

Taking the monumental leap from the flatter, second dimension to the more-involved third dimension is one that must be done with great care and precision. Without a smoothly flowing camera that allows you to see the surrounding environment, the 3D environment becomes a weakness rather than a strength. In a game that promotes exploration- and to some degree, combat- being able to see and move around the 3D space of Super Mario 64 with precision is crucial, if not a necessity.

Super Mario 64 is a monumental game, because it proved that a camera in a 3D space could be done successfully. Although it has its flaws, it still works incredibly well for the time of the game's release. The analog stick on the N64 controller assists with ease of use of the camera, alongside the C buttons, and while playing I was able to use a USB N64 controller and get the full experience. The camera moving separately from the character allows one to explore the 3D environment, thus leaving an immense amount of variation for level design. For example, in climbing the mountain on the first level, being able to angle the camera around the corner to check for rolling objects is much better than taking a guess, walking out, and getting hit immediately. The 3D space itself is also important, since it offers a wide range of possible directions to move. Whereas a directional pad-based game would require some sort of movement grid, a 3D one allows 360 degrees of possible motion.

Whilst you move around in Super Mario 64, the camera follows you, and as you rotate the camera, Mario's direction changes as well. In having an influence on Mario's direction, the camera plays a very important role- allowing you to see where it is that you're going. With a camera fixed to a player, you are unable to see entirely around the character. However, when you can see where you're going before you make the full turn in that direction, it provides the player an experience that allows them to see the surrounding environment, and thus explore the world to a fuller potential.

The camera, however, is far from perfect. While it's undeniably a huge advancement for its time, it can often be fairly difficult to control. In water levels, the camera attempts to stay above water before diving, and if you're near a wall of some sort, the camera cannot be moved to an intended location, thus preventing looking ahead. To 'fix' this, Mario must swim a little further out into the water such that the camera- existing as an object in the world- can perform a full rotation.

As arcade games became the norm of video games, going to an arcade became a sense of familiarity on its own. Ease of camera movement was benefitted by the addition of buttons and the analog stick. On the note of moving to a home console, keeping the familiar sense of comfort at home was a crucial component of home consoles. While the analog stick, along with various buttons, on a comfortable- but quite awkward- controller contributed to keeping the arcade feel alive at home, it played its largest role in making movement around a 3D world much smoother.