thoroughly, just to entertain. Some lose our engagement through bad management, by breaking the flow, the trust, or credibility and allow our minds to separate from the convincing sequence of sounds and images to think about what this guy's doing with our minds. We can analytically criticize the process, detach or just reject it.

Really powerful movies grab us and involve us, convince us. They take us by the ears and make us hear and see it their way.

It can be the best of experiences to be involved so thoroughly, Das Boot, Ordinary People, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, Fearless, Straw Dogs, and King Lear are just a few of the movie experiences that absolutely involved me. They carried me away, let me live through the director's vision. It's the greatest calling for those rolls of celluloid; all those production values, the theatres, the assembled audience's time.

When that process goes astray, when the director's use of such a powerful medium is heavy-handed, ineffective or clumsy, all the convincing power of music, light, sound, movement, is wasted.

In Movie Monday's eclectic mix we will try to bring you the best in engaging, involving, provocative films, the best the medium has to offer. Suggestions are welcome - give us your best shot!

Bruce Saunders