It's the million-dollar question: Is stereoscopic 3D a novelty that will eventually fall out of fashion and fade away, or is it the future of creative production? IBE's **Robert Taffurelli** reports.

The future...in 3D

Welcome to the year of 3D. Not a new claim, admittedly. After all, with so many proclamations and announcements being made in a barrage of conferences and exhibitions, broadcasters have become somewhat immune to the 'next big thing'. And who can blame them? With technology moving at such a pace the innovation of the decade is always just around the corner and yet, how often has the industry truly experienced a groundbreaking innovation? Could 3D be what we've all been waiting for?

3D immediately conjures up images of B-movie monsters, third-rate sequels and ridiculous (not to mention uncomfortable) cardboard eyewear. In short, a gimmick that has always fallen short of its potential. Could it be the very idea that 3D moving images can never be matched by the reality? And yet, the goal of 3D vision, it seems, is just too alluring. Filmmakers, technology companies and post production houses have refused to give up on the holy grail of production technology.

So, the million-dollar question is: is stereoscopic 3D a novelty that will eventually fall out of fashion and fade away, or is it the future of creative production?

Quantel certainly believes it is the latter. In a white paper entitled 'Future shock: Why stereoscopic 3D may be the key business opportunity for broadcast and post', Mark Horton, strategic marketing manager, Quantel, underlines stereoscopic 3D's growth in little over one year. "Stereoscopic 3D was hardly registering as a subject for the vast majority of people worldwide in our industry or outside of it," said Horton. "Now, for filmmakers, post houses, broadcasters and increasingly consumer electronics companies, it is the single hot topic."

Encouraged by high praise and, of course, box office success, stereoscopic 3D in Hollywood continues to go from strength to strength. But can the small screen take advantage of the latest must have technology?

The film industry, more specifically Hollywood, has been the first to take stereoscopic 3D seriously and maximise its full potential. "It seems from the 1960s onwards the film 3D market settled into specialist areas like IMAX with the odd high profile side project to a big movie: Amityville 3D, Jaws 3D and Terminator 2, often linked to theme parks and museums," said Horton. "Things started to change a few years ago."

Back in 2006, 3D started to make inroads into feature-length films, originally appearing in exclusive IMAX-only presentations of major theatrical releases, such as Sony Pictures Animation's Open Season. This was soon followed by Beowulf and U2 3D, only this time the films were being screened in mainstream cinemas to larger audiences - on came the glasses and Bono and the boys were performing in the cinema with you, only inches away from your popcorn.

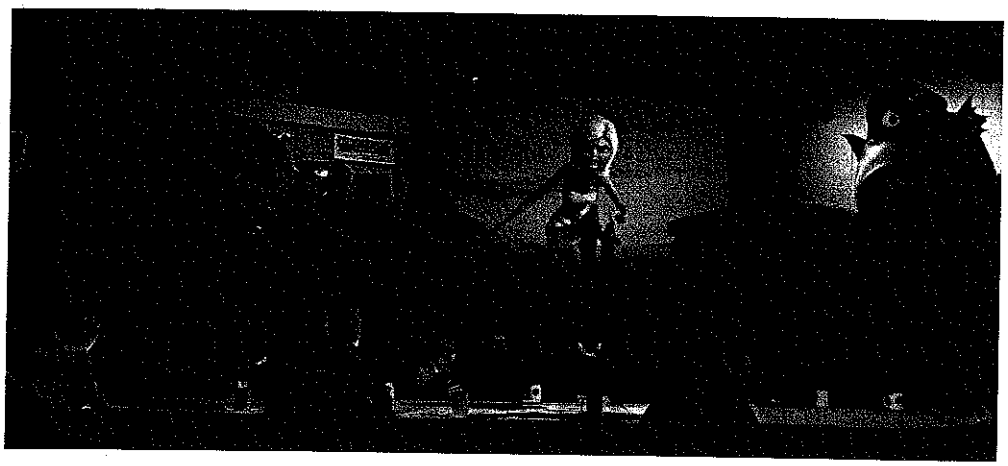
The success of these films, along with Hannah Montana & Miley Cyrus: Best of Both Worlds Concert Tour, has only served to increase Hollywood's appetite for the technology. Kung Fu Panda, My Bloody Valentine, Bolt, Jonas Brothers: The 3D Concert Experience, Final Destination 4, the 3D-list goes on and on. Such is the demand for all things three dimensional, DreamWorks has announced from this year all its animated films will be produced in 3D. As Mark Horton points out: "Every month brings announcements of new projects."

With a special 3D screening of Journey to the Centre of the Earth, the first live action, narrative film to be shot in digital 3D, and the first trans-Atlantic telecast in stereoscopic high definition 3D, IBC 2008 truly entered the third dimension. RealD and Christie joined forces for the trans-Atlantic telecast enabling digital 3D images to be projected using a single digital cinema projector on larger screens than previously possible. The CP2000-XB, the latest addition to Christie's digital cinema projector line-up, combined with RealD XL technology, are allowing 3D cinema content to be projected onto screens larger than any other digital 3D technology with a single projector.

"RealD has been involved with live 3D broadcasting since its inception," said Joshua Greer, president and co-founder of Real D. "Our participation with Christie underscores RealD's commitment to innovation and continued leadership in 3D technologies. By combining the digital and cinema expertise of both companies, we can now deliver 3D to even larger screens without compromising quality."

Already partnered with Odeon and UCI installing 500 digital 3D cinema systems across Europe, RealD are at the forefront of the 3D cinematic experience, and the first trans-Atlantic telecast in stereoscopic high definition 3D at IBC proved a success. Indeed, during the live interview with Jeffrey Katzenberg, chief executive officer of DreamWorks Animation SKG, who was awarded the IBC 2008 International Honour for Excellence, Katzenberg stated: "As we enter the year of 3D, I have never experienced a more

Continued on Page 12.



dynamic and exciting time within the film industry than right now."

Encouraged by such high praise and, of course, box office success, stereoscopic 3D in Hollywood continues to go from strength to strength. But can the small screen take advantage of the latest must have technology? In an interesting experiment involving both film and television, 3D received its biggest challenge when over 150 million pairs of 3D glasses were given away in the US to TV viewers, enabling them to watch an exclusive 3D trailer for DreamWorks' animated film Monsters vs Aliens. Featuring the voices of Kiefer Sutherland and Reese Witherspoon, the 90-second preview was broadcast during the Super Bowl final on 1 February 2009. Whether a success or a flop, by the time this issue of IBE is in your hands, all will be revealed.

Investing 'tens of millions of dollars' in the campaign, DreamWorks clearly sees this as an opportunity to show off the full potential of 3D technology and, in the process, who knows, maybe even convert a few cynics.

The 3D march into television is inevitable and it seems Sky TV is determined to lead this technological revolution. The satellite broadcaster recently announced it had successfully delivered 3D programming to domestic television via a high-definition set-top box, becoming the first UK broadcaster to deliver 3D TV into the home.

Demonstrating Sky's technological capability for 3D services, the content included England vs New Zealand Rugby Union Test Match, Liverpool FC vs Marseille UEFA Champions League, Sky1's Gladiators and Ricky Hatton vs Juan Lazcano.

Above: A 3D trailer for DreamWorks' Monsters vs?Aliens was broadcast to US viewers during the Super Bowl final on 1 February. 150 million pairs of 3D glasses were given away to viewers prior to the event.

Many in the industry believe viewers at home do not want to have to wear 3D glasses. And no matter how impressive your stereoscopic 3D images are, no glasses means no viewers, which means no point.

The content was delivered using Sky's digital satellite broadcast platform and playback, via a 3D-enabled TV, was direct from the hard drive of a standard Sky+HD set-top box. All content was filmed, produced and edited by Sky's in-house team using dedicated 3D TV cameras and rigs.

"The breakthrough is the latest in a long line of Sky firsts since our launch 20 years ago, including the UK's first digital TV service, the ground-breaking Sky+ and the introduction of HD," said Gerry O'Sullivan, Sky's director of strategic product development. "Our R&D activity is all about anticipating customers' future demands, including the potential to turn HD into 3D. We've demonstrated that it's now possible to offer a 'seeing-is-believing' 3D TV experience in the home and, thanks to our high-capacity satellite network and HD boxes, we have shown that Sky+HD is already '3D ready'."

But are the viewers ready? Forget about the technological advancements for a moment, the simple fact remains that many in the industry believe viewers at home do not want to have to wear 3D glasses. And no matter how impressive your stereoscopic 3D images are, no glasses means no viewers, which means no point.

"I really don't know how we can be so certain about that," said Mark Horton. "Many of us wear spectacles, or at least sunglasses, without objection. Sales of walkmans or iPods do not seem to have been affected by the need to wear earphones. People will happily go to a 3D movie and wear special glasses - the same may soon go for computer games. So while of course glasses-free viewing (autostereoscopic) would be ideally preferable, it doesn't seem to be mandatory and in any case, auto-stereo TV sets using picket or lenticular display methods are coming on the market as a possible future choice for broadcasters to use."

So, will 2009 be the year 3D is finally accepted? There is undoubted interest in 3D from both the film and TV industries. Indeed, 3D cinema appears to be going from strength to strength, albeit that the output at present consists of teenage pop sensations, horror and animation - a wider variety of genre is surely needed to guarantee 3D's cinematic future. As for 3D TV? "Stereo 3D broadcast is amazing, I've seen tests with my own eyes," said Horton. "Maybe you can if you are my age, just, remember the first time you saw colour TV compared to black and white. The difference is that big. No point in saying more, just wait until you see it."

Let's just hope the wait will be worth it. Now, where did I put my glasses...