Sounding Modern, Sounding Moral: Censorship and Hollywood's Transition to Sound

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the relationship between Hollywood's transition to synchronized sound and the rise of the industry's self-censorship practices, processes which were precisely commensurate during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Through nuanced historiographical discussion, this thesis explores how the transition to sound interfaced with other mechanisms at work in the Hollywood industry of the late 1920s—namely, regulatory discourses and practices. Both of these processes represent crucial shifts in the technologies, practices, and politics of Hollywood filmmaking. This thesis proposes that this coalescence produced compelling negotiations visible in the films of that era. Synchronized sound film is defined as part of a broader web of emergent sound media which, as Steve Wurtzler (2007) argues, interfaced with pre-existing concerns surrounding technologically mediated modernity and its effects on traditional morality. The study is illustrated by discussion of two part-talkie films of the flapper cycle, *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928) and *Our Modern Maidens* (1929) both of which negotiate a new technological terrain and indicate Hollywood's ongoing negotiations with contemporaneous film-morality debates.

Dedicated to:

Gerald and Evelyn Archer, in loving memory

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Introduction

Hollywood's adaptation to synchronized sound was precisely commensurate with the rise of the industry's self-censorship practices, known widely as the Hays Code. Yet too little work has examined the relationships between these two crucial shifts in the technologies, practices, and politics of Hollywood filmmaking. These topics are frequently dealt with separately or as only incidentally related, despite their mutual importance in shaping our understanding of this period. At the crux of this thesis is the assertion that the transition to the synch-sound period is a fertile period for the study of how Hollywood worked through issues of censorship, morality debates, and the introduction of new technologies concomitantly—an aspect of this period of film history that has heretofore been understudied.

Donald Crafton asserts that the period of Hollywood's transition to synchronized sound must be defined not as a paroxysm but as a "messy and complicated business," and a process which occurred over a period of years. Crafton is responding to a tendency in both scholarly and popular histories to simplify the industrial changes which occurred in Hollywood in the years 1926-1930, as well as the tendency to assert a greater demarcation between sound and silent eras than is appropriate, both historically as well as technically and aesthetically. Many extant histories collapse the processes of change into one or two dramatic events, typically favouring the "watershed moment" narrative which centres firmly on the release of *The Jazz Singer* in 1927. Indeed, that film is at the core of most conventional histories of early American synch-sound cinema. However, despite the often hyperbolic stories of *The Jazz Singer*'s exceptional commercial and critical success upon its New York premiere, the release of this film did not confirm the immediate success of synchronized sound in motion pictures. Nor was sound rapidly

adapted for now-conventional storytelling purposes, contrary to mainstream, narrative-driven films of the early 1930s which have a heavy reliance on spoken dialogue. Rather, filmmakers and studios grappled with the most effective way to incorporate the new technology into their films.[1] As Crafton puts it, "there was no obvious formula for mastering the new medium." [2] The recognition of this initial confusion explodes the longstanding belief that sound was something the cinema had always *lacked* and that the transition to sound was a natural and relatively seamless process.

Regardless of its inaccuracies, the overnight success narrative of early synch-sound cinema has endured and, until fairly recently, remained unchallenged in studies of American film history. For instance, Alexander Walker's assessment of the transition to sound is summed up in the title of his book, *The Shattered Silents*. The word "shattered" is used to suggest that all of the performers and filmmaking techniques of the silent era were swept away with the arrival of sound. This approach is again solidified in the beginning of his introduction. He writes, "There has been no revolution like it. It passed with such break-neck speed, at such inflationary cost, that a whole art form was sundered and consigned to history almost before anyone could count the cost in economic terms or guess the consequences in human ones—and certainly before anyone could keep an adequate record of it."[3] Written in 1979, *The Shattered Silents* does admittedly come before the resurgence in critical, scholarly attention to this period, and Walker was not a historian but rather a film critic with a passion for silent film. Writing some fifty years

[1] Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926-1931*. Berkley: University of California Press (1998). Crafton provides extensive information regarding the various early uses of sound in filmmaking. One prominent example were Vitaphone shorts which offered exhibitors and audiences access to a "Virtual Broadway." These programs consisted of short variety skits or song interludes performed by popular vaudeville stars and capitalized on the popularity of revue-type programs, which were common in big city theatres but not feasible in smaller towns.
[2] Crafton, *The Talkies*, 352.
[3] Alexander Walker, *The Shattered Silents*. New York: William Morrow and Company (1979): vii.

after the period he is addressing, Walker lays out an uncritical historical review of the transition to sound, one that has its roots in a standard historiography of sound filmmaking which can be found in works as early as Fitzhugh Green's *The Film Finds its Tongue*, and later reinforced by the film industry in films like *Singin' in the Rain* (1952, Stanley Donen) and *The Artist* (2011, Michel Hazanavicius).[4]

In recent decades scholars like Crafton, James Lastra, and Douglas Gomery have worked to destabilize these myths by exploring the industrial and technical history of Hollywood in the late 1920s. Donald Crafton's seminal book *The Talkies* provided the first truly exhaustive study of Hollywood's transition to synch-sound. James Lastra's *Sound Technology and the American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity* (2000) provides useful industrial and theoretical rethinking of this transitional phase in American filmmaking. Other studies have focused more narrowly on particular films and their sound aesthetics, such as Rob King's study of early sound shorts or Katherine Spring's work on film theme songs and performance authenticity in late 1920s musical or hybrid-musical films. Jennifer Fleeger has demonstrated how jazz and opera played a crucial role in demonstrating the cultural value of sound cinema, especially through their use in short films during the conversion era, and by extension in shaping the aesthetics of classical Hollywood film scores.[5]

While these studies have been invaluable to the development of a new historiography of American sound filmmaking, they nevertheless neglect an important aspect of Hollywood's transition to sound: the effects of and reactions to synchronized sound by contemporaneous

[4] Fitzhugh Green, *The Film Finds its Tongue* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1929).
[5] Rob King, "Introduction: Beyond Vitaphone: The Early Sound Short." *Film History* 23.3 (January 2011): 247-250; Katherine Spring, "Pop Go the Warner Bros., et. al.: Marketing Film Songs during the Coming of Sound." *Cinema Journal* 48.1 (Fall 2008): 68-89. And Katherine Spring, "'To Sustain Illusion is All That is Necessary': The Authenticity of Song Performance in Early American Sound Cinema." *Film History* 23.3 (January 2011): 285-299; Jennifer Fleeger, *Sounding American: Hollywood, Opera, and Jazz*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

audiences in both urban and rural settings, specifically with regards to questions of movie morality. My research addresses this key aspect of the transition, responding to Donald Crafton's call for a more nuanced historiographical discussion of the period. The goal of this thesis is to open up a new perspective from which we may study this transitional period in addition to technological, industrial and aesthetic frameworks. I aim to explore how the transition to sound interfaced with other mechanisms at work in the Hollywood industry of the late 1920s—namely, regulatory discourses and practices. This thesis proposes that the coalescence of two processes—industry self-censorship and the production changes necessitated by the transition to sound in late 1920s Hollywood together produced compelling negotiations visible in the films of that era.

I primarily focus on two ways in which regulation and the transition to sound were plainly inseparable. First: the changes to production methods necessitated by sound recording may be considered regulatory in the sense that the codification of rules in the Production Code shaped how the talkies sounded. Second, synchronized dialogue and music for films meant that directors had more direct control over the exhibition of their films as music could be selected or in many cases written specifically for the films and was inscribed directly onto the images, rather than played live. Spoken dialogue recorded on film meant that violence or innuendo-laden scenes became supplemented with words that could support or emphasize these meanings, but also downplay or disguise them. To be sure, filmmakers invented uses of sound to help them obscure racy themes.[6]

[6] This claim is substantiated by Carmen Guiralt's (2016) study of *A Woman of Affairs* (1928) in which careful self-censorship allowed the film to tell two stories: one morally acceptable which was presented through inter-titles, a second presented implicitly through the film's imagery and understandable only by those audience members with the previous knowledge to decode its symbolism. See Carmen Guiralt, "Self-Censorship in Hollywood During the Silent Era: *A Woman of Affairs* (1928) by Clarence Brown." *Film History* 28.2 (Spring 2016): 81-113.

In conceiving of this thesis, I had initially intended to demonstrate how films of the transitional period evidenced growing disregard for increasingly stringent censorship rules, a trend which is repeatedly stressed in scholarship on the films of the early 1930s in the so-called "pre-code era". Rather, I have found that while debates about sound and censorship certainly proliferated in this period in the trade press and other contemporary discourses, the wholesale abandonment of censorship guidelines I had expected (or wanted) to find in the films was simply not present. A few exceptional examples notwithstanding, my evidence suggests that filmmakers found distinct and varied ways to negotiate and ultimately accommodate the changing technological and regulatory environments in which they were operating. As such, this project is framed by the assumption that Hollywood is best understood not in terms of a monolithic industry but rather as a greater system of multiple parts in which different responses or approaches to contemporary issues within and outside of the industry can not only be found, but are to be expected.

This project is an investigation and discussion of different approaches to the questions of sound and censorship and debates about film meaning in late 1920s Hollywood. In order to focus this discussion I will analyze two popular films of the "flapper" genre, *Our Dancing Daughters* (Harry Beaumont, 1928) and its sequel *Our Modern Maidens* (Jack Conway, 1929), both of which deploy both silent and sound filmmaking techniques, making them examples of the "part-talkie" film.[7] This was a common aesthetic in late 1920s productions as studios grappled with how best to use sound technologies in their films. Inasmuch as the films negotiate a new technological terrain, they also indicate negotiations with contemporary film morality debates. Both films follow the exploits of modern, wealthy, and sexually liberated young adults, and both

[7] A third film, *Our Blushing Brides* was released in 1930. All three films star Joan Crawford who plays similar flapper characters in each. *Our Blushing Brides* is not considered in this paper because it is a full-sound production.

star Joan Crawford as similar (but not identical) characters who figure as the head of their particular social set.

The following questions guide my research: How do these two part-talkie films reflect the industry's negotiations with regulatory debates? In what ways are active experiments with the new technologies of sound film and increasingly stringent codes of morality and self-censorship made visible in these films texts, and their para-texts in the trade paper and fan magazine discourse of the day? The thesis is divided into two distinct sections. The first is aimed at establishing the historical context of these two films, and the second will focus on the films themselves. The first section will establish the histories of both the technological and censorship components of the study, offering an overview of relevant aspects of both. I chart the development of sound film and Hollywood self-censorship as concurrent processes which met during the transition to sound period. My analysis of these films will demonstrate the ongoing negotiations about morality in late 1920s Hollywood, negotiations which pre-figured the often cited Pre-Code Era of the early 1930s. Further, the paper will demonstrate the ways that changes in American social mores were seen to be connected to modernity and technology, especially technologies of representation like the synchronized sound film.

A key text informing this paper's approach is Richard Maltby's re-examination of the history of the censorship enacted by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America. Maltby demonstrates how the industry operated in practice, highlighting the negotiations between producers, the public, and Catholic reformers regarding film content occurring in the years 1930-1934, and continuing afterward. This account fundamentally alters the popular conception of the Production Code and its administrators as "philistine and picayunish villains," instead demonstrating their importance as integral participants in Hollywood's practices of

production as it entered its "Golden Era." [8] Further, his account of the period situates the negotiations over regulation of movie content within broader concerns about the movies as a cultural institution. Maltby explodes the idea of the Pre-Code era's salaciousness, arguing that the films produced in Hollywood between 1930 and 1934 weren't necessarily more morally transgressive than those produced after this period. Rather, as Maltby's examination of the Production Code's administrative history shows, films produced post-1934 shifted their representation of taboo subject matter like sexuality, to emphasize textual ambiguity so that "a pre-existent knowledge was required to gain access to it". [9] Maltby's account extends the process of negotiation forward in time, I want to extend this negotiation *backward* as well. In focusing on the negotiations that early part-talking films undertook with regards to morality and self-regulation, this thesis will develop current understanding of how two concurrent processes—the coming of sound and the increasing regulation of Hollywood production—affected, and were affected by, each other and the cultural context in which they emerged.

Historical revisions uncover the pertinence of one fundamental question faced by film practitioners during the transition to sound: what was the best way to incorporate sound reproduction technology into the motion picture? The introduction of sound film was not merely a technological advance—it sparked debates about the basic ontological properties of the motion picture itself. Indeed, the straddling of both silent and sound production styles in early synch-sound cinema speaks to the uncertainty of how best to employ sound technology, and the lack of concrete evidence that audiences were truly interested in seeing "all-talking" films. Proponents of the new sound films argued that sound meant greater realism. William A. Johnston, writing for the Motion Picture News offered the opinion that sound would provide "a newer and richer

[8] Maltby, "The Production Code and the Hays Office," in *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise 1930-1939*, ed. Tino Balio (Berkley: University of California Press, 1994), 71.
[9] ibid., 64.

entertainment," one that wouldn't "subordinate the motion picture but [would] make it still more powerful in its appeal."[10] Johnston's assessment is intriguing in that he essentially repudiated the standpoints of those film supporters of a few decades earlier who, working to legitimate the motion picture, had argued that cinema was not inferior to the dramatic stage play but rather an entirely new art form precisely because of its lack of speech and rich pantomimic language based upon movement and gesture. The best example of such work is Hugo Munsterberg's *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, first published in 1916. Munsterberg, a German-born psychologist, argued for the legitimation of film as an art form largely on these grounds. More than the simple "photographic reproduction of stage performance," Munsterberg considered film to be an "independent art, controlled by aesthetic laws of its own" which must be considered independent to the theatre.[11] Writing in 1916, Munsterberg's description of the motion picture did not include synchronized sound, an element he likely would have considered superfluous to the its power as both art and entertainment.

Apart from concerns about how sound films would affect the motion picture's basic ontology, by the late 1920s a debate was growing in the trade papers about the morality of the talkies. Efforts by public reformers to censor inter-titles had long troubled movie studios. Now spoken dialogue added a new element to censorship debates. In the 1920s, a number of notorious scandals involving important Hollywood figures had also increased public scrutiny of the movies and people involved in making them, further galvanizing those moral reformers persistently wary of the medium's potential for moral digressions. Francis Couvares notes how, more so than earlier commercial amusements, the movies "threatened to gain control over the representation

[10] William A. Johnston, "A New Era on the Way: Rapid Developments in 'Sound' Movie Field." *Inter-titles* January 14 1929, 117.
[11] Hugo Munsterberg, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings*, ed. Allan Langdale (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 64.

of crime and punishment, of class and ethnicity, and especially of familial and sexual relations."[12] For moral reformers, these "merchants of leisure…seemed capable of subverting the moral lessons of family, church, and tradition."[13] Increasing demands for regulation prompted several states to set up their own censorships boards, the first being Pennsylvania in 1911. [14] By 1920, eight states and more than 200 municipalities had formed censorship boards, many of which were local affiliates of the National Board of Review, which was based in New York City.[15] These boards were charged with the task of imposing locally-defined standards of morality on films before they made it to exhibition. But as they functioned independent of each other their regulations varied in degree of strictness and what sorts of behaviour or stories they deemed inappropriate. Thus was the state of American motion picture regulation and censorship in the early 1920s, when a number of scandals rocked Hollywood and damaged its public image. In 1922, in response to continuing troubles on the censorship front, the industry united under the banner of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). Under the leadership of Will H. Hays, a Protestant and prominent member of the Republican party, the MPPDA formed the Committee on Public Relations, through which Hays courted Hollywood's critics and offered them a chance to collaborate in the work of improving the "democracy of entertainment."[16] In 1927 the Studio Relations Committee (SRC) was created, headed by Colonel Jason Joy. The SRC codified the most common complaints from the censorship boards into one document, colloquially known as the "Don'ts and Be Carefuls" which was to be used by studios to make sure their films would conform to their standards. However, as Black notes, these rules

[12] Francis Couvares, "Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church: Trying to Censor the Movies Before the Production Code," *American Quarterly* 44.4 (1992b): 585.
[13] ibid.
[14] Gregory D. Black, "Hollywood Censored: The Production Code Administration and the Hollywood Film Industry, 1930-1940," *Film History* 3 (1989): 169.
[15] ibid.
[16] unknown author cited in Couvares, "Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church," 589.

were really only guidelines, and the SRC had no official power to force studios to conform to them.

Meanwhile the gradual introduction of sound films onto American screens gave critics something else to worry about: spoken dialogue. The SRC was tasked with reading scripts and scenarios to look for dialogue that would be unacceptable to state censors.[17] But, once again, since the SRC held no formal power, studios were not forced to submit their scripts to them. The much celebrated Pre-Code era of 1930-1934 is noted for its films which negotiated the changing terrain of American moral standards, often flouting them entirely. However, it is a myopic view of American film history that would relegate this negotiation to those years alone. As Couvares and Maltby's works cited above demonstrate, these negotiations were occurring during the silent era, and they became more complex with the coming of sound. Some motion picture advocates like William Johnston were cautiously optimistic, suggesting that spoken dialogue in films would usher in a new era of filmmaking, while others debated how to control what actors said on screen, and how they said it.[18] For some, spoken dialogue was seen to carry a great deal of meaning. Indeed, the coming of sound generated concern amongst moral guardians, not only about dialogue but about all manner of sounds. Some feared certain kinds of music and the salacious images and style of talking that went with it. In some instances this meant concerns about the influence of big city life on small towns through sound and talking pictures. As Raymond Moley writes, "execrable girl-and-music shows, heretofore seen only by the out-of-towner on an occasional trip to New York, were being brought by the talkies to every hamlet." [19] The fast-talking, racy Broadway play was now available to patrons on Main Street.

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[17] Gerald R. Butters, *Banned in Kansas: Motion Picture Censorship 1915-1966* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 186.
[18] Crafton, *The Talkies*, 445.
[19] Raymond Moley, *The Hays Office* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1945): 65.

Framing my analysis is the acknowledgement of growing divisions within American society in the early 20th century, divisions perpetuated by the population growth of urban centres versus sub-urban or rural communities, and the relatively unchanging social customs, values, and beliefs central to the ideologies of many smaller communities. In histories of American film, the act of "going to the movies" is typically conceptualized as occurring within the framework of the city. For audiences, this lived experience of urbanity (and its attendant modernity) shaped their experience of viewing Hollywood films. As the popularity of the movies grew, single-purpose theatres became the dominant site for exhibition in cities, while in rural areas multi-purpose spaces like public meeting halls continued to be used. By 1920 America's urban population comprised a slim majority at 51.2% of the whole. [20] However, this population remained clustered around a small number of metropolitan or urbanized spaces, especially in the north east of the country, while the remainder of the population was scattered across the country in sub-urban, ex-urban, or rural areas. The Middle Atlantic census division, for example, comprises only three states: New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, yet the population for these three states in 1920 totaled 22,261,144, 75.4% of which was considered urban population. The South Atlantic division comprises nine states (Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia, the Virginias, Carolinas, Georgia and Florida), whose total population at the 1920 census was only 13,990,272, 31% percent of which was urban population. By 1930 America's urban population had grown to 56.1%, but this still represents a slim margin with the population dispersal (less urban spaces than rural spaces) being the same.

Robert Allen has noted what he calls a "devaluation of the rural" in cultural studies, especially a "determinative connection between the experience of metropolitan urbanity and the

[20] United States Census Bureau, "Table 1. Urban and Rural Population: 1900 to 1990," October 1995 https://www.census.gov/population/censusdata/urpop0090.txt

experience of cinema."[21] Figuring the spectator's position as urban ignores the substantial population of Americans who did not live in a city. Moreover, Allen asserts that maintaining the metropolitan experience of movie-going as the centre of conceptions of historical movie-going obfuscates the "complex and dynamic cultural and social geography" of early American movie-going and re-affirms a simplistic binary of city/country.[22] In order to grasp a fuller picture of historical film-going, we must attend to the variations of movie viewing experience in suburban areas, small towns, and rural areas. Working on a history of silent-era spectatorship, Kathryn Fuller-Seeley cautions against conceiving of audiences as one distinct entity, definable by a set of static, umbrella social terms. Instead, she writes that it is vital to note the "continuing cultural tensions between urban and rural attitudes," during this time, the differences between white and ethnic audiences, working and middle-class audiences, and how these experiential frameworks shaped one's movie-going experience.[23] Gregory Waller's study of silent-era movie patronage in Lexington, Kentucky similarly aims to offer a means to reconsider longstanding assumptions about practices of early movie-going, approaching the study as it does from a position outside the metropolis.[24] Waller argues that the demographic makeup of Lexington, and many other cities and towns in the American South in the early 20th century, was "simply not home to identifiably ethnic, immigrant working-class communities," social markers that have figured prominently in traditional histories of the experience of silent era film-going. While a focused discussion of regional sound film practices is beyond the scope of this thesis, these works nevertheless serve as guides to my approach as these divisions ultimately shaped the form of both *Our Dancing*

[21] Robert Allen, "Relocating American Film History: The 'Problem' of the Empirical," *Cultural Studies* 20.1 (2006): 62-64.
[22] ibid, 64.
[23] Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, *At the Picture Show: Small Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture,* (London: Smithsonian University Press, 1993): 29.
[24] Gregory A. Waller, *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896-1930*, (Washington: Smithsonian, 1995): xiv.

Daughters and *Our Modern Maidens* which both enjoyed a widespread popularity in both urban and rural contexts.

Chapter One

Historiography of Censorship and Regulation Practices

As a major component of this thesis is the history of Hollywood censorship, this chapter will provide an overview of the state of American movie regulation from the early 1900s through to the late 1920s. The early decades of the American motion picture industry were marked by ongoing negotiations between studios, exhibitors, and public reform groups over movie content and regulation. For some, the movies and other forms of commercial entertainments were perceived to threaten traditional sources of cultural authority, like religion. In response, reformers fought to maintain their centrality to the American way of life by calling for a moral uplift for the movies. The central question at stake was what the social function of the motion picture should (and could) be, and to what degree systems of regulation and censorship should control it.

The historiography of Hollywood censorship, like the history of the transition to sound, is often condensed and simplified in such a way that it obfuscates the nuances of it as an ongoing process of negotiation between Hollywood studios and the public. In conventional Hollywood histories, especially those dealing with the "Pre-Code Era" [25] the establishment of the Production Code in 1930, and its administration board in 1934, serve as the defining moments in the account of the industry's censorship history. As Ruth Vasey points out, while the Production code was "specifically occasioned" by the coming of sound, its deployment was situated within a trend

[25] See Mick LaSalle, "Complicated Women" (New York: St. Martin's, 2000) and "Dangerous Men" (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002) to see how these stereotypes have been perpetuated in popular film criticism.

toward regulation of movie content which had been increasing since at least 1922.[26] Francis Couvares argues that this trend goes even farther back. His work restages the history of movie censorship within what he argues was a longstanding American *kulturkampf* dating from the mid-nineteenth century.[27] During this decades-long period of cultural change, debates about the morality of all popular entertainments abounded. As the locus of cultural authority shifted from organized religion and the social traditions associated with it, various reform groups were organized by concerned citizens in the defence of traditional American values. Reformers invariably accused modern entertainments like vaudeville, the penny press, and motion pictures of aiding the moral downfall of the American people. These "merchants of leisure" seemed, to reformers, "capable of subverting the moral lessons of family, church, and tradition."[28] Thus, in response to this threat, reform groups fought to reinstate older forms of cultural authority and social standards within the texts of new commercial entertainments.

Setting the Scene

The Progressive Era of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was a period marked by widespread cultural and social change in the United States. A series of reforms, both infrastructural and legislative, served to manage the development of the country as it became

[26] Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939*, (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997): 80.
[27] Francis Couvares, "Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church: Trying to Censor the Movies Before the Production Code." *American Quarterly* 44.4 (1992b): 584.
[28] ibid., 585.

increasingly industrialized, urbanized, and corporatized.[29] These reforms united what Robert Wiebe has called the "island communities" which pre-existed them. [30] Small communities, individual counties, and even states were isolated from one another by a weak communication system and were typically governed by local autonomy, further separating them from the national whole. Following the reforms of the Fourth Party System, various independent governments became better connected through a centralized system of public policy, and physically connected with the growing system of national railways.[31] However, joining these disparate communities by railways and through state and governmental reform did not smooth over differences in culture or values, which became magnified. Deep-seated differences in social values remained, largely influenced by the ongoing division between urban and rural communities, which remained ill-served by the rail system. [32] It was these distinctions in tastes and values which became one of the most trying issues faced by early attempts at movie censorship. For policymakers, it soon became apparent that standardized moral guidelines established for audiences in New York or Chicago wouldn't necessarily be acceptable for audiences in small-town Georgia, and vice-versa.

But nevertheless the spirit of Progressive Era reformism impacted the motion pictures. Rather than write-off the medium entirely, many reformers who saw its potential benefit as a medium, actively sought to improve movie content, elevating popular film to a moral standard

[29] Mark Whalan, "Introduction" *American Culture in the 1910s*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010): 5.
[30] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1870-1920,* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967): 2-4.
[31] The Fourth Party System is a term used to delineate the years 1896 to 1932 in American political history. The central issues tackled in these years were the dismantling of trusts or monopolies and the standardization of a single currency and banking system. Reforms aided the connection between local governments as they began to follow standards established at the national level. See, Lewis Gould, *America in the Progressive Era, 1890-1914*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).
[32] In fact the railroads were opposed by some groups in the Northwest, the South, and the Plains states, condemned as "alien intruders" from distant urban centres, financed by wealthy monopolies and oblivious to local needs. See Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, 86.

they found acceptable. Progressive Era reformers believed that society's issues could be combatted through rational, organized, and scientifically based approaches. Tom Gunning has theorized that this reformer mind-set was a reaction to modernity—an attempt by citizens to maintain a status quo as their small, contained world grew exponentially into an intangible network of cities and townships, mechanized and technologized in ways that had previously been inconceivable.[33] With this antecedent in mind, then, it is possible to see how reformers who wanted to maintain old-world values in modern entertainment should not simply be written off as proverbial wet-blankets categorically opposed to all change, but rather a section of the population which sought to shape that progress into something they recognized, and wasn't entirely alien to them.

Regulation from Without — The National Board of Review

The National Board of Censorship (later the National Board of Review) was a product of the spirit of the Progressive Era, and one of the most central players in the early history of Hollywood regulation and censorship. Founded in 1909, it was initially a group of fourteen prominent figures in the fields of social work, religion, and education based in New York City. By 1914 it had taken the place of many local censor boards and was making recommendations

[33] Gunning theorizes that the transformation of cinema from "short, percussive actions" to longer, character-focused stories, is suggestive of this desire to contain the modern and re-package its energy into more controlled, understandable forms. See Tom Gunning, "Modernity and Cinema: A Culture of Shocks and Flows" in *Cinema and Modernity*, ed. Murray Pomerance, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006): 310.

on about 90% of the motion pictures produced in the United States. [34] The Board was an offshoot of The People's Institute, a reform group founded in 1897 by Charles Sprague Smith, a prominent New York City-based intellectual and former professor at Columbia University. Sprague, as with other socially-minded intellectuals of the Progressive Era, sought to improve society through social activism and civic engagement across a wide range of issues from education and child labour to housing and nutrition.[35] The output of these reformers included things like the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, which sought consumer protection by making it illegal to use dangerous, cost-cutting substitutes in the production of foods and drugs and standardized labelling practices. [36] An article on Sprague from 1908 sums up his view of censorship. In it, the author, Francis Oppenheimer, characterized censorship as "part of the machinery of the State" in the Old World, and therefore at odds with the ideals of "free America" where censorship "is governed by wholly moral considerations." [37] Meaning, American censorship was not aimed at curtailing free speech, but rather to shape media along moral lines as dictated by religion and social values.

Sprague formed the National Board of Censorship to act as advisory council to the mayor's office. New York City's then-mayor George B. McClellan had recently ordered the shutdown of all the city's movie theatres following widespread complaints about the immoral content of the movies shown there. Sprague, true to the spirit of the Progressive Era, believed that the movie theatres could (and should) continue to function, as long as the movies shown

[34] n.a "National Board of Review of Motion Pictures records 1907-1971," *New York Public Library Archives*. http://archives.nypl.org/mss/2100.
[35] ibid.
[36] n.a "The 1906 Food and Drugs Act and Its Enforcement," *United States Food and Drugs Administration*. https://www.fda.gov/AboutFDA/WhatWeDo/History/Origin/ucm054819.htm.
[37] Francis Oppenheimer, "New York City's Censorship of Plays." *Theatre* May 1908, 134.

were of a higher moral calibre. [38] The Board acted as an advisory council for the mayor's office on potentially controversial subject matter, and helped guide the development of the movies along a morally righteous path—that is, to allow them to continue to be shown, so long as their content met a moral standard set by the committee.

Initially the Board worked to establish and codify mainstream morality, preparing reports on the decency of each film it reviewed. It eventually branched out from its New York City base to serve a similar role in other cities and towns across the United States. [39] However, the difficulties of creating a set of regulations that would suit the tastes and values of so many disparate communities soon became apparent. Values-based differences of opinion were often visible along geographic lines as the board, which was based in the East, struggled to make regulations which suited the more culturally liberal censors in the West. [40] The constituent members of the board, moreover, were on a kind of ideological scale ranging from "Victorian traditionalist to cosmopolitan modernist." [41] These were differences informed by ones everyday experience, and they caused struggles within the committee as well. [42] The widespread divisions between rural and urban experience in America in the 1910s meant these differences were deeply felt.

In 1916, the Board changed its name to the National Board of Review, signalling a change in their policy—it would no longer attempt to dictate the standards of morality. This decision was based in part on the fact that its members found this task "repugnant to their

[38] n.a "National Board of Review of Motion Pictures records 1907-1971," *New York Public Library Archives*.
[39] ibid.
[40] Couvares, "Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church," 587.
[41] ibid., 586.
[42] ibid., 586.

conception of freedom of expression.'[43] Regardless of the qualms of its members, the board never had any legal authority to enforce its regulations anyway, and movie studio adherence to their regulations was voluntary. On a basic level then, the name change better identified the board's role as a public service organization which offered reviews and classification for newly released films.[44] However, more than a simple restructuring of its mandate, the name change also demonstrated an important vote of confidence in the motion picture industry. It indicated public support for the artistic potential of the new medium at a time when it was being roundly criticized.[45] The National Board of Review's presence as a public watchdog was not enough to curtail criticism of the movies. Ruth Vasey indicates that the passage of censorship legislation in New York State in 1921 speaks to ongoing concerns nation-wide that the National Board of Review was not an adequate check on movie standards.[46] Such regulation from outside (i.e. governmental) groups was a mounting concern for movie moguls who sought to keep their oligopolistic business affairs separate from government supervision. So, in 1922 the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) was formed to act as an internal bulwark against public scrutiny and to help with intra-industry coordination against government regulation to support the industry's continued autonomy

[43] Richard Griffth, "Richard Griffith to Vincent Imprellitteri, June 18, 1948, National Board of Review records, Archives and Manuscripts Collection" *New York Public Library Archives.* http://archives.nypl.org/mss/2100.
[44] Reviews and classifications were made available through the National Board of Review's various publications, beginning in 1917 with *Film Program* (1917-1926), and later *Exceptional Photoplays* (1920-1925), *Photoplay Guide to Better Movies* (1924-1926), *National Board of Review Magazine* (1926-1942), *New Movies* (1942-1949), and *Films in Review* (1950-present). Anthony Slide, *The New History of the American Film Industry*. (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2001): 140.
[45] n.a. "National Board of Review of Motion Pictures records 1907-1971," *New York Public Library Archives.*
[46] Vasey, "The World According to Hollywood," 27.

Regulation from Within — Will Hays and The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America

The official stated purpose of the MPPDA was "to foster the common interests of those engaged in the motion picture industry by establishing and maintaining the highest possible moral standards of motion picture production." [47] It was in the interest of Hollywood moguls to promote self-regulation within the industry, rather than to open the door to outside groups' direct influence on Hollywood products. Under the leadership of Will Hays, a former Postmaster General and Washington insider, the MPPDA embraced a system of self-regulation which aimed to strike a balance between the National Board of Review's "too indulgent" standards and stricter governmental censorship which threatened both free artistic expression and privatized business.[48] The MPPDA represented itself as a moral watchdog, which was good for public relations. Its more pressing internal concern was warding off threats of legal action on the part of the government to impose strict antitrust laws which would inhibit Hollywood's oligopolistic control of all aspects of production, distribution, and exhibition, and curtail its freedom as an industry. [49] Thus the MPPDA's regulation mandate applied not only to film content but also intra-industry business affairs and negotiations with the government, all of which was in the interest of safeguarding Hollywood from outside control.[50]

Hays's strategy as head of the MPPDA was to act as mediator between Hollywood and concerned public reform groups. Mustering his image of clean and wholesome Protestantism, Hays worked to reshape Hollywood's public image, emphasizing the movies' potential as an art

[47] Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999): 34.
[48] Couvares, "Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church," 587.
[49] Richard Maltby, "The Production Code and the Hays Office," 42.
[50] ibid.

form which could educate and entertain within the bounds of correct morality. He fostered relationships between the MPPDA and concerned public groups, offering them the chance to unite in the common goal of "film betterment" with membership in the Committee on Public Relations. Hays eventually realized that Hollywood would only be able to maintain autonomy over production if it was seen to voluntarily accept the standards that would be imposed on them in any case.[51] To that end, in 1927 the association published a document referred to colloquially as the "Don'ts and Be Carefuls" which synthesized common restrictions of state censor boards into a single code.

Audible Immorality? — Sound and Censorship

By 1927 synch-sound filmmaking was being considered by those involved in censorship debates. Some believed that sound would elevate the morality of the motion picture. Professor and sound psychologist Walter Pitkin predicted that "the talkies [would] uplift the movies more than all reformers ever [could]." [52] Pitkin based his claim on the assertion that "the ear is more moral than the eye," meaning that *hearing* immoral content was more affecting than simply *seeing* it, as in silent films. Expanding on Pitkin's claim, an editorial in the National Board of Review Magazine argues that, like in the theatre, plot deficiencies and egregiously questionable subject matter were more obvious in films with spoken dialogue. Drawing upon Pitkin's arguments, the article maintains that risqué content was more offensive when rendered audio-

[51] ibid., 43.
[52] Walter Pitkin, cited in n.a. "Sound Sense," *National Board of Review Magazine*, April 1929, 3.

visually, as "[t]he eye could slide over [salacious inter-titles] but the lips could falter." [53] Following a then-popular rhetoric of synch-sound's ability to professionalize movie making, the author suggests that with the introduction of sound, immorality and cheap thrills on the screen would be curtailed.[54] If movies were to include dialogue, commentators argued, then they would be subject to the same levels of scrutiny as the stage play—especially in terms of morality. Audiences who may have let immoral subject matter slide by in the silent film, they theorized, would tend to be more upset by immorality in dialogue (as they would be when watching a stage-play) and so producers would tend to scale back the crass or taboo subject matter in the talkies.

While these commentators believed spoken dialogue would usher in moral uplift for the movies, others were less optimistic. Summarizing the fears about sound films' influence on mainstream morality, Raymond Moley writes that the "frenzied filming of Broadway plays […] brought the clink of highball glasses, the squeal of bedsprings, the crackle of fast conversation to a thousand Main Streets."[55] Public critics (often staunchly Protestant or Catholic, and middle-class) decried the motion picture's influence as they saw their cultural hegemony under threat by the influence of modern metropolitan culture, now more "realistically" rendered in synch-sound films, which they regarded as alien.[56] Such opinions lingered a good decade after the initial shifts

[53] n.a "Sound Sense," *National Board of Review Magazine*, April 1929, 3.
[54] ibid.; This rhetoric is expounded elsewhere in trade press and magazine articles. One example is found in an article explaining the new technologies of the talking picture published in *Photoplay*. The author, Al Cohn, characterized the new professional attitude of the cameraman who "no longer stands with cap reversed, turning his crank nonchalantly and looking about in a bored manner," but remains focused during filming. Cohn' explains that this change toward a more professional production style was necessitated by the increased technical rigour of producing a sound film. Al Cohn, "How the Talkies are Made," *Photoplay Magazine,* April 1929, 28-31, 130.
[55] Raymond Moley, "The Hays Office," 65.
[56] Maltby notes that the term alien was occasionally used as a synonym for Jewish, demonstrating that the distrust of Hollywood's products was, in some cases, fuelled by a latent anti-Semitism. Maltby, "The Production Code and the Hays Office," 45.

toward sound. Writing in 1937 Martin Quigley, a co-author of the 1930 Production Code and founding editor of the *Exhibitors Herald* trade paper, argued that with the coming of sound, "the problem of the moral and social significance [of the movies] became magnified" because spoken dialogue added to the "power of the screen to convey ideas," which if immoral in nature, would be ever more damaging.[57] Speech meant that previously mute characters could explain their actions, no longer restricted to pantomimic gesture. This observation is borne up by the tendency of the earliest talkies to showcase dialogue, eschewing the more nuanced combination of pantomime and dialogue which was quickly adopted. Concerns about impressionable audiences and the possible damaging effects of the movies had existed from their earliest days, and the same thinking was brought to the talkies.

Impressionable audiences frequently meant children. In an article for *Film Daily*, a trade paper aimed at producers and exhibitors alike, editor Maurice Kann urged movie studios to "remember the family," and stop the tendency of producing "entertainment in the guise of questionable themes."[58] In the talkies, Kann found a new concern in spoken dialogue and synchronized soundtracks where "sophistication [was being] heaped on films at too rapid a gait."[59] This sophisticated content, although not described, likely refers to the "wise-cracks and […] spicy dialogue" decried by a National Board of Review magazine editorial which cites Kann's article.[60] Whereas urban audiences might have been more accustomed to this sophisticated subject matter, small town audiences were generally not, and Kann urged the studios to remember that "there is something in this industry's structure aside from the New

[57] Martin Quigley, *Decency in Motion Pictures*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1937): 18.
[58] Maurice Kann, "Step Carefully," *Film Daily*, April 1 1929, 1.
[59] ibid.
[60] n.a. "Editorial," *National Board of Review Magazine*, April 1929, 4.

Yorks and Chicagos.'[61] While not explicitly tied to censorship debates there was, during the transition to sound, a move to pair the actor's image with an acceptable voice. For instance, concerns about "excessive foreignness" negatively impacted those silent-era stars whose heavy accents undermined their performance in the talkies. [62] Moreover, as Jessica Taylor notes, during the conversion era discourses of appropriate gender performance were brought to bear in the union of voice and body of famous stars, both women and men. [63] While Taylor concludes that media discourses on the voice during the conversion era hinged on a concerns about appropriately embodied voices "based on an ideology of authenticity," we might consider a deeper ideology hinging on traditionally acceptable American notions of gender performance and "Anglo-American-ness" which were upheld in the aural aesthetics of the talkies.

During the silent era, efforts were made to enforce regulation on movie content at the point of production. Lee Grieveson has demonstrated how screenwriting manuals produced by the National Board of Censorship in the 1910s worked to codify "moral endings" which made obvious the links between behaviour and causality.[64] Manuals like these, although not mandatory to follow, worked to create certain norms of narrative conventions. Local or state censorship boards reviewed completed (already-produced) films on an individual basis, judging whether or not they were suitable to be screened in their theatres. In some cases, films would be banned completely while in others, particular scenes were removed and the films screened in their shortened form. *Our Dancing Daughters* was subject to the latter in Pennsylvania, where several

[61] Maurice Kann, "Step Carefully," 1.
[62] For example, Scott Eyman cites the case of Vilma Banky whose "decidedly heavy" Hungarian accent impeded her ability to work in the talkies. See Scott Eyman, *The Speed of Sound: Hollywood and the Talkie Revolution*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997): 267.
[63] Jessica Taylor, "'Speaking Shadows': A History of the Voice in the Transition from Silent to Sound Film in the United States." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 19.1 (2000): 1-21
[64] Lee Grieveson, "Policing Cinema," *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early Twentieth-Century America.* Berkley: University of California Press, 2004: 26.

scenes were removed from the prints circulated in that state. [65] Studios had the option of submitting completed films or scripts to the National Board of Review who for a fee, and if they deemed the film acceptable by their standards, attached their seal of approval to the film and inserted a title-card reading "Passed by the National Board of Review."[66]

Ruth Vasey has pointed out that the coming of sound constituted a major factor in the emergence of the Production Code of 1930.[67] She writes, "sound movies were simultaneously more vulnerable to censorship action than the silents and less able to accommodate it." [68] Silent films were more easily altered to adhere to the various codes of local censors, but the need for synchronization of early sound-on-disc films greatly diminished this malleability. The technology of early sound films fundamentally transformed the practical work of censorship. Previously, films were easily censorable because offensive scenes or titles could be cut from the film strip with a simple snip of scissors. While sound-on-film processes maintained some of the flexibility of the silent film (i.e. easy censoring for different markets), the sound-on-disc process did not. Western Electric's Vitaphone became the dominant sound-on-disc system and was used by Warner Brothers. It involved the recording of sound on a phonograph disc simultaneously with the recording of images on film. During exhibition the disc and film would be played back, ideally in perfect synchrony, although minor slippages were commonplace. Hasty cutting of films accompanied by sound discs resulted in irreversible de-synchrony between image and soundtrack. Censoring sound-on-disc films in post-production proved a costly and time-

[65] The first of these was a steamy love scene between Diana and Ben, the others dancing scenes in which Crawford's underpants were visible. Syd Silverman, "Film Reviews: Our Dancing Daughters," *Variety* 92.13 (Oct. 10 1928). 22-26.
[66] Slide notes that this practice became obsolete with the growing number of local censorship boards. By 1938 Providence, Rhode Island was the only city left requiring all films screened to contain the seal. Anthony Slide, "National Board of Review," *The New Historical Dictionary of the American Film Industry,* Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2013.
[67] Vasey, "The World According to Hollywood," 80.
[68] ibid., 78.

consuming process because it involved re-recording a film's sound discs with the sections corresponding to deleted scenes removed. Sound-on-film systems like Fox's Movietone carried sound information on an optical track on the side of the film strip which made post-production censoring simpler. Both films considered in this thesis are Movietone films.

Since the visual and aural elements of sound-on-disc films were separate, cutting out scenes involved removing frames from the celluloid along with the corresponding sections from the wax discs which housed the soundtrack, otherwise the sound and image would be knocked out of synch. New pressings of the wax soundtrack discs needed to be made for each version of a film, a costly and time consuming process. The vagaries of regulating sound films with spoken dialogue, and the expense of editing them for different markets, made the institution of stricter production codes a practicality. The most persuasive argument for heeding production regulations became an economic one—studios would save money by not filming material that would contravene the censors. With this economic incentive in mind, producers were now more willing to follow a strict system of regulation and demanded a firm codification of the rules. [69] In September 1929, Hays and Colonel Joy, Director of Public Relations at the MPPDA, began drafting an updated version of the 1927 code. At the same time, producer Irving Thalberg headed a committee of his fellow producers who were drafting a code of their own. A third code was prepared by Father Daniel A. Lord of Chicago, the focus of which was the influence of motion pictures on children.

The contrasts between the studio/producer-created code and Father Lord's demonstrates the fundamental difference of opinion on the impact the motion picture had on audiences. Maltby notes that Thalberg's code underlined Hollywood producers' belief that the educational and moral influence of motion pictures tended to be over-emphasized. Their code spoke to the needs

[69] ibid., 45.

of adult audiences at first-run, urban theatres, where the lion's share of their revenues were earned, while Lord's document was aimed at the audiences of neighbourhood or small-town movie halls.[70] In early 1930, Colonel Joy worked on a document which was a compromise between the two drafts. Joy put his expertise as a public and studio relations manager to good use, focusing his concerns on those matters he knew were particularly important to external censors like profanity, gratuitous use of liquor, and depictions of sex that violated "the standards of family relations."[71]

The internal resistance to industry self-censorship stemmed from producers' belief that they were not responsible for the morality of their audiences. Irving Thalberg stated his position as such: "We do not create the types of entertainment, we merely present them." [72] Furthermore, since the motion picture industry is first and foremost a business, the producers were most keenly interested in appeasing that section of the market in which they earned the most financial returns: adult audiences in first run theatres in major cities. But, in the grips of a national financial crisis, Hollywood had to be careful to maintain its base of film audiences, and thus the stricter enforcement of the Production Code post-1934 indicates the realization that in order to maintain public support and fend off federal intervention, such regulatory practices must become, or appear to become, more rigid.

[70] ibid., 47.
[71] ibid. and Joy (1930) citied in Maltby, "The Production Code and the Hays Office," 47.
[72] Irving Thalberg, quoted in Maltby, ibid., 43.

Scripted Morality — The Fight For Free Speech

Concurrent to the transition to sound during the late 1920s, concerns about the loss of the First Amendment right to freedom of speech were again linked to the debates about movie censorship. This concern was magnified now that movie censorship would affect spoken words as well as images. State and local censorship boards went to court over the right to censor talking pictures. The ruling in the *Mutual Film Corp. v. Industrial Commission of Ohio (1915)* was until this time a standard legal reference in movie censorship debates. Ohio's censor board was highly influential to many Midwestern states and the decision in this case set standards for censor boards outside of Ohio.[73] The ruling held that films could not be protected from censorship because as entertainment they were not the same as publications or speech. [74] Because the language of the original ruling did not address synch sound films, as they did not yet in a practical sense exist, the legality of censoring synch sound of all types had yet to be determined. J.L. Clifton, Ohio's Director of Education, approached state Attorney General Edward Turner for a ruling on the legality of censoring sound films. Turner found that the addition of spoken dialogue and synchronized soundtracks was not enough to significantly change the medium and the right to censor film content was extended to synchronized sound films. The Attorney General wrote that it was "obvious" that what was heard by audiences in sound films "may be as clearly within the mischief which occasioned the enactment of the censorship law" for silent films.[75]

[73] Crafton "The Talkies," 465
[74] Jennifer Petersen, "Can Moving Pictures Speak? Film, Speech, and Social Science in Early Twentieth Century Law." *Cinema Journal* 53.3 (Spring 2014): 76-99.
[75] Edward Turner quoted in n.a "Ohio Sound Picture Censorship Ruling Text Given," *Inter-titles* July 21, 1928: 206.

As the regulations on motion pictures increased in the late 1920s, print media was enjoying greater freedom as censorship of the press and the written word was scaled back.[76] Different from novels and magazines, the motion picture was seen to have a greater power over its audience. Father Lord argued that the motion picture's "mobility, popularity, accessibility, emotional appeal, vividness, [and] straightforward presentation of fact" meant that it "affected audiences more intimately and more powerfully than other forms of expression."[77, 78, 79] It was because of this widespread popularity but also the means by which that popularity was built, then, that the motion picture industry was made culpable for shifts in mainstream American morality, and ultimately the focus of the strictest censorship.

Despite abundant scholarship on Hollywood censorship and the Hays Office, there has been little mention of the contemporaneous concerns about freedom of speech, granted by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Curiously Jeremy Geltzer's recent (2015) book on censorship in Hollywood, although ostensibly focused on the connection between film and the First Amendment makes only passing reference to this connection during the transition to sound. To be sure, debates centered on censorship and freedom of speech are evident in the newspapers and trade papers of the late 1920s. As courts deliberated on the legal right of state boards to censor film scripts, concerned public groups and especially newspaper publishers wrote in to trade papers to voice their concerns that the censorship of movie dialogue was un-

[76] Jeremy Geltzer, "Dirty Words and Filthy Pictures: Film and the First Amendment," (Austin,: University of Texas Press, 2015): 90.
[77] Lord quoted in Maltby, "The Production Code and the Hays Office," 47
[78] Maltby, ibid., 47
[79] Lee Grieveson, in turn, connects these early theories of "damaging" spectatorship to the work of late nineteenth century cultural critics Gustave LeBon and Gabriel Tarde who did pioneering work in the fields of crowd psychology, sociology, and social psychology. The inherent suggestibility of individuals, they argued, was heightened in relation to images (especially moving images) through which behaviours, beliefs, and attitudes could be transferred. Lee Grieveson, "Why the Audience Mattered in Chicago in 1907," *American Movie Audiences: From the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era*. eds., Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, eds. (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1999): 82.

Constitutional. Motion Picture News, a trade paper which carried extensive coverage of the legal proceedings, characterized these negotiations as a "censorship battle" which "raged" in fifteen states.[80] Two Ohio-based newspaper editors, Charles L. Knight and I.E. Judd, of the Akron Beacon Journal and Akron Times-Press respectively, wrote Motion Picture News to express their concern that censorship of motion pictures infringed on constitutional rights to freedom of speech. James E. Chappell, assistant publisher of *The Birmingham News and Age-Herald*, an Alabama newspaper also expressed concerns about movie censorship, as he believed that "[a]ny abridgement of expression *within the bounds of recognized decency* is a menace to freedom."[81] The article states that censorship had long been opposed in Alabama, and Chappell maintains that caution must be used when making moves toward outright censorship of motion pictures as a form of expression. He proclaims support of content that is "within the bounds of recognized decency," although this vague definition wouldn't help policy-makers define what "decent" entertainment actually is. Again, Chappell and the other editors maintain the same rhetoric as Oppenheimer, that censorship, conceived of as an oppressive tool to curtail free speech, was a relic of the Old World and something that was repugnant to the American notion of the right to free speech. While these editors argued against this kind of outright censorship, they may have preferred the term "regulation" for movie content, since they all seem to agree that maintaining certain moral values in motion picture content was desirable. It would not be until the 1952 *Burstyn v. Wilson* case that motion pictures were granted protections under the First Amendment. In this case the Supreme Court ruled that movies were "an important medium for the

[80] n.a "Industry Fights Admission Tax Bills in 15 States; Censorship War Rages, Ohio is Battleground," *Inter-titles*, February 9, 1929: 427.
[81] James E. Chappell, quoted in n.a "Alabama Press Supports Pathé In Censor Fight," *Inter-titles*, January 19, 1929: 192. Emphasis added.

communication of ideas" and therefore should be granted the same protections given to other forms of artistic expression.[82]

Conclusion

As Donald Crafton notes, the transition to sound was marked by a struggle to "control and contain the social effects of the talkies."[83] The increased fervour in public discourse about movie morality was linked to both American society's move away from 19th century values and the changing ontology of the movies themselves. Dialogue and sound effects offered new ways for movies to transgress traditional social values as it gave characters the opportunity to speak for themselves. Aside from the practical issues of censoring sound films in post-production, dialogue meant that film's meanings were often more explicit than implicit, augmented by tone, emphasis, and volume. While inter-titles could be written to obfuscate racy subject matter, spoken dialogue had to be written carefully to keep meanings more ambiguous.[84] Because of spoken dialogue's tendency to be more direct, audiences didn't need to rely on "pre-existent knowledge" to grasp any sexual suggestiveness or references to criminality that might be

[82] Garth Jowett, "'A Significant Medium for the Communication of Ideas': The *Miracle* Decision and the Decline of Motion Picture Censorship, 1952-1968," in *Movie Censorship and American Culture*, ed. Francis Couvares, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006): 258.
[83] Crafton, "The Talkies," 445.
[84] While screenwriters in the early sound era were doubtless capable of writing ambiguous dialogue, the "golden age" of dialogue ambiguity has been traced to the screwball comedy genre of the late 1930s. See Cathleen Londino, "Verbal Sex: Hollywood Censorship and the Birth of the Screwball Comedy." *International Journal of the Image* 2.1 (2012): 25-35.

present.[85] Moreover, as Taylor's work cited above suggests the tone or accent of the speaking voice carried important meaning-making function as well.

The history of Hollywood regulation and censorship recounted here aims to emphasize the importance of conceiving of Hollywood as an industry, composed of many constituent parts, all of which had individual trajectories. The various Hollywood studios and their producers all responded to regulations in different ways, with some trying to get around them as much as possible. The Fox studio, for example, seemed to be a consistent provider of "licentious" material.[86] Arguably, the issue of utmost importance in the negotiations over regulation and censorship was the fight to keep Hollywood independent of government intervention. The steps taken by the MPPDA demonstrate the aim to maintain control of Hollywood products while simultaneously appearing to respond to public demands for tighter control on subject matter.

Whereas there exists much scholarship on the bureaucratic and legal side of the increase in Hollywood regulation and censorship in the 1920s, there is a lack of scholarship that closely examines specific films in order to assess how practices of industry self-censorship affected the aesthetics of films. Carmen Guiralt has also identified this gap and addresses it in a detailed analysis of the late silent film *A Woman of Affairs* (1928, Clarence Brown), demonstrating how it cleverly works within the bounds of decency established by the MPPDA.[87] The film's source material novel *The Green Hat* written by Michael Arlen, is rife with objectionable material: nymphomania, sexually transmitted diseases, suicide, and abortion. In order to appease the censors the film's inter-titles are carefully constructed to tell an alternate story. Guiralt shows,

[85] Maltby, "The Production Code and the Hays Office," 64.
[86] Crafton makes this statement in reference to the number of times Fox's films encountered problems with the censors. One was *Hot For Paris* (1929), a film described by reviewer as "a hilarious comedy [for the men]" filled with frank and "stag" dialogue. Crafton, "The Talkies," 472.
[87] Carmen Guiralt, "Self-Censorship in Hollywood during the Silent Era: *A Woman of Affairs* (1928) by Clarence Brown." *Film History* 28.2 (Spring 2016): 81-113.

however, how Brown carefully structures the mise-en-scène to tell an alternate story more faithful to the original text. Thus, the original, morally questionable narrative was able to pass the censors because it was not explicit but implicit—the audiences' understanding of it was based on their pre-existent knowledge of the subject matter, and their ability to decode the images' alternate meaning. As such, we see how films are complicated texts comprising far more than simple narrative content or spoken dialogue. Although *A Woman of Affairs* was produced as a silent film, the same tenets hold true for synchronized sound films produced in the same era. Sound films existed then, as they do now, as multi-layered audio-visual texts replete with voices, music, and sound effects that further complicated questions of meaning and morality in Hollywood's products.

The next section will examine two films from the era under consideration: the films *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928), and *Our Modern Maidens* (1929). These are two part-talkie films made during the conversion era. Each demonstrates the material ways in which, like other Hollywood films from the transition to sound era, their aesthetics and narrative content show the marks of ongoing negotiation of movie morality. Moreover, the films' specific use of their respective synchronized sound scores functions similarly to the functions of mise-en-scène Guiralt identifies in *A Woman of Affairs*, in that they shape the viewer's interpretations and responses to on-screen events. The specific ways in which this occurs will be demonstrated in the following chapter.

Chapter Two

"Peppy Pictures of Youth Aflame"
Depictions of Youth and Sexuality in Early Part-Talkies

Moving from broader contextual factors shaping film censorship in the late 1920s, this chapter turns to offer analysis of two films pertinent to thinking about morality and modernity in Hollywood films of the conversion era. In studying *Our Dancing Daughters* and *Our Modern Maidens*, both highly successful films of the flapper film cycle, I demonstrate the effect that negotiations about film morality had on films produced by Hollywood, and the MGM studio in particular. [88] The notion of "Jazz" and the meanings surrounding this term, as well as the broader contemporaneous concerns about sound technologies and culture are mapped out. Integrating synchronized scores into tight synchronization with moving images meant that these films, when exhibited in their synch-sound version, worked to convey the same meanings at each exhibition site, something which was previously untenable. Before synch-sound, a film's musical accompaniment had varied at all its exhibition sites. It was performed by live performers of various skill levels with instrumentation ranging from full orchestras to single pianists who either improvised or worked from a cue sheet. Depending on their performance, this accompanist could

[88] *Our Dancing Daughters* was co-produced by the Cosmopolitan Productions company and Metro Goldwyn Mayer, who also distributed it. *Our Modern Maidens* was produced by MGM. Joan Crawford was, from 1925, a contracted player with the MGM company. Cosmopolitan Productions was founded in 1918 by newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst and Adolph Zukor of the Paramount studio, and often produced film versions of the stories published in Hearst's magazines *Cosmopolitan*, *Harpers Bazaar*, and *Good Housekeeping*. See David Nasaw, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst*, (New York: Mariner Books, 2001);
The popularity of these films can be discerned from exhibitor's notes published in trade papers like *The Exhibitors Herald World* which show that both played in urban and small-town/rural areas alike to positive reviews. One such review came from R.A Wilson of the New Theatre called *Modern Maidens* a "very good attraction" which played to "general patronage" in DeWitt, Arkansas.

"What the Picture Did For Me: Verdicts on Films in Language of Exhibitor" Exhibitors Herald World, January 25 1930 page 70

reinforce, undercut, or comment on the action, offering audiences a film-viewing experience that was unique to that theatre, and that might be entirely different from one in a neighbouring city. With the introduction of the synchronized soundtrack, the malleability of a film's meanings was curtailed, and the director's choices for musical accompaniment could be maintained at exhibition. With this in mind, I demonstrate how the soundtracks for *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens* were carefully constructed to embody the height of 1920s youthful spirit and excess while holding the films' content to a certain moral standard that made them palpable, and indeed profitable, with a majority of audiences from varying backgrounds across the United States. Finally, I will analyze the advertising material for the films, discussing the way MGM marketed these early sound offerings, highlighting the differences in tone between advertising texts and filmic texts.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, debates about movie morality frequently rested on the growing dichotomy between urban and rural society in 1920s America. Ideas about culture and experiences of this dichotomy were often articulated in spatial terms, and the metropolis was seen to afford the best access to high-brow culture.[89] Modernization's uneven impact resulted in a spatial conception of the nation consisting of metropolitan centres surrounded by a "vast periphery" of rural hinterland. [90] Like other media and cultural forms, the emergent sound media offered opportunities to bridge this gap and unify America's population at the level of culture. Steve Wurtzler describes the "longing for a social cohesion" present in American society and the belief that it could be achieved through "a shared cultural imaginary promulgated by acoustic media" which became central to discursive constructions of sound

[89] For more discussion of this concept of culture and space see Susan Hegeman, *Patterns for America: Modernism and the Concept of Culture*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 1999).
[90] Steve Wurtzler, *Electric Sounds: Technical Change and the Rise of Corporate Mass Media,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007): 196.

technology since the 1920s. [91] Will Hays echoed this sentiment when he argued that sound film performed a public service toward the goal of unifying America in a shared national imaginary, establishing national speaking patterns, refining accents and improving vocabulary. [92] These changes promised to ameliorate if not eradicate cultural boundaries between urban and rural at the level of spoken language. As Hays put it, the movies had aided the "socialization of the hinterland."[93] This sentiment shared a wide base from industry and corporate interests to cultural leaders.

But the potentially edifying aspects of sound media were balanced by the realities of consumer taste. Through the dissemination of popular jazz programs on the radio, and the trend of "jazzing the classics" — performing jazz style renditions of classical music— new sound media had the undesirable side-effect of exposing listeners to what were frequently deemed lower cultural forms, which often meant ethnic or minority forms marked by cultural differences of race and ethnicity.[94] The synchronized sound film entered into this uneasy relationship between modern technology and traditional culture and taste, and its development was in reaction to the territory it had to tread. Hollywood's growing self-censorship may be read as part of this reaction, since sound film represented yet another sound technology with the power to influence culture and morality broadly, and then need as a consumer product to appeal to as many people as possible. And ongoing reformers and industry apologists like Martin Quigley were well aware that sound films could be easily understood as a threat to morals because they combined visual and aural representation, continuing rather than ending the enduring battle of morality debates and the movies. Steve Wurtzler has argued that emergent sound media of the

[91] Wurtzler, *Electric Sounds*, 171.
[92] Will H. Hays, "The Movies Are Helping America," *Good Housekeeping* (January 1933): 131.
[93] Ibid., 130
[94] See Wurtzler, *Electric Sounds*, 199-200.

early 20th century in many ways actually exacerbated existing concerns around morality and modernity. In the case of radio, for example, jazz music programs were seen by some to degrade or otherwise endanger "good taste" because they disseminated a lower musical form (as opposed to classical music, for example) to the masses. Indeed, ongoing negotiations about film morality were largely intensified by the coming of sound, as moral watchdogs feared the power sound films might have to corrupt traditional values. This concern was especially prevalent in relation to small-town America, the vanguard of traditional social customs and morality. The visual (and now, aural) appeal of big city entertainment would be accessible in any local, small-town theatre wired for sound. What needed to be defined, then, was *what* and *whose* culture was to be transmitted through phonograph records, radio programming, and the sound film. The Hollywood censorship debates of the late 1920s were thus a medium-specific solution to the growing question of what America's national culture and moral ethos would and should be going into the 20th century.

The Urban/Rural Dichotomy in 1920s America

Hollywood producers targeted urban audiences at first-run theatres as this was where they stood to make the most profits. However, in terms of numbers, urban populations made up only a slim majority of the American population. Rural audiences made up a large constituency in their own right. By 1920, 51.2% of the American public lived in urban settings.[95] But this statistic

[95] ibid, 68-71.
The following are excerpts are from the bicentennial edition of *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970,* a publication by the U.S. Department of Commerce and Bureau of the Census, which explain the terms used in the United States Census in the early 20 th century and up to the 1970s. A

must be qualified with the acknowledgement that these urban populations were clustered around a small number of large urban centres, most of them in northeastern states, while the majority (in geographical terms) of the American population lived in rural or otherwise non-urban spaces. This is illustrated by the organization of American Census divisions. The Middle Atlantic division, for example, comprises only three states: New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Yet the population for these three states in 1920 totalled 22,261,144, 75.4% of which was considered urban population. The South Atlantic Division, on the other hand, comprises nine states: Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia, the Virginias, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida) the total population of which was only 13,990,272 at the time of the 1920 census, 31% of which was considered urban. By 1930, the urban population of the United States had grown to a 56.1% majority, and that population remained clustered around a relatively small number of large cities.

In the 1920s popular discourse equated "rural" with backwardness, and those living in cities openly mocked and derided their country-dwelling counterparts through popular culture

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number of changes were made through these decades to improve the quality and the usefulness of the data collected by the census, especially toward the practice of cross-tabulating population data with data on social and economic characteristics.

"In censuses prior to 1950, the urban population comprised all persons living in incorporated places of 2,500 or more."; "The first attempt to define the metropolitan population of the United States was presented in the 1910 census in which Metropolitan districts were defined for cities of 200,000 or more." In 1940, the definition of metropolitan was changed to cities of 50,000 or more."; "In the 1950, 1960, and 1970 censuses, urbanized areas were defined as cities of 50,000 or more and surrounding closely settled areas, including incorporated places and unincorporated territory."

Because of the discrepancies in terminology, in this study the term "urban" shall be used in the sense of the Metropolitan District category of the 1910 census (i.e. an area of 200,000 or more). The term sub-urban shall be used to indicate places of population of 50,000 or more. The term rural shall be used to describe areas below 50,000 persons, both incorporated and unincorporated towns and townships, and rural farmland.

n.a *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, Part I.* United States, Bureau of the Census. Washington, D.C., 1975.

with so-called "rube songs" and a wide vocabulary of condescending nicknames.[96] In 1922, Lewis Mumford went so far as to suggest that "those who do not wish to remain barbarians must become metropolitans," highlighting the strength of the anti-rural sentiment. [97] By contrast to this "backwardness," the contemporaneous metropolitan zeitgeist was closely tied to a popular culture which flaunted traditional social mores and scandalized many small-town pundits. In reaction to this urban culture, philosopher John Dewey observed that for rural, small-town America, an "attachment to stability and homogeneity of thought and belief [seemed] essential" in the face of the growing "heterogeneity, rush and unsettlement" of the modern world found in America's booming cities. [98] William Leuchtenburg claims that the city's threat to the rural way of life prompted the rise of political fundamentalism seen in the 1920s, through immigration restrictions, prohibition, and the revival of the Ku Klux Klan. [99] Also on the rise was adherence to fundamentalist religion, then being championed by early celebrity evangelists like Aimee Semple McPherson and Billy Sunday. These moves toward a new conservatism were, according to Leuchtenburg, attempts by rural and small-town Americans to maintain a sense of political and social cohesion as the nation shifted from predominantly rural to predominantly urban.[100] The dwindling agricultural economy reduced opportunities and many young people, especially young women, left for the city to find work. [101] As people left the country for the city the subsequent "brain drain" left mostly those who were content to live quietly following the same traditions and

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[96] James H. Shideler, "'Flappers and Philosophers,' and Farmers: Rural-Urban Tensions of the Twenties," *Agricultural History* 47.4 (October 1973): 289.
[97] Lewis Mumford, "The City," in *Civilization in the United States: An Inquiry by Thirty Americans*, ed. Harold E. Stearns, (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1922): 17.
[98] John Dewey, "The American Intellectual Frontier," *The New Republic,* May 10, 1922: 303-305.
[99] William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958): 203-224.
[100] ibid.
[101] A slight agricultural depression and that manufacturing had become the major employment sector by the 1920s. See Shideler, "Flappers and Philosophers," 284.

routine as the generations before them. The urban-rural divide presented here has been propagated in historical discourse by dominant approaches to American historiography of the 1920s which favour interpreting the distasteful aspects of the era's social climate (i.e. nativism and the rise of the KKK) through such a binary, thus pinning the blame for these phenomena on backwards small-town traditionalists.[102] While this binary has likely been over-determined by historians, such a divide did exist and its impact would have been felt by rural or small-town movie audiences upon viewing the kind of entertainment which was modern and urban in sensibility.

By the 1920s, the public perceptions of the small-town movie theatre saw it as drastically inferior to big city movie palaces. [103] These movie palaces offered a richer sensory experience, and "embroidered the movie-going experience" with opulent architecture and decoration, expanded repertoires of pre-film Vaudeville acts and stage shows, and often boasted large orchestras and Wurlitzer organs to accompany screenings. [104] The small-town theatre, by comparison, was humbler and less impressive architecturally with musical accompaniment typically limited to a single pianist. The coming of the synchronized soundtrack effaced at least one of those differences, providing smaller theatres with the musical accompaniment afforded at urban movie palaces. Now small-town theatres that were wired for sound could offer their audiences the excitement of up-to-date entertainment with all that modern technology offered.

While jazz-infused cue sheets prepared specially for silent films were available, there was no guarantee that they would be purchased and used by exhibitors. [105] If they were purchased by

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[102] See Charles Eagles, "Urban-Rural Conflict in the 1920s: A Historiographical Assessment," *Historian* 49.1 (Winter 1986): 26-48. for fuller discussion of approaches to the historiography of 1920s America which were prominent from the 1920s to the 1970s.
[103] Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, *At the Picture Show*, 99.
[104] ibid.
[105] Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): 354.

theatres, inconsistencies in instrumentation and accompanists' skill-levels meant they did little in terms of standardizing the film's audile component and the meanings it generated. In fact, the cue sheets for *Dancing Daughters* suggest different music than what is heard in the synchronized score, and what is suggested in the cue sheets is written for piano alone while the score includes a full orchestra. The synchronized score evokes a fuller conception of jazz and the modern city because of it is performed by a full jazz orchestra, remaining more true to the conventions of jazz instrumentation. Christina Petersen explains how jazz scores had powerful mimetic effects on their audiences, especially flapper audiences, who were encouraged to feel "jazzed up" especially while watching party scenes in films like *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens.* [106] She theorizes this use of music was a mode address to an "embodied consumer," arguing that silent flapper films presented vivid images and aural impressions sound of jazz dancing designed to appeal young audiences. Such an address could only be strengthened by the recorded soundtrack, which became an important vehicle for transmitting emotional affect to the viewer. The question remains—what did the coming of sound and its connections to urban, metropolitan culture and entertainment mean for small-town and rural audiences? If silent-era film meanings were, in part, constructed by their musical accompaniment, and this site-specific meaning making varied drastically between urban and rural theatres, can we suggest that the "ultra-modern" themes of suggestive movies were toned down by rural theatres where the morals of these stories were more problematic? Would a film like *Dancing Daughters*, exhibited as a silent film, make meanings that were widely different between a screening in an orchestra-equipped theatre on Broadway versus a meeting-hall turned movie screening space in rural Wyoming? Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve into any sustained examination of regional sound practices, I have included this historical discussion as context for the emergence of

[106] See Christina Petersen, "Paradise for the Young." PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2010: 185.

synchronized sound film and the connection this technological shift had to censorship practices. This was a gradual technological transition that began in cities and was working its way into other venues but ultimately would take years to be fully secured. *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens* were successful in both their sound versions with the majority of audiences nationwide, suggesting that their use of sound was contrary to what moral arbiters feared. In the discussion that follows I suggest that these films balanced the salacious, modern aspects of their narratives through synchronized soundtracks which contained meanings, ultimately shaping audience reception. In the case of *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens*, the possibilities for subversion of traditional American social mores, especially regarding young women's sexuality, were curtailed by the synchronized score.

The "Jazz-Age," Modernity, and America's Youth

Briefly mentioned above, music was a major point of contention with early sound media. Concerns proliferated regarding the cultural value of content broadcast over radio airwaves. *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens* both channelled the cultural phenomenon of "jazz" in their visual and aural aesthetic. In the 1920s, the term jazz was used to indicate both a musical genre and, in mainstream (white) American culture a modern lifestyle or "jazz aesthetic" equated with modernity, looser morals, and urban spaces. [107] Not unsurprisingly, jazz music was seen by some conservative members of society as an "acoustic assault on the musical canon," and the

[107] Sheila Liming, "Suffer the Little Vixens: Sex and Realist Terror in 'Jazz Age' America", *Journal of Modern Literature* 38.3 (Spring 2015): 99.

broader Eurocentric values that classical music embodied for its American listeners. [108] Jazz was seen as a lower cultural form whose connection to bodily movement provoked critiques that were equally fuelled (if not more so) by racist prejudice against what was originally an African American musical form. The symphonic jazz promoted by bandleader Paul Whiteman sought to make jazz more acceptable to white middle-class audiences through a melding of jazz instrumentation and European musical traditions. This toned-down jazz maintained the modern, lively spirit of "hot jazz" but made it appear less of a "cultural assault against white, middle-class, Christian, small-town taste."[109] The musical soundtrack in *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens* owes more debt in style to Whiteman than it does to truly authentic black jazz. However, it nevertheless traffics in the notion of the bodily with characters shown to dance when they hear music.

Since the term jazz meant more than a musical genre alone, the cultural critique of jazz was present in literary works of the decade as well. Edith Wharton, a famous American novelist and the first female recipient of the Pulitzer Prize in 1921 for her novel *The Age of Innocence* (1920), was an outspoken critic of "jazz" and its affects on modern culture. Sheila Liming shows how, in Wharton's writing and American society more generally, jazz became a "multivariate term…a stylistic conceit governing everything from fashion and entertainment to food, drink, and philosophical convictions."[110] Reviews for *Modern Maidens* reify the separation between "jazz" and "music" present in 1920s vocabulary. A review from a Moberly, Alabama newspaper describes the lively nature of *Modern Maidens*, with its "jazz and music"— with jazz here shown

[108] Wurtzler, *Electric Sounds*, 26.
[109] Gerald Early, "Pulp and Circumstances: The Story of Jazz in High Places," *The Culture of Bruising: Essays on Prizefighting, Literature, and Modern American Culture* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1994) 178-79.
[110] Liming, *Suffer the Little Vixens*, 101.

to mean something other than music alone, something akin to the modern youthful spirit.[111] Another review describes the "jazz and foibles" of modern youth, an example of the usage which Liming describes.[112]

While countless other films were produced chronicling the exploits of America's "flaming youth" few were as successful with all sections of the audience as *Our Dancing Daughters* and *Our Modern Maidens*. [113] Both films seemed to strike a fine balance of sex and propriety—providing a glimpse onto the exciting, racy exploits of the nation's youth while maintaining an overarching moral tone. Through narrative and aural aesthetic, the films present a lesson about the perils of being an "ultra-modern"—that is, doing away with all the tenets of traditional (female) virtue and social customs like courtship. Both films narrate the foibles of modern youth in a gentle manner and avoid glamorizing questionable behaviour like excessive drinking or casual sex. The screenplays for both *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens* were written by Josephine Lovett, with titles by Marian Ainslee. Lovett was known for her ability to create screenplays which, according to Abigail Salerno, consistently created "modern fantasies for women which skirted the censors," providing just enough titillating subject matter to sell, but not so much that they were banned outright.[114] This forms a basic strategy in classical Hollywood filmmaking, especially in the fallen woman cycle of the 1930s.[115] However, early synch-sound films dealing with similar subject matter present their own transitional strategies and specificities which will be discussed below.

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[111] n.a. "Attractions at the Moberly Theatres," *Monitor-Index and Democrat* (Moberly, MO), Oct. 12 1929, 5.
[112] n.a. "Our Modern Maidens," Lime Springs Herald (Lime Springs, IA), Sept. 18 1930, 1.
[113] Titles include *The Fast Set* (1924) *Bobbed Hair* (1925), *Mantrap* (1926) *Rolled Stockings* (1927), and the appropriately named *Flaming Youth* (1923).
[114] Abigail Salerno, "Josephine Lovett," *The Women Film Pioneers Project*, 13 Sept 2013. https://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-josephine-lovett/
[115] See Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942*. (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997).

This careful negotiation of content was the basic formula for the flapper movie, a cycle of films which featured young women who "rejected the traditional sexual ideals of morality and femininity without being 'ruined'" like their Victorian counterparts.[116] In these movies, the flapper heroine is redeemed by the film's end as her modern sexuality is contained through endings in which, according to Cynthia Felando, she "ceases her extravagant pleasure-seeking and prepares to marry." [117] But despite this containment, Felando notes that flapper films were often denounced by conservative critics who claimed they endangered the morality of American youth. While producers sought to appease critics by re-asserting traditional morality by the end of each story, those critics argued that it wasn't these tidy conclusions that audiences remembered. The exciting depictions of wild youth found in flapper films lingered in audiences' minds, bolstered by the use of similar, although often more scandalous imagery in the films' marketing campaigns. This struck a "culturally sensitive nerve" among those Americans concerned about what they perceived as rapidly changing social mores.[118]

Problematic or not, Hollywood studios latched on to the meanings and aesthetics of jazz in order to sell films to big city audiences. The jazz visual and aural aesthetic of *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens* are prominent in promotional materials for the films. This look and sound was the epitome of modernity in late 1920s American culture. More generally, late 1920s promotion for sound films suggested their ability to bring big-city entertainments to small–towns, emphasizing the notion that sound films were modern and that synchronized scores represented a technological breakthrough. In an "annual announcement" advertising insert published in the June 29, 1929 edition of Motion Picture News, MGM's official publicity

[116] Cynthia Felando, "Searching for the Fountain of Youth: Popular American Cinema in the 1920s." PhD Dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1996: 107
[117] ibid., 111
[118] ibid.

acknowledges how it catered to audiences that, as they put it "[love] life and gayety and youthful romance," by producing films like *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens*. [119] The advertising spread, produced two months before the release of *Maidens* includes short summaries of each contracted star's upcoming productions and promotional material for MGM's new films. The "lightning-fast Jazz capers" which Joan Crawford gets into are featured as a selling point for *Maidens*, suggesting the appeal for audiences seeking characters with youthful vitality. [120] At the end of the advert are short summaries of MGM's upcoming films, categorized by star and divided into two sections: one for silent releases and one for sound. *Our Modern Maidens* appears in both sections as it, like *Our Dancing Daughters*, was released in both silent and sound versions. Interestingly, the description for the film differs between silent and sound. In the summary included under "16 Pictures available for Theatres without installation" it is described as a "gay and dashing romantic drama of Today's youth," whereas in the selection of films for "wired houses" it is described as "a brilliant synchronized drama of today's flaming youth." [121] While this difference is minor, it is appreciable, and the change in tone between the two suggests that as a sound film, its modern sensibility is increased by the excitement offered by the synchronized score. Additionally, the exaggerated copy demonstrates the hard-sell that studios were using to get exhibitors to buy their sound films. By highlighting their excitement and prospective for big box office returns, studios could persuade exhibitors to undertake the costly process of wiring their theatres for sound. Rural or non-urban movie theatres were typically slower to wire for sound, and these bifurcated marketing tactics address that difference.

[119] n.a. "Joan Crawford," *Inter-titles*, June 29 1929: 25.
[120] ibid.
[121] n.a "16 Pictures," 72-75.

Sounding Modern *and* Moral: Two Case Studies of the Use of the Synchronized Score

In the following section I talk specifically about the films, providing examples of the use of sound in each. This use of sound is theorized to shape audience perceptions of the story and, in certain cases, to tone down or moderate suggestive themes and immoral behaviour. *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928, Harry Beaumont) is a silent drama film, the first of the three "Our Series" films starring Joan Crawford. It tells the story of three young, wealthy flappers and their romantic exploits. Crawford stars as "Dangerous Diana" Medford, who lives a life of parties and luxury, and her friends Ann (Anita Page) and Beatrice (Dorothy Sebastian). The main conflict revolves around Diana and Ann's competition for the affections of millionaire Ben (John Mack Brown). A minor sub-plot involves the recently-married Beatrice, whose former life as a party girl troubles her old-fashioned husband. The film solidified Crawford's stardom and secured her first screen persona as the archetypal flapper. *Our Modern Maidens* capitalized on the popularity of *Dancing Daughters* and cast Crawford in a similar role as Billie Brown, the high-spirited daughter of B. Bickering Brown, a wealthy, publicity-loving automobile executive. In both *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens*, Crawford's flapper is bold, free-spirited, and modern, but has a fundamental respect for traditional social mores and customs, exemplified by her desire to get married and start a family. In both films, her on-screen parents are shown to approve of, and even facilitate, her wild party-filled lifestyle. An innate maturity enables her to maintain control of her life despite her drinking, partying, and casual relationships with men. Other friends who either are, or pretend to be, more traditional, get into more trouble than Diana/Billie. Just like Cynthia Felando describes, Diana/Billie's flapper exploits are explained in the end as

harmless, youthful acting-out—behaviour that is effectively curtailed at the end of each film's story.

Those characters who also aspire to or are part of the flapper lifestyle but aren't honest about their motivations are not redeemed in this way. In *Dancing Daughters* Ann's virtue and innocence is revealed to be an act, part of a scheme by her mother to snare a wealthy husband. Ann's punishment for this deceit is her dramatic death at the end of the film when she drunkenly falls down a set of stairs and breaks her neck. In *Maidens*, Kentucky (also played by Anita Page) is a naïve small-town girl who becomes pregnant after one night of passion with Gil Jordan (Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.), Billie's fiancé. The film offers no closure for Kentucky who faces her pregnancy alone after Gil, who wasn't aware of her pregnancy, marries Billie. The fast-and-loose sexual and romantic couplings in both *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens* read like a potboiler melodrama and indeed contemporaneous reviews for the films noted this tendency. A reviewer for the Lime Springs (Iowa) Herald noted the "powerful lesson" which underlies "gorgeous spectacle of the jazz and foibles of boys and girls of today" which is presented in *Modern Maidens*.[122] The review continues, "Laws of life are just the same, even though one dances new dances, lives in new modernistic settings, and tries to apply a new code of morals to life."[123] These risqué narratives constitutes their "jazz sensibility"— an aspect of the films' appeal which was heavily promoted in advertising for the films.

These films both benefit from their treatment as a "part talkie." The extravagant jazz-age lifestyle enjoyed by these characters is powerfully transmitted through the film, with all the techniques of the mature silent film like subtle pantomimic gesture, expressive camera movement, and sophisticated editing techniques brought to bear along with a tailored

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[122] n.a "Our Modern Maidens," *Lime Springs Herald*, Lime Springs, IA: 18 Sept. 1930, 1.
[123] ibid.

synchronized score, imbuing the film with a lively tempo. A reviewer writing for the Detroit Free Press reveled in the "great opportunity for sound" in *Our Dancing Daughters* with "jazz music, 'hot' dance music, gales of laughter, chatter of young voices [and] the beautiful singing of the theme song as a frame for the love scenes" all examples of its achievements as a sound picture.[124] The reviewer claims that "the story lends itself perfectly to the background of music, song and effects" and picks up on the ways that each are cued to "just the right places." [125] The silent and sound versions of both *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens* were marketed differently but were often reviewed similarly, with most drawing attention to their modern sensibility.

Because neither film has synchronized dialogue, meaning-making through sound is carried exclusively by music and sound effect which establish character motivation and set the mood for particular scenes. In her study of music in early sound film, Katherine Spring notes the recurrent use of theme music within synchronized scores which prompt "dramatic recognition" for both onscreen characters and audiences. The synchronized score of early sound films was embedded within both the filmic and extra-filmic worlds, performing a dual role in shaping both the perceptions of on-screen characters and audiences. Repeated over the course of the narrative, theme songs "accumulated association with characters and dramatic motifs."[126] Variations in tempo, instrumentation, and key signature reflected the mood of a particular scene, as well as charting its narrative trajectory.[127] Finally, as a result of this repetition, theme songs accrued meaning which meant they could reveal information to characters and actively shape narrative

[124] n.a. "Picture Scores Distinct Success," *Detroit Free Press*, Sept. 18 1928, 15.
[125] ibid.
[126] Katherine Spring, *Saying It With Songs: Popular Music and the Coming of Sound to Hollywood Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 98-99.
[127] ibid., 99

form.[128] Spring's concern here is focused on meanings within the films, but I contend the same meaning-making through theme music can be extended to audience perceptions as well.

The film's use of synchronized sound subtly shapes the viewer's experience of the film, and their interpretation of on-screen events. Harnessing recorded sound's relation to contemporaneous cultural notions of modernity, the studio utilized the technology in the film and associated promotional materials to push the films' spectacle of jazz youth from the films' beginnings. *Dancing Daughters* begins with a close-up on a pair of fancy high-heel shoes sitting in front of a three-way mirror. A pair of legs (Diana's) fade into the shoes with a dissolve and immediately begin to dance. Over the soundtrack an up-tempo jazz dance song plays, with strong percussion, lively strings and brass. Also audible are the sounds of a cheering group and clapping hands. As Diana dances for this invisible audience she gets dressed, first slipping on a pair of lacy underpants and then, in a medium-shot showing her thighs, fastens a fringed skirt around her waist. While her feet and legs seem to dance frantically, she admires her reflection in the mirror as the dance music fades into a slow rendition of the film's theme song, "I Loved You Then As I Love You Now," a song which, through repetition, becomes tied to Diana and Ben's star-crossed relationship. The song was written especially for the film, and was published as sheet music as a advertising tie-in for the film (an image of Joan Crawford is prominent on the cover), which meant that it entered the American popular culture beyond the movie theatre. (see fig. 2) This meant that its message could already be familiar to listeners even if they had not yet seen the film.

Diana is dressing to attend a party with friends at the local yacht club. This scene begins with a dramatic overhead shot of balloons descending on the dance floor and being tossed around. On the soundtrack, cheering voices and the sounds of balloons popping are heard, and a jazz

[128] ibid.

band performs up-tempo dance music. In the centre of the crowd, Diana stands on a table holding two balloons as the music quiets. A close-up shows the band's drummer calling toward her while on the soundtrack a male voice is heard saying "Come on, Miss Diana! Strut your stuff!" Diana nods enthusiastically and begins her frantic, free-spirted gyrating. The head violinist and bandleader signals to the musicians and starts to fiddle, smiling in Diana's direction. Diana leaps off the table and continues her dancing as everyone else watches from the side of the dance floor. Behind the audience the band (composed entirely of white musicians) are visible as they perform the music Diana she dances to. She unfastens her skirt and casts it aside in order to move more freely while her audience cheers. Ben, who has arrived for dinner at the club, watches from outside the ballroom, an expression of awe on his face. Like Whiteman's symphonic jazz the music played by this band is tightly arranged, a mixture of syncopation, rhythmic pep with enough polish and gentility to make it appealing to both the sophisticated party-goers and middle-class white audiences.

Later, Ben and Diana are introduced by a mutual friend. During this scene their love theme is repeated and as they dance with each other an off-screen male ensemble sing the following refrain:

I loved you then as I love you now,
You are mine in my thoughts always.
Love comes but once to the hearts of men,
When it does then it always stays.
You filled a spot in my empty heart,
And tho' perhaps in the end we part,
I'll always dream of what might have been,
For I love you now as I loved you then.

Performed as a vocal, their love theme serves in this scene as a vehicle of narration with the lyrics foretelling Diana and Ben's relationship. Later, when they kiss for the first time it is

heard on the soundtrack, performed with swelling brass and strings indicating their emotions. The use of this sentimental ballad along the hot jazz dance music evidences the film's carefully structured address, As evident from the lyrics cited above the song's message of enduring love acts as a counterbalance to the characters' otherwise modern approaches to sex and courtship. The music parallels and supports this bifurcated address.

Synchronized sound is used to similar effect in *Modern Maidens*, which again has music and sound effects but no spoken dialogue. In the opening lively up-tempo music accompanies shots of Billie and her friends racing their cars side by side down dark country roads. Cheering and yelling voices are also heard. Depicted as reckless and carefree, the group are apparently oblivious to the danger of their game as they narrowly avoid crashing into an oncoming car. They pull over, laughing and cheering, near a glowing sign which reads "B. B. B. SAXAHORN" which is later revealed to be a kind of "musical billboard" with a radio tuned to a station owned by Billie's father. [129] The music quiets and an announcer's voice, emanating from the billboard, calls out the station identification signalling the diegetic source of the music. The interruption of this speaking voice makes all the characters cease their chatter and turn to look at the sign, apparently startled by it. The "all night program" is playing jazz dance music, and when the music resumes the group gets out of their cars for an impromptu dance party. At no time in this sequence does any of the dialogue synchronize with a single on-screen speaker. The spoken dialogue from the announcer is accompanied by shots of the sign and the speakers attached to it, thus identifying it as the source of the sound. In this sequence, the radio is shown to animate their interactions with one another. Their interest in this "electric diversion" (to paraphrase Donald Crafton) is tied in with the notion of a youthful affinity for radio. Sound is again visualized in the film's party sequence. A series of kaleidoscopic dissolves interweave close-ups of jazz

[129] "Saxahorn" is a portmanteau of saxophone and horn, two instruments typical of the jazz dance genre.

instruments including a xylophone, drums, and trombones being played with shots of people dancing while dance music (presumably being played by these instruments) is heard over the soundtrack. Animated rings are overlaid on the images, emulating sound waves emerging from a speaker. The camera is craned away from the dancers, showing the enormous art-deco set and the size of the party. The movement expressed here through trick photography, camera movement, and the jostling dancers is matched with the synchronized score resulting in a powerful appeal to Petersen's embodied consumer.

Billie will soon be graduating from a private girls college and is engaged to her childhood sweetheart, Gil Jordan. She is determined that their wedding won't take place until Gil has secured a job working for the French Ambassador because she wants to live in Paris. Gil is uncertain about his chances, so Billie promises to make it happen proclaiming, "I'll get you to Paris if I have to start another war!" Billie decides the ticket to Gil's success is Glenn Abbott, an American diplomat to Argentina who has been described in a magazine's society page as "dynamite." In order to win his favour, she sets to work seducing him but ends up falling in love. Meanwhile the quiet and old-fashioned Kentucky, who has fallen in love with Gil starts an affair with him, despite the fact that he is engaged to her best friend.

Like in *Dancing Daughters,* the salacious dealings of the characters in *Modern Maidens* are rendered less shocking by the film's synchronized score. While party scenes are livened up with the hot jazz songs of the day, syrupy romantic theme songs re-occur throughout performing the same narrative function as those in *Dancing Daughters*. One of these is "Should I Reveal...?" the lyrics of which pair with the film's theme of unrequited romance. [130] The second love theme is "I've Waited A Lifetime For You" and both were marketed as sheet music, with their

[130] This song was later re-used in another MGM production, the early sound musical *Lord Byron of Broadway* (1929).

connection to *Modern Maidens* made clear on their cover. (see fig. 3) Although in this film the songs are only performed instrumentally, audiences' familiarity with them as known popular songs ensured some recognisability and knowledge of their lyrics which could add dimension to their reading of the films' meanings. In timbre and mood, "Should I Reveal…?" is lively and youthful sounding while "I've Waited A Lifetime For You" is more dramatic and mature. "Should I Reveal…?" serves mainly as the romantic theme for Gil and Kentucky, and reflects the latter's naiveté and sweet personality. These songs are classified as ballads, composed in strophic form (with repeating melody) but each recur in their respective soundtracks with stylistic and tonal variations. For example, in romance scenes the songs' tempos are slow and the instrumentation is largely composed of strings and languid-sounding brass. When the songs are heard during dance scenes the tempo is increased and more emphasis is placed on percussion and bright, peppy brass in the instrumentation.

Billie orchestrates several meetings between herself and Glenn, and eventually ends up at his home where she asks for his help in getting Gil a position at the embassy. Billie's flirtatious manner has fooled Glenn into believing she is interested in him—which she eventually is. Despite this, she remains loyal to Gil and doesn't break off their engagement despite her feelings for Glenn. Not realizing Billie is engaged to Gil who she claims is "just a friend," Glenn agrees to her request, telling her "there isn't a thing in the world I wouldn't do for you." They share a brief kiss, but Billie becomes flustered and quickly leaves. The music in this scene is a 4/4 time waltz-style rendition of "I've Waited A Lifetime For You" performed with strings and crooning brass and indicates the character's romantic feelings for each other.

Once Gil's appointment to diplomatic service is secured, his engagement to Billie is announced in the paper. Glenn finds out and takes his revenge on Billie in a menacing scene in

which he nearly sexually assaults her. After stopping at his house during a rainstorm, Glenn barges in to a room where Billie is changing out of her wet clothes. Billie nervously brushes off his advances, and Glenn sneers "What's the matter? I thought you were a '*modern'*." This scene is accompanied by music that reinforces the drama, and serves to suggest the attraction the two have for each other despite the violence which is occurring. Escalating scales in strings lead into the romantic theme "I've Waited A Lifetime For You," this time played dramatically with heavy strings and horn. If this is their theme song, this rendition of it suggests the strength of the emotions the characters are feeling. While Billie has been spending more time with Glenn, Gil has been spending time with Kentucky, who becomes pregnant. This pregnancy is never made explicitly obvious (it isn't mentioned in any intertitle), and the audience is left to make this connection through what little information is provided. The scene when this information is (partially) revealed is described below.

When their wedding day arrives, neither Billie nor Gil seem particularly excited about getting married. In their separate rooms, they both look wistfully out windows—Billie toward Glenn Abbot's house, and Gil down at the lake where he and Kentucky first kissed. On the soundtrack, down-tempo versions of both romantic themes play, underscoring the characters' regrets for love lost. Intercut between both are scenes of the gathering wedding guests, accompanied on the score by a jazz rendition of Mendelssohn's wedding march. During the actual wedding ceremony Wagner's Bridal Chorus is heard on the soundtrack, with singing voices performing the lyrics—although no choir is shown. The scene cuts back and forth between shots of the wedding proceedings and Kentucky who is upstairs draped over a chair and crying. After the ceremony, Kentucky has a breakdown and confesses her affair with Gil to Billie, who isn't angry but instead mournfully wishes Kentucky had told her all this before the

ceremony took place. Billie recalls that Kentucky had nervously dropped her purse earlier, and snatched it back when Billie bent to pick up its contents. She suddenly realizes the reason Kentucky is so upset, and goes to her purse to look for proof. She comes up with a doctor's appointment card which reads "Mrs. Kentucky Strafford" although she is unmarried. Billie reads the card and widens her eyes, drawing her hand to her mouth in a shocked expression as she realizes the meaning of Kentucky's subterfuge—she has gone to see a doctor using a married name because she is pregnant. Over the soundtrack, a dramatic crescendo of strings and brass is heard as the characters shout. As if hearing this commotion of music and crying voices Gil, who is in an adjoining room, comes running in and learns what Kentucky has been hiding from him.

While Gil comforts Kentucky, Billie thinks back on her party lifestyle. The series of kaleidoscopic dissolves showing musical instruments seen earlier in the film are repeated, while a slow and mournful rendition of "Should I Reveal…?" is heard on the soundtrack. This spinning effect encapsulates what she describes as the "dizzying round" of parties, drinks, and men that she had formerly enjoyed. The image fades back to Billie as she laughs, realizing the foolishness of it in light of their present situation. When she leaves Gil and Kentucky to face the guests waiting to see her off on her honeymoon, Billie alternates between crying and smiling as she tries to hold together her emotions. Again, a slow tempo version of her love theme, "I've Waited a Lifetime" is heard alongside snippets of the "jazzified" Wedding March. In these climatic scenes, the carefully constructed soundtrack perfectly underscores the character's emotions and ties together previous scenes of the film (i.e. romantic scenes between the two couples) with their present situation.

Selling the Jazz Aesthetic: Promotion and Critical Reception

Because of the paucity of primary source documentation specifically related to audience experiences of silent era movie-going, it remains difficult to properly define viewer reactions to these films. Perhaps the best known and most often cited studies in this vein are the Payne Fund Studies, which were funded by the Motion Picture Research Council in conjunction with the Payne Fund. From 1929-1933, Payne Fund researchers investigated the impact of the motion pictures, as well as radio and reading, on American children and youth. In 1933, sociologist Herbert Blumer, a member of the research committee, published a compilation of their findings in "Movies and Conduct," while Henry James Forman wrote the summary "Our Movie Made Children" which was aimed at a popular audience. The descriptions of interviews and study findings in both of these works have often served to evidence the mimetic nature of flapper films on youth audiences. [131] However, in light of the still-persistent lack of focused data on audiences for both *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens*, and to avoid attempting to make any broad claims about these audiences, I want to focus on the studio-produced extra-textual promotional and popular press discourse on them to determine how the films were advertised to contemporary audiences nation-wide. This is an important aspect of their interpretation because, as Kathryn Fuller-Seeley has noted, the "lurid exaggerations or out-right misrepresentations of risqué or violent film action" found on some movie posters were often the only exposure to films for social critics, and fuel for their movie censorship campaigns.[132] And furthermore, advertising campaigns operated by logics that were not always identical to those of the films they promoted.

[131] Useful discussions of each can be found in Christina Petersen's "Paradise for the Young" and in Lori Landay, "The Flapper Film: Comedy, Dance, and Jazz Age Kinaesthetics," in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, ed. Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002): 221-248.
[132] Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, *At the Picture Show*, 58.

Focusing on the publicity materials for *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens*, I explore how they visualized the films' jazz-aesthetics, tying in with MGM's advertising copy, like that from the Motion Picture News cited above, which promoted their "jazz sensibility." The jazz aesthetic of the films' visual and aural components are highlighted in both press material and reviews. Like Fuller-Seeley, Ruth Vasey has also indicated the importance of advertising to critics' image of Hollywood. The salacious imagery used in the adverts to sell to audiences was often more provocative than anything actually appearing in the films themselves. Nevertheless, these images provided "the context for the audience's imaginative elaboration of the action on the screen." [133] While not explicitly promoting the films' use of Movietone sound technology (they employed a more general strategy for a nation-wide campaign targeting all theatres, wired or not), advertising copy and illustrations make specific connections to jazz as key for both the aural and visual aesthetics of these films.

In lobby cards for *Dancing Daughters*, depictions of the characters evoke a sense of movement frozen before a camera. One shows stars Crawford and John Mack Brown in what appears to be a dance pose. (see fig. 4) Brown is holding Crawford in his arms as she leans backward, her arms outstretched, one leg raised. Brown looks down toward Crawford while she looks outward with a wide grin. In one version of the card, Crawford's dress has been tinted red. Red, yellow, and green circles hover behind them, suggestive of the bubbles in the champagne the characters often drink. The colours and expressiveness of the figures on the card combine to give a sense of the film as being one filled with movement and youthfulness, and serves as a visual surrogate to its synchronized score. Prominent on the right of this card is the film's title, written in yellow art deco-style lettering, with Crawford's name featured beneath it. A second official lobby card shows a scene from the film, during which Crawford's character performs a

[133] Vasey, "The World According to Hollywood," 124.

table-top dance. (see fig. 5) She stands on top of the table, arms raised, again with a wide grin while a crowd of fellow party-goers look up at her, smiling. This image has also been colour tinted, along with an inset photograph of Crawford posing with a hand on her waist and her other arm raised above her head. One of her legs is outstretched and she looks over her left shoulder with a coquettish grin. The emphasis of Crawford's image here establishes her as the film's star—along with her name prominently displayed at right. These images promise viewers frank sex appeal through Crawford's dances and conjures the impression of the lively dance music which would accompany this party scene.

Similar images accompany promotional material for *Modern Maidens*. In an official poster, an illustration shows Crawford sitting on a table with one bare leg kicked upward as she turns to smile coquettishly at the viewer. A group of admiring men look up at her, their champagne coupes raised. This image is a kind of "freeze-frame" from her major dance scene in this film. In the film itself there is no sustained image of Billie holding her leg up in this manner, and within the context of the scene her pose is attributed to a playful, eccentric spirit rather than a vampy seductiveness. A second lobby card also features Crawford prominently, illustrated mid-dance at the side of the image with the figures of her supporting cast drawn to the right. The emphasis on Crawford's image in these posters establishes her as the film's star—along with her name which is prominently displayed on both. A small newspaper ad for *Modern Maidens* claims it as "Broadway's Sensational Hit" although it was not derived from any Broadway play. This ad, likely placed by a local exhibitor, includes a small cartoon of a young flapper holding a champagne coupe being held up by two men, and calls the film "a treat for the eyes and a feast for the ears."[134]

[134] This fragment, with the publication date November 26, 1929 is from an unknown American newspaper and was found on the following webpage https://www.joancrawfordbest.com/filmsourmm.htm

Contemporaneous reviews for *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens* use similar descriptive language as the promotional materials, suggesting the same link between modernity, jazz, and urban space which is to be found in the films. Norbert Lusk of Picture-Play Magazine, a fan magazine, likened the film to "an unfilled éclair," regarding it as "unsubstantial."[135] However, he concedes that the film is "marked with the stamp of enormous box-office success," suggesting that the film's lavish sets and modern sensibility would captivate audiences, who would then be able to overlook the story's weaknesses or contrivances. Employing the same kind of language that the film's promotional lobby cards evokes through imagery, Lusk writes that Crawford is "a spangled dart of pure light," and that the film's lively jazz dancing sequences and use of sound effects make it generally entertaining. Motion Picture Classic's Laurence Reid echoed Lusk's sentiments, stating that the film's "atmospheric opulence" and its "magnetism" would appeal to younger audiences. [136] Further, he believed that the film's weak plot would be overlooked by most because of the quality of the production and "the spirit with which it moves."[137] These continued references to the film's movement tend to signal its urban, modern sensibility.

Modern Maidens was seen by most reviewers as an attempt by MGM to capitalize on the success of *Dancing Daughters* and was generally perceived as a weaker film. *Modern Maidens* manages a vivid portrayal of the era's reckless youth while remaining based within a traditional moral structure. One reviewer wrote that underlying the film's "gorgeous spectacle of the jazz" and depiction of youth culture was a powerful moral lesson. [138] Reviewer Sue Bernardine wrote that the "special photographic effects, elaborate settings [...] and gorgeous clothes" effectively

[135] Norbert Lusk, "The Screen in Review: An éclair," *Picture-Play Magazine*, January 1929: 71.
[136] Laurence Reid, "The Celluloid Critic: On With the Jazz," *Motion Picture Classic*, December 1928: 53.
[137] ibid.
[138] n.a "Our Modern Maidens," *Lime Springs Herald*, Lime Springs, IA: Sept. 18 1930, 1.

sugar-coated the moral which its story preached.[139]

Thus *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens* both traffic in modern and perhaps racy themes, and provide their audiences a vivid picture of an extravagant, liberated flapper lifestyle. This is counterbalanced with carefully structured narratives and synchronized scores which serve to shape audience experiences and meanings made accessible by the film. I have presented these films as case studies of the cycle of unique "part-talkie" films produced during the conversion to sound era. Although musical scores plainly continue to shape meaning in films, what makes these films unique is that aural meaning making rests mainly (and often, solely) on the synchronized score and sound effects, since most part-talkies were produced with inter-titles with little or no synchronized dialogue. *Our Dancing Daughters* and *Our Modern Maidens* are two films which represent negotiations around sound, morality and technologically-driven modernity which were ongoing in Hollywood during the late 1920s.

It becomes difficult to trace precisely the differential marketing and reception of these films across the rural-urban divide. Although detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis, it should point to the complex life of these films, marked by varying degrees of compromise necessary in the production of mass-media texts intended to generate profit and entertain a national audience. Both *Dancing Daughters* and *Modern Maidens* existed and created cultural meaning in silent and sound versions, advertised as entertainment commodities connected to notions of emergent modernity, technology, and liberated sexuality.

[139] Sue Bernardine, "'Our Modern Maidens' Pleasing Picture; Joan Crawford is Star," *San Bernardino County Sun*, San Bernardino, CA: Oct. 1 1929, 5.

Conclusion

In the popular imaginary, the "roaring twenties" is characterized by racy popular culture, new technology, and speed of living. This may have been reality for some in urban settings, but it is largely incompatible with realities of life in rural America in the late 1920s. This division may be seen to have deepened with the coming of sound, as it brought the ability to represent urban spaces and new modern lifestyles visually *and* aurally. Indeed, it was sound film's ability to "bring Broadway to Main Street" that most troubled small town moral arbiters, as they believed local audiences were not prepared for big-city style entertainment.

During the transition-to-sound era, negotiations around sound film and morality exposed the basic and profound divide between motion picture producers and certain segments of their public (i.e. religious or moral reformers) as to the motion picture's basic ontology and what function films served in society—that is, they were obliged to educate and edify, or were they only harmless entertainment? And, how further standardize a mass cultural form that was still capable of adapting to local practices in order to sell more tickets? Hollywood studios' ongoing negotiations with demands for stricter regulation can be discerned in the films they produced, well before the days of Joseph Breen's Production Code Administration. Films of the late 1920s weren't completely saccharine fantasies with unimpeachably moral characters nor did they baldly reject all contemporaneous notions of propriety and decency. Instead, in order to appeal to all sections of the audience, studios sought a balanced mixture of both. While movie reformers like Father Lord called for family-friendly content, producers were aware that they made their largest profits from urban theatres with adult audiences, who preferred edgier, sexier movies. Economic demands meant that studios needed to strike a balance between these two extremes. In order to appeal to potential ticket buyers, posters and other marketing material typically followed

that long-understood principal—sexualized women sell tickets. But film content was typically toned down as films were still subject to censorship when posters were not. Within the films themselves, synchronized sound scores were used to tone down sexual suggestiveness and to re-assert traditional notions of female sexuality. In both films examined here, romantic love ballads shift the interpretation of the characters' casual sexual coupling from questionable to respectable expressions of "true love." The active sexual desire of the young flapper is thus also rendered less threatening to traditional structures of patriarchal society. The scores, which bifurcate between these romantic ballads and hot jazz dance music—coded with a (too-liberated) sexuality in late 1920s American culture serve to contain the female characters "flapper tendencies" and to return her to prescribed societal expectations of marriage by the films' conclusions.

Toward a Study of Regional Sound Practices

I want to conclude with mention of another part-sound film, recently restored, which is highly relevant to this study. Censoring of sections of a film result in differences among versions, telling of the different standards in various places. An interesting and clear example of this comes from *The Man and the Moment* (George Fitzmaurice, 1929) which was made using the Vitaphone sound system. Starring Billie Dove and Rod LaRoque, the film was previously thought lost but was restored in 2016 from an obscure dupe negative. The differences in tone between the silent and sound versions are made abundantly clear in this copy, which maintains both the dialogue from the Vitaphone discs and the text dialogue from the inter-titles. The source negative used for the restoration had been re-cut for silent exhibition, and so without the inter-

titles it would have been out of synch when paired with the Vitaphone discs. Because of this, the restoration team had to keep the inter-titles in place to maintain synchronization with the soundtrack. It is an unusual text for these reasons. This film is another romantic melodrama, this time based on a story by Elinor Glyn, a popular novelist known for her provocative, sexy romance novels. A man and woman enter into a sham marriage to avoid their problems, in her case, an overbearing guardian, and in his a gold digging woman who pursues him despite his lack of interest. Because of the story's salacious source text, it was likely subject to greater scrutiny from the censors. There are several instances where sections of dialogue shown in the inter-titles are very different from what is heard. When Michel is proposing the scheme, Joan is concerned since they are essentially strangers. Michel replies that if he is a stranger, it's "a fault he'll gladly remedy." This suggestive phrase is heard on the soundtrack, but skipped in the inter-titles. Joan looks away shyly and tells him not to be "funny." In this case we are lucky with the way the film has been restored as it allows us to see more clearly the example of differences in meaning between its silent and sound version, which during this period in film history roughly maps onto differing segments of the film-going audience, the former resting beyond the bulk of Hollywood's urban market. As my work progresses I want to examine this and other semi-sound texts which bear these interesting marks of censorship process at work, and which indicate the variety of approaches to storytelling, contemporaneous American social mores, and Hollywood's negotiations with each.

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The Jazz Singer. Directed by Alan Crosland, Warner Bros. Pictures, 1927.

The Man and the Moment. Directed by George Fitzmaurice, Warner Bros. Pictures, 1929.

Appendix

Figure 1

Sheet music for "I Loved You Then, As I Love You Now" composed by Axt and Mendoza, lyric by Ballard Macdonald for the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer production of *Our Modern Maidens* (1928)

Figure 2

Sheet Music for "I've Waited a Lifetime For You" and "Should I Reveal…?" Composed by Gus Edwards, lyric by Lou Goodwin for the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer production of *Our Modern Maidens* (1929)

Figure 3

Official lobby card for *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928)

Figure 4

Alternate official lobby card for *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928)

Figure 5

Official poster for *Our Modern Maidens* (1929)

Figure 6

Local newspaper advertisement for *Our Modern Maidens*. Fragment from an unknown American newspaper, dated November 26, 1929.