



Living in Cinema

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Who's driving your 3-D plane?

By Craig Kennedy - July 29th, 2009; 11:52 am



Look at our faces. 3-D even makes the '50s fun.

Everywhere I look these days, it's 3-D this and 3-D that. I wonder though: Is the technology being driven by the studios who want us to want it or are audiences actually demanding it?

DreamWorks Animation chief Jeffrey Katzenberg has been haranguing theater owners for a couple of years to convert to 3-D and now he's even [starting to get excited](#) about 3-D TV without glasses. That's funny because one of the inducements for theater owners to bear the expense of conversion was that 3-D was something they could provide that audiences couldn't get at home.

Meanwhile, Pixar [famously announced](#) last year that nearly all of their future films would be in 3-D. They've not only delivered on that promise with *Up*, they're going back to [double dip](#) their catalog in triple dimensions.

James Cameron of course has the life-altering 3-D *Avatar* (why not Smell-o-Rama?) coming out and he's [even threatening](#) to go back and turn *Titanic* into a 3-D movie. Why? Why not if it convinces a few more suckers to pony up to see a movie they've already seen 11 times?

This year, even the Venice Film Festival [climbed on board](#) with an announcement they planned to offer a new sideline award for the festival's best 3-D film.

So what's it all about? What's driving this push into the (simulated) third dimension?

The short answer is: Money. Studios like 3-D because they can charge a



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premium for tickets and because it puts a damper on piracy...at least until Katzenberg's 3D TVs hit stores and become affordable. Plus, like Cameron and Pixar, studios can repurpose some of their catalogue material in the hope of convincing audiences to fork over their money one more time for the same old crap. Wizard of Oz, in color and in 3-D!

Is it working? Maybe. Maybe not. Looking at declining ratios of opening weekend grosses between 3-D and 2-D equipped theaters, [the LA Times](#) recently asserted that 3-D was losing audience interest. This claim [was refuted](#) by proponents of 3-D who point out that 3-D screens still pull in 1.5 to 2 times as much as the same films on 2-D screens and they also point to independent surveys by Screen Digest and [USC's Entertainment Technology Center](#) which they say indicate strong audience enthusiasm for 3-D and that "the more viewers see this generation of 3-D, the more they say they like it and the more eager they are to see more."

Who are the people clamoring for this stuff? Who thinks 3-D makes the experience better and who is willing to pay more for it even now that the novelty is wearing off? I'm not saying these people don't exist, I simply want anecdotal proof they're out there.

To me, 3-D is a neat gimmick, but it's still a gimmick. Even when it's well done, the "oh wow" factor tends to draw me out of the story. The claim is that 3-D makes for a more immersive experience, but the exact opposite happens in my opinion. Instead of drawing you in, the technology simply calls attention to itself.

What do you think of 3-D? Is it more likely to get you off your couch and into the movie theater? Will you pay more for it?

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4 Responses to "Who's driving your 3-D plane?"

1. [Ari](#) - Jul 29 '09, 12:41 pm

The future is so bright I gotta wear shades!

2. [joel](#) - Jul 29 '09, 12:50 pm

I don't think the folks "clamouring" for 3D read this blog, Craig, so this question may not get much of the response you're looking for. Kids really seem to love 3D, but that's not surprising. I think they are the main audience right now.

I'm still waiting to see a big live action movie (and not one that is mostly CGI like Avatar either) in this new 3D to see if it's really all that. Making CGI 3D is fairly simple. Making live action work that way is a different matter entirely.

Anyway, it is kinda funny but not surprising that Katzenberg is all a flutter over 3D TVs because it means the studios can not only sell you the same content in even more formats, it means they can re-release the content you already own in the new format. CHe-CHING!!

The irony is that because of the economic slowdown and the surge in LCD ownership in China, Chinese export prices are actually projected to go up right now. The expected trend is to see HD TV prices flatline or

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