

“We had to be careful.” The Self-imposed Regulations, Alterations and Censorship Strategies of Nordisk Films Kompagni 1911-1928

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ABSTRACT: This article addresses the strategies that the Danish film company Nordisk Films Kompagni adopted from the early 1910s in order to satisfy the censorship demands of different markets, and also the strategies of self-regulation the company practiced in order to reach as large and as culturally-differentiated an audience as possible. Nordisk’s business relied on the international markets; only a small percentage of its production was sold to the domestic market, and in order to maintain the export levels, Nordisk devised very explicit strategies for the kinds of films the company would make. These strategies included among other things the creation of guidelines for scripts accepted by the company, alternative endings made for the same film to please the varying tastes of audiences in different countries, and the circulation of information that derived from the company’s branches and agents about the censorship rules in individual countries to Nordisk’s stock company of writers and directors, to help them in preparing their films for production.

RÉSUMÉ: Cet article se penche sur les stratégies adoptées par la compagnie cinématographique danoise Nordisk Films Kompagni à partir des années 1910 afin de répondre aux demandes de censure de différents marchés ainsi que sur les stratégies d’autoréglementation utilisées par la compagnie afin de rejoindre un public aussi large et multiculturel que possible. Les affaires de Nordisk dépendaient des marchés internationaux ; seul un petit pourcentage de sa production était destiné au marché intérieur, et afin de maintenir ses niveaux d’exportation, Nordisk a conçu des stratégies très explicites quant aux genres de films que la compagnie produirait. Notons entre autres la création de directives pour les scripts acceptés par la compagnie, des fins alternatives réalisées pour un même film afin de répondre aux goûts variés des audiences de différents pays, ainsi que la diffusion d’information issue des différentes branches de la compagnie et relative aux règles de censure propres à chaque pays afin d’aider ses auteurs et ses réalisateurs à préparer leurs films pour la production.

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In his memoirs Ole Olsen, the founder and Director General of the Danish Nordisk Films Kompagni, recalls:

Vi maatte passe paa at lave saadanne Film, som man kunde forstaa overalt, for Eksempel skal jeg nævne, at en Film ikke kunde sælges i England, fordi en Mand gik gennem et Soveværelse, og saa var der endda ikke nogen i Værelset. Da vor Produktion var størst, havde vi, foruden Skuespillere og Artister, sytten Hundrede ansatte, der alle skulde have regelmæssig Løn, og derfor kunde det heller ikke nytte, at der var altfor mange kloge Hoveder, som vilde fortælle, hvad vi skulde optage. De kunde jo ikke betale Regningerne, der kom, hvis vi tog de forkerte Film (Olsen 105)

[We had to be careful and make the films in such a way that they could be understood everywhere. As an example I might mention that a film could not be sold in England if a man walked through a bedroom and no one else was in the room. At the peak of our production we had, in addition to actors and artists, seventeen hundred employees, all of whom needed a steady income, and because of this it was of no use at all having loads of clever people telling us what we should shoot. They couldn't pay the bills, when they came in, if we shot the wrong pictures.]¹

What is striking about Olsen's recollection is that in his mind there is little distinction between making a film "understood everywhere" and getting it past the often obscure and culturally contingent censorship regulations—in this case the eyes of the British censors and their monitoring of sexual morality. Though Olsen doesn't explain the exact reason for the banning of the unnamed film, he was right: English censorship would not clear a film if a young man invited a young woman to his room, and there was a bed in the room—even though it was actually a divan (Schröder 2003 478).

The early 1910s marked a shift in the film-business. The films increased in length from one reel to multi-reel and eventually to the length of today's feature films. Exhibition of the films changed from nickelodeons to cinemas built for the purpose of film-watching, and the transition "led the film-industry to seek to appeal to middle-class audiences by telling moral stories and by imitating norms of respectable forms of middle class culture" (Grieveson 27). Nordisk's systemized self-regulation of film content can be seen as a part of the embourgeoisement of the cinema, but it was also highly influenced by external censorship—one might indeed ask whether a distinction can be drawn between external censorship and internal self-regulation. Janet Staiger writes about the film companies' self-regulation: "Self-censorship was also profitable in that it encouraged a product acceptable to all cultural groups" (Bordwell et al. 104). Staiger's point corresponds with Olsen's notion of making films "understood everywhere."

In this article I will describe and analyze the self-imposed regulations and censorship-strategies that Nordisk chose to employ in the period known as the golden age of Danish Cinema: The Guidelines for the Scriptwriters, the Russian Endings and the Censorship Memoranda.

In the case of Nordisk we are in a unique position because so much archival material still exists from the silent era. Large parts of the company's business archive have survived in the Nordisk Special Collection (NFS), housed at the Danish Film Institute in Copenhagen. Where we would normally find information about censorship of the period in trade-magazines or on censorship cards, the excellent archival situation of Nordisk offers an inside view into how external censorship rules and the wish to garner as large an audience as possible shaped self-imposed regulations and alterations of the films in a major company in the silent era.

Guidelines for Scriptwriters

In the 1910s Nordisk belonged among the leading film companies in the world. The company's business was based on sales to the international market; only a small percentage of the production went to the domestic market. On Nordisk's role as a major player on the world market, David Bordwell writes: "Nordisk took its place alongside Pathé and Gaumont as a major producer and distributor" (81). As the first of the major film companies, Nordisk reorganised its production to multi-reel films around 1910-1911.

In the transition to multi-reel films, Nordisk established a Story Department in 1911. The production of multi-reel films demanded more planning and also control over the actual content of the film. To fulfil its distribution deals, Nordisk had an obligation to produce films that could both pass censorship restrictions and suit the tastes of audiences at the same time. Nordisk engaged in a constant search for new material to film in order to meet the necessary production volume, and one of the tools it used in selecting among the approximately 1500 uninvited scripts submitted each year (Schröder 2006 101) was a set of "Guidelines for Scriptwriters" that the company had formulated around January 1912. These guidelines, which were in effect an elaboration of the understanding that Nordisk had already achieved about what kind of films suited which markets, were printed in German later in the same year, for Germany was one of the most important foreign markets for Nordisk.

The guideline consisted of ten items that one should bear in mind in order to have a script accepted. Many of the guidelines concern practical or pragmatic issues: for example, that the script should be typewritten or at least legibly handwritten, how much one could expect to be paid for a script, that a film should have at least one sympathetic character, and so on. But some of the guidelines

derive from the internal self-regulation of the company, about which they are quite revealing. We find the following instructions about the content of the films:

5. Forbrydelser, saasom Mord, Tyveri, Vekselfalsk o.l. maa absolut ikke vises, men kun antydes.
6. Handlingen skal foregaa i Nutiden og spille blandt det gode Selskab. Stykker, der spiller blandt Smaakaarsfolk og Bønder, antages ikke. Ridderstykker, historiske Stykker og nationale Stykker heller ikke.
7. Det er heller ikke tilladt at skrive noget nedsættende eller ufordelagtigt om kongelige Personer, Øvrighedspersoner, Præster eller Officerer. Nihilisme, Anarkisme o.l. maa ikke benyttes.
(Nørgaard 1971 99)

- [5. Crimes like murder, theft, counterfeiting and the like, must absolutely not be shown, but only suggested.
6. The action has to take place in the present day and play out within good society. Dramas that take place among people of humble means and farmers will not be accepted. Stories about knights, historical and national dramas are equally unacceptable.
7. Nor is it allowed to write anything derogatory or unfavourable about royalty, about persons of authority, priests or military officers. Nihilism, anarchism and the like may not be employed.]

Rules 5 and 7 reveal Nordisk's idea of the common morality of the time and indicate the company's eagerness not to offend established values in society by showing disrespect for royalty, priests, officers and authority. The net effect of these guidelines, then, is the embougeoisement of the cinema in the early 1910s; they illustrate the necessity of adjusting to censorship in the international and domestic market. The prohibition of anarchism and nihilism is in line with the middle-class values of the time: political *isms* that contested these values were considered highly dangerous in the years leading up to World War I. Another example of the downplaying of the political is to be found in a 1913 letter from Alfred Kjerulf, the head of the Story Department, to the scriptwriter Harriet Bloch. Kjerulf was about to buy Bloch's script *Socialistens Hustru* [The Wife of the Socialist] but after conferring with Olsen he chose to reject the script for the following reason: "I Tyskland har Censuren nemlig navnlig Kig paa Arbejder-Revolte" [In Germany the censor is particularly watchful of workers' revolt] (Schröder 2003 477). Two years earlier, in 1911, Nordisk did actually produce *Dødsflugten* [Flight to Death] about a group of nihilists whose awful plans are revealed by a young count. The film was a success, selling 138 copies—against the average of 60 copies that a film could expect to sell in 1911. This success suggests that there was a market for films about nihilists, anarchists and other revolutionary groups, but

censorship rules must have changed so much after the release of *Dødsflugten* that films with revolutionary or subversive themes no longer got past the censor.

Rule 6 warns against setting the film among people of humble means or farmers, and clearly states that the action should take place within good society, a requirement that stems from Olsen's assumptions about what kind of films Nordisk should make:

Jeg kendte nok Folks Smag saa meget, at jeg vidste, at de vilde se noget fra Livet omkring dem, saaledes som det levedes de Steder, hvor de ikke selv kunde komme. De unge Mennesker vilde gerne se smukke Selskaber med elegante Kjoler... De vilde ogsaa gerne see, hvordan en Greve, en Baron eller en Konge boede, og hvordan han spiste til Middag.
(Olsen 77-78)

[I certainly knew the taste of the people so well that I knew that they wanted to see something from life far from themselves, as it was lived in places they couldn't go themselves. The young people wanted to see beautiful parties with elegant dresses... They would also like to see how a count, a baron or a king lived, and how he ate his dinner.]

Judging by the success of the films from Nordisk, Olsen must have been right. The audience wanted to see how life was lived in good society.

The avoidance of national plays referred to in Rule 6 corresponds with the Nordisk's overall international profile. Even though the guidelines clearly states that historical films are rejected, Nordisk made historical films, such as *Revolutionsbryllup* [*The Heart of Lady Alaine*] (1915), but they were exceptions. The reason for not accepting scripts with knights or historical themes is to be found in the international film-industry of the time. Italian film companies had specialised in spectacular historical dramas, with huge settings and hundreds of extras, and Nordisk couldn't compete. In her book *History of British Film* Rachael Low notes the tendency of national film industries to specialize in particular genres. Low writes that the Americans made romantic dramas, the Italians spectacular film, the British the situation-drama, whereas Nordisk focussed on social drama, which Low defines as "the dramatic conflict of human emotions with social conventions" (206).²

The Danish film historian Ebbe Neergaard agrees with Low's assessment with the following specification: "Ved 'social' må man dog ikke forstå en så klar stillingtagen til samfunds- og klassespørgsmål, som der nu ligger i ordet" [By the term 'social' we should not understand the kind of attitude towards societal or class issues, as the word presently denotes]. On the contrary the social drama is about the contrast between the upper classes and the lower levels in society, "skildret ikke som et socialt (foranderligt) fænomen, men som en skæbne, der

vel er foranderlig for det enkelte menneske” [depicted not as a social (alterable) phenomenon, but as destiny, which could be changeable for the individual human being]. Neergaard emphasizes that the reason for the repetition of this theme was because it was interesting for the audience at the time (39).

Another Danish trait that featured in the films was the “erotic melodrama.” “Ulykkelig kærlighed, trekantshistorier, begrundet og ubegrundet jalousi var emner, der blev taget op og vendt og drejet i en uendelighed” [Ill-starred love, the *ménage à trois*, justified or baseless jealousy were subjects endlessly taken up and explored], writes Marguerite Engberg (441). Already by 1910 *Afgrunden* [*The Abyss*] produced by the minor Danish company Kosmorama and starring Asta Nielsen had established the erotic melodrama as a Danish speciality in the mind of the audience:

Danske film fik snart et ry for at være dristige, vovede, og mange steder blev de følgelig stærkt beskåret af censuren, hvis de da ikke blev helt forbudt. Det var ikke alene emnevalget, men også udførelsen, der gjorde, at de danske film blev betragtet som både “lascifs” og “scabreux.”
(Engberg 441)

[Danish films soon got a reputation for being daring and consequently in many places they were heavily cut by the censors, if they were not totally banned. It was not only the choice of subject, but also the execution that caused the Danish film to be considered both “lascifs” and “scabreux.”]

Mark Sandberg underlines that the reputation of the Danish films was created by a combination of their multi-reel length and their sexual themes (10). In 1913 a conservative politician objected to the Minister of Justice that “moralsk nedbrydende film, kommer ikke fra Paris, men fra København” [morally subversive films don’t come from Paris, but from Copenhagen] (278).

As noted above, an awareness of the international competition most likely lay behind the rule rejecting historical plays. Nordisk did not want to compete with film genres other companies had specialized in; it did want its buyers to know what kind of film to expect from Nordisk.

A slightly altered version of the guidelines were made in 1917 and includes a new item:

7. Af Hensyn til den vanskelige Filmcensur bør Forfatteren være overordentlig varsom i sit Valg af Emner og Stof. Alt, hvad der kan tænkes at virke uæstetisk, ophisende eller forraaende, maa undgaas.
(NFS: VIII, 1: 4)

[7. Bearing in mind the strict censorship codes the author must be extremely careful in his choice of subjects and material. Everything that can be considered unaesthetic, exciting or brutalizing, must be avoided.]

In contrast to the guidelines from 1912, the consideration of censorship has been explicitly worked into the new guidelines. According to these guidelines, a script could be rejected by Nordisk either for being “uoriginalt, for almindeligt i indhold eller censurstridigt” [unoriginal, too ordinary in its content or contrary to censorship codes], as the guidelines put it (NFS: VIII, 1: 4). The problem of censorship had become an important issue for the Danish film-industry. As Schröder emphasizes, it is striking that the entire first chapter of the first Danish manual for scriptwriting, Jens Locher’s *Hvorledes skriver man en film* [How One Writes a Film] from 1916, concerns censorship restrictions (2003 475). Even before addressing the directions and principles of the art of scriptwriting, Locher warns: “Der er i næsten alle Lande indført en særlig Filmscensur, der har Magt til at forbyde de fil” [Almost all countries have introduced a special film censor, who has the power to prohibit films] and later in the manual the entire set of Nordisk guidelines for scriptwriters is reproduced (Locher 8). Locher’s comment clearly indicates the importance of censorship and self-regulation in the Danish film-industry; his inclusion of the entire Nordisk guideline indicates the dominant position the company held in Denmark. But promulgating guidelines for screenwriters was only one of the strategies Nordisk used to regulate its films for international markets. Another strategy was to alter the film scripts it produced.

Russian endings

In 1912 and 1913 Russia was Nordisk’s second largest export market, only surpassed by Germany, and in 1914 the Russian market became Nordisk’s largest. An article from the Russian film magazine *Kinogazeta* from 1918 reads:

All’s well that ends well! This is the guiding principle of foreign cinema. But Russian cinema stubbornly refuses to accept this and goes its own way. Here it’s “All’s well that ends badly”—we need tragic endings.
(Tsivian 24)

The Russian audience preferred tragic or unhappy endings for the films, and Russian production companies had made a standard of producing two endings for the films, a happy ending for export, and a tragic for the domestic market. Yuri Tsivian believes that this custom came from the Moscow-based branch of the French company Pathé, which produced films for export. Tsivian mentions

the film *Nevestna ognya* [*The Bride of Fire*] (1911?) as the first one produced with two endings (26).

So the idea of producing alternative endings to suit different international markets was not unique to Nordisk. In 1908 the company told both the Vienna Branch and several agents that the film *La Tosca* (1908) could be delivered with and without a murder at the end if two endings would increase the sale of the film (NFS: II, 8: 384). With *Balletdanserinden* [*The Ballet Dancer*] (1911) or *Jernbanens Datter* [*The Little Railroad Queen*] (1911), the production of alternative endings became a part of Nordisk's production policy, and the moment coincides with the closing of a new distribution deal with the Moscow-based company Thiemann, Reinhardt & Osipov. In a letter Nordisk assures the Russian company:

Sie können versichert sein, dass wir immer, so fern es möglich ist spezielle dramatische Enden für Russland machen. Wir haben schon wiederholt diesbezüglich ausdrückliche Instruktionen an unseren Regisseure und literarischen Mitarbeiter gegeben.
(NFS: II, 24: 468)

[Rest assured that we will always, if possible, make a special dramatic ending for Russia. We have already repeatedly given clear orders about this to our directors and literary employees.]

Initially, then, the provision of alternative endings was geared to the Russian market, but soon the practice spread to other markets. British and American audiences, unlike their Russian counterparts, preferred happy endings; with them in mind Nordisk began to produce happy endings for originally tragic films. In some cases Nordisk misjudged the tastes of the individual countries, as a letter to the London branch shows:

Deres Bemærkninger m. H. t. de for England mest egnede Slutninger har vi taget os ad notam. Vi laver forøvrigt i alle Tilfælde, hvor det er muligt, altid flere forskellige Slutninger efter Smagen i de forskellige Lande. Vi søger derved ogsaa altid at ramme den engelske Smag, men det er en ret vanskelig Sag altid at være heldig hermed.
(NFS: II, 23: 630–631)

[We have noted your comments about the endings that would be most suitable for England. By the way, if it's possible, we do in all cases always create different endings according to the tastes in the different countries. We do always aim to hit English taste, but it is pretty difficult to be consistently lucky in this.]

Apart from the Russians, other countries also wanted unhappy endings, as a letter from Nordisk to the Italian agent indicates: "bemærker vi, at De fremtidig...

ønsker den samme Slutning paa Deres Films for Italien, som vi anvender for Rusland” [we note, that in the future you... wish the same ending to your films for Italy as we use for Russia] (NFS: II, 29: 39).

It is not easy to say exactly how widely these alternative endings were used. More than half of the scripts of the over 1100 films Nordisk made between 1911 and 1928 have survived in the Nordisk Special Collection; amid them we find various indications that some at least had alternative endings. The script for *Dramaet i den Gamle Mølle* [*The Last of the Old Mill*] (1913) reads, “N.B. For Rusland maa det slutte med, at alle tre dør i Møllen og denne ramler, medens Bjørner magtesløs ser til.” [N.B. For Russia: it must end with all three dying in the mill, while Bjørner, powerless, looks on] (NFS: Manuscript 1035). And in the script for *Fader Sorg* [*Father Sorrow*] (1917) we find the following typewritten note: “Obs: For England tilspilles en Slutscene hvor Faderen lever.” [Note—For England an end scene has to be shot in which the father survives] (NFS: Manuscript 1496). Mostly the endings are typewritten, which suggests that they were planned during the development of the script, and only in very few cases does a hastily-written note in shorthand indicate that an alternative ending should be shot, for example for the film *Den Dødsdømte* [*The Condemned Man*] (1916) (NFS: Manuscript 1342).

Besides the endings we find in the scripts, the approximately 40,000 outgoing letters that have survived from Nordisk provide a further source for identifying films from the company with alternative endings. And finally, five of the actual endings have survived.³ For *Evangelieemandens Liv* [*The Candle and the Moth*] (1915) we even have two alternative endings left, a Russian and a Swedish. The Swedish ending is interesting because it was most likely conceived in order to get the film past the very strict Swedish censorship board. Contrary to the normal custom of creating Russian and English endings, which were employed simply to provide extra choices for Nordisk’s customers, the two endings in this case were also a matter of necessity—to get the film past the censors.

On the basis of surviving films, letters and scripts, we know that at least 56 alternative endings were made from 1911 to 1928. Curiously enough, however, there are no indications that alternative endings were created for any of the five films in which we still have the actual endings. This demonstrates that Nordisk produced alternative endings for more films than the 56 which we know to have had such double endings because they survive. Another indication of the extensive use of alternative endings can be seen in a letter of 1916 from Nordisk’s artistic manager, August Blom, to the director Hjalmar Davidsen in which he points out the following:

Paa Foranledning unnlader jeg høfligst at erindre d’Herrer Instruktører om den engang vedtagen Regel, at hver Film med trist Slutning,—altid, selvom det maatte synes ganske misvisende,—forsynes med en forsonende Slutningsscene extra.
(NFS: II, 39: 551)

[I beg to remind directors of the previously approved rule that for every film with a sad ending, even if it seems misleading, must always be supplied with an extra ending scene.]

The letter appears to be a standard letter issued to all of the directors at Nordisk in the 1916 season. The archival material indicates that the habit of making alternative endings was an integral part of Nordisk's production policy from around 1911 to the late 1920s. Apart from Russian film companies, Nordisk was the only company that so consistently produced alternative endings for their films. One can find examples of alternative endings in American films from the 1920s such as *Suds* (1920) *Flesh and the Devil* (1926) and *The Crowd* (1928), but Nordisk was the only company that made it a part of its production policy to deliver alternative endings to satisfy different international audiences.

The Censorship Memoranda

Nordisk kept a close eye on developments taking place in various international markets; all through the silent era, the company subscribed to all the major international trade magazines. These sources allowed the company to follow the ways in which censorship rules changed around the world; in 1915 this attentiveness resulted in yet another initiative to adapt the films to different markets. In a meeting in November 1915: a new set of rules for the directors was decided upon. One of the rules was

Saafremt der i en Film forekommer Scener, som man antager vil blive forbudt af Censuren i visse Lande, skal Instruktøren lave 2 Scener, en diskret og en stærkere fremstillet.
(NFS: VIII, 22: 19)

[If a film should contain scenes which you think might be banned by the censor in certain countries, the director must shoot two different scenes, one decorous and one more explicit.]

The guidelines further specify that the management of Nordisk will keep the directors and scriptwriters updated as to the relevant censorship changes and regulations from around the world. On the sixth of December 1915, Censorship memorandum no. 1 was handed out to directors and the Story Department at Nordisk. The internal memoranda, which were often stamped "confidential," remained part of company practice until no. 50 from 6th October 1920. In them, excerpts from letters and information from Nordisk's branches and distributors were passed on to the directors and the Story Department of the company. The

information they contain mainly deals with particular films and the reasons why they had been banned, or what cuts and alterations had been necessary to get a film approved by a censorship board. The memoranda also contained general information about the Management's decisions about future policies regarding the content of films.

Many of the recurring reasons for cuts or bans are similar to the topics warned against in the guidelines for scriptwriters. The depiction of criminality in whatever form was often the cause of prohibition and often earned the censor's designation of "brutalising." Another theme that drew the censor's attention was the erotic. The New York branch reported that an intertitle explaining "Den følgende Morgen" [The following morning] had to be removed because it contained a hint of a sexual encounter (NFS: II, 16: 128). Memorandum no. 40 tells that a scene with the appearance of the naked leg of a woman had been cut to pass the censorship in Norway (NFS: II, 56: 43).

Beside the actual information about which films had been censored and banned, and for what reasons, the memoranda also include some clear directions about production policy, for instance about the use of uniforms:

Paa given Foranledning gentager vi paany, at Uniformer saa vidt muligt bør undgaas, og altsaa kun benyttes, hvor der er uomgængelige nødvendigt, at vedkommende Person ifølge sin Embedsstilling maa optræde uniformeret. Denne Forholdsregel dikteres ikke alene af Censurhensyn, men navnlig fordi det for Tiden er overordentlig vanskeligt at sælge Films med Uniformer i. Vi har—som før nævnt—haft Tilfælde, hvor Uniformer, selv om de med Flid har været komponerede saa neutrale som muligt, dog i England vakt Anstød som "tyske" og i Tyskland som "engelske".
(NFS: II, 56: 8)

[We repeat again, uniforms must be avoided if possible, and they should therefore only be used in cases of unavoidable necessity, when the person in question appears in uniform according to his official position. This precaution is dictated not only because of censorship concerns, but mainly because it is extraordinarily difficult at present to sell films with uniforms in them. There have—as mentioned earlier—been occasions in which uniforms, even when they had been diligently designed to be as neutral as possible, still caused offence in England for being "German" and in Germany for being "English."]

Denmark was neutral during World War I and Nordisk was able to maintain its exports to the Axis powers as well as to the Allies. Though they sought to avoid offending audiences in any of the belligerent countries, Nordisk's attempt to create uniforms that couldn't be recognized as belonging to any particular nation was apparently in vain. Nordisk tried to avoid choosing film subjects involving

fighting, espionage, and other military activities that could be connected to the ongoing war:

Films, hvori der forekommer *Krigsscener*, *Valpladsscener*, *Lazaretsccener* o. lign. for der første ikke vil blive tilladt af nogen Censur i de Krigsførende Lande og for det andet ikke vil blive taalte af publikum i disse Lande.
(NFS: II, 56: 11)

[Films in which *war scenes*, *battlefield scenes*, *camp hospital scenes* and the like occur will in the first place not pass the censor in any of the belligerent countries, and secondly will not be tolerated by audiences in these countries.]

The memoranda also reported positive comments from the branches and agents. About the film *Hotel Paradis* [*Hotel "Paradise"*] (1917), the German branch writes: "Der Film ist in allen Einzelheiten so geschickt ausgeklügelt, dass der Zensur ein Einspruchsrecht kaum zusteht" [The film is in every detail so cleverly thought out that the censorship board could hardly have any right to object] (NFS: XII, 86: 5). The branch praises the way in which the well-executed film gets away with including criminal actions and themes by only hinting at them, thereby avoiding the censors. Nordisk's management concludes that this "...bekræfter, at næsten et hvilket som helst Emne kan behandles saaledes, at den færdige Film bliver censurfri" [confirms that nearly any subject can be treated in such a way that the finished film will be censorship free] (NFS: XII, 86: 5).

In another memorandum the Berlin branch informs the company that it has reservations about the commercial potential of the film *Hvo der elsker sin Fader* [*Who, So Loveth His Father's Honour*] (1916) because the branch believes it is an "ausgesprochener Männerfilm" [an avowedly male film] (NFS: II, 56: 10). This remark from the German branch makes Nordisk's management stress later in the memorandum that such male-centred films are considered problematical:

Dette er utvivlsomt rigtigt. Det "svage" Køn danner i alle Lande Hovedparten af de Biografbesøgende, og det er derfor navnlig med saadanne Films, som tiltaler Damerne, at Teatrene gør gode Forretninger. Dette til underretning for D'Hrr. Instruktører ved deres Valg af Sujetter.
(NFS: II, 56: 10)

[This is undoubtedly correct. In all countries the "weaker" sex makes up the majority of the cinema audience, and it is mainly due to these films, which please the ladies, that the theatres make a profit. This information is for you gentlemen directors to consider in your choice of subjects.]

Here the management encourages the directors and writers to make films that appeal to an important section of the ticket-buying audience—women, which illustrates Staiger’s point that self-censorship also meant making a product acceptable to different cultural groups, thereby ensuring that the films be profitable. The necessary consideration of the spectators arises again in the memoranda’s discussion of the choice of actors. The Berlin branch warns of the danger of using one of the stock actors, Alf Blütecher, as a villain seeing that the audience had grown accustomed to him playing the part of a young attractive lover (NFS: II, 56: 14). The objection to actors playing both heroes and villains is repeated in a memorandum from the London branch (NFS: II, 56: 40).

Often the censorship-rules changed, as the Branch in London reported: “I Lystspillene maa der helst være saa mange badende Damer som muligt, dog maa Badedragterne være fikse og stramtsiddende” [There have to be as many bathing ladies as possible in the comedies; however, the bathing suits must be smart and tight-fitting] (NFS: II, 56: 40). This could suggest that the British censors were beginning to soften their stance on erotic subjects. No wonder it was difficult to deal with the many different individual tastes from the many countries. Or as the Berlin branch despairingly complained, when the censor had cut a scene because it contained an accident: “Wenn auch Unglücksfälle verboten werden, was dürfen wir denn machen?” [If accidents are also prohibited, what then are we going to film?] (Schröder 2003 478).

The censorship memoranda give us an insight into the basis of Nordisk’s self-regulation: the regulations were dictated by censorship practices, but perhaps more interesting are the regulations that the management itself imposed upon its directors and screenwriters.

The archival material in the Nordisk Special Collection provides an excellent resource for understanding the advanced and well-organized ways in which a large, international film company self-regulated its film production. The guidelines for the scriptwriters, the alternative endings and the censorship memoranda are all expressions of Nordisk’s self-regulation. These strategies reflect both the actual external censorship, the embourgeoisement of cinema in the early 1910s and Nordisk’s efforts to please many different cultural groups. For a company that based its business on exporting all over the world, this integration of audience taste with the moods of the censors was necessary to sell films and make a profit. Making “de forkerte Film” —“the wrong pictures”— did not pay the bills. Ole Olsen was right to be careful.

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NOTES

1. 1700 employees is highly exaggerated. A qualified guess would be that when Nordisk success peaked during World War I between 800 and 1000 people were employed by Nordisk in Denmark and abroad. Here and elsewhere the translations are my own.
2. The appearance of national traits or “special attractions” in the European film-industry is pointed out by Richard Abel who comments on the “special attractions” of individual national cinemas: “While producers such as Cinès in Italy concentrated on lavish historical reconstructions and those in Denmark specialized in sometimes risqué, contemporary films, the French ranged across the spectrum of so-called serious drama.” (299)
3. *Et Drama paa Havet* [*Fire at Sea*] (1912), *Atlantis* (1913), *Evangelimandens Liv* [*The Candle and the Moth*] (1915), *Blade fra Satans Bog* [*Leaves from the Satan’s Book*] (1921), *Præsten fra Vejby* [*The Hand of Fate*] (1922). The DFI has released *Atlantis*, *Evangelimandens Liv* and *Blade fra Satans Bog* on DVD, including the alternative endings.

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