

Contrarian corner: The 3DS

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E3 2010: the mecca for gamers. Nintendo officially unveils the 3DS, and gamers everywhere swoon in fits of ecstasy. I stand in line at Nintendo's booth, encountering models with 3DS's tethered to them like nuclear footballs. Nintendo is not taking any chances with security. I finally try out Nintendo's miracle handheld, and my impressions are...underwhelming. The mainstream gaming press was a bit less, shall we say, **nuanced**:

"I've been gaming on handhelds for pretty much 20 years now, and this is the first time in a long time I said "holy crap" after experiencing a portable system." - [IGN](#) [1]

"Just, wow. Pretty much everyone that's seen the 3DS at E3 is blown away by it, and I've yet to hear anyone really criticize it. - [Gamepro](#) [2]

"I'm so shocked at how good the 3D effect is that I find myself wondering why it is that no other company has picked up on this technology already." - [Gamespot](#) [3]

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Published on Electronic Component News (<http://www.ecnmag.com>)



**Nintendo's 3DS from their booth at E3 2010.
Special thanks to Andrew Maiman.**

Mind you, I'm not accusing these venerable publications of hyperbole, but I have to wonder if we saw the same demos.

The 3DS is based on autostereoscopic technology. A parallax barrier creates the illusion of 3D without the need for special glasses. It's a neat effect, but inherently limiting—the tech is single-user, and you must be in the “sweet spot” to perceive 3D. Deviating too far in any direction breaks the autostereoscopy. The 3DS doesn't improve upon this formula. Even Hideki Konno, the 3DS Hardware Director, has [admitted](#) [4] that “There's a sweet spot of 3D for each person.”

I've witnessed first-hand the consumer electronic industry's [crusade on behalf of 3D](#) [5]. 3D was the unofficial theme at CES 2010. And if CES 2011 signaled anything, it was the industry's intent on shoving 3D down our throats. [Modest sales figures](#) [6] notwithstanding, the industry is betting the house on a technology that no one seems to want.

At CES 2011, Toshiba had a demo showcasing large-scale (56 and 65-inch) glasses-free 3D TVs. The TVs had three “sweet spots” and if you deviated, the image got blurry. The 3DS is similar but on a much smaller scale. With most games, I was constantly adjusting the 3D slider; in some cases, I gave up and played in 2D. Resident Evil was probably the worst offender—I had to tilt the 3DS 10-20° to perceive any depth. Mario Kart was virtually pain-free, but then the question becomes: what does 3D add to the experience?

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Cinema-philes have long pondered this fundamental question: aesthetically-speaking, what does 3D add to the experience? Would *Citizen Kane* be improved with the addition of stereoscopy? Is 3D anything beyond a kitschy gimmick? The tech has evolved since the 50's, but humans haven't. Because of how we perceive depth, the best 3D (*Avatar*, Pixar films) still looks like a high-end diorama. Objects "pop" unnaturally, creating the illusion of depth.



About 12% of people suffer from poor binocular vision, rendering them incapable of perceiving 3D images. Others become ill when observing 3D media. I get nauseous after watching 3D movies for about an hour. I can't imagine playing a 3D game for any significant length of time.

Nintendo's answer? Turn down the 3D slider. Play the 3DS as a 2D system. But why would I pay \$249.99 for a 2D handheld when I already own a PSP? The original Game Boy bested technologically-superior foes like Gamegear, Lynx, TurboExpress, and WonderSwan Color because of Gunpei Yokoi's focus on simplicity—modest hardware coupled with long battery life, superior software, and competitive pricing. Game Boy launched at \$89.99. Adjusted for inflation, that's about \$160. By contrast, the 3DS will launch at \$249.99, nearly \$100 more than its primitive ancestor.

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I'm not sold on the 3DS. All told, I think I'll save my money for the NGP.

Originally posted on [Bitmob](#) [7].

Source URL (retrieved on 08/21/2014 - 2:31pm):

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[1] <http://ds.ign.com/articles/109/1098014p1.html>

[2] <http://www.gamepro.com/article/previews/215573/e3-2010-nintendo-3ds-impressions/>

[3] <http://e3.gamespot.com/story/6266572/gut-reactions-nintendo-3ds-e3-2010?tag=topslot;thumb;5>

[4] <https://uk.ds.ign.com/articles/109/1099199p3.html>

[5] <http://www.ecnmag.com/Articles/2011/01/Editors-Views/3D-the-tech-no-one-wants/>

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

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