

stability. Even though this book only details limited aspects of 1920s and 1930s European cinema, it nevertheless focuses on how knowledge was produced and disseminated, how processes of institution building and stabilization took hold, how different temporal registers led to (productive) misunderstandings and adaptive behaviour, why specific initiatives proved to be successful while others vanished (almost) without a trace. The way in which this volume proposes to understand the 1930s is to see the decade as the ‘incubator’ of developments that became influential much later. Many of today’s insights and critical methodologies in film and media studies can be traced back to ideas and arguments in 1930s Europe, and their rivalling and often mutually exclusive claims continue to shape critical debates to this very day. David Bordwell’s and Kristin Thompson’s neo-formalist approach, for example, combines a psychological Gestalt theory influenced by Rudolf Arnheim and others with Russian neo-formalist vocabulary and an attention to the intricacies of montage as learned from Eisenstein and Vertov. Equally, much of current media theory is unthinkable without Walter Benjamin’s and Siegfried Kracauer’s interventions which took shape through their encounter with 1920s alternative film culture. In particular, Kracauer’s model of writing a national history of German cinema, and Benjamin’s approach to the mediality of film, have provided the classical templates for numerous subsequent analyses.⁸

On a general level, this book is concerned with the migration and traffic of images, ideas and people within the institution cinema in its widest sense. This is of course a topic that is all too familiar and current, as we today partake in the global circulation of film images via digital networks. In this sense, the collection can be understood as a genealogical investigation into how certain practices, institutions and assumptions took hold in the 1930s on a transnational level. But we should not lump all instances of border crossing together under a single term, but instead differentiate between phases and usages. Dudley Andrew has, in a discussion of contemporary film culture, proposed a historical schema of how the ‘vast geographical flow of images, as well as the time-lag that inevitably accompanies it’ has passed through various phases since the beginnings of film in the late nineteenth century. For him an ontological slippage lies at the heart of cinema, a ‘*décalage* ... between “here and there” and “now and then”’⁹ that distinguishes cinema from television with its incessant liveness and direct address. Whether one wants to follow Andrew in his Bazinian media ontology or not, an outline of five phases through which the cinema has passed