**Morton, Ben, University of Iowa. "How does it sound in the theater? Killing Sound for Sound Film Exhibition"**

Today the folks at THX strive to rid any film exhibition space of the noises that might identify one theater from another. Their ultimate goal is an unmediated film experience. The seed for this type of theater exhibition was cultivated during Hollywood's transition to sound — roughly 1926-1931. As Rick Altman shows in his revealing study of early film exhibition, Silent Film Sound, some of the many sound practices utilized during the silent years became part of the later sound film aesthetic. It wasn't as if sound representation practices were implemented overnight. Ideas about types of microphones, microphone placement, sound recording, actor dialogue, and on-set music were fervently argued by directors, producers, and audio personnel.

My presentation will shift the emphasis of Altman's—and a majority of other transition to sound scholars'—focus from film production to film exhibition. Through archival research of trade publications popular among the thousands of film exhibitors across the U.S., I will demonstrate that significant debates about how sound should be represented existed in the actual sites of exhibition. My argument points out the transformation of movie houses and theaters, concluding that there was a conscious push for sound economy—keeping only the essential dialog and music, and getting rid of extraneous noises. Audiences, theater managers, and the engineers and architects furnishing sound theaters were integral to film-sound discourse during the 1926-1931 transition. Because they were ground zero for public reception, t hese voices were an essential source of audience feedback for Hollywood studios.

**Ben Morton** is a Ph.D. candidate in Communication Studies at the University of Iowa. He is interested in media history and theories of technological change, especially in the growing yet undefined field of sound studies. He likes historical work that makes the present and future seem different than before.