**Introduction**

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The history of the cinema in its first thirty years is one of unprecedented expansion and growth. Beginning as a novelty in a handful of big cities -- New York, Paris, London, and Berlin -- the new medium quickly found its way across the world, attracting larger and larger audiences wherever it was shown and displacing other forms of entertainment as it did so. As audiences grew, so did the places where films were shown, culminating in the great 'picture palaces' of the 1920s which rivalled theatres and opera-houses for opulence and splendor. Meanwhile films themselves developed from being short 'attractions', only a couple of minutes long, to the feature length that has dominated the world's screens up to the present day.

Although French, German, American, and British pioneers have all been credited with the 'invention' of cinema, the British and the Germans played a relatively small role in its world-wide exploitation. It was above all the French, followed by the Americans, who were the most ardent exporters of the new invention, helping to implant the cinema in China, Japan, and Latin America as well as in Russia. In terms of artistic development it was again the French and the Americans who took the lead, though in the years preceding the First World War Italy, Denmark, and Russia also played a part.

In the end it was the United States that was to prove decisive. The United States was -- and has remained -- the largest single market for films. By protecting their own market and pursuing a vigorous export policy, the Americans achieved a dominant position on the world market by the eve of the First World War. During the war, while Europe languished, the American cinema continued to develop, pioneering new techniques as well as consolidating industrial control.

Meanwhile, in the United States itself, the center of film-making had gravitated westwards, to Hollywood, and it was films from the new Hollywood studios that flooded on to the world's film markets in the years after the First World War -- and have done so ever since. Faced with the Hollywood onslaught, few industries proved competitive. The Italian industry, which had pioneered the feature film with lavish spectaculars like Quo vadis? (1913) and Cabiria (1914), almost collapsed. In Scandinavia, the Swedish cinema had a brief period of glory, notably with the powerful sagas of Victor Sjöström and the brilliant comedies of Mauritz Stiller, before following Denmark into relative obscurity. Even the French cinema found itself in a precarious position. In Europe, only Germany proved industrially resilient, while in the new Soviet Union and in Japan the development of the cinema took place in conditions of commercial isolation.

Hollywood took the lead artistically as well as industrially. Indeed the two aspects were inseparable. Hollywood films appealed because they had better constructed narratives, their effects were more grandiose, and the star system added a new dimension to screen acting. Where Hollywood did not lead from its own resources it bought up artists and technical innovations from Europe to ensure its continued dominance over present or future competition. Sjöström, Stiller, and the latter's young protégé Greta Garbo were lured away from Sweden, Ernst Lubitsch and F. W. Murnau from Germany; Fox acquired many patents, including that of what was to become CinemaScope.

The rest of the world survived partly by learning from Hollywood and partly because audiences continued to exist for a product which corresponded to needs which Hollywood could not supply. As well as a popular audience, there were also increasing audiences for films which were artistically more adventurous or which engaged with issues in the outer world. Links were formed with the artistic avant-garde and with political groupings, particularly on the left. Aesthetic movements emerged, allied to tendencies in the other arts. Sometimes these were derivative, but in the Soviet Union the cinema was in the vanguard of artistic development -- a fact which was widely recognized in the west. By the end of the silent period, the cinema had established itself not only as an industry but as the 'seventh art'.

None of this would have happened without technology, and cinema is in fact unique as an art form in being defined by its technological character. The first section of Part I of this book, ' The Early Years', therefore begins with the technical and material developments that brought the cinema into being and helped rapidly to turn it into a major art form. In these early years this art form was quite primitive, and uncertain of its future development. It also took some time before the cinema acquired its character as a predominantly narrative and fictional medium. We have therefore divided the history of the first two decades of cinema into two: an early period proper (up to about 1905); and a transitional period (up to the emergence of the feature film shortly before the First World War), during which the cinema began to acquire that character as a form of narrative spectacle which has principally defined it ever since.

The watershed came with the First World War, which definitively sealed American hegemony, at least in the mainstream of development. The second section,' The Rise of Hollywood', looks first at Hollywood itself in the 1910s and 1920s and the way the Hollywood system operated as an integrated industry, controlling all aspects of cinema from production to exhibition. The international ramifications of America's rise to dominance are considered next. By 1914 the cinema was a truly world-wide business, with films being made and shown throughout the industrialized world. But it was a business in which the levers of power were operated from afar, first in Paris and London, and then increasingly in New York and Hollywood, and it is impossible to understand the development of world cinema without recognizing the effect that control of international distribution had on nascent or established industries elsewhere.

As far as European cinema was concerned, the war provoked a crisis that was not merely economic. Not only did European exporters such as France, Britain, and Italy lose control over overseas markets, and find their own markets opened up to increasingly powerful American competition, but the whole cultural climate changed in the aftermath of war. The triumph of Hollywood in the 1920s was a triumph of the New World over the Old, marking the emergence of the canons of modern American mass culture not only in America but in countries as yet uncertain how to receive it.

Early cinema programs were a hotch-potch of items, mingling actualities, comic sketches, free-standing narratives, serial episodes, and the occasional trick or animated film. With the coming of the feature-length narrative as centerpiece of the program, other types of film were relegated to a secondary position, or forced to find alternative viewing contexts. This did not in fact hinder their development, but tended rather to reinforce their distinct identities. The making of animated cartoons became a separate branch of film-making, generally practiced outside the major studios, and the same was true of serials. Together with newsreels, both cartoons and serial episodes tended to be shown as short items in a program culminating in the feature, though some of Louis Feuillade's serials in France could fill a whole program and there were occasional attempts at feature-length animation. Of the genres emerging out of the early cinema, however, it was really only slapstick comedy that successfully developed in both short and feature format. While Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton made a successful transition to features in the early 1920s, the majority of silent comedians, including Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, built their careers in the silent period almost entirely around the short film.

The section 'The Silent Film' looks at the kinds of film, like animation, comedy, and serials, which continued to thrive alongside the dramatic feature in the 1920s, and also at the factual film or documentary, which acquired an increasing distinctiveness as the period progressed, and at the rise of avant-garde film-making parallel (and sometimes counter) to the mainstream. Both documentary and the avant-garde achieved occasional commercial successes ( Robert Flaherty's Nanook of the North ran for several months in a cinema in Paris; and works by French 'impressionist' film-makers like Jean Epstein and Germaine Dulac also attracted substantial audiences). On the whole, however, documentary and the avant-garde were non-commercial forms, with values distinct from the mainstream and a cultural and political role that cannot be assessed in commercial terms. The film avant-garde had an important place in the modernist art movements of the 1920s, especially in France (with Fernand Léger, Marcel Duchamp, and Man Ray), but also in Germany (Hans Richter) and the Soviet Union, and this modernist impulse was to animate documentary both in the 1920s (Dziga Vertov in the Soviet Union, Walter Ruttmann in Germany) and after.

Of the countries which developed and managed to sustain distinctive national cinemas in the silent period the most important were France, Germany, and the Soviet Union. Of these, the French cinema displayed the most continuity, in spite of the crisis provoked by the war and the economic uncertainties of the post-war period. The German cinema, by contrast, relatively insignificant in the pre-war years, exploded on to the world scene with the 'expressionist' Cabinet of Dr Caligari in 1919 and throughout the Weimar period succeeded in harnessing a wide spectrum of artistic energies into new cinematic forms. Even more spectacular was the emergence of the Soviet cinema after the Revolution of 1917. The new Soviet cinema resolutely turned its back on the past, leaving the style of the pre-war Russian cinema to be perpetuated by the many émigrés who fled westwards to escape the Revolution. The section on National Cinemas gives separate treatment to all three elements: the pre-revolutionary Russian cinema, recently rediscovered; the Soviet cinema; and the Russian émigrés.

The other countries whose cinemas merit an article of their own in this Part are: Britain, which had an interesting but relatively undistinguished history in the silent period; Italy, which had a brief moment of international fame just before the war; the Scandinavian countries, mainly Denmark and Sweden, which played a role in the development of silent cinema quite out of proportion to their small populations; and Japan, where a cinema developed based on traditional theatrical and other art forms and only gradually adapted to western influence. Space is also given to the unique phenomenon of the transnational Yiddish cinema, which flourished in eastern and central Europe in the inter-war years.

For most of these articles the period covered is from the earliest days up to the introduction of synchronized sound at the end of the 1920s. For the German cinema, however, the cut-off point is the Nazi takeover in 1933. For similar reasons the story of Yiddish cinema is carried up to 1939, when it was brutally terminated by the Holocaust. In the case of Japan, only the years up to the great Kanto earthquake of 1923 are covered in this part, and the later development of silent cinema in Japan, which went on well into the 1930s, is dealt with in Part II.

Silent cinema is strictly speaking a misnomer, for although films themselves were silent, the cinema was not. The showing of early films, particularly non-fiction, was often accompanied by a lecturer or barker, and in Japan there developed the remarkable institution of the benshi, who both commented on the action and spoke the dialogue. It was largely because of the benshi that silent film survived in Japan long after other countries had converted to sound. Universal throughout the 'silent' cinema, however, was musical accompaniment, which ranged from improvisations on an out-of-tune piano to full orchestral scores by composers of the calibre of Saint-Saëns ( L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise, 1908) or Shostakovich ( New Babylon, 1929). Music was an integral part of the silent film experience. The final section of this part looks first at the extraordinary development of film music and its role in shaping the audience's perception, before proceeding to an overview of what the silent cinema was like in its heyday in the 1920s.