

“WHY MOVIES WILL NEVER REPLACE BOOKS”

BY JOHN SCHERBER

Movies have been with us for about 115 years now. Their charm is obvious—movement, sound, color, the impact of constantly changing visuals. Some even offer 3-D. Aren't they about the most stimulating entertainment possible? The violence especially is often more than you could ever imagine, or would want to. With all this, why would anyone bother to pick up a book anymore?

Books are your grandmother's entertainment, and you can put as many greats before the grand as you want. They are *old* stuff. They are black and white, they are lines of print that vary only in length. Sitting on the shelf, you have to dust them periodically, and in humid climates, they get moldy. Furthermore, they're expensive. Only the airport racks furnish paperbacks that are about the same price as a movie ticket. Then there are the times when you have to go to your online dictionary to look up a word you don't know. Movies never make you work like that. You don't even have to think.

Look up at the screen; every square inch of space is filled. Nothing is left out, nothing is blank. You are shown what the director feels you need to see, because the theater is darkened and nothing else is available to look at. What to feel and how to express it is demonstrated to you, as the actors portray their emotions. If you see a movie on television that you saw in the theater five years ago, that movie has not changed, although you have.

Here's the difference: the book you are reading has air in it. The author has left elastic spaces for you to insert your own reactions and experience, whether small or large. The very basic limitation of books, the inability to show you everything in the story in all its detail, is also its principal strength. The inability of a book to be visual, only to stimulate you visually, is a huge plus. You are not only able, you are *required* to fill in the blanks to enjoy the book. Reading is a participatory experience in a way that movies can never be.

You, the reader, are at the writer's shoulder creating the book page by page. The writer has done his best to imply, suggest, stimulate, evoke, and hint, but every touch of his pen is incomplete. It begs you to add actions and feelings you've experienced, with the subtleties that only your mind and personality can bring. The author will etch on the page the smells, the tastes, and colors that bloomed in his mind as he wrote, but you will bring your own twist and nuance to each of them. Each book is different to each of its readers.

Unlike in the movie, where you leave with the ringing of explosions still haunting your ears, you finish a book with the awareness of having worked at it, a sense of fulfillment and achievement. The author has made you contribute to this effort, and as a result, you are the coauthor, if not of the book itself, then of your experience of the book. Properly done, the book will leave you thinking that you're ready to go on another journey with this writer, because it's been rewarding in ways you hadn't anticipated. Where will he take you next time? It's as if you're already packed and ready to go.

And when you read this book once more, five years later, or ten, it will be a different book again and a different journey, although the words will not have changed, because you will bring to it the increased layers of your experience and insights. Your collaboration with the author will be comprised of a different pair of people than it was the previous time. This is why we keep books on our shelves and in our lives.

This is why movies can never replace books.

So turn off your surround sound, your sixty-inch flat screen, leave your car in the garage, and drop your 3-D glasses back into the drawer. Pick up a book and turn on your mind. No electricity is required because it's powered by magic, and you are the sorcerer.