

# Residual Media

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*To Lillian Ava*

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# 8

## Vaudeville: The Incarnation, Transformation, and Resilience of an Entertainment Form

JoAnne Stober

In 1906, the Empire Theatre in Edmonton, Alberta, opened with this announcement, "Don't be afraid to bring your wife, sweetheart, or children . . . as we cater particularly to that class." The storefront theater opened as a vaudeville house, and although it was said to have connections to the Sullivan-Considine vaudeville circuit, it opened with locally recruited talent. The notice for the opening continued:

Empire Theatre: Two Doors South of New Post Office. Open Monday, June 25th. In Refined Vaudeville, Motion Pictures, Illustrated Songs. Four Shows Each Day. Afternoon 2.30 and 4 o'clock. Each Performance One Hour and Twenty Minutes. Change of Program Each Week. Matinee Prices: 10c and 15c; Night: 15c and 25c. Reserved Chairs for Ladies and their Escorts without Extra Charge.<sup>1</sup>

The opening of the Empire in Edmonton is typical of smaller city vaudeville houses of this period. The Empire attempted immediately to draw in families and to establish itself as "clean and classy." Vaudeville's roots in what was considered "rowdy" entertainment were not ancient history and sometimes led to it being misunderstood, so every attempt was made to ascertain the wholesomeness of vaudeville as an entertainment form. Vaudeville underwent a number of transformations to get to this point. Variety entertainment had its roots in the popular entertainment institutions of live theater, minstrel shows, and burlesque. Consequently, vaudeville also had roots in the practices associated with these entertainments. In the late 1850s and early 1860s, variety was the performance of brief entertainment acts that became concentrated as part of concert saloon entertainment aimed principally at audiences of working-class men.<sup>2</sup>

So-called small-time vaudeville made its debut in ramshackle theaters, often doubling as saloons. The Empire in Vancouver was famous for its variety acts but even more renowned for housing a brothel on the second floor.<sup>3</sup> Some of the cities' "ten-cent" houses presented inoffensive shows but were operated sporadically, and the nature of the acts was often uncertain.<sup>4</sup> However, by 1900, vaudeville was appealing to a mass audience in North America by guaranteeing clean, inoffensive entertainment with strict standards for vaudevillians and audiences. This outcome took its course over a half century, from the 1850s to 1900, and everything that vaudeville became was a reconstruction of earlier popular entertainment forms.

Vaudeville's influence was pervasive, and its presence was increasingly seen as a sign of urbanity and success. Even smaller cities and towns attempted to offer some form of vaudeville entertainment either by booking the big-time circuits and offering shows two or three times a week or by offering a more local bill of music and comedy performers. A number of popular entertainment forms that had been relatively independent of any particular presentational venue, including magic lantern shows, puppetry, and magic illusions, were absorbed into vaudeville. "Vaudeville shows compressed spoken drama into short playlets, derived production numbers from musical comedy and even presented capsule versions of recent stage hits. Though often scorning or mocking 'legitimate' theater, ballet, opera and classical music, vaudeville also emulated their status" as symbols of high culture.<sup>5</sup> This emulation was necessary because variety acts had a long-running association with burlesque and, as Robert C. Allen argues, burlesque and vaudeville were actually "negative reflections of one another."<sup>6</sup> Implicit in the cultural construction of what vaudeville became as an entertainment form were continual shifts and changes in both composition and performance practices. That is to say, to understand vaudeville as an entertainment form is to think about it as a composition of new and old media and entertainment practices.

In this chapter, I survey the existing research on the history and evolution of vaudeville.<sup>7</sup> I propose that tracing the transformation of vaudeville as it begins to incorporate entertainment practices already in existence and new media technologies allows us to gain insight into the emergent and residual forms of "variety" entertainment. Raymond Williams encourages us to read continuity into cultural practices and experiences. To help us do so, Williams identifies residual forms as "experiences, meanings and values which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture" because they are the residue of a "previous social formation."<sup>8</sup> Inherent in cultural practice is change and as Williams describes "emergent forms [create] new meanings and new practices and experiences."<sup>9</sup> To be sure, the emergence and consolidation of vaudeville occurred over more than a half century and traces of vaudeville are present well into the era of synchronized sound cinema and on radio and television as these new technologies emerge. Certain components of the vaudeville presentation and its relationship to technology, programming practices, exhibition sites and practices and audience formations, create layers in the entrepreneurial structural logic of vaudeville as an entertainment form. The incarnation, transformation

and resilience of vaudeville is intrinsically linked to residual and emergent forms of media and pursuant practices.

The expansion of vaudeville can be seen as an emergent and defining aspect of its consolidation while certain components of its presentation and its relationship to film exhibition and programming practices in theaters became residual forms. The sediment of this popular entertainment and its corresponding social formations are part of its continuity. In addition, I focus on the resilience of vaudeville, which is intrinsically linked to new media and exhibition history, including distribution, sites of exhibition, audience formations, practices and discourses of popular entertainment. Vaudeville's resilience during the transformation from silent cinema to synchronized sound cinema can be seen specifically in Montreal, Quebec. Contrary to dominant perceptions of new media replacing old, vaudeville made its return on the very heels of synchronized sound and in Montreal, the first Canadian city wired for sound movies in 1928, vaudeville had been a dominant cultural form. The presence of vaudeville as an enduring and popular entertainment form in the city is complex and related to the changing dynamic and cultural patterns of film exhibition during the period when silent cinema and sound cinema are settling their differences.

The residual and emergent forms of popular "variety" entertainment seem to accompany the introduction of new technologies and changes in the practices associated with these technologies. When discussing the discourses and activities that fall into the realm of commercial entertainment, I find that, as Harold Innis argues, one of the effects of technology as it was introduced into society was that it would influence patterns of perception. Specific shifts to new media of communication have been characterized as creating profound disturbances in the current relationships and patterns of living that existed previous to the establishment of the new media.<sup>10</sup> Innis's insight into the moment when a new media is introduced as something that would, in its use, destabilize the current relationships and patterns of living that existed is a powerful legacy, simply for the reason that it draws our attention outward from the media as an object to the effects of its destabilization on social and cultural life. To be sure, rather than disappearing when new technologies are introduced, vaudeville adapts and shifts into forms that follow dominant entertainment media, and in each shift there is a destabilization of surrounding social relations. I contend that these relations and intersections, examined together, stress the cultural and social impact of the arrival of new media, entertainment forms, and the resistance of established forms and formation of hybrid forms.

In asking about the ongoing contexts of the emergent and residual forms of variety and vaudeville, I begin in 1870. In the early 1870s, burlesque and minstrel shows were uniting in a hybrid form of entertainment.<sup>11</sup> Allen says this "marriage" was "facilitated both by economics and by an underlying structural logic emanating from the homology between the blackface minstrel and the burlesque performer."<sup>12</sup> A consequence of the union was to reroute the course burlesque had been taking as an autonomous popular entertainment form for mainstream bourgeois theaters and audiences and put it on the minstrel show's course, destined for a working-class audience. As burlesque became a working-class form of

entertainment, variety, too, began to emerge as a "separate popular entertainment form."<sup>13</sup> Within the dense downtown of New York City, rising from the concentration of opera houses and dime museums, a retargeting of audiences from working-class men to women and families took place. Tony Pastor's Opera House in Bowery Row of New York City was one of the first entertainment houses to target a more familial audience in 1865.<sup>14</sup> By 1890, Pastor "played a major role in establishing a new audience for variety and, in New York at least, in loosening variety's tie to prostitution and rowdy, working-class leisure."<sup>15</sup> Pastor positioned his variety theater amid New York's theater and retail shopping district and offered his audience a steady stream of acts and performances without the vice of alcohol and cigarettes. Pastor had managed, through the elimination of smoking, drinking, and explicit acts, to separate the "concert saloon's connection with liquor and sexuality" from variety entertainment, thereby succeeding to attract an audience of both men and women.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the rise in urban entertainment, the railway networks that were spreading across North America were making it possible for burlesque and variety shows to travel. Both the spread to smaller towns and the solidification of sites and an entertainment structure in cities were influencing the entertainment dynamic of the time and setting a course for future mass amusements.

Having seen the results of Pastor's variety theater, Keith endeavored to create an enterprise of clean, legitimate, and popular variety entertainment. He converted his New York dime museum (located in Boston) into a continuous performance variety house with a schedule of performances that repeated throughout the day, and he consequently reported a rise in attendance.<sup>17</sup> Unlike New York, Boston's liquor licensing laws did not allow for theatrical performances to take place in taverns, so there was not as strong a connection among booze, rowdy behavior, and entertainment.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, Keith did not have to struggle with variety's association to alcohol and immorality and in turn was free to tackle what he saw as the next task: breaking variety's link to working-class leisure. Keith introduced an eccentric twist of variety and comic opera performances into an environment where the patrons already felt comfortable, hoping to attract a refined middle-class patron.<sup>19</sup> By actually separating variety from entertainments associated with the traditional dime museum (freaks and curios and the lower-class patrons entertained by curiosities, medical mishaps, and strange sites), Keith had astoundingly reintegrated the previously fragmented American audience into the transformed dime museum.<sup>20</sup> To prevent any slippage toward the old norms of variety in dime museums and concert saloons, Keith enforced a strict code of conduct and decorum, which he applied to both performers and patrons. To ensure proper bourgeois behavior, uniformed ushers handed out fliers requesting gentlemen not to stamp their feet, ladies to remove their hats, and no talking, smoking, or raising of voices to respond to performers.<sup>21</sup> Gilbert Douglas also claims Keith lectured his audiences personally on behavior, and he had bouncers onsite to ensure patrons did not smoke, spit, whistle, or crunch their peanuts.<sup>22</sup>

The environment for Keith's new clean and sophisticated brand of entertainment was propagated in 1894 when he partnered with Edward F. Albee, a

former circus man, to construct his new vaudeville theater, B. F. Keith's New Theatre. As an entrepreneur, Keith saw an opportunity to incorporate variety further into the norms and behaviors traditionally associated with bourgeois theater. The legacy of Keith's desire took variety and turned it into vaudeville as a structured entertainment institution complete with the characteristics now commonly associated with vaudeville: clean entertainment, appeal to family and children audiences, no interaction between audiences and entertainers, traveling circuits, continuous performances, lavish theaters, and quality entertainment scheduled through a central booking office.<sup>23</sup> Vaudeville's entrepreneurs made a discursive choice by consolidating what had been considered "variety" entertainment into "vaudeville." As Allen indicates, "The terminological shift from variety to vaudeville signifies not so much a change in performance structure as changes in the form's institutional structure, social orientation and audience."<sup>24</sup> Robert Snyder argues that Keith wanted to "beat the stigma attached to variety" and so "christened his performances as 'vaudeville.'"<sup>25</sup> The B. F. Keith New Theatre was proclaimed to be the first vaudeville palace. As an architectural site, it featured a custom-designed original exterior and an interior featuring accoutrements like leather sofas, telephones, writing desks, and messengers in the lobby, signaling an attempt to incorporate business-class working patrons into the regular audience. Albee's decoration was inspired by the legitimate theaters but also by the public buildings of Europe. He incorporated ornamental ironwork, stained glass, marble pillars, mirrors, gargoyles, and original paintings into the theater's interior.<sup>26</sup> Vaudeville "grandiloquence," as Robert C. Allen labels it, swept through North America, and theaters for big-time vaudeville arose in major cities and even smaller centers that benefited from the vaudeville acts on traveling circuits. Of all the opulent theaters constructed in cities across North America, the Palace in New York City was the "throne room of the Kings of Vaudeville" and the "Queens of Comedy for 19 years."<sup>27</sup> Keith went to great lengths to make vaudeville high class, including advertising interior decoration and amenities in his theaters to appeal to higher tastes.<sup>28</sup> When Keith opened the Colonial Theatre in Boston, he announced publicly that \$670,000 had been spent on decorations and \$89 alone for a red velvet carpet.<sup>29</sup> He extended big-time vaudeville to smaller towns, and using the technology of the railroad and the telegraph created traveling circuits coordinated from central booking offices.

Part of the sustaining ability in vaudeville was what Raymond Williams identified as the allure of the individual performance. Of the music hall he wrote, "There emerged a generation of solo performers whose line has since been unbroken: the performers we call entertainers and comedians. Their songs, monologues, sketches and routines have precedents in a long tradition of comic acting, but their presentation as individuals was in effect new."<sup>30</sup> Always a delicate balance between material that was seen to belong to low culture and an appeal to high drama, vaudeville was built on articulations of spectacle, the "tinsel and plush kind . . . sequins rather than diamonds."<sup>31</sup> The adaptations and resilience of vaudeville was more than the evolution of an entertainment form. Even as vaudeville was institutionalized into Benjamin Keith's cultural schema,

the roots of variety held in older entertainment forms like circuses, sideshows, and burlesque were visible.

Each phase in vaudeville's development is also composed of a process of dynamic contradictory relationships in the interplay of dominant, residual, and emergent forms.<sup>32</sup> Vaudeville carried with it the living traditions and institutions that had contributed and been amalgamated to shape its existence. The articulations of vaudeville are derived from everyday life and comedic situations whose relevance reflects technological change, the history of cultural practices, the concepts of high and low culture and the various incarnations of the entertainment industry as it vied for control and standardization of the market and audiences. Whatever degree of standardization we assume in terms of vaudeville programs and audiences, the emergence of the entertainment paradigm cannot be grasped as a simple middle-class experience. We can see the formation of the vaudeville audiences as a process of multiple and uneven transitions just as Miriam Hansen advocates for the transitional period when audiences of live entertainment were becoming audiences of classical cinema.<sup>33</sup> There are striking similarities among the market interests, industry attempts to create respectable audiences in vaudeville's consolidation as an entertainment form, and the later formation of cinema spectators that Hansen is treating. Hansen's argument that the cinema, "in its emancipation from existing live entertainment outlets . . . grafted itself onto surviving structures of working-class culture" can also apply to vaudeville as it struggled to disassociate itself from lower-class entertainment offerings. Vaudeville grafted itself onto higher forms of entertainment and amusement like the legitimate theater and ballet, even adopting the institutional structure of grand-scale theaters. The similarities between the consolidation of vaudeville and the transition from silent to sound cinema are striking and point to the need to develop an understanding of the transitional period as both an industrial shift and as an integration of mass entertainment and consumer culture.

It is possible to account for the history of film exhibition as a tale of novelities bridged together by allegiances of audiences and exhibitors. Prior to industry integration and control of cinema chains, the consumer and the showmen had a relationship based on appeal and appreciation: the showmen would attempt to appeal to the audiences, and the audiences might appreciate their efforts or not; thus was the cycle of consumption. Vaudeville's transitions to this point demonstrate what Roy Rosenzweig refers to as a transfer of allegiances from the existing cheap entertainments and entertainment venues. Rosenzweig situates the transfer of loyalty from the saloon to demonstrate that in the small industrial town of Worcester, Massachusetts, the prosperity of commercial entertainment was linked to incomes, industrial and leisure time, and conceptions of amusements as either high or low culture.<sup>34</sup> For working-class patrons in small towns, the movies were amenable as entertainment, offering cheap prices and short programs that allowed even the overworked and underpaid a chance to participate. Rosenzweig claims that the movie theater became a central working-class institution like the saloon had been. Along with the saloon patrons, women, children, and immigrants were a part of the new audience. This

was part of the phenomena for vaudeville as audiences formed in both urban and rural locations.

The men at the helm of the consolidation of vaudeville, Keith and Albee, may not, as Allen notes, have been the entrepreneurs solely responsible for affecting the shift from variety to vaudeville, but "their strategies set the tone for this nascent show business industry."<sup>35</sup> Many theaters were built explicitly for touring vaudeville, including the Orpheum in Vancouver, the Sherman Grand in Calgary, and the Palace in Montreal and Toronto.<sup>36</sup> "As a high-class vaudeville theater, the Orpheum (Vancouver) required a staff of about 100, including the stage crew, maintenance people, musicians, and four projectionists (two for each shift). But the majority was front-of-house staff: one outside and three inside doormen to greet 'milord' and 'milady,' ticket sellers, the . . . 'French' maids, and 65 usherettes."<sup>37</sup> The Sherman Grand was the most luxurious theater in Calgary, and its manager Martin Beck was touted as holding his patrons in the highest regard by featuring Orpheum vaudeville. "There is nothing in the world so cosmopolitan, and so delightfully so, as modern vaudeville."<sup>38</sup> The opinion that vaudeville was high-class entertainment seemed to have spread across North America.

In terms of performance, vaudeville was a compilation and a continuation of the previous entertainment forms from which it took attractions. Robert Allen argues that "Vaudeville existed only as a distinctive, presentational, environmental and institutional form; in terms of content, vaudeville was nothing and everything."<sup>39</sup> Big-time bills would often feature larger groups of singers and dancers as well as sketch comedy and physical or slapstick turns. A program from the Palace, New York's premier vaudeville house, shows the organization of a typical vaudeville show. Continuously available, vaudeville acts ran from early morning until late into the evening and embodied the serious and the trite. The juxtaposition and uneven transition from show to show was the opposite sort of effect that now goes into television programming: the "flow" in entertainment was avoided in vaudeville; instead, performances were programmed to be disjunctive in an endless stream of novelty.<sup>40</sup> The vaudeville program may have been loosely knit together in terms of content, but acts were tailored to audience interests, timed for shifts in mood to maintain excitement and incorporate all six to nine acts plus the headliner in a dynamic tempo. Programs were printed and distributed to the audiences, and acts were scheduled and selected well in advance based on the traveling schedules of the vaudeville circuits, which were based in the United States and traveled cross border from south to north. The circuits were organized in the most conscientious time-saving way to eliminate unnecessary travel and costs. Local acts would target their routines to the audience, sometimes using ethnic characterizations carried over from minstrel and so-called coon shows.<sup>41</sup> Humor based on ethnic characterizations was a major component of many vaudeville routines, which also included comic sketches, joke routines, songs parodies, and acrobatic and dance turns.<sup>42</sup> Just as the terminological shift from variety to vaudeville resulted in wider changes in the institutional structure, social orientation, and audience, so too did technological shifts in film, audio recording, broadcast, and eventually sound films,

which more than one historian has proclaimed to be the technology that dealt the final blow to the popular entertainment form of vaudeville.

Vaudeville was solidly anchored in the tradition of itinerant spectacles like the minstrel show and burlesque, circuses and Wild West shows. Following a pattern set down by P. T. Barnum in which Barnum had mastered the "rhetoric of moral elevation, scientific instruction and cultural refinement in presenting his attractions," B. F. Keith carefully packaged mass entertainment to appeal to middle-class patrons.<sup>43</sup> Vaudeville established itself firmly on the map of popular amusement in three concrete ways: the development of commercial circuits, the stabilization of a programming mode, and the establishment of permanent vaudeville houses in the big-city centers.<sup>44</sup> Vaudeville's centrality and dispersal over a vast territory was a means of disseminating entertainment. The infrastructure for the movie industry was laid with the early vaudeville shows.

When moving pictures took up residence in vaudeville houses in the early 1900s, their place on the program was typically as an intermittent break from the live vaudeville acts. The emergence of nickel movie houses established a new trend; many vaudeville houses were converted into nickelodeons where motion pictures and illustrated songs were the main attraction.<sup>45</sup> As Russell Merritt points out, nickelodeons began by showing "a miscellany of brief adventure, comedy, or fantasy films that lasted about an hour," and they willingly tailored exhibition techniques found in vaudeville and used "sing-alongs, inexpensive vaudeville acts, and illustrated lectures" to augment their programs.<sup>46</sup> The introduction of the nickel theaters and the continuation of the vaudeville houses resulted in a coexistence and an interaction between the two sites and forms. Rosenzweig claims that in Worcester "those with only ten cents to spend could sit in the gallery of Lothrop's Opera House and watch melodramas and minstrel shows or visit the nearby Front Street Musee for burlesque or vaudeville."<sup>47</sup> The mixing of live entertainment in the form of either vaudeville or musical acts with motion pictures became a prevalent entertainment model and thrived as an entertainment program in various sites from the nickelodeon to the vaudeville theatre to converted music halls and church basements throughout the teens and into the 1920s.<sup>48</sup> In nickelodeons, which stood in clean contrast to vaudeville and attracted middle class audiences that had previously not gone to the movies with any notable frequency, moving pictures were the main attraction and the illustrated song was typically an intermittent break from the moving pictures. In *Moving Picture World*, George Crow speculated, "The formative stage through which the film theaters are passing will probably make the illustrated song an institution and will eventually discard cheap vaudeville."<sup>49</sup> In giving the illustrated song priority, Crow argued against vaudeville's economic viability and its cultural standing, including the "half-baked 'actors' who smirk and wiggle and clog-prance about the stage."<sup>50</sup> He claimed the expense of the number of acts required for a vaudeville program would never allow it to compete effectively against box office draws. This shift in vaudeville's popularity, shortly after it had reestablished its presence alongside the nickelodeon theaters, cannot be read as simply disinterest in the entertainment or persistent accusations of vulgarity in the form. Rather, the "democratic leveling" of the nickelodeon's pricing fostered

a new sense of proprietorship in the movie house and business independence to which the working class responded positively. The nickelodeon, in the eyes of community advocate John Collier, writing in 1908 for *Charities and Commons*, had successfully bucked its legacy of all that is evil and still represented in vaudeville. Collier wrote, "Five years ago the nickelodeon was neither better nor worse than many other cheap amusements are at present. It was often a carnival of vulgarity, suggestiveness and violence."<sup>51</sup> Vaudeville remained lumped in with the bad guys—penny arcades, saloons, and melodrama—painted as reliant on illegitimate methods for success and only of "limited interest for the great, basic, public of the working and immigrant classes in New York."<sup>52</sup> The nickelodeon, in contrast, had shimmied up the ladder of lowbrow entertainment to occupy a new rung of social and moral respectability starting fresh with motion pictures, offering a cheap, varied program with families in mind.

By 1909, small-time vaudeville had combined several reels of film with an abbreviated vaudeville program in the same sort of legitimate theaters to which nickelodeon owners had moved their shows. The emergent hybrid form of entertainment saw vaudeville once again on the bill and the perception of the variety show bounced back to being one of clean fun. Sometimes, in the case of the integration of the nickelodeon and vaudeville, the emergence of a hybrid form of media is more telling than either the birth or death of the prior media. Seeing beyond the technology to what de Certeau called the "functionalized space in which consumers move about"<sup>53</sup> enables us to focus on the way vaudeville entrepreneurs viewed and competed against the popularity of the nickelodeon. The reemergence of vaudeville as a family-oriented entertainment is what de Certeau would call *strategy*; media technologies use in standardizing, institutionalizing practices of space. The incorporation of film as a prevalent part of the vaudeville program is what de Certeau might call a *tactic*; media technology and the everyday practices associated with them are operational and depend on practice.<sup>54</sup> Vaudeville, as a cultural form, is a composition of "strategic representations offered to the public as the product of these operations."<sup>55</sup> To ensure its survival and prosperity, vaudeville reemerged as a cultural form in which variety and film had a place. In addition, the social and cultural standing the nickelodeon had achieved in the community was not lost; rather, it was transferred onto the emergent vaudeville form and ensured that the public significance of vaudeville was augmented.

During the transitional period, the vaudeville palaces continued to emphasize opulence, grandeur, and the value of the "show" over specific acts or films. The vaudeville acts that took their place in these upscale houses were more akin to the theatrical world of live entertainments than the burlesque shows and bars of vaudeville's principal incarnations. As the vaudeville house continued to rise in stature, it concentrated on establishing itself as different from the "sensational" houses that catered to "the element which craves 'action' pictures, that is, not only western subjects, but others that may be called melodramatic in the extreme."<sup>56</sup> By emphasizing the "show," the act of going to vaudeville theaters remained essentially a theater experience as opposed to a film experience. As we see in the late 1920s in the transition from silent cinema to sound cinema, the

same emphasis is placed on the "show" as an event rather than specific films or stars. As Richard Koszarski argues, the belief in a "balanced program" was almost mystical among silent picture palace managers, who saw this part of their business as closer to the vocation of vaudeville manager.<sup>57</sup> As head of Loew's Inc., the theater chain MGM, Marcus Loew's motto, "We sell tickets to the theater, not movies,"<sup>58</sup> emblemized the transition from silent to sound cinema, whereas the first evidence of selling the experience rather than the actual acts or performances had its roots in the establishment of vaudeville.

As I have argued thus far, the disjointed variety-style program never really vanished; it just reshaped itself into different forms that we can trace in the sediment of popular amusement from burlesque and variety to the consolidation of vaudeville as an entertainment form that is institutionally regimented and recognizable. By the mid-1920s, vaudeville's popularity and the well-established mixed programs of live and filmic entertainment in cinemas was being encroached on by the industry experiments with sound-on-disc systems and other methods of synchronizing sound. Vaudeville managers had sought solace in the silent screen, believing that as long as cinema was silent, vaudeville could not be supplanted. It was with the secure sense that silent films could not trump live delivery that vaudeville houses had added films to their programs. The wide-scale booking of films began to interfere with the traditional circuits of traveling vaudeville shows. In addition, the theater chains that were controlling the production and distribution of films were now creating longer films, and to book these films vaudeville houses were shaving their live acts to the bone.<sup>59</sup> Congruently, movie palaces were playing some live vaudeville acts, thereby profiting from vaudeville's popularity and at the same time lessening the hold of the vaudeville houses on the entertainment form.

In 1926, a dubious feeling accompanied the coming of sound and, as with the arrival of most new technologies, opinions differed about the introduction of synchronized sound to the existing mix of silent cinema and live vaudeville. 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."<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> The talkies quickly became one of the inventions in the evolution of film that led "inexorably to the modern movie industry."<sup>62</sup> Jacob Lewis's account of the transition to sound film that had swept through the American film industry was written in 1939 and is a good example of the degree to which sound film's institutionalization and the creation of the studio system was understood and for many cases is still understood:

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 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.<sup>63</sup>

Standard film histories widely accept that the introduction of synchronized sound to cinema quashed vaudeville and all the practices associated with the exhibition of silent cinema whether they were established or not. In stating the consequences of the coming of sound in film exhibition and reception, Kerel Dibbets emphasizes a radical break: "Sound changes not only the film, but also the film's presentation and its relation to the viewer. In fact, the roots of silent film culture had to be demolished to give room to the rise of talking pictures."<sup>64</sup> He continues, "In the first place, the transferral of the orchestra from the pit to the sound-track marked the end of cinema as a multimedia show with live performance, giving way to the cinema as a single-medium event."<sup>65</sup> The conception of film exhibition in the transitional phase of silent to sound cinema created 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 neighbourhood and status of the theater, 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."<sup>66</sup> Lying at the heart of the transition from silent to sound cinema was a change from what Hansen has characterized as a disjointed presentation of live and filmic performance to a streamlined, all-filmic program.<sup>67</sup> The adoption of an all-filmic program meant that the live character once lent to the exhibition was vanquished, therefore rendering exhibition practices and programs seamless and homogeneous from milieu to milieu and city to city.

Film historians have documented the differences in exhibition practices from city to city and particularly the difference between going to the movies in the city as opposed to the experience in small towns.<sup>68</sup> Although 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 theaters, and the audiences. Douglas 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 theaters not yet wired for sound. Gomery demonstrates that the uneven adoption of new technologies, and certainly the study of specific locations, is an integral part of understanding the experience of going to the theater in these transitional phases. Moreover, the forms of entertainment that exist prior to the innovation and adoption of new technologies do not just vanish; rather, they are integrated and incorporated into the emergent forms. Such is the case with vaudeville. After theater managers and critics believed the thrill of sound had worn off, they quickly turned back to a program style proven popular prior to the adoption of the all-filmic program that accompanied synchronized sound. The return to programs featuring live acts was an effort to return to the entertainment style audiences were accustomed to before the takeover of the synchronous sound feature film.

The New York City exhibition of *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927) corresponded to Warner's plunge into exhibiting talking films and its merger with Western Electric. The film marked the grand departure on the part of the major studios to go ahead with talking film and with their investment: "Warner's broke the logjam that had blocked the introduction of sound equipment to the nation's movie theatres."<sup>69</sup> Although the premiere of *The Jazz Singer* in New York City marks a key moment in film history, it was not shared by other cinemas, cities, or countries. Locating the premiere of the film in Montreal, Quebec, puts researchers into the year 1929, skipping over the period and cultural practices underscoring the transition to sound exhibition in that city. Prior to the business deal that brought *The Jazz Singer* to the screen in New York City as a part talkie, synchronized sound technology was being demonstrated and tweaked in exhibitions for audiences in the United States and Canada.

In Montreal, vaudeville was firmly established in the city's cinema programs, but with the introduction of synchronized sound, a shift in practice was taking place. Experiments with synchronized sound had been demonstrated in theaters in the city since 1926, and in 1928, the Palace was the first theater wired for synchronized sound in Canada. The Palace, Loew's, and the Capitol spent thousands converting to synchronized sound, and with great triumph their owners announced to the moviegoing public that their theaters had been wired and completely refurbished in grand elegance.<sup>70</sup> The first indication that live vaudeville might be in jeopardy was at the Palace's opening night, which featured an all-filmic program with the exception of the Palace Symphony Orchestra.<sup>71</sup> Gradually vaudeville was phased out and replaced by filmic entertainment except at Loew's, where it remained at the heart of its program until late in 1930. By September of that year, long after other cinemas in the city relied on a bill of entirely film to draw audiences, Loew's announced vaudeville would be discontinued, and in its place, patrons could expect "a splendid program of talking and singing pictures."<sup>72</sup> In turn, Loew's offered a 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 long-standing houses like the Capitol took it up again. In what at first seemed like a dead cat bounce for vaudeville, the Capitol brought back its live stage show within a month of the discontinuation at Loew's.

The Capitol announced its inaugural gala show as "the most important event in Montreal's theatre history."<sup>73</sup> 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."<sup>74</sup> 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!"<sup>75</sup> The theaters in Montreal were reacting to a plunge in attendance by rejuvenating the screens with added attractions, a resurgence 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 a complete show. Other theaters also introduced bargain prices and thrift matinees. The Palace theater even brought in a special French-language movie to include French-language spectators in their target audience. Theater managers brought back the sort of entertainment audiences were accustomed to before the takeover of the synchronous sound feature film. Montreal is not the only case of vaudeville enjoying a resurgence in Canada. Doug McCallum notes that at the Orpheum in Vancouver, vaudeville was the main attraction from 1927 to 1932, even in the mixed program of live acts and film. He comments, "For some people the movies were the main drawing card, while others considered them decidedly less important—at least at the Orpheum. Some even sat out the movies in the foyer, returning to see the vaudeville twice."<sup>76</sup> This action by the audience points to a steady appreciation for the live acts that were now considered as accompaniments to the movies. It also indicates the resilient expectation audiences had for the continuous mixed show as the dominant form of programming.

For years, audiences at the Orpheum had seen the who's who of the vaudeville stage, including George Burns and Gracie Allen, Jack Benny, and even Bob Hope. The performers passed through on a circuit that moved west from Chicago to Vancouver, and a weekly bill consisted of five or six acts, fifty-two weeks a year.<sup>77</sup> By this time, vaudeville circuits had been disrupted because of decreased booking. The Orpheum, not wired for sound until 1937, was unable to offer acts from vaudeville circuits. Under the direction of Ivan Ackery, the Orpheum continued to present a mixed program of filmic and live acts while drawing live performance from the local community and select touring acts. Although vaudeville and silent cinema are believed to have taken a leap hand in hand from the entertainment stage, there is evidence that the shift to synchronized sound was uneven and inconsistent. Even the infamous Palace in New York City did not see its last vaudeville turn until 1932 when it became a motion picture house.<sup>78</sup> What this demonstrates is that not only do we have to push the dates of the conversion of sound forward beyond what is commonly believed to

have taken place as early as 1928 and to have been largely completed by the 1931–32 season; we also have to imagine that theaters not yet wired for sound were still featuring live acts in addition to films, shorts, and orchestral programs. Because there is evidence that refutes a homogeneous and rapid conversion to sound, we must, in turn, refute a rapid and sudden purging of vaudeville. Live stage shows may have been an obvious reminder of the old days after the motion picture industry adopted synchronized sound, but we can argue that the power of the stage show was its reintegration into film programs in spite of the novelty of sound. Not only is this a reminder of vaudeville's popularity as a way to add novelty to filmic programs, it is also a reminder to examine the period when new technologies are introduced for residual media forms.

In September 1930, the *Montreal Daily Star* announced that the public was fed up with sound, claiming, "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."<sup>79</sup> The last two years "have seen the talkie take hold on the imagination and pocketbook of the theatregoer."<sup>80</sup> 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 theaters. Referring to the initial adoption of sound by Hollywood as an effort to invigorate the amusement industry, the article says that once again the industry must deal with a public bored by the novelty of sound. We can read this "once again" boredom as part of a pattern in the movie industry to implement a novelty that will be received as the next best thing in entertainment and draw in the audiences. The *Montreal Daily Star* claimed, "People are fed up on lame products offered with a sugar coating of sound and theatres are beginning to worry."<sup>81</sup> It was announced that, "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."<sup>82</sup> Just a month after cutting its stage show, Loew's jumped to restore vaudeville in October 1930, announcing, "Loew's theater 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."<sup>83</sup> Other cinemas in the city followed suit. In an effort to attract crowds, theater managers were attempting to recreate the flush of excitement that had shrouded the first exhibitions of talking film and the format of incorporating film into a wide range of entertainment and live musical acts.

Around the film world, a debate was raging. Would the talkies take a nose-dive right off the 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.<sup>84</sup> As Crafton notes, "By summer even the Fox, Publix, and Warner organizations were turning their unprofitable theaters into miniature golf courses."<sup>85</sup> 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 be taken 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.<sup>86</sup>

Louis Mayer of MGM suggested pantomime artists as a solution to declining attendance; Radio Keith Orpheum's William Le Baron foresaw the proper formula for exhibition as one-half dialogue and one-half pantomime.

It appeared that the return to silent films was not the only threat to the somewhat disenfranchised talkies. Morgan Powell of the *Montreal Daily Star* wrote, "Movies and talkies are here to stay. [They] 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."<sup>87</sup> 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."<sup>88</sup> While the public tastes were deemed fickle, the major studios were housecleaning by cutting their contract layers down.<sup>89</sup> If they had not been drawing a crowd they were out, and no one was secure any longer because studios had adopted a "one-picture contract" rather than a long-term or lifelong contract they may have agreed to in the past. The excuse used by an industry that needed to employ cost-cutting measures because of lower box office returns was that the public was calling for an industry malleable to the ever-changing whim of the moviegoer.<sup>90</sup>

The new economic pressure of the Depression inspired lower prices as theater owners struggled to pull in audiences. The thrift matinee and the bargain matinee and programs around the city had begun to add stage shows and other novelties like the organ, symphony orchestras, and even so-called freak shows. The Godino Siamese twins and their brides appeared on the stages of "Five United Amusement Theaters in Addition to Their Regular Double Film Programs!"<sup>91</sup> Some new technological 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 theater.<sup>92</sup> The changes brought about in exhibition were not entirely based on the need for something novel; although the studios and theater managers blamed the fickle attitude of audiences, the pattern that had been established in the industry was part of the equation. We see, in examining the lineage of entertainment practices and technological transitions, a consistent pattern of overlapping progressions and recessions as entertainment forms shifted. In the lead up to the 1930s, the resilience of the live stage show I demonstrate is both a reminder of the residual and emergent practice in entertainment and an opportunity to think about how audiences may have identified with each form. The audiences, or interpretations and assumptions about the audiences, played an integral role in the hybrid entertainment forms that developed as the use and incorporation of new sound technologies was negotiated.

Similar to the criticism Staples notes of vaudeville when it began closely to mimic Broadway revues, audiences complained about 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 nauseam in the past."<sup>93</sup> Some critics still thought vaudeville could survive in spite of the talking picture. Alexander Bakshy harshly criticized vaudeville as it was in 1929, "In spite of the fifty thousand vaudeville artists in this country, the programs even in the leading American theaters seldom contain more than one or two really satisfying numbers. The rest are the veriest junk which only the utter degradation of vaudeville standards has permitted to be performed."<sup>94</sup> He continued to say that vaudeville had lost its class, but in spite of the current state of entertainment, vaudeville was needed to rival the talking film. Bakshy felt, "There will be one weapon, however, which will never be found in the armoury of the talking picture—the power of the direct and personal appeal to the audience which distinguishes the art of vaudeville more than any other form of stage entertainment."<sup>95</sup> Predictions of what cinema would become after the talkies ceased 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. The talkies were different in that they were not just a novel addition to cinema programs. They threatened both the established practices of silent cinema and greatly destabilized the live theater as an entertainment form.

In the wake of this destabilization speculation, an interview with seventy-seven-year-old theater producer David Belasco forecasted the "death of the talkies" and claimed good silent pictures would sweep the country.<sup>96</sup> Many filmmakers and theorists agreed. Charlie Chaplin had already pushed the limits on silent film in 1931 with *City Lights*, yet he surprised people by doing a silent film, *Modern Times*, in 1936. In other words, the movement away from sound was not only on the basis of aesthetics. 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 theaters for the public presence contributed to the decreased attendance at the theaters more so than the single idea that the novelty of the talkie had worn off. The variety-style program was popular with audiences, and when theaters 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 theater, returning to programs that had proved popular previously—a mixture of sound film, vaudeville acts, and short features. They deliberately made use of vaudeville artists and performances (sometimes even local amateur acts) as part of their overall presentational packages.

The "return" of vaudeville after synchronized sound film was adopted in the entertainment industry is not historically unique. A flash forward to the advent of television demonstrates that in 1948 as networks were bringing in seven-day-a-week programming, time needed to be filled, and former vaudevillians were recruited and signed to perform live and be broadcast on television. By this time, former vaudevillians were the epitome of star talent—established performers with reputations in the entertainment world. These stars could command serious salaries and be a considerable audience draw for television.

Joe Cohen wrote in *Variety* magazine, "The comeback of vaudeville is television's hottest development. Both talents and networks foresee as many

variety forms used in this medium as in the days when the Keith-Albee, Pantages, and Orpheum circuits flourished."<sup>97</sup> In prior demonstrations of television, vaudeville had also been the easy answer for test programming. In September 1930, *Saturday Night* announced that in London, a public screening of live television would take place at "one of the West End cinema theatres" wherein "short performances comprising of simple turns and the televising of personalities singing or talking" would be watched by the moviegoers as a special screen was mounted on wheels and moved onto the exhibition platform.<sup>98</sup> This early demonstration mimicked a vaudeville stage show in content, and similar to early trials of synchronized sound, it featured performers speaking and singing to demonstrate the technological prowess of the media. The surge in popularity and sales of television sets in the late 1940s and early 1950s was attributed to the everlasting popularity of the variety show, termed "vaudeo" by film and television critics. Major stars of the vaudeville stage were contacted by the television industry in hopes that they would make a return to the small screen. Joe Laurie Jr. cited television as the future of vaudeville in his birthday tribute to the Palace theater in New York. These were his final words in the article: "Who knows, maybe television will be the Palace of tomorrow?"<sup>99</sup>

Bob Hope had been one of the most successful stars of vaudeville, and long after theaters no longer featured live acts he toured internationally. In 1931, amid the wake of controversy over whether the talkies would drive vaudeville under for good, Hope secured his first contract at the Palace in New York. *Variety* magazine reviewed his performance: "He is a nice performer of the flip comedy type, and he has his own style. These natural resources should serve him well later on."<sup>100</sup> Hope's return to the stage and move to the small screen of television was relished by the National Broadcasting Corporation. On June 29, 1949, John F. Royal wrote a letter to Hope:

I have been involved in this television racket for a long time, and have been amused by the hurrying and scurrying of late regarding a lot of rough, slapstick comedy, and I want to take a little bit—in fact, a goddam big bet—that the first time Hope gets into television, he will do to this industry what Jolson did to talking pictures.<sup>101</sup>

This reference to Al Jolson and the fame and mythic presence of *The Jazz Singer* (1927) is emblematic both of the legends built in the media industry and the exhilarating desire to revive the vaudeville acts and the heroes of the stage seen as possible through television. Hope's response to Royal was cordial and signaled not only Hope's persistent adoration of vaudeville but his feeling that the habitual practice of taking in the vaudeville shows as an amusement habit would need to be re-created in the new media of television if a vaudeville revival was going to be a success. Hope wrote,

It was nice to receive your vote of confidence with regard to television, but Berle can have the medium all to himself for the next year. Then I shall have my head blocked and we'll all go back into vaudeville!

Without a doubt television will really be going in a couple of years and we will have to put on our very best manners and do a nice half-hour show every week. I don't think any less than that will do, as television will have to become a habit, but, nevertheless, an interesting one.<sup>102</sup>

The following year, the vaudevillian revival was magazine cover material. *Look* magazine paid tribute to the return of the vaudeville stars with a cover photo featuring vaudevillians on television including Fred Allen, Jack Benny, Bob Hope, Groucho Marx, Eddie Cantor, Ken Murray, Ed Wynn, Bobby Clark, George Burns, Gracie Allen, and Jimmy Durante.<sup>103</sup> In general, the rehashing of vaudeville stars as new television stars can be seen as a competitive shift instigated by the instability of the new media of television and broadcast. The variety show format is consistently the entertainment form that exhibitors and broadcasters return to in the case of a perceived instability in attendance. It was believed, on numerous occasions, that vaudeville was dead: the form was not alleged to be interesting or sophisticated enough to withstand the various innovations in site, sound, synchronization, and streamlining that occurred in entertainment programming. However, as I have shown, by following vaudeville past the first certain date of its decline and beyond its impending doom at the advent of synchronized sound, we can see that the entertainment form had a resilience not often noted in the history of film.

By 1930, the model of the all-filmic program that accompanied the transition from silent cinema to synchronized sound was economically not viable for many exhibitors trying to draw in Depression crowds more concerned about the national bread prices than the Saturday matinee. In what could be characterized as a desperate move, exhibitors brought live vaudeville programs back to the cinema. The cost of converting to sound made making additional large-scale adaptations to theaters impossible for most exhibitors. Having wired their theaters and already booked sound films would have made it impossible to do anything but show the films. The movie industry was also financially committed to producing and distributing sound films. Although vaudeville had been eulogized numerous times, it made a return on the very heels of synchronized sound and the feature film-based program, the new media that was said to banish live entertainment. This move backward to a mixed program was brought about by what theater managers perceived as audience's declining taste for the novelty of sound, the perception that audiences were not responding to all-filmic programs, and the economic uncertainty of the Depression. Contrary to dominant perceptions of new media replacing old, the unexpected historical return of vaudeville to filmic exhibition in the early 1930s offers a vivid example of vaudeville's hold on the popular imagination and its resilience as an entertainment form. At the very least, the use of vaudeville to augment programs and the recruitment of vaudeville artists by theater managers and, later on, television producers demonstrates that within technological transitions, vaudeville brought a sort of resilience and reliability to the stage and the screen. Moreover, examining the resurgence of live performance over the course of several periods of change shows that a form of entertainment as enigmatic and effervescent as vaudeville actually had a much broader relevance in the concepts of technological adoption, the history of cultural practices,

and the concepts of high and low culture. A closer examination of the cultural life of vaudeville reveals that resurgences are associated with periods in which the entertainment industry (in its various incarnations) is vying for control and standardization of the market. The residual and emergent forms of vaudeville over the first few decades of the development of the film industry demonstrates patterns indicating that more than anything, the introduction of new media proves, as Harold Innis argues, to destabilize the existing relationship of communication media and patterns of living.

## Notes

1. *Bulletin*, June 26, 1906, 1. For a history of the Empire theater and other theaters in Edmonton, Alberta, see John Orell's *Fallen Empires: The Lost Theatres of Edmonton, 1881-1914* (Edmonton, Alberta: NeWest Publishers, 1981), Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Alberta.
2. Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 178.
3. Doug McCallum, *Vancouver's Orpheum: The Life of a Theatre* (Vancouver: Social Planning Department, 1984), 6.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 179.
7. There is no shortage of historical work on the history of vaudeville and most histories of early film, silent film, and the coming of sound era will mention vaudeville. For an excellent history of burlesque and vaudeville see in particular, Robert Allen's *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) and Robert Snyder's *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). For more on the relationship between vaudeville and film see Robert C. Allen, *Vaudeville and Film, 1895-1915: A Study of Media Interaction*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1977. For more on the history of vaudevillians and the vaudeville aesthetic see Shelly Staples, *Male-Female Comedy Teams in American Vaudeville, 1865-1932* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984) and Henry Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
8. Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure," in *Marxist Cultural Theory, Problems in Materialism and Culture* (New York: Verso, 1980), 38.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Harold Adams Innis, *Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), 188.
11. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 177.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. Shelly Staples, *Male-Female Comedy Teams in American Vaudeville, 1865-1932* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), 33. Pastor even tried ham and turkey giveaways to lure more women into the Opera House.
15. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness* 180.
16. *Ibid.*, 179.
17. Robert C. Allen accounts the detailed tale of Keith's move from dime museum manager to variety, as does Robert Snyder in *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
18. There were also strict regulations governing the number of saloons in the city, which may have been a factor. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 182.
19. *Ibid.*, 183.
20. Although vaudeville immediately differentiated itself from the curio side of popular entertainment, a residual presence of live stage shows featured freak shows and odd characters like bearded ladies, dwarfs, and fat ladies. In 1925, Lester (Bob) Hope and George Byrne were booked on a tour in which the headliners were eighteen-year-old Siamese twins Daisy and Violet Hilton. The Hilton sisters' show featured the twins telling stories of their lives, playing saxophone and clarinet

duets, and dancing with Hope and Byrne. Brochure for "Siamese Twins" Daisy and Violet Hilton, ca. 1925, Bob Hope Collection, Motion Picture, Broadcasting & Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress. From "Vaudeville: Bob Hope and American Variety," Library of Congress online exhibition, <http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/bobhope/vaude.html>.

21. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 182–85.

22. Douglas Gilbert, *American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), 204–5.

23. These characteristics are most commonly associated with vaudeville, but there are of course variances. For instance, the illustrated song was very popular on Canadian programs, and audiences interacted with performers in these cases. For a detailed account of illustrated song, spectatorship, and the role of exhibitors in Quebec, see Pierre Verroneau, "The Reception of 'Talking Pictures' in the Context of Quebec Exhibition 1894–1915," *Film History* 11, no. 4 (1999).

24. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 179.

25. Robert Snyder, *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 27.

26. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 185.

27. Joe Laurie Jr., "Happy Birthday," *Variety*, March 10, 1948. Accessed as part of the Guy Weadick Collection, M1287, file 34, Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Alberta.

28. *Ibid.*, 205–6.

29. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 206.

30. Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Wesleyan University Press, 1974), 59.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977).

33. Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

34. Roy Rosenzweig treats the emergence of nickel theaters in Worcester, Massachusetts, and the popularity of the movies in *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

35. *Ibid.*, 185. Robert Snyder similarly describes what Allen calls "vaudeville grandiloquence." In New York, Frederick F. Proctor was starting the construction on Proctor's Pleasure Palace. The Romanesque auditorium had a roof garden, German café, library, and barbershop, Turkish bath, flower stand, and a smaller auditorium called the Garden of Palms. Oscar Hammerstein constructed the Olympia Theatre in 1895. The Olympia trumped Proctor's Palace like the Chrysler Tower did the Empire State Building. The Olympia had two large auditoriums, a musical hall, concert hall, café, roof garden, billiard hall, smoking lounges, a bowling alley, and a Turkish bath. See Robert Snyder, *Voice of the City*, 82–87.

36. Canadian theaters booked the vaudeville acts that toured North America, usually originating in the United States. These theaters also played local and amateur acts.

37. McCallum, *Vancouver's Orpheum*, 15.

38. "Orpheum Bulletin," Sherman Grand Theatre, Calgary. December 19–21, 1912, Barron Enterprises Collection, M7268, Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Alberta.

39. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 185.

40. Raymond Williams's concept of flow was first identified in relation to television programming and a comparison of British and American programming schedules.

41. Blackface minstrel shows were sometimes seen as part of vaudeville programs. Al Jolson was a popular vaudeville entertainer before he began his career in movies, and his character in the *Jazz Singer* (1927) was based on his popular vaudeville routine. Other ethnic acts featured comic characters that were commonly Irish, Jewish, German, and Italian.

42. For sample programs and examples of vaudeville sketches and turns, see "Vaudeville: Bob Hope and American Variety," Library of Congress online exhibition, <http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/bobhope/vaude.html>.

43. Shirley Staples, *Male-Female Comedy Teams in American Vaudeville 1965–1932* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), 76.

44. Robert C. Allen, *Vaudeville and Film, 1895–1915: A Study of Media Interaction*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1977.

45. Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, argues that by 1904 the moving pictures were no longer sporadic novelties for view on busy corners or in makeshift movie houses but began to be given more permanent homes in Worcester's vaudeville theaters. See Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours*

for *What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1920*, 192. For a complete picture of early vaudeville and its relation to film, see Robert C. Allen, *Vaudeville and Film, 1895–1915*.

46. Russell Merritt, "Nickelodeon Theaters 1905–1914: Building an Audience for the Movies," in *The American Film Industry*, rev. ed., ed. Tino Balio (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 85.

47. Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, 194.

48. For an excellent overview of the contexts of film distribution and exhibition in relation to understanding the function of movie theatres and sites for movie consumption as public spaces, see Gregory Waller's edited collection: *Moviedom in America* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002).

49. Craw wrote a weekly column in *Moving Picture World* advising theater managers on the box office business from programming, to audiences and how to make their theatre popular. George Rockhill Craw, "Swelling the Box Office Receipts," *Moving Picture World* 8 (May 13, 1911): 1059–60.

50. *Ibid.*, 1060. Vaudeville was also argued to be civically damning, and the regulation of motion pictures was thought to be a civil authority in North America as illustrated in Boyd Fisher, "The Regulation of Motion Picture Theatres," *American City* 7 (1912): 520–21. Fisher argues that vaudeville should be ruled out as a cheap expedient for profit and should be barred from theaters. He is explicitly referring to small vaudeville shows, which were often thought of as cheap entertainment: "Vaudeville cannot be profitably furnished unless it is either immoral and cheap or simply inferior and cheap. To rule it out of all except vaudeville theatres is to safeguard the moral and intellectual quality of picture theatres."

51. John Collier, "Cheap Amusements," *Charities and the Commons* 20 (April 1908): 73–76, reprinted in *Moviedom in America*, ed. Gregory Waller (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 46–47.

52. *Ibid.*, 46.

53. De Certeau identifies trajectories or what he calls "wandering lines" (lignes d'erre) which are the tracings of audiences as they move within functionalized spaces. He warns against simplifying or "flattening out" the path of practice because we would miss the complex combination of elements that form these trajectories which are, to De Certeau, the combination of discursive elements of practice and use. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xviii.

54. *Ibid.*, xviii.

55. *Ibid.*

56. Harold B. Franklin, *Motion Picture Theatre Management* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Company, 1928), 27; reprinted in Waller, *Moviedom in America*, 116–23.

57. Richard Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915–1928* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 9.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Staples, *Male-Female Comedy Teams*, 301.

60. Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926–1931* (New York: Simon & Schuster/Macmillan, 1997), 1.

61. Alexander Walker, *The Shattered Silents: How the Talkies Came to Stay* (New York: William Morrow, 1979). Walker's work supports the legend that claimed the "Art of the Silent" cinema as victim of the new sound technology.

62. *Ibid.*, 27.

63. Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939), 334.

64. Karel Dibbets, "The Introduction of Sound," in *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 214.

65. *Ibid.*

66. Miriam Hansen, "Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 147.

67. *Ibid.*

68. See Gregory Waller, *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896–1930* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), for an examination of mid-sized American cities; for Manhattan, see Robert C. Allen, "Motion Picture Exhibition in Manhattan: Beyond the Nickelodeon," *Cinema Journal* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1979), 2–15; Russell

Merritt, "Nickelodeon Theatres, 1905-1914: Building an Audience for the Movies," in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 59-79; and Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, eds., *American Movie Audiences from the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era* (London: British Film Institute, 1999).

69. It is well accepted in film history that the 1927 decision of Warner Bros. to add synchronized sound dialogue to their film *The Jazz Singer* (1927) marked the move that shut the door on silent cinema. See Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment*, 90. Film historians have also acknowledged the leg- end of *The Jazz Singer* and attempted to work around the mythic proportions of the film, which has become a temporal marker in film history. Notably, Al Jolson, one of the most famous vaudeville stars, commanding a salary of \$100,000 per year, helped the film go down in a privileged historical place. Accounts of the film in media sources and popular writings from the period are consistently inter- twined with stories about Jolson. See Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926-1931* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 520-30.

70. The Palace theater's interior had been completely restored and wired for Fox Movietone and Vitaphone sound systems. Theater manager George Rotsky announced in the French- and English- language press that \$100,000 had been spent to make the theater the most luxurious in Montreal: *Montreal Daily Star*, September 1, 1928, 22; *La Presse*, September 1, 1928, 69.

71. Dane Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884-1938* (Waterloo, Ontario: Penumra Press, 1993), 103. Not long after it reopened, the Palace's famous orchestra led by Maurice Meerte lost its spot, and the Palace shows were entirely film. Meerte turned up soon after at the Capitol theater. For more on the transition to synchronized sound in Montreal, see my master's thesis, *That's Not What I Heard: Synchronized Sound Cinema in Montreal, 1926-1931*, Concordia University, Montreal, 2001.

72. Advertisement for *Way Out West* (1930) at Loew's, *Montreal Daily Star*, September 13, 1930, 24.

73. Advertisement for the "Capitol's Greater New Show Idea during Prosperity Week," *Montreal Daily Star*, October 11, 1930, 23.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. McCallum, *The Orpheum*, 17.

77. Ibid., 16.

78. Snyder, *Voice of the City*, 152.

79. "Public Getting 'Fed Up' with Lame Movies Despite Sound Novelty," *Montreal Daily Star*, September 1, 1930, 14.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

84. "Photoplay Executives Give Options on the Future of the Talkies," *Montreal Daily Star*, October 11, 1930, 24.

85. Crafton, *The Talkies*, 263.

86. "Photoplay Executives Give Options on the Future of the Talkies," *Montreal Daily Star*, October 11, 1930, 24.

87. Morgan Powell, "About Ticket Prices" [editorial], *Montreal Daily Star*, October 25, 1930, 23.

88. Ibid.

89. "List of Movie Players Will Undergo a Weeding Out Process Very Soon," *Montreal Daily Star*, November 2, 1930, 6.

90. Crafton, *The Talkies*, 182.

91. Advertisement for the appearance of the Godino Siamese twins at five United Amusement Theatres, *Montreal Daily Star*, March 4, 1931, 6.

92. The *Montreal Daily Star* reported that *Cimarron* cost \$1 million to make.

93. Morgan Powell, "How About the One-Reeler?" *Montreal Daily Star*, March 7, 1931.

94. Alexander Bakshy, "Vaudeville: Vaudeville's Prestige," *The Nation* 129, no. 3342 (July 24, 1929): 98-100.

95. Ibid.

96. "Belasco Predicts Death of Talkies," *Montreal Daily Star*, July 24, 1930, 6.

97. Joe Cohen, "Vaude's 'Comeback' Via Vaudeo: Talent, Agents Hopping on TV," *Variety*, May 26, 1948, 43-44.

98. "Progress of Television," *Saturday Night* 45 (September 13, 1930): 15. This demonstration of early television featured the Baird system, which allegedly cost between £50 and £60 and did not then have a wavelength to broadcast. The article claimed this was the first public exhibition of television.

99. Laurie, "Happy Birthday."

100. Bob Hope Collection, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress. From "Vaudeville: Bob Hope and American Variety," Library of Congress online exhibi- tion, <http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/bobhope/vaude.html>.

101. Letter from John Royal to Bob Hope, June 29, 1949. Typed manuscript. Bob Hope Collec- tion, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress. From "Vaudeville: Bob Hope and American Variety," Library of Congress online exhibition, <http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/bobhope/vaude.html>.

102. Letter from Bob Hope to John Royal, July 13, 1949. Typed manuscript. Bob Hope Collec- tion, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress. Within months of this correspondence Bob Hope agreed to host his own show, and fellow vaudevillian Milton Berle continued to host Berle's *Texaco Star Theater*. Hope's first national television appear- ance was on April 9, 1950, as a regular host of *Star Spangled Revue*, a variety show produced by Max Liebman. Broadcast live from New York, the program was much like Hope's radio show with a monologue, skits, and musical performances. "Vaudeville: Bob Hope and American Variety," Library of Congress online exhibition, <http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/bobhope/vaude.html>.

103. "TV's Old-New Stars," *Look* magazine (April 10, 1951). Library of Congress online exhibition, <http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/bobhope/vaude.html>.