

James Cameron promotes 3D for the tube

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James Cameron is bestowing 3D upon us, whether we want it or not. Judging by 3D TV's [lackluster performance](#) [1], it's obvious we **don't** want it. But that hasn't stopped the Oscar-winning director from surging ahead. Cameron has partnered with "Avatar" cameraman Vince Pace to [form a venture](#) [2] aimed at "driving the widespread adoption of 3D technology in episodic television, sports and advertising."

Says Cameron, "3D is just how all broadcast entertainment will be done. Sports, episodic drama, scripted and unscripted -- we haven't seen anything yet that doesn't have a great degree of value added by being in 3D."



But Cameron (and the industry) has yet to adequately explain **how** 3D improves the experience. Stereoscopic 3D isn't a natural phenomenon. The industry loves to point out that "we don't see the world in 2D." But we don't see it in "three dimensions," either. 3D is, and always has been, an illusion—a digital trick that manipulates our brains into perceiving added depth.

A reader (ASilzars) points out that 3D neglects the depth cues provided by head movement and depth of focus, creating an insurmountable eye-brain conflict. In turn, this gives 3D the appearance of a high-end diorama. Objects "pop" unnaturally, creating the **illusion** of depth. The sense of immersion is offset by a sneaking suspicion that one is being hoodwinked.

Nintendo's 3DS provides an interesting microcosm of the 3D phenomenon. The autostereoscopic handheld gaming platform (rumored to utilize display tech from Sharp) uses a parallax barrier to create an illusory 3D effect—without the need for special glasses. At its unveiling, gaming journalists were universally floored by the 3DS' autostereoscopic capabilities. A few of us were a [tad more skeptical](#) [3], but I digress.

Post-launch, many of these same analysts have changed their tune—suddenly, they're a bit more cautious, a bit more apprehensive about the system's gimmicky claim-to-fame. They've suddenly realized that having a narrow "sweet spot" is extremely problematic for a portable gaming device—especially one that

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incorporates accelerometer technology. And they've abruptly discovered that 12% of the population can't even perceive 3D properly.

Even Nintendo preemptively [backpedaled a bit](#) [4]. Prior to launch, 3DS producer Hideki Konno downplayed the notion that 3DS games would **require** the utilization of 3D. "We want to get software out to as many people as possible, and there are some people who just can't see 3D. We're moving away from any stance that says if you don't use the 3D functionality you can't play this game," he said. Essentially, Nintendo was waving the white flag—the 3DS' claim-to-fame, it turns out, was merely peripheral.

The 3DS is emblematic of the industry's heedless drive for 3D, irrespective of consumers' lukewarm reception. The past two Consumer Electronics Shows were dominated by 3D. The giants of industry are begging consumers to swap their "obsolete" LCD, LED, and Plasma TV's for 3D-TV's. But upgrading CRT to thin-screen is more dramatic than the incremental leap from LCD to 3D. Consumers aren't biting. So the industry responds by redoubling its efforts—consumers need to be "educated". Clearly, they just don't see the benefits.

The likeliest scenario for 3D's penetration of the market is adoption by Trojan Horse. In the case of the 3DS, consumers will buy into Nintendo's good name and the promise of beloved franchises yet to come. And when all new TV's are 3D-ready, the stealthy invasion will be complete. Ipso-facto, we'll have a 100% adoption rate.

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[1] http://www.displaysearch.com/cps/rde/xchg/displaysearch/hs.xsl/101012_3d_tv_not_growing_as_fast_as_tv_makers_expected_in_2010.asp

[2] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/04/12/us-3d-idUSTRE73A5NR20110412?feedType=RSS&feedName=entertainmentNews&rpc=22&sp=true>

[3] <http://www.ecnmag.com/Articles/2010/06/Nintendo-3DS-impressions/>

[4] <http://www.industrygamers.com/news/3ds-not-to-rely-on-3d-says-nintendo/>