That's Not What I Heard:

Synchronized Sound Cinema in Montreal 1926-1931

JoAnne Stober

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis recognizes the introduction of synchronized sound cinema as a point of departure into a study of the cultural and social dimensions of moviegoing. This research focuses on Montreal between 1926 and 1931 where the first Canadian demonstrations and exhibitions of synchronized sound cinema took place. Using film critiques, advertisements for theatres, letters to the editor and editorials in the Montreal popular press to examine appeals made to audiences, I locate patterns and relationships of moviegoing. This study makes clearer the development of a process through which social and cultural experience is articulated, interpreted and contested all of which point to a need to revisit Canadian film history and audiences. By situating early cinema and early audiences within a complex cultural space of performance, diversity of entertainment, theatre architecture and interior design it is clear that more than technology is implicated in shaping cinematic spectatorship and the conception of historical audiences. The relationship between technology and culture is examined in a synchronic manner to avoid missing the crucial dimensions of moviegoing as it pertains to Montreal.

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Introduction

To coincide with the 300th anniversary of the signing of La Grand Paix-The Great Peace[1] in Montreal, organizers at the Montreal Museum of Archeology and History sponsored a series of performances in the narrow, cobblestone streets and alleys of Old Montreal. Situated along a walking path, spectators were invited to move from performance to performance. Despite cloudy skies, hundreds of people gathered in Old Montreal to experience 1701 through the dramatic recreations in the streets. Since the group of spectators was very large and everyone began at the same point, a long line of people began to file along the street to the site of the first performance. A small theatre troupe was at each site and gave a reenactment of life in Montreal three hundred years ago. After a crowd had gathered, the performers would begin. At each special station, audience members would watch quietly as the drama played out and then a cast member would indicate the end of the skit by yelling, "circulate." This was both the cue for members of the audience to move on to the next reenactment and for the long line of people waiting to move forward and take their places. Those who had been in the back of the group would then file into position—the good seats—and wait as the actors prepared to perform the skit again.

On more than one occasion, I was at the edge of the audience: that is, I was close enough to see most of the action but too far away to be able to hear clearly what was

[1] Commemorating the ratification of the Great Peace Treaty in 1701 between 39 representatives of Amerindian nations and the French inhabitants of Montreal. The Treaty was signed in Montreal and 2001 marks the 300th anniversary of the event.

being said. This was an obscure position. From my vantage point, I was acutely aware of a "borderland" space between the audience and those waiting in line to see the performance. The people behind me, unable to see or hear, would talk amongst themselves, laugh and carry on as if the performance was not even happening. The people in front of me would lean forward intently to catch the action. The "borderland" was a precarious place and while inhabiting it, I was aware of the performance because I could hear and see bits and pieces yet I was also aware of those who were not able to see the action because I could feel their pushing and hear their private discussions. As the crowd behind me grew, it seemed those in the "borderland" began to also talk amongst themselves, admire the architecture of Old Montreal, and make plans for after the performance. This conduct bled forward until it seemed only audience members in the first two rows were actually watching and listening to the performers. In the end, I spent more time in the "borderland" than I did watching the skits, even when I was able to move into the first couple of rows of spectators I found myself struggling to separate from the people behind me in order to direct my full attention toward the performance. The vigor I normally devote to live performance, was absent. The venue of the street, the mobility required of spectators and the autonomy that this gave the audience resulted in an atmosphere that shaped the way viewing took place.

I offer this anecdote to remind the reader that the conceptualization of the public as "a mixture of competing forms of organizing social experience means thinking of it as a potentially volatile process, defined by different speeds and temporal markers."[2] The spectatoral situation of the re-enactment of the Great Peace was influenced by the

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[2] Hansen, Miriam, "Transformations of the Public Sphere" Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1994) 144.

location, the time, the performance schedule, the surroundings of Old Montreal, the size of the crowds, the amplification of the performers voices, and the movement required of the spectators, not to mention the wide range of non-spectral activities and reasons for people to be at the performance—wanting to get out of the house, a chance for a family activity, an occasion for walking in the romantic streets with a love interest, something to do before going for a drink at the pub. With certainty, the anecdote reminds us of all the influences on spectatorship present at the site of the performance. In addition, competing popular forms of entertainment influence audience behavior and etiquette. If we are to situate audiences in a specific historical and social framework, it is necessary to consider the cultural practices of that time. In other words, the process of envisioning the public is as unpredictable as understanding all elements of exhibition and performance. As Catherine Russell considers;

> By locating early cinema within a complex cultural space of architecture, theatre, journalism, and a diversity of popular entertainments, the activity of film-viewing is conceived as a function of everyday life. Moreover, the mobility of the spectator through the diversity of spectacles, along with the role of intertextuality in early cinema, renders the viewer's participation highly interactive.[3]

While the foundation of classical theories of spectatorship presumed a distanced, decorporealized, monocular eye completely unimplicated by the objects in its vision,[4] researchers later began to view the body as subjective rather than a fixed object—vision

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[3] Russell, Catherine, "Parallax Historiography: The Flâneuse as Cyberfeminist," Scope. (January 7, 2000). Accessed 06/26/01 http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/film/.

[4] Linda Williams, ed. Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1994) 5.

was an unfolding process within the body—the body was capable of producing images rather than only registering them. From here, among other theories of vision, came many of the apparatus models of spectatorship that dominated early film theory. If the spectator-position of apparatus theory aligns viewing with transcendental forms of consciousness and the illusions of visual mastery, the spectator of early and late cinema is an embodied, socially configured and heterogeneous construction.

Spectatorship has evolved with changes in cinematic production and exhibition. A historiography of spectatorship needs to take into consideration the particular dynamic of the public as well as the cinematic and non-cinematic influences on spectatorship. It is also necessary to have a theoretical understanding of the possible relations between films and viewers and to be able to situate the viewers in the cultural practice of going to the movies. The conception of film exhibition in the transitional phase of silent to sound cinema created an unpredictability between what was understood as a live performance (variety acts, vaudeville and performance combined with film presentation) and what became a more streamlined cinematic exhibition momentarily phasing out live performance. Cinemagoers were subject to a shift in technology and presentation that imposed a new form of viewing on the public. Not only did the cinema undergo a dynamic innovation with the introduction of synchronous sound, films were viewed differently. As Miriam Hansen points out, films were likely to have

> ...a wide range of meanings depending on the neighborhood and status of the theatre, on the ethnic and racial background of the habitual audience,

on the mixture of gender and generation, and on the ambition and skills of the exhibitor and the performing personnel.[5]

Linda Williams rationalizes the need for theorists to insist on prodding the cerebral matter of the hypothetical subject. "No amount of empirical research into the composition of audiences will displace the desire to speculate about the effects of visual culture and especially moving images, on hypothetical viewing subjects."[6] The concept of the spectator-subject as a passive subject is, as Williams sees it, a stereotype in need of revision in order to emphasize the plurality and variation of many different historically distinct viewing positions. "Film historians have often traced the history of cinema in technologically deterministic terms: that is, once the technological apparatus was invented, cinema as we know it could be seen to follow."[7] Scott MacKenzie argues that relations between technology and culture "need to be examined in a synchronic manner, and not strictly by a causalist view of technological determinism."[8] As this study will prove, much more than technology is implicated in shaping cinematic spectatorship and the conception of historical audiences involves complementing the research of a specific time period. To be sure, a local study, precise in scope and size, will avoid missing all the wonderful, and crucial dimensions of moviegoing as it pertains to specific places. To capture the relationship between the cinema and early audiences is to examine specific locations to see the "development of a process through which social experience is

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[5]Miriam Hansen "Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere" Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film. Ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers UP, 1994) 147.
[6] Williams, Viewing Positions, 4.
[7] Ibid., 10.
[8] Scott MacKenzie, "A Screen of one's own: early cinema in Quebec and the public sphere 1906-1928," Screen 41.2 (Summer 2000) 201.

articulated, interpreted, negotiated and contested in an intersubjective, potentially collective and oppositional form."[9]

This study focuses on Montreal from 1926-1931—a range of five years when synchronized sound exhibition was being experimented with and implemented in the cinemas of Montreal. In the first chapter, I will characterize some of the historical forces that have assured a continued destabilization of the spectator. I will situate this study in a review of historiographical research in cinematic reception and examine further the theoretical role of the spectator. This chapter will also highlight the relevance of examining specific areas or localities of early cinemagoing. Further to that, I will sketch my method to present the emergence and development of popular press discourses on cinema and synchronous sound as they pertain to Canadian film history and film theory.

Rather than position 'cinema' as a strictly empirical force or a byproduct of a homogenous textual reading that often results in banishing audiences to the speculative, approaching cinemagoing through the popular press is one way to augment empirical research. Empirical research on audiences is characterized by counting and categorizing audience members and by attempted measurement of direct effects of communication. Therefore, by locating the appeals made to audience members in the popular press we can move toward a cultural understanding of historical audiences and of cinemagoing during the period when sync-sound was being introduced in the theatres. To get at the early cinematic spectator, the cinema must be understood as an attraction, one that changed from a performative, live action address to a representational, more streamlined, stylistic exhibition. Audiences in the late 20s were not only going to the cinema to see the movie

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[9] Miriam Hansen, introduction, Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film, (New BrunswickNJ: Rutgers UP, 1994) 144.

that was playing. Unlike most audiences of today who decide which film to see rather than where to see it, audiences of film in the late 20s were given fewer choices of films and cinemas would offer short runs—usually a week held over to two if the film drew large crowds. Going to the movies was offered to audiences as an experience, an event, complete with musical numbers, variety acts, comedy shorts and newsreels. In addition, theatre managers went out of their way to create the atmosphere of famous 'picture palaces' where audiences could go to see the films. Therefore, the question of exhibition cannot be studied in isolation. "The materiality of cinemagoing as a practice needs to be acknowledged; the activity itself is a form of cultural expression and participation, one that operates in the context of economics and taste."[10] By moving toward cultural studies wherein the industrial dimensions, the audience and the practice of cinemagoing are combined, categorical interpretations of reception can be avoided. A reminder that cinemagoing is a collection of practices both filmic and extra-filmic is in order so as not to neglect one or the other.

In the second chapter I will examine the American accounts of reception to early sound exhibition. Authors who have focused on the industrial structures have provided important works of history; however, a wide range of cultural practices and determinants are not considered, especially the discursive construction of the movie audiences. On an industry level, Hollywood dominated the moviemaking scene in the late 1920's. Ultimately, seeking to examine filmgoing in Canada leads to the American film industry and to the reception of Hollywood films in Canada since it was primarily American films

[10] Charles Acland. "Popular Film in Canada: Revisiting the Absent Audience," A Passion for Identity, eds. David Taras and Beverly Rasporich (ITP Nelson: Scarbourough, 1997) 281-96.

that Canadians were watching. According to Raymond Williams, "an essential starting-point in history is provisional analysis and groupings which are intended to clarify, rather than merely register, the diversity itself."[11] This chapter seeks to examine how U.S. audiences have been talked about historically and in particular at the introduction of synchronous sound. Canadian audiences are consumers of American film, which is why I want to first explore how the U.S. filmgoing experience has been treated and discussed. This will lead to the ways in which the experience of filmgoing was localized for Montrealers—audiences of the same films first exhibited in the United States before moving north across the border, sometimes over a year after the U.S. premiere.

Chapter three will begin the review of the popular press in Montreal from 1926-1928. These years mark a sort of pre-history to the arrival of the first feature length sound films characterized by experiments in sound, demonstrations in theatres, speculations about the cinema and the effects of sound, and the introduction of mechanisms used to exhibit sound film like the de Forest Phonofilm. Here we see that both anticipation and dread engulfed the introduction of sound to the cinema. At the time, Montreal was a hotbed for cinema and theatre entertainment, often exhibiting the same or similar shows to New York City. As Pierre Véronneau says, "Montréal est une ville de cinéma" perhaps the cinema capital of Canada.[12]

Chapter four deals with 1928-1929 when the first exhibitions of synchronous sound cinema using Movietone and Vitaphone technology took place in Montreal. This chapter is an exploration of the discursive appeals made to the audiences, the reactions to

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[11] Raymond Williams, "British Film History: New Perspectives," British Cinema History Eds., James Curran and Vincent Porter (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1983) 11.
[12] Pierre Véronneau, Montréal Ville de Cinéma. (Montréal: Cinémathèque québécoise/musée du cinéma, 1992) 5.

synchronous sound, the conversion and decoration of theatres to support sound systems and the changes in exhibition that coincided with the introduction of synchronous sound cinema. I will examine the press accounts of the first exhibited talking films in Montreal and how they were received by critics and audiences. Finally I look at the legend of The Jazz Singer (Alan Crosland, 1927) and the status the film has obtained in historical accounts of the beginning of sound films. Despite the fact that The Jazz Singer was not exhibited in Montreal until December of 1929 the picture maintains a perhaps unwarranted status in popular culture as the watershed film of talking cinema.

In chapter five I look more closely at audience practices, movie programs, and critical commentary in the popular press as Montrealers adapted to the changes in exhibition that occurred with the introduction of sound film and had time to settle into patterns of moviegoing. For the most part, this chapter is an examination of audience reactions to sound exhibition and the changes in exhibition and spectatorship brought about by sound. This chapter also brings us closer to the audience through letters from local moviegoers published in the Montreal Daily Star. The writers expressed both resistance and praise for sync-sound cinema as well as vocalizing social and cultural concerns directly stemming from the influence film was thought to have on society. Indeed, resistance to the talkies was experienced in numerous ways in Montreal; especially vocal were the editorials of Samuel Morgan Powell, the drama editor with the Montreal Daily Star. He argued consistently for the supremacy of the legitimate theatre and a revival of silent cinema. His writing makes us a large part of the discourse surrounding the emergence and development of sound cinema.

Finally, in the sixth chapter I examine the adoption of new technology and exhibition practices as cinema managers competed to get an edge over other cinemas in the city. After the initial excitement that surrounded the arrival of sound in Montreal, theatre managers were forced to work harder to bring in spectators. Not only were moviegoers more critical of films, they were more vocal about what they liked and did not like about the program of exhibition. Attendance in theatres declined at the beginning of 1930 and into 1931 and once the appeal of novelty had dissipated, the decreased presence suggested that audiences found other sources of popular entertainment and spectacle. Most notable in this period was the return to live performance in the cinema, which had, with the introduction of synchronous sound, been banished in some theatres in favor of film entertainment. This suggests that sound cinema addressed the needs of spectacle and pleasure rather than the films having narrative appeal.

As Tom Gunning has pointed out, early cinema was characterized by the power to astonish over the ability to narrate. The factors that brought about debate were linked to the nature of the attraction itself. Sound, was both embraced for its technological merit and novelty and resisted for the social and cultural effects it was thought to bring about. As Scott MacKenzie has argued, "the 'power' of the cinema lies at the intersection of: first, the public space; secondly, the audience; thirdly, the cinematic text; and fourthly, the public discourses which surround the cinema."[13] The present work has traced the arrival of synchronized sound cinema and the development of the popular press discourses as they pertain to Canadian film history and film theory. As this thesis will demonstrate, the 'power' of synchronized-sound cinema was lodged in the four

[13] Scott MacKenzie, "A Screen of one's own: early cinema in Quebec and the public sphere 1906-1928," Screen 41.2 (Summer 2000) 183- 202.

intersecting aspects MacKenzie has pointed out. I contend that these relations and intersections, examined together stress the cultural and social impact of the arrival of sound and successfully lead to a clearer understanding of the period.

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Window of Opportunity:

Rethinking Canadian Film History

In the introduction to Germain Lacasse's Histoires de Scopes, Pierre Véronneau spells out the current state of what is needed in film history. Véronneau claims we know the work that has preceded Lacasse—the work of Canadian film historians like Belanger, Morris and Turner.[14] Large surveys of Canadian film and general accounts of Canadian production and film technology offer invaluable information but, the point of view representing the production, the distribution and the exploitation of the films in Quebec's silent cinema is missing.[15] Véronneau claims a window of opportunity was offered to Lacasse—a moment in the grand history of cinema in Quebec where very little is known

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[14]Germain Lacasse, Histoires de Scopes, Les Archives Nationales du Quebec (Montreal: La Cinémathèque québécois, 1988) 3.

[15] Other prominent contributions to Canadian Film History relevant to this study include: Leon-H Belanger, Les Quimetoscopes: Leo Erners Quimet et les debuts du cinema Quebecois, (Montreal-Nord: VLB 1978); Peter Morris, Embattled Shadows (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1978); John Turner, "Dans la nouvelle vague des annees 1920: Joseph-Aurthur Homier" Perspectives, 26 (January 1980). Arguably the contributions of Belanger, Lacasse and Andre Gaudreault are not well known outside of Quebec in North America. This makes it seem as if even fewer Canadian contributions have been made to the field of film history. Notably Gerald Graham has made a significant contribution toward a history of Canadian film technology. See, Gerald G. Graham, Canadian Film Technology, 1896-1986. (Newark: University of Delaware Press. London: Associated University Press 1989).

aside from the general accounts that have been written. In relation to the work done by Lacasse, Véronneau claims it is necessary to present a living, detailed history of events as they were presented in the pages of the popular press in Montreal. Despite the fact that many of the silent films have been lost and many of the first theatres in Montreal are no longer in existence, the press, Véronneau argues, can offer a revitalization of the battles, the victories, and the defeats of the initiators of silent film in Quebec.

This thesis is a response to Véronneau's call to engage with Canadian film history. When we look at what has been written on Canadian film history we find general accounts covering the last 100 years of cinema that offer few insights of early audiences. It becomes evident from the lack of detailed history and the absence of audiences that the work of the cultural historian is to look more closely at isolated periods, to seek new sources from which to draw out the living moment of the early years of film exhibition and filmgoing in Canada, and to engage what we already know with what we find in untapped sources such as archives and the popular press.

There have been some major contributions to the history of film and the topic is of interest to many fields of scholarship. The methods of doing film history continue to be debated among the fields of film studies, history, cultural studies and communication studies. Robert Sklar explores some of the aspects of the current state of historical writings about film in his essay "Oh! Althussar!: Historiography and the Rise of Cinema Studies." His feeling is that cinema studies developed quickly and fostered little criticism from within its own or other fields of academic study. The quick growth resulted in primarily theoretical contributions. Sklar claims that film history under the purview of dominant theoretical discourse had little tied with traditional academic history, "at best, it

[film historiography] could do little more than assemble the raw empirical data that theorists required to exercise their analytic powers on historical subjects."[16]

The form of historical knowledge born of what Dominick LaCapra calls 'the urge to historicize' is characterized as "limited to plausibly filling in the gaps in the record'."[17] Douglas Gomery summarizes the work that has been done by historians of cinema as follows: "There seem to be at least two approaches that researchers have utilized to improve our knowledge: 1) working backward from cultural appeals of the films themselves, or 2) crudely estimating from evidence generated by social scientists during the 1940's."[18] Gomery is extremely critical of the later approach. He says that some historians have approximated earlier audience attendance figures based on information concerning American audiences of the 1940's. Leo Handel's 1950 book entitled Hollywood Looks at its Audience [19] generated a large amount of empirical information about American audiences which has been utilized as a source by historians who argued, it is plausible to simply extrapolate backwards, and conclude that the size and

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[16] See Robert Sklar, "Oh! Althusshar!: Historiography and the Rise of Cinema Studies" Resisting Images: Essays on Cinema and History Eds., Robert Sklar and Charles Musser (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1990) 16. Film historians continued to accumulate empirical data however; it was Sklar's position that they would have faced great difficulty establishing historical methods in the field of cinema studies due to a rise in theoretical studies, film criticism and work based on film texts.

[17] Dominick LaCapra is quoted from Robert Sklar's "Oh! Althusshar!: Historiography and the Rise of Cinema Studies," Resisting Images: Essays on Cinema and History. Eds., Robert Sklar and Charles Musser (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990) 4.

[18] Douglas Gomery, "Movie Audiences, Urban Geography, and the History of the American Film," The Velvet Light Trap, no. 19 (1982) 23.

[19] Leo A. Handel, Hollywood looks at its audience; a report of film audience research. (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1950). Handel was the former director of audience research at MGM and in 1953 he claimed that Hollywood was the only major industry to have not made an attempt to study its potential market. See also Leo A. Handel, "Hollywood market research," Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television vol. 7 (Spring 1953) 308.

composition of audiences for movies in the 1920's closely resembled the socio-economic characteristics of their latter counterparts in the forties.[20] In response, Charles Musser criticizes cinematic scholarship for remaining adamantly anti-historical, and "tainted by empiricism" no doubt a reaction to accounts of film history that have taken empirical data and tried to make novel interpretations.[21] Other inquiries hinged on the concept of the ideal spectator, attempting to claim a "unified and unifying position offered by the text or apparatus."[22] Earlier attempts at film history revolving around the spectator as passive are no longer current according to Miriam Hansen. She claims the historical significance of the 1970s theories of spectatorship is that they may have "mummified" the spectator-subject of classical cinema thereby permitting a shift in film-spectator relations to correspond to emergent, highly specific modes and venues of consumption.[23] I maintain that the shift also permits a rethinking of early cinema in its unique and specific contexts of exhibition. A discursive approach to audiences permits research into both the empirical and the cultural. In this way, empirical evidence previously collected is not called upon to support new claims and more is discovered about the audience through discursive methods such as the recovery of journalistic pieces and archival material.

The initial emergence of the movies has been studied using a cultural approach to history in an effort to reconstruct and revisit the past. According to Sklar, movie

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[20]Gomery, "Movie Audiences, Urban Geography, and the History of the American Film," 29.

[21] Charles Musser, introduction, Resisting Images: Essays on Cinema and History. Eds. Charles Musser and Robert Sklar. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990) 3.

[22] Film theory in the 1970s and 1980s that revolved around the spectator has fallen to ritual critique of its epistemological and methodological shortcomings. See Miriam Hansen,. "Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere" in Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film. Ed. Linda Williams. (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers UP, 1994)134.

[23] Miriam Hansen. "Early Cinema, Late Cinema," 135.

audiences of this era hardly received any attention as theorists focused on cinematic apparatus—concluding that the spectator saw cinema through the ideology of the apparatus. Studies of this framework drew attention away from the work historians do by focusing on the text, ideology and audience as subjects. Tom Gunning's "Cinema of Attraction" challenged the notion that audiences were subjects of film exhibition. He notes, "spectator identification with the viewpoint of the camera is a linchpin of early cinema."[24] Asserting more than just a connection between the film text as ideology and the apparatus as the source of ideology exists, Gunning claims audiences went to films to see how the mechanical apparatus would work as well as to watch the films, and that audiences had an undisguised awareness of their active position as viewers, not an anonymous absorption into the film narrative. Theorists' focus on cinematic apparatus as purveyor of ideology is a dominant viewpoint resulting in the view of the audience as homogeneous.[25] Douglas Gomery's says that film should be seen as 'cinema', as an ideological practice, an apparatus, an institutional mode of representation, a classical Hollywood narrative and an imaginary signifier because this all points to the spectator as subject. 'Cinema', as Gomery proposes, is a more inclusive category of study, one that attempts to rationalize all aspects of film production and consumption in order to draw theories and conclusions. By moving toward a more inclusive history of film, we can avoid some of the past faults. As Robert C. Allen points out,

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[24] Tom Gunning. "The Cinema of Attractions," Early Film: Frame, Space, Narrative, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: BFI Publishing, 1995) 58.

[25] Gunning's work represents a major shift in early cinematic theory. Critical study of audiences, had previously concentrated on the text of the film emphasizing the interpretive strategies used by majority and marginal groups of viewers to suggest the ways a film is understood and meaning created.

> Film history had been written as if films had no audiences or were seen by everyone in the same way, or as if however they were viewed and by whomever, the history of 'films' was distinct from and privileged over the history of their being taken up by the billions of people who have watched them since 1894.[26]

To better understand the evolution of 'looking at the audience' to gain insight into cultural practices it is important to draw upon past contributions in cinematic history. The conflicts of early cinema influence the "dominant ideologies and discourses on the relation of media, class, and culture" and are therefore relevant to current studies.[27] Two works in the U.S. made great strides toward the advancement of knowledge of early cinema audiences—Russell Merritt's 1976 essay "Nickelodeon Theatres, 1905-1914: Building an Audience for the Movies,"[28] and "Motion Picture Exhibition in Manhattan: Beyond the Nickelodeon" written by Robert C. Allen in 1979.[29] These works were revisionist texts methodologically and historically. From a methodological standpoint, both articles focused on an individual city, Boston and Manhattan respectively, as test cases. This localized approach served to transform the general interpretation of the audience of early film exhibition.[30] Allen claimed that, at least in Manhattan, the middle-

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[26] Robert C. Allen, "From Exhibition to Reception: Reflections on the Audience in Film History," Screen 31.4 (Winter 1990) 348.
[27] Sklar. "Oh! Althusshar!: Historiography and the Rise of Cinema Studies" 20.
[28] Meritt, Russel. "Nickelodeon Theatres, 1905-1914: Building an Audience for the Movies," The American Film Industry, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: U of Wisconsin Press, 1976) 59-79.
[29] Robert C. Allen, "Motion Picture Exhibition in Manhattan: Beyond the Nickelodeon," Cinema Journal vol. 19, no 2 (Spring 1979).
[30] Merritt and Allen challenged what Judith Thissen calls 'the founding myth' of film history—the assumption that audiences of early film exhibition were primarily working class and immigrants. See Judith Thissen "Jewish Immigrant Audiences in New York

class as well as working class and immigrant audiences' embraced moviegoing between 1906 and 1912. Using Trow's Business Directory, Allan based his findings on his mapping of theatre locations in the city. He then determined attendance based on residential class profiles. Robert Sklar and Benjamin Singer challenged Allen's findings. Singer uncovered archival sources (a police report calling for the shut down of all nickelodeons in Manhattan) that contradicted the estimates Allen made about the number movie theatres. Taking issue first with his empirical evidence, Singer also questioned whether social composition of movie audiences could be determined as a reflection of the neighborhood wherein the theatre is situated. Despite his critiques, Singer's findings were also largely based on empirical data and Judith Thissen, William Uriccho and Roberta Pearson[31] took issue with his conclusions.

Exactly what can be generalized from the length to which Allen and Merritt's findings about movie audiences have been disputed? Primarily, and of interest to this study, is the need to expand inquiry into film history beyond empirical information. Conclusions can be drawn from empirical data but need to be reinforced by seeking ways to examine cultural history. The method of locating the historical audience cannot singularly be approached as an empirical study. The Allan and Merritt studies fail on this count as they base their findings on sources such as telephone directories and mapping the city. There are trying to answer questions about the composition of historical film audiences in New York City without actually seeking to discover the social and cultural

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City, 1905-14" American Movie Audiences from the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era, eds. Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (London: British Film Institute 1999) 15-28.

[31] Melvyn Stokes, introduction American Movie Audiences from the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era. (London: British Film Institute, 1999). 4.

practices. The question of how audiences are composed and what meaning is given to attendance and exhibition "could be better approached by means of discursive evidence surrounding then than by the kind of evidence preferred by Singer."[32] Certainly the cinematic subject is much more interesting as "one that continues to be formed and reformed throughout the history of cinema, a product of converging and diverging forces including the economic, technological, and textual."[33] There is a need to shift inquiries about spectatorship to the cultural and to locate new sources for inquiry that will permit a convergence of empirical and discursive information. In doing so, a more intricate exploration of the social formations and lives of spectators can be drawn out. To be sure, moments of emergent forms like sound are crucial to marking the history of cinema and its relation to local audiences.

In "Film History and Visual Pleasure: Weimer Cinema," Thomas Elsaesser claims:

> The best part of the energy in recent writing comes from an awareness of a double front: a dissatisfaction with all those film histories where a consensus is presupposed about what 'film' and 'history' have to do with each other, and a debate among the new generation of film historians about the 'determinants' (demographic, economic, technological, ideological) that might have 'produced' the qualitative changes and

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[32] Ibid., 4.

[33] Charles Acland, "Cinemagoing and the Rise of the Multiplex," Television and New Media. vol. 1, no. 3 (August 2000). 3.

> permutations of forms on whose account films may lay claim to have any history at all.[34]

He claims that film history has moved away from the study of films and film criticism toward what used to be called the sociology of film—of which the task was to define genres, movements, periods or, occasionally, the sociocultural significance of a particular national cinema.[35] The new film history Elsaesser refers to may have moved away from films but it was devoted to 'materialistic determinants'—"entrenched in economic histories of particular studios and financial cartels, of court actions and patent wars, real-estate deals, popcorn franchises, 'zoning' agreements and fire regulations."[36] This sort of application of reception theory as a historical project is what Mary Beth Haralovich refers to as "de-centered" history—history that discusses the intricacies of the social formation from many points of entry, avoiding the consensus interpretations, which can mask the heterogeneity of social life. What is needed to analyze heterogeneity as well as the ways people participate in dominant discourses is an expansion upon the empirical base to look for the 'passage ways into which and through which experiences and ideas flowed.'[37] The 'materialistic determinants' Elsaesser claims film historians became fixed on were a way of moving away from films toward social intricacies however, they also 'de-centered' history by failing to look for the flow of experiences and ideas and especially by failing to locate the audiences within these passages.

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[34] Thomas Elsaesser, "Film History and Visual Pleasure," 48.
[35] Ibid., 49.
[36] Ibid., 49.
[37] Ibid., 48.

Whereas in the past, "theorists were no more likely to be found in archives than an atheist in a foxhole."[38] There are still many questions in early film history that are largely unanswered. Moreover, there are assumptions, particularly about audiences as homogeneous crowds and entire nations as indistinguishable masses, that are not well documented or supported. "Applications of reception theory and cultural studies are based on the assumption that films can be received and understood differently by a diverse and identifiable social group."[39] Scholars have become more interested in critical interpretation of the discourses that formed the context of spectatorship in historical eras. "Historical spectators, to be sure, can only be apprehended in their contemporary setting by what was said to and about them."[40] Questions about historical periods in film and the recent interest in reception of cinema can add to film scholarship by shifting the focus from text driven studies in film history to localized studies that attempt to frame a particular era of film history. The diversity of moviegoing in early cinema calls for an approach like that of Charles Musser who, in 1991, demonstrated the value of going into the archives and seeking previously unexplored material such as legal documents, correspondence and newspaper articles to make claims about early filmgoing.[41] The importance of seeking primary and archival material is that the documents haven't been examined before and they provide a new path for the discovery of early film audiences. Spectatorship theories that portrayed audiences as having a homogenous, national

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[38] Robert Sklar, "Oh! Althusshar!" 16.
[39] Mary Beth Haralovich "The Social History of Film: Heterogeneity and mediation" Wide Angle vol. 8, no. 2 (1986) 5.
[40] Robert Sklar, "'The Lost Audience': 1950's spectatorship and historical reception studies," Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies, eds Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (London: British Film Institute, 2000) 89.
[41] Charles Musser, Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

character do not provide enough insight to talk about moviegoing in detail. I say national because the national spectator is often taken as the lowest common denominator in research into audiences. Preferably, cultural inquiries with a local audience as a base for the study can begin to piece together the national scope of historical audiences rather than beginning with large generalizations, it is possible to add up smaller studies to create a more precise, inclusive picture of Canadian film audiences.

Another element has been added to film historiography over the last 15 years. Film scholarship has shown an increasing concern with historical issues surrounding the exhibition of films and film audiences. Film exhibition has been added to the agenda of film history, which Allen sees as a demonstration of "how important exhibition was as an historical determinant of film history."[42] While Phillip Corrigan declared "the history of film audiences is still almost completely undeveloped, even unconsidered," [43] the interest in exhibition brings moviegoing and audiences to the forefront. Since then, several theorists have found newspapers and periodical presses to be fruitful sources to reconsider the history of film. Newspapers themselves offer both empirical and discursive evidence of moviegoing, which allows for a more intricate exploration of the lives of spectators. This is precisely what is needed for Canadian film studies as it is at an in-between stage, still trying to provide answers to fundamental qualitative questions and ready to apply what we already know to move toward a cultural history.

Newspapers are especially valuable in that they can fill in the missing voice of those who lived in the period of early film history. While historical research often

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[42] See Corrigan's comments in Robert C. Allen, "From Exhibition to Reception: Reflections on the Audience in Film History," 349.
[43] Ibid., 349.

depends upon first person accounts of the past, memories, diaries, letters and photographs to gain insight into the social and the cultural lives of subjects, newspapers are also valuable where there are no longer many living subjects from whom to seek oral histories. Newspapers, written to reach their audiences, are one path to the daily appeals made toward the public of Montreal. As Crafton observes, in theorizing early sound there are still people who can recall their first experiences attending sound films. Northeast Historic Film conducted a survey of some of these people in 1990-1991 and found that most of the respondents remembered the talkies as "great," "more real," and "miraculous"[44] While oral histories and recollections are valuable testimonies about the impact of sound on specific individuals, Crafton claims they are "necessarily limited by the representative validity of their small sample size, lack of controls, and of course, subjectivity due to inevitable loss and embroidery as memories become more distant."[45]

Film studies' growing concern with reception of cinema and issues of moviegoing has brought the question of how moviegoing became a part of everyday life into serious consideration. Who were the first audiences? What kind of discourse circulated about the audience? How did the industry promoters think of the audience? And, how could this be determined? Were audiences drawn to what Gunning calls the "cinema of attractions"? Was the technology the only attraction or were they also drawn to the cinema to see the elaborate interior design or to swoon over the latest reel of fashion shows straight from Paris or London? Did the coming of synchronized sound discipline the audience or did it increase cacophony of the movie theatre? Did French language as well as English

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[44]Donald Crafton, The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926-1931. New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1997) 6.
[45] Crafton, The Talkies, 6.

language audiences appreciate films from Hollywood? Were Canadian theatres wired for sound at the same pace as American theatres? Was the standardization of the American film industry extended to the foreign owned theatres and if so, was there a standardization of the audience's experience? Questions like these, which have rarely been posed directly reveal how little we know about film reception in Canada at crucial points of departure in film history. Moreover, the fact that we don't have answers to these questions makes it obvious how little we know about those who actually went to the cinema in Canada and about the social and cultural functions the cinema performed.

Historians like Pierre Véronneau, Gerald Graham, and Peter Morris have made great contributions but offer little to construct patterns and relationships of cultural practice. Their work in Canadian film history is important in that it offers an overall chronological presentation of how the film industry developed in Canada. While this work is essential to the historical project of national film it doesn't go far enough to respond to the unanswered questions about the cultural and social function of Canadian moviegoers Morris presents the most inclusive film history of Canada in Embattled Shadows, a survey of close to five decades and Gerald Graham's Canadian Film Technology, 1896-1986 is the most comprehensive presentation of technological implementation in Canada. These contributions remain vital but are responses to what Charles F Altman calls the 'first stage' of film history. In Towards a "Historiography of the American Film" Altman concludes that: [f]ilm history has now reached its second

stage: from the who, what, where, and when we have moved to the how and why; from establishing facts we have progressed to explaining facts.[46]

Despite Altman's stance, I maintain that the study of film history in Canada is only moving toward the second stage. As this study indicates, many of the factual questions still need to be considered along with the how and the why. If American film has conquered the first stage and is ready to move on, the American answers to the qualitative questions are also relevant to a study concerning Canadian film audiences, as Canadians were also audiences of American film. However, other factors require specific examination of Canadian context. In order to answer questions about how technology influenced the cultural production and circulation of film in Canada it is helpful to limit the study to a small area—at least one that is small enough to be covered thoroughly. Archivist and curator of the Cinémathèque québécoise/musée du cinéma, Pierre Véronneau has limited his studies to Canadian film in Quebec and has made valuable contributions to fill in some of the blanks in Canadian film history. Véronneau has recently heeded and echoed the call to closely examine primary and archival sources to form a better understanding of early cinematic history by writing and encouraging studies in Canadian film that are more intensely concentrated on specific periods in film history and specific moments of reception. Montreal, Ville de Cinema pays homage to the industry that has developed uniquely in Montreal, as compared to the rest of Canada.[47] In his exploration of 'talking pictures' in Montreal, 1908-1910 Véronneau brilliantly expounds on a period in film history that he claims, "was bound to catch the attention of

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[46] Charles F. Altman in Cinema Histories Cinema Practices eds, Patricia Mellencamp and Philip Rosen (Los Angeles: University Publications of America, 1984.
[47] Véronneau, Montréal Ville de Cinéma.

researchers."[48] Véronneau's use of the popular press results in offering new insights into the period before synchronous sound was used in exhibition. He plunges film history further into a model of cultural studies by attempting to account for the filmic experience of the spectator and the role of the exhibitors. He also makes an important link between theatre and the evolution of the cinema from mute to talking in terms of aesthetics and technology. He offers advice to future researchers to take into consideration the relationship between film aesthetics and the development of filmic language and technological innovation.

Véronneau has had a hand in encouraging other researchers in the field of Quebec cinema, particularly Germain Lacasse. Lacasse's work on the history of scopes in Montreal is a good model for the present study. Using the popular press in Montreal, Lacasse has rewritten the accounts of the Histograph in Quebec, 1896-1930.[49] Lacasse is interested in epistemological pursuits from sources that have not been accounted for in the writing of Canadian film history. Histoires de Scopes provides new insight, into the emergence of cinema in Quebec, exhibition practices, and popular amusement in Montreal. Lacasse breaks new ground by examining press accounts of the Histograph. Nevertheless, the size of his project allows him to fall prey to the same faults of his predecessors; it limits the depth to which he can critically examine his data. Rather than framing his study theoretically, he attempts to expose and draw as much as he can from the press. His final two chapters cover the periods 1927-1928 and 1928-1930 respectively, in a scant total of twelve pages. While he mentions the arrival of

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[48] Pierre Véronneau, "The reception of 'talking pictures' in the context of Quebec exhibition 1894-1915," Film History vol. 11, no. 4. (1999).
[49] Germain Lacasse, Histories de Scopes. Les Archives Nationales du Quebec (Montreal: La Cinémathèque québécois, 1988).

synchronous sound, these chapters serve as a mere starting point for the research that has yet to be done on this period in film history and for research presented here.

The introduction of sync-sound in Canada was a major event in film history brought about by advances in film technology, exhibition, and aesthetics. Prior to sync-sound, silent films relied on narration, orchestras, and musicians to create the sound while the film was being projected. Véronneau's research points to the use of actors who would narrate films from behind the screen as the primal form of 'talking pictures.'[50] This indicates that sound was not a new addition to the exhibition of motion pictures. As Véronneau and others like American Donald Crafton have indicated, the talking cinema came into being in various ways before the advent of synchronous sound. While Véronneau's work leads us up to the period when synchronous sound was introduced in Canada, it remains a time that has not been extensively documented. While many generally assume that the history of cinema and film has been written, finding new sources has demonstrated that there are many details missing.

The methods of conducting historiographical research in cinematic studies are problematic and difficult. Of all aspects, "the history of the audience remains the most elusive aspect of cinema history, since audiences form only the most temporary communities, and leave few traces of their presence."[51] Putting together histories of audiences for the purpose of enhancing our knowledge of cinemagoing practices requires a willingness on the part of the researcher to come to terms with the past debates of film historiography, to seek out new and innovative methods of research and source material and the interpretive skills to interrogate those sources. There are general

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[50] Véronneau, "An Intermedia practice," 7.
[51] Stokes and Maltby, introduction, American Movie Audiences, 9.

historiographical problems involved in seeking to gain information about early cinematic audiences. The major problem is the fact that first hand evidence in the form of memoirs, diaries and personal accounts is hard to come by. Evidence found in newspapers, the popular media of the period, can offer insight into the research problem in a number of ways. First, newspapers during the period of 1926-1930 were the dominant form of popular media circulating on a daily basis among the audience in question. As such, the newspapers are a direct link to the dominant discourses circulating in everyday life. The reviews of films, comments regarding film technology, theatres, popular amusements, the film industry, actors, advertisements and letters from the public offer lucidity to the time period, popular culture and reception. Second, following the newspapers for an extended period, five years in the case of this research, reveals patterns, groupings, themes, and reoccurring topics in the discourse of media arts and film. Listening to audiences and to the appeals made toward them through the popular press is not methodologically straightforward "spectators accounts of their viewing behavior are 'forms of representation produced within certain cultural conventions', and the interpretation of those conventions forms a part of the interpretation of the viewing."[52] Accounts in the press can offer useful information on audience reactions, linguistic relations, verification of dates and exhibition programming and practices as well as insight into audience conduct, tastes and acceptance of synchronous sounds.

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[52] Stokes and Maltby (eds) Identifying Hollywood's Audiences, 11. Stokes is paraphrasing Jackie Stacey's account of her methodology in her study female film goers in 1940s and 1950s in an effort to learn about spectatorship. She held that Hollywood dominated film and it was necessary to determine what spectators said about Hollywood to gain insight into issues of spectatorship. See Jackie Stacey, Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 76.

Thomas Doherty successfully used exhibitor's trade journals to illuminate the subject of early audiences of synchronous sound in the United States.[53] He was interested in what he calls 'folkways of motion picture spectatorship'—what it was really like to go to the movies in the 1930, to be a part of the crowd, to be roused in a "follow the bouncing ball" songfest as a part of an audience and to experience how sound recast spectatorship. Doherty's is one of the most recent contributions of reception studies in American cinema using secondary and archival sources like industry trade magazines. While Doherty draws conclusions about filmgoing in the United States from his evidence, Charles Tepperman demonstrates the relevance of a local study in reception.

Recently, in his MA thesis "The Perfect Order of a Canadian Crowd: Cinema in Ottawa, 1894-1896", Charles Tepperman draws attention to film reception and cultural studies. Tepperman examines the context of the arrival of cinema in Ottawa addressing the Ottawa spectator. He suggests, "There is a history of film in Canada that has yet to be written. This is the history of film reception."[54] Tepperman's exploration of Ottawa finds the unconventional factors that made it a unique urban landscape of reception for the coming of cinema in 1896. It offers understanding of cinemagoing practices as well as being a methodological model of inquiry. His goal is to document how cinemagoing audiences received the movies as a popular form of entertainment. To do this, he examines the popular press in Ottawa and other archival sources such as letters and records from the Department of Agriculture regarding film exhibition in the city's parks.

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[53]Thomas Doherty, "This is Where We Came In: The Audible Screen and the Voluble Audience of Early Sound Cinema" American Movie Audiences from the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era, eds. Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes (London: British Film Institute, 1999) 143.

[54] Tepperman "The Perfect Order," 7.

He demonstrates that what was understood as a normative experience of film reception in the discourses of modernity and the cinema was not what took place across Canada and North America. He claimed that culture is mediated by local experience, and that reception studies attempting to provide general explications for phenomena lack the socially critical detail and insight that localized studies can present.

Tepperman is vague about positioning his study amongst other reception studies in film history. Lacking is the theoretical framework to position his thesis as a response to his call for a new Canadian film history. He meekly refers to the newspapers as "other" types of evidence without differentiating or stipulating what makes newspapers "other" types in the larger scale of evidence drawn upon by historians. As Raymond Williams writes:

> In any full assessment of history it is necessary to be aware that these temporary and provisional indications of attention and emphasis--of 'subjects'--can never be mistaken for independent and isolated processes and products.[55]

Another example of a study that mistakenly isolates processes and products is Matthew Smith's MA thesis "Introducing A New Medium: Newspaper Reviews Of The First Film Screenings in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto and New York in 1896" demonstrates a hazard to be avoided in examining the popular press. Smith determines that "every review from 1896 should be seen not only as journalism, but as genuine audience reactions" since the journalists' perceptions are as fresh as the other audience members in regard to the

[55] Raymond Williams, "British Film History," 10.

newness of the medium.[56] His claim that the journalist's word can be taken by researchers to stand for public opinion is based loosely on the journalistic style of the time, when most journalistic writing about film was dedicated to plot summary and news about the industry rather than what has evolved into criticism as we know it today. Smith's ease at accepting the reportage as the public voice is naïve. The popular press is a valuable indicator of audiences and reception but it can no more be equated with public opinion in 1895 than it can be today. Moreover, Smith fails to look toward the most obvious indication of public opinion in a newspaper—the letters to the editor. Furthermore, Smith lacks a theoretical frame and a time frame for examining the first film reviews and this leads to deliberate extrapolation from major events in film history.[57] He works backward by relying on previously recorded dates in film history and using the press as a verification tool. This is counterproductive to the task of seeking new sources of information in order to expand the horizon of understanding of historical events. Finally, Smith's failure to pick a city to focus the study forces him to pick and chose events to document while attempting to pay equal attention to each city in the study. Ultimately he can just skim the surface. By narrowing his focus to a single city he could have offered a detailed examination of cultural practices associated with the first film reviews and provided more insight into public opinion.

What can a focus on a particular city tell us that studies like Smith's and other past research like Allen and Merritt's fail to accomplish? By avoiding a strictly empirical

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[56] Matthew Smith, "Introducing A New Medium: Newspaper Reviews Of The First Film Screenings in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto and New York in 1896," Master's Thesis, Concordia U, 1996, 31.

[57] Matthew Smith, "Introducing A New Medium: Newspaper Reviews Of The First Film Screenings in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto and New York in 1896," Master's Thesis, Concordia U, 1996.

approach we can avoid drawing hard lines and shutting out informative and significant indicators of common life. Furthermore, by narrowing the focus of the study to a single city there is more of a chance to gain insight into the cultural lives of the inhabitants of the city. As Elsaesser claims, film is "as much constructed outside—in the discourses of financing and of spin-offs and residuals, in promotional campaigns and journalistic or critical reviews—as it is constructed within the length and duration of its celluloid strip and the space of its projection."[58] I maintain that film of the 1920s and 30s had an "outside" discourse of advertisements, programs meant to please any audience member, Broadway spin-offs and promotional campaigns that featured dynamically designed theatre spaces and short-runs on films. The spectator was appealed to in a variety of ways and the activity of cinemagoing was folded into a range of consumption activities. As a historical document newspapers provide a window to what local audiences knew of the cinema in their city, complete with qualitative information like dates, times, exhibition practices, programming styles, theatre openings, and technological innovations. Newspapers also contain the appeals made to audiences by theatre managers and theatre chains in advertisements and articles that allow the historian insight into the active history of the everyday moviegoer, local exhibitions and local audiences. The popular press is a way to discover the everyday lives of cinemagoers and cultural historians can find answers to questions like the following; what was the entertainment scene like in Montreal during a particular time period? Were there many entertainment venues competing for the audiences' attention? Were certain movie houses preferred over

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[58] Thomas Elsaesser, "Film History and Visual Pleasure: Weimar Cinema," Cinema Histories, Cinema Practices, eds. Patricia Mellencamp and Philip Rosen (Los Angeles: U Publications of America, 1984) 52.

others? Why? Did the audiences have a preference for a particular actor when they were able to hear them speak on film? Were the French and English language audiences segregated due to language or were the films subtitled or dubbed? Is there evidence of the makeup of the audiences at the time of the introduction of sync-sound cinema? What, if anything, is particular to the local audiences of Montreal in comparison to widespread accounts of the period in film history?

City spaces offer opportunities to rethink film reception. Cinemagoing implies a negotiation of city space. Certainly every city has a unique urban reality and during each period in cinematic history, has a different story of reception and cinemagoing that makes it valuable to the overall project of national film history. Local studies act as test basins for theories that could be expanded to serve on a greater scale but do not necessarily become more telling when expanded. Indeed, the relevance of a city in economic and cultural aspects of city life is important to the understanding of cultural processes and theories. By drawing on the popular press within Montreal I can access the discourse that circulated around the introduction of synchronous sound and throughout its integration into exhibition in the city. Perceptions and conclusions about Montreal will not likely apply to St. John's or Vancouver but that does not lessen their worth in determining aspects of cinematic history and cultural studies. In turn it heightens the merit of doing concentrated studies in Canada as a contribution to our national film history. And by concentrating on a single city I avoid having to compare and contrast completely different cases as Smith is forced to do with Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal and New York. A localized study is more manageable than a historiographical study on a national or international scale. In addition, focusing on a single city heightens the claim that

audiences were not identical and that researchers cannot be as confident as to believe that a nation received cinema in a standardized fashion anymore than researchers can lay claim to a universal understanding of any cultural practice.

A common starting point for historiographical research is the emergence of a new media or new technology. The reception surrounding the introduction of a particular technology acts as a cleavage and shifts the cultural practices that were already in place. Unlike the studies of modernity and cinema, these studies concentrate on the phenomenon of a single new and popular technology to probe cultural practices. By documenting particular moments in history, researchers can analyze how cinemagoing audiences were talked about and appealed to. The introduction of a new technology acts as a point of departure for the inquiry.

Studies in other countries have shown the arrival of sync sound initiated a major change in the way movies were shown, scheduled, watched, advertised and enjoyed. Yuri Tsivian's study of the cultural reception of early cinema in Russia claims that recorded synchronous sound from the kinetophone and chronomegaphone received complaints from audiences. Tsivian writes that audiences were disappointed with the selectivity of the mechanical sound. "A dog runs about noiselessly like a disembodied ghost, but his barking is far too loud. People sing and dance; the singing is loud, but you can't hear the shuffling sound of the dancing."[59] Observers complained that "the lack of sound when the actors move about spoils the illusion" because sound did not portray all objects thus failing to portray space. Furthermore, audiences complained about the timbre of the

[59] Yuri Tsivian, Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception, ed. Richard Taylor (Routledge: London and New York, 1994) 102.

kinetoscope when doing ordinary speech—making it sound ridiculous.[60] Movie critics observed that the sounds—especially the guttural, nasal sounds of the human voice—made viewers laugh, or put them off, rather than excited them. One drama critic wrote, "sometimes you are reminded of a talking parrot."[61]

Tsivian's observations surrounding the reception of recorded sound are taken from popular press in Russia at the time of the introduction of synchronous sound. He uses the introduction of a new, and popular technology as a point of entry into historical research of audiences in Russia. While this study is on a national scale, it is a methodological model for research in cinemagoing. Certainly, it is possible that many of the same problems or phenomena Tsivian documented existed in Montreal. By examining the press it is possible to present a depiction of what cinemagoing meant when sync-sound was introduced in Montreal. My goal is to use the introduction of sync-sound technology as a point of departure into a cultural study of audiences in Montreal during the five-year period of 1926-1931. Information about Montreal audiences of the sync-sound era involves a review of historical and archival material in both the French and the English language press since these were the two dominant communities in the city. Montreal is a dynamic local focus for this study. Since the inception of cinema, no city in Canada has boasted as vibrant a film culture as Montreal. The city's many theatres were primarily located in focal districts of cinemagoing like Saint Catherine's Street and St. Laurent Boulevard but the city also had neighborhood theatres. The first exhibition in Canada took place in Montreal, as did the first recorded exhibition of synchronous sound cinema.

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[60] Tsivian, Early Cinema in Russia, 103.
[61] Ibid., 103.

In consultation with provincial and national newspaper directories, I decided to use La Presse and the Montreal Daily Star.[62] La Presse had the highest circulation among Quebecois and declared itself to be the "organ of the French Canadian people." Furthermore La Presse was dedicated to politics, literature and theatre. In juxtaposition, Le Devoir concentrated on politics, Le Canada was directed toward wealthy and business class and La Patrie marketed itself as a family paper complete with colouring pages for the kids. La Presse was, among other things, established as a newspaper dedicated to arts and culture.[63] In the English press I chose Montreal Daily Star over the Gazette because of its higher circulation during the time period. The Montreal Daily Star had a much higher circulation in Quebec: 119,346 compared to the Gazette with 33,745. The Gazette also defined itself as "independent and conservative" and focused more on business.[64]

I began with the year 1926 in both the French and the English Press. I chose the time period of 1926-1931 based on other studies into the rise of the 'talkies' and integration of sync-sound in exhibition. Donald Crafton's History of the American Cinema: The Talkies[65] and Scott Eyman's The Speed of Sound[66] both focus on this five year period as it encompasses the phasing out of silent film and the industrial takeover of sound film to a point of dominating film exhibition. I examined each microfilm copy of La Presse and the Montreal Daily Star looking for cinema related stories of silent and sound films, advertisements for films, theatres and cinema events, programming, commentary about audiences and audience behavior, letters to the editor concerning film

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[62] Beaulieu et Hamelin, La Presse Quebecoise (1920-1932) and the Canadian Newspaper Directory.
[63] Canadian Newspaper Directory Montreal: A. McKim, 1940.
[64] Canadian Newspaper Directory Montreal: A. McKim, 1940.
[65] Crafton, The Talkies.
[66] Eyman, Scott. The Speed of Sound. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997

exhibition, reviews of films from critics and any other accounts of cinema during the period of 1926-1931. I have included some of the press stories and advertisements in the appendix of this document. The weekend edition of the Montreal Daily Star featured an arts section where I found numerous articles on the technology of sound, the exhibition of synchronous sound, the wiring of theatres and the audience reaction to talking films. La Presse also featured a weekend section on arts and amusements where I found a number of articles devoted to sound film.

I am using the term reception as Robert C. Allen used it in his 1990 essay "From Exhibition to Reception: Reflections on the Audience in Film History."[67] For Allen, reception is used as a general concept to mean the most inclusive category of issues surrounding the confrontation between the semiotic and the social in four categories: exhibition; audience; performance and activation. While it may not be possible to construct the audience so as to account for all aspects of the viewers' lives, examinations of particular groupings that highlight commonalities of experience based on the peculiarities of the local audiences can add to our knowledge of early cinemagoing. Exhibition refers to the economic and institutional dimensions of reception. Audience refers to the social meaning ascribed to viewing and in the case of historical study, the social practice of moviegoing. Borrowing from Ien Ang as Allen does, "within the category of audience, I am also talking about the social meanings attached to moviegoing."[68]

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[67] Allen, Robert C. "From Exhibition to Reception: Reflections on the Audience in Film History." Screen 31.4 (Winter 1990) 352.

[68] Ien Ang cited in Allen, Robert C. "From Exhibition to Reception: Reflections on the Audience in Film History." Screen 31.4 (Winter 1990) 352.

I am interested to discern whether there were different meanings ascribed to viewing a new release film on opening night at the Palace or an adaptation of a silent film into a talking film at the Monkland Theatre. I propose, as Janice Radway does, that the "audience is as much a discursive as a social phenomenon."[69] Members of the audience are constructed and solicited through promotions, theatre décor, and what Gunning called the "attractions" of the theatre.[70] All of the social and sensory elements present in the time and space of viewing a film combine to create the performance. Finally, the way all the generative mechanisms that operate variably produce the audience reading of texts over time is the activation. Thus, in relation to activation, the localized study of Montreal when synchronized sound film was being introduced is relevant to the history of film reception in relation to other underlying structures of reception.

In the following chapter, I will examine the historical accounts of the reception of synchronous sound in the United States. As Stokes and Maltby so concisely put it, "A cultural history of cinema must take account of both Hollywood's actual audience and the discursively constructed audiences its movies [and exhibitor's] addressed."[71] Numerous accounts of talking cinema in the United States have been written and many of the early debates of film history are located in the United States. Crafton's extensive examination of the transition to sound includes a final section devoted to the audiences of sound cinema. This thesis is an attempt to take a closer look at issues of what Crafton calls

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[69] Cited in Allen, Robert C. "From Exhibition to Reception: Reflections on the Audience in Film History." Screen 31.4 (Winter 1990) 352. Radway talks about women and the social meaning ascribed to reading romance novels. See Janice Radway, Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 1985).

[70] Allen, "From Exhibition to reception", 352.

[71] Stokes, introduction, Identifying Hollywood's Audiences, 3.

"audienceship". Crafton uses the term "audienceship" to go beyond the understanding in film history of spectatorship—a notion that often connotates an idealized film viewer--to encompass the variance of moviegoers, thrown together by numerous motives at a particular time in the theatre.

2

You Heard it Here First:

Returning to the Arrival of Sync-Sound in the United States

In 1926 a dubious feeling accompanied the coming of sound. The New Yorker World headlined "Talking, Laughing, Singing Screen to Rival The Silent Drama Films" and, as with the arrival of most new technologies, there were differing opinions about the introduction of sound. The oncoming birth of the talkie and the predicted death of the silent film are the most commonly associated myths of this particular technological change. Inevitably, the advent of a new technology sparks claims that an established form of media must die, being replaced by the new. As Donald Crafton points out, the popular tale of Hollywood's shift from silent to sound cinema has become a sort of urban legend. "The components of the popular retelling of sound always represent it as a dividing line between the Old and New Hollywood...sound divides the movies with the assuredness of biblical duality"[72] The sound to silent border has become an organizational axis for the study of film and continues to divide film into two separate worlds where sound would be the victor and silent would be relegated to the back shelf. Alexander Walker even entitled his book on the topic The Shattered Silents: How the Talkies Came to Stay in

[72] Crafton, The Talkies, 1.

support of the legend that claimed the victim of sound was the Art of the Silent cinema.[73] In addition, most historical accounts point to The Jazz Singer as the watershed film to usher in the sound era—a legendary film with a legendary film star. Accounts of this era written by Americans are quick to boast about The Jazz Singer, Al Jolson, the pioneering entrepreneurship of the Warner Brothers and how the "audiences saw them [talkies] as miracles."[74] Most of the success of the talkies is accounted for as a revolution, a smash, an amazing invention that took Hollywood and everybody in it, actors and audiences alike, by storm. Endless accounts of the Hollywood talkies focus on the sheer numbers and speed of the era that witnessed the end of silent film and the rapid conversion to sound. The talkies quickly became one of the inventions in the evolution of film that led "inexorably to the modern movie industry."[75] Take for example Jacob Lewis's account of American sound film in 1939, worth citing at some length.

> Suddenly in 1927 the progress of motion picture technique was brought to an abrupt halt by the invention and adoption of sound. The incorporation of spoken dialogue as a permanent element of motion pictures caused a cataclysm in the industry. Technique lost its sophistication overnight and became primitive once more; every phase of the movie medium reverted to its rudiments. The interest in artistic film expression that had been stimulated by the superior foreign films, now having reached a climax, was stifled in the chaos that the advent of sound produced. The new film principles that were just beginning to crystallize seemed destined for the

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[73] Alexander Walker, The Shattered Silents: How the Talkies Came to Stay (New York: Wm. Morrow, 1979).
[74] Eyman, The Speed of Sound, 27.
[75] Ibid., 27.

> dump heap, and directors, stars, writers, musicians, and foreign talent who had succeeded in the era of the "silents" found themselves unwanted. Movie art was forgotten as the studio doors were flung open to stage directors, Broadway playwrights, vaudeville singers, and song-and-dance teams. Voice, sound, noise, were all that now mattered. Diction schools sprang up; everyone took singing lessons; voice tests became the rage; speech filled the ears of the movie capitol.
>
> The year 1929 was literally a time of sound and fury. What lay ahead?[76]

Lewis's statement about the impact of sound technology on the industry, though it amounts to one paragraph at the end of a chapter, is part of an everlasting account that has just recently been questioned by historians and film and cultural theorists. He goes on to treat film history as an account of texts and prominent directors in the American movie industry but he does not continue with the commentary on sound to any degree other than the rant cited above.

The urge to situate specific films as markers is a component of the life and death cycle that is a trope of technological discourse. The birth of a new technology heralds an automatic death knell for whatever it will foreseeably replace. More often than not the death cry is premature, the birth announcement late. The case is no different in the Hollywood history of the talkies. "You Ain't Heard Nothin' Yet," Al Jolson's famous line first audible in The Jazz Singer is often equated with the memory of the first talkie in prominent historical writing. Andrew Sarris' book bearing the famous phrase as a title

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[76] Lewis, Jacob, The Rise of the American Film (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939) 334.

perpetuates the myth that it all started with The Jazz Singer.[77] This film has gone down in history and on many printed pages as the first exhibited talking picture and the watershed film to mark the transition from silent to sound.

Far from being the first exhibited talking picture, The Jazz Singer, a part-talkie,[78] is not the best measuring point between silent and sound cinema. The film is not even the most popular and well-received film according to Crafton's analysis of box office records.[79] The exhibition of The Jazz Singer in 1927 corresponded to Warner's plunge into exhibiting talking films and investing in the wiring of theatres. More prominently, Warner's had joined Western Electric to promote sound film. The film marked the grand departure on the part of the major studios to go ahead with talking film. "Warners broke the logjam that had blocked the introduction of sound equipment (with its huge investment) to the nation's movie theatres."[80] Notably, Al Jolson was already one of the most famous vaudeville stars commanding a salary of $100,000 per year.[81] Jolson helped the film go down in the privileged historical place it has showing that history too may be influenced by celebrity. In his analysis, Crafton finds that accounts of the film are consistently intertwined with stories about Jolson.[82]

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[77] Sarris, Andrew, "You Ain't Heard Nothin' Yet" The American Talking Film History and Memory, 1927-1949 (New York : Oxford University Press, 1998).
[78] Part-talkie refers to films made with synchronized music and sound effects to match the action and with only dialogue parts that were deemed essential. All other nonessential dialogue would be cut out and replaced with titles.
[79] Crafton, The Talkies, 520-530.
[80] Sarris, "You Ain't Heard Nothin' Yet , 26.
[81] Gomery, The Coming of Sound, 74.
[82] Crafton refutes the legendary status of The Jazz Singer. For a more detailed examination of his media analysis and box office analysis see: Crafton, The Talkies, 520-530.

It can be more advantageous to historical perspective to look beyond the life-death allegory since drawing strict lines does not allow for an exploration of the wider cultural and popular practices that exist. While sync-sound cinema did not cause a sudden change nor a great revolution that shocked audiences, synchronized sound was a new technology and its adoption in film exhibition left a mark on American audiences. In his overview of the transition to sound in American cinema, Donald Crafton refutes the sudden arrival of sound.

> Metaphorically speaking, sound did not arrive in town all at once like an express train. It came gradually, in little crates, over a period of more than ten years... the concept of synchronizing music, noises ("effects"), and speech did not take producers by surprise in the late 1920's.[83]

In response, Crafton's exploration of the audience "investigates how social power was asserted over cinema and how Hollywood tried to contain it; how consumers may or may not have acquired their own power as fans; and finally how moviegoers apparently did not drop everything to see The Jazz Singer in unprecedented droves, as legend has it."[84] Crafton's challenge of The Jazz Singer legend is admirable. He seeks to uncover why the film has gained the status it has. From his investigation of popular press and the box office data Crafton is able to refute claims that indicate the grandiosity of The Jazz Singer. Why is Crafton so concerned with refuting the legend of the film? The answer is not in the conclusion but in the method Crafton uses to investigate. He analyses the media as an attempt to get at the audience and to make the point that 'audienceship' is elusive and influenced by many factors. Furthermore, he refutes the use of geography to

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[83] Crafton, The Talkies, 8.
[84] Ibid., 444.

determine the composition of the audiences. He writes, "...in a country that takes pride in its mobility, we should not assume a demographic correlation between a theatre and its locale."[85] He adds that even if a correlation could be drawn between attendance and geography it would be different for each theatre. Through media and box-office analysis Crafton concluded,

> the case of The Jazz Singer illustrates it is more "efficient" for a historical discourse to have an 'event,' a 'turning point,' a 'revolution,' a Rubicon to cross, than a slow, convoluted, somewhat irrational development, as was the case with the coming of sound. Rewriting events as a drama with the loose ends tied up is helpful in retelling a complicated process as a conventionalized, thus comprehensible, narrative.[86]

Crafton claims the need for Hollywood to reprocess new technology into old forms like the reconfiguration of silent films into sound films and Broadway hits into sound films was due to the lack of real knowledge of film attendees.[87] "The most elusive aspect of assessing 'audienceship' was ascertaining the consumer's preferences, the holy grail for purveyors of popular culture."[88] The relationship between Hollywood and the audiences was a sort of hit-and-miss situation. While the mass audience and the public press tested the models Hollywood proposed, "Hollywood guessed. Audiences came or stayed away"[89] and Hollywood endeavored to anticipate consumer tastes. The introduction of sound to the screen, despite current success of silent cinema, was thought

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[85] Ibid., 520.
[86] Ibid., 530.
[87] Ibid., 536.
[88] Ibid., 536.
[89] Ibid., 536.

by some to be the force to bring a new audience to the cinema. "Talking pictures became the rage... The industry went batty on the subject of dialogue" recalled William Seiter, the director of First National.[90] Eyman also suggests The Jazz Singer did not mark a beginning of talking productions. He writes,

> ...talking pictures existed for years before The Jazz Singer. The desire for synchronized sound arose simultaneously with the possibility of projecting images. From the beginning, the cinema abhorred silence; the cinema *needed* some sort of sound, if only to cover up the distracting noises of the projector and the shuffling of the audience.[91]

While Crafton claims "[t]here was no watershed film" to separate the silents from the modern age of the talkies, he does say 1929-1930 was the peak of theatres making the switch from silent to sound which explains Sarris' reference to the year 1929 as "a time of sound and fury."[92] While some of the first sound films were exhibited in 1927-1928 it was a gradual and systematic changeover in the industry. Historians studying the arrival of sound in an economic model agree with Crafton's claim that the arrival of synchronous sound was not a revolution but an evolution. Gomery explains the changes as the interaction of many complex forces and the decisions made by the industry's "profit maximizing businessmen."[93] Scott Eyman is able to give an insider's historical account by very successfully tapping into the memories of those who shared somehow in the sound era as entrepreneurs, theatre owners and technicians, weaving together interviews and archival documents from patent applications to diaries and industry correspondence

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[90] Ibid., 532.
[91] Eyman, The Speed of Sound, 25-6.
[92] Crafton, The Talkies, 4.
[93] Gomery, The Coming of Sound, 445.

not to mention working with and combining the expertise of historians and theorists like Douglas Gomery and Russell Merritt. While Eyman says the book covers 1926-1930, it begins long before that with accounts of some of the first experiments in sound in the United States. In a lively, upbeat, informative flow, Eyman's pursuit to fill in the details and color of the sound era includes all the ingredients of a movie plot: brilliant ideas, patents, battles, copyright swindles and the rise and the fall of businessmen and actors. While he discovers some pretty impressive stories, he comes up short on recounting the experience of audiences and the reception of synchronous sound in the United States. Eyman's depth in all other areas and lack in audience information seems to support suggestions that the inward looking film industry went ahead with day-to-day business somewhat oblivious to their markets and audiences.

Gomery claimed industry officials were rallying reasons and ammunition in a stand of opposition to talkies. Fearful of an expensive, complicated and upsetting change in the industry, movie officials, screenwriters and actors deep in the traditional art of silent filmmaking adopted a puritan approach to talking films. Henry Carr, a journalist and screenwriter sided against any changes, "the public has seen many lovely girls on the screen, and handsome sheiks. To each one they have given an imaginary voice. In real life, some of them talk like sick peacocks."[94] He concluded that many fires of movie fame would be doused forever were they suddenly to talk. The cards would have to be reshuffled. Despite the defense of silent cinema as a preferred indulgence of audiences, and even claims that audiences desired the dark, silence of film theatres, the industry leaders Warner and Fox eventually sided with the camp of talkie promotionists.

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[94] Eyman, The Speed of Sound, 105.

As Gomery declares, the majors did not rush into the production of talkies; they preplanned each step and the level of industry integration is proof of that. As William's claims, "majority cinema, in both silent and sound periods, can be reasonably seen as the flowering of a whole body of drama, theatre and entertainment, which in its essential interests and methods preceded film but was then enhanced and made much more widely available by it."[95] However, the diffusion of sound was rapid after the industry officials backed the innovation. Though the fundamental developments for sound had been in the laboratories of inventors, offices of professors and electrical conglomerates for years, manufactures had to 'sell' the idea to the industry producers and to audiences if they were going to successfully launch sound cinema.[96] Eyman discovered an early example of audience enthusiasm for sound. According to Eyman's account, at the premier of Don Juan (Alan Crosland, 1926), the audience was not prepared for such perfect synchronization. The seats to the show were reportedly sold out at $5.00 and Variety claimed the results of sound had preceded the audience's expectations; "the house applauded, cheered and stamped its feet."[97] As the film toured, city after city repeated the same stunned enthusiasm. Ads promoting the film gave greater billing to Vitaphone than to the film's star John Barrymore and "Vitaphone was hailed as the latest scientific miracle."[98]

By 1929 the conversion of theatres had sped up considerably. 250 theatres a month were equipped with sound and Western Electric reported 1,082 backorders in the

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[95] Williams, "British Film History," 17.
[96] Crafton, The Talkies, 21.
[97] Eyman, The Speed of Sound, 102-3.
[98] Gomery, The Coming of Sound, 140.

United States, 37 in Canada and 125 in other countries.[99] The format of presentation familiar to early cinema was marked by a combination of commercial entertainment not necessarily focused on the feature film presentation. With the move toward sound, feature films became more common and other programming changes like the elimination of live acts, vaudeville and comedy skits in lieu of short film presentations were adopted in theatres. Where was the audience in all the commotion? Thomas Doherty seeks to write the position of the audience in film history during the sound era by examining archival sources, particularly movie programs and trade journals. While using industry documents Doherty's emphasis is on the temporary position of cinematic audiences. As the legendary Jazz Singer saga demonstrates, trying to recover historical facts about films and audiences in popular reception is difficult. In addition to media sources, Doherty also jogs the memory of aging moviegoers to uncover what he calls the "audible audience."[100] He argues that live performance combined with the exhibition of films and shorts resulted in audiences that were the audible byproduct of a fusion of live theatre and rambunctious vaudeville performance. Doherty proposes that the programming of film exhibition to include live and screen acts produced an audience that was reactionary. Doherty unearths explicit forms of audience response including applauding in the middle of the diegesis (particularly in the middle of moralistic monologues), warm reactions to elaborate montage sequences, whistles and cheers for shorts and cartoons and, catcalls and wails

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[99] Eyman, The Speed of Sound, 219.

[100] Doherty, Thomas. "This is Where We Came In: The Audible Screen and the Voluble Audience of Early Sound Cinema" in American Movie Audiences from the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era., eds. Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes (London: British Film Institute 1999) 143.

for "chirpy commentary and discredited dogma" during the Depression."[101] Aside from confirming conjecture of audience reactions in film history, Doherty also discovers that the film industry would send scouts out to the theatres to gauge the audience reaction to films. Furthermore, Doherty claims that the industry would incorporate cues like "follow the bouncing ball" to encourage the audible audience.[102] While it is often suggested that Hollywood was an industry with no awareness of its audiences,[103] Doherty finds otherwise claiming, for example, that due to the negative reactions and catcalls of the Depression audiences "newsreels shied away from politically charged material."[104]

Undoubtedly the use of sound in film projection changed the way films were exhibited and changed moviegoing. Archival copies of theatre programs document the exhibitor and industry appeals made to the moviegoing public on a daily basis. Doherty finds that "throughout the 30s newspaper ads for motion pictures omitted scheduling information."[105] The ads would clearly indicate the venue, the film to be shown and short subjects but not a time specifically. From this, Doherty concludes that punctuality was not a virtue of spectatorship and he is pressed to look further to explain the everyday lives of moviegoers. He claims that moviegoers would actually call managers at theatres to find out what time films were playing and in many cases crowds would linger outside of movie theatres or in the lobby until the main attraction was announced. When movie theatres adopted a practice of charging less for a matinee presentation than for the evening showing of a film, audience members would try to buy tickets before the critical

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[101] Doherty, "This is Where We Came In," 144.
[102] Stokes and Maltby, Identifying Hollywood's Audiences, 143.
[103] See Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (eds) Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies. London: British Film Institute, 1999 for more on this.
[104] Doherty, "This is Where We Came In," 145.
[105] Ibid., 145.

change in pricing went into effect. They would then take in the evening show at a reduced price.

If there is little known of the audiences in the United States, there seems to be even less known of the Canadian audiences and other audiences around the world who were watching American films. American films had a good portion of the world market. To penetrate linguistic frontiers American films were produced in multiple languages. A slight problem during the era of silent film, dubbing became a headache as far as synchronized sound films and shorts were concerned. While it was not the goal to be simply making silent films into talking films, by early 1929, sound engineers were successfully dubbing sound over old footage by graphting a dialogue scene onto them. The so-called 'goat-gland' movies required actors to record separate dialogue scenes to accompany the film score.[106] Dubbing was an important technique for the American producers to hone because international producers were not making sound films and the Americans wanted to hold onto the world market.

As American films spread throughout the world, the addition of sound sparked fears that brought on movements to censor, control and contain the social effects of film. Crafton claims, "audiences, the media, censors and the film industry's internal custodians were disturbed by the changes they were seeing and hearing."[107] Fears about the power of film to shape the attitudes of viewers resulted in the rise of formal agencies and informal channels like the popular press professing the need to safeguard citizen's from

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[106] Eyman, The Speed of Sound, 208-211. "Goat-gland" referred to the controversial medical practice of surgically implanting goat testes into humans as a cure for impotence. The dialogue scenes would be tacked on to the film as either add-ons or dubbed onto the silent footage.
[107] Crafton, The Talkies, 445.

the negative influence of film. Crafton writes, "Although the efforts of censors and the rhetoric of the popular press may at first seem to be unrelated or antagonistic, these groups had a common goal of defining and restraining the power of film... insisting on issues of quality, propriety, decency and taste was a strategy for channeling the new filmmaking into acceptable forms. Sound was the catalyst."[108] The lack of production units in other countries increased the demand for Hollywood films to be translated and dubbed in order to fulfill the market. Producing soundtracks for distribution posed a complex problem. "Dubbing seemed the best alternative at first, but audiences proved too sensitive to the products of the crude dubbing techniques then available."[109] In one case recorded by Eyman, Laurel and Hardy took matters of translation and dubbing into their own hands. They would make the picture first entirely in English, and then rely on translators to tell them their lines in another language. They would record versions of the first scene in French, German, Spanish and Italian by writing the dialogue phonetically and saying the lines based on the emotion of the English dialogue. Audiences in Barcelona reportedly howled with laughter at the valiant attempts of "Stan Laurel attempting to wrap his Lancashire accent around sensuous Spanish vowels."[110]

By late 1929 Paramount had deemed dubbing to be "very amateurish and hardly worthy of further experimentation."[111] Instead, they turned to subtitling. "Some countries would see complete English-language films with subtitles; for the newly popular musicals, foreign markets would see weird hybrids in which, as a memo stated, 'we take

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[108] Crafton, The Talkies, 445.
[109] Gomery, "The Coming of Sound," 456.
[110] Eyman, The Speed of Sound, 334.
[111] Paramount tried dubbing but reported a slight degree of success and declared it unlikely they would ever use it unless it was perfected. Eyman, 1997: 332.

out the dialogue, retain the dance numbers, and then synchronize the entire picture to a musical score'."[112] While international markets allowed actors like Adolphe Menjou to shoot in French and English thereby capitalizing on his bilingualism, it was costly and time consuming for the studio. The results were often laughable for audiences and generated fear about the spread of American propaganda across borders.

With theatres in Canada being wired for sound as quickly as they could be built concerns for public perceptions and social control arose in Canada too. As of October 30, 1929, Gomery cites 41% of Canada's 1,110 theatres as wired for sound. This was the highest percentage of wired for sound theatres outside of the United States. In contrast, international statistics collected by Gomery show a complete lack of Canadian production in 1929.[113] Voice was not only an aesthetic concern but became a social and cultural one. As Crafton claims:

> Of the many debates circulating around the film industry, the struggle for control over the voice was the most inclusive. Arguments raged over two broad areas: shaping the form of the voice according to preconceived ideals, and restricting the content of language in order to protect the welfare of the listener[114]

While the social debate over voice wages, audiences were voting with their feet against the idea of a movie industry that could exist as half-talking, half-silent. "In the

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[112] Eyman, The Speed of Sound, 332.
[113] Germany in comparison was producing 32% of their total film production in sound films. Franklin S. Irby "Recent and Future Economic Changes in the Motion Picture Field," cited in Gomery, "The Coming of Sound," 347.
[114] Crafton, The Talkies, 447.

beginning, if a picture talked it would do business,"[115] reported theatre owners. Nonetheless, an uncertainty escorted the transition to sound for major studios and audiences. Audiences were beginning to discriminate between sound and talking film as this citation illustrates,

> ...the public would call theatres and demand to know if the film showing was a talking film—if it was just music they wouldn't come because audiences had already heard talkies and that's what they wanted. Although space on the marquees was limited, it was impossible to fit more than one star, the name of the picture and maybe one other word. Different terminologies soon arose to help audiences make their decision about moviegoing... We would put up the word SOUND if the picture had no talk, just music. Otherwise, it was TALK on the marquee.[116]

In addition to the theatre marquee, advertisements also made clear whether the feature film was talking. By March of 1928, theatre operators were sending publicity manuals to their theatres concerning the correct way to advertise Vitaphone. "Shorts were to be called: 'BIG TIME VITAPHONE VAUDEVILLE' and had to be billed above the features. The word 'Vitaphone' was to dominate and no matter how large or how small, the ads must show at a glance the number of acts in the program."[117] The presentation of the films in the context of the cinema and the technology that accompanied sound was what interested audiences. As Raymond Williams points out,

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[115] Eyman, The Speed of Sound, 267.
[116] Ibid., 267.
[117] Ibid., 172. A series of full page ads for Warner Brothers features at the Palace theatre ran in La Presse over the course of a year from 1929 to 1930.

> In the simplest version, film and cinema have been treated as unitary subjects, which are made to disclose their historical stages of development: the early technology and its institutions; the silent film; the sound film; films for television. In what appear more complex versions, tendencies or schools or (very commonly) national 'traditions' are identified within the more general phases: a form of history which can then be developed into a form of criticism—the identification of key directors, actors, techniques, described and evaluated as leading factors in the general historical development."[118]

The desire to group film into categories for the purpose of developing a history has served as organizational and is responsive to the first stage—the who, what, where, when of film history. However, we see that there are misconceptions even in the basic information—take the case of The Jazz Singer—the film whose reputation certainly preceded its reception. This is the reason, as Elsaesser claims, that a new generation of historians is seeking to redraw the boundaries. The problem appears to have been a 'technological deterministic' stance which overemphasizes the impact of new technology and the itemization of its consequences. Williams claims that very little of film history is explicable or predictable from the technological (technical history) or the systematic technologies. Rather, these provided certain new possibilities, at times themselves entailing further technological developments within the general pressures and limits of social and cultural contact.[119] Williams tries to indicate some of the diverse practical ways in which to present an active history rather than a narrated one without creating

[118] Raymond Williams, "British Film History," 9.
[119] Ibid., 14.

headings and summaries under headings.[120] What he has created are four 'bearings' that may be put side by side to present an 'actual history' (Williams' term) rather than what he calls a 'categorical history'. By placing technology and its uses, film and popular culture, modernist culture and established culture on the same plane we can avoid technological determinism and consistently proclaiming that we have a 'new industry' and a 'new art' in each historical evolution.

In the upcoming chapter I will situate my findings from the Montreal popular press in a cultural frame. There are many similarities that exist in the reception of films in the United States and Canada. Moving north across the border to Canada, the city of Montreal was at its peak of theatrical entertainment featuring the same popular films as the Strand and the Roxy in nearby New York. As a foreign market of Hollywood, Canadians were screening Hollywood films in both English and French versions. During the early silent era some translators were hired to do translation in French outloud. By the 1920s many silent films screened with bilingual titles and a certain number of talkies were dubbed.[121] Chapter three begins the examination of the popular press during the years when Canadian audiences first heard synchronous sound films. The change in exhibition practices that followed the innovation of talking films challenged habitual cinemagoing in the city and denotes the moment at which a new cinema audience emerged. I will examine popular press accounts of the first exhibitions using Movietone and Vitaphone technology, the discursive appeals made to the audiences, the reactions to synchronous sound, and the changes in exhibition that coincided with the introduction of

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[120] Ibid., 12.

[121] Dave Lanken, Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884-1938. (Waterloo, Ontario: Penumbra Press, 1993) 27.

sound to determine the appeals made to the audiences of Montreal. The experience of synchronous sound cinema differed slightly in Quebec from the reception in the United States. What we can draw from the American debates that have taken place over the introduction of synchronous sound cinema is the diversity of the experience across the country. The experience of sound cinema was not identical for all audiences regardless of the films being exhibited. Moreover, the work done in the United States has demonstrated that the myths about audience reception and films like The Jazz Singer can be exposed by reexaming the history of reception. At the peak of theatre wiring in the United States, Montreal experienced a boom in construction of theatres. Audiences were drawn as much to the cinema as to the film even with the novelty of sound technology, which demonstrates the intertextuality of cinemagoing. The advent of sound to the cinema allowed new discourse to emerge, which need to be examined in a synchronic manner. Knowing the debates that have taken place in the United States informs the inquiry of reception in Canada.

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de Forest's Debut in Montreal[122]

The de Forest Phonofilm was being used in exhibitions and demonstrations in Montreal in 1926. The novelty and illusion of the new innovation in sound cinema was publicized in a few articles in the Montreal Daily Star and La Presse. Headlines such as "Eddie Cantor Shows How Phonofilm Gives a Complete Illusion" on February 26, 1926 and "Eva Leoni Sings on Phonofilm and Voice is Amazingly Brilliant" on April 3, 1926 are perfect examples of the eagerness associated with the demonstrations. Actor's voices were recorded on phonograph records and whether the system was de Forest Phonofilm or what was later introduced as Warner's Vitaphone and Fox Movietone, they all used records or sound-on-disc, to provide synchronized sound. At the Capitol Theatre, Phonofilm was advertised as an "Added Attraction" to its regular program featuring orchestral, musical and silent film features *(Figure 1)*. Both Eddie Cantor and Eva Leoni were at the time well known and loved U.S. stage performers. Eddie Cantor's performance was praised for the success in "translating for the public the personal factor

[122] Although he was born "De Forest," throughout his adult life the inventor spelled his own name "de Forest" according to James A. Hijiya, Lee de Forest and the Fatherhood of Radio, Bethlehem, (Pa.: Lehigh University Press, 1992)152. Crafton also notes this spelling.

of the human voice."[123] The Phonofilm was further praised as a device capable of projecting the personality of the performer, the illusion of perfect synchronization and having "the effect on the beholder as though he were actually watching human figures dancing on stage before him."[124]

The first demonstrations of sound film used already well-known performers as evidence of the replicating ability of the equipment. Rather than use an unknown, the status both stars enjoyed as vaudeville entertainers stood as a testimony of the legitimacy of the new technology and of the ability to mechanically reproduce sound and to do it well. Many reports exemplify the authenticity or the ability of the equipment to reproduce the voices of the stars. La Presse coverage emphasized the permanence of the recorded sound-on-disc and offered an explanation of how the de Forest technology worked as well as claiming the exhibition was proof of the technological prowess of the Phonofilm.[125] The comparison between the recorded and the "real" voice of the star was further demonstrated by having the star tour with the demonstration of sound. The real Eva Leoni toured with her Phonofilm recording (*Figure 2*). "Audiences will first hear the recorded version then see the real person "step out of the film...and hear her actual voice."[126]

To be sure the audience understood what they were to take away from the comparison between the real and the reproduced, the paper was clear to indicate.

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[123] "Eddie Canto Shows How Phonofilm Gives a Complete Illusion," Montreal Daily Star 27 Feb. 1926: 23.
[124] Ibid., 23.
[125] "Mme Eva Leoni et le Phono-film De Forest," La Presse 3 April 1926: 41.
[126] "Eva Leoni Sings on Phonofilm and Voice is Amazingly Brilliant," Montreal Daily Star 3 April, 1926: 20.

> It will thus afford an unique opportunity of comparing the Phonofilm reproduction with the actual human voice singing, and this will constitute a notable criterion of the accuracy and degree of realism that have been attained on the Phonofilm up to date.[127]

The emphasis on reproduction was extended to all levels of the performance and the tell-all style of reporting that told audiences exactly what to expect from a performance. This style emphasized what the audience should look forward to in a production and how to interpret what they see and hear. Take for example this account of Eva Leoni's performance in La Presse; "When Mlle Leoni's voice is heard afterwards it will be found that the Phonofilm reproduction is indistinguishable from the actual sung notes."[128] Furthermore, it is reported that she will wear the exact same costume to recreate the atmosphere so that the performance "will be more realistic."[129]

In the early demonstrations, the illusion the Phonofilm provided was something of awe as was the idea that not every star was capable of demonstrating the Phonofilm illusion. Indeed it seemed only certain actors made good test models for the sound system. Of Eddie Cantor, it was claimed, "he has tested and proved to be successful in translating for the public the personal factor of the human voice."[130] The ability of the recorded version to portray the personality of the star was of concern to the public according the press accounts. "The personality of the artist was projected from the screen across the footlights, and simultaneously with that his voice comes from the screen

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[127] Ibid., 20.
[128] Ibid., 20.
[129] Ibid., 20.
[130] "Eddie Cantor Shows How Phonofilm Gives a Complete Illusion," Montreal Daily Star 27 February 1926: 23.

synchronizing perfectly with his dancing and the movements of his lips."[131] Press accounts emphasized the precision of the synchronization in early experiments which both amazed and impressed spectators of sound demonstrations. The precision of the movements of actor's lips, with the sound of their voices was in part represented as the illusion of the new technology. The following excerpt from the Montreal Daily Star promoted the Phonofilm as an invention that was both ripe with potential and nearly perfected. Along with Eddie Cantor's vaudeville performance a short film featuring the Strand Theatre Ballet group from New York was exhibited in Montreal. It was not unusual for a theatre program to mix vaudeville acts, orchestral overtures and the Ballet piece and in this case, the Phonofilm demonstration. The varied acts were used to show off the ability of the Phonofilm sound technology to enhance all kinds of performance.

> Another angle to the Phonofilm possibilities is provided by the dancing of the famous Strand Theatre Ballet (New York) to the music of Liszt's Second Hungarian Rahpsody. Here synchronization of rhythmic motion with musical rhythm is demonstrated beyond the possibility of error, and the effect on the beholder is as though he were actually watching human figures dancing on the stage before him. As an illusion, it is well-nigh complete.[132]

The performance of Ben Bernie's Roosevelt orchestra in New York was also represented in the press as a success in synchronization *(Figure 3)*. "It is a remarkable tribute to the accuracy and the comprehensive nature of the Phonofilm that it can achieve such results with jazz music in particular, when the numerous changes in tempo and in tone qualities

[131] Ibid., 23.
[132] Ibid., 23.

of certain instruments are borne in mind."[133] With the orchestral demonstration of de Forest's Phonofilm came the new concept of mass sound and solo sound reproduction of which a similar amazement was expressed at the accuracy of the technology to reproduce the different, distinct sounds.

> One of the most remarkable features of the de Forest Phonofilm is that it records sound in mass as accurately and as convincingly as it does individual sounds. Thus an instrumental trio is reproduced by the Phonofilm just as clearly as a solo singer. A solo instrumentalist is no more vividly recreated than is an orchestra."[134]

The introduction of sound to film with synchronous music and sound effects was not always received with praise. Saturday Night Magazine wrote the following about Mary Pickford's screen masterpiece "Little Annie-Rooney" despite the popularity of the Monteal native as "The World's Sweetheart": "If this putting songs into pictures should become the movie rage, the possibilities are somewhat appalling— but at any rate Mary Pickford is the pioneer in the field and will not suffer even under keen competition..."[135] Mary Pickford was hailed in the article as the girl who could sing the old songs, who could bring song into pictures and who could be the ambassador for song in pictures.

The de Forest Phonofilm was of course, in tradition of new inventions, compared to other existing mechanisms, denounced and proclaimed all at once. In the article that announced Eva Leoni's performance, the invention of the Phonofilm was compared to the radio. "One of the significant facts about the Phonofilm is that it offers a permanent

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[133] "Orchestral Record By Phonofilm Brings Out Fullest Harmony," Montreal Daily Star 6 March 1926: 23.
[134] Ibid., 23.
[135] Saturday Night 9 January 1926: 7.

record, as compared with the inevitably temporary record of the radio."[136] The emphasis in the article was on the permanence rendered possible via the Phonofilm record versus the temporality of radio broadcast. "What is heard over the radio can never be recaptured. What is heard via the Phonofilm can be recorded again and again, and be repeated for future years. It is an historic record, as well as one for immediate enjoyment."[137] At this early stage we do not see anything written about the replacing of one technology with another or the 'life & death' cycle.

Throughout the year of 1926 other Phonofilm demonstrations were presented in theatres in Montreal including a sequence of Phonofilms presented by United Amusement Theatres. Twelve de Forest films were presented at the Rialto, Papineau, Corona, Belmont and Plaza theatres with one new program each week. The series presented such acts as the internationally famous Radio Franks, Ben Bernie and his band and other well-known vaudeville acts.[138] In addition to variety and vaudeville presentations on Phonofilm, there were also political speeches and newsreels shown in Montreal theatres; for example, the arrival of Colonel Lindbergh in Washington and New York was presented at the Papineau Theatre. Audiences were able to see the "greatest welcome ever accorded an American citizen" and it was proclaimed in the press "the cheering crowd can be heard, bands playing and comments of the multitudes."[139]

While the French press advertised the demonstrations of the Phonofilm less than the English press, announcements were of a more political-economic nature. In the

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[136] "Eva Leoni Sings on Phonofilm and Voice is Amazingly Brilliant," Montreal Daily Star 3 April, 1926: 20.
[137] Ibid., 20.
[138] "United Amusement Theatres to Feature Series of Phonofilms," Montreal Daily Star 21 August 1926: 18.
[139] Ibid., 18.

section of the paper entitled "Electricité," the General Electric Company declared that after years of research, the Company had successfully created an apparatus that would allow audiences to hear the actors projected on screen speak.[140] Furthermore, Western Electric stated that the synchronization between actors and voice was perfected. In an effort of self-promotion they added that it was not necessary to use a different projector rather simply add the sound apparatus to the previous or existing system.[141] Earlier in 1926, La Presse announced that Warner Brothers Vitaphone Company rented the Manhattan Opera House with the goal of making films with synchronized sound and visuals under the headline "Le Cinema Musical."[142]

An article published on May 1, 1926 was outwardly critical of the lack of ingenuity in the presentation of films to the public. According to the article, the music that accompanied films was predictable and text based. For instance, "storms, disasters, burglars or villains have their own tune, anything British is accompanied by 'Land of Hope and Glory' or 'Rule, Britannia,' and no matter what surface horses gallop on, be it sand or cobblestone, the movement is accompanied by the same sound."[143] The sentiment expressed in the article indicated that sound in film is limited at this time, the same few melodies and tunes are tinkled out on numerous occasions, even when it is not fitting, and audiences were growing bored and tired with the monotony of the recorded sounds. The repetition of popular melodies like "The Prisoner's Song" in unrelated situations seemed to be ruining the appeal of musical scores in films. An article in the Montreal Daily Star

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[140] "Films Parlants Qui Seraient Parfaits" La Presse 14 February 1927: 68.
[141] Ibid., 68.
[142] "Le Cinema Musical," La Presse, 22 May, 1926.
[143] Silver Screen, "Ingenuity needed in the presentation of films to the public," Montreal Daily Star 1 May 1926: 22.

claimed. "It [The Prisoner's Song] has mad a gigantic appeal to all classes of people, is really a beautiful piece of melody and poetry, but besides being used as the main theme in the accompaniment of a melodramatic film... it has also been used with that clever comic strip Felix The Cat... Next week it will probably be used during the solemnization of a film wedding!"[144] The complaints continued to include the tunes that accompanied caption illustrations like "Next Week's Feature Presentation." The audience was reportedly tired of watching the same fairy pop out of a chest to wave her wand at a title and of watching the "Camera Man" grind his machine though, "we sincerely appreciate his efforts... his patience and his ability to show us all the most interesting places."[145]

In October of 1927 the new Lon Chaney film, Mockery (Benjamin Christensen, 1927) opened at the Capitol. "The best electric phonograph in the world will have its exclusive demonstration in Montreal"—The Brunswick Super Panatrope *(Figure 4)* is declared a marvel of science, of reproduction and of acoustics.[146] The week after the Super Panatrope demonstration was Gala French week, and the Capitol featured an exclusive French program. However, no advertising for the Super Panatrope appeared again at the Capitol or any other theatre in the city and the device seemed to disappear as quickly as it appeared. Despite the majority population of French speakers in Montreal, no theatres were devoted to French only sound films until 1931. This does not mean that theatre managers ignored the French-speaking citizens of Montreal. Certain theatres in the city would periodically exhibit French-language films like 'Semaine de Gala Français,' at the Palace. Theatres also advertised French language versions of films or

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[144] Ibid., 22.
[145] Ibid., 22.
[146] Advertisement for "Mockery" La Presse 2 October 1927.

special screenings on weekdays, usually at times that would not interfere with the regular weekly schedule of English programming. For example, French language films were offered at 9:30am and 11:30pm.

As mentioned previously, the French press seemed to embrace American cinema. For example, a regular feature in La Presse entitled "Les Productions Americains Sur Le Marché Mondial" was devoted to the American productions on the world market.[147] In 1926 and 1927 there appeared to be an admiration of the American cinema if not for the products, for the position in world entertainment. Evidence suggested that the French speaking public in Montreal was attending the cinema due to the dominance of Hollywood films and English language presentations. La Presse advertised the same films as the Montreal Daily Star and although La Presse generally had less commentary about the cinema in Montreal it seemed the moviegoing public in Montreal was being addressed in much the same way whether they were English or French speaking.

The practice of moviegoing in Montreal was a rather hot topic in the press. There was some obvious confusion about going to the cinema due to various historical accounts of moviegoing that claim audiences were not regulated by the hours dictated on a program of exhibition.[148] Audiences, accustomed to the live performances of vaudeville would enter, come, and go as they desired and so did the same with moviegoing. The title of Thomas Doherty's article on audible audiences emphasizes this point, "this is where we came in," refers to the moment where audience members would recognize that they began viewing the show, whether in the middle or near the end. In Montreal there was an

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[147] "Les Productions Americains Sur Le Marché Mondial" feature in La Presse would list all the films from the major American companies that were playing in the world by title and principle actor. The first list I came across was the 22 May 1926.
[148] Doherty, "This is Where We Came In," 145.

emphasis on arriving on time for the showing of a film or being forced into a bad seat in the theatre and inconveniencing those who had arrived punctually. Accounts in the press emphasized that everyone ought to know the horrible outcome of arriving too late to the cinema, as it is illustrated in the following excerpt from the Montreal Daily Star.

> The last ten rows of any theatre, like the first five, leave much to be desired from the viewpoint of the audience at least...oh! how the audience suffers during those hours when the raucous voices of ushers inform all and sundry that there is "Only one seat left in the front row;" "Standing room only downstairs;" or "Seats in the first balcony." Then, as the crowd grows larger and larger, the shouts include such admonitions as "To the left, please!" or merely "Keep behind the brass rail!" Such shouts as these kept up not only through the latter half of most feature pictures, but even during the musical part of the program, constitute a grave source of annoyance...[149]

According to the article things would calm down between 8:45 and 9:00, the time before the exodus would begin at 9pm. Then, "pandemonium reigns again for fifteen minutes or so."[150] La Presse advised moviegoers to attend the matinee showing of the film or to get to the cinema on time to avoid the chaos.[151] The Montreal Daily Star continued to urge the public to push for more reserved seating to avoid the inconvenience for those who arrive on time and late alike. "Such a condition has obtained for a very long time in Montreal, and will obtain until we, the public, wake up to the fact that we make these

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[149] "The Last Ten Rows!," Montreal Daily Star 27 March 1926: 20.
[150] Ibid., 20.
[151] Advertisment for Theatre Francais "Attraction Supplementarie Dr. Lee De Forest Phonofilm" La Presse 17 April 1926.

movie theatres possible and that if we care to exert ourselves sufficiently we can make or break them." Going to the theatre and going to the movies were seen to have only slight differences and the proposed solution of reserved seats seemed to be an idea adopted from the theatre as this citation illustrates "...of course, regular hours for the arrival and departure of audiences would have to be established, just as they are in legitimate theatres, with the only difference that movies can give two shows a night."[152] Although the suggestion was made for reserved seats it did not catch on in cinemas in Montreal.

If moviegoers in Montreal were feeling empowered at being able to come and go as they pleased, they were thrown for a loop when the Provincial Authorities decide cinemas should be closed on Sundays. The Act, entitled the Federal Lord's Day Observance Act called for the closure of Motion Picture Houses in Montreal, other places of Amusement and small stores and was poised for adoption in early 1928.[153] The adoption of the law was against public sentiment and the majority of Montreal cinemagoers responded feverishly. A petition declared that 75 per cent of the laboring public went to the movies on Sundays. A letter written to the editor, "Workers and Sunday Shows" illustrates the public desire for Sunday entertainment:

> Sir, — There is an old proverb that "the voice of the people is the voice of God"; and the voice of the public is for open Sunday shows. It is all right for the rich people to who have their cars, gramophones, radios, etc., to enjoy life outside or in their homes on Sundays, but the masses of the people are depending on a show for their amusement and are looking forward to it all week. The working man and his family go downtown to a

[152] "The Last Ten Rows!," Montreal Daily Star 27 March 1926: 20.
[153] "To The Public of Montreal," petition, Montreal Daily Star 18 February 1928: 11.

> cheap place: and everybody has spend joyfully a few hours. Where is the harm? That show is enjoyed immensely, and thousands of readers will agree with me; Is Montreal going to become the seat of "blue laws"? Different people have different ideas about how to make use of their day of rest. Let each individual use his or her own judgment how to use it.[154]

Those members of the Montreal public who were working a six-day work week and had only Sunday off for amusement and relaxation consider going to the cinema a privilege they deserved.[155] The fire in the Laurier theatre on Sunday 9 of January 1927 had already restricted viewing for children. The catastrophic fire took the lives of 78 children who, on a cold winter afternoon, were allowed to go to the cinema without their parents. This was a regular practice in Quebec but the tragedy of the fire and the deaths of the children changed Sunday viewing in the city. Under the direction of Judge Boyer a review of cinemagoing practices was conducted with the particular goal of ending Sunday moviegoing. Despite the impact of the Laurier fire, Montrealers continued to attend Sunday movies and they fought for their right to attend the cinema on Sundays. Finally, in 1928, a law was passed that allowed Montrealers to return to the cinema on Sundays with the exception of children under the age of 16 who were banned completely from the cinema unless there was an outdoor screening.[156]

The cinema cannot be underestimated as a popular source of cheap entertainment for Montrealers. In the press, the cinema and theatre are often compared as sites of leisure and entertainment. This increased, as the two forms of entertainment were

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[154] (Mrs.) Rose Stone, letter, "Workers and Sunday Shows," Montreal Daily Star 18 February 1926: 11.
[155] "To The Public of Montreal," petition, Montreal Daily Star 18 February 1928: 11.
[156] Véronneau, Montréal Ville de Cinéma, 10.

perceived as threats to one another. The fear that the talking film and the popularity of synchronized sound would spell the end for live drama resulted in frequent debates of each of the forms merits. S. Morgan Powell, the Montreal Daily Star writer in arts and entertainment at the time, was an outspoken advocate of legitimate theatre and an activist for the "little theatre" in Montreal. He was not opposed to cinematic exhibition, but the reader is often left with the very certain feeling that if there had to be a choice between one and the other, S. Morgan Powell would abandon the cinema in a flash. Powell had been with the Montreal Daily Star since 1908 when he joined as news editor. He wrote many articles on art, drama, and music, which he contributed to newspapers in Canada, United States and Europe. He was also an accomplished author and was outspoken in his position as the Literary and Dramatic Arts Editor.[157] As we will see, he was a prominent voice in matters pertaining to the new talkies.

The end of the 1925-26 season was deemed as sounding the first death-knell for vaudeville. Comments in the press indicated that there were now so many forms of amusement for Montréalers to choose from that only a certain number could survive. It was declared "the public has so much money available for amusements...if their outlay is increased in any one field, it is automatically limited in the other fields."[158] In addition the Phonofilm exhibitions had been successful and vaudeville acts that used to be performed live were being recorded and exhibited on the screen with sound from the new device. The focus of the discussion in the press was to oppose the existence of film with the existence of legitimate theatre—a theme found running through the discourse of early

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[157] The Canadian Who's Who, vol. IV, Samuel Morgan Powell (Toronto: Trans-Canada Press, 1948).

[158] Morgan Powell, editorial, "The End of the Season," Montreal Daily Star 8 May 1926: 22

sound film exhibition. As film began to be presented with sound synchronization and recorded sound tracks, it became obvious that film would be a competitor for live entertainment. Proponents of live theatre expressed concern and fear for the survival of legitimate theatre. Morgan Powell noted "the film can never replace the first-class spoken drama, because mechanics can never be substituted successfully for the human factor."[159] Despite Powell's efforts to preserve the art of theatre in Montreal the feeling that the cinema was positioning itself to take over popular amusement was noticeable.

The beginning of the 1927-28 season marked a period of change and excitement in exhibition and theatre policy in Montreal. New theatres were being built and a sense of anticipation surrounded moviegoing. Evidence of the enthusiasm was revealed in a cartoon featured in La Presse for the grand opening of the Rivioli theatre *(Figure 5)*. Montrealers were depicted as doing anything to get to the Riviolo including swimming across the St. Lawrence Seaway from the South Shore to the Island of Montreal, prisoners breaking out of Bordeau, patients leaving hospitals claiming they are no longer sick, the rich living in "Ville Modele" asking their chauffeur "James" to drive them to the Rivioli and a giant parade was making its way North from Park LaFontaine.[160] The Famous Players Canadian Corporation owned The Palace, known as the prestige movie house in Montreal, and the Capitol, one of the largest and most distinguished cinemas in the city. The theatres, located on St. Laurent and St. Catherine Street respectively, had adopted new policies to promote and regulate their exhibition of films. The takeover of The Palace in 1922 (previously known as the Allen built by the Allen family) by the

[159] "First Recorded Film Encore Takes Place in the Berlin Press Club," Montreal Daily Star 8 May 1926: 22.
[160] "Un dixieme theatre de 'United Amusement Corporation," La Presse 11 December 1926.

Famous Players Canadian Corporation should have ended the Capitol vs. Allen theatre duel[161] in the city. However it seemed the two first-run theatres were still competing against one another. Palace manager Mr. George Rotsky had announced a new policy of "big-run" picture presentation wherein the theatre would show the foremost European and American productions. The Palace acted to uphold its self-awarded reputation of "Canada's Exceptional Amusement Palace" as it described itself in the silent era. The Capitol, in turn, announced that to inaugurate the season and the seventh anniversary of the theatre, it would remain highly competitive in the city.[162] The announcement boasted about financial clout and the ability to offer the best setting to the moviegoing public of Montreal; "with a capital of fifteen million dollars, the controlling company is in a position to serve the Canadian public with the best available pictures from coast to coast, and to supplement these with additional forms of amusement that cannot be found in houses less fortunately conditioned."[163]

Shortly after announcing their new policies and positioning themselves as contenders in popular entertainment, the managers of the Palace and the Capitol made the technological changes to their theatres that would truly advance them ahead of the competition. The Palace was first, after a succession of announcements regarding new technological capabilities and experiments in sound being carried out in the United States. An article published in the Montreal Daily Star from New York demonstrated the coordinated effort the film industry took when bringing in the new synchronized sound

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[161] Lanken, Montreal Movie Palaces, 98-101.
[162] "Capitol Celebrates Seventh Birthday In Montreal Next Week," Montreal Daily Star 3 September 1927: 22.
[163] "New Policy for the Palace Theatre for the 1927-1928 Season," Montreal Daily Star 3 September 1927: 22.

systems.[164] This was not a random act of technological advancement in any way. The Engineering resources of Radio Corporation, General Electric Company and Westinghouse Electric & Manufacturing Company along with the distribution of Film Booking Office Pictures Corporation had combined to present "a newly perfected device for sound reproduction in motion picture."[165] The new device was proclaimed to be so cheap that it would be readily available to even the smallest theatres in the country and what's more "the Radio Corporation's device will not exclusively be held by Film Booking Office, but would be available for the entire motion picture industry, and in order to place the device before the public it had been decided to introduce it through Film Booking Office, which was the largest non-theatre owning motion picture group in the country."[166] The benefit to theatre owners was stressed in the proclamation that the new devices, including a new sound reproducer, television and radio synchronization devices, would be at the command of motion pictures and even the smallest theatre owner.[167] What followed this announcement was the excitement of change and the beginning of a new chapter in film exhibition based on the adoption of a new technology. The cultural act of filmgoing in Montreal changed sooner than some had expected. La Presse headlined an article on the first talking film being made by Paramount in August of 1928. The film, to be entitled Burlesque, was claimed to be the first talking film and could be expected in theatres in about a month.[168] The article stated that not all the

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[164] "New Invention for Synchronizing Film and Speech Announced," Montreal Daily Star 7 January 1928: 15.
[165] Ibid., 15.
[166] Ibid., 15.
[167] "Ibid., 15.
[168] I think the film What Price Burlesque (Sammy Cohen,)1929 is what the anticipated Burlesque became. What Price Burlesque was a Vitaphone Sound Mix.

dialogue would be spoken. The sense of something very exciting on the horizon was expressed in La Presse as the article warned of the rapid adaptation of theatres to accompany the new invention claiming that in five years, there may not be any silent cinema in America.[169] The following chapter begins with the fulfillment of this prophecy—the arrival of synchronous sound talking films in Montreal, the first stop on the Canadian map. The lead up to sound exhibition was characterized first by the adoption of new feature-film policies for the Palace and the Capitol. Then, at the end of the 1927 season, the Palace announced it was closing for renovations. Meanwhile, articles began to appear in the press, with greater frequency, about the alliances between radio, the film industry and the electrical companies.

[169] "Ce qu'on fait a Hollywood," La Presse 18 August 1928: 27.

4

They All Talk in the Important Scenes

> I invite you to the brightest and most luxurious theatre in Montreal, offering a program that is the acme of perfection. For the first time you will see and hear with perfect synchronized sound effects the famous Wm. Fox Movietone features and novelties.[170]

The Palace Theatre, under the management of George Rotsky, was not only the first theatre in Canada to present talking film, but as La Presse claimed, also the first theatre in the entire Empire.[171] At the start of the 1928 season in Montreal the Palace made headlines with a renovation project that cost a proclaimed 100,000 dollars and was performed by none other than the master of theatre interiors, Emmanual Briffa. Making headlines was exactly what the Palace theatre wanted to achieve. It was the first theatre in Canada to be equipped with Fox Movietone and Vitaphone synchronized sound systems installed by the Northern Electric Company.[172] Surprisingly, little was published before the reopening of the theatre and there was little upsurge in the press about the addition of

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[170] Advertisement for Street Angel, Montreal Daily Star 1 September 1928: 22. Cited from an address to the public made by the manager of the Palace Theatre in Montreal, Mr. George Rotsky.
[171] "Grand changements au theatre Palace," La Presse 25 August 1928: 61.
[172] "Grands changements au theatre Palace," La Presse 25 August 1928: 61.

a sound system. In a single paragraph on August 25, 1928, buried amongst the film ads, La Presse reported that the Palace was closing for renovations that would include the installation of both Fox Movietone and Vitaphone systems making it the first theatre in Montreal to be able to show films with synchronized sound effects, music and dialogue. The article tucked into La Presse was the only announcement informing the public what to expect from the renovations. When the Palace announced it's reopening, the press was quick to proclaim a list of firsts. La Presse reported the Palace was the first theatre in the Dominion of Canada to exhibit synchronized sound film. George Rotsky was declared the first theatre manager in Canada to bring Movietone to the screen and the first film he would present was Street Angel (Frank Borzage, 1928). In the ads for Street Angel, *(Figures 6, 7 and 8a)* George Rotsky wrote a short address to the public where he revealed that during the month of the Palace closure, it had been transformed into the most luxurious theatre in Montreal. The night it reopened, the program included seven items, six of them films of which four had synchronized sound, and one live performance from the Palace Symphony Orchestra led by Maurice Meerte.[173] From that day on, the Palace referred to itself as "Home of the Perfect Talkie" and within months the Palace orchestra led by Maurice Meerte lost its spot and the Palace shows were entirely film.[174] Many other theatres followed this lead and the talkies were later blamed for pushing live musical accompaniments and entertainment in the form of variety acts out of the cinema.

The program that night was reportedly well received and La Presse claimed the new invention of Movietone touched on perfection as the synchronized sounds were so

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[173] Lanken, Montreal Movie Palaces, 103.

[174] Maurice Meerte and the Capitolians became the orchestra at the Capitol theatre shortly after the Palace was wired. (See *Figure 13*)

perfectly set to the visuals. The article urged audiences to go to the Palace, not only to see and hear the new innovation but also to see the film Street Angel.[175] According to the article in the Montreal Daily Star, "no better film could have been chosen for the occasion" (of the inauguration of Movietone in Canada).[176] Ads for the film proclaimed "standing room only since the opening" and "forty thousand people have already seen the spectacle at the Palace."[177]

The day after Street Angel opened at the Palace, an article in the Montreal Daily Star looked back nostalgically to the early demonstrations of synchronized sound film that took place in Montreal.

> Several years ago, it will be recalled, an invention was presented at the Palace Theatre entitled the de Forest Phonofilm, in which sound was synchronized with the action on the screen by means of photographing the vibrations caused by the actors' voices [...] over the weekend the Palace, again in the forefront of innovation presented the public of Montreal with the latest development of this combination of action and sound, the Vitaphone and Movietone, in which the de Forest principle has been carried forward along the same lines as those its original inventor laid down. Sound pictures, in the opinion of many, have come to stay; therefore, Montreal must have them.[178]

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[175] "Le cinema 'parlant' au théâtre Palace," La Presse 4 September 1928: 8.
[176] "Movietone at Palace Theatre—Program of Unusual Interest," Montreal Daily Star 1 September 1928: 22.
[177] "Le cinema 'parlant' au théâtre Palace," La Presse 4 September 1928: 9. See (*Figures 9a-d* in Appendix)
[178] Morgan Powell, "Sound Pictures Shown For the First Time at The Palace Over Week-End" Montreal Daily Star 3 September 1928: 6.

And have them they did. Montreal's prestige theatre was redecorated for the occasion and welcomed the public into an oasis of gold, colour, upholstery and sound. "The public here is clearly interested in the new sound pictures" though a great many people had no idea what to expect before they saw the film and "went to the theatre with a great many misconceptions."[179] Though Powell does not give precise examples of the misconceptions the public had before attending the exhibition at the Palace, he does attempt to clarify what Movietone was and how it worked. "It may well be explained that the feature film has a Movietone accompaniment whereby the action throughout is synchronized with the music, which was played by a special orchestra when the movie was made."[180]

Years later, there are still public misconceptions about the first presentation of synchronous sound in Montreal. This period in exhibition history was the introduction of sound-on-disc systems like Fox Movietone and Vitaphone to Canadian audiences.[181] According to Pierre Véronneau, Street Angel, Four Sons (John Ford, 1928) and The Jazz Singer are all in the same category of almost silent melodramatic films augmented with songs and music in certain scenes. He claims that talking films arrived in Montreal in 1928 with the Palace exhibition of Street Angel.[182] The first of the talking films seen in Montreal (in this order) were, Street Angel, Four Sons and The Jazz Singer. There is a

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[179] Ibid., 6.
[180] Ibid., 6.
[181] Fox Movietone and Warner Vitaphone were sound-on-disc systems that used a recorded disc, synched with the action of the film to offer sound. Movietone did experiment with a sound-on-film system as well but most theatres were equipped with disc systems, some were able to play either sound-on-disc or sound-on-film however none were equipped for only sound-on-film. For a more extensive discussion of the differences and characteristics of each system see Donald Crafton's The Talkies, 1997.
[182] Véronneau, Montréal Ville de Cinéma, 11.

general historical confusion over the presentation of Street Angel and the extent to which the film was a talking film at all. According to film reviewer Leonard Maltin, [183] the movie "...[was] a delicate, beautifully photographed silent film. [Janet] Gaynor who won a Best Actress Oscar (shared for her performances in 7th Heaven (Frank Borzage, 1927) and Sunrise (F.W. Marnau, 1927)) did not speak in the film."[184] The controversy as to whether or not the film was the inaugural 'talking film' presented in Canada stems, I believe, from the full program of films and shorts exhibited at the Palace on the night of September 1, 1928. Also on the program that night were: Rachel Meller in Chorpus Christi; The Prince of Wales paying tribute to a soldier killed at Grimsby, England; French Army troupes parading through the Arc de Triomphe; "The Hut" a tragedy of Siberia and; a speech by the President of France. Some of the film shorts and newsreels presented in the program were talking or featured dialogue in the form of a speech (synchronized talking).[185] "The Movietone specialties includes the news reel, with reproductions of sound, crowds cheering, people speaking, and bands playing, synchronized exactly with the action as shown upon the screen."[186] While Morgan Powell went on to explain that Movietone provided a musical accompaniment[187] to the action of the film, other press accounts asserted "Movietone is not a talking picture; it is simply a synchronization of the voice and film, and the volume of sound comes direct

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[183] Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2000 ed. Leonard Maltin et al. and Internet Movie Database at www.imdb.com claim the film Street Angel was silent.
[184] Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2000. ed. Leonard Maltin et al.
[185] Morgan Powell, "Sound Pictures Shown For the First Time at The Palace Over Week-End" Montreal Daily Star 3 September 1928: 6.
[186] Ibid., 6.
[187] Street Angel was accompanied by nothing more than orchestral musical synchronized to the action of the film.

from the film."[188] The public confusion surrounding talking films in 1928 seemed to be based on their lack of technological understanding and comprehension of precisely how a film could be made to 'talk'. La Presse offered a complete two-page spread to their readers detailing the process of making talking films in order to help the public understand what they saw and heard in the cinema.[189] And while the idea of talking film was not quite clear with the public who saw the films, it is fair to say that it has never been quite clear with historians either.

Claims in the press stated that "no better picture could have been chosen" for the first Movietone exhibition in Montreal; "Street Angel is like good wine-- it needs no bush in the shape of elaborate music, though the Movietone accompaniment is...a remarkably fine artistic achievement."[190] Despite the film's remarkable popularity, Street Angel was not the first talking film to be exhibited. In order to clear up the public misconception in 1928, Powell offered an explanation still valuable today. "For general information... it may well be explained that the feature film has a Movietone accompaniment whereby the action throughout is synchronized with the music."[191] While claims that the Palace was the first theatre in Canada to exhibit talking movies are true, the first feature film to be exhibited after the Palace was renovated was not a talking film. Rather, the film had some sound in the form of musical accompaniment and was part of a program comprised of other talking shorts. Both the English and French language presses offered explanations of the Movietone technology to the public and

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[188] Montreal Daily Star, 1 September 1928: 22
[189] "Comment se Font les Films Dialogués" LaPresse, 9 February 1929: 56
[190] Morgan Powell, "Sound Pictures Shown For the First Time at The Palace Over Week-End" Montreal Daily Star 3 September 1928: 6.
[191] Ibid., 6.

assured the public that sound effects, music and dialogue could be heard but that the films were not entirely talking films. I maintain that the exhibition on September 1, 1928 at the Palace theatre was indeed a synchronous sound exhibition as it used Movietone technology but, according to the accounts in the popular press, Street Angel was not a talking feature film as historians have claimed.

The impact of the Movietone exhibition and talking shorts at the Palace produced reactions of acclaim, surprise, approval and devotion from the audiences in Montreal. The public received the film with excitement and anticipation, indicated by the attendance numbers that drove theatre manager Rotsky to hold the film over for another week. First impressions of the exhibition indicated that Movietone technology would be tremendously successful at providing musical accompaniment as good as any orchestra could, although a few adjustments needed to be made to the volume. The specialties of Movietone included the newsreel as can be seen in Powells comments, "... the interest is accentuated enormously; for instance, when you see Raymond Poincare standing before the newly-erected monument to Foch making his speech of dedication... each word comes ringing from his lips upon the screen as clearly as if her were actually on the stage in the flesh."[192] The initial presentation of Movietone in Montreal set a tone for future exhibition and the understanding of synchronous sound both among the critics and the public.

Due to the public confusion that stemmed from the exhibition at the Palace, future advertisements for talking films were conscious and gave discretionary information regarding the amount of talking that would take place on screen. Further articles were

[192] Ibid., 6.

devoted to explaining the degree of sound synchronization in films; for example, La Presse indicated that important parts of films would have sound like during 'tête-a-tête' conversations between principle characters. In February of 1929, with the exhibition of In Old Arizona (Raoul Walsh, 1929), Warner Brothers proclaimed to offer the public the real thing—something completely new. Audiences had seen and heard talking films but In Old Arizona was positively the "first full length talking production successfully combining outdoor spectacle with spoken drama."[193] The film was proclaimed to be "The Miracle of Modern Times"[194] as the first "100% All Talking"[195] Western film shot outdoors. In the advertisements for the film it was clearly indicated as a talkie with sound effects and spoken drama. There seemed to be a need to reassure the public that they would see and hear a complete talking film perhaps due again to the uncertainty that surrounded the first talking film exhibitions and competing claims made by theatres.

Accompanying the exhibition of In Old Arizona was a Movietone newsreel with special significance to Canadian film history. When it became possible to synchronize sound many political figures were recorded giving prominent speeches that would later be exhibited alongside a program of shorts, cartoons, newsreels and feature film. One talking short of a political nature stands out from the others listed as part of the programs in Montreal between 1926 and 1931. Possibly the first talking film made in Quebec, the opening of the parliamentary session in Quebec City was recorded and shown at the Palace to accompany the talking film In Old Arizona.[196] In the film, Premiere

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[193] Advertisement for In Old Arizona in Montreal Daily Star 9 February 1929: 15.
[194] Advertisement for In Old Arizona in Montreal Daily Star 16 February 1929 27.
[195] Advertisement for In Old Arizona in Montreal Daily Star 9 February 1929: 15.
[196] Advertisement for In Old Arizona, La Presse 9 February 1929: 68.

Taschereau was seen and heard in a "stirring address."[197] He was filmed outside the Legislative Buildings in Quebec City, delivering a brief appeal to Americans on behalf of French-Canadians living in the United States.[198] There is no further comment about the contents of the speech in either the Montreal Daily Star or La Presse.

While you might think there would be differences in the advertisements and appeals to the public in the French and English language press, with a few exceptions, the advertisements and journalistic encounters with the cinema and popular amusements were very close, if not, direct translations. During the debut presentation of the 'talkies' in Montreal the week of September 1, 1926, ads in the French and English language press were identical (*Figures 9b. and 9c.*). While Street Angel was not a talking film, rather a film with sync-sound effects and music, I have not been able to find out whether the titles would have been in English, French or both. From the press accounts of the reception of the film and the full program of shorts, speeches and orchestral sequences, both linguistic communities in Montreal were appreciative of the new technology, even impressed with the precision of synchronization

> ... the public not only viewed an exceptional film, but heard the music of a symphony orchestra of 125 pieces synchronized so perfectly with the picture that it is difficult to realize at the first viewing what has actually been achieved through the invention of the latest device of the moving picture industry.[199]

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[197] Advertisement for In Old Arizona, Montreal Daily Star 9 February 1929: 15.
[198] Morgan Powell, "In Old Arizona, First Outdoor Talking Picture, Is Of Interesting Quality" Montreal Daily Star 11 February 1929: 6.
[199] "At the Palace," Montreal Daily Star 8 September 1928: 27.

At this time, synchrounous sound most often referred to the synchronization of action with music and sound effects so claims of audiences being impressed by the precision were referring simply to the coordination of movement and sound.

The public reaction to the presentation at the Palace was positive as Powell reported. "Preliminary to the feature picture [Street Angel], several short subjects, all Movietone, are seen and heard, all of which proved popular with this week's patrons."[200] The Montreal Daily Star also stated that the short subjects; "Chorpus Christi", "The Treasurer's Report" and "The Hut" are "supplemented by dialogue."[201] Advertisements appealed to cinemagoers' desire to see the renovations that had been made to the theatre and to experience for themselves the "new form of divertissement."[202] Evidently, cinemagoers in Montreal responded and during the second week of the Palace program presenting the Movietone shorts and the feature film Street Angel the opening hour was advanced and the theatre could still not accommodate everyone who wanted to see the film (Figure 11).

The extent to which the public attended the film cannot be interpreted as singularly a strong attraction to sound exhibition, but must also be understood in the context of the dynamic, much publicized theatre renovations that had taken place at the Palace. Theatre managers often made extemporaneous appeals to lure the public to the cinema; décor topped the list during the era of palatial theatres in Montreal and cannot be underrated. Appealing to cinemagoers through the site is common in the era of the movie palace. The Palace Theatre continued to establish its reputation by declaring itself the

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[200] Ibid., 27.
[201] Ibid., 27.
[202] Ibid., 27.

"Finest Theatre in Canada" and depicting mass crowds of cinemagoers entering the Palace at street level, flanked by drawings of the marquee signs of the Roxy in New York and the Palace in Montreal. Visually the Palace proclaimed itself as the Canadian equivalent to the prestigious theatres in the United States *(Figure 12)*. Both the French- and English-language press offered luxurious descriptions of the renovations done by Emmanuel Briffa.[203] The Palace re-opening was proclaimed, praised and detailed in La Presse to a greater degree than it was in the Montreal Daily Star. The excitement and pride expressed in the gala exhibition of sound at the Palace, where primarily English-language cinema was shown, was treated as a triumph for Montrealers and the city regardless of language. While this may surprise some who expect the language barriers to be represented rigidly in the arts, there is no evidence in the presses to suggest a diversion from this course in the five years I examined. The exhibition of Street Angel received much praise in La Presse, "the 1st of September is a memorable date for the theatre in this British county and the name of Mr. Rotsky will remain attached to this date."[204] The article announced the Palace theatre had been completely transformed and redecorated to a point where it was no longer recognizable as the old Palace. The Palace, La Presse declared, would be the talk of the town for a long time. [205]

After a two week run at the Palace on St. Catherine Street, Street Angel was shown at some other theatres around the city in less extravagant surroundings and with less technological fanfare. At the time many films were made with two versions, one with sound and the other without, to accommodate theatres that had not yet been wired for

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[203] Advertisment promoting Emmanuel Briffa in La Presse 19 May 1928: 73. Emmanuel Briffa had decorated 19 theatres in Montreal by this date. *(Figure 8c.)*
[204] La Presse 27 October 1928, 16.
[205] Ibid., 16.

sound.[206] As indicated by Véronneau, the next sound film to be exhibited in Montreal was Four Sons.[207] This film was not a full-dialogue picture either but another Fox Movietone in which action and music, not speech, were synchronous.[208] The film was shrouded in the myth of American exhibition as well. Film programs were portrayed as more prestigious and more valuable in Canada if they were currently or had just finished exhibiting to mass audiences at well-known American theatres. For Montreal audiences, the most common American theatres mentioned in the press and associated with prestige and popularity were The Roxy, The Strand, and The Rialto in New York City. It was also common to read that a picture or a play was showing on Broadway as is seen in the advertisement for Four Sons (Figure 12). The film was popular with Montrealers and was consequently held over for a second week of exhibition at the Palace. "Movietone has attracted thousands to the Palace this week. It proves to be the exception demonstrating that traditions have been carried out by descendants of mothers and fathers."[209] It was further declared in an advertisement: "Hundreds turned away daily."[210] Several talking shorts were again programmed with the feature Four Sons. The shorts and newsreels were also popular with the patrons and the Montreal Daily Star wrote "the newsreel takes on an added value when you see and hear the voices of

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[206] Douglas Gomery explicitly charts the number of theatres in the USA and Canada that were wired for sound each year from 1928-1931. See, The Coming of Sound to the American Cinema: A History of the Transformation of an Industry. Madison: University of Wisconsin, PhD. Dissertation, 1975.

[207] Véronneau, Pierre. Montréal Ville de Cinéma. Montréal: Cinémathèque québécoise/musée du cinéma, 1992.

[208] "What Film Agencies Say About Pictures On Show Next Week" Montreal Daily Star, 15 September 1928, 63.

[209] "Coming to the Theatres...At the Palace," Montreal Daily Star 22 September 1928: 15.

[210] Advertisement Four Sons, Montreal Daily Star 22 September 1928: 15.

prominent people" such as Mussolini and Premier Poincare of France.[211] With the sound film of Premier Poincare, the audience was put in a position to testify to the ability of the synchronized sound recording and playback to produce a very precise replication of the person's voice. It was done previously with live speeches and performances immediately following the recorded performance (Eva Leoni's appearance in Montreal following her de Forest Phonofilm debut). This time with Premiere Poincare, La Presse said that those who had been to France and heard the Premiere speak would marvel at the perfect reproduction realized by Movietone.[212] The statement was curious in that the editors at La Presse believed cinemagoers from Montreal had heard the Premier give a live address before and would be able to testify to the reproductive precision. Again, after the exhibition of Four Sons and the accompanying program of shorts, audiences were not shocked by the voices coming from a screen; they were seemingly surprised with the precision and the reproductive quality of the Movietone and Vitaphone technology. Not once in the popular press accounts of the first sound film exhibitions was there a sense of audiences being astonished. As Crafton notes, the "gee-whiz" excitement surrounding various innovations in sound technology dissipated quickly.[213] Moreover, "gee-whiz" is a far cry from astonished and amazed when it comes to measuring reactions.

A movie I did not read about in any of the historical literature of Canadian film exhibition was Mother Knows Best (John G. Blystone, 1928), which opened in Montreal at the Palace theatre on September 30, 1928. The film began a new picture-era according to Morgan S. Powell: "from noon until midnight people flocked to the Palace Theatre

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[211] Montreal Daily Star 8 September 1928: 27
[212] "Poincaré parlera à l'auditoire du Palace," La Presse 8 September 1928: 76.
[213] Crafton, The Talkies: 536.

yesterday to see the picture."[214] It was a film that told its story as any other film did, by printed titles and by action, with one exception. The popularity of the feature length film was owed to the introduction of spoken voice to the screen in a feature length film. "The real interest in the picture, however, strong though it is, rests in this particular instance not so much in its inherent romance as in the fact that it is the first full-length feature film in which speech is introduced."[215] The dialogue was, as mentioned above, introduced at significant moments, and, according to accounts in the press, it lent emphasis to particular climactic events in the film. "The spoken dialogue serves not so much to lend support to the unreserved eulogies that have been literally sprayed upon the 'talkies' as it does to indicate the tremendous possibilities of the new invention."[216] Those tremendous possibilities were not expounded upon but the writer took the opportunity to comment on the infancy of the technology of sound. "The 'talkies' have a long way to go" it was stated and the article went on to present a mostly optimistic outlook. Furthermore, the reviewer gave the opinion that there were moments in the film when, as a viewer, it would be preferable to not have the spoken word, yet in other moments "the spoken word does very vividly and very emphatically, illuminate the climax."[217] Crafton maintains part-talkies were not a stepping stone to all-dialogue films. "It seems likely that the producers of these features conceived of them as autonomous products... This conception

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[214] Morgan Powell, "Spoken Voice in Film at Palace--Beginning of a New Picture Era," Montreal Daily Star 1 October 1928: 6.
[215] Ibid., 6.
[216] Ibid., 6.
[217] Ibid., 6.

is consistent with the underlying assumption that sound was a supplement to the movie, not an integral part of it."[218]

The arrival and implementation of new technology is often accompanied by soothsayers who, when a technology is in its early stages, or infancy, like to predict how the technology will effect industry and audiences. Writers in the Montreal Daily Star were no different and took the opportunity of the exhibition of Mother Knows Best to offer the following speech.

> The "talkies" are still in their infancy. They have a long way to go. But when science shall have achieved the seemingly impossible—as science almost always does—there will arise a new form of entertainment, which will completely revolutionize the entire film world. We shall have intelligence for stupidity; we shall have understanding for blind obedience to by no means infallible direction; we shall have the emotional moment lent tremendous significance by the spoken word; and we shall have an entirely new film technique. "Optimists will await the arrival of that much-to-be-desired triumph with keen expectation."[219]

The attitudes among popular authors toward the proper application of sound were, as Crafton claims, focused on the way the new technology would change the existing movie institution.[220] One clear area of emphasis was on the voice and the quality of voice as was seen in Montreal, particularly in Powell's comparison of

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[218] Crafton, The Talkies, 177.
[219] Advertisement for Mother Knows Best, Montreal Daily Star 1 October 1928: 6.
[220] Crafton, The Talkies, 447.

the theatrical voice to the film voice. It was also seen in the emphasis and reviews of the first speaking role of an actor's career.

Mother Knows Best captured the designation of being the first feature picture to introduce dialogue in Montreal. After that exhibition more than one film tried to capture the title of first entirely spoken feature film shown to Canadian audiences. While short spoken films, synchronized musical scores and sound effects had won the praise of cinemagoers, the presentation of The Terror (Roy del Ruth, 1929) in May of 1929 was proclaimed in La Presse to be the first demonstration of the degree of perfection attainable in the development of the art of cinematography and sound.[221] As Crafton also points out, The Terror was advertised as the first 'titleless' all-talking film and truly was a 100 percent talker; even the opening credits were spoken.[222] Ads in the Montreal Daily Star and La Press do not indicate the film as 'titleless' but it was indeed all spoken.

In Film Daily Yearbook 1929 it was claimed that for the fiscal year ending 1928 Warner Brother's reported a profit of $2 million, "[an] astonishing turnaround attributable entirely to sound."[223] The heightened appetite for sound films was seen in the response of critics. While most of the reviews of film were concerned with plot summary in 1929 and 1930, the critics in the press responded to the innovation by extending their criticism to the quality of the sound recording, and comparing films based on their use of synchronous sound. Take for instance S. Morgan Powell's review of The Terror:

> The voices one hears are, in the main, both sonorous and expressive, particularly in the case of that veteran English actor, Alec B. Francis, and

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[221] "Premier Film Entierement Parlant Au Theatre Palace," La Presse 12 May 1929: 61.
[222] Crafton, The Talkies, 118.
[223] Film Daily Yearbook 1929 cited in Crafton, The Talkies, 118.

> that clever Irish actor, Holmes Herbert. Edward Everett Horton, the American who plays the principle comedy role, also speaks clearly and with good expression. In one or two instances, the voices are not so satisfactory. But they are extremely well synchronized with the action, with a few exceptions...[224]

Powell also noted the atmosphere and mood of the film as great but questioned the amount of synchronization in the film.

> But why the synchronized music? It looks as though the producers had gone crazy over synchronization. The music goes on almost ceaselessly from the beginning of the picture to the end, it is not wholly unnecessary, but a drawback to the dialogue, since it interferes with the latter to the extent, at times, of preventing one from hearing all the speakers are saying.[225]

The first exposure to synchronized sound for audiences in Montreal might have been in any one of three forms: a feature film with an added synchronized musical score; a talking short, perhaps one of a well-known vaudeville personality; or synchronized sound news reel.[226] The idea of an entire feature film synchronized with dialogue, music and sound effects was considered a possibility but as Crafton points out, there was a common prejudice against talking movies, in favor of silent film.[227] Crafton cites this as one of the reasons the movie industry was slow to introduce a feature film that was

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[224] Morgan Powell, "The Terror, First Full Length Talking Film, Has Big Melodramatic Appeal" Montreal Daily Star 14 January 1929: 8.
[225] Ibid., 8.
[226] Crafton, The Talkies ,101.
[227] "Premier Film Entierement Parlant Au Theatre Palace," La Presse 12 May 1929: 61.

entirely dialogued. However, when The Terror was released in 1929 in Montreal, an article in La Presse noted after the private screening they were convinced that films with dialogue would attain the approval of the public.[228] An incomplete understanding of the performance practices of film led to the historical confusion concerning which film was the first talking film exhibited in Canada. Moreover, the desire on the part of theatre managers to make claims about the films led to competition in advertising that could have added to the confusion. Understanding the state of films and the difference between talkies and music and sound effects enables me to identify a more accurate reception of the first synch sound films.

The fourth chapter continues the examination of Montreal audience's appreciation and resistance to the talkies as they were expressed in the popular press. This chapter deals with moviegoing in Montreal as sound really begins to take hold in the city's 50-odd theatres. The rapid construction and wiring of theatres for sound seemed to headline daily in the drama and entertainment section of the press. It seemed every film was a sound film every actor was making his/her first talkie and everyone was focused on the future of synchronized sound cinema. Especially vocal was Morgan Powell of the Montreal Daily Star. Though he argued consistently for the supremacy of the legitimate theatre and a revival of silent cinema, he wrote much of what appeared in the press about the 'talkies'. This chapter also provides a more detailed look at appeals made to audience members by theatre managers in an effort to lure the public to the theatre. After the initial excitement that surrounded the arrival of sound in Montreal, audiences added sound to their habitual moviegoing and theatre managers were forced to work harder to bring in spectators.

5

Something to Suit Everyone

As synchronous sound cinema was incorporated into the habitual lives of cinemagoers in Montreal, theatres were competing against one another and tried to appeal to as large an audience as possible. Theatres attempted to cater to diverse constituencies similar to what Miriam Hansen refers to as "the blockbuster gamble [which] consists of offering something to everyone, of appealing to diverse interests with a diversity of attractions and multiple levels of textuality."[228]

Competing declarations about sound appeared on advertisements and in film reviews by critics. Claims like: "100% Talking"; "You hear every character you see"; "See it—Hear it!"; "Talking-Singing-Sound"; "First all-talking film of ..." were all common phrases in advertisements for synchronized cinema. Less than a year after the first exhibition took place at the Palace, sound films were beginning to face criticism. Managers were working hard to continue to lure the public with the innovation of sound but the public was becoming more critical and less enticed by it alone. The Palace theatre ran a series of ads for Warner Bros and First National Vitaphone in La Presse. The ads were two full pages and the word Vitaphone appeared larger than other text (*Figures 19-24*). The ads were huge in comparison to other film ads and also featured written

[228] Hansen, "Early Cinema, Late Cinema,"136.

promotional appeals to audiences. It was announced, "Air-cooled voices will talk at the MGM studios. The warm air of summer effects the microphones and in order to keep producing talking films, a large ice-plant will be installed."[229] Unfortunately, no mention of air-cooled ears listening to the talkies appeared, and in the summer of 1930, when the attendance at the theatres dropped off dramatically, air conditioning in the theatres would have been an added advantage.

Part of the attendance problem in the cinema was due to latecomers and the exhibition style, which presented continuous-shows at uncertain starting times. Audience members had gotten in the habit of regarding a film house as a place of amusement that they could enter and leave at any time. They carried out this practice week after week, quite content to see a bit here and there.[230] Unlike the theatres, with reserved seating and concrete starting times for shows, the cinema had no such organization for exhibition. Powell concluded that the public preferred "the haphazard seating method." However, there were too many latecomers and moviegoers were beginning to complain that they could only tolerate a few latecomers without suffering from the inevitable inconvenience of having to move for them, sometimes more than a dozen times during a feature film.[231] As a solution, Powell used the pages of the Montreal Daily Star to push for an organized seating plan in cinemas. His rational was simple, the practice of coming and going was bleeding into theatergoing in the city as well and unlike the cinema, the theatre could not tolerate disturbances of any kind.[232] Reserved seating in the cinema was not adopted in Montreal aside from one exception, Theatre Saint-Denis, outside of which there did not

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[229] "Air cooled voices for the 'Talkies'," Montreal Daily Star 8 June 1929: 28.
[230] Morgan Powell, "Attendance at Theatres" Montreal Daily Star 1 August 1931: 20.
[231] Ibid., 20.
[232] Ibid., 20.

seem to be any kind of pubic support for an organized seating plan, or reserved seating. Theatre St. Denis presented a mixed program featuring a silent film and a live-theatre production as indicated in its advertisements it was possible to make reservations.[233] Powell summed up the situation in his observation that the public really cared little about reserved or organized seating, "so long as they get what they want when they want to."[234]

Attendance and excitement at the beginning of the exhibition of sound cinema inspired a building boom in the construction of wired movie palaces. March of 1930 was a busy month for gala cinema-openings. The United Amusement Company opened two new neighborhood theatres both designed to be on the cutting edge of acoustic perfection for the exhibition of the talkies. The Monkland, which opened on March 7, boasted of being the only theatre in the city built specially for talking pictures, with architecture and building material specifically designed to meet all acoustic requirements *(Figures 25 and 26)*. Apart from the seats, not an inch of wood was present in the entire place; only steel and concrete and all the steel was concrete-encased. The design was planned to eliminate all those difficulties in acoustics being experienced in circular or semi-circular theatres. The camera booth was said to be the "last word in sound picture projection" and the theatre was also equipped with the most modern system the Northern Electric Company had to offer.[235] Theatre Amherst was also wired for sound with the Northern Electric System *(Figure 27)*.[236] In a detailed advertisement welcoming those who frequent the Amherst, La Presse claimed the synchronization of the voice and the movements of

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[233] Advertisement for Theatre St.Denis in La Presse 11 April 1931: 24. Trader Horn had reserved seating when it opened at His Majesty's theatre in April 1931.
[234] Morgan Powell, "Attendance at Theatres" Montreal Daily Star 1 August 1931: 20.
[235] Advertisements for Monkland Theatre in Montreal Daily Star 6 March 1930: 6 and 7 March 1930: 16.
[236] Advertisement for Le Theatre Amherst in La Presse 8 March 1930: 59.

actors were so perfect it was impossible to decide whether the talking you heard was natural or reproduced by the mechanism.[237] The Northern Electric Company had studied sound and the problems associated with sound for a half century, first in the fabrication of telephones and now in the wiring of 5000 theatres in forty five countries claimed the advertisement.[238] Meanwhile, back at the Granada, the final word was the atmospheric style of the interior by Emmanuel Briffa. Looking up at the ceiling gave the "illusion of open air at night with the starlit roof and cloud effects."[239] "The general effect of the interior is of a huge rectangular auditorium with a night sky roof, the walls done in large craftex panels within slim beaded frames. The proscenium arch is a remarkably fine one."[240] The opening of the Granada followed less than a month later *(Figure 26b)*. Again, decorated in the atmospheric style by Briffa, the Granada boasted of many other added attractions to be enjoyed by the public including a smoking room for gentlemen, a retiring room for ladies, one on each side of the theatre, an orchestra pit and spacious isles. Scars remained after the devastating fire at the Laurier theatre and moviegoers were lured by special measures to ensure a safe exit in the event of a fire or any other emergency. The public was informed that there were 15 exits allowing the theatre to be emptied of its 2000 audience members in just three minutes and the spacious isles permitted easy access to exits without any risk of congestion. Somewhat surprisingly, the theatre, as mentioned, was built with an orchestra pit and dressing rooms under the stage to accommodate live acts. This is peculiar since most theatres were axing their orchestras,

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[237] Ibid., 59.
[238] Ibid., 59.
[239] Montreal Daily Star 7 March 1930: 7.
[240] Morgan Powell, "Granada Theatre With Capacity of 2,000 To Be Opened This Evening" in Montreal Daily Star 28 March 1930: 14.

as well as organists, and were opting for musical accompaniments that were no longer live. On the contrary, the opening performance at the Granada featured performers from every cabaret in the city perhaps foreshadowing the revival of vaudeville. [241]

The construction of the Granada Theatre at the corner of Morgan Boulevard and Ste. Catherine Street East was part of the United Amusements Corporation "pursuance of its policy of establishing neighborhood houses throughout the city and district of Montreal."[242] The theatre was the largest built to date by United Amusements and was said to serve a population of over one hundred thousand in the east end of Montreal. No holds were barred on the architectural detailing and interior design of the theatre indicating that neighborhood theatres, though not situated in a theatre district or downtown hub, were also a component of the movie palace movement. According to the press account the Granada theatre in the east end was situated to serve the population of that district. The movie palaces in Montreal, with their dynamic interiors, and grand stature were designed to draw in the public. The theatres, often reportedly filled to capacity, were built to seat over a thousand indicating that attendance at the movie palaces was not a problem.

After the first demonstrations of sound cinema, theatres like the Granada and the Monkland were build specifically for sound with special structures and details for acoustic perfection. Speculation in the popular press about what effect sound cinema would have on the public grew. The letters to the editor provide some insight of public response to the arts in Montreal, to film, and to the talkies. Samuel Morgan Powell, the drama editor for the Montreal Daily Star wrote most of the paper's articles, decided

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[241] Ibid., 14.
[242] Ibid., 14.

which letters to print and wrote the editorial. Therefore, Powell's opinion seeps into more than just his signature piece every Saturday. Powell, as a responsible journalist, does publish letters that take up an opinion contrary to his own even if it is rare. Indeed, a lack of comparable discussion about art, film and the talkies was presented in La Presse. While La Presse featured an arts and entertainment section it contained little editorial content and rarely featured a contribution from the public. Nonetheless, the same themes can be found running through each paper and a strong debate about silent vs. sound cinema was one of the most prominent.

Resistance to the talkies was greatest by those who perceived them to have a negative influence on human speech. Though both feared and proclaimed as nonsense in the press, it was felt the talkies would "talk the English language off the map of the worked and substitute it for Hollywoodese."[243] Largely a concern for British people was the American speech characteristic of "talking through the nose." A writer for the London Morning Post voiced this opinion in the pages of the Montreal Daily Star, "I think that the most unpleasant thing which the talkies seem to leave behind is a devastated modern speech."[244] The British writer continued to let loose on how he felt about the talkies "in particular, the human voice; for the most part, it is a delaying, harsh, unmusical, and often ridiculous farce with raucous accents issuing from a static microphone."[245] Languages, already in a low state will become about "eight times as horrible to listen to as they are today." The criticisms of the American language translated into an argument of taste in the press. The high English standards of good taste are called to action as a standard

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[243] "Many changes in Field of Music Are Wrought By Arrival of Talkies," Montreal Daily Star 7 September 1929: 26.
[244] "Talks About Talkies," Montreal Daily Star 21 September 1929: 61.
[245] "Talks About Talkies," Montreal Daily Star 21 September 1929: 61.

much higher than that of Hollywood, which was seen to have no standard at all. Hollywood talkies were criticized as being "vulgar, vicious and vapid" by G.A. Aikinson of the Daily Express in London.[246] Thus, popular taste became a question of high and low culture, British being perceived as high and American as low.

The resistance to American cultural products translated into an attack on American cultural and industrial products. "The general characteristic of the talkies in 1929 has been their appalling vulgarity or viciousness. The talking innovation raised a window through which we [audiences] had hitherto seen vulgarity at a distance."[247] The critic from London further claimed that "If Hollywood only knew what was good for them they would hasten and adopt "English social codes," rather than pleasing the American masses, "among whom the average mentality is admittedly that of a child of fourteen or less."[248] Aikinson goes on to explain the metaphor that has caused the greatest social calamity in the history of the world. "There is no necessity for us to think that the people we saw through the window were real. But now that the window has been raised, now that the medley of raucous voice has actually invaded the room, we realize that these people and their manners are only too true."[249] The release of voice, actual audible speech, has convinced audiences that these people—actors in films—were real people whereas before they spoke, the silence acted as a barrier between reality and imaginary. The horror then, was in accepting that the screen antics and speech were real. Aikinson predicted this would be the demise of the talkies since the public would not be

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[246] G.A. Aikinson, "Hollywood Talkies Are Vulgar, Vicious, Vapid, Contends London Critic," Montreal Daily Star 25 January 1930: 25.
[247] Ibid., 25.
[248] Ibid., 25.
[249] Ibid., 25.

able to accept this dose of reality. "No entertainment has ever managed to exist without the indispensable leaven of patronage from people who model their outlook on good taste and refinement."[250] The crisis was not manageable according to the press accounts of the takeover of British cinema by the Americans. "We have at the moment, a state of affairs in which our cinemas are flooded with American films whose characters talk a language admittedly alien to our own, alike in idiom and in accent. The result is that millions of young people...are being trained instinctively to speak something utterly different from their mother-tongue." This slipshod English as it is referred to, is evident in phrases such as; 'Some picture!', 'The cutest thing I have seen in years,' 'Oh boy, don't he do his stuff bully!, 'And how!', and 'Gee, she's a wow!'.[251] Examples such as these were printed in the English-language press in Montreal with a consistent frequency indicating a concern for the Canadian English vernacular.

In addition to the negative influence the talkies were claimed to have on language, another form of resistance to the talkies was expressed as a dislike for the canned music presented as an accompaniment to the films. A common criticism made by the editors in the press, and musicians (perhaps bitter toward losing their orchestral seats in the theatres) was that the public tastes no longer recognized good music.

> When you touch the public pocket, you touch something that can become extraordinarily and alarmingly vocal in the twinkling of an eye. I believe a howl of protest would go up from Halifax to Vancouver if there were talk of raising the prices of talking picture theatres ten per cent. Yet that is

[250] Ibid., 25.
[251] Ibid., 25.

what would be necessary... to enable the theatres now playing talking pictures to restore the human orchestra and still operate at a profit.[252]

Whether or not the public was prepared to pay more for live music in the cinema was one question of debate. Another was whether or not moviegoers in Montreal felt as strongly as did Powell, a position consistently reflected, in his own articles and those he chose to publish from newspapers in England.

A mode of inquiry to determine public sentiment regarding Powell's commentary was to seek letters to the editor. One letter from Montrealer Fred Hill was published some days later.[253] Hill indicated the public was not nearly as dissatisfied with talking films as Powell led his readers to believe (although it appears that Powell only prints the letter so that he may rebut it as he so often does with letters expressing an opinion contrary to his own). Hill, as a moviegoer, wrote emphatically, "all this talk about 'squawkies' and 'canned music' just burns me up."[254] He says that he had seen innumerable talkies and with each invention they are getting better and there is nothing at all 'squawkie' about them, despite the fact that they are sometimes a little raspy as is also true of the stage. The talkies, Hill claimed, give a greater appearance of reality to the screen and the titles are no longer there to "interrupt your view" and having no titles "eliminates the pests known as 'title readers'" who disturb other members of the audience.[255] Hill had grown tired of the campaign against the talkies and has taken the liberty of conducting his own guerilla survey of public opinion. Mr. Hill has found that of 118 people asked, 102 prefer the talking pictures; five preferred the silent ones, "on account of deafness." Hill

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[252] Morgan Powell, "Music in the Theatres" Montreal Daily Star 19 July 1930: 22.
[253] Fred Hill, letter, "We Are Criticized," Montreal Daily Star 2 August 1930: 20.
[254] Ibid., 20.
[255] Ibid., 20.

concluded, with evidence, the public wanted the talkies. Proof of this, Hill wrote, was that the death of the talkies had been predicted more than a year ago and they were still being played—the talkies were not being deserted by the public as had been predicted.[256]

Powell did not waste any time and penned a written response the same day. He claimed that a survey done in the United States found only 49 per cent of the public liked the 'talkies' hence 51 per cent of the public would worship the return of the silent film.[257] Powell never revealed his source for the survey. Moreover, Powell said that some countries react more quickly than others and that Britain had already denounced the 'talkie' from Hollywood and was fast returning to the silent film. This was true according to other articles in the press, though this was no indication that the British were actually denouncing the invention of talking film but rather that they were taking steps to slow down the importation of Hollywood talkies.

In particular reference to the music in theatres, the letter written by Hill painted a picture of the theatre orchestra as a meager offering, comprised of a drummer and a pianist. Hill said, "the people who attend these theatres (smaller theatres) prefer this so-called 'canned music'" which, until the talkies arrived, they never had the opportunity to hear.[258] Patrons choosing to attend small theatres did not have the option, even before the talkies, of enjoying an orchestral accompaniment and for other filmgoers in Montreal it was not only an issue of whether an orchestra at their local theatre could be maintained but whether or not it was affordable to attend the theatres with larger orchestras like Loews. "The average family man is intelligent enough to appreciate music—even if his

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[256] Ibid., 20.
[257] Morgan Powell, response to Fred Hill, Montreal Daily Star 2 August 1930: 20.
[258] Fred Hill, letter, "We Are Criticized," Montreal Daily Star 2 August 1930: 20.

purse does not permit him to attend the large shows, and I am sure that with the talkies he is now hearing many fine selections that heretofore had been prohibited because of the cost," claimed another Montrealer.[259] The live orchestra was one of the most costly amusements in the city and out of reach for many Montreal patrons but the price of a ticket to see a 'canned' orchestra in sound films made amusements more economical and accessible. Advertisements for films in 1929 and early1930 verify that it was possible to see a matinee for 25 cents and an evening show for as low as 40 cents. The price of films dropped later in 1930 as attendance in the city plummeted and theatre managers began to offer bargain and thrift matinees. According to Hill some of the public was concerned about the cost of entertainment and did not take issue with "canned music" as Powell did. "You cannot have it both ways. Either the talkies as they are, with canned music, at present prices, or the talkies as they are with the addition of a musical program by a human orchestra—at increased prices."[260] While Powell's preference for a human orchestra was predictable, he made a point about the film industry that took some of the pressure off the public. "The film theatre is a commercial proposition first, last and all the time, and to expect it to consider the public preference at its own expense would be about as sensible as to expect a giraffe to sleep with its neck tied in a knot. Canned music seems to be an essential and inevitable concomitant of canned acting."[261] A Montreal musician felt that the musicians had no choice but to solicit the help of intelligent moviegoers and to push for the return of live music in the cinema. "The educated public will not rest

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[259] J.P., letter, "Music in the Theatre" Montreal Daily Star 8 March 1930: 28.
[260] Morgan Powell, "Music in the Theatres," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 19 July 1930, p. 22.
[261] Ibid., 22.

content with a talking or musical picture as the principle item of a program."[262] And, the public, he felt, was beginning to realize they were not getting the entertainment they used to when a more balanced program of film and music was presented. In chapter 6 a further exploration of the public desire for a program featuring live musical acts and film is offered.

Music was not the only point of contention for sound cinema. Men and women audience members were expressing different levels of appreciation and repulsion for what they were seeing on the screen. "How much of the talkies decreased power is due to the prevalence of crime and sex pictures and how much to the fact that the novelty of the original has worn off while the improvements promised have yet, in large degree, to be implemented, it's not easy to estimate."[263] While kissing noises may not have been laughed at wildly in Montreal the way Yuri Tsivian accounted for in Russia audiences in Montreal were not ecstatic receivers of sex-based plots and love scenes that were deemed to be inappropriate. Amidst other complaints about the talkies a letter written by a women who referred to herself as "Grouch" said that some of the photoplays seen recently in Montreal were no more glorious than "a garbage for the home."[264] "I have heard words spoken and I have seen situations which implied a multitude of words, which would have been expressly forbidden in the old-fashioned subtitles."[265] She attested to the vulgarity present on the screen in talking films and claimed the silent film never thought to resort

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[262] Morgan Powell, "A Misunderstanding Here," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 2 August 1930: 20.
[263] Morgan Powell, "A Combination Art," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 2 May 1931: 27.
[264] Grouch, letter, "A Too Swelled Head," Montreal Daily Star 1 August 1931: 20.
[265] Ibid., 20.

to "suggestiveness and downright vulgarity."[266] "Grouch" maintained the industry was at fault for both the stupidity present in the silent cinema and that the industry, by means of the talkie, had simply progressed in technological aptitude but not intellect. Her letter is worth citing at some length.

> Goodness knows to what depths of banal stupidity many of the old silent pictures used to descend with monotonous regularity. The film business, and by this I mean all its attendant attributes, such as managers, booking agents, publicity men and so forth, has developed a swelled head. It suffers from the delusion that, with the audible invention it had become intellectual...the film is no wiser than it used to be. If there is any distinction between the old and the new, it may be that the present 'squawkie' is more windy. I am bored by silly moronic speeches, very nearly drenched in saccharine insipidity.[267]

'Grouch's reference to the talkies as 'squawkies' touches on an important aspect of the talkie debate. In the silent films there had been a separation of image and sound and as Crafton claims, "a deeper schism between the viewer's confidence in the good looks of actors and the substance of their dialogue."[268] Powell editorialized the "ghastly achievements the human voice was capable [of]" and he said the awakening for audiences had been painful. "Many notable artists of the silent drama have simply vanished from the scene altogether. Their voices condemned them."[269] Issues of voice

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[266] Ibid., 20.
[267] Ibid., 20.
[268] Crafton, The Talkies , 486.
[269] Morgan Powell, "Silent vs. Talking Films," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 19 October 1929: 32.

included putting proper inflections on spoken words and public approval was not always easy to obtain. The talking picture had proved a flop in England, and the European countries do not want talking pictures they cannot understand, claimed J.E. Poole a journalist from London. The following excerpt about voice was printed in the Montreal Daily Star; "This is somewhat a 'ticklish' issue for Canadians whose tones and inflections still distinguish him from an Englishman...but it is a fact that the so-called American voice, particularly the uncultivated Broadway chorus type of vocalization is decidedly displeasing to English audiences." [270] Poole further claimed, "the metallic harshness and flat quality of the voices reproduced in many of the sound-films sent across the Atlantic...American producers may find it necessary to develop a new type of movie voice. It is noticeable, however, that the Canadian voice seems to be clear of the particularly irritating brassy effect that so many of the American actresses seem to affect on the sound film."[271] Not only did voice become a national point of contention but also one based on gender. The American woman's voice was criticized for tone whereas the male voice was never singled out and criticized in the press.

In many of the letters written to the editor, the writer signed with initials and it was not possible to determine whether a man or a woman penned the letter. If it could be said that the industry was not aware its audience, it could also be said that the industry was less aware of female fans. Women were claimed to be less interested in audible films that rarely featured a female star let alone a female heroine. Whether this criticism was exclusive to sound films is unlikely. However, a criticism of the movie industry that

[270] J.E. Poole, "Pictures in England" Montreal Daily Star 23 August 1930: 30.
[271] Ibid., 30.

extends well beyond the early era is that it had always just pummeled ahead with minimal knowledge of its audience.

As Crafton observes, "Some critics hated speaking films because the voice pulled the movie away from something essentially 'filmic' and modern and toward old-fashioned theatricality."[272] Morgan Powell was not of this category. He would occasionally proclaim himself to be impressed with the talkies, but his standard position was that the stage was superior to the screen and if anything, maybe the talkies could benefit from the film's new theatricality. While his Saturday editorial represents a major source of discourse regarding the cinema in Montreal his word cannot be taken to mean public opinion. If anything, Powell was an antagonist in relation to those Montrealers who enjoyed the talking cinema. The popular press, used as a historical reference to determine appeals made to audiences and reception of synchronous sound cinema, does not adequately represent public opinion. Powell's bias for the theatre and silent cinema and criticism of the talkies did not go unnoticed by moviegoers in the city.

One Montrealer, M.W., wrote that he had never written to the newspaper before but that he really wanted to let off some steam. He began, "Sir, –May I ask you what you have against the 'Talkies?' Not only you, sir, but almost all critics seem to slam them."[273] M.W. defended two films that had recently exhibited in Montreal and he addressed the social and popular reasons for the talkies appeal to the public. "We, in Montreal could never see [a fine film such as Gold Diggers of Broadway (Roy Del Ruth, 1929)] for the price and in so comfortable a theatre before [the talkies]."[274] M.W. also

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[272] Crafton, The Talkies.
[273] M.W., letter, "The Talkies Defended," Montreal Daily Star 1 March 1930: 26.
[274] Ibid., 26.

cited Disraeli (Lee Garmes, 1929) as a film he could not "get out of his mind it was so splendid." After acknowledging Powell's bias for the legitimate theatre, M.W. questioned whether the Orpheum, a theatre that has just closed in Montreal and become a talkie playhouse, would not have done better if there were more comfortable chairs and some elbow and knee room? In addition, M.W. drew attention to the prices of plays in Montreal, which he thinks are high, and thought it was no wonder that people chose the movies instead. Humorously, he added that the silent films were irritating in much the same way contemporary audiences are irritated watching a dubbed movie; the lips move and there is no sound. As a moviegoer who appreciated the talkies, M.W. was especially thankful that he no longer had to listen to women reading the titles out loud he was ready to offer up a prayer.[275]

The censors were another conservative voice of dissent against sound films. One letter to the editor claimed that the talkies mitigated the attack on films by the censors. "The real advantage of the talking pictures over silent ones is that the censors cannot change the dialogue as they used to change the titles. They cannot change husband and wife into fiancé and fiancée and make the whole picture look ridiculous."[276] Despite the moviegoer's rosy outlook on censorship, Powell responded, "he evidently overlooks the fact that the censor can, and frequently does, cut out whole sections of the film, scene, dialogue and all, instead of merely changing them."[277] Montrealers were vocal about the

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[275] Ibid., 26. I have assumed M.W. was a man given his open criticism of female audience members. In this case the critique of title readers was directed specifically toward women audience members and according to Crafton, title readers were often adults reading the titles to their children. Given the policy of theatres in Quebec to not allow anyone under the age of 16 into the cinema this was not likely the case.
[276] D.E. Sarhart, letter, "The Film Censorship" Montreal Daily Star 5 April 1930: 27.
[277] Morgan Powell, response to D.E Sarhart's letter Montreal Daily Star 5 April 1930: 27.

censoring of film. While some praised William H. Hays, President of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association, for his decision in 1930 to issue a code for films deemed to have a content directed toward more mature audiences, others were not in favor of any action taken to condone the censorship of film. "Under this code, no producer will be permitted to produce a picture that will lower the moral standards of life."[278] The codes "ought to emphasize the 'wholesome instincts of life.' Now perhaps we can look forward to seeing some pictures which will be somewhat less repulsive than those which have been thrown on the screen in the last few years" attested one moviegoer in support of the codes as indicators of content.[279] Dissenters felt the screen should reflect life rather than censor reality with a heavy hand. "One of the purposes of the audible movie talkie sound (etc) films is to 'hold a mirror up to nature.'"[280] This moviegoer felt it was not up to Mr. Hays or anybody else for that matter to decide what aspects of human nature should be shown on the screen, he claimed, "The activities of censorship are misguided and misplaced."[281] Sarhart maintained,

> ...the censor, finding that human nature is so infirm, unclean, and wicked, decides that the mirror of the screen shall not reflect to us the things of everyday life, that it shall not expose our weaknesses, nor convict us of our crimes.[282]

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[278] Powell, S. Morgan, "A Code For the Talkies," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 29 March 1930: 24.
[279] Eric L. Wethey, letter, Montreal Daily Star 5 April 1930: 27.
[280] Morgan Powell, "Remarkable Film Condemned Here," Montreal Daily Star 26 April 1930: 26.
[281] D.E. Sarhart, letter, "The Film Censorship," Montreal Daily Star 5 April 1930: 27.
[282] Ibid., 27.

Even the often-moral Morgan Powell voices his opposition to the censors when The Passion of Joan of Arc (1929), a film he deemed exceptionally educational and dramatic, was banned in Montreal. Moreover, Powell argued that those who attended a private screening of the film in Montreal (himself, two professors, a judge, and newspaper professionals amongst others) hailed the film unequivocally.[283] The film had played to appreciative audiences and received strong reviews internationally and Powell could not understand why it should be banned in Montreal. The writer of the following letter spoke for film fans who thought it is about time they were let in on the secret—the parts of the film had been left on the censor's floor,

> ...this film cutting business is the most annoying thing. Take a scene from a picture and you merely feed the imagination of that picture's public. This has been stressed time and time again by correspondents in your page. But the fact remains that the majority of film fans would like to know just what has been cut out.[284]

The letter writer suggested the complete scenario of a film be printed in the movie program along with the names of the cast and other points about the playbill already offered to the public. That way, the public, in the name of justice and fairness, could have a way to check up on the censors. As the writer asserted, the feeling that the censors were cutting out more than was necessary had been expressed in the press before by moviegoers who felt they were getting ripped off and that the original picture had been destroyed to a certain extent. The call to print the entire pre-censored scenario in the

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[283] Morgan Powell, "Remarkable Film Condemned Here," Montreal Daily Star 26 April 1930: 26.
[284] Letter, "Two-Fold Purpose," Montreal Daily Star 5 September 1931: 20.

program was original and while my study concludes with the beginning of the 1931-32 season, it would be interesting to follow up the public demand for "fair censorship."

Popular reaction was to exert pressure to limit censorship. A sentiment that the moviegoer was missing out on something whenever it was known that a film had been changed to meet censor codes dominated these reactions. It is the same feeling expressed today when for instance, a film is modified for video release or for television. Many audiences demanded the right to be their own censors and decide what social and cultural codes the talkies should and should not adhere to. This was demonstrated most obviously by Powell's determined responses to letters written by moviegoers not supporting his point of view. Montrealers did not support Hollywood's experiments, most notably films with intermittent dialogue, the part-talkie and films that had only sync-sound effects. Despite Powell's support for a return to the silent cinema, moviegoers in Montreal had had a taste of the talkies and most were not interested in a return to any other style.

Theatres continued to compete and entice the audience with appeals about sound. The introduction of sync sound to the cinema affected the way theatres programmed and rather than offering a mix of live and film presentations many theatres abandoned their live acts. While the novelty of sound seemed to be enough to carry any theatre in 1928-1929, the economy declined as the Depression began and theatre managers were left to figure out how to bring back the crowds. The following chapter deals with 1930 and 1931 in Montreal and the changes in exhibition practices that took place. Near the end of the chapter I will also examine the speculations of the imminent death of the talkies and the proposals for the future of cinema.

6

Moveable Feast

Many film historians have documented the differences in exhibition practices from city to city and particularly between small towns.[285] While the same film may have been the feature on a playbill it would have been programmed differently depending on the location, the exhibition capability of the theatres and the audiences. Gomery points out that well into the late 1920s film production companies were still making two copies of films, one talking and one silent, to be shown in theatres not yet wired for sound. Certainly the study of specific locations is an integral part of understanding audiences and the reception of film. For the purpose of this study, Montreal is the gateway of what will help begin a more detailed piecing together of the puzzle of early film spectators and the discursive appeals made to audiences in future research.

Lying at the heart of the transition from silent to sound cinema was what Miriam Hansen has discussed as a shift from a disjointed presentation of live and filmic performance to a form of exhibition no longer characterized as disjointed, fragmented and dispersed. The live variety acts mixed with filmic exhibition were characteristic of the style of early silent cinema and were popular in Montreal. To illustrate, Hansen's description is worth citing at some length.

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[285] See Gregory Waller's Main Street Amusements for an examination of mid-sized American cities and Robert C. Allan (1979), Russell Merritt (1976), and the collection of works in Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, American Movie Audiences from the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era, eds. (London: British Film Institute, 1999).

> The format of presentation typical of early cinema was shaped by the commercial entertainments in whose context films were shown, in particular vaudeville and traveling shows. From those entertainment forms, the cinema borrowed two major principles: (1) a disjunctive style of programming—the variety format—by which short films alternated with live performances (vaudeville turns; animal, acrobat, and magic acts; song slides) and (2) the mediation of the individual film by personnel present in the theatre, such as lecturers, sound effects specialists, and, invariably, musicians. Both principles preserved a perceptual continuum between space/time of the theatre and the illusionist world of the screen, as opposed to the classical segregation of screen and theatre space with its regime of absence and presence and its discipline of silence, spellbound passivity, and perceptual isolation. What is more, early cinema's dispersal of meaning across filmic and nonfilmic sources... lent the exhibition the character of a live event, that is, a performance that varied from place to place and time to time depending on the theatre type and location, audience composition, and musical accompaniment.[286]

To be sure, enticing the audience is a certain component of film exhibition. This inquiry demonstrates that the Hollywood streamlined program attempted in Montreal in the late 20s did not stick. The shift in exhibition due to sinking box office returns and public appreciation of the variety format occurred in Canada less than three years after sync-sound made its debut.

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[286] Hansen, "Early Cinema, Late Cinema," 39.

The program for cinemas was sometimes published in the newspaper most often as part of the advertising. At other times advertisements were vague and focused on only the feature presentation. From the years when Montrealers were presented the first sound film demonstrations through to the revival of vaudeville, the programs indicate the increasing, then waning novelty of synchronous sound. In this final chapter, I will sketch the return to programs featuring live acts, the effects of tough economic times on exhibition in Montreal and the appeals to spectators made through the popular press. After theatre managers and critics believed the thrill of sound had worn off, they quickly turned back to a program style they knew was popular before the talkies. Theatre managers brought back the sort of entertainment audiences were accustomed to before the take-over of the synchronous sound feature-film.

While the program may have been the drawing card for audiences when making a choice of which theatre to attend, arriving at the beginning of said program did not seem to be as important a factor. As stated earlier, neither spectators nor exhibitors were bound by strict starting times for shows. Doherty claims this was true of American audiences and there is evidence of the phenomenon in film advertisements in the Montreal press as well. Exhibitors, even if they did advertise a starting time, were at their own discretion whether or not to follow it. "With starting times ever-changing and unpublicized, movies were a sort of moveable feast or a pick-and-chose buffet."[287] As spectators wandered in and out as they pleased, those already in the theatre might grow agitated. It soon became a common practice for theatres to publish starting times or hold lines outside of the theatre and not allow spectators to come and go at their own will.

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[287] Doherty, "This is Where We Came In," 145.

Doherty purports that despite efforts of theatre managers and complaints from filmmakers, audiences remained "determinedly non-linear."[288] This was also true of audiences in Montreal where, even as late as 1930, newspapers advertised continuous shows from morning until night with managers making adaptations to the program as needed to adjust to the flow of audiences. If a particularly large crowd was present, managers were known to cut out parts of the program, sometimes showing just the feature film. This sort of action was not greeted kindly by audience members who preferred to come and go as they pleased and were not impressed about missing shorts, newsreels and the scenic films, especially those of Canada. There were theatres that indicated the show starting times in their advertisements however they also indicated that shows were continuous suggesting that the theatre would determine the starting times depending on the crowd that day *(Figure 31)*.

"The novelty of sound was thrown as a sop to the public. So far it has worked. But the news now is that it has ceased to work."[289] In 1930, the public was fed up with the meager efforts of the film industry to salvage their own selves by adopting sound. The last two years "have seen the talkie take hold on the imagination and pocketbook of the theatergoer."[290] The article in the Montreal Daily Star was critical of the film industry's use of sound to ward off the encroaching radio entertainment and to fill otherwise emptying theatres, claiming, two years later, Hollywood is again facing a competitive amusement industry and a public bored by the novelty of sound. "People are fed up on lame products offered with a sugar coating of sound" and theatres are beginning to

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[288] Ibid., 146.
[289] "Public Getting "Fed Up" With Lame Movies Despite Sound Novelty," Montreal Daily Star 1 September 1930: 14.
[290] Ibid., 14.

worry.[291] Cinemas struggled to keep vaudeville on the stage, most of them ending the live variety acts when the cinema was wired for sound and they were able to exhibit sound films. It remained a feature at Loews on Saint Catherine Street while other cinemas relied on feature films with synchronous sound to draw audiences. Although the management at Loew's struggled to keep their vaudeville acts in the program, two weeks after the passionate proclamation of a renaissance of romance in the picture palaces, they announced vaudeville would be discontinued *(Figure 32)*. In its place, patrons could expect "a splendid program of talking and singing pictures."[292] Loews offered the new program of talking films and shorts at reduced prices of 25 cents to 50 cents but even the bargain did not change the irony of the disappearance of the last standing vaudeville accompaniment to film exhibition in Montreal just before longstanding houses like the Capitol took it up again. "In an effort to restore waning interest the big local show houses have restored the stage prologue, with its lavish acts and pretty dancing girls discarded two years ago."[293]

The arrangement at Loew's did not last much longer than a month as the public was devoted to their renowned vaudeville, and the live acts returned to the city stage in October 1930. "Loew's theatre have completed arrangements whereby they can definitely assure the public of the weekly selection of the very best acts available in this particular field of theatrical." The Capitol theatre also took its place among the prestige houses to present an all-new "show idea"*(Figure 33)*. Back was the orchestra, the organ novelties

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[291] Ibid., 14.
[292] Advertisement for Way Out West at Loew's, Montreal Daily Star 13 September 1930: 24.
[293] "Public Getting "Fed Up" With Lame Movies Despite Sound Novelty," Montreal Daily Star 1 September 1930: 14.

and the live stage acts. "Be one of the first to enjoy Canada's largest and finest stage productions," urged their advertisement.[294] Not long after Loews and the Capitol reinstalled live acts in their programs, other cinemas followed suit. In an effort to attract crowds theatre managers were resorting to recreating the exciting time in exhibition when talkies first began and synchronized cinema was programmed into a range of entertainment and live musical acts.

Around the film world a debate was raging. Would the talkies take a nosedive right off screen? Other forms of entertainment particularly the popularity of 'midget golf' (mini-golf) and a severe summer slump were blamed for the decreased attendance at the cinemas.[295] The popularity of miniature golf was no joke. By the summer of 1930, Fox, Publix and Warner were turning unprofitable theatres into miniature golf courses.[296] In an industry just beginning to realize that novelty had great power in terms of reception and bringing in audiences, the wearing off of a novelty should not have been take lightly. The industry looked for ways to bring back the crowds and despite Warner's confidence in the talkies, the extent to which silent cinema could be brought back was not ruled out as an option.[297] Louis Mayer of MGM suggested pantomime artists as a solution to declining attendance while Radio Keith Orheum's William le Baron foresaw the proper formula for exhibition as one-half dialogue and one-half pantomime. Meanwhile Charlie Chaplin who had been holding out on talking film must have been in his glory as he was due to star in his new silent feature.

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[294] Advertisement for Prosperity Week Program at the Capitol Montreal Daily Star 4 October 1930: 23.
[295] "Photoplay Executives Give Options On The Future of the Talkies," Montreal Daily Star 11 October 1930: 24.
[296] Crafton, The Talkies, 263.
[297] Ibid., 24.

It appeared that the return to silent films was not the only threat to the somewhat disenfranchised talkies. Powell was glowing with 'I told you so' as he wrote, "Movies and talkies are here to stay, are an interesting and educational form of cheap entertainment and will continue to be patronized extensively by the public; but, they can never take the place of spoken drama."[298] According to Powell's article, people wanted "plays and music rendered by real flesh and blood people"—they also wanted "plays teeming with human interest, wit, educational value and entertainment" They wanted wholesome entertainment that was a true representation of life not an exaggeration—except for the innocent exaggeration of life that harms no one by its merriment and lifts everyone for a few cheering hours from life's drab realities.[299] While the public tastes were deemed fickle the major studios were housecleaning by cutting their contract layers down.[300] If they had not been drawing a crowd they were out and no one was secure any longer as studios had adopted a 'one picture contract' rather than a long term or lifelong contract they may have agreed to in the past. The public "changes its taste in pictures. At present, the comedy people are going over big"[301] The notion and the excuse used by an industry that needed to employ cost cutting measures due to lower box office returns, was that the public was calling for an industry malleable to the ever changing whim of the moviegoer.[302]

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[298] Morgan Powell, "About Ticket Prices," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 25 October 1930: 23.
[299] Ibid., 23.
[300] "List of Movie Players Will Undergo A Weeding Out Process Very Soon," Montreal Daily Star 3 November 1930: 6.
[301] Ibid., 6.
[302] Crafton, The Talkies, 182.

Montreal has a world-class reputation of being a city of festivals which it did not come by unwittingly. In the midst of the fears about the future of sound and the desires of audiences came the celebration of Prosperity Week to lift everyone's spirits. Prosperity Week was celebrated throughout Canada and endorsed by the Prime Minister and the mayor of Montreal Camillen Houde as a "movement to create a spirit of optimism and prosperity in the Dominion." Prosperity week kicked off a series of events in Montreal including the appearance of Prime Minister R. B. Bennett on several local moving picture screens in an audible film.[303] "In adding his support to the Prosperity Week campaign, Mr. Bennett pays tribute to the talking screen and its significance." Prosperity Week was advertised and talked about in the press as a huge celebration in Montreal. For the special week, the Capitol announced its inaugural gala show as, "the most important event in Montreal's theatre history."[304] In almost a revival theme, the Capitol "took its place among America's Finest Theatres—presenting the same programs as the world's biggest theatres provide."[305] The "Greater new show idea" at the Capitol brought several features to the program for Prosperity week including: stage productions, organ novelties, musical surprises, a concert orchestra and the "Greatest Talking Pictures!"[306] The theatres in Montreal were reacting to a plunge in attendance by rejuvenating the screens with added attractions, a revival of live acts to accompany the 'talkies' and new bargain prices making filmgoing even more accessible to the public. Moviegoers paid only 25 cents before twelve thirty in the afternoon and were able to see

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[303] "Premier Bennett In The Audible Pictures Talks Of Canadian Prosperity," Montreal Daily Star 8 Oct 1930: 6.
[304] Advertisement for the Capitol's Greater New Show Idea during Prosperity Week, Montreal Daily Star 11 October 1930: 23.
[305] Ibid., 23.
[306] Ibid., 23.

a complete show. Other theatres also introduced the bargain prices and thrift matinees. The Palace theatre even brought in a special French movie to reach a new target audience.

> The management of the Palace theatre announces that for the benefit of French-Canadians of Montreal it will inaugurate a new policy that will be in force during the engagement of Maurice Chevalier's latest vehicle, the Playboy of Paris, at this theatre. Starting today and every morning hereafter, except Sunday, there will be a special matinee commencing at 9:30a.m., when the all-French version of Playboy in Paris will be shown[307] *(Figure 34).*

In addition, the new economic pressure of the Depression inspired lower prices, the Thrift Matinee and the Bargain Matinee spread from cinema to cinema. The programs around the city had begun to add stage shows, the organ and symphony orchestras, and even "freak shows." The Godino Siamese twins and their Brides appeared on the stages of Five United Amusement Theatres In Addition to Their Regular Double Film Programs![308] *(Figure 35)* In addition, new innovations began to clamor for the public's attention including the film Cimarron (Wesley Ruggles, 1931) to be presented on a gigantic screen at the Palace theatre.[309]

I maintain that the changes brought about in exhibition were not only due to an economic decline at the beginning of the Depression. Powell also attributed it to the

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[307] "Morning Matinees for Special French Movie," Montreal Daily Star 25 October 1930: 23.

[308] Advertisement for the appearance of the Godino Siamese Twins at five United Amusement Theatres, Montreal Daily Star 4 March 1931: 6.

[309] The Montreal Daily Star reported Cimarron cost one million dollars to make.

attitude of the discriminating picture lover in Montreal who had grown tired of Hollywood's persistence in producing films that tell stories about "gold-diggers, unfortunate chorus girls, successful thugs and underworld characters, and all the rest of the stuff that has been served up ad nauseum in the past."[310] Powell predicted the return of the 'one-reeler' used extensively in programs before the talkie became the feature film. The 'one-reeler' referred to a single reel of film, usually a comedy short, which had faded into the background in recent years. In the press, there were headlines and articles predicting the next revolution in cinematic exhibition. There were triumphant reports of survival like this headline, "London Theatres Have Countered Competition of Talkies Effectively" celebrating the survival of London's west end theatres, despite having to temporarily resort to films. The talkies, and films in general were not seen by all as something that had to be survived, a sort of passing plague. On the same page, two articles appeared about a new talkie in production. Another touted the new revolution of the screen—color.

Indicative of the desire to find the next novelty, the new attraction, the sentiment in the popular press was that the talkies were on their way out and something new hung in the waiting to once again revolutionize the screen and draw crowds. Despite predictions of a new invention to transform cinemagoing, there was no fast escape from the current reality of decreased attendance. Managers in Montreal worked hard to reach out to their audiences and recruit new theatre patrons. Take this statement on April 4, 1931 for example; "[Princess] management is especially delirious of pointing out that

[310] Morgan Powell, "How about the one-reeler?" Montreal Daily Star 7 March 1931.

care has been taken to supply French titles for the convenience of their French-speaking patrons."[311]

One of the new inventions predicted to revolutionize the cinema was only indirectly associated with exhibition. "The past week has witnessed the introduction into the amusement world of a factor that may quite conceivably effect a revolution comparable to that which was brought about by the invention of the talking picture"[312] proclaimed Powell. Every futuristic theatre would surely be equipped with the Trans-Lux, an automated replacement for the many employees of cinemas like ushers, and people in ticket booths.[313] Already in place in New York, the Trans-Lux simply needed a turnstile to work its wonders. All a moviegoer would have to do is put money into a slot and enter the cinema by means of a turnstile. The ticket box would be eliminated, as would the ushers, the box office and some of the overhead costs. It was thought that due to the cost of running a palatial theatre combined with the increased cost of producing talking films the Trans-Lux would soon become a reality. Until now, the "talkie was a novelty, there was a rush to see it" and that covered the costs. "But that day is over. It is a novelty no longer."[314] Add to that, theatres slashing prices and the extravagance of the film industry and there is a definite imbalance between expenditures and revenues. It was declared that the turnstile, of the Trans-Lux, could not be fooled and it was predicted the turnstile could govern the theatre of the future. To be sure, the Trans-Lux would also regulate starting times of films and would govern the movements of the audiences. The

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[311] City Lights (Charlie Chaplin, 1931) was not a dialogue film but it did have synchronized sound effects and music. Montreal Daily Star 4 April 1931: 25.
[312] Morgan Powell, "The Automatic Cinema," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 21 March 1931: 25.
[313] Ibid., 25.
[314] Ibid., 25.

automatic cinema was an experiment as well as evidence of a difficult time in exhibition though there is no indication it ever did become a reality in Montreal.

If the talkie was becoming less of a novelty for the audiences, it makes sense that the viewers were becoming more critical of what they saw on the screen. This closer, more critical watching of films was evident in the letters to the editor in the popular press. One film, Africa Speaks (Walter Futter, 1930)[315] drew a deluge of criticism from Montrealers in the pages of the Montreal Daily Star. Spectator C. Weaver had seen the film four times and he claimed, as did another viewer, the film was interesting but many of the scenes had been faked. Weaver broke down some of the scenes in a shot-by-shot analysis to point out the extent of the bloopers in the continuity of the film. After setting up the scene, Weaver gleefully and smugly wrote, "I caught a glimpse of something like a mike standing up on a long pole."[316] Up to this poing, audiences had often been referred to as fickle by the film industry and theatre managers having difficulty drawing a crowd but it seemed audiences were becoming more aware of cinematic conventions and without the novelty of the talking cinema to capture all their attention perhaps they were paying more attention to other aspects of cinema such as storylines, and continuity. The amount of criticism sparked by the film Africa Speaks was enough that Powell created a special section in the paper and more than one letter criticized continuity and the content of the film.

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[315] This film was originally titled Ubangi. The theme of transporting the audience member to a new geographical place spawned the travel film or the travelogue—part ethnography, part attraction as Crafton claims in The Talkies, 388. The travel film still had ties to the lecture film and according to accounts in the press and letters from moviegoers, they were very popular even if contentious.

[316] C. Weaver, letter, "More Letters on Africa Speaks," Montreal Daily Star 6 December 1930: 24-25.

Early in 1931 the Northern Electric Company pioneered a new process called noiseless recording that was introduced to Montrealers at the Palace *(Figures 36a and 36b).* In spite of the new innovations in sound Powell remained a silent film purist and couldn't have been more drawn and vocal about the pursuit back to pantomime. The evolution into talking film had its moments of conversion that resulted in what Powell called half-talking film based on "essential speech" and pantomime. It is this form of cinema that he preferred as illustrated by his editorial:

> In art as in nature, the revolutions that prove most important are not always those that are directed in the noisiest manner. Within two short years a complete revolution has been brought about in the art of the cinema, which changed the entire motion picture industry. Now another revolution is being affected, without any peal of trumpets, which will no less prove of the utmost importance to the public who go to see the films.[317]

Powell's prototype was a German film that has not yet been exhibited in Canada, entitled The Blue Angel (Josef von Sternberg, 1930). The translation of the film for English audiences had spawned a hybrid of the silent and talking cinema that Powell supported. He wrote,

> ...all unpleasant dialogue was omitted, only the vital utterances in English were recorded, and the German dialogue was retained in a few essential instances. The net result was a film in which the art of pantomime was

[317] Morgan Powell, "The Talkie of the Future," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 14 February 1931: 25.

> predominant, speech a secondary consideration, and sound factors merely employed for illuminative purposes.[318]

His conclusion was that talking pictures that did not depend on speech were better than those that entirely depended upon dialogue to advance the plot. An article in La Presse echoed the idea that the talkies should limit talk.[319] The article claimed that all indications showed the talkies would always be in style but it was necessary to find a new technique of production that would reduce dialogue to a strict minimum. It was indicated that the talkies talked too much and a bit of silence would be for the best. Powell would have liked to push the issue further and have all speech omitted. Rather, he promoted a return to only essential speech to create a hybrid art by configuring aspects of the talking cinema, silent film and live spoken drama. According to Powell, experiments were already very popular in London, Paris and Berlin and even New York. He offered an account of the experiments taking place at the London Coliseum,

> [An] enormous revolving stage is erected by means which spectacles can be shown in which living artists take part and which are on scale comparable to that of film, thus combining the one advantage of the screen with the factor of the personality of the living artist.[320]

Powell concluded that the public was seeking this sort of hybrid entertainment rather than the musical comedy and the ever-current theme song that were not suited to the screen.[321]

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[318] Morgan Powell, "A Combination Art," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 14 February 1931: 25.
[319] "Une annee d'activite du cinema," La Presse 8 August 1931: 65.
[320] Morgan Powell, "The Talkie of the Future," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 14 February 1931: 25.
[321] Ibid., 25.

> There will be very few of these made in the future. On the other hand, they (the Hollywood magnates) have come to a realization that the picture which is over laden with utterance is not likely to be a success either, and they are striving to arrive at a medium which is more likely to prove the foundation upon which the talkies of the future will be based—the type suggested by Blue Angel.

Although the producers are not seeking to develop this sort of film Powell claimed "it is certainly likely to be much more to the general public taste."[322]

Blue Angel , German film ingenuity, and the hybrid art of future film entered Powell's columns again later in the summer of 1931. This time, Powell echoed director René Clair's position that the "Talkies [were] Talking Too Much." Clair argued that too much attention has been given to the dialogue resulting in filmmakers ignoring the aspect of universality. He wrote, "Language is an intensely national thing and films, to be sure, should stick to fundamentals like emotion and keep talk to a minimum."[323] It was claimed that the public had grown accustomed to entirely dialogued films and by any means; the public would find silent films not as interesting and at times ridiculous.[324] However, according to Powell, the public also acclaimed the film Blue Angel, and even its critics pointed out the exemplary departure from conventional talking pictures and the possibility for the future. The carefully evolved German technique marked, for Powell, the talkie's return to artistic stature. All of this, from a cost-cutting effort on the part of

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[322] Morgan Powell, "A Combination Art," editorial, Montreal Daily Star, 2 May 1931: 27.
[323] René Clair cited in Morgan Powell, "Talkies Talking Too Much," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 6 June 1931: 23.
[324] "Une annee d'activite du cinema," La Presse 8 August 1931: 65.

the Germans when making the translated English version, seemed like serendipity. Powell's predictions represented a future shift in the exhibition of sound films, one that was beginning to include films from other countries besides the United States.

What information can I glean about the public taste at this time from the popular press? How much power had the talkies lost? The Montreal Daily Star wrote, "the obvious conclusion at which those best able to judge have arrived—is that the talking picture is losing its power to lure the public."[325] In the past, the slow down at theatres over the Christmas season, in summer due to lack of air conditioning, and as Doherty claims, during lent for the Roman Catholics, had always been temporary. The sagging economy in late 1930 and 1931 did not seem to have an end in sight. No statistics were offered for Canada but Powell claimed the attendance at talking picture houses in London had fallen off by over thirty per cent in a year. Imaginably the decrease in North America was comparable causing industry producers and managers, "to devise some new form of diversion by means of which they will be able to lure back to their theatres the public who have deserted them."[326]

The industry message was that the "thrill hungry Montreal public"[327] had deserted them. However, the public appeared to have been displeased with the content on the screens and responded vocally and physically by not consuming films as voraciously. This is not to say that the public was satisfied with the current technology for the exhibition and production of synchronous sound, but evidence showed other factors

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[325] Morgan Powell, "A Combination Art," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 2 May 1931: 27.
[326] Ibid., 27.
[327] An ad for the film Trader Horn filmed in Africa refers to the public as thrill hungry, adding to the impression that the film industry had of the public as seeking novelty, demanding action and thrills. Montreal Daily Star 11 April 1931: 24.

influencing their moviegoing. "When the talking picture first burst into the limelight, all Hollywood hailed it as the solution of the very serious problems that were then facing the film world. It would provide the essential stimulus for a jaded public; it would make the film market worldwide; it would give Hollywood pre-eminence everywhere."[328] If this was what the talkies were predisposed to doing, they were successful for a short time but encountered a lot of resistance from the critics which may have led to a negative outlook from the public. An advertisement for United Theatres depicted a father and son pulling the mother away from the stove in the kitchen, supposedly to leave the dishes and spend the night at the movies *(Figure 37)*. The image suggests a reluctant public and one that needs convincing to attend the cinema at this time.

While Powell felt the talkies took hold of the public imagination he attributed their failure to live up to all the predictions of 'talking pictures' to the stars and their performances. "It was suddenly revealed that they could not talk as the talking pictures demanded they should talk. They could look adorable, they could dress beautifully, they could simulate all the lighter emotions with more or less success; but they could not talk the English language as it was required to be spoken."[329] The prospect of a worldwide film industry was coveted particularly by Hollywood. Arguments of imperialism and Hollywood's dominance of the film industry were at the core of national discourse in Canada, Britain, France, Germany and Italy. The attempt by Hollywood to create a worldwide market for the talking film was resisted by other nations, especially those

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[328] Morgan Powell, "Talkie Difficulties," Montreal Daily Star 9 May 1930: 25.
[329] Ibid., 25. The claim that the talkies stole all the silent film stars, then pillaged the stage performers when it was discovered that not all the silent stars could talk (aesthetically) which then led to disappointing talking films and the destruction of other performance industries was part of Powell's disillusion with what had become of the talkies.

where English was not spoken. International audiences resented Hollywood's attempt to speak their languages and, with the exception of Canada, declared that they would make their own talking films. Canada however was closer to the United States and the American version of English was not all that different. On a national level, Canadian moviegoers expressed a longing to see more of Canada reflected on the screen. B. K. McIntyre added to the plea: "May I join those who have expressed themselves as interested in seeing films of our country rather than the hackneyed, dull 'shots' of another country."[330] He further added a plug for more shorts in the program claiming that the short films dealing with a travel subject or question of historical or commercial interest received "more than a scattered applause at their conclusion. But in spite of what the public wants, our managers continue on in the same old path, throwing us cheap, tawdy comedies, tawdy vaudeville turns and a host of uninteresting and sometimes unhealthy celluloid clap-traps"[331] Not only did the moviegoer express a desire to see Canadian content but better quality film shorts rather than the same things that managers kept on giving the audiences—productions which probably were not cheap but were deemed cheap for their awful qualities. The failure of the managers to respond to crowd approval and create programs that reflected what the public appreciated annoyed some moviegoers. Powell claimed, "[t]he public has grown rather exacting and is no longer satisfied with a single feature film."[332] He called for programs to consist of an overture if there is an orchestra, a scenic, a cartoon, a brief comedy, and a newsreel or two in

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[330] B.K. McIntyre, letter, "The Shorter the Better," Montreal Daily Star 5 September 1931: 20.
[331] Ibid., 20.
[332] Morgan Powell, "The Choice of Programs," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 23 May 1931: 23.

addition to the feature film. Surely it should be possible for theatre managers to pay attention to the character of the audiences criticized Powell. "We in Canada are more interested in Canadian than in foreign events."[333] Especially when it is something like a memorial or a trifling celebration—the sort of events that have much more appeal on a local level. Another Montrealer, H. E. Whitehorse echoed the call for more of a national perspective.

> I might call your attention to the so-called "News of the World" which we are also afflicted with on every possible occasion. These views certainly make me laugh! "News of the World" nine out of every ten of which show happens in the United States, of which the average Canadian has no interest, the tenth picture being possibly a British or foreign view. This is the "News of the World" brought to us by Hollywood."[334]

The 'Hollywoodcentric' content of the programs, especially the news and travel shorts had the Montreal moviegoers wondering about Canada's position in the film world. In April of 1931 an article indicated that Canada was paying increasing attention to British pictures. Out of 632 engagements Canada wide, one British film company had 267 in Montreal, which led the districts in bookings.[335] The Motion Picture Distributers and Exhibitors of Canada announced that they were going to pass a quota on the number of foreign films and the National Council of Education declared,

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[333] Ibid., 23.
[334] B.H. Whitehorse, letter, "News of the World" Montreal Daily Star 5 September 1931: 20.
[335] Morgan Powell, "Film Quota for Ontario," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 11 April 1931: 26.

> The cinema is one of the six great agencies of the modern world. For that reason its control by foreign interests directly or indirectly is a matter of national concern and demands nation-wide consideration. A Canadian Corporation is now making newsreels for Canadians, and they are as a rule very satisfactory. We can do with more of them, and we can also do with more scenics of our own land... On the principle that every man should know his own land... [and] from a purely educational viewpoint, it is surely desirable that we should see as many scenics dealing with Canada as deal with scenes beyond our own borders.[336]

The promotion of documentary film and the criticism of popular cinema as dangerous not only found its way into developments in Canadian film policy but formed the basic agenda of the National Council of Education (NCE). As Charles Acland has pointed out, from 1920-39 the NCE saw as its purpose, the promotion of "proper" uses for culture. "The NCE was a powerful lobby, initiator of cultural activities, and producer of cultural criticism. At every level, it laboured to produce a nationally minded, educated Canadian citizenery through culture."[337]

Take for example, the irony of this citation from Powell, written in July 1931, as he contemplated uses for Empire Films.

> The idea is to take scenes of everyday life, haphazard, from various agencies and under various conditions, so that the spirit of the period may be caught and transferred to the screen. It is specifically planned to avoid

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[336] Morgan Powell, "The Choice of Programs," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 23 May 1931: 23.

[337] Charles Acland, "Mapping the Serious and the Dangerous: Film and the National Council of Education, 1920-1939" Cinémas vol. 6, no 1: 103.

> anything in the nature of formal acting. The only 'actors' will be the people in the streets and about their houses and places of business. There will be no formal scenario, and the ultimate result, it is hoped, will be a film that will set before the public in other parts of the world the City of Edinburgh, its people and their daily routine.[338]

Despite the fact that he was writing about film making in the Empire of Britain, I maintain this was the root of positioning the Canadian audience as receptors of educational films, films with a purpose, documentary films designed to educate the public. Such was the agenda of the NCE and a way in which to differentiate Canadian production from Hollywood. Moreover, as Acland maintains, "the NCE sought to make the modern Canadian citizen into an imperial subject of Britain."[339] Films were created that would be of genuine value to both citizens and travelers—"constitute memorials in which prosperity might reasonably be expected to take an intelligent interest."[340] Poster films were designed as commercial tools for Empire products such as Canadian wheat and Australian wool and were also deemed educational tools to be used in classrooms to educate pupils on industry. Canada took her place, having sent sixteen such films to Britain. One such film was entitled Conquest and told the story of "the coming of civilization to Canada."[341] I argue that the dissatisfaction with the talkies and the 'Hollywood' scenarios, fears of cultural imperialism, a quest to create a contained

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[338] Morgan Powell, "Uses for Empire Films," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 18 July 1931: 19.
[339] Charles Acland, "Mapping the Serious and the Dangerous: Film and the National Council of Education, 1920-1939" Cinémas vol. 6, no 1: 107.
[340] Morgan Powell, "Uses for Empire Films," editorial, Montreal Daily Star 18 July 1931: 19.
[341] Ibid., 19.

national identity, and most importantly, a desire to regulate public taste, contributed to the persistence of the NCE and writers like Powell to promote Empire Films. Hence at the close of this study, Canada was examining its position in the film industry and moving toward the production of 'education for leisure', a discourse still dominant in Canadian film production.

This chapter provided an examination of exhibition in Montreal during the late 1930s and 1931. While it is increasingly evident that a change in exhibition is on the horizon, the talkies have not lost all momentum. The number of cinemas operating successfully in the city of Montreal is proof of that. However, predictions of what cinema will become after the talkies cease to draw a sole spectator demonstrated the vulnerability of the synchronized sound film as a new invention. Talkies fell prey to the hype that surrounds a new innovation and consequently to the predictions of demise that follow. On July 24, 1930, an interview with 77 year old theatre producer David Belasco was printed in the Montreal Daily Star. Belasco predicted the "Death of the talkies" and claimed good silent pictures would sweep the country[342] *(Figure 38)*. This stance came as no surprise. However, I maintain that the changes in exhibition brought about by the initial success of the feature-length sound film and the competition among theatres for the public presence contributed to the decreased attendance at the theatres more so than the single idea that the novelty of the talkie had worn off. The variety style program was popular with audiences in Montreal and when theatres ceased to present live acts and musical performances, opting instead for a program of only film, attendance was affected. Managers competed to entice moviegoers to the theatre returning to programs that had

[342] "Belasco Predicts Death of Talkies" Montreal Daily Star 24 July 1930: 6.

proved popular previously--a mixture of sound film, vaudeville acts and short features. At the same time, the nation of Canada was trying to position itself in the domestic and international film production industry hence positioning Canadian audiences as 'students' of purposeful film.

Conclusion

The Lights on the City

This thesis began with an account of the way historical research positions the audience. In Canadian cinema it is evident that the images we have of ourselves come from both filmic images and images of ourselves as audience members. In the late 1920s the lack of Canadian productions did not translate into a lack of audiences--often the criticism of today's Canadian film industry. On the contrary, the first Canadian demonstrations and exhibitions of synchronous sound took place in Montreal. The city also boasted some of the most spectacular palatial theatres, the most theatres per capita in Canada, a dynamic merging of French- and English-language audiences and abundant discourse about film in the popular press. If it were not for Morgan Powell's editorials in the Montreal Daily Star and his determination to analyze the talkies there would have been much less material for this study. La Presse, though it was a newspaper directed toward politics, literature and the arts did not have an editor such as Powell and for that reason I was able to draw less from La Presse. This is not to say that the French language audiences were not as vocal or interested in the cinema, because as I have stated, the linguistic communities seemed integrated as moviegoers to a certain degree.

The city of Montreal had its share of firsts, including the first theatre to be wired for sound and the exhibition of the first synchronous sound film in Canada.

> Talking cinema is not only here to stay but it is going to get better and soon become indispensable to the art of cinema. After the first experience we've had, we feel it will be adopted in all cinemas.[343]

The reaction after the first presentation of synchronized sound cinema in the program at the Palace Theatre on September 1, 1928 was optimistic. La Presse declared the 'new' Palace would be the talk of the city for quite awhile and George Rotsky would remain attached to the date of the first sound exhibition.[344] A great deal of excitement accompanied the exhibition of Street Angel and the anticipation of what was to come in the cinema. As I have demonstrated, the arrival of synchronized sound was not the great shock it is often depicted as historically. I am not the first to take issue with the declaration that audiences were stunned with the first audible films, and I have added to the growing amount of research that shows that though the transition to synchronous sound exhibition was rapid, it is difficult to say it was a revolution. While bringing about many changes in exhibition, sparking worries and concerns about the effects of the cinema and drastically reshaping the cinema industry, audiences in Montreal were eased into synchronous sound through the various experiments with sound and film that took place in the city dating back as far as 1908 according to Veronneau.[345] Spectators in Montreal were familiar with the use of sound in film exhibition—perhaps more than one would expect. The greatest appreciation from the public and the critics was with the advent of 'photographing' sound such that sound appeared to be coming directly from the

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[343] "Le Cinema 'parlant' au theatre Palace," La Presse 4 September 1926: 8-9. (My translation).
[344] "Le Palace, le premier théâtre de l'empire à avoir le cinema parlant," La Presse 27 October 1928: 16.
[345] See Pierre Veronneau, "An Intermedia practice: 'Talking Pictures' in Montreal, 1908-1910," Film History, vol. 11, no. 4 (1999): 427.

film itself. Audiences acclaimed 'perfect' synchronization—when the actor's mouths would move perfectly in sync with the words and sounds were coordinated.

Another myth, the claims of a landslide film, can be laid to rest.[346] History has credited The Jazz Singer as being the film to change it all. This researcher found no evidence of the sort, in fact, in Montreal the The Jazz Singer did not even play until the end of December 1928 and no great reaction was noted in the press. Crafton did not subscribe to the myth of The Jazz Singer and his analysis of box office records demonstrated that the reputation of the film and its star Al Jolson has been perpetuated in the media. Crafton discovered that box office records could not support the historical claims that had been made about The Jazz Singer. What this indicates about media analysis and historiographical method is that research and researchers mustn't limit their study to one source. Furthermore, Crafton's findings highlight the need for researchers to go back and to reexamine film history, to return to the box office records, periodicals, and trade journals and to seek new sources like the popular press and archival material. In the case of this study, my examination of the popular press in Montreal support Crafton's claim. Moreover I have discovered that there is a great deal of confusion surrounding the arrival of synchronous sound in Montreal.

Both the case of The Jazz Singer and the first talking film in Montreal, suggest that when trying to recover historical facts about exhibition and a film's place in popular reception, we must, as Crafton noted, "be careful to distinguish between the social context of the film and the writing of those with vested interests in laying claim to the

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[346] For further discussion on the landslide concept see Crafton, Donald (1997) The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926-1931. New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan.

film for their purposes." Crafton is pointing to the difficulty that can be associated with determining the validity of the sources used in historical reception research, particularly media analysis. While this is a good point to bear in mind, the confusion surrounding the first exhibition of talking film is only partly due to sloppy media analysis. An incomplete understanding of the performance practices of film like the difference between part-talkie, talkie, music and sound effects led to a great deal of confusion and competing claims in the press and in Canadian film history. To be sure, greater attention should be paid to the different performative practices with the goal of gaining a better understanding of cinemagoing and cultural practices rather than creating a categorical history.

The question of moviegoing was approached in its materiality as a form of cultural expression and participation. A close examination of exhibition context reveals the uneven nature of the transition to sound. This is most evident in the momentary return of earlier mixed programs. Montreal audience members consumed not only film but also other amusements presented as part of the exhibition program, the décor surrounding them, and numerous other live events. The introduction to synchronous sound film in 1926 and the growing use of sound leading up to dialogue films was an innovation able to draw in audiences, but only temporarily. The novelty of sound was waning a year after the exhibition of Street Angel. Audiences and the press tested Hollywood's various innovations like the part-talkie, sound effects and music only, dialogue limited to certain scenes, and programs focused on film with no live entertainment. Audiences, after having a taste of all-dialogue films, were no longer content with limited synchronous sound or hybrid sound/silent films and dismissed many

of these experiments. By 1930 spectators of sound films became seasoned and critical of the overall programming of cinematic exhibition, perhaps perpetuating the declining numbers at cinemas. Among the many reasons for the dwindling attendance it was believed that the novelty of the talking film had worn off and that a sound feature alone could no longer be counted on to pack theatres. Managers scrambled to discover the next big diversion and to draw crowds. This is demonstrated by an urgent desire to take the new technology of sound and present it in familiar forms. Audiences were offered a return to mixed programs with live entertainment and a myriad of other added attractions. The bargain and thrift matinee extended to most theatres across the city and the first run theatres like the Palace and the Capitol began to more specifically target the French-language community in Montreal.

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is interesting to speculate about whether the decreased attendance of the late 30's led to Canada's role as a branch plant of the American film industry.[347] At this point, the Canadian film industry began to position itself as an 'educational institution' making documentary and 'poster films' as an effort to make an investment in global cinema but also, as Acland has pointed out, to contain and control the social effects of film and public taste.[348] Montreal audiences were indeed vocal in calling for a national product on Canadian screens as was demonstrated in letters to the editor of the Montreal Daily Star. The role the NCE took in creating film for educational leisure also shows continued fears about social effects on audiences of the

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[347] For a more detailed discussion of Canadian film shaped by the perception of an absent Canadian audience see, Charles Acland's "Popular Film in Canada: Revisiting the Absent Audience." In A Passion for Identity: An Introduction to Canadian Studies, 3rd Edition. David Taras and Beverly Rasporich (eds). Toronto: ITP Nelson, 1997 p. 281-296.

[348] Acland, "Mapping the Serious and the Dangerous," 103.

talkies. This thesis illustrates the public discourse and perhaps the roots of Canada's evolution into educational film and the documentary genre for which Canada became world-renowned. Ironically, in 1929 Symon Gould, director of the Fine Arts Guild, believed that one or two years after the debut of synchronous sound the public would reject talking films, at which time synchronized sound will have been nearly perfected for news and documentary.[349] What cannot be determined by looking at the popular discourse in this study is whether the decreased attendance in 1930 and 1931 represented a decreased interest in talking film or film in general or if it was entirely due to the economic Depression. It would be interesting to explore the reception of the talkies after the Depression passed.

Even more interesting is the fear of the affects the talkies would have on daily life, especially speech. Fears that the English language would be replaced with 'Hollywoodese' were especially present in Canada and Britain. In cultural studies, the absence of a suspected discourse is often as important as its presence. In the case of language, little concern was expressed in the French press for the French language. There were no documented fears about encroaching English. Unlike the circulating discourse in Quebec and the strong association of culture and language now present, La Presse published very little on the subject. Ironically, the eclipse of proper English was a much greater fear in the pages of the Montreal Daily Star.

In 1929, an article predicting the future path of the cinema was published in La Presse. The article claimed, no one, except maybe some crazy genius would have believed the mechanical realizations that have taken place in the last ten years, including

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[349] "Le film parlant n'aurait qu'une vogue éphémère," La Presse 27 April 1929: 76.

synchronous sound cinema.[350] Forecasts for talking film were scattered in many different directions. Some said the screen would be considered from a different angle but synchronous sound would not affect silent cinema, others thought it would be the end of live theatre while still others wanted to see some form of hybrid entertainment with only the important segments 'talking'. Silent and sound cinema were not able to survive together and according to the press accounts no great desire arose on the part of moviegoers to return to the era of silent film. Still, sound had many naysayers, particularly vocal about concerns of the purity of the art of film and the goal of the cinema to become an international art. The public did not reject the use of sound in one or two years, nor did they push for a judicious use of sound.[351] Rather, as this study shows, the public incorporated sound film into their habitual practice of moviegoing.

The title of this chapter is a direct reference to the stand Charlie Chaplin took on sound film. While he had declared he would never act in one, and in 1931 released a silent film, his stubborn resistance did not bring in the crowds. As Crafton observed, "The reception of City Lights laid to rest permanently any possibility of an alternative silent cinema, an idea which Chaplin had bruited about. If anything it confirmed his silent-comic genius while symbolically ending the era of silent productions."[352] However, films from Europe such as The Blue Angel succeeded in showing critics that sound "could be used evocatively and creatively."[353] The feature that brought about the most anxiety and debate was nevertheless linked to the attraction itself—sound—and the delicate balance between sound and silence. Ironically, a projector for noiseless sound

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[350] "Ce que sera le cinèma en 1939," La Presse 13 July 1929: 16.
[351] "Le film parlant n'aurait qu'une vogue éphémère," La Presse 27 April 1929: 76.
[352] Crafton, The Talkies, 17.
[353] Crafton, The Talkies, 17.

film exhibition was introduced in 1931 when audience interest in the novelty of sound was waning. Northern Electric's claim, "The latest development of Sound Pictures, as revolutionary as Sound itself, is the Noiseless Recording Process," demonstrated the industry desire to innovate and entice audiences. The end of the period of study fails to show delineation away from the characteristics Gunning associated with early film exhibitions.

By drawing together the popular press accounts of the arrival and exhibition of synchronous sound from the point of view of both the French and English language press in Montreal I have been able to demonstrate the value of a local study of film reception in Canada. A study such as this one demonstrates the importance of the local experience in determining a more precise history of reception within the nation. Moreover, the mass of material pertaining to the reception of synchronous sound film by Montrealers is evidence of the vast amount of research not yet done. Interestingly, the French and English language audiences in Montreal did not exist in different worlds; theatre managers in Montreal appealed to both linguistic communities in lieu of the fact that most films were exhibited only in English. Furthermore, since the historical audience is not easy to locate seeking other sources such as the popular press enabled me to combat some of the myths of spectatorship and film history that override a precise reading of history. This study illustrates that we cannot assume the effects of technology on audiences nor can we take for granted work that has already been done in film history. Certainly, this thesis draws attention to the need to have a better understanding of Canadian cinema and the cultural practices surrounding the activity of going to the cinema.

One cannot trace the development of cinema by examining only the technology, nor can one study the introduction of new technologies as *a priori* to culture. The introduction of a new technology, though a point of departure, cannot be traced in exclusion unless one is attempting "a kind of retrodetermination whereby the political history of technology is converted into the unfolding nature of that technology."[354] As I have demonstrated, the power of the introduction of synchronous sound to cinema lies in the intersections of the audiences, the public spaces, the public discourses and the cinematic text. All these factors combine to create the variable and dynamic cultural landscape wherein exists the historical spectator. As this study set out to prove, more than technology is implicated in shaping cinematic spectatorship and the conception of historical audiences. The audience interest in the context of cinematic presentation, competition among theatre manager to elicit the attention of moviegoers, and the persistence of moviegoers to seek pleasure all point to factors beyond the scope of a study dedicated solely to the introduction of a new technology. The myths that have been perpetuated to this point in film history and spectatorship are due to the commitment to determinism whether it is empirical, technological or textual. Returning to the main historical work in Canadian film is useless unless the researcher is willing to seek new sources, and approach film history and film theory as an intersection of all that surrounds the cinema. The introduction of technology denotes a change in spectatorship and to assume a stable, unified spectator defeats the purpose of trying to move beyond the stagnant commitment to making both film history and film theory fit the parameters of analysis. Rather, cinema is the site of contestation.

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[354] Michael Warner cited in Scott MacKenzie "A Screen of one's own: early cinema in Quebec and the public sphere 1906-1928," Screen 41.2 (Summer 2000) 201.

Appendix

Figure 1: Advertisement for Eva Leoni's Phonofilm and live appearance at the Capitol Theatre (Montreal Daily Star, 3 April 1926, p. 21).

Figure 2: Advertisement for Dr. Lee de Forest Phonofilm (Radio Talking Pictures) as an added attraction at the Capitol Theatre (Montreal Daily Star, 6 February 1926).

Figure 3: Ben Bernie's Roosevelt orchestra Phonofilm recording is proof of the Phonofilm's ability to record sounds in 'mass' as well as 'solo' (Montreal Daily Star, 6 March 1926, p. 23)

Figure 4: Advertisement for The Brunswick Super Panatrope appeared only once in La Presse. There is also an advertisement for the upcoming Semaine de Gala Francaise (La Presse, 2 October 1927)

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Figure 8a: Close-up of Palace theatre manager George Rotsky's address to the public of Montreal that was printed on the advertisement for Street Angel on 1 September 1928. Montreal Daily Star 1 September 1928, p. 22.

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Figure 8c: Advertisement for Emmanuel Briffa's renovations to the Empress Theatre. Ads like this were common and Briffa was well known in Montreal having decorated or assisted in decorating 19 theatres in Montreal and more than 110 in North America. La Presse 19 May 1928, p. 73.

Figure 9(a-d): Advertisements for Street Angel at the Palace for the week of 3 September 1928. Emphasized the success of the film and the Palace was the only theatre in Montreal wired for synchronous sound. Notice that Figure 7a and 7b are direct translations. The same ads often appeared in La Presse and Montreal Daily Star indicating that the Palace addressed both linguistic communities.

Figure 10: Article in La Presse claimed the Palace theatre was the first theatre in the British Empire to present talking films. 27 October 1928, p. 16.

Figure 11: Street Angel was held over at the Palace and proved popular with Montrealers. The complete program was listed and again, theatre manager George Rotsky emphasized 100,000 dollars had been spent to bring sound to the public. Montreal Daily Star 8 September 1928, p. 27.

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Figure 16: Advertisement for In Old Arizona and the Movietone short of Premier Taschereau giving his opening address at the legislative assembly in Quebec City. La Presse 9 February 1929, p. 68.

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Figure 25a: Grand Opening of the Monkland Theatre at the corner of Monkland and Girouard from Northern Electric Sound System. Montreal Daily Star 7 March 1930, p. 16.

Figure 25b: Grand-Opening of the Outremont Theatre La Presse 4 October 1929, p.6

Figure 26a: Sketch of the Monkland exterior cited the cost of construction at $350,000. La Presse 7 March 1930.

Figure 26b: The opening of the Monkland and Granada were two days apart. Both were equipped with Northern Electric Sound Systems and could accommodate over 1500 people. Montreal Daily Star 26 March 1930, p. 6.

Figure 27: Northern Electric Sound System advertisement for Amherst Theatre in La Presse 8 March 1930, p. 59.

Figure 28: Advertisements for the Capitol Theatre and the Granada. The Capitol announces French and English Titles and The Granada, with Vitaphone

technology emphasizes that it is Montreal's most beautiful theatre. Capitol ad in Montreal Daily Star 12 January 1929, p. 16. Granada ad in Montreal Daily Star 12 April 1930, p. 29.

Figure 29: Advertisement for West of Zanzibar at the Capitol emphasizes bilingual titles. La Presse 9 February 1929, p. 67.

Figure 30: Ads for the Palace and the Capitol Theatre in Montreal Daily Star. Both ads highlight the 'something for everyone' program. At the Palace it is declared that the actors talked in all the important scenes and at the Capitol the program is still a mixture of live and film acts including Maurice Meerte and the Capitolians. The Capitol also announced "Prices to Suit Everyone's Purse" Montreal Daily Star 26 January 1929,p. 23.

Figure 31: Advertisement for the Princess theatre included a program that listed show times. There were no longer any live acts on the program. Montreal Daily Star 23 May 1930, p. 6.

Figure 32: Loew's announced they would have to temporarily discontinue vaudeville at the theatre. Montreal Daily Star 13 September 1930, 24.

Figure 33: Advertisement for Prosperity Week at the Capitol and the announcement of the Capitol's Greater New Show Idea featuring a mixed program of live stage acts and sound film. Montreal Daily Star 11 October 1930, p. 23.

Figure 34: The Palace presented an All-French version of The Smiling Lieutenant twice daily at 9:30a.m. and 11p.m. This was a switch from the titled versions that were often exhibited.

Figure 35: The Godino Siamese Twins appeared live at five of the United Amusement Theatres in Montreal. Montreal Daily Star 4 March 1931, p. 31.

Figure 36a: Advertisement for Northern Electric's new process of noiseless recording at the Palace where "tense moments of silence are produced." Montreal Daily Star 7 January 1931, p. 15.

Figure 36b: Detailed advertisement for noiseless recording exclaimed as an Evolution! Also the Palace theatre the "Eleven Tube Superheterodyne-Plus" from Philco Tone and distributed by John Millen & Son in Montreal. The ad suggests theatres in the city are teaming up with local businesses to give special offers to audience members. Montreal Daily Star 7 January 1931, p. 15.

Figure 37: United Amusement Corporation advertisement to promote their theatres depicts the 'men of the house' pulling the wife and mother to leave the dishes and come to the movies. La Presse 28 June 1930, 50.

Figure 38: It comes as no surprise to see the predicted death of the talkies.
"Belasco Predicts Death of Talkies" in Montreal Daily Star 24 July 1930, p. 6.

Figure 1: Advertisement for Eva Leoni's Phonofilm and live appearance at the Capitol Theatre (Montreal Daily Star, 3 April 1926, p. 21).

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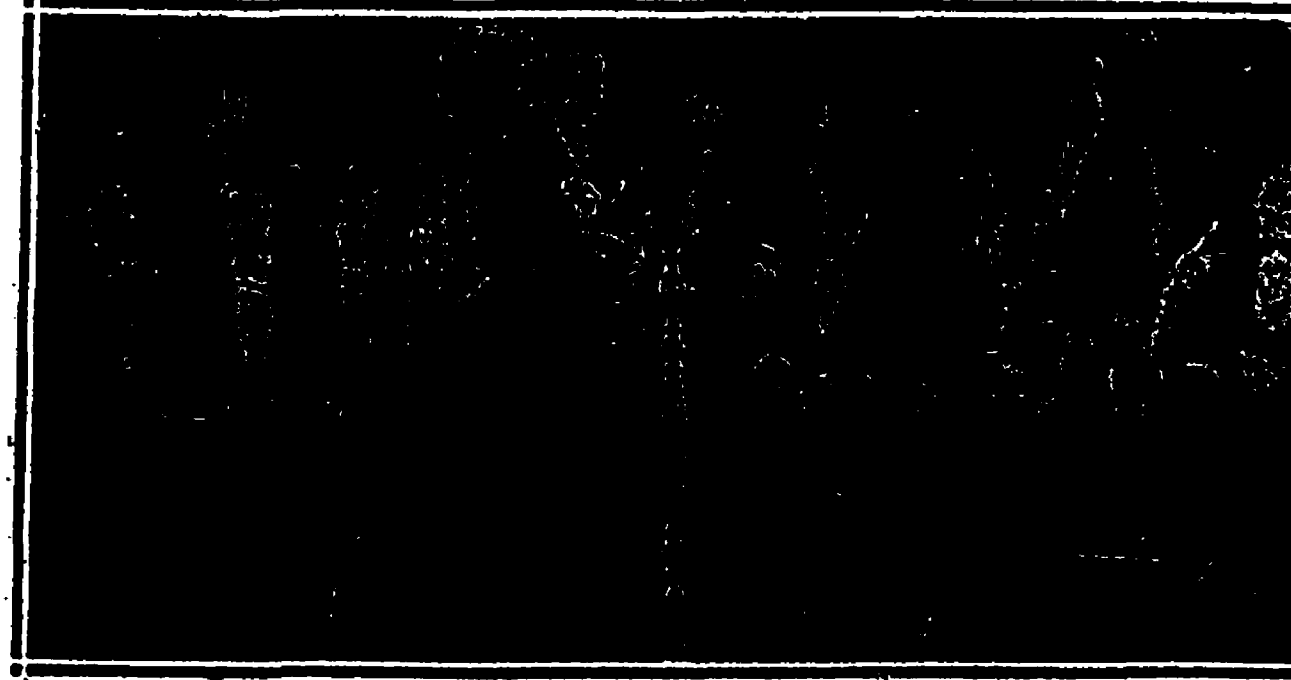
• record sounds in 'mass' as well as 'solo' (Montreal Daily Star, 6 March 1926, p. 23)

Ben Bernie and his Hotel Roosevelt Orchestra



Internationally famous dance orchestra who will be seen and heard in Montreal shortly on the DeForest Phonofil

Orchestral Record By Phonofilm Brings Out Fullest Harmony

One of the most remarkable features of the de Forest Phonofilm is that it records sound in mass as accurately and as convincingly as it does individual sounds. Thus, an instrumental trio is reproduced by the phonofilm just as clearly as a solo singer. A solo instrumentalist is no more vividly recreated than is an orchestra.

Ample proof of this is to be found in the records made by Ben Bernie's Roosevelt orchestra in New York. This is the "crack" orchestral organization attached to the big Roosevelt Hotel, and it enjoys a unique reputation in the American metropolis. It has made a number of feature records for the Phonofilm, and the results will be hear' in Montreal shortly.

Mr. Bernie himself conducts, and the picture affords the audience ample opportunity to note how accurately the various instruments are reproduced. As first one and then another takes up the melody lead, the tone is sharply defined, and the heavy background of sound provided by bass and tuba does not overwhelm the main theme at any time.

Whether in song feature numbers or in jazz, the result is the same. The various instrumental values are easily to be identified, and solo work stands out against the harmonization. It is a remarkable tribute to the accuracy and the comprehensive nature of the Phonofilm that it can achieve such results with jazz music in particular, when the numerous changes in tempo and in tone-qualities of certain instruments are borne in mind.

In another feature, a dancer performing to music by the banjo, the synchronization of the dancing tempo w of the player's music is the out factor. Miss Goody Montgomer while Mr. Brooks John plays h He is an expert, and she is a graceful artiste. The complete ation between sound and mov maintained throughout and the created is all the more emphasis by.

Laura Burt, a well-known actress, has gone to London in a new play.

* * *

A. L. Erlanger has accepted the construction of a theatre 44th Street, New York, that $1,000,000. The Erlanger office in the building.

* * *

Fay Lamphier, who won t "Miss America" at this season' contest at Atlantic City, will a role in Leon Gordon's next pr which he is planning for August

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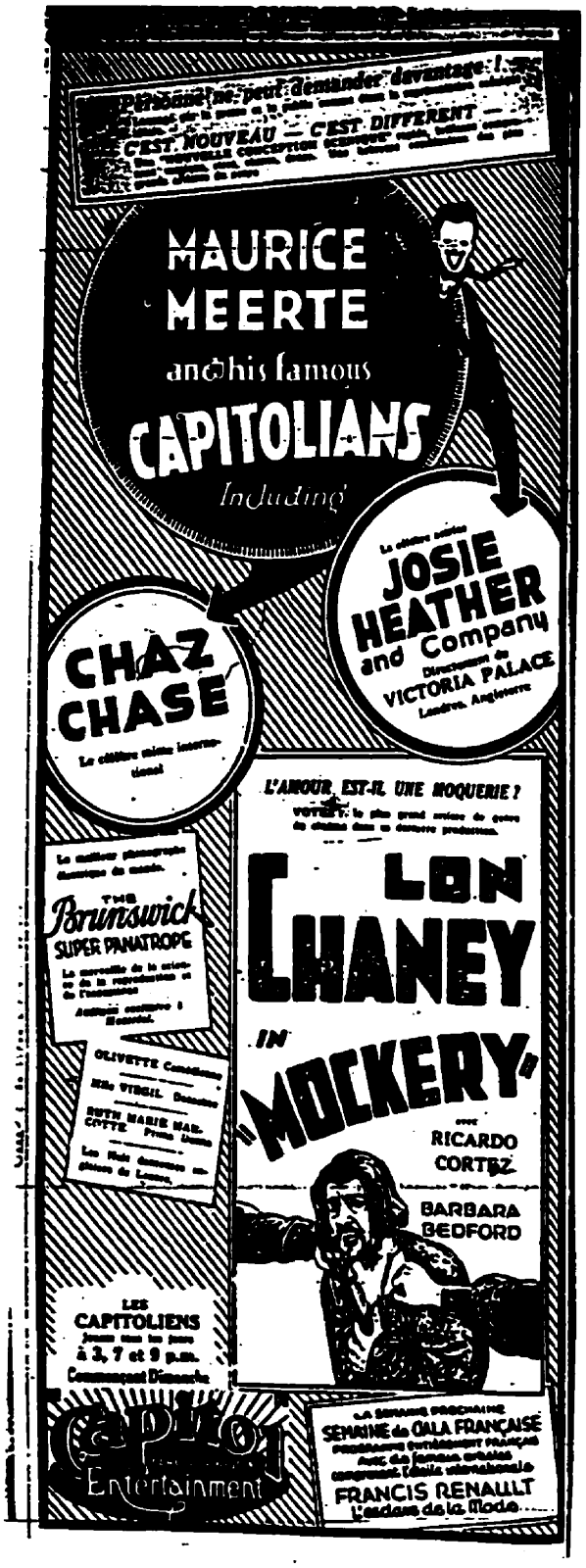
to correct an error concerning the cast of "Makeshifts," the first of the one-act plays presented at the Empire Theatre on the night of February 21. The part of Dolly, which was to have been taken by Miss Rose Klein, was filled instead by Mrs. Flynn, and not by Miss Jeannette Goldwater, as stated in the program. The club is indebted to Mrs. Flynn for her interpretation of an eleventh-hour role.



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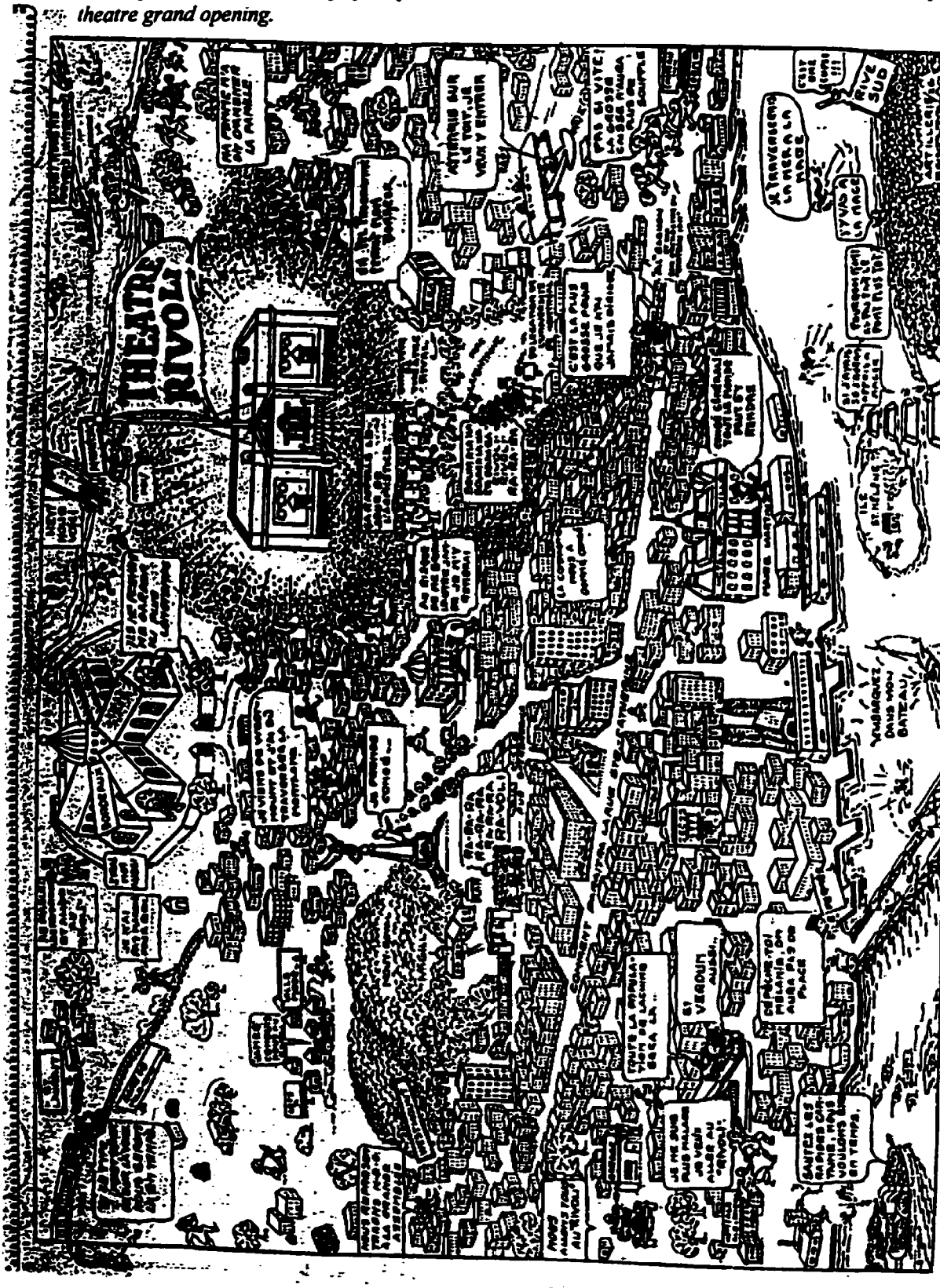

Figure 6: Advertisement for Street Angel on opening night at the Palace after the restoration of the interior and the wiring of the theatre. LaPresse 1 September 1928.

Figure 7: Advertisement for Street Angel *on opening night at the Palace after the restoration of the interior and the wiring of the theatre. Montreal Daily Star 1 September 1928.*

8a.

To the Montreal Public!

I greet you and invite you to the reopening of the Palace Theatre upon which $100,000. has been expended, since the doors were closed barely a month ago. I invite you to the brightest and most luxurious theatre in Montreal, offering a programme that is the acme of perfection.

For the first time you will see and hear with perfect synchronized sound effects the famous Wm. Fox Movietone features and novelties, together with other special added attractions, including the special engagement of Maurice Meerte—Canada's famous Boy Musical Director, constituting the finest entertainment in Montreal—

Yours Sincerely,

Geo Rotsky

Figure 8a: Close-up of Palace theatre manager George Rotsky's address to the public of Montreal that was printed on the advertisement for Street Angel *on 1 September 1928.*
Montreal Daily Star 1 September 1928, p. 22.

8b.

Les magnifiques couleurs, feuilles métalliques, etc. employées à la décoration de ce théâtre ont été fournies par

C. R. CROWLEY LIMITED

667 rue Ste-Catherine ouest
Montreal, P. Q.

Figure 8b: Advertisement for theatre decorating company in Montreal in LaPresse 19 May 1928, p. 73

8c.

Les somptueuses et incomparables décorations du

THEATRE EMPRESS

ONT ÉTÉ EXÉCUTÉES PAR

EMMANUEL BRIFFA

Artiste bien connu

On doit à M. Briffa la décoration de plus de 110 autres magnifiques théâtres au Canada et aux Etats-Unis d'Amérique, dont 19 dans la ville de Montréal.

Figure 8c: Advertisement for Emmanual Briffa's renovations to the Empress Theatre. Ads like this were common and Briffa was well-known in Montreal having decorated or assisted in decorating 19 theatres in Montreal and more than 110 in North America.
LaPresse 19 May 1928, p. 73.

Figure 9a: Advertisement for Street Angel, Montreal Daily Star 3 September 1928, p. 6.

Figure 9b: Advertisement for Street Angel, Montreal Daily Star 5 September 1928, p. 6.

Figure 9c: Advertisement for Street Angel, LaPresse 4 September 1928, p. 9.

Figure 9d: Advertisement for Street Angel, Montreal Daily Star 7 September 1928, p. 6.

Le Palace, le premier théâtre de l'empire à avoir le cinéma parlant

M. Georges Rotsky, le populaire gérant du théâtre Palace, s'est de nouveau placé au premier rang de nos hommes de théâtre par la politique nouvelle et excessivement intéressante qu'il inaugurera aujourd'hui même à son grand théâtre de la rue Sainte-Catherine. C'est là, en effet, qu'on entendra pour la première fois en ce pays, les vues "parlantes" qui font fureur en ce moment aux Etats-Unis. Non seulement M. Rotsky a l'honneur d'avoir été le premier au Canada à prendre cette initiative, mais dans tout l'empire britannique. Le 1er septembre 1928 est donc une date mémorable pour le théâtre dans les pays britanniques et le nom de M. Rotsky restera attaché à cette date.

Par vues "parlantes" ,on entend les films à la photographie desquels ont été parfaitement synchronisés une musique d'accompagnement fournie par les plus grands orchestres du continent, les effets de sons et de bruits qui accompagnent tous les incidents du film, comme le bruit des locomotives, des automobiles, des portes qui se ferment, des pas, des objets qui tombent, des collisions, coups de tonnerre, etc., bref c'est l'enregistrement parfait du bruit en même temps que de la photographie. Dans les parties les plus intéressantes des films, comme les tête à tête, on entend le dialogue des principaux artistes. C'est ainsi que les films de nouvelles et les comédies peuvent avoir aussi l'accompagnement sonore si intéressant. Le grand programme de début comporte un film qui nous montre un orchestre de 11 musiciens exécutant une composition que l'on entend parfaitement et nombreuses autres innovations.

Mais le film parlant ne sera pas la seule nouveauté du théâtre Palace. Cette salle a été entièrement transformée et redécorée, au point qu'on la reconnaîtra difficilement. Sous les mains expertes de M. Briffa, qui nous a donné de si beaux théâtres, les tentures, peintures,

M. GEORGE ROTSKY, gérant du théâtre Palace, le premier à inaugurer l'ère du cinéma "parlant" au Canada.

électriciens, lustres, meubles et tapis ont été changés. Il n'y a pas un pouce du théâtre qui n'ait été retouché et embelli. L'or a été répandu à profusion dans les décorations, de même que les soieries les plus luxueuses. Le nouveau Palace fera certes grande sensation et sera pendant longtemps le sujet de conversation de la ville.

Figure 10: Article in La Presse claimed the Palace theatre was the first theatre in the British Empire to present talking films. 27 October 1928, p. 16.

Figure 11: Street Angel *was held over at the Palace and proved popular with Montrealers. The complete program was listed and again, theatre manager George Rotsky emphasized 100,000 dollars had been spent to bring sound to the public. Montreal Daily Star 8 September 1928, p. 27.*

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…USIQUE

PREMIER FILM ENTIEREMENT PARLANT AU THEATRE PALACE

"The Terror", le film qui sera présenté au théâtre Palace à partir d'aujourd'hui, introduira le film entièrement parlant dans cette ville. Les petits films parlants et les films avec accompagnement synchronisé ont gagné la faveur des amateurs de cinéma, mais "The Terror" sera la première démonstration du degré de perfection atteint dans le dernier développement de l'art cinématographique. Ceux qui ont pu voir et entendre "The Terror" en présentation privée sont convaincus que les films dialogués garderont la faveur du public. Même sous forme de film silencieux, "The Terror" serait une attraction dépassant l'ordinaire. Il combine des situations émouvantes avec un élément de mystère assez profond pour captiver l'auditoire et les développements de l'histoire amènent des péripéties étonnantes.

L'action se passe dans un ancien manoir de la campagne Anglaise, habité par un vieux médecin et sa fille. Il apprend dans un journal que deux dévaliseurs de [illegible] "La Terreur" n'est pas révélée.

La troupe comprend [illegible]

Au nombre des courts films [illegible] au programme, il y a une comédie [illegible] "The Night Court" [illegible] (Communiqué.)

Figure 15: <u>The Terror</u> *headlined as the first all talking film at the Palace theatre. Even the credits were spoken for the film. LaPresse 12 January 1929, p. 61.*

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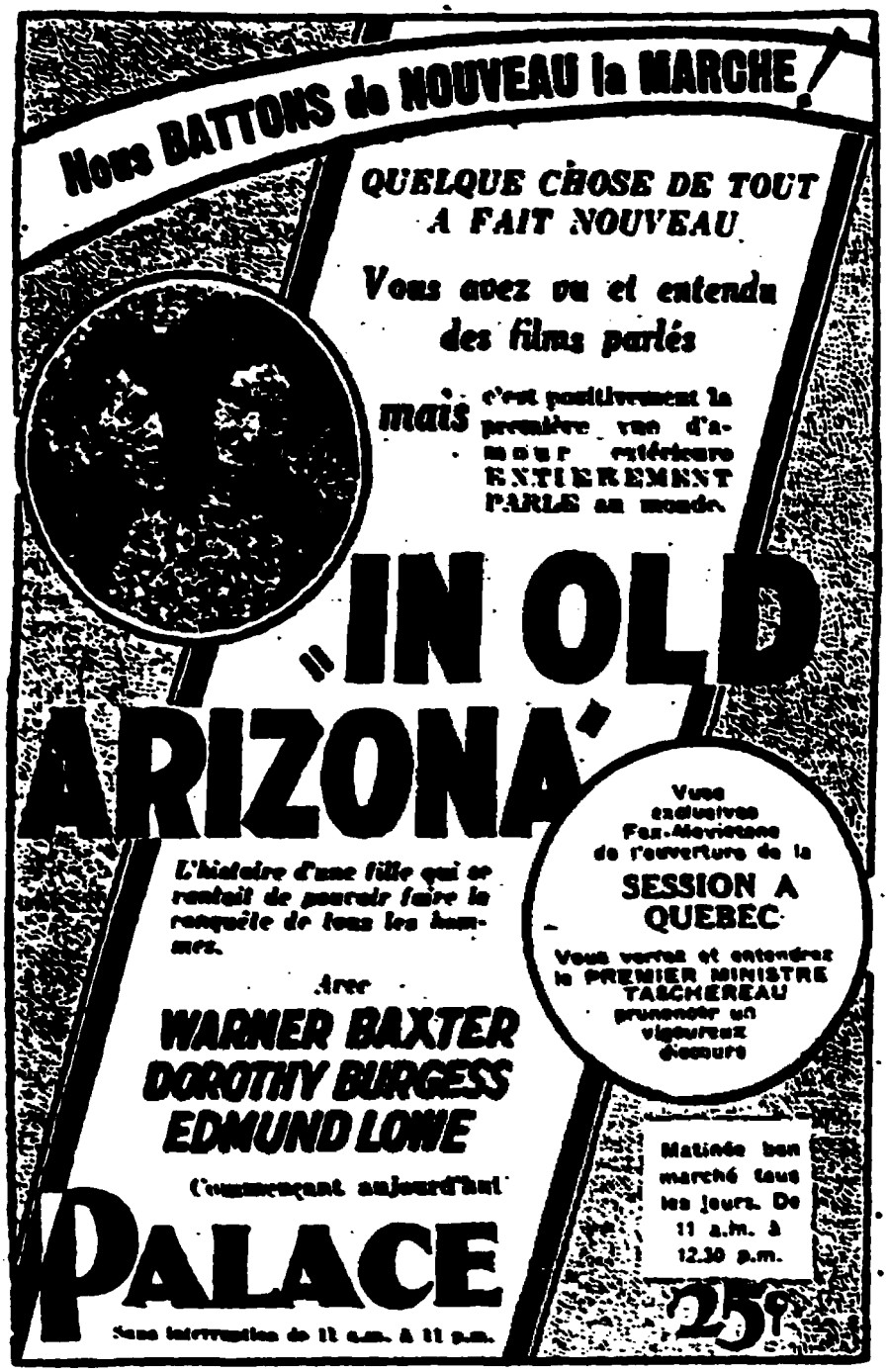


Figure 17: Advertisement for In Old Arizona *claimed the film was 100% All Talking in Montreal Daily Star 9 February 1929, p. 15.*

18a.

Le premier film parlé Paramount

"Burlesque" sera le premier film dialogué du Paramount. C'est l'adaptation à l'écran du drame de Manker Watters et de Arthur Hopkins. Victor Fleming en a la direction.

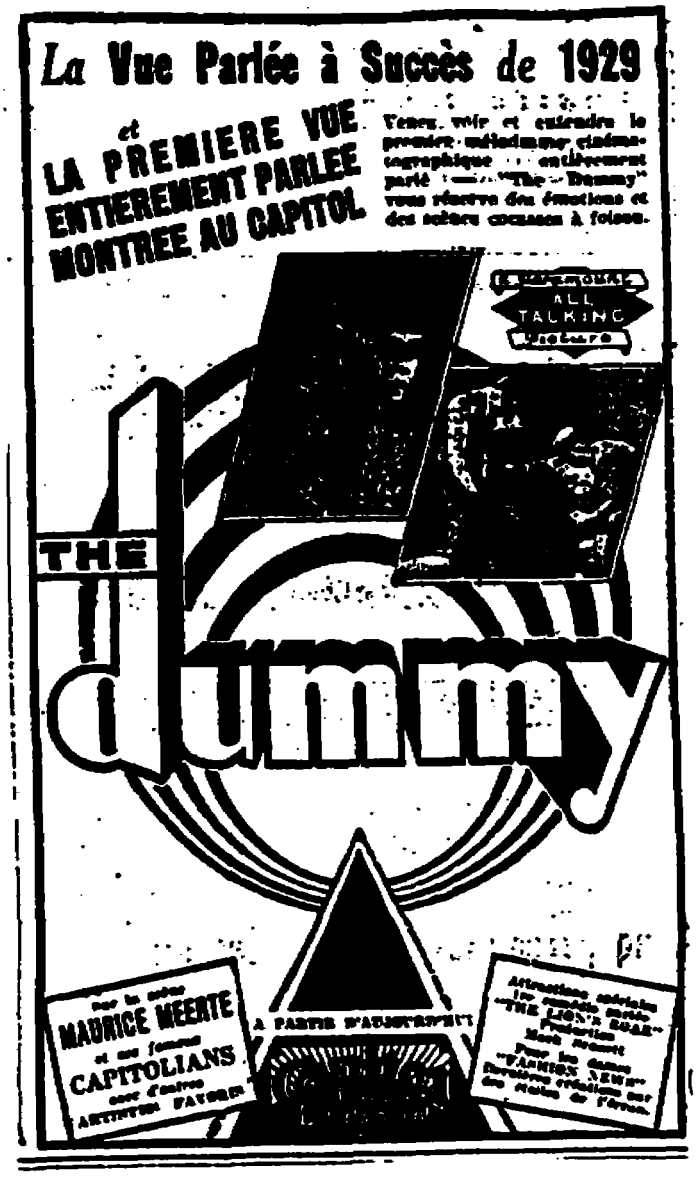
"Burlesque" fut un des plus grands succès de la scène américaine de la saison dernière. On y entendra l'argot de la scène, les chansons, les bruits de scène qui ont fait de ce drame une oeuvre remarquable.

Tout le dialogue ne fera pas disparaître les légendes, si l'on veut les sous-titres, que l'on peut lire actuellement entre deux séries de photographies et qui permettent de suivre l'enroulement de l'action dramatique. Mais ajoutant le dialogue, la musique, les bruits de scène aux photographies on complète l'illusion de façon étonnante.

Lorsque "Burlesque" sera distribué, lancé dans la circulation, plus de quinze cents cinémas auront été munis des appareils qui permettent la synchronisation de la photographie et du son projeté. On en compte actuellement près de mille. Comme ce film sera mis en circulation dans un mois environ on peut se faire une idée de la rapidité d'adaptation des théâtres à la nouvelle invention.

Dans cinq ans on ne comptera peut-être plus un seul cinéma silencieux en Amérique.

18b.



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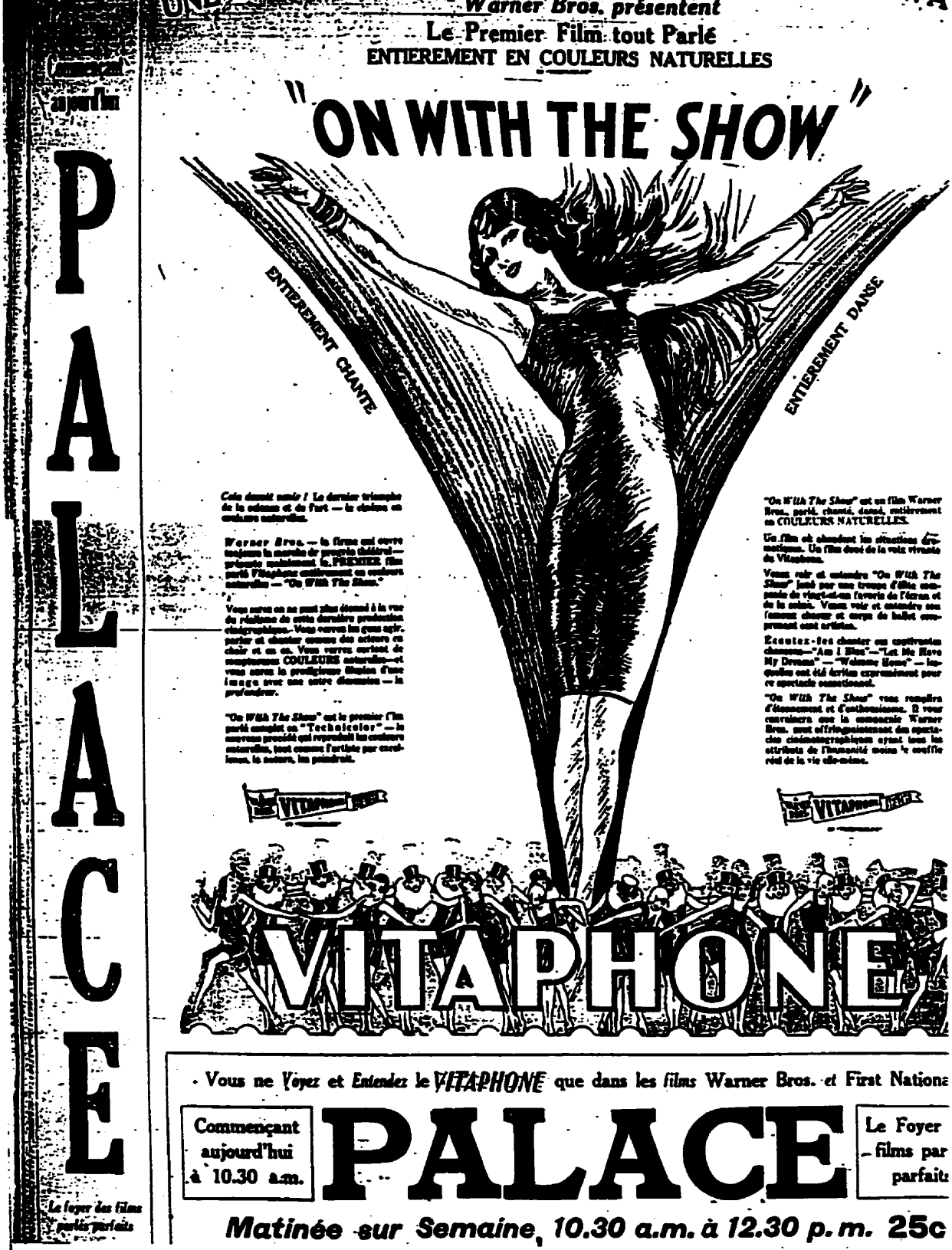

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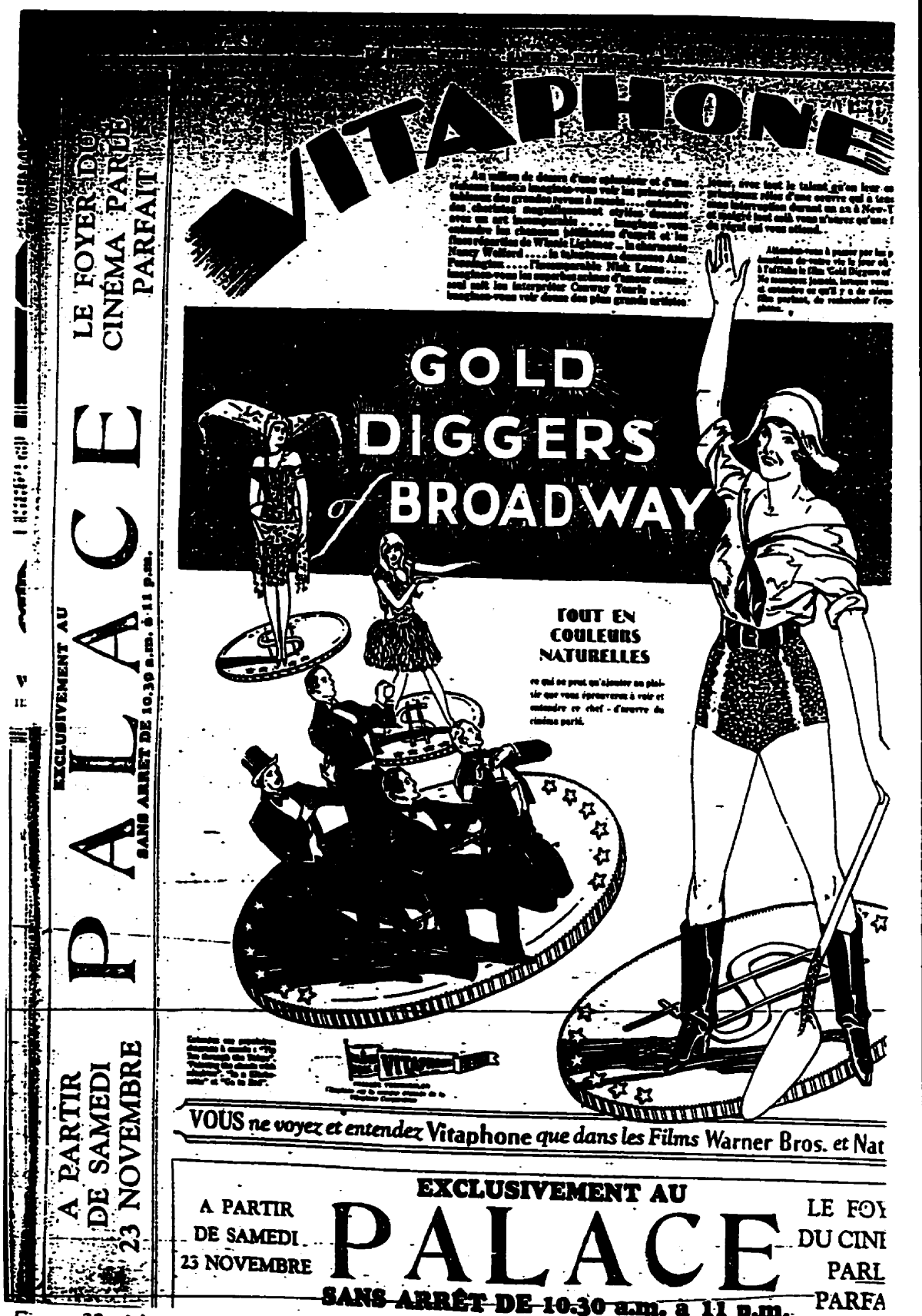

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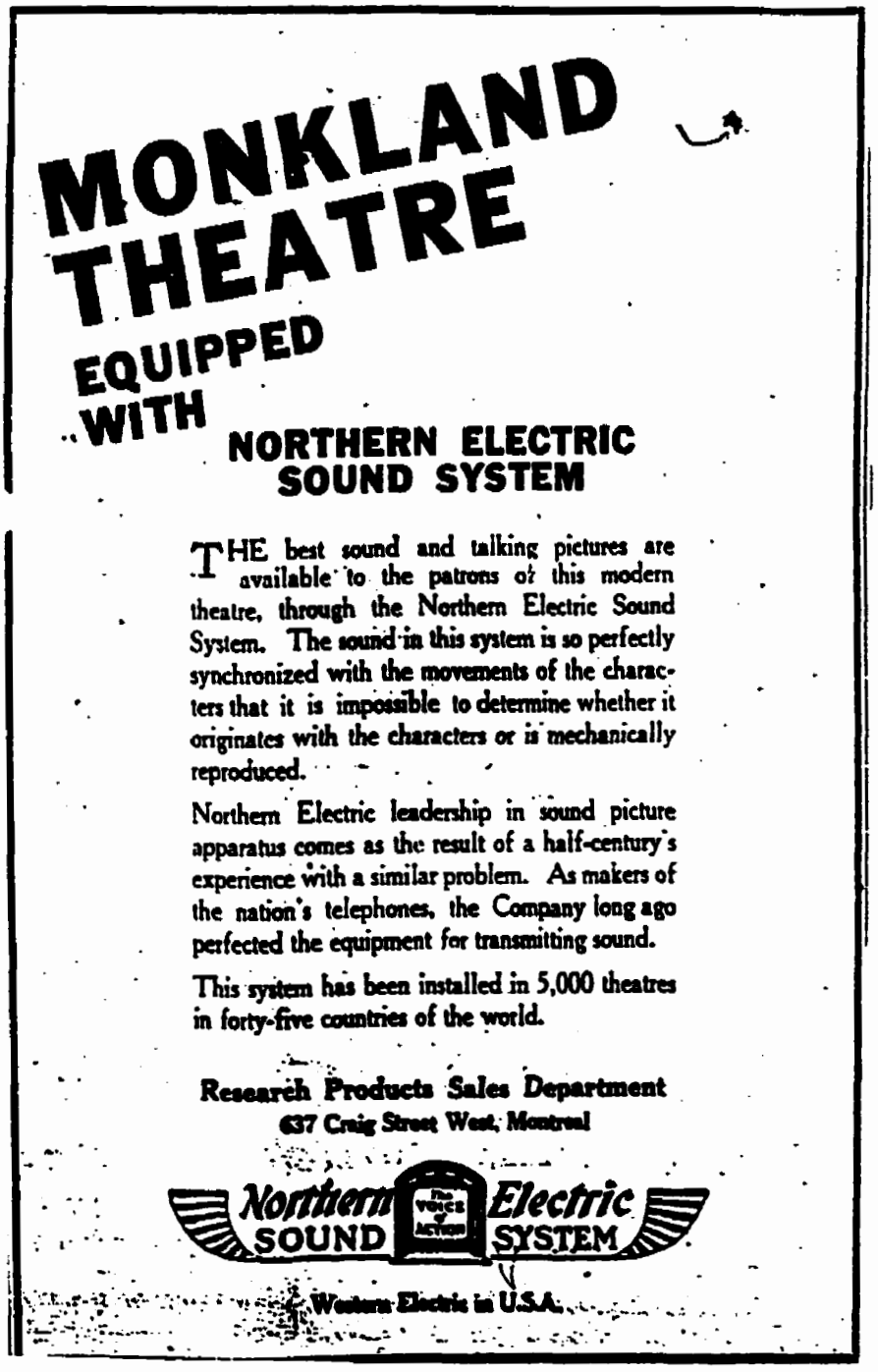

MONKLAND THEATRE

EQUIPPED WITH

NORTHERN ELECTRIC SOUND SYSTEM

THE best sound and talking pictures are available to the patrons of this modern theatre, through the Northern Electric Sound System. The sound in this system is so perfectly synchronized with the movements of the characters that it is impossible to determine whether it originates with the characters or is mechanically reproduced.

Northern Electric leadership in sound picture apparatus comes as the result of a half-century's experience with a similar problem. As makers of the nation's telephones, the Company long ago perfected the equipment for transmitting sound.

This system has been installed in 5,000 theatres in forty-five countries of the world.

Research Products Sales Department
637 Craig Street West, Montreal

Northern Electric
SOUND SYSTEM

Western Electric in U.S.A.

Figure 25a: Grand-Opening of the Monkland Theatre at the corner of Monkland and Girouard from Northern Electric Sound System. Montreal Daily Star 7 March 1930, p. 16.

Figure 25b: Grand-Opening of the Outremont Theatre LaPresse 4 October 1929, p.6

Figure 26a: Sketch of the Monkland exterieur cited the cost of construction at $350,000. LaPresse 7 March 1930.

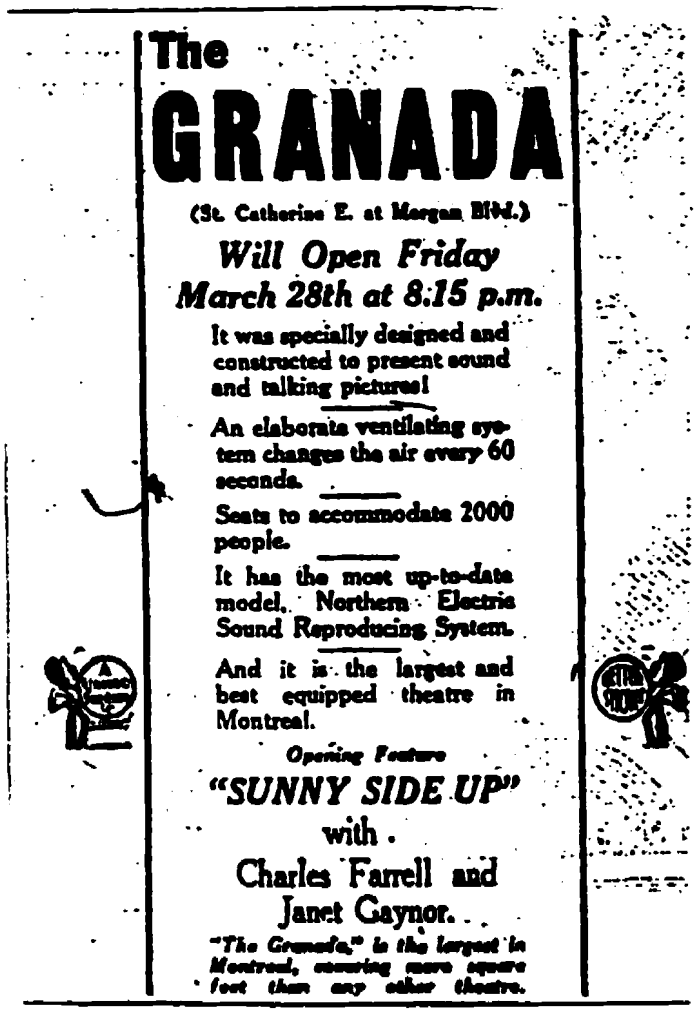

Figure 26b: The opening of the Monkland and Granada were two days apart. Both were equipped with Northern Electric Sound Systems and could accommodate over 1500 people. Montreal Daily Star 26 March 1930, p. 6.

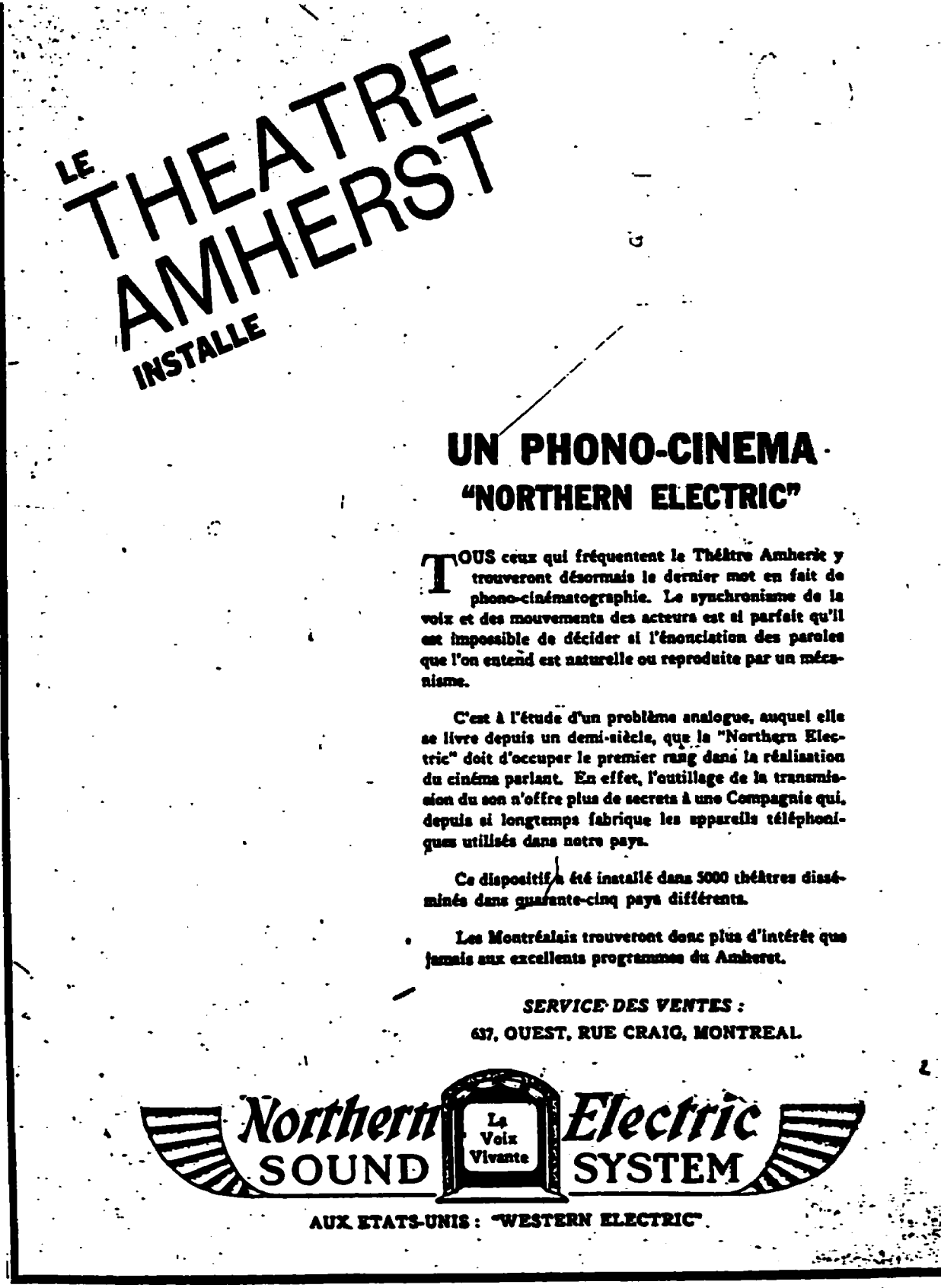

Figure 27: Northern Electric Sound System advertisement for Amherst Theatre in LaPresse 8 March 1930, p. 59.

Figure 28: Advertisments for the Capitol Theatre and the Granada. The Capitol announces French and English Titles and The Granada, with Vitaphone technology emphasizes that it is Montreal's most beautiful theatre. Capitol ad in Montreal Daily Star 12 January 1929, p. 16. Granada ad in Montreal Daily Star 12 April 1930, p. 29.

Figure 29: Advertisement for West of Zanzibar at the Capitol emphasizes bilingual titles. LaPresse 9 February 1929, p. 67.

Figure 30: Ads for the Palace and the Capitol Theatre in Montreal Daily Star. Both ads highlight the 'something for everyone' programme. At the Palace it is declared that the actors talked in all the important scenes and at the Capitol the program is still a mixture of live and film acts including Maurice Meerte and the Capitolians. The Capitol also announced "Prices to Suit Everyone's Purse" Montreal Daily Star 26 January 1929,p. 23.

Figure 31: Advertisement for the Princess theatre included a program that listed show times. There were no longer any live acts on the program. Montreal Daily Star 23 May 1930, p. 6.

Figure 32: Loew's announced they would have to temporarily discontinue vaudeville at the theatre. Montreal Daily Star 13 September 1930, 24.

Figure 33: Advertisement for Prosperity Week at the Capitol and the announcement of the Capitol's Greater New Show Idea featuring a mixed program of live stage acts and sound film. Montreal Daily Star 11 October 1930, p. 23.

33

Figure 34: The Palace presented an All-French version of The Smiling Lieutenant *twice daily at 9:30a.m. and 11p.m. This was a switch from the titled versions that were often exhibited.*

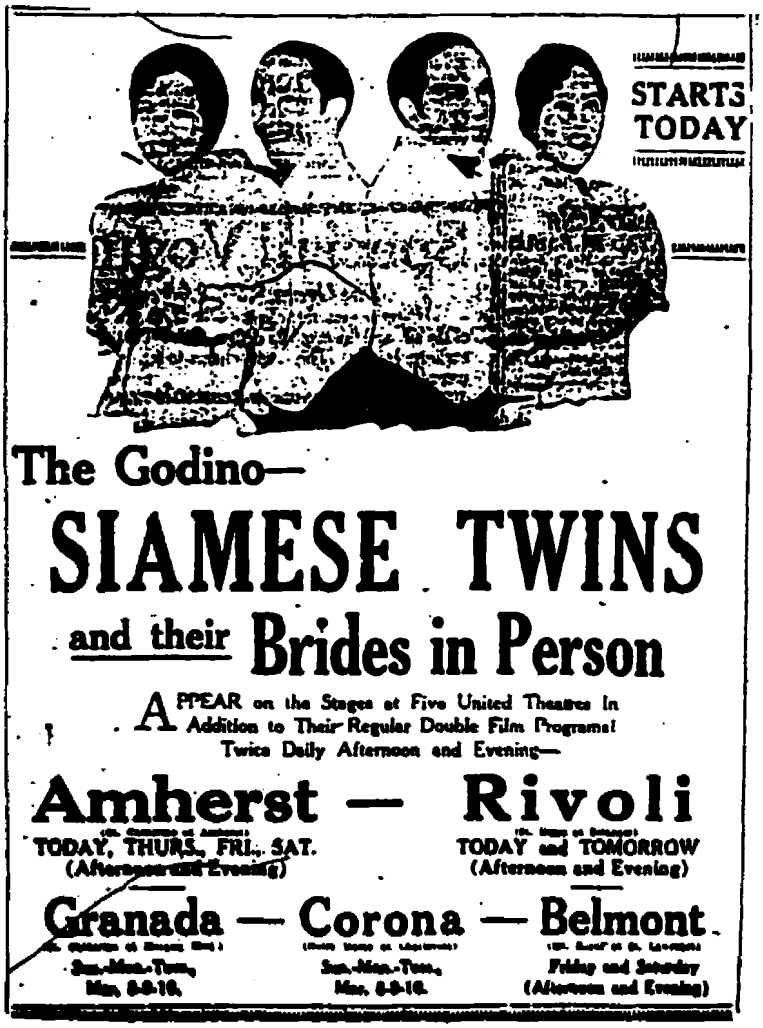

Figure 35: The Godino Siamese Twins appeared live at five of the United Amusement Theatres in Montreal. Montreal Daily Star 4 March 1931, p. 31.

PALACE THEATRE

featuring

RUTH CHATTERON

in

"THE RIGHT TO LOVE"

A PARAMOUNT PICTURE

The first picture to be produced by the new process of noiseless recording.

Starting Thursday 8th

In this picture many tense moments of "silence" are produced. The wind in the trees and grasses seen in this "still" is plainly audible.

THE latest development of Sound Pictures, as revolutionary as Sound itself, is the New Noiseless Recording Process which has been developed by the Hollywood Laboratories of the Bell Telephone System. This process entirely eliminates the annoying scratchy, hissing sounds which have hitherto characterized even the finest Sound and Talking Films.

Northern Electric

NEW PROCESS NOISELESS RECORDING

(Western Electric in U.S.A. and other countries)

NORTHERN ELECTRIC COMPANY LIMITED, 637 CRAIG ST. WEST

Figure 36a: Advertisement for Northern Electric's new process of noiseless recording at the Palace where "tense moments of silence are produced". Montreal Daily Star 7 January 1931, p. 15.

Evolution! Evolution! Evolution!

PARAMOUNT

brings you

the first picture ever filmed with the *marvelous new Western Electric System of noiseless recording*

The Right to Love

with

Ruth Chatterton

Here is the drama of a woman who pays with bitter memories for the follies of passionate youth—who lives only to give her daughter the courage to love—beautifully and honestly!

Starts Thursday

A PARAMOUNT PICTURE

Secure a Paramount-Philco oil painting of Ruth Chatterton, size 22" x 28". Get your card at Palace Theatre, fill it out and turn it in at one of the Philco Dealers listed on the back of the card.

PALACE

HOME OF THE PERFECT TALKIES

brings you

New! ELEVEN TUBES

SUPERHETERODYNE-PLUS

THE PLUS IN PHILCO'S NEW SUPERHETERODYNE — PLUS

11-Tube Power—More than the average owner needs, but wonderful to reach out and bring in the programs YOU want.

Automatic Volume Control—Making this great power USEFUL by holding the reception at constant level without FADING.

Tone Control—4 qualities of tone, "Brilliant," "Bright," "Mellow," "Deep,"—whichever YOU like, at a touch of the finger.

Superheterodyne Selectivity—Combined with the sensitivity of screen grid tubes, recognized as the most perfect circuit known.

Station Recording Dial—On which you can permanently log your favorite station.

Balanced Units—Which produce the true, clear, UNdistorted Philco Tone.

JOHN MILLEN & SON, LIMITED

MONTREAL QUEBEC

Philco Distributors for Province of Quebec

Figure 36b: Detailed advertisement for noiseless recording exclaimed as an Evolution! Also the Palace theatre the "Eleven Tube Superheterodyne-Plus" from Philco Tone and distributed by John Millen & Son in Montreal. The ad suggests theatres in the city are teaming up with local businesses to give special offers to audience members. Montreal Daily Star 7 January 1931, p. 15.

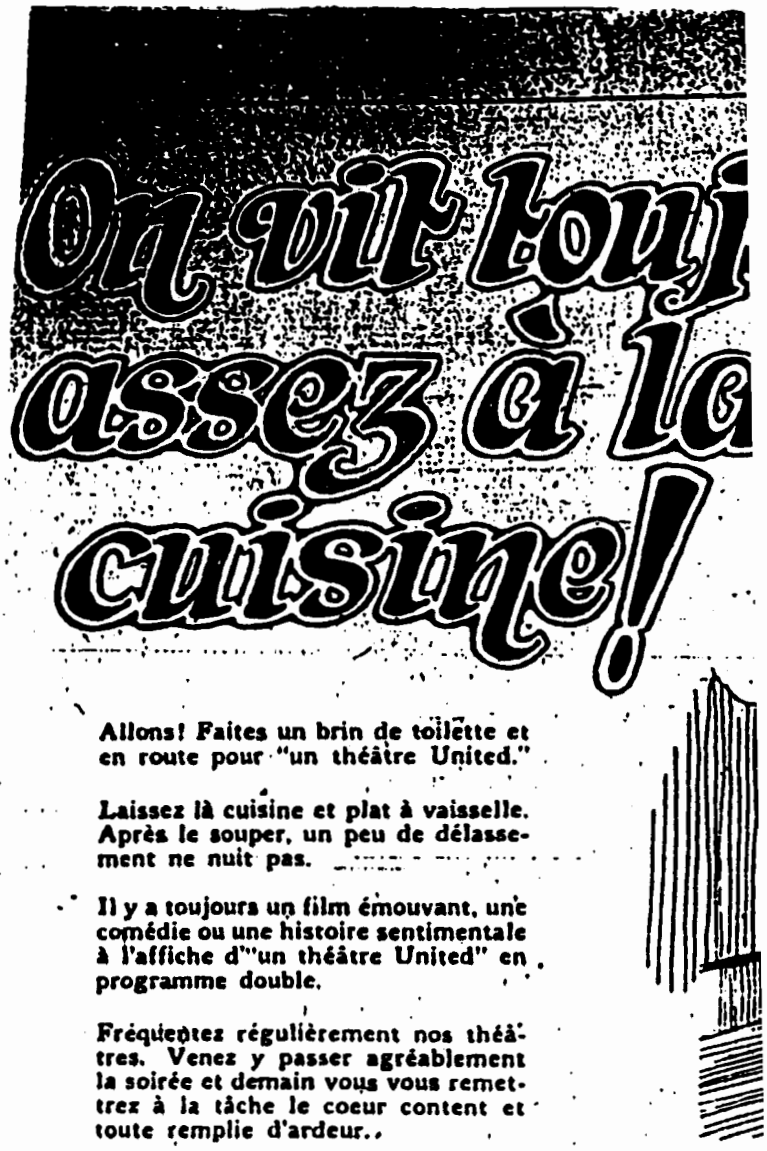

Figure 37: United Amusement Corporation advertisement to p
depicts the 'men of the house' pulling the wife and mother to l
to the movies. LaPresse 28 June 1930, 50.

Figure 38: It comes as no surprise to see the predicted death of the talkies.

"Belasco Predicts Death of Talkies" in Montreal Daily Star 24 July 1930, p. 6.

BELASCO PREDICTS DEATH OF TALKIES

Good Silent Pictures Would Sweep Country, He Declares

DIFFERENT OPINION

Talkies Will Abolish Grand Opera Houses, Says Will Hays

ATLANTIC CITY, July 24 — (Star Special.) — The decline and fall of the talking picture was forecast by David Belasco yesterday in his birthday interview. He is 77 years old.

"If I were younger and had plenty of money," he said, "I would go into the production of silent pictures. That is the great field for the right man today. Good silent pictures would sweep the country.

"The great mistake of the motion picture producers was that of ever launching the talking pictures. The silent picture was one of the most interesting developments in the field of entertainment. It has deteriorated from an art to a nuisance with the introduction of the 'squawkies.'

"The talking picture interested the public in the first place as a novelty and then as a freak. The novelty has worn off, and there are signs everywhere that the people are tiring of the talking picture. The difficulty is not only that of the mechanical fault of reproduction, but the inferiority of the motion picture product. They cannot turn out good talking pictures on a large scale.

"A producer of legitimate drama has to work and struggle with raw material all year and he is exceedingly lucky if he produces one or two good plays. The talking picture companies aim at producing 25 or 30 of more talking pictures in the course of a year. No wonder the average talking picture is what it is. The talking picture producers can never turn out good work on any such scale.

GREAT REVIVAL

"As the public is turning away from the talking pictures, it is ready to turn towards the silent picture again, and it is also ready for a great revival of the legitimate stage. I regard the future of the legitimate stage as extremely bright. I have been in the business a great many years and every year I have heard the same talk that the stage is going to the bow-wows, but the fact is that a good play will command as much patronage today, or more than it ever did."

COMING TO

(1)—Ann Harding and Robert Ames i
(2)—Richard Dix and Lila Lee in "Lo
(3)—William Powell and Marion Shilli

COMING TO
Advance . . . Ag

ORPHEUM. — Next week at this theatre Phillip Barry's famous social comedy, "Holiday," will be enacted by the New Orpheum Players. Mr. Victor Sutherland, having announced his intention to present to the public here the best available dramas of the contemporary stage, feels that with the production of "Holiday" the company is adhering faithfully to their announced policy. It is a tale of the upper set in New York, a subtle tale told with all the artistry of which Barry, who wrote "Paris Bound," is capable, according to advance reports. There is romance and drama in the play together with smart dialogue that raises it above the average of Broadway dramas. Miss Nancy Sheridan will have the very important leading role about which the entire action centres.

* * *

LOEW'S.—"Cheer Up and Smile," a romance of campus and night club life, isn't a musical comedy but a graphic picture of adventuring happy-go-lucky youth—and as such it was inevitable that there be music in it. There is music aplenty, and songs by such people as "Whispering" Jack Smith, Dixie Lee and Arthur Lake. The stage show features "The Runaway Four." It is one of the most entertaining acts of its kind in vaudeville. Ralph Olsen, assisted by nine young ladies, will be seen in a dance diversion assisted by Anita and the Gamby Girls. The comedy offering entitled "Stick to Your Horn," by Saul Brilliant and Ferne Rogers, Carlton and Ballew, in a comedy, singing and piano act, and Homer Romaine presenting "Aerial Eccentricities" will comprise the remainder of the bill.

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