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Importing Asta Nielsen:  
The International Film Star in  
the Making 1910–1914

Editors: Martin Loiperdinger and Uli Jung

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The International Film Star  
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## British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Importing Asta Nielsen:  
The International Film Star in the Making 1910–1914

Series: KINtop Studies in Early Cinema – volume 2

**A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library**

ISBN: 9780 86196 708 7 (Paperback)

*Cover:* Cut-out of a poster from Det Danske Filminstitut.

Published by  
**John Libbey Publishing Ltd**, 3 Leicester Road, New Barnet, Herts EN5 5EW, United Kingdom

e-mail: [john.libbey@orange.fr](mailto:john.libbey@orange.fr); web site: [www.johnlibbey.com](http://www.johnlibbey.com)  
Direct orders (UK and Europe): [direct.orders@marston.co.uk](mailto:direct.orders@marston.co.uk)

Distributed in N. America by **Indiana University Press**, 601 North Morton St,  
Bloomington, IN 47404, USA. [www.iupress.indiana.edu](http://www.iupress.indiana.edu)

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Printed and bound in China by 1010 Printing International Ltd.

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## Acknowledgements

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This book collects the proceedings of the international conference “Importing Asta Nielsen: cinema-going and the making of the star system in the early 1910s” which took place at the German Film Museum in Frankfurt, 27 to 29 September 2011, hosted by Deutsches Filminstitut. We wish to thank all participants for their willingness to submit their contributions. We were lucky to be able to invite since yet another number of researchers who did fine and original research on Asta Nielsen’s significance in countries which could not be covered during the conference. Their contributions are an invaluable addition to the scope of this book.

We are grateful to Det Danske Filminstitut, Copenhagen; Nordisk Film Archive, Valby; Icelandic Film Archive, Reykjavík; National Library of Sweden, Stockholm; National Archive of Finland, Helsinki; Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin; Renate Seydel Collection, Berlin; Stadtarchiv Mannheim; Stadtarchäologie, Zurich; Archiv Tram-Museum, Zurich; Musée historique de Lausanne; Archives Départementales de la Moselle, Saint-Julien-lès-Metz; Médiathèque de Metz for giving us permission to use photographs from their collections. We also owe thanks to Scott Merrillees and Equinox Publishing, Jakarta, for making available to us picture post cards from the book *Greetings from Jakarta*.

Filmarchiv Austria, Vienna, permitted us to translate and print two articles from Heide Schlüpmann et al. (eds): *Unheimliche Liebe. Asta Nielsen, ihr Kino*. They also gave us access to frame enlargements made from Asta Nielsen film prints of the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Berlin, and of Det Danske Filminstitut, Copenhagen. Moreover, Pyotr Bagrov and Anna Kovalova, St. Petersburg; Marlis Schmidt, Filmarchiv Austria, Ian O’Sullivan, British Film Institute; Thorsten Kretzer, University of Trier, helped us with the provisioning and production of illustrations. Frankie Kann, Trier, proof-read, corrected, and oftentimes translated into English all manuscripts by non-anglophone authors. Her fine and vigorous contribution to this book cannot be underestimated.

This volume was made possible through the generous grant of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation, DFG) for the conference, and through funds provided by Deutsches Filminstitut, Frankfurt, and the University of Trier for the proceedings of the conference.

Supplementary to conference and book alike there is the online database *Importing Asta Nielsen* which collects adverts and articles of the trade press and local press from all over the world to provide sources for further research on the distribution and exhibition of Asta Nielsen films before the First World War. This database will be expanded by and by once new findings will turn up. The database *Importing Asta Nielsen* was generously supported by Freundeskreis Universität Trier.



# Spansk Elskov.

I Hovedrollen: **Asta Nielsen**

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### Introduction

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The beginning of Asta Nielsen's film career is breathtaking: After the unknown actress of the Copenhagen New Theatre had appeared in the lead role of her debut film *AFGRUNDEN* (DK 1910), she became a well-known and popular actress in many countries all over Europe and beyond, within only one year. *AFGRUNDEN* (*THE ABYSS*) was premiered on 12 September 1910 in Copenhagen and distributed widely in many countries of the continent in the 1910/11 season. In this very same season two 'white slave' films produced by the Danish company Nordisk Film caused a furore alongside *AFGRUNDEN*. They were shown in many cities, be it shortly before, shortly after, or at the same time as *AFGRUNDEN*. In some places, e.g. in Warsaw, it was promoted as part of a 'white slave series'.<sup>1</sup>

In 1910 the European film market had gone through a crisis of overproduction of short film programmes for two years. New economic impulses were urgently needed: a new kind of film which could be produced, distributed and exhibited profitably. Long-feature films, which could have long running periods in the cinemas, promised to be the lifesaver. While short film programmes were usually exchanged after only three or four days, *AFGRUNDEN* played at the film theatre Kosmorama in Copenhagen, belonging to the producer, for several weeks on end. The producer sold the exhibition rights to *AFGRUNDEN* to various countries where the film was usually distributed and exhibited as an exclusive – as was the case in Germany. In Paris it ran as an exclusive for four weeks.<sup>2</sup> In a short period of time, in the spring of 1911, two more films with Asta Nielsen in the lead role were also released in Germany and distributed abroad. And as of August and September 1911 the first 'Asta Nielsen series' made in Berlin started in many European countries.

Asta Nielsen had not only proven herself a convincing actress, but she had entered the cinema business in Germany's first exclusive long-feature at exactly the right time. She was also embraced by audiences as a new actress whose acting skills convinced not only the general public, but also the cultural elite. A German trade paper reports from Düsseldorf:

Facing page:  
Danish poster for *TOD IN SEVILLA* (*SPANISH BLOOD*). [Det Danske Filminstitut.]

Up to now, it was assumed that all film dramas were 'kitsch'. But *ABGRÜNDE*, showing at the *Palast-Theater*, has all of a sudden made artists enthusiastic fans of cinema pantomime. The audience was delighted by everything about this film, not the least by the gaucho dance. (...) I have met almost no artist or actor there who had not seen *ABGRÜNDE* [*AFIGRUNDEN*] for the third, fourth, fifth or even the eighth time. (...) At any rate, *ABGRÜNDE* has contributed a great deal, if not the most, to turning the conversation in society more than usual to film theatre and to leading people whom you would never expect to go to the cinema.<sup>3</sup>

It follows that the art circuit of Düsseldorf, at the time the Western German centre of high art and highbrow entertainment, shaped the tastes of the city's 'better circles' and selected *AFIGRUNDEN* (and thus Asta Nielsen) as an example of a new attraction for the educated. This is an example of how the audience thus laid the ground work of her success in Germany<sup>4</sup> – a popular success that quickly spread internationally. This earned Asta Nielsen and Urban Gad, the writer-director, an exclusive contract for three 'Asta Nielsen series'. In her autobiography the actress reminisces:

Out there in the world outside, *ABGRÜNDE* ran in triumph across the white screen, and outside sat a few men who could both see and calculate. And, when everything was all totalled up, the quills scratched a thick line drawn under the sum. The noise became a brief squeak with which the door to the world opened for me.<sup>5</sup>

With her acting skills she had created the necessary prerequisites to acquire the status of a star. Most commentators and historiographers, starting with Béla Balázs, and also the later academic research literature, have focussed on Asta Nielsen's proficiencies as an actress. But only a few publications have focussed on the role of the film trade in the transition from short film programmes to multiple-reel films. In her ground-breaking standard work *Frühe deutsche Kinematographie*, Corinna Müller has explored the economic changes that shaped the German film market before the First World War by analysing the trade journals of the time.<sup>6</sup> In his dissertation, Ivo Blom has more or less done the same for the Netherlands by studying the commercial correspondence of the Amsterdam cinema owner and film distributor Jean Desmet.<sup>7</sup> Some articles in the magnificent two-volume homage to Asta Nielsen, edited by Heide Schlüpmann, Karola Gramann et al., *Unmögliche Liebe* and *Nachtfalter*, cover the international distribution, exhibition and allotment of Asta Nielsen films in different countries.<sup>8</sup>

From this, the international conference "Importing Asta Nielsen: Cinema-Going and the Making of the Star System in the Early 1910s", held at the Deutsches Filmmuseum in Frankfurt in late September 2011, took its point of departure. More than two dozen film scholars scrutinized the role Asta Nielsen films played in different film markets of various countries, in distribution and exhibition practices, in the competition between local cinemas, in the innovation in film marketing and film advertising, in short, in the establishment of a new basis for the film markets in many countries around the world. This book collects the presentations given at the conference; even more contributors were invited to enlarge the number of national, regional, and local case studies. Thus

we acquired quite an overview of the various strategies applied in different countries to establish Asta Nielsen as a film star within an environment of film marketing which at the same time launched a new film commodity requiring new modes of film trading and film exhibition: the exclusive long-feature changed the film programmes profoundly and subsequently also the habit of cinema-going.

As a consequence of an overproduction of short films, which made up the programmes of the store front cinemas as well as the cinema theatres and cinema palaces,<sup>9</sup> the film industry resorted to the production of long-feature films to overcome the economic crisis. At the same time a rental system was introduced that guaranteed cinema owners the exclusive rights to exhibit films for a defined territory for a specified period of time.

To achieve this structural change in cinema programming, the long-feature film alone was not sufficient because the markets were not unified. Small towns which had seen travelling cinemas at their fairgrounds and which were now met with a single fixed-site cinema cannot be compared with sizeable cities which boasted, early on, the competition of several cinema enterprises at the same time. Whereas the short film programmes were more or less indistinguishable from one another, the long-feature film – especially under the conditions of the exclusive rental system – set apart the offer by one cinema in town from those of all other venues. Still, the long-feature was no guarantee of success. Sizeable segments of the audience continued to fancy the diversity of the short film programme, which catered to all kinds of individual predilections; hence, some audiences preferred the short films stubbornly to the *Kilometer-Films*, as they were ironically called in Germany during this period. This induced producers and distributors in various countries to take new measures to draw cinema-goers to the shows. In Germany and Denmark, for example, reputable literary artists were hired (and duly advertised) as scriptwriters; in Italy grandiose historical or mythical epics were produced and proved very successful. Also biographical films on great figures of history and culture were made in many countries. Yet another measure which was most promising was the branding of films by linking them to the name of an actor. This is where Asta Nielsen comes in.

The crucial point in most countries was to establish Asta Nielsen as a star. The offer that the distributor Internationale Films-Vertrieb-Gesellschaft (IFVG) made was accepted by distributors, exhibitors and audiences in many countries. For distributors and exhibitors this was a result of promising perspectives to make money by speculating on mostly rising box-office earnings. For audiences, this was a result of their desire for entertainment and their craving to see Asta Nielsen. Once in the cinema theatre, they felt confirmed by the innovative adverts. These, on the other hand, looked very much the same nearly all over the world. In many local newspapers theatre owners started advertising Asta Nielsen in adverts ever increasing in size, embellished with portrait sketches or even photographs of the actress, as can be seen in

Mannheim, Innsbruck, Lausanne etc. On the other hand, when the *Innsbrucker Nachrichten* introduced a regular film column to the paper, adverts for films became rather standardised, and special adverts in larger size and print became rare. In Barcelona, film adverts were treated like those for stage plays. They had the same size, the same layout – they did not look like commercial adverts but rather like announcements.

Many of the adverts for Asta Nielsen films conspicuously look alike to a degree that it seems more than probable that they were being orchestrated by the German companies: highlighting Asta Nielsen's name, many times over in even larger print than the title of the film, graphic portraits of the leading lady, embellishing her name with epithets that suggest a comparison with the most culturally acclaimed theatrical actresses, Eleonora Duse and Sarah Bernhardt, etc. Moreover, Asta Nielsen is very often referred to as a member of the Royal Dutch Theatre, which was actually not the case. This clearly indicates that alongside the strategies to implement the exclusive rental system, yet another goal of the film industries was to attract a target audience which as yet was not likely to be interested in the cinema, namely the educated middle class who were hitherto accustomed to going to the legitimate theatre. This is furthermore evidenced by the fact that many of Asta Nielsen's films were labelled in terms of theatrical genres – as melodramas, dramas, tragedies, comedies, etc., on the screen.

This aspect must be seen in combination with the introduction of the exclusive rental system which made film exhibition more expensive for exhibitors but gave them an opportunity to lure more patrons into their cinema theatres. One of the crucial questions is to what extent it was the innovation in film exhibition or the screen personality of Asta Nielsen that made the new mode a success. These questions are furthermore complicated by the fact that the strategies did not seem to work the same in different countries. For instance, the exclusive system was not easily imposed in all local markets. Barcelona is an especially clear case in point here.<sup>10</sup> It is very likely that other local studies will bring to light similar developments in other major cities.

This, at the same time, makes it obvious that information gathered from the study of local newspapers not only grants an insight into local film (and media) history, but also gives us evidence on how differences in the overall national distribution system are reflected in local exhibition; by extension, we can learn about large scale changes on the national level by looking at the local form of exhibition. Thus it can be said that alongside the research in the trade press, which has given us quite a good insight into the marketing strategies of producers and distributors, as Corinna Müller has demonstrated convincingly in her work on the transition from short film programmes to multiple-reel feature films and the *Monopolfilm*, the German exclusive film distribution system,<sup>11</sup> the local daily press will provide us with abundant information on exhibition practices of film theatres. Hence, beyond the scope of local media historiography, a closer and more systematic scrutiny of local newspapers will

give us a better idea of how films were presented to audiences, how they were being advertised and reviewed.

The local level is where we can see Asta Nielsen's star status most clearly. First of all, we find adverts in the daily press which refer directly to bookings of her films at local film theatres – often speaking of an 'Asta Nielsen Festival' or of a 'guest appearance', yet another reference to cultural practices of the legitimate stage. Moreover, as early as in November 1911, a newly purpose-built cinema theatre opened in Düsseldorf and was named after Asta Nielsen.<sup>12</sup> She and her husband Urban Gad were present at the festive opening and the *Asta Nielsen Waltz*, especially written for the occasion, was performed.<sup>13</sup> And quite naturally an Asta Nielsen film was shown, *DER FREMDE VOGEL* (THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE). This may gain even greater significance when one remembers that the grandiose opening of the Mozartsaal, which was to become one of the most preferred venues for lavish film premieres in Berlin, was launched in September 1910 with a special programme consisting of only the most select films showing Emperor Wilhelm II.<sup>14</sup> Since films of the Kaiser were usually not distributed exclusively, they were available to any cinema owner. What could be organised in Germany's capital as a special ceremonial programme became a celebration of Asta Nielsen once she had been established as one of the most popular celebrities in the film world. Her public standing in the popular culture of her time apparently equalled that of Wilhelm II: She was expected to be able to bestow as much glamour to a cinema opening as the Kaiser could – at least outside of the capital. Also outside of Germany, she had that appeal: In Lausanne, for instance, the gala re-opening of the Royal Biograph in 1911 was celebrated with Asta Nielsen's latest film, *DEN SORTE DRØM* (THE CIRCUS GIRL). And the Nýja Bíó (new cinema), the second cinema in Reykjavík, started its showings on 29 June 1912 with *NACHTFALTER* (RETRIBUTION).

The exclusive system was a marketing measure that was meant to secure a smooth exhibition of films without direct local competition by another cinema offering the same film in the same week. Thus audiences no longer had to decide which cinema to go to in their leisure time – as had been the case with the short film programme – but rather which film to select. This system applies especially to Asta Nielsen because her name functioned as a brand linked to all those films which were part of the 'Asta Nielsen series' and were advertised as such. This marks her star status as something unique and sets her apart from all other film stars who were coming up in a short period of time. Moreover, every four to six weeks, a new film of hers appeared on the market, and the adverts placing her name above the title, oftentimes printing it even larger than the film title, indicated that Asta Nielsen had become the figurehead of a commodity that was automatically labelled by the use of her name.

Asta Nielsen and her star status were obviously very instrumental in this process, as can be seen in the example of Innsbruck, where in 1911 two cinemas competed with each another with exclusively programmed long-feature films. The exclusive exhibition of Asta Nielsen's films was so attractive for audiences



that a new film theatre which opened in April 1912 in Innsbruck secured the exclusive rights to her films, apparently hoping to make a major sweep of the local cinema-goers. One of the competing cinemas responded by announcing an exclusive Ida Nielsen series, obviously hoping that the clients would confuse the two names.<sup>15</sup>

What is most remarkable is that the marketing innovation of the exclusive rental system had not only recuperations in the local exhibition practices in Germany but that it was rather established across the world within a short time. In many countries the exclusive system was introduced as a most promising attraction for audiences and thus became the regular market policy of distributors and cinema owners. The attraction consisted, on the one hand, in the introduction of long-features which made it possible to tell more complex, psychologically more 'realistic' stories. On the other hand – and this is most significant for the purpose of this book –, it was Asta Nielsen whose screen personality was so closely linked to the establishment of the long-feature programme that it is easy to identify the one with the other. It can thus be said that, on an international scale, Asta Nielsen was very instrumental in the transformation of film marketing. Accordingly, in the 1911/12 and 1912/13 seasons, she became increasingly not only a popular film actress but rather a commodity, a brand name that was acknowledged by film exhibitors and audiences alike as guarantors of commercial success and good entertainment.

The contract that bound Asta Nielsen and Urban Gad to the Deutsche Bioscop stipulated an hitherto unheard-of salary of 85,000 marks for five months of shooting the ten films of the first 'Asta-Nielsen series', plus a percentage of the profits. What Urban Gad was being paid is not known. To obtain a return on this expense, the company had of necessity to export these films. German producers had already cooperated with international distributors. In this case, this was obviously part of the calculation to make Asta Nielsen the brand name of a new film commodity, the German 'Asta-Nielsen series'. The first series was offered as early as September 1911 in France, Sweden, the Netherlands, Great Britain, etc. Thus, in a short period of time Asta Nielsen had become a trademark. By making her films available to the international markets in short succession – a new film was released every four to six weeks during the season – the combination of the long-feature programme, Asta Nielsen as a leading actress with star qualities and new ways of advertising which by and by included the spreading of human interest stories about her in daily papers and the gradually emerging fan magazines, the concept eventually proved very lucrative commercially. As early as the 1911/12 season, the international marketing of German films was quite common, as the example of *SÜNDIGE LIEBE*, a film produced by Deutsche Bioscop shows – a film that became a success in Great Britain (titled *FOOLS OF SOCIETY*) although it could not boast of a star in the leading role.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, this mode of distribution and exhibition did not work everywhere. In the USA, for instance, Asta Nielsen's stardom was quite

limited. Although adverts constantly compared her to Sarah Bernhardt, reviewers, while lauding her films for their complex stories, often found fault with her films because they perceived them as ‘jumpy’ and lacking logic, probably due to cuts by “over-scrupulous authorities”. Her films were also cut for purely commercial reasons. Since the German long-feature format running up to one hour screening time did not fit the American programme standards, some Asta Nielsen films were cut down from three to two reels. In the 1912/13 season, some Asta Nielsen films were brought to the USA through the American outlet of Pathé Frères, who at the same time, however, specialized in the supply of those theatres which were hanging on to the traditional short-feature programme. Moreover, they invested intensely in the production of serials, which in many American theatres posed a serious competition for the long features. What is more, although Pathé initially banked on Asta Nielsen’s name, as in the cross-dressing comedy of *LADY MADCAP’S WAY* (*JUGEND UND TOLLHEIT*) – beginning with *THE DEVIL’S ASSISTANT* (*DIE SÜNDEN DER VÄTER*), trade press adverts made no mention of her. One advert for *A ROMANY SPY* (*DAS MÄDCHEN OHNE VATERLAND*) quoted three trade press reviews without including her name. Others for *A MILITANT SUFFRAGETTE* (*DIE SUFFRAGETTE*) were illustrated with production stills of Asta Nielsen’s recognizable face yet made no reference to her name at all.<sup>17</sup>

In Australia and New Zealand there was no necessity for an exclusive system, since Asta Nielsen films entered these markets usually with only one or two prints which circulated in these countries. Moreover, the long-feature film had been long established in Australia and New Zealand, so that audiences were already accustomed to long-running films. Not everywhere was Asta Nielsen the first film star in a modern sense. Australasian audiences, for example, had already had an opportunity to see recognizable stars before Asta Nielsen entered the market. Likewise in Great Britain, she was faced with the competition of other very successful actors. To be sure, she acquired quite a popular following, but an ‘Asta craze’ that could be seen in countries like Russia or Italy did not materialise. Although Asta Nielsen’s popularity in distant countries – Brazil, the Netherlands Indies, Australasia, Japan etc. – was more likely limited, yet her presence in these countries as part of the world market which had already been in place from the days of Georges Méliès and early Pathé is proof that this market was quite suitable to be used for the commercial turnover of films branded by the main actor, and Asta Nielsen was very functional in its construction. This was a result of very deliberate planning. For Arthur Mellini, editor-in-chief of the German trade journal *Lichtbild-Bühne* and, at the same time, in charge of the public relations campaign for the first ‘Asta Nielsen series’, the development of the film industry proceeded as follows:

In the very earliest period, we simply took the *film* and had interest only in the length. Later, we filled the programme according to the genre (...). Then came the period of the *plot*, a situation which continues to this day, and now we have the personality who, with her all-encompassing dramatic mimic artistry in the leading role, is to draw in the public.<sup>18</sup>

He describes this development not in terms of a natural progression, but rather as a succession of marketing modes that reflected different business activities in the various stages of the development of film into an internationally active industry. Therefore, the focus on the ‘personality’ of actors and actresses is, from Mellini’s point of view, a logical consequence of the previous stages. His last remark, of course, refers to Asta Nielsen, whose *DEN SORTE DRØM* (*DER SCHWARZE TRAUM*, *THE CIRCUS GIRL*) is reviewed in this article.

Moreover, she became an international film star who was not only advertised in connection with her films but who also became the focal point of a fan community which was interested in her persona. As a consequence, cinema owners published articles on Asta Nielsen to either promote a forthcoming film of hers or to keep the readers’ interest in her person alive. For instance, a cinema owner in Trier had told the readers of the local daily paper that Nielsen was paid 85,000 marks for the ten films of the 1911/12 season – a shooting period of five months.<sup>19</sup> The press also carried reports on Asta Nielsen’s private life in Copenhagen – or rather what was staged to pass for her private life. Even more significant is a report in the *Union-Theater-Zeitung*, founded by the Union-Theater cinema chain in 1912 and distributed in Berlin where the chain boasted of five film palaces. In its 12<sup>th</sup> issue, the paper reported that the Danish actress had moved to Berlin and had thus become a “Berlin compatriot” who was by now not only shooting films in the streets of the German capital but could also be seen at location-shootings in the Mark Brandenburg.<sup>20</sup> In addition, Asta Nielsen was also photographed in poses that suggested the privacy of her Berlin home; these images were distributed on fan picture postcards as of 1913 at the latest. They were meant to propose to the consumers that Asta Nielsen, although a famous movie star, was yet not withdrawn from the realm of reality. She had become a ‘Berliner’ like all the readers of the paper: she goes to the Mark Brandenburg and brings in her films the comforts of the countryside back to those cinema-goers who cannot afford spending their leisure time outside the metropolis. Yet, Mellini, in his aforementioned article, also points to the commercial aspect of Asta Nielsen’s popularity:

At the moment, we may consider Asta Nielsen as the *Fortuna* of cinematic art. It is, of course, regrettable that dramatic, mimic art is linked so brutally to profit, but even the best royal court actor works, after all, for hard cash, whereby, even here despite all idealism, pure materialism has gained the upper hand.<sup>21</sup>

The theatre owners can live with the gratifying fact that the famous Asta Nielsen has fled into the wide-open arms of a capitalistic society. She wishes to transform her art into money; thus the enterprising theatre managers can convert the Nielsen films into tinkling hard cash. A practical transformation that profits everyone.

Although the production of films had become more expensive, and, although the distributors bought their prints from the producers at a higher price, and, even though they rented these prints to the exhibitors at higher fees – while it was not at all clear whether the cinema owners could easily raise their admission

fees – Mellini describes the new marketing strategies in terms of a win-win situation.

Whereas the short film programmes of the century's first decade had already provoked very negative responses from educators and the clergy – ultimately leading to the formation of the cinema reform movement in Germany as of about 1907 – now it was the local authorities who eyed the new medium quite suspiciously. The venues for film screenings in fairground tents or the back-rooms of pubs and dance halls did not seem fit for the entertainment of the masses. Police in many places enforced regulations that called for special previews to prove the decency of the programmes. When long-feature films took centre stage, a new debate emerged. Especially among the educated strata of society, film started to be acknowledged as an art form which did not have to fear comparison with the legitimate stage. The strategies distributors and exhibitors had applied to promote their films, namely, to link actors to the theatres and screenplay authors to highbrow literature, did not necessarily initiate intellectual debate, but the short-lived correspondence of the two tendencies gives us a clear idea that the point of reference on both sides was the theatre or highbrow culture at large. This was applied at first to Asta Nielsen who was – as already mentioned – advertised as the ‘Duse of the art of cinema’ or the ‘*Fortuna* of the art of cinema’. But beyond that there is also mention of her versatility as an actress. Before Asta Nielsen appeared on film, all the actors who were known by name – Max Linder, Prince, André Deed etc. – were more or less fixed to the genre of comedy shorts. They stuck in the memory of audiences just because they kept appearing in ever new variations of the same. Arthur Mellini supports this point of view: “Actually, we already have the popular figure within the humorous genre”.<sup>22</sup> With the advent of Asta Nielsen the dramatic genre saw now for the first time an established film celebrity who was cherished by an ever growing fan community. But something else must be mentioned here. Asta Nielsen is perceived as a very versatile actress. On the occasion of *TOD IN SEVILLA (SPANISH BLOOD)* Paul Ehren, editor in chief of the promotional journal of the Union-Theater cinema chain, wrote:

Up to now, she has surprised us again and again. She has appeared to us as a flirtatious female, as a fighter for her beloved husband; we have seen a humiliated woman, then, in turn, a proud, domineering temperament – always someone else and yet always herself, always unmistakable – Asta Nielsen.<sup>23</sup>

Although Ehren does not refer to it explicitly, it is clear that he suggests Asta Nielsen's art to be comparable to the artistic capacities theatre-goers would expect from stage actors. What is even more: Asta Nielsen was seen throughout her early career in even a much wider variety of roles than Ehren enumerates. She appeared not only in social dramas, but also in comedies, in cross dressing roles, in historical epics, etc. This once again, must be seen as an innovation that was part of the industry's marketing strategies.

On the other hand – regardless of the growing cultural reputation of the new medium – Asta Nielsen's roles, their frequent connection to the demi-monde

– the circus, variety theatres and the like – her repeated representation of motherhood out of wedlock, her often depicted social decline as a consequence of her falling victim to aristocratic suitors etc., – all in all, the many roles she played, which were perceived as being risqué in the conservative educated middle class, called the censors to the fore in many different countries. Thus, the growing complexity of the stories told in films was answered by state and local authorities by calling into question whether the complex structure of meaning was in line with official and officious demands political and clerical circles made on society. In some countries it was the Asta Nielsen films which gave reason for establishing formally or informally working censorship boards.<sup>24</sup> Apparently, in most cases, her films were not outright banned from public screening, but many times over children and youth up to 14 or even 16 were not admitted, or the films were restricted to evening screenings when children and youth were not allowed to attend cinema shows, anyhow.

Asta Nielsen's stardom has – as can be seen in this volume – many different aspects. One can read her films in terms of marketing strategies, ideological responses, aesthetic innovation and, last but not least, unifying audiences. To be sure, by the beginning of the First World War other actors and actresses had come forward and overshadowed her star status. But when these entered the screen Asta Nielsen was already established as the first transnational European film star.<sup>25</sup>

## Notes

1. Cf. Andrzej Dębsky's article in this volume.
2. Cf. Valdo Kneubühler's article in this volume.
3. Nico, "Düsseldorf im Januar 1911", *Der Kinematograph*, no. 213 (25 January 1911).
4. Cf. Annemone Lingens's article in this volume.
5. Asta Nielsen, *Die schweigende Muse* (Berlin, GDR: Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, 1977), 127.
6. Corinna Müller, *Frühe deutsche Kinematographie. Formale, wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Entwicklungen* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 1994).
7. Ivo Blom, *Jean Desmet and the Early Dutch Film Trade* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003).
8. Heide Schlüppmann et al. (eds), *Unmögliche Liebe. Asta Nielsen, ihr Kino*, (2nd edn) (Vienna: filmarchiv austria, 2010); Karola Gramann and Heide Schlüppmann (eds), *Nachtfalter. Asta Nielsen, ihre Filme* (2nd edn) (Vienna: filmarchiv austria, 2010).
9. Cf. for a distinction of different types of fixed-site cinemas Joseph Garnarz, *Maßlose Unterhaltung. Zur Etablierung des Films in Deutschland 1896–1914* (Frankfurt and Basel: Stroemfeld, 2010).
10. Cf. the article by María Antonia Paz and Julio Montero in this volume.
11. Cf. Müller, *Frühe deutsche Kinematographie*, 105–158.
12. Cf. Sabine Lenk, "Das Asta-Nielsen-Theater in Düsseldorf (1911–1986)", in Schlüppmann, *Unmögliche Liebe*, 308–312.
13. Cf. Jeanpaul Goergen, "Drei Walzer für A.N.", in Schlüppmann, *Unmögliche Liebe*, 281–286.
14. Cf. O.A., "Lichtspiele", *Vossische Zeitung* (5 September 1910), as quoted in: Dominik Petzold, *Der Kaiser und das Kino: Herrschaftsinszenierung, Populärkultur und Filmpropaganda im Wilhelminischen Zeitalter* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012), 153.
15. Ida Nielsen was the married name of Ida Kier (1887–1918), a Danish operetta actress who appeared

## Introduction

as the leading lady in Swedish long-feature films in 1911 and 1912. Cf. Jan Olsson, *Sensationer från en bakgård. Frans Lundberg som biografägare och filmproducent i Malmö och Köpenhamn* (Stockholm: Symposion, 1988). Cf. also Patrick Blaser's article in this volume.

16. Cf. Jon Burrows' article in this volume.
17. Cf. Richard Abel's article in this volume.
18. [Arthur Mellini], "Asta Nielsen – die populäre Kino-Schauspielerin", *Lichtbild-Bühne*, no. 35 (2 September 1911).
19. *Trierischer Volksfreund* (31 October 1911). Cf. Martin Loiperdinger's article in this volume.
20. "Asta Nielsen als Berliner Bürgerin", *Union-Theater-Zeitung* 1:19 (20–26 July 1912): 15. Cf. Martin Loiperdinger's article in this volume.
21. [Mellini], "Asta Nielsen".
22. Ibid.
23. P.E. [Paul Ehren], "Die spanische Asta Nielsen. Ein neues Kinodrama", *Union-Theater-Zeitung* 2:8 (21–27 February 1913): 1.
24. Cf. the articles by Outi Hupaniittu, María Antonia Paz and Julio Montero, and especially by Jon Burrows and Anne Bachmann in this volume.
25. Cf. Ian Christie's article in this volume.

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# **PART I**

## **ASTA NIELSEN IN DENMARK**

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## Casper Tybjerg

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# Presenting AFRUNDEN in Copenhagen and Skive

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The following article will try to give a sense of how Asta Nielsen's breakthrough film AFRUNDEN was presented in Denmark on its initial release, focusing on its premiere run in Copenhagen and its presentation in Skive, a provincial town.

The cinema where AFRUNDEN (THE ABYSS) first opened on 12 September had also financed it. It was not made by a major film company; it was a one-off experiment by the proprietor of Kosmorama, an important Copenhagen cinema. Kosmorama was founded in 1904 by cinema entrepreneur Constantin Philipsen on Strøget, Copenhagen's main shopping street, and it was the first viable cinema in Denmark. Kosmorama was not located directly on Strøget itself, but in rooms off of a courtyard that had been built as the first part of City-Passagen, a never-completed project to construct an elaborate arcade. To attract spectators, a uniformed barker, a so-called 'Swiss guardsman', would pace back and forth on Strøget's pavement and attract attention to the show inside. The Swiss guardsman is pictured on the cover of Kosmorama's programme booklets: like more traditional theatres, Kosmorama printed booklets describing its programme. The cover picture (drawn by the painter Paul Fischer) also shows a pair of well-dressed ladies; one is urging her friend to go inside and visit the picture-show. These ladies, I think, we can assume are the cinema proprietor's own image of what his ideal audience looks like.

Constantin Philipsen did not stay to run Kosmorama for very long. He left to found a whole series of Kosmoramas across Denmark, 26 in all, or about one-quarter of all picture-houses in Denmark, selling Kosmorama to Hjalmar Davidsen in May 1908. Davidsen was the son of a wholesale dealer in dried fish; he had seen films in Paris and become fascinated. His father advanced him part of his inheritance, allowing him to take over Kosmorama. Davidsen soon had a great success with L'ASSASSINAT DU DUC DE GUISE (THE ASSASSINATION OF THE DUKE DE GUISE) and other French film d'art productions. Davidsen

Facing page: Cover for Kosmorama programme booklet, c. 1910. For each new film, a printed programme booklet with a cast list and a detailed plot description was stapled inside this cover. The picture is signed by the celebrated artist Paul Fischer. [Det Danske Filminstitut.]



**KOSMORAMA**  
Østergade 26.

Kl. 1 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> - 2 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> - 3 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> - 4 - 4 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> - 5 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> - 6 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> - 7 - 7 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> -  
8 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> - 9 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> - 10 - 10 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>.

**AFGRUNDEN**

Hoved-rollerne spilles af:

**Poul Reumert.  
Asta Nielsen.  
Robert Dinesen.**

Newspaper advert for the opening run of AFRUNDEN at the Kosmorama Cinema in Copenhagen. September 1910.

had been a friend of the Gad family from childhood. It was therefore him that Urban Gad approached with the idea of making a film with Asta Nielsen, for which he had written a script. In an interview from 1954, Davidsen said: “We agreed that I, who had a bit more experience with films, would rework it”.<sup>2</sup> The film took three weeks to shoot, according to the interview. It had apparently been completed by 21 June 1910, when a newspaper item described it as “ready to roll”.<sup>3</sup> According to Davidsen’s reminiscences, however, the results had initially looked very discouraging:

But although Urban Gad denied all responsibility because I had changed the script, I did not give up. I recut the film completely, putting the scenes in a different order, and at the premiere it turned out that the film gave a completely different impression. The success was assured, and Gad and I became friends again.<sup>4</sup>

This claim seems rather unlikely – AFRUNDEN’s plot is very straightforwardly structured, and it is hard to imagine how it might have been structured differently. But even if Davidsen’s contribution may not have been quite as extensive as he recalled it many years later, the film was certainly a hit from the start and played for many weeks at Kosmorama, with performances from early afternoon and almost until midnight. Davidsen was not involved in the wider distribution of the film. In a 1919 interview, he claims that he had travelled “all over Germany” to sell it, “but nobody wanted it. It was thought to be too big. Back then, you only had films that ran for fifteen or twenty minutes and couldn’t imagine people could stand having them bigger.”<sup>5</sup> After the film’s success in Copenhagen, he sold the German distribution rights to Ludwig Gottschalk.<sup>6</sup> But what about Denmark?

In her book on Asta Nielsen, Marguerite Engberg writes that the film company Skandinavisk-Russisk Handelshus (SRH) acquired the distribution rights for



Interior of Biograf-Teatret, Skive. Photograph from 1910–1920. [Det Danske Filminstitut.]

AFGRUNDEN.<sup>7</sup> SRH later changed its name to Filmsfabriken Danmark and became one of the most significant Danish production companies, and it has been the subject of a massive, voluminous study by Jan Nielsen. Nielsen quotes Engberg's original 1955 taped interview with Johan Christensen, one of the company's managers: "The first one we sold was, as it happens, the very well-known film AFRUNDEN, shot by Alfred Lind and Hjalmar Davidsen with Asta Nielsen and Poul Reumert".<sup>8</sup> Jan Nielsen points out that this is not supported by the first and then only Danish film trade paper, *Nordisk Biograf-Tidende*, which was closely connected with SRH but makes no mention of AFRUNDEN. Nielsen also quotes an unpublished manuscript, probably from the mid-1930s, describing the early history of another company, Fotorama, based in Aarhus and initially named Th. Hermansen, Ltd. Here, we read: "Of other purchases may be mentioned Hjalmar Davidsen's 'mimic drama' AFRUNDEN owned exclusively for Denmark – except for Strøget in Copenhagen – for 3600 crowns for two prints".<sup>9</sup>

Jan Nielsen does not try to resolve these discrepancies, but I think a brief newspaper item may help. Three days after the premiere, we can read the following brief announcement in the newspaper *Politiken*: "The exclusive rights for Kosmorama's new art film AFRUNDEN have been sold for Norway and Sweden by Mr. Hjalmar Davidsen to Skandinavisk-Russisk Handelshus (...). The latest stage triumph of Mr. Reumert and Miss Asta Nielsen will be repeated throughout Scandinavia."<sup>10</sup> I think it is likely that this purchase of

rights is what Johan Christensen of SRH recalled in 1955, and that Fotorama did indeed control AFGRUNDEN's distribution in Denmark as indicated in the unpublished company history quoted by Jan Nielsen.

What of local exhibition? The Irish sociologist Richard Jenkins picked the town of Skive, in Jutland, when carrying out his extensive field study about Danish national identity because it seemed a good example of “a very ordinary town in most respects”.<sup>11</sup> I chose to focus on Skive because of some particularly interesting source material. In 1911, Skive had a population of 5,500 inhabitants.<sup>12</sup> Unusually for a town of its size, it had two cinemas, Kosmorama and Biograf-Teatret. Constantin Philipsen opened the first in 1906 and soon sold it to a local entrepreneur; the second was opened the following year. The chief of police refused to grant a license, because he saw no need for more than one theatre, but the proprietor appealed directly to the minister of justice and was allowed to continue; but “sparks frequently flew between the two”, according to the pioneering historian of Danish cinemas, Gunnar Sandfeld.<sup>13</sup>

Biograf-Teatret showed AFGRUNDEN in April 1911 and printed an elaborate promotional folder for the occasion – large in size, between A3 and A4, four pages, printed on thin orange newsprint. I knew of its existence from earlier research at the Danish Film Institute, but when I went back to examine it, it had unfortunately disappeared from the files. Luckily, I still had photocopies I took of it fifteen years ago. The first two pages consist of extended excerpts from the uniformly enthusiastic reviews of the film in the Copenhagen newspapers. We only get to Skive on page 3, where we get the following text, set in large type:

Biograf-Teatret, Skive, has at great expense purchased the performance rights for this piece for Skive and the surrounding area, and hopes that the audience will appreciate this sacrifice by showing interest in the shows.

AFGRUNDEN's character is something like the great French play *Pangs of Conscience* which was so tremendously popular a couple of years ago. The Copenhagen artistes show here that they are in every way equal to the most illustrious artistes of France.

*The ticket prices are, despite the great costs of the acquisition, only the usual 25 øre.*

*Children are definitely not admitted.*<sup>14</sup>

The French film mentioned can be identified as L'EMPREINTE OU LA MAIN ROUGE, a Film d'art production directed by Paul Henry Burguet and released in France in 1908. It is a showcase for the famous mime Gaston Séverin and does not have a story similar to AFGRUNDEN, but it does feature a striking apache dance, a 'dance chaloupée', performed by Mistinguette and Max Dearly. Moreover, this film was imported to Denmark by none other than Hjalmar Davidsen, so it seems quite likely that it served as a source of inspiration.

The same page of the promotional folder includes another section, set in somewhat smaller type, entitled: “The audience's verdict on AFGRUNDEN”. It starts out by describing how audiences in Copenhagen have braved long lines to see the film: “People stood like fish in a barrel outside and waited patiently

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>mæssige Udørelse. Hr. Reumert er fortrinlig som Gæjleren, og Puk Asta Nielsen lærer den unge Piges Rolle igennem med stor og ægte Kunst.</p>  | <p>Hr. Dinesen indgyder Sympathi som Engelen, og i en lille Rolle som Operarier er Hr. Stryholt overmaade morsom. „Afrunden“ vil blive et Tillægsstykke.</p>  |
|   |   |
| <h2>Publikums Dom<br/>over<br/>„Afrunden“.</h2>  |   |
| <p>Saaledes lyder de københavnske Blades Lovord om „Afrunden“ Dagen efter Premierens.</p>  | <p>hos dem alle været en Oplevelse af virkelig Værdi.</p>   |
| <p>Og som Pressens Dom var anerkendende og rosende, saaledes har ogsaa Publikums Dom været det.</p>  | <p>Bliver Tilstrømningen og Tilhøringen mindre i Skive? Nejppet — Publikum i Skive har ved sin trofaste Tilhøring til „Biograf-Teatret“ vist, at de forstaaer at sætte Pris paa virkelig fin og god Film-Skuespilkunst. De vil ogsaa nu vide at skønne paa, at „Biograf-Teatret“ med stor Bekostning har sikret sig „Afrunden“, dette enstemmigt anerkendte Stykke Biografteater-Kunst, som intet „rigtigt“ Teater kunde gøre mere grænsende og virkningsfuldt.</p> |
| <p>Det bedste Bevis herpaa er den enorme Tilstrømning, som har været til „Kouorama“ paa Østergade, hvor Billedet forevistes i København.</p>   | <p>Strømmen vil derfor nu i de kommende Dage gaa tæt og heed til „Biograf-Teatret“, Folk vil sikre sig Billet og Program og taalmodigt vente paa at blive slupne ind, dersom man ikke skulde være saa heldig at komme netop ved en Forestillings Begyndelse. Kort sagt, det livlige københavnske Sceneri vil genstaae sig hver Time paa Aftenen, i den Tid „Biograf-Teatret“ holder „Afrunden“ paa Plakaten.</p>  |
| <p>De første Dage var der et formeligt run. Og det blev ikke mindre de følgende Dage. Folk stod som Sild i en Tønde udenfor og ventede taalmodigt paa, at det fyldte Teater løstes og en ny Forestilling begyndte.</p>                                       | <p>Billetspriserne er uagtet de store Omkostninger ved Anskaffelsen kun den sædvanlige.</p>   |
| <p>Dette har genstaaet sig Forestilling efter Forestilling, saaledes „Afrunden“ er gaaet over det hvide Lærred.</p>  | <p>25 Øre.</p>  |
| <p>Naar Strømmen gik ud fra Teatret, optogede man af Omstølen, det interesserede Publikum gav Forestillingen, Replikker, som tydeligt røbede, at det spændende og dog saa jordbundne Drama havde fængslet Tankerne og sat Sindene i Bevægelse. Det havde</p> | <p>Born har absolut ikke Adgang.</p>  |
|    |   |

Page 3 of the tabloid-sized four-page programme Biograf-Teatret in Skive printed to promote AFRUNDEN. [Det Danske Filminstitut.]

# Biograf-Teatret, Skive,

har med meget store Bekostninger købt Opførelsesretten til dette Stykke for **Skive** og Omegn og haaber, at Publikum vil paaskønne dette Offer ved at vise Forestillingerne sin Interesse. — „Afrunden“s Karakter er noget lignende som det store, franske Stykke „Samvittighedsnag“, der for et Par Aar siden gjorde saa kolossal Lykke. **Dekøbenhavnske Kunstnere viser her, at de paa intet Punkt staar tilbage for Frankrigs fornemste Kunstnere.**

Billetspriserne er uagtet de store Omkostninger ved Anskaffelsen kun den sædvanlige.  
**25 Øre.**  
Born har absolut ikke Adgang.

for the packed auditorium to empty and a new show to start.” If this description is accurate, it means that the film was not shown in continuous performance, and that the cinema had to be emptied after each show. We can see from the newspaper adverts that the show times were just 45 minutes apart.<sup>15</sup> This would not have left much time for emptying and filling the auditorium. The film lasts 37 minutes in the 2005 DVD version produced by the Danish Film Institute, which was transferred at 16 frames per second, and it may originally have been slightly longer: the only extant print of the film seems largely complete (if badly damaged in many places), but the original titles are missing, and certain descriptions indicate that there may have been an additional shot at the end, showing the police putting the Asta Nielsen character into a car and driving off with her. Still, there may have been just enough time to allow audiences to enter and leave without running the film at a noticeably higher speed.<sup>16</sup>

In Skive, the folder suggests (in a hopeful tone), the cinema will be similarly mobbed:

The coming days, therefore, will see a broad and dense stream of people coming to “*Biograf-Teatret*”; they will secure their tickets and programme booklets and wait patiently to be let in if they are not so fortunate as to arrive just when a show is starting. In short, the lively Copenhagen spectacle will repeat itself every hour of the evening for the time “*Biograf-Teatret*” keeps AFRUNDEN on the programme.<sup>17</sup>

This suggests that *Biograf-Teatret* would usually show films in continuous performance, but shifted to fixed show times for AFRUNDEN. I looked through the newspaper adverts from September 1910 through April 1911, and in most cases, they do not include show times. One advert includes the text: “In order that people from the countryside may get the chance to watch this excellent program, there will be *continuous performance on market day*”.<sup>18</sup> This may possibly mean that continuous performance was not the norm, but it may also just mean that there would be film shows throughout the day, while the cinemas normally ran only in the evenings, judging from the few cases where show times were listed.<sup>19</sup>

The existence of the elaborate promotional flyer agrees with Sandfeld’s description of Skive as a rather competitive film market, and a study of newspaper advertisements also bears this out. *Skive Folkeblad*, the largest newspaper in town, would carry advertisements for both cinemas. They both usually changed their programmes twice a week: one programme would play Monday through Thursday, another from Friday to Sunday. Kosmorama had two musicians to accompany the films, a pianist and a violinist.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from the two permanent cinemas, the area was also regularly visited by travelling film showmen. An advert from 20 January 1911 reads:

*Moving pictures* shown at Højslev Inn Saturday the 21<sup>st</sup> at 8 o’clock.

At Stoholm Temperance Hall Sunday the 22<sup>nd</sup> at 8 o’clock.

In particular, the programme includes:

DEN HVIDE SLAVEHANDEL

See the posters!

THE PASGAARD BROTHERS<sup>21</sup>

White Slavery films were very popular at the time. In the first week of April 1911, both of Skive’s cinemas showed DEN HVIDE SLAVEHANDELSE SIDSTE OFFER (IN THE HANDS OF IMPOSTORS), a brand-new Nordisk production.<sup>22</sup> The two cinemas seem to have competed intensely, although they usually did not both show the same film at the same time. In December 1910, Kosmorama ran Nordisk’s DEN HVIDE SLAVEHANDEL (THE WHITE SLAVE) whereas *Biograf-Teatret* ran UNCLE TOM’S CABIN and gave it the subtitle “The Black Slave Trade”, possibly to make it appear a direct competitor to the ‘white slave’ film.<sup>23</sup> UNCLE TOM’S CABIN is probably the Vitagraph version; *Biograf-Teatret* showed a number of Vitagraph films, identified as such in the adverts: WHISKY-SMUGLERNE I KENTUCKYS BJÆRGE (probably IN THE MOUNTAINS OF KENTUCKY) was called a “Grandiose, exciting American Vitagraph art film”.<sup>24</sup>

Kosmorama and *Biograf-Teatret* would often advertise different films with the same title, however. In late November 1910, for instance, Kosmorama showed

a film called ANSIGTSTYVEN (The Face-Thief).<sup>25</sup> A month or so later, Biograf-Teatret showed a film of the same title. A closer study of the adverts, however, shows that two different films are involved. Biograf-Teatret's advert dismissed the competition: "Note: ANSIGTSTYVEN must not be confused with a picture which was previously shown under the same title to deceive the audience. This is one of the usual big all-evening plays, performed by the ensemble of Aarhus Theater."<sup>26</sup> "All-evening" is certainly an exaggeration; a fragment of 100 meters survives, but the film may have been a two-reeler. The film was produced by Fotorama, an Aarhus based distribution and exhibition company which had launched an ambitious production programme in 1909. In the spring of 1910, they had released the first Danish feature-length film, DEN HVIDE SLAVEHANDEL, with a number of respected actors from Aarhus Teater, the most important stage of the country outside Copenhagen, in the leading roles. In the fall, it was plagiarised by Nordisk, leading to a confrontation between the two companies.<sup>27</sup> A mutually satisfying deal was struck, however; Fotorama received the distribution rights for Nordisk's films in Norway and Sweden and in return agreed to withdraw from film production, and leading figures from Fotorama were subsequently brought into management positions at Nordisk.<sup>28</sup>

Before this happened, however, the rivalry between the two companies made itself felt in places like Skive. As a rule, Kosmorama ran films from Nordisk, whereas Biograf-Teatret showed Fotorama's productions, and DEN HVIDE SLAVEHANDEL was far from being the only case where the offerings of the two companies were very similar. The film entitled ANSIGTSTYVEN which had been shown at Kosmorama, provoking accusations of "deceiving the audience" from the competition, is not easily identifiable; it does not appear in the Danish National Filmography.<sup>29</sup> The advert calls it a detective story and names three actors, [Agnes] Nyrop Christensen, [Otto] Lagoni, and [Einar] Zangenberg,<sup>30</sup> but the only film listed in the Danish National Filmography featuring all three is KEAN, from Dumas's play. Zangenberg and Lagoni were regular players at Nordisk, however, and made a number of detective films. One of these may have been retitled as an underhand tactic to draw audiences away from the Fotorama film.

In October 1910, both cinemas ran a film called I BONDEFANGERKLØER (In the Claws of Confidence Tricksters), but actually these were two different films. One (at Biograf-Teatret) was a Fotorama production of this very title, while the other one, better known under the title FRA DET MØRKE KØBENHAVN (FROM DARKEST COPENHAGEN), was produced by the smaller Copenhagen company Biorama.<sup>31</sup> Fotorama and Biorama also both made adaptations of *Elverhøj*, a romantic-nationalist Danish favourite and in Denmark possibly the best-known 19<sup>th</sup>-century stage play; both these film adaptations were also called ELVERHØJ, and later that October, they also played in Skive at the same time, one in each cinema.<sup>32</sup>

It is difficult to know if Fotorama was being ripped off by the Copenhagen film companies in all these cases or whether they gave as good as they got. The



recurring head-to-head competition, however, shows that there was an intense struggle for predominance. In all cases mentioned, the films involved were labelled *kunstfilm* (art films). The term *kunstfilm* is of course a translation of the French *film d'art*, but while some later film historians have tended to associate the French term with costume pictures, in Denmark, at least, it generally means that the performers were artists, that is, established actors from the legitimate stage. Even DEN HVIDE SLAVEHANDEL was promoted as a *kunstfilm* for this reason. The term also laid claim to higher quality than regular picture-house fare, and many of the films mentioned ran longer than one reel.

If art films were the battleground, it would certainly make sense for Fotorama, which did not have the facilities to make a large number of films, to buy up the distribution rights for AFRUNDEN, the most popular art film around. If it was distributed by Fotorama, it would also fit with the fact that it was shown at Biograf-Teatret like all the Fotorama productions. The proprietor of Kosmorama was probably aware several months before the premiere of AFRUNDEN in Skive that the competition had locked it up: in December, Kosmorama presented a film called AFRUNDEN, but the small print reveals that this was actually an American film: The Danish title might have been chosen to cash in on the success of Urban Gad's film, but the advertisement is at least honest enough to admit that this was "A uniquely exciting American art film".<sup>33</sup> In fact, this time AFRUNDEN was a one-reeler, made by American Kinema, Pathé's subsidiary company in the US. It was released end of October 1910, before Urban Gad's and Asta Nielsen's AFRUNDEN became famous in Europe, with the title THE INDIAN AND THE MAID. The film tells the story of a red indian who saves a white girl from falling into an abyss, then falls in love with her and commits suicide. The French title is LA GOUFFRE FATALE (THE FATAL ABYSS), and the German title is DER ABGRUND (THE ABYSS)<sup>34</sup> – maybe for the same reason it was called AFRUNDEN in Denmark.

When the long-feature AFRUNDEN appeared in Skive in April 1911, it too was promoted as an art film. The newspaper advert is more detailed than usual. Beneath the title, the film is described as "Drama in 2 acts (50 scenes) by Urban Gad". A cast list follows, naming all the six actors with roles of any size and the characters they play, and the scene of the action is described: "partly in Copenhagen and the surrounding area, partly in a Zealand vicarage, in the present day". Then the advert goes on:

The *Gaúcho-Dance* appearing in the drama is performed by Miss Asta Nielsen and Mr. Poul Reumert.

With rare unanimity and in even rarer detail the press of the capital has discussed this great art film which is now playing at the leading picture-theatres the world over, and many are the words of praise that have been spoken of it.<sup>35</sup>

AFRUNDEN opened on Tuesday, 18 April 1911; Monday the 17<sup>th</sup> was Easter Monday. It ran the whole week, until Sunday. The advert also includes show times: 8 and 9 o'clock every evening, with Sunday shows at 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10

o'clock. On Wednesday, an extra show for Friday at 3 o'clock was added to give "people from the countryside the chance to see AFRUNDEN".<sup>36</sup>

Neither *Skive Folkeblad* nor the other newspaper, *Skive Social-Demokrat*, carried any film reviews in this period, and I found no news articles about the cinemas' programmes in *Skive Folkeblad* either. *Skive Social-Demokrat*, though, occasionally mentions film programmes in a listing of upcoming events. AFRUNDEN is very briefly described: "This poignant picture will be held over by Mrs. Jensen of Biografen until the end of the week so that everyone may have the opportunity to see it. It is splendidly done but very frightening."<sup>37</sup>

AFRUNDEN was replaced by the 26-minute Italian epic *LA CADUTA DI TROIA* (THE FALL OF TROY), directed by Giovanni Pastrone and Luigi Borghetto for Itala Film. With this film, "Itala was the first Italian film company to step beyond the 600-metre mark and to define two-reelers as feature films".<sup>38</sup> The adverts do not give any showtimes for *LA CADUTA DI TROIA*, suggesting that it did not bring the great crowds that flocked to AFRUNDEN. On the other hand, it ran at both cinemas at the same time, and the notice in *Skive Social-Demokrat* was longer and more enthusiastic than the one for AFRUNDEN:

THE FALL OF TROY which is on the programme at both Kosmorama and Biograf-Teatret these evenings, is the newest of the new and the most magnificent yet seen.

Everybody is familiar with the historical drama of the Greeks and the Trojans, and in this picture everything is shown, from the departure of King Menelaus to the death of Prince Paris.

The picture itself has been magnificently staged; it is incredible that this could be done. In addition, both programmes include a couple of other interesting pictures.<sup>39</sup>

We may conclude that while AFRUNDEN was a one-off production for Hjalmar Davidsen and an unusually successful film, it was also part of a general trend where more ambitious productions with established actors and longer running times were used by film companies jockeying for position as a means of gaining a competitive edge.

## Notes

1. For more information on the Gad family, cf. Julie Allen's essay in this book.
2. "Hvorfor er filmen ikke blevet bedre end den er", interview with Hjalmar Davidsen, *Politiken* (31 July 1954).
3. "Teater og Tribune", *Politiken* (21 June 1910).
4. "Hvorfor", interview with Davidsen (1954).
5. "Oplevelser omkring Optagelsesapparatet", part VIII, interview with Hjalmar Davidsen, *B. T.* (29 December 1919).
6. Cf. Martin Loiperdinger, "AFRUNDEN in Germany: *monopol*film, cinemagoing and the emergence of the film star Asta Nielsen in Germany", in Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby and Philippe Meers (eds), *Cinema, Audiences and Modernity. New perspectives on European cinema history* (London: Routledge, 2011), 142–153.
7. Marguerite Engberg, *Filmstjernen Asta Nielsen* (Aarhus: Klim, 1999), 53.
8. Johan Christensen interviewed by Marguerite Engberg, tape, Det Danske Filminstitut (DFI),

- quoted in Jan Nielsen, *A/S Filmfabriken Danmark: SRH/Filmfabriken Danmarks historie og produktion* (Copenhagen: Multivers, 2003), 45.
9. "A/S Fotorama – Et Tilbageblik paa Selskabets første 25 Leveaar", unpublished manuscript, DFI, 6, quoted in Nielsen, *A/S Filmfabriken*, 46.
  10. "Teater og Tribune", *Politiken* (15 September 1910).
  11. Richard Jenkins, *Being Danish: Paradoxes of Identity in Everyday Life* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2011), 24.
  12. "Skive", in *Salmonsens Konversationsleksikon* (2nd edn), vol. 21 (Copenhagen: J.H. Schultz, 1926), 576–578.
  13. Gunnar Sandfeld, *Den stumme scene: dansk biografteater indtil lydfilmens gennembrud* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag / Arnold Busck, 1966), 81–82.
  14. "Afgunden", undated folder, photocopy, DFI ([Skive: Biograf-Teatret]), 3.
  15. *Politiken* (12 October 1910).
  16. Thanks to Martin Loiperdinger for bringing up this question.
  17. AFGRUNDEN, undated folder, 3.
  18. *Skive Folkeblad* (30 December 1910).
  19. E.g. *Skive Folkeblad* (17 October 1910 and 24 March 1911).
  20. *Skive Folkeblad* (3 April 1911).
  21. *Skive Folkeblad* (20 January 1911).
  22. *Skive Folkeblad* (3 April 1911).
  23. *Skive Folkeblad* (5 December 1910).
  24. *Skive Folkeblad* (27 March 1911); other films identified as Vitagraph productions are mentioned 19 December 1910, 6 February 1911, 10 February 1911, 27 February 1911.
  25. *Skive Folkeblad* (25 November 1910).
  26. *Skive Folkeblad* (30 December 1910).
  27. Cf. Marguerite Engberg, "Plagiarism and the Birth of the Danish Multi-Reel Film", in Dan Nissen and Lisbeth Richter Larsen (eds), *100 Years of Nordisk Film* (Copenhagen: DFI, 2006), 72–79.
  28. Isak Thorsen, *Isbjørnens anatomi: Nordisk Films Kompagni som erhvervs virksomhed i perioden 1906–1928*, PhD thesis (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2009), 93–98.
  29. <http://www.dfi.dk/FaktaOmFilm/Nationalfilmografien.aspx>
  30. *Skive Folkeblad* (25 November 1910).
  31. *Skive Folkeblad* (14 October 1910).
  32. *Skive Folkeblad* (21 October 1910).
  33. *Skive Folkeblad* (16 December 1910).
  34. Cf. Herbert Birett, *Das Filmangebot in Deutschland 1895–1911* (München: Winterberg, 1991), 4.
  35. *Skive Folkeblad* (18 April 1911).
  36. *Skive Folkeblad* (19 April 1911).
  37. *Skive Social-Demokrat* (22 April 1911).
  38. Silvio Aloysio, "The 'Pastrone System': Itala Film from the Origins to World War I", *Film History* 12:3 (2000): 250–261, here 254.
  39. *Skive Social-Demokrat* (25 April 1911).