

COM 321, Documentary Form in Film & Television

Hale's Tours & Scenes of the World

Form

Originated with travelogues, and the popular “phantom ride” movies.

Phantom ride films were shot from the front of a moving vehicle (train, streetcar, subway, etc.).

Hale's Tours added the aspect of a unique exhibition space--small movie houses constructed to look like train cars that each seated 72 passengers.

A 7-10 minute film that had been shot from the front of a moving train would be projected at one end of the train car.

Machines would rock, vibrate, and tilt the car to simulate train travel.

Accompanying sounds included steam whistles and train wheel effects.

Fans blew bursts of air at the passengers from the rear of the car.

Painted scenery would roll past the side windows.

A human “conductor” might collect tickets and make announcements.

History

Preceded by an 1895 patent application by Robert Paul and H. G. Wells for a rocking and moving movie house designed like a spaceship, using still photos or movies. This was intended to “simulate travel through time and space” a la Wells' science-fiction novel, *The Time Machine* (Fielding, 1970). The device was never constructed, however.

Also preceded by:

→ Cineorama, a French simulation of a hot-air balloon ride, with a 360-degree movie view (which burned down after two days)

→ Mareorama, a presentation by the Lumiere Brothers that simulated the view from a ship's bridge

→ Again, phantom rides, which were particularly popular in Britain

Hale's Tours first opened in May of 1905 in Kansas City's Electric Park, as conceived by retired Kansas City Fire Chief George C. Hale.

→ Hale was a mechanical engineer who spent most of his career as a fireman. With two business partners, he first introduced his invention at the 1904 St. Louis Exposition.

Success

By 1907, there were 500 Hale's Tours theaters in the U.S. They could also be found around the world—in Havana, Mexico City, Melbourne, Paris, London, Berlin, Hong Kong, Oslo, and other cities. In Cleveland, Hale's Tours could be seen at the Luna Park amusement park.

Those who worked in Hale's Tours installations included Sam Warner, as a projectionist. Those whose first viewing of a film was at a Hale's Tours theater included Carl Laemmle (later the Universal Pictures mogul), Mary Pickford (movie star and United Artists co-founder), and Ronald Colman (movie actor). Hale's Tours convinced Adolph Zukor (later the Paramount Pictures mogul) to go into the movie business.

But, within just a few years, the popularity of Hale's Tours waned. Most were gone by 1911.

Content & Presence

The basic purpose was to create a heightened sense of reality via simple emulation of physical motion—one very common type of *presence* (the “illusion of non-mediation”). With high physical presence (telepresence), you feel like you're really “there.”

→ Like the Magic Lantern shows, Hale's Tours films are an early version of "4-D"
Unclear exactly which films were dedicated Hale's Tours films (Selig Films in Chicago were a significant provider).

However, some Hale's Tours films included some narrative (fictional) components

→ Example: *From Leadville to Aspen: A Hold-up in the Rockies*, 1906

Related technologies and entertainments

Based on the notion of the 19th century dioramas.

Also related to Lumieres' "panoramas"—actualities shot with a moving camera (e.g., from a gondola in Venice, or a rising elevator).

Again, Hale's Tours films were an elaboration of "phantom ride" films

→ Examples (definitely phantom ride films; may have been shown at Hale's Tours theaters):

* *The Georgetown Loop*, 1903

* *Interior New York Subway*, 1905

* *A Trip Down Market Street*, 1906

(http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504803_162-20019755-10391709.html)

* British Film Institute (BFI) Screenonline has a nice collection of phantom ride films online...but we cannot access them!



← Shooting a phantom ride film
(Billy Bitzer? May be.)



← Interior of a Hale's Tours theater



← Exterior of a Hale's Tours theater

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