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The Rise and Fall of Film Europe

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The Film Europe movement of the 1920s was a short-lived phenomenon. Yet in the period between 1924 and 1929, co-operation among the film-producing countries of Europe was beginning to show distinct signs of eroding the seemingly overwhelming superiority enjoyed by American films in continental markets.[1] Moreover, international co-operation of a similar sort practised within Europe in recent decades has been a major factor in keeping film industries there viable. Why, then, did the 1920s movement begin to decline in 1929?

Background: 1918–1923

There was no question of co-operation among film-producing countries in the years immediately after the First World War. The conflict had radically altered the balance of control among these countries. France and Italy, which had been forced to cut back production, were in a severely weakened position. The USA took advantage of the war to move into markets like South America, Australasia and Southeast Asia, depriving the main European producing countries of their biggest source of foreign revenue. As of 1917, the USA had essentially gained control of most world markets outside Central and Eastern Europe, the USSR and the Middle East.[2]

This control was to continue in most areas, but that was not at all apparent to people in the film industry at the war's end. American experts speculated nervously in the trade papers as to how to maintain their lead. For a few years it seemed possible to many that one European country or another might cut that lead significantly. France and Italy were possible competitors, but most observers saw Germany as the main contender. Faced with a nearly decimated film industry after the

communist revolution, the USSR was not yet a factor, although other countries eyed it nervously as a vast potential market which might fall under German control.

Ironically, Germany had come out of the war with a greatly strengthened industry. Before the war it had exported a negligible amount of film and had in fact been one of America's best overseas customers. But when the German government banned the importation of all but Danish films in 1916, the domestic industry entered a period of isolation that would last for nearly five years. A major breakthrough came in late 1917 with the creation of the Universum Film-Aktiengesellschaft (Ufa) by the government and large industrial investors. This move marked the entry of big capital into the German film industry, as well as the beginning of vertical integration there. Other large companies were soon formed, though none on the scale of Ufa. The ban on imports continued to the end of 1920, and relatively few foreign films seem to have been smuggled in.[3] Government regulation in support of the German film industry would continue throughout the 1920s, another factor contributing to Germany's advantage over other European producing nations. The German industry was gearing up to compete on the world market well before the war ended, and German firms moved systematically into neutral countries during and just after the war.

Aside from a general fear of such powerful economic competition, other European nations retained considerable anti-German sentiment as a result of the war. With American control an accomplished fact and the constant fear of a German "invasion" motivating many in the British, French and Italian film industries, a highly competitive, uncooperative situation existed in America and Western Europe until about 1922. The French industry was initially adamantly opposed to allowing any German films in at all, and an attempt to import Ernst Lubitsch's *Madame Dubarry* in 1921 had resulted in a ban, due to the perceived anti-French propaganda in the piece. But *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, the first German film to play in Paris after the war (opening in February 1922), helped change French opinion; soon a small but steady trickle of German films was coming into France, winning mostly favourable reactions. A slow thaw in relations began, culminating in an almost complete turnaround by 1924, when a spirit of friendly co-operation surfaced among some elements of the European film industry. During this thaw, Western Europe was also beginning to recover from the economic depression of 1921; starting in 1922, most countries made

greater progress in rebuilding after the war damage and in moving toward currency stabilisation during the mid-1920s.[4]

By 1924, then, the economic situation in Western Europe was less disorganised than it had been just after the war, and there was perhaps less inclination to cut-throat competition among film-producing nations. Furthermore, it became increasingly clear that no one producing nation could make serious inroads into the American control of world film markets. Britain, France and Italy had made virtually no progress in that direction. (The number of films made annually in Italy actually declined during the 1920s after a brief resurgence immediately after the war.) After the lifting of the import ban in 1921, Germany had managed to hold the largest share of its own domestic market as a result of its quota system and the trade barrier of hyperinflation, but during 1923 and 1924 it lost the latter advantage as the mark was stabilised. The American share of the German market rose sharply, from about one-quarter of the total in 1923 to one-third in 1924; by 1925, American films held 42 per cent of the German market, surpassing the domestic product for the first time in a decade. In 1926 that lead widened, with American films at about 45 per cent, to Germany's 36 per cent. These were the years of the German film industry's post-stabilisation crisis; although it remained the strongest in Europe, it faced obstacles comparable to the industries of other countries. The advantages of economic co-operation against the common American enemy were becoming increasingly apparent.

The Spread of Film Europe: 1924–1929

European film experts were well aware of the reasons enabling the USA to maintain its widespread control. America was by far the largest single film market in the world. In the early 1920s it had around 18,000 theatres. Its nearest competitor, Britain, had around 4,000, Germany about 3,700, and France only about 2,500.[5] Moreover, American theatres were on average larger than elsewhere; they operated more days of the week, and their patrons were more regular film-goers. Thus the American firms could afford to spend a great deal more per film, with a guaranteed return from the large domestic market and predictable revenues from abroad. Indeed, as early as 1917, most American producers began calculating negative cost on the basis of estimated world, rather than domestic, revenues. The result was a considerable jump in production values just in time to counter possible post-war

competition.[6] American films were not only more lavish than those of other nations' producers, but the American exporters could afford to sell these big films relatively cheaply abroad. Other countries' producers, given a limited domestic market and fewer export opportunities, had to keep budgets low and rentals high in order to ensure even a small profit.

In the early 1920s, however, members of the European film industry began to realise that by combining their individual domestic markets into one large unit, with films circulating freely and regularly across borders through reciprocal distribution agreements, they would stand a chance of competing with America. With a larger guaranteed export market, budgets for individual films could also be raised, and those films could be sold at prices to compete with those charged by American firms.[7] Such films still might not be able to enter the largely closed American market easily, but they could contend on more equal terms with the Hollywood product in such important markets as South America and Australasia. The creation of a larger base for production was the main goal of the Film Europe idea.

During the same period, the idea of pan-European co-operation was gaining much currency in other fields. It had been voiced by left-leaning politicians and writers since the war's end, but during 1922 and 1923 the "European idea" was becoming more widespread and plausible, and the concepts of widespread European political and economic co-operation were widely debated in the popular as well as the specialised press. The French occupation of the Ruhr made some sort of peaceful solution more vital. In August 1923, Gustav Stresemann's election as Germany's Chancellor made the concept of Franco-German collaboration more viable; late that same year he spoke in favour of the idea. With the election in May 1924 of the Edouard Herriot government in France, the idea seemed even more workable, as Herriot had long been an advocate of European economic co-operation. In October of that year he spoke at the Sorbonne in favour of a "United States of Europe." By then, capitalists in various fields had come to realise that the huge American market gave the USA a trading advantage abroad in many areas. European business had lost its central position in the world during the war, and it had become apparent that it would not regain it using current strategies. Business leaders in France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and elsewhere were beginning to make an increasing number of bilateral or mutually beneficial contracts.[8]

The film industry followed this trend in 1924, with an early attempt at reciprocal distribution agreements between European countries, with

the intention of building a larger market. During the summer of that year, Ufa signed a mutual distribution agreement with the Etablissements Aubert, one of the major French distributors. There had been many distribution contracts signed between companies of different countries during the years after the war, but most such contracts simply appointed one firm as the foreign distribution agent for another, usually stronger one. The mutual distribution pact was different in that it signalled a willingness to open markets for a two-way exchange. Moreover, this arrangement was explicitly presented to the public as an attempt to create a European market. French reporters repeatedly interviewed the initiator of the pact, Erich Pommer. As head of Ufa, the single strongest film firm in Europe, Pommer was seen as a potential leader in a new pan-European industry. He summed up the new approach which many industry members hoped would guide the European film in the future:

> I think, said Mr. Pommer, that European producers must at last think of establishing a certain co-operation among themselves. It is imperative to create a system of regular trade which will enable the producers to amortise their films rapidly. It is necessary to create "European films," which will no longer be French, British, Italian, or German films; entirely "continental" films, expanding out into all Europe and amortising their enormous costs, can be produced easily.[9]

Similar opinions were expressed repeatedly in the trade and popular press of Europe for the rest of the silent period.[10]

The idea of Film Europe took some time to bear fruit. It came into being shortly before the German industry entered its post-stabilisation crisis. In the autumn of 1924, shortly after the Ufa–Aubert deal, the Wengeroff and Stinnes interest in Germany formed Westi, a production and distribution company with subsidiaries in the major producing countries. Wengeroff intended to sponsor production in all these countries, then to circulate the results throughout Europe. In December, Westi and Pathé formed Pathé-Westi, a mutual production and distribution firm. Again, the move attracted great attention and was seen as a big step forward in the creation of a European film to compete successfully in world markets. A major expansion programme went on in early 1925. But the project's scope went beyond what the current German situation could support; Westi went out of business less than

a year later, in July 1925.[11] Apart from the Westi project, there was no successful follow-up to the hopeful beginning made by Pommer and Aubert during 1924 and 1925 (though Ufa and Aubert exchanged German and French films on a regular basis). When Ufa was in financial difficulty in 1925, it turned for a loan, not to its fellow firms within in the European film industry, but to rival American companies. The result was the famous Parufamet agreement, in which Paramount and MGM provided a loan to Ufa of $4 million for ten years. The two American companies were to release ten Ufa films annually in the United States, while the three firms set up a joint company for distribution in Germany: Parufamet, which would distribute twenty Paramount and twenty MGM films annually, as well as an unspecified number of Ufa films. The distribution in Germany, rather than the loan, was the main point for the Americans: Parufamet was a means of gaining import certificates and a secure place in the German market, and they continued to release through this company in Germany into the early 1930s. The loan allowed Ufa to survive the crucial period of indebtedness during Germany's stabilisation crisis.[12]

Once the German post-stabilisation crisis ended in 1926 and 1927, however, the film industry there resumed its role of leading the continent in the serious business of co-operation. As other European countries stabilised their currencies and passed beyond the main period of post-war reconstruction, they too entered the boom years preceding the Depression. Over these years, production companies continued to sign agencies in other European countries. Companies in one country invested in similar companies abroad. One of the most notable of these came when Ufa and Svenska formed a jointly controlled distribution firm, involving French investment, in Paris in mid-1926; its name reflected the sentiments of the period—L'Alliance Cinématographique Européene (ACE). The company announced plans to produce in all three countries, but its main purpose was actually to serve as an outlet for Ufa films in France, and it functioned very efficiently as such for the next few years. Ufa continued to set the pattern, signing a reciprocal distribution agreement with Gaumont-British in December 1927; this was hailed in Britain as the first such major signing for a British firm.

Despite the groundbreaking success of the 1924 Ufa–Aubert mutual distribution pact and later the ACE initiative, France had to be content to play second fiddle to Germany in the Film Europe effort. Hollywood had become the single largest source of films in the French market during the war, and there was no import ban or government regulation

during the post-war years to help French film-making to recover its leading position in its own market. While Germany managed to carve out a toehold in several important regions, including South America, France continued to have very limited export possibilities. A trickle of German films even went into the lucrative American market, while French films were largely locked out except for the art-cinema circuit. (In 1925, for example, the prestigious Raymond Bernard film, *Les Miracle des Loups* [1924], was given a five-week run at the Criterion Theatre in New York, specially rented for the purpose of finding an American distributor. Despite favourable reviews no one picked up the film.[13])

The Soviet Union's film industry played no part in the early years of the Film Europe movement. Export was minimal during the period when the government was trying to encourage the rebuilding of the industry after the devastating effects of the Bolshevik Revolution. It was not until the phenomenal success of *Battleship Potemkin* in 1926 that Soviet films gained any prominence in Europe. Over the next few years, however, the USSR did benefit by participating indirectly in Film Europe. In October 1926, a joint Russian–German production and distribution company was formed, called Derufa (DEutscheRUssischa FilmAllianz; the name was later changed to Derussa). The investors were Sovkino and Phoenix Films and they planned to co-produce in Germany and distribute a regular programme of both German and Soviet films. Derussa went bankrupt in the autumn of 1929, after having imported a number of important Soviet films, including Room's *Death Bay*, Barnet's *Girl With a Hat Box*, Pudovkin's *The End of St Petersburg* and Eisenstein's *Old and New*.

The year 1928 was probably the most intense period for international reciprocal agreements. In March, another larger German company, Terra, signed a distribution pact with the French company Cinéromans; in April, British International Pictures did the same with Pathé; in June, Ufa and the state-run film agency LUCE, of Italy, signed to distribute each other's films. Other agreements between smaller companies occurred throughout this period. The net result was a noticeable increase in the circulation of films within Europe. Ludwig Klitzsch, the new director of Ufa, commented at the time of the LUCE deal:

> A European film cartel is actually established now. The German–Italian agreement was only an incidental step in a whole series of general European agreements. A number of leading film enterprises

> in important European film countries have joined to form a solid front against America in order to be able to negotiate on terms of equality with the greatest film factor in the world.[14]

In general, the Film Europe movement can be said to have shown distinct signs of achieving its aims on a modest scale. From 1926 until the decade's end, a few countries actually managed to chip away at the American hegemony and to increase the circulation of European films. They did this primarily through distribution contracts and quota laws. As a result of such co-operative measures, the American share in Germany fell from about 45 per cent in 1926 to 32 per cent by 1930, while the German share rose from 40 per cent to 50 per cent in that same period. As Table 3.1 indicates, a similar pattern occurred in Britain and France, with a drop in the American share after 1926, when the European economy had recovered enough to make production more feasible. Germany's share climbed steadily in both the French and British markets, paralleling the rise in contracts between countries for distribution. In Britain, sound caused a drop in foreign-language films; but by dint of making French-language versions, Germany built up its share of the French market again in 1932.[15] Germany's relatively strong production and its quota laws enabled it to regain the largest portion of its domestic market by 1927.

Britain, starting from a very low state of production, with American films dominating its market to a considerable extent in 1926, also managed to improve steadily. The effects of the 1927 quota are obvious in the rising British share of the market. Partly because of the Film Europe co-operation of the period, the quota had a restraining effect on American imports, while German imports continued to rise until sound came in. In the long run France benefited less from Film Europe than its two main partners, Germany or Britain, simply as a result of having too weak an industry to hold up its end.

The Decline of Film Europe: The Depression and Sound

Given that the efforts of the Film Europe participants seem to have seen a relatively hopeful beginning in the 1920s, why did the notion die out in the 1930s? We can attribute the decline, which occurred fairly quickly, to a combination of important historical changes, both in the film industry and in the larger political and economic spheres. Chief among the causes were the Depression, the introduction of sound,

Table 3.1. Source of feature films in circulation in Germany, France and Britain, 1926–1932 (based on numbers of feature films censored in each country)

Year	No. of films from USA	% of total	No. of films from Germay	% of total	No. of films from France	% of total	No. of films from Britain	% of total	Total no. of films
a) Germany									
1926	229	44.5	202	39.2	22	4.3	2	0.4	515
1927	192	36.9	241	46.3	27	5.2	2	0.4	521
1928	205	39.4	221	42.5	24	4.6	15	2.9	520
1929	142	33.3	192	45.1	16	3.8	17	4.0	426
1930	97	31.8	151	49.5	13	4.3	9	3.0	305
1931	80	28.0	148	51.7	32	11.2	3	1.0	286
b) France									
1924	589	85.0	20	2.9	68	9.8	–	–	693
1925	577	82.0	29	4.1	73	10.4	7	1.0	704
1926	444	78.6	33	5.8	55	9.7	2	0.4	565
1927	368	63.3	91	15.7	74	12.7	8	1.4	581
1928	313	53.7	122	20.9	94	16.1	23	3.9	583
1929	211	48.2	130	29.7	52	11.9	24	5.5	438
1930	237	49.6	111	23.2	94	19.7	16	3.3	478
1931	220	48.5	60	13.2	139	30.7	8	1.8	453
1932	208	43.4	99	20.7	140	29.2	7	1.5	479
c) Britain									
1926	620	83.6	43	5.8	24	3.2	36	4.9	742
1927	723	81.1	71	8.0	34	3.8	40	4.5	892
1928	558	71.7	93	12.0	24	3.1	95	12.2	778
1929	495	74.7	60	9.0	16	2.4	87	13.1	663
1930	519	69.5	49	6.6	22	2.9	142	19.0	747
1931	470	72.6	16	2.5	10	1.5	139	21.5	647
1932	449	70.0	18	2.8	7	1.1	153	23.9	641

consolidation within individual national industries, and political upheavals in Europe and the USSR.

The Depression caused general political and economic policies in many countries to follow a similar path of change. Individual nations tended to draw back from international co-operation, erecting trade barriers in an attempt to improve domestic economies internally rather than through systematic international dealings. The amount of

government regulation of commerce increased during the 1930s. National industries tried to raise exports and lower imports, frequently without regard to co-ordinating efforts with other countries. In the film industry, this trend was exacerbated by the fact that the first commercially viable sound systems happened to be introduced in Europe just at the time when the effects of the Depression were spreading. While sound had been innovated in the USA between 1926 and 1928, it did not reach Europe until 1929, and then only on an occasional, initiatory basis. The process of widespread conversion of studios and theatres went on during the early 1930s.

Sound offered several encouragements to increased competition within Europe. Most obviously, it introduced language barriers among countries. Previously films could circulate throughout Europe and the rest of the world with the simple substitution of different intertitles, but now the export-import process among countries without shared languages became more challenging. At first, dubbing was too technically crude to be feasible. Subtitles were not popular initially, and it was not clear that they would prove an acceptable solution. Initially, it was widely believed that Europe would break up into small clusters of countries with shared languages, protected by the language barrier from a large influx of imported films. Sound was thus at first seen as a way of wrenching domestic markets back from American domination. Some industry officials and commentators seem to have hoped that American films would be confined to Great Britain, the Commonwealth and other English-speaking areas. If this had indeed happened, it would have meant that European producers could amortise their films more easily within their domestic markets and the few other countries with the same language. They would have a more limited market but one involving far less competition.

This idea had some currency in France. The editor of *La Cinématographie française* wrote in 1930 that sound would be good for the French industry: "Numerous are the territories where the French language is spoken and employed, or where it is utilized as the preferred second language." He listed Belgium, Switzerland, North Africa, Egypt and the Near East as such markets. He also pointed out that ticket prices in France had risen with the introduction of sound: "The coming of the 'talkies' is all for the good of the French industry, for now film production can be covered, with considerable profit, within the country itself; in addition to which there is a certain sure [sic] foreign market. Competition from outside is no longer to be feared."[16] This writer was

overly optimistic. By 1931, subtitles and dubbing had been improved and began to emerge as the standard ways of dealing with language barriers. American films continued to be a major force on the French market, making up about 43 per cent of the market in 1932, and remaining around that share until about 1935.

By then, it was apparent that the French-language market was not large enough to permit competition on equal terms with English-language production. A 1935 report by a French government official pointed out that about 75 million people around the world spoke French and that there were about 5,000 cinemas catering to them. But English-language films had a world-wide audience of about 225 million, or three times as many; these people had access to 30,000 cinemas, or six times as many. The report concluded: "To protect the French production against foreign production is not only to defend it, but even and above all to place it once more in a position which would permit it to attack, with equal chances, its international competition, at first on its own market, later on foreign markets."[17] It was the same call that had been issued over and over since the late war period (and still is heard in the 1990s): win back the French market, then move into export. The report also called for the poorly organised French film industry to be re-structured.

The huge English-language market mentioned in this report had also caused the British industry to shift its tactics. British firms had had strong links with German and other continental firms in the late 1920s, participating in both co-productions and mutual distribution pacts. Yet they had been largely unsuccessful in sending films into the American market. With the coming of sound, some in the British industry apparently experienced renewed hope. There was a widespread assumption that with great actors speaking the King's English in adaptations of famous literature or in costume pictures based on British history, British films would appeal to American audiences. The tremendous success of *The Private Life of Henry VIII* in 1933 seemed to confirm this assumption. There was a great deal of financial speculation in film production over the next few years, ending in a disastrous decline in production in 1937. Indeed, by the late 1930s American firms had a stronger grip than ever on the British market.[18] The British production sector's gamble on English-language films as its hope for prosperity turned it away from European co-operation during the 1930s and toward the USA. There were many foreign film-makers working for British firms in the 1930s, but they no longer came to participate in

British–German co-productions; these were refugees from Germany and various Eastern European countries.

Sound had another major effect on the European film industry, which exacerbated the effects of the Depression. In every country, the high cost of wiring theatres and studios came in the period 1930–35, during the depths of the Depression. In particular there were many small, locally owned cinemas that had no choice but to pay for the installation of equipment or go under.

Changes within National Industries

The USSR

At the same time that the Depression and the conversion to sound were occurring, other significant changes were taking place within the film industries of various European countries. In general, within major producing nations, there was some attempt at consolidation of the structure of the industry. I will concentrate here on the situations in the USSR, Germany and France. Each country experienced a move toward monopolistic or oligopolistic structures of some sort. In the USSR and Germany, these consolidations were linked to political shifts toward totalitarian regimes, and these political pressures ensured the success of the changes. In France, the attempted restructuring of the industry failed because of the continuing weakness of the film industry.

In the USSR the film industry made a late start after the First World War. The government nationalised the industry in 1919, but relatively few films were made in the next few years. Shortages of raw stock, equipment, personnel and capital plagued production companies for the next few years. Indeed, shortages of basic equipment continued into the 1930s and would influence the whole import-export question and the shape of the first Five-Year Plan as it related to cinema.

Co-operation from abroad was vital to the establishment of the Soviet film industry. In 1922 the Treaty of Rapallo opened the first official trade relations between the USSR and a Western country, Germany. German firms would provide the main source for production equipment imported into the Soviet Union, as well as acting as a distribution conduit through which Soviet film exports subsequently flowed out to other countries.[19] In particular, throughout the 1920s the German Communist group, the Internationale Arbeitershilfe (IAH, the Workers' International Relief) formed a link between the Soviet film industry and

much of the rest of the world. This group was responsible for financing a significant portion of the Soviet film industry during the 1922–3 period, supplying credit and German-made production equipment. In 1924 the IAH also set up Prometheus, a German–Soviet distribution firm based in Berlin. Prometheus became one of the main importers of Soviet films into Germany, one of Russia's most lucrative foreign markets, and also distributed them to many other countries. The IAH also established one of the most important Soviet production companies, Mezhrabpom. Mezhrabpom kept up its close link with Prometheus in Germany and was highly successful in producing films for export.[20]

The USSR was certainly never a major participant in the Film Europe movement. The government would hardly have been interested in helping set up a healthy capitalist film industry in a European context. The IAH, however, was interested in using the films it produced in the USSR to promote an international workers' cinema.[21] By their early and continuing links with the German film industry, Soviet producers and distributors indirectly benefited from the Film Europe movement. By the late 1920s, Soviet films had gained a wide reputation abroad, in part because of the kind of international film circulation fostered by Film Europe through, for example, artistically oriented film expositions and conferences. During the early 1920s, such exhibitions had been organised within single countries and focused on the national cinema of the organising body. In the spring of 1928, however, the first internationally focused exhibition, the "Internationale Tentoonstellung op Filmgebied," was held in The Hague. This also happened to be the first foreign exhibition in which the Soviet film industry participated, through screenings of several Soviet Montage films and a display by the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS). A similar Soviet presence was provided in mid-1929 at the "Film und Foto" exhibition in Stuttgart, organised by the Deutsche Werkbund. These events, which occurred in part because of the growing Film Europe movement, helped give Soviet films a higher profile.[22] Soviet films would become regular attractions at international gatherings of this sort, including the film festivals founded in Venice and elsewhere in the 1930s.

From the early 1920s, however, the Soviet film industry was moving in two contradictory directions. On the one hand, its need for import and export led to increasing participation in the European film industry. On the other, the government was moving toward greater self-sufficiency and isolation from the outside world, and ultimately it would

largely choke off the film industry's connections to the European film circulation.

In general, the Soviet government gradually moved toward consolidating its entire film industry into a monopoly, though its progress in this direction was slow and fitful and ultimately did not succeed until several years after the Film Europe movement was moribund. In late 1922, the government tried to create a state monopoly by creating a firm called Goskino. This company is generally held to have been a failure; it never managed to concentrate distribution and import-export functions or to eliminate the private firms that had sprung up under the New Economic Policy. Its general programme included the exportation of films, because foreign currency was still needed to build up the physical assets of the film industry. Foreign films also had to be imported, because Goskino needed to distribute them in order to make money to expand the Soviet film industry. By 1924, Soviet film production was showing signs of health, and another attempt was made to create a state monopoly through the formation of Sovkino. Rather than subsidise industry extensively, the government demanded that the film industry pay for itself. Moreover, the film industry was supposed to expand rapidly and possibly even one day to become a major source of general revenue for the government.

Ironically, Sovkino began operating at the beginning of 1925, the same year in which Stalin's policy of "Socialism in one country" was first put forth publicly. His goal was eventual self-sufficiency, but like many other Soviet industries of the time, the film industry was largely dependent on export and import. Indeed, in the mid-1920s, the Soviet cinema was just gaining its first success in the West. In 1926 the release of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* in Berlin brought the new Soviet Montage movement dramatically to European and American attention. Late that same year, the distribution company Amkino was formed in New York, acting as the outlet for most Soviet films entering the American market during the 1920s and 1930s.

Sovkino's policies were, however, already under attack within the USSR, and the attacks intensified as the decade progressed.[23] Many viewed both the import and export of films as dangerous to the Soviet film industry. Western films brought undesirable ideological views to workers and peasants, presenting bourgeois ideals and Hollywood's images of the luxuries of consumer society. Perhaps more surprisingly, however, film exports were seen as ideologically suspect.[24] Officials had no particular wish to spread communist ideas through cinematic

propaganda, despite what censors and critics in the West seem to have suspected, given the widespread editing and outright banning of Soviet films abroad. The Soviet government and film industry had other, simpler intentions in sending films abroad: to generate an inflow of foreign currency. As far as ideology was concerned, exportation was widely viewed as creating a more decadent Soviet cinema. Sovkino was repeatedly accused of ignoring ideological correctness in its attempt to appeal to foreign audiences. Sovkino films were consistently compared with foreign films and found to be too similar. They were not considered entirely fit for domestic audiences.

Thus Sovkino was caught in a bind. It had to import and export in order to pay for the build-up of the Soviet industry, but it was attacked by government officials and the press for doing so. This kind of criticism continued in spite of the apparent success of Sovkino. During the 1927–8 season, Soviet films for the first time generated more revenue on the domestic market than imported films.[25]

The first Soviet Five-Year Plan was announced in December 1927, and applied to the film industry in March 1928. As in other industries, it called for the elimination of imports and for self-sufficiency in production; exports were to be used to finance the continued build-up of the cinema in the USSR. In effect, this meant that the whole notion of co-operation with European film-producing nations was now against official policy. Soviet film did not achieve the goals of the Five-Year Plan on schedule: while exports continued with some success during the late 1920s and early 1930s, imports also continued into the mid-1930s.

The Five-Year Plan in film took some time to achieve its goals primarily because the industry was wholly dependent on foreign raw stock and equipment at the time the plan started. In order to make the Soviet cinema self-sufficient in these areas, manufacturing had to be built up from scratch. One part of the plan was to avoid the importation of the new sound-film technology pioneered primarily in the USA and Germany. Through government control, the introduction of sound was largely delayed in the USSR until technically successful systems could be invented and innovated domestically. Production of sound films began in 1930, but a lack of funds and a far-flung system of locally owned rural cinema installations caused a slow conversion to sound exhibition. The Soviet industry was still making silent films into the mid-1930s, and the silent period persisted there longer than in any other major producing country except Japan. During the early 1930s, however, the goal of self-sufficiency was achieved. Similarly, the

Five-Year Plan demanded that all raw film stock for the domestic industry be produced in Soviet plants. It took several years to build the promised factories, but they opened in late 1931. During 1932 there occurred a complete switchover from 100 per cent imported to 100 per cent domestic raw stock.[26] Hence the Soviets did succeed in providing the material base which had originally delayed the recovery of the entire film industry.

In 1930, the film industry was again restructured in a way which changed its operations. The foreign dealings of all industries in the USSR came under more centralised control through the formation of a series of import-export combines; the cinema combine was Intorgkino, formed in April. Then, during May and June, Sovkino was replaced by Soyuzkino, a company controlling the domestic market. It formed a more complete monopoly than had Sovkino and was vertically integrated to control all segments of the industry. Together Intorgkino and Soyuzkino changed the earlier policies of Sovkino. Officials at Sovkino had persisted in their orientation toward import despite the Five-Year Plan. Now imports fell more rapidly. According to American customs figures for shipments of film into and out of the USA, 1932 marked the first year when the Soviets achieved a trade surplus with the USA.[27] By 1937, virtually no imports were going into the USSR. Indeed, in that year a major American trade publication, the *Film Daily Year Book*, gave up covering the USSR in its annual survey of foreign markets; there was simply no hope for American firms dealing with the USSR.

In 1935 the last separate production company within the USSR, Mezhrabpom, was dissolved into Soyuzkino. Mezhrabpom, as we have seen, originated through investments and loans from the German communist group, the IAH, in the mid-1920s. By 1933, the remnant of the IAH had fled the Nazi regime, re-establishing itself in Paris. The Comintern dissolved it in 1935, precipitating the disappearance of Mezhrabpom as a separate entity in the USSR.[28] Thus the last vestige of Soviet co-operation with European film interests in the 1920s was eliminated, and a totally monopolistic, nationalistic organisation was achieved within the film industry.

Germany

The situation in Germany presents some parallels to that of the USSR, in the sense that the Nazi government eventually nationalised the film industry and capped the process of cartelisation by forming one large monopolistic company in 1942. The circumstances that led to that

culmination were, however, vastly different. Germany had been the leader and the stabilising force in the Film Europe movement, and the country that had benefited most from the movement's achievements. Yet this success made it all the easier for Germany to turn away from co-operative policies and attempt to dominate its neighbours' markets once the adverse effects of the Depression became apparent.

Germany was among the countries hardest hit by the economic crisis, and it has been argued that some effects of the slump surfaced there even earlier than in the USA.[29] The German film industry suffered through deepening crisis between 1929 and 1932. The introduction of sound meant that costs were rising, and the major producers were competing fiercely among themselves. There was no structure comparable to the relatively peaceful oligopoly within the Hollywood film industry; that oligopoly had established itself in the 1910s and 1920s, functioning without cut-throat competition. By contrast, in Germany large firms frequently absorbed smaller ones or drove them out of business. While there were eighty-three film production companies in existence in 1929, the number had fallen to forty-nine by 1934. Moreover, many of the smaller companies became contractually linked to the three largest German firms during that period. One of the most powerful firms was Tobis-Klangfilm, which had arisen only with the introduction of sound in 1929. During the early 1930s it expanded its influence both horizontally and vertically. Of the forty-nine firms mentioned as existing in 1934, twenty-four had links to Tobis. Nazi policy consistently favoured the trend toward concentration in the film industry.

During the 1930s, the Nazis fostered a course of consolidation, first toward oligopoly and later toward monopoly. The few biggest companies, primarily Ufa and Tobis-Klangfilm, continued to expand, and the many small companies that had typically existed alongside them were gradually eliminated. The nationalisation process began in 1936 with the formation of a government-sponsored company to buy up the existing film companies, and culminated in 1942 with the formation of the state monopoly, Ufa-Film, or Ufi.[30]

Determining the reasons for Germany's withdrawal from its leading role in the Film Europe movement depends on an examination of Nazi policies concerning import and export. Even before nationalisation began, government regulation and policy were influential in these areas. For example, in 1933 the government changed the existing system for awarding certificates to films being shown domestically. Previously such

certificates had been used simply to indicate the artistic quality of a film so that it could qualify for tax breaks. Now all films had to have a certificate to be exhibited at all. Some of the categories added over the years were "Politically especially valuable," "Valuable for youth," and "Artistically valuable." This last description was reserved for prestigious films, many earmarked primarily for export.[31] For the most part, however, the Nazis favoured strongly nationalistic films. This attitude went against the Film Europe spirit of the 1920s, when it was widely assumed that films should appeal to an international audience. For example, on 23 March 1933 Goebbels addressed the film producers' organisation for the first time, informing them of new policies and claiming that: "I gain the impression that all present are honestly willing to co-operate. The film can only be re-established on a healthy basis if German nationality is remembered in the industry, and German nature is portrayed by it."[32] This could be interpreted as an anti-Jewish statement, but it also suggests a more general desire to avoid films calculated to appeal to any non-German groups. Similarly, when the new head of the German theatre-owners' association gave an address shortly thereafter, he expressed similar sentiments. David Hull describes his speech:

> He warned the audience that the "Friedrichstrasse crowd" (a reference to the Berlin street where Jewish producers had their offices) was through for good. Germany did not want to cut herself off from the rest of the world, he said, but German films must be made by Germans who understand the spirit of the German people. All non-Germans in distribution must go.[33]

Again, Hull takes this reference to the "Friedrichstrasse crowd" as directed only against Jewish producers. It is worth noting, however, that the Friedrichstrasse was also the location of many of the foreign companies' import and export offices. Quite early on, then, nationalism became the explicit policy of the Nazi government, and this discouraged any sort of co-operation with other countries in regard to the circulation of films.

Exportation, however, was still necessary to various German industries. In general, Germany had only a very small stock of gold and foreign currencies, but the country was still dependent on imports of certain raw materials. Hence it needed to keep exporting goods in order to be able to pay for these imports. When the Depression hit Germany,

bank runs and unemployment alarmed foreign lenders and investors, and many withdrew their money from the country in mid-1931. Exports of manufactured goods were central to the Nazi policy of recovery and expansion, and despite lowered film imports, the German industry tried to maintain exports at as high a level as possible. David Welch argues that this was one reason for the delay in nationalising the film industry until the second half of the 1930s, since such a move would have scared away foreign buyers of German films.[34]

Nevertheless, film exports did fall. In 1929 approximately one-third of the cost of an average feature film was paid by export revenues. By the 1934–5 season, these revenues paid only 8 per cent of the industry's income, and they had fallen to 7 per cent by 1938–9.[35] Despite attempts at appeasement abroad, there was much resentment of the Nazi regime. Exhibitors in many countries would not want to risk offending their patrons. For example, when Hitler became Chancellor in 1933, all German films playing in New York theatres were immediately withdrawn—with the significant exception of *Mädchen in Uniform*, which was publicised as an anti-Prussian film and therefore inimical to the new regime.[36] There were also many Jews and others in film industries abroad who despised the Nazi regime and refused to deal in German films.

Customs figures on American imports and exports give an indication of the fortunes of German films abroad. German exports to the American market reached their peak between 1930 and 1932, and then declined. Similarly, American exports to Germany peaked for the entire inter-war period in 1929 and 1930, then fell fairly regularly; there was a considerable drop from 1933 to 1934. As Ufa had its own branch office in New York City during this period, the USA seems a good market by which to judge the general decline of German films on world markets.[37] Government protectionism and support did aid the domestic German film industry until the country began definitively to lose the war. Certainly the long-range Nazi policy was to take over foreign markets through conquest rather than co-operation. Territorial invasions during 1930 and 1940 created an expanded film market with no competition. Welch states that by the end of 1939, German distributors had a monopoly within an area containing about 8,300 theatres, well over double the number of theatres in Germany itself.[38]

Ultimately the effects of the Depression in Germany and the changed policies under the Nazi regime were almost certainly the most significant

factors in the decline of the Film Europe movement. The withdrawal of the USSR from extensive participation in the European market would not have made an significant difference by itself, but Germany had been the leader of the movement from the start. It had probably the only film industry capable of fostering a co-operative policy into the sound era, but at that crucial point the German industry moved in an entirely different direction.

France

The third producing country, France, also showed signs of attempting to develop a film industry organised around larger companies. In this case the outcome was quite different from the state monopolies that developed in Germany and the USSR. Since the First World War, France's film industry had adhered to the general pattern of business in that country, which lagged behind the more developed industrial countries. While the USA, Britain, Germany and Japan modernised technology and developed large, vertically integrated corporations, France clung to an ideal of small, privately owned businesses. Such companies often lacked the means to modernise and were too small to benefit from economies of scale. Many were family firms and had a small, regular market. Such a situation did not foster competition, and the firms had little reason to innovate. Despite the growth of some large industries during the 1920s, the pattern of small companies lingered into the 1930s.[39]

The film industry was no exception. After the war, there were few companies that were vertically integrated. The relatively large companies had only small theatre chains and were reluctant to undertake production, preferring to distribute independently produced films. This meant that small production companies had to take most of the financial risks. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the bulk of the French production sector was made up of dozens of small firms that produced only two or three films before going under. Such firms were constantly entering and leaving the market-place. Moreover, there was little organisation of any type within the industry. Since the vast majority of theatres and distribution companies were individually owned, their interests were often opposed to those of the producers. The French film industry was not particularly successful at controlling its own market, and it also did badly in foreign markets. The number of French films released in Britain and Germany rose only slightly in the late 1920s, and very few French companies succeeded in having their films released

in the USA. As a result, producers had a difficult time amortising their films.

Sound did bring a small boost in 1930 and 1931, at least domestically and in the German market. This boost was aided by the fact that the Depression hit France somewhat later than other countries. Moreover, many in France actually believed that the system of small businesses would protect it from the effects of the economic crisis altogether. Such confidence, combined with hopes for high profits from sound films, led to a higher rate of investment in the French film industry. During 1929 big film companies formed or expanded through mergers. Tobis-Klangfilm, for instance, formed a major production subsidiary in France, which soon became one of the most successful exporters of French product, including René Clair's first four sound films. 1929 also saw the formation of Gaumont-Franco-Film-Aubert, a merger of three companies, including Aubert, the French half of the 1924 German–French mutual distribution pact with Ufa. When, in the same year, the largest French firm, Pathé, became Pathé-Natan through a similar merger, the French industry seemed to be moving along a path similar to those of the American firms when they formed the Hollywood oligopoly a decade earlier.[40]

As a result of this investment and growth, production rose significantly over the next few years. However, these big companies and other relatively large ones failed to form a successful oligopoly. Instead, they practised cut-throat competition in an attempt to monopolise the industry. A government report in 1936 concluded that the French industry structure of the early 1930s had been weakened by the great contrast between these big, vertically integrated firms and the many small, independent producers: "The large companies committed the error, in the early years of sound, of wanting to enlarge themselves in order to monopolize the French market."[41]

The competition was simply too intense; it caused a great number of failures among both types of companies in the mid-1930s. The crisis peaked in 1934, when Gaumont-Franco-Film-Aubert almost went bankrupt, and was saved only by a government loan. In the second half of the decade, production was almost entirely given over to a host of tiny independent companies, as the industry reverted to a nearly total lack of vertical integration. As a result, investment and credit remained low, since many companies inevitably failed.[42]

These problems meant that French film was still weak abroad. It fared better in its domestic market, aided by a series of government

trade barriers introduced from 1933 on. Up to that point, the French government had offered little protection against imported films. It had set up a weak quota in the late 1920s, allowing seven foreign films to be imported for every one French one released domestically. Even this quota could not be rigidly enforced, since French production was not usually high enough to meet the theatres' demand. In 1933, however, a quota of dubbed features was set for the next year's import, and the required number was raised in each subsequent year. This quota involved the first attempt to set a definite number to imported films, instead of the earlier ratio of imported films to domestic ones. The *Film Daily Year Book*'s coverage of France suggests that this new regulation was the first actually to hinder American firms releasing in France. Over the next few years the French share of its domestic market slowly grew, while the American and German portions declined. After 1935, the German share fell considerably. French films continued to be more popular than American imports in the domestic market. At mid-decade they reached 50 per cent of the French market for the first time since the war. Moreover, after a long decline in box-office receipts induced by the Depression, French revenues finally began to rise in 1937, and the crisis eased slightly.[43]

All this suggests that France was more successful on its own than it had been as part of the Film Europe movement, although the change was slow and unspectacular, and French film-makers and commentators still considered the industry to be in crisis in the late 1930s. During the 1920s, co-operation with other countries had benefited them rather than the weaker French industry. In the first half of the 1930s, German films in particular continued to be important in the French market, and French companies were remarkably willing to continue their co-operation.[44] Germany maintained a policy of making French-language versions of its films long after other countries had stopped doing so. France continued to enter into co-productions with German firms and sent its best personnel regularly to work in Germany.[45] Thus the remnants of the Film Europe policy apparently continued to benefit German firms more than French ones.

Conclusions

The decline of the Film Europe movement paralleled that of the general European idea and the effort to create a federation of European states. After much discussion during the 1920s, this effort came to a head at

the Tenth Session of the League of Nations Assembly in September 1929 in Geneva. There Aristide Briand, France's Foreign Minister and one of the central supporters of the European idea, proposed a European federation; he was backed by Stresemann and Herriot. There was much debate over the next few years, but it soon became clear that the project was doomed. The rising right-wing parties in Germany condemned the move as an "enslavement" of their nation. Stresemann's death on 7 March 1929 and Briand's on 7 March 1932 were severe blows. By the autumn of 1931, the European idea was waning quickly, and it was soon largely eclipsed. It never died out completely, however, and after the Second World War it helped form the basis for the formations of the Council of Europe, the Common Market and the developing European Union.

The Film Europe movement, though short-lived, had some significant effects. For one thing, it made many film-makers known outside their own countries who might otherwise have remained primarily national figures. One result of this was probably to pave the way for the assimilation of European émigrés into the Hollywood industry during the 1930s and 1940s. In addition, the circulation of films provided many influences that enhanced styles of film-making throughout the world. (Teinosuke Kinugasa's *Page of Madness* [1926] and Carl Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* [1928] are only two of the more obvious early examples.) Ultimately Film Europe contributed institutions which have been far more thoroughly developed in the subsequent decades. Today international film festivals, co-productions, and multinational casts and crews are common strategies. All of them either originated during the 1920s or at least received their first widespread and systematic use then.

Notes

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1. For figures on the decline in American control, see my *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907–1934* (London: British Film Institute, 1985), pp. 124–8, or Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), p. 186.
2. For an account of the American move to domination in world film markets and the European response, see *Exporting Entertainment*, chs 3 and 4.
3. Some films did make their way into Germany via the nearby neutral countries; a salesman for one major export company described having seen American films regularly in Berlin theatres during 1919. Some German companies were reported to have block-booked their product into theatres for 1920 and 1921, in order to prevent American films from flooding in. *Moving Picture World*, 8 May 1920, p. 811; 20 September 1919, p. 1824.
4. Derek H. Aldcroft, *From Versailles to Wall Street 1919–1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 125–49.
5. "Die Kinotheater der Erde," *Lichtbilbühne*, vol. 14, No. 4, 22 January 1921, p. 27.
6. A. George Smith, "English, French and Italian Films Will Reduce American Exportation," *Moving Picture World*, vol. 43, no. 9, 28 February 1920, p. 1423.
7. For one of many statements on this point, see W. Wengeroff, "Es darf nicht gezogt werden!," *Lichtbildbühne*, vol. 17, no. 86, 26 July 1924, p. 14.
8. For a general history of this trend, see Carl H. Pegg, *Evolution of the European Idea, 1914–1932* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).
9. C. de Danilowicz, "Chez Erich Pommer," *Cinémagazine*, vol. 4, no. 27, 4 July 1924, p. 11.
10. For a discussion of the debate over what the nature of "continental" or "international" films should be, see my "National or International Films? The European Debate During the 1920s," *Film History*, vol. 8, no. 3, Autumn 1996, pp. 281–96.
11. For a more detailed discussion of Westi, see Thomas Saunders's essay in this volume.
12. For a more detailed discussion of Parufamet, see Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment*, pp. 107–1.
13. C.S. Sewell, " 'The Miracle of the Wolves,' " *Moving Picture World*, vol. 73, no. 1, 7 March 1925, pp. 39–40; advertisement for *The Miracle of the Wolves, Moving Picture World*, vol. 73, no. 6, 11 April 1925, p. 526.
14. *New York Times*, 22 June 1928, p. 5.
15. For further discussion of this development, see Joseph Garncarz's essay in this volume.
16. P.A. Harlé, "1930—France—1931," *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1931, p. 572.

17. Quoted in Francis Courtade, *Les Maledictions du cinêma français* (Paris: Éditions Alain Moreau, 1978), p. 117.
18. For accounts of this period in Britain, see Robert Murphy's "A Rival to Hollywood? The British Film Industry in the Thirties," *Screen*, vol. 24, nos 4/5, July/October 1983, pp. 96–106; and Rachel Low, *Film Making in 1930s Britain* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985).
19. On the Soviet Union's film trade with Germany during the 1920s, see my "Government Policies and Practical Necessities in the Soviet Cinema of the 1920s," in Anna Lawton, ed., *The Red Screen: Politics, Society, Art in the Soviet Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 24, 28–38, and "Eisenstein's Early Films Abroad," in Ian Christie and Richard Taylor, eds, *Eisenstein Rediscovered* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 55–9.
20. For accounts of the IAH's film work, see Vance Kepley, Jr, "The Workers' International Relief and the Cinema of the Left 1921–1935," *Cinema Journal*, vol. 23, no. 1, Fall 1983, pp. 7–23, and Denise Hartsough, "Soviet Film Distribution and Exhibition in Germany, 1921–1933," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1986, pp. 131–48.
21. Willi Munzenberg, *Solidarität: Zehn Jahre Internationale Arbeitershilfe, 1921–1931* (Berlin: Newer Deutscher Verlag, 1931), p. 515.
22. On these and other exhibitions and conferences with Soviet participation, see my "Early Film Exhibitions and the 1920s European Avant-Garde Cinema," in Thomas W. Gaehtgens, ed., *Künstlerischer Austausch/Artistic Exchange: Akten des XXVIII. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte Berlin, 15–20. Juli 1992* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), pp. 147–50.
23. Denise Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era, 1918–1935* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), p. 112.
24. Richard Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema 1917–1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 96; Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era*, p. 112.
25. Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema*, p. 65.
26. B. Kotiev, "L'organisation cinematographique en U.R.S.S.," in A. Aroseff, ed., *Le Cinema en U.R.S.S.* (Moscow, 1936), p. 215.
27. Based on annual figures from the *Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), for the late 1920s and early 1930s.
28. Kepley, "The Workers' International Relief," p. 19.
29. Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression 1929–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 116–17; R.J. Overy, *The Nazi Economic Recovery 1932–1938* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 18.
30. David Welsh, *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 36.
31. Ibid., pp. 20–1.

32. Quoted in David Stewart Hull, *Film in the Third Reich* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 18–19.
33. Ibid., p. 23.
34. Welsh, *Propaganda and the German Cinema*, p. 30.
35. Ibid., p. 31.
36. "German Films Get a Setback in City," *New York Times*, 9 May 1933, p. 20.
37. *Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, for years cited).
38. Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema*, p. 35.
39. Nathanael Green, *From Versailles to Vichy: The Third French Republic 1919–1940* (Arlington Heights, IL: AHM Publishing, 1970), pp. 5–12.
40. Georges Sadoul, *French Film* (London: Falcon, 1953), p. 56; Richard Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave 1915–1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 62–3.
41. Quoted in Paul Leglise, *Histoire de la politique du cinêma français: Le cinêma et la III Republique* (Paris: Librairie Générale de la droit et de juriprudence, 1970), p. 123.
42. Ibid., pp. 107 and 123; Raymonde Borde, "The Golden Age: French Cinema in the 1930s," in Mary Lea Bandy, ed., *Rediscovering French Film* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1983), pp. 67–9.
43. Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment*, pp. 119–21, 211–12; *Film Daily Yearbook* (coverage of France, 1929–38); P.A. Harle, "France During 1937," *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1938, p. 1147.
44. On German-French Film relations in this period, see several of the essays in Sibylle M. Sturm and Arthur Wohlgemuth, eds, *Hallo Berlin? Ici Paris! Deutsch-französische Filmbeziehungen 1918–1939* (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 1996).
45. Courtade, *Les Maledictions du cinêma*, p. 107.