

The Washington Times

25 September 2006

Jennifer Waters, Washington Times:

What do you see as the future of 3D movies and why?

Alexander Lentjes, 3-D Revolution Productions:

The real future of 3-D movies is the creation of a proper generation of 3-D filmmakers. Not just directors who pick up a 3-D camera but 3-D artists who understand the medium through and through.

At the moment, there is a stark division between the technical knowledge of the few 3-D professionals in the field and the creative ideas that make a 3-D film work. You cannot plan and shoot a 3-D shot that is not going to work in 3-D and a filmmaker who understands 3-D from a technical AND a creative perspective will never do such a thing.

For example: although James Cameron is really helping 3-D at the moment to gain a real foothold in the industry, his live-action 3-D films have been shot using no-go 3-D camera alignments, shot durations, camera movement and environments in terms of 3-D textbook rules. That leaves patrons with a big headache and the question why they paid so much more to see a 3-D film rather than an eye-pleasing flat film; this is also why there are rules in 3-D filming in the first place, so ignoring them is like ignoring to take the lens cap off your camera and expecting to shoot a brilliant film.

Modern 3-D mistakes

HD cameras with fish-eye lenses were used on James Cameron's *Aliens of the Deep*. Besides through DMR blow-up of the HD imagery to 70mm IMAX format, retinal rivalry is created by the fish-eye lenses picking up different vertical angles in the corners of the image. This means serious viewing discomfort for the audience. Although this problem is unique to *Aliens of the Deep*, a serious question mark must be placed with directors and d.o.p.'s who are planning to shoot in 3-D, but are not aware of some basic limitations of using a stereoscopic camera setup.

Connected to this is the apparent inability of directors and d.o.p.'s who are preparing to shoot for IMAX 3-D to consider the magnified parallax of the larger IMAX screen. When using converging cameras, this can mean serious divergence and thus serious eyestrain for the audience. Ignoring this magnification is simply inexcusable for anyone working on an IMAX 3-D release!

By employing a converging HD camera setup underwater, the dirt floating around in the sea close to the camera lenses has too large a screen parallax. This means that the eyes cannot look inward that much to be able to see these particles without seeing them double. This causes a headache with the audience and Cameron should have known better shooting in these conditions. A non-, or less converging setup should have been used to spare the audience discomfort but again well-known 3-D knowledge was ignored during filming. It may well have been shot using HD cameras, blown up to IMAX format using DMR and presented using LCD shutterglasses, but isn't it the content that should be looked at, not the technological circus used to present it? We are, after all, talking about telling stories in 3 Dimensions.

Robert Rodriguez' films *Spy Kids 3-D* and *The Adventures of Shark Boy & Lava Girl in 3-D* are two other examples. The wish to display all colours whilst still using anaglyphic glasses is an obvious mistake because reds and blues should not be visible through both lenses. It is very basic knowledge but simply ignored, consciously or unconsciously. There are simple ways to show colours through anaglyphic glasses whilst not destroying the 3-D encoding – not just by omitting reds and blues but by simulating them in the end result as seen through the glasses - but these technologies are sadly ignored and the visually painful experience is used as ammunition for the argument of 3-D DLP projection even though these are two separate issues. And strangely, Rodriguez is in the DLP promoting club, whilst releasing his 3-D films using anaglyphics.

Thinking in 3 Dimensions

So directors, camera men, editors, and at an earlier stage of production storyboard artists, producers and even script writers need to think in terms of 3-D and can't just go for regular shots. 3-D is not an add-on medium; it is a different way of producing film and as it is currently being used, with exceptions of course, it does become an add-on production part and turns 3-D into a gimmick. Even worse, turning flat movies into 3-D, like George Lucas is doing right now to his *Star Wars* films and was done to a few sequences in the recent *Superman Returns* release, is practically speaking a mutilation of an old piece of art. Jerry Katzenburg may have said it's showbusiness, not showart, but then why spend so much time perfecting the image in the first place? The imagery was created to work as a flat composition, only to be turned into something it is not: a volumetric piece of art. Like turning the *Mona Lisa* into a statue and making people pay 2 times as much to see that statue, claiming it adds value to the original piece.

Stereoscopies are a kind of art form separate from cinema. In two ways it is closer to theatre than cinema: because of its life-like representation of the world and because of its preference for first-person camera work, creating a sense of being there at the performance. However, in its subject matter it is often closer to a sort of modern variety show, a nickelodeon or a theatre of freaks. It looks at itself and says: "Gee, being dimensional is really neat! Look what I can do!" after which it will jump through hoops to entertain the audience in the most basic of ways.

However, there are also arguments against stereoscopic cinema attempting to tell a fictional narrative story like regular cinema does.

First and foremost, the dimensionality easily distracts the viewer from the story and its characters. This way, the viewer is removed from the experience of enjoying the story and has to switch brain sides to enjoy the technicality of the 3-dimensional spectacle. This is something special-effects-driven movies without a good plot have in common with stereoscopic cinema, and its audience may be wooed in the first few seconds, but will be unimpressed by the whole thing at the end of the movie.

Secondly, when watching a 3-D movie that does not perform the usual bag of out-of-the-screen tricks, its audience will question the need to shoot the film in 3-D in the first place. But then is colour always used in a functional way in film and should most films be shot in black & white and silently if they don't exploit colour and sound? 3-D film is an art form that can work seriously and in its own right, narrative and non-narrative. As long as filmmakers will find a way to tell a good story that works in 3 Dimensions, 3-D film has a golden future ahead of it. And chuck an object or two at the camera every once in a while.

The Future of 3-D Film

Why is this such an important argument for the future of 3-D film? Because 3-D cinema has come and gone three times in film history before, and all three times because of the same reason. The main problem facing a prosperous future of 3-D releases of films is that people are willing to pay extra and go more often if a film is released in 3-D, but NOT if that movie is a BAD MOVIE. The biggest reason why the 3-D boom was over within a year in 1923, 1953 and 1983 was not because of 'silly red-green glasses', as journalists happily write these days, but because the kind of films made in 3-D were just BAD. A stinker is a stinker, no matter how you dress it up. The few 3-D jewels that are remembered to this day were indeed shot by directors passionate and educated about 3-D and this shows in every finely crafted 3-D frame.

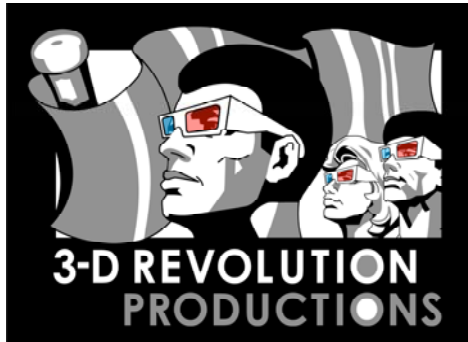
There is a difference between making a great 3-D movie and adding 3-D to a movie to make it look and sell better. International success of 3-D films will remain a short-lived affair if the latter is done too often. The argument "but it's in 3-D" is as valid as "but it's in colour". Colour does not mean the right colour,

enjoyable colour, colour you want to watch and sit through for 2 hours. It's exactly the same with 3-D.

So how can this new generation of 3-D filmmakers be created? Mainly by exposing more people to 3-D and giving them the tools to experiment with 3-D themselves and eventually create an independent 3-D filmmaking industry rather than keeping all the 3-D filmmaking power in the hands of a few movie moguls.

3-D Technological marvel

The frantic search for a technical breakthrough in 3-D display, which has been going on for more than 100 years now, is fuelled by the promise of an evolutionary step in visual entertainment. But most of the current audio-visual industry perceives 3-D as a means to re-sell old product in a new shell and moreover, being able to charge more for the same product but with the added 3rd dimension. This statement can be backed up by the observation that there are no real plans to develop a new visual language once the 3-D revolution happens – nobody is being educated or trained in 3-D filming, there is no literature on 3-D cinematography other than technical manuals and even those are mostly unread by the handful of present day 3-D filmmakers. The only source that talks about 3-D from a perspective of content is our website: www.the3drevolution.com



3-D Revolution Productions is based in Bristol, England, and specializes in 3-D stereoscopic animation production.

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