

Danish Sixties Avant-Garde and American Minimal Art

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“Act so that there is no use in a centre”.¹

Gertrude Stein

Denmark is peripheral in the history of minimalism in the arts. In an international perspective Danish artists made almost no contributions to minimalism, according to art historians. But the fact is that Danish artists made minimalist works of art, and they did it very early.

Art historians tend to describe minimal art as an entirely American phenomenon. America is the centre, Europe the periphery that lagged behind the centre, imitating American art. I will try to query this view with examples from Danish minimalism. I will discuss minimalist tendencies in Danish art and literature in the 1960s, and I will examine whether one can claim that Danish artists were influenced by American minimal art.

Empirical minimal art

The last question first. Were Danish artists and writers influenced by American minimal art? The straight answer is no. The fact is that they did not know about American minimal art when they first made works, which we today can characterize as minimal art or minimalism. Minimalism was just starting to occur in America when minimalist works of art were made in Denmark. Some Danish artists, all of them linked up with *Den eksperimenterende Kunstskole* (*The Experimenting School of Art*), or *Eks-skolen* as the school is most often called, in Copenhagen, were employing minimalist techniques, and they were producing what one would tend to call minimalist works of art without knowing of international minimalism. One of these artists, Peter Louis-Jensen, years later, in 1986, in an interview explained:

[Minimalism] came to me empirically, by experience, whereas I think that it came by cognition to the Americans. In fact I made what one could call empirical minimal-sculpture, whereas the Americans considered intellectually and wrote essays, essays that by the way were unreadable to me. (quoted from Andersen 2003: 24, my translation)

¹ Gertrude Stein. *Ømme dupper/Tender Buttons*, København: Borgen, 2004, p. 110.

This statement, that minimalism came to him “by experience”, is crucial. It informs us that Peter Louis-Jensen did not know of international minimalism when he made his early works. Peter Louis-Jensen and other Danish artists connected to Eks-skolen worked their own way out of European modernism and into some sort of minimalism. Exactly as American artists did. And they did so at the same time as the Americans.

Peter Louis-Jensen’s “Struktur. 16 objekter” (“Structure. 16 objects”) from 1966 exemplifies how Danish artists did make minimal objects almost as early as the American minimalists did. Peter Louis-Jensen’s work is made of 16 identical boxes arranged in 4 x 4 straight rows placed directly on the floor. The boxes are made of wood and plywood, and they are all painted white. In fact Peter Louis-Jensen’s boxes are very similar to Robert Morris’ early minimalist works. “Struktur. 16 objekter” would have fitted in quite well at Robert Morris’ show containing light grey works in plywood at Green Gallery, New York, in 1964-1965.

Thus it seems like some Danish artists – Peter Louis-Jensen, Per Kirkeby, and Poul Gernes, to name a few – and American minimalists such as Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, and Robert Morris arrived at quite similar artistic stands almost at the same time. This means that, when the topic discussed is minimalism in Denmark in the sixties, the notion of periphery and centre is of limited relevance. The Danish avant-garde of the sixties was not an echo of the international avant-garde, and Danish minimalism was not an imitation of American minimalism. The Danish avant-garde and the international avant-garde reached at similar stands simultaneously. In a broader perspective this means that one will have to understand developments in minimalism rather as a complicated network of influences or as a “multilinear development”, as Tania Ørum calls it, than simply a line of inspiration (Ørum 2006: 149). To put it in another way, the Danish sixties artists did not borrow or copy ideas from the Americans, they worked their own way towards minimalism. There were no first (American) minimalism, and, consequently, no second (Danish) minimalism derived from such an initial and original minimalism. Instead there were two separate minimalisms occurring at the same time in art history, but in different places.²

² Tania Ørum is right when she in “Minimal requirements of the post-war avant-garde of the 1960s” notes that “The Experimental School of Art [...] reaches the phase characterized by Meyer as ‘High Minimalism 1964–1967’ roughly at the same time as American artists” (Ørum 2006: 148). The book Ørum here refers to is James Meyer’s *Minimalism*, 2000. Tania Ørum, in this fine essay, deals with some of the same problems as I do here.

That does not mean that Danish artists did not discover American minimal art at an early point. They did, and they recognized that internationally others were occupied with artistic strategies quite similar to their own, they discovered a sensibility they already knew from their own art in American minimal art. And that is presumably one of the reasons why American minimal art was introduced in several essays in Danish magazines at an early stage in the history of minimalism. This further did help to create an awareness of minimal art and minimalism in the Danish sixties avant-garde. Danish artists at Eks-skolen developed their own minimalism, later they learned about American minimalism.

Early minimalism in Europe

The major and most influential minimal art shows in the USA took place between 1965 and 1968. “Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculpture” in 1966 at The Jewish Museum in New York was in almost every respect essential, not least in the history of minimal art. Many of the artists who were later to become the leading minimal artists were for the first time presented together at “Primary Structures” in 1966. The American critic Hilton Cramer declared: “A new aesthetic era is upon us”, and the artist Mark de Suvero, who did not participate himself, remarked: “Primary Structures” was “the key show of the sixties” (both quotes are taken from Meyer 2001: 13). Kramer and de Suvero were – as proven by art history – right.

In Europe the first minimal art-show was “Minimal Art” in Gemeentemuseum den Haag in The Netherlands in 1968. “Documenta IV” in Kassel in the summer of 1968 and “The Art of the Real”, an exhibition from MoMA in New York that toured some of the capitals of Europe (Paris, London, Zurich) in 1968 and 1969, also rank among the first larger presentations of American minimal art in Europe. Neither “Documenta IV” nor “The Art of the Real” was minimal art-exhibitions, but minimal art was shown alongside other types of art at both exhibitions. And these two exhibitions attracted attention in European art circles. Therefore they represent crucial junctures – also in the history of minimalism in Europe. A show by Carl Andre in 1967 at Galerie Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf ranks among the very earliest one person minimalist shows, and shows at Stedelijk van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven by Robert Morris in 1968, Dan Flavin in 1969, and Donald Judd in 1970 also stand as examples of early presentations of American minimal art in Europe. In other words, there *was* a response to American minimal art in the late sixties in Europe, but minimal art was introduced a bit earlier in Denmark. Not through

large exhibitions of American minimal art at public museums, but through writings, or alternatively through small more or less underground exhibitions by members of Eks-skolen, and first of all through artists' practices.

The Danish artist Per Kirkeby visited New York in late 1966 and early 1967 (Kirkeby 1971). In January 1967 Peter Louis-Jensen and John Davidsen joined Per Kirkeby in New York. They took part in a happening festival, "Scandinavian Avant-garde 1. A Music & Happening Program from Denmark and Sweden", but more importantly – at least when it comes to Danish avant-garde and American minimal art – they saw art, *minimal art*, in New York. We know from his writings that Peter Louis-Jensen, and presumably also Kirkeby and Davidsen, saw Whitney's "Annual Exhibition 1966. Contemporary Sculpture and Prints". From the catalogue to this exhibition one can see that works by Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Ronald Bladen, Robert Smithson, Sol LeWitt and Walter de Maria were at show (Andersen 2003: 157). This means that these Danish artists, as early as 1967, actually saw American minimalist works of art, and they saw them not only as reproductions. Kirkeby, Louis-Jensen, and Davidsen were all associated with Eks-skolen, and they no doubt reported at home what they had seen in America.

Later in 1967, in issue 4 of the little Danish magazine *ta'*, Peter Louis-Jensen introduced Ronald Bladen, and he mentions having seen a work by him at Whitney's earlier the same year.³ *Ta'* 4 not only contained Peter Louis-Jensen's essay on Bladen, but also a translated version of Robert Smithson's crucial essay "Entropy and the new monuments". In Smithson's essay several of the most important American minimalists were introduced. Peter Louis-Jensen was aware of this when he introduced Bladen. He could, he wrote, have introduced "seemingly more significant and sophisticated exponents of a new concept of sculpture", and mentions Judd, Flavin, and Smithson as examples (Louis-Jensen 1967: 34, my translation). When compared to for example Hans-Jørgen Nielsen, but also Per Kirkeby, Peter Louis-Jensen stands as one of the less theoretically schooled members of Eks-skolen. He was first and foremost a practising artist, but his remarks on Bladen and minimalism show that he was well informed about who was who, and on who were names of significance, in minimalism in 1967. He was even able to point out important differences in works of Judd and Bladen. Judd's works "are static and controlled, Bladen's [...] are dynamic and insistent", he wrote, and continued: "whereas a box by Judd occupies the room,

³ *ta'* was a magazine that is often considered the mouthpiece of Eks-skolen, and *ta'* is also the crucial magazine for the early minimalist sensibility in Denmark. Only 8 issues were published in the years 1967 and 1968. This did not prevent the magazine from being essential.

but does it in a passive way, Bladen conquers the room with his forms” (Louis-Jensen 1967: 35, my translation). This analysis is clear, it is precise, and it shows a fine sensibility towards minimalism in the arts. Carried out, as it is, by one of the less theoretically founded members of Eks-skolen – a fact that Louis-Jensen himself from time to time stressed – it shows that in general artists connected to Eks-skolen were indeed well-informed on minimalism.

In his book *Hændelser på rejsen (Incidents on the journey)* from 1971 Per Kirkeby brings to mind that he met Robert Morris in New York. From what Kirkeby writes it is clear that he made no serious contact with Morris in 1966. But the mere fact that he saw Robert Morris in his studio suggests an interest in and an awareness of American minimalism. When Peter Louis-Jensen returned from New York he was interviewed in the Danish journal *Berlingske Tidende*. He proclaimed: “Paris is associated with a myth that we are no longer concerned with. The art that I am dealing with mainly comes from the USA” (quoted from Andersen 2003: 18, my translation). That is to say that the art he was dealing with was minimal art. It is remarkable that Peter Louis-Jensen’s notions are very similar to notions expressed by Donald Judd and Frank Stella in Bruce Glaser’s now classic interview with these two artists, “Questions to Stella and Judd”. In this interview Judd points out that it suits him fine if “the whole European tradition” is “all down the drain” (Glaser 1995: 150). And later he concludes that: “I’m totally uninterested in European art and I think it’s over with” (Glaser 1995: 154). “Questions to Stella and Judd” is now considered one of the defining points of minimal discourse, but it is unlikely that Peter Louis-Jensen should have known the interview when he claimed that the only interesting art was American. Glaser’s interview was originally broadcasted on radio in 1964, then it was printed in *Art News* in 1966, but it first gained canonical status when reprinted in Gregory Battcock’s anthology *Minimal Art* in 1968. Nevertheless Peter Louis-Jensen expressed the same thoughts on European art as the leading American minimalists did in the mid-sixties.

“We know everything”

Hans-Jørgen Nielsen was theoretically one of the leading figures in the group around Eks-skolen and *ta’*. His essay “Gruppebillede fra 60’erne” (“Group picture from the sixties”) from 1986 is an essential document about Eks-skolen. Nielsen describes the school as an “edged box” (Nielsen 2006: 468). The members of the group were very aware of who was in this edged box and who was not. Eks-skolen, Hans-Jørgen Nielsen writes, was artistically closed, and it was full of self-assured contempt towards positions outside Eks-skolen, but on

the other hand, he continues, there were intense exchanges with international contemporaries. In other words Eks-skolen was closed to Danish artists not associated with the school, but open to new movements in art internationally, not least new movements in American art, mainly pop art and minimal art. As an example of this awareness and of international exchanges Nielsen mentions that a group of artists from Eks-skolen met Robert Morris when he made a performance with Yvonne Rainer in Copenhagen in the mid-sixties. Furthermore, Nielsen mentions, Morris' important essay "Notes on Sculpture" caused intense theoretical discussions inside the group before anyone had really heard about Robert Morris – or for that sake minimal art – in Europe. Morris' "fellow-countryman Robert Smithson is also translated in *ta'* and he becomes world-famous among us before he gets famous in the rest of the world. We can do everything. We know everything. Of course", Nielsen writes in "Gruppebillede fra 60'erne" (Nielsen 2006: 469, my translation).

They knew everything, of course they did. But nonetheless it was revealing to Hans-Jørgen Nielsen to go to "Documenta 4" in Kassel in Germany in 1968. In an essay, "Adskilligt på foranledning af Documenta 4" ("A good deal at the instance of Documenta 4"), he writes that to him "Documenta 4" "was a unique opportunity to *see* a number of artists and works of art that in recent years have come to mean a lot to me via essays and photos" (Nielsen 2006: 207, my translation).

A number of these writings and photos Nielsen knew from American art magazines as *Art in America*, *Art News*, and *Art Forum*. It is said that some of the members of the Eks-skolen group went to the American embassy in Copenhagen to read American art magazines that presented the newest tendencies in American art. But American minimal art was also presented in Danish art magazines, and no doubt some of the essays Nielsen had in mind, when he wrote that he knew minimal art from essays and photos, were written by Jane Pedersen, a Danish art librarian who almost no-one mentions today when talking or writing about Danish sixties art. They should. Jane Pedersen wrote a number of introductions to what was not quite yet called minimal art. Most notable is maybe her essay "Den ny abstraktion" ("The New Abstraction") in the first issue of the Danish magazine *Billedkunst* in 1967 (Pedersen 1967a). At the end of essay Jane Pedersen introduces a number of exponents of this new art, e.g. Judd, Stella, Morris, and Andre. These artists are, as I have stressed earlier, the most crucial of the American minimalists – if that was not already clear in the sixties, art history has later shown that – and they were introduced comprehensively in a Danish art magazine already in early 1967. The precise selection of important

artists in minimal art furthermore reveals a wide knowledge of minimal art at an early point. Also in 1967 Jane Pedersen did introduce the American exhibition "Systemic Painting" in *ta*. "Systemic Painting" was at show at Guggenheim in the fall of 1966, and Jane Pedersen in her introduction mentions Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, and Carl Andre, artists that by the way did not take part at "Systemic Painting". The names of these artists, and presumably also photos or at least descriptions of their works, were no doubt circulated within the group. They crop up regularly in their writings.

At "Documenta 4" Hans-Jørgen Nielsen found that Danish artists weren't behind American artists at all. He writes that if one has been aware of what people like Peter Louis-Jensen and Poul Gernes have showed recent years – most often in humble places – one will be familiar with many of the concepts that American artists now were breaking through with. The works of the Danish artist "in certain instances [has] a form that is quite as strong" as that of the Americans, Nielsen notes (Nielsen 2006: 207). As an example Nielsen mentions Peter Louis-Jensen's "Struktur. 16 objekter". This work was, as Hans-Jørgen Nielsen writes, showed "long before anyone had heard about minimal art" in 1966 (Nielsen 2006: 207).

In "Adskillig på foranledning af Documenta 4" ("A good deal at the instance of 'Documenta 4'") Hans-Jørgen Nielsen quotes Donald Judd's essay "Specific Objects", which was originally printed in *Arts Yearbook* 8 in 1965. Judd's essays are not common reading, and they certainly weren't in the sixties either, at least not outside certain art circles in America. But Nielsen, and presumably others from Eks-skolen, was, as we can see from his quotations, familiar with Judd's writings in the late sixties. This is of course important. The knowledge of American minimal art was not randomly based on hearsay and small black and white photos. Some of the Danish artists did read what leading American minimalists were writing – Peter Louis-Jensen's statement that he did not understand what the Americans were saying also confirms this. Hans-Jørgen Nielsen quotes a central, but not very often quoted, statement in Judd's essay, where Judd writes: "Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface" (Judd 2005: 184). Nielsen writes that "Judd somewhere stated", that space "can be treated more specific than paint on a flat surface" (Nielsen 2006: 209). Nielsen knew what minimalism was all about. Very few outside the in-crowd of minimal art did that in the sixties. Nielsen knew Judd's writings, and he understood them well. In fact they were very similar to some of his writings – written before Nielsen had read Judd.

Malevich at the dining table

In an essay, “Bilderstreit” from his book *Håndbog* from 1991, Per Kirkeby writes that he in the early sixties joined Eks-skolen to learn how to do etchings, but already the next morning, he writes, he “met Malevich at the dining table where Troels Andersen did some sort of lecture on Russians I had never heard of” (Kirkeby 1991: 91, my translation). This presumably changed his plans and his artistic career.

Troels Andersen’s lectures on and introductions of Russian constructivism at Eks-skolen is without doubt one of the reasons, maybe the main reason, why many Danish artists arrived at a sort of minimalism early – almost as early as the Americans did. In the same essay Per Kirkeby writes that when the Danish artists got to know American minimalism they did not, as later when things got politicized at the end of the decade, see it as America against Europe: “We perceived it as underground to underground [...] It was the same change that we ourselves were working on” (Kirkeby 1991: 92, my translation). In American art the Danish artists at Eks-skolen found a sensibility much more in tune with their own sensibility than anything they could find anywhere in Danish or for that sake European art. The changes, they performed in the arts, were also performed by some American artists, and the battles they fought against high modernism were also fought by the Americans.

Troels Andersen’s influence on Danish minimalism, in his lectures at Eks-skolen, could – and should – be displayed further. Andersen did, as far as I know, not teach modern American art at Eks-skolen. He taught Russian constructivism, and these introductions to Russian constructivism may be one of the main reasons why Danish artists at an early point reached a stand that in retrospect can be described as minimalist. Troels Andersen was one of the first Western art historians to gain access to Russian constructivist works in the Soviet Union.⁴ This means that Danish artists, through Andersen’s teachings at Eks-skolen, had an early knowledge of crucial works by for example Malevich and Vladimir Tatlin.

It is a fact that many of the American minimalists were also aware of Russian constructivism; for example Judd often mentions Malevich in his early reviews, that is reviews from the start of the sixties. A clear example of this awareness is

⁴ Tania Ørum also mentions Troels Andersen’s influence in “Minimal requirements of the post-war avant-garde of the 1960s”. She writes that Troels Andersen: “was one of the first, if not *the* first, Western art historian allowed to look at works of the Russian avant-garde during his studies (of more acceptable Russian artists) in the Soviet Union in the late 1950s and early 1960s” (Ørum 2006: 148).

demonstrated by the fact that the longest ongoing series of works in Dan Flavin's oeuvre is a series of more than 50 works dedicated to Vladimir Tatlin. Flavin began this series entitled "'monument' for V. Tatlin" in 1964, and he continued to make variations until 1990. The Danish artists also knew Tatlin well. Again it was Troels Andersen who had introduced him. Per Kirkeby used him in an essay from 1968, "Laokoon", to demonstrate the pure pole in his own opposition of the pure and the impure in his art. This pure pole in early Russian avant-garde, and not least Danish and American artists' focusing on this pure pole, maybe led to minimalism – in Denmark and in the USA simultaneously.

"It's clear, it's simple ..."

Hans-Jørgen Nielsen, who artistically was first and foremost a writer, and the Danish composer Henning Christiansen made a small book called *informations* in 1965. This book contained a score by Henning Christiansen and something called "textures" by Hans-Jørgen Nielsen. Nielsen's textures consisted of dots and circles matching Christiansen's score. A short text followed *informations*, which I will shortly analyse. It is in English:

it's clear it's simple it's elementary it's anonymous it's conscious it's controllable it's mechanical it's not expressive it's not vitalized it's not entertainment it's without dramatic organization it's without complexity it's what it is it's music to hear it's textures to look at it's informatory.
(Nielsen 2000: 100f)

I consider this text an important example of early Danish literary minimalism. The text is programmatic, and one can easily read it as a comment on Christiansen's score and Nielsen's textures, but it is also an aesthetic text, it is a work of art. The short text is printed on two pages, and it appears as a rectangle or a square on each page. Each square contains 15 lines and in each line there is space for ten letters. That means that there is 10 x 15 x 2 spaces in the two squares, and that again means that there are 300 spaces to be filled with a letter, a punctuation (which in general is left out, the only punctuation is a punctuation mark at the end of the text), or an empty space between each word. To count the number of spaces to be filled out in a text is not the usual way to read a text. It is to see the text as a grid, a grid made up of letters on a page, letters arranged in a certain way.

There are 16 sentences in the text. Every sentence starts with "It's ...". Thus we have a marked repetitive structure; a textual seriality, which anaphoric and paratactic blots out any dynamic in the text. The first seven sentences contain

positive statements: "It's X". The following five are denials. The three first of the type "It's not X", and the last two "It's without X". At the end there is four positive statements of the same type as the opening statements "It's X". The text is not just a manifesto. It is also a demonstration of what is said in the manifesto. To tighten the argument, the reader does not have to read the text. He or she can just look at it. The text looks as what it says. The squares are anonymous, simple, clear, almost mechanical or industrial, and so is the repetitive structure of the text.

Tania Ørum, in her postscript to Nielsen's collected poems, *Nielsen sort på hvidt. Samlede digte* (2000), notes that Nielsen and Christiansen dissociate themselves from the modernism of the preceding generations, most clearly of course in the sentences containing denials. A number of modernism's characteristics are renounced, e.g. *expressiveness*, *vitality*, *dramatic organization*, and *complexity*. But more important, while Nielsen and Christiansen dissociate themselves from modernism, they approach minimal art. Nielsen and Christiansen focus on specific aspects of modernism, that is exactly the aspects that were also rejected in American minimalism, and they replace these aspects with exactly the aspects that were becoming the crucial aspects of American minimalism. The same year as Hans-Jørgen Nielsen and Henning Christiansen wrote the cited sentences, Donald Judd in "Specific Objects" wrote: "Most works finally have one quality. In earlier art the complexity was displayed and built the quality" (Judd 2005: 184). Donald Judd in this statement of course implied that precisely complexity was not one of the main characteristics displayed in minimal art, and it wasn't in Christiansen's and Nielsen's *informations* either.

Instead of complexity Nielsen and Christiansen put *clarity*, *simplicity*, *anonymity*, and *controllability*; most precisely formulated in the tautologically: "It's what it is". "It's music to hear" and "it's texture to look at" as Nielsen and Christiansen put it in statements very close to Frank Stella's well known "What you see is what you see" – a statement that is often read as prototypical minimalist (Glaser 1995: 158). In an essay on Henning Christiansen's music, "Efter Zero" ("After Zero") Hans-Jørgen Nielsen's wrote that Christiansen's music is a *høre-ting* (a thing to listen to), and in the same essay Nielsen compared Christiansen's music to three-dimensional works by Robert Morris, Ronald Bladen, and Robert Smithson, who, as Nielsen wrote, "do big anonymous, [...] immediately readable things to look at" (again the word Nielsen used in Danish

was *se-ting*, just like Christiansen do things to hear (*høre-ting*) (Nielsen 2006, s. 124).⁵

In these statements on Christiansen's music Hans-Jørgen Nielsen is formulating a point of view that is close to what we, using the vocabulary from Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood" from 1967, could call *objecthood* (Fried 1995). Nielsen does it two years before Fried wrote his essay. Objecthood, Fried informed us, marks the condition in which the artist has no intention to suspend the object status of the object to let it become more than literal.⁶ To preserve objecthood is to Fried the same as to let the object stay a thing or an object instead of making it into a work of art. To Fried a work of art is an object in which the *objecthood* is suspended. Nielsen expresses no intentions concerning the suspension of the object's objecthood. Rather he wants to preserve objecthood and to emphasize the text or work of art as literal *and* as a thing. This ideal is underlined by his terminology – *se-ting* and *høre-ting* – a terminology that is clearly dissociated from the more or less metaphysical rhetoric of modernism.

Rosalind E. Kraus, in her essay "Grids", writes that the grid – often used to describe aspects of minimal art – announces a "hostility to literature", the grid, she continues, has lowered a barrier "between the arts of vision and those of language" (Kraus 1993: 9). I have analysed Nielsen's and Christiansen's text as an aesthetic text, that is as literature, and as a grid. The fact that I am able to do this – or that I have to do that in order to understand the (visual) text – means that Nielsen and Christiansen have opened up the barrier Kraus thinks the grid lowers between the arts of vision and literature. Nielsen and Christiansen have

⁵ Hans-Jørgen Nielsen's "Efter Zero" was written over some years in the sixties. In 1965 Nielsen wrote the essay "Efter Zero. Om Henning Christiansen og Perceptive Constructions II" ("After Zero. On Henning Christiansen and Perceptive Constructions II"), and in 1966 he wrote "Henning Christiansens rokader" ("Henning Christiansen's castlings"). The first essay was published in the Danish music magazine *Dansk musiktidskrift* 7, 1965, the second, which was a short introduction to a score by Christiansen, in the magazine *Hvedekorn* 6, 1966. These two essays Nielsen put together as "Efter Zero" for his collection of essays *Nielsen' og den hvide verden* (Nielsen and the White World) in 1968. Especially the second essay was altered – or rather extended – when Nielsen put it in "Efter Zero". What Nielsen added in the final version of the text was all the references to minimal art. This suggests that he between 1966 and 1968 became aware of minimal art, and that he became aware of the resemblances between the art made at Eks-skolen and minimal art. What is even more interesting is the fact that the contents of the two early essays fit perfectly well with theories drawn from minimal art in the final version of the text. For example Nielsen in the first essay from 1965 wrote about Christiansen's music as representing "anonymity, objectivity, rationality" (Nielsen 1965: 215, my translation). "You will have to accept simplicity", he concluded (Nielsen 1965: 215, my translation).

⁶ *Literalism* was the term Fried suggested for the kind of art we now know as minimal art.

made a grid in language. They have made neither art of vision nor literature, but art of vision and literature at the same time.

It is quite well known that Donald Judd in 1965 opened his essay “Specific Objects” by stating that: “Half or more of the best work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture” (Judd 2005: 181). Judd’s statement was – though presumably not intended so – a defining statement in minimal art. Minimalists made specific objects, which means that they made neither painting nor sculpture. They did not accept the barrier between painting and sculpture, and they did not want to make any of these, but preferred to make what they called specific objects or just three-dimensional works. It seems like Christiansen and Nielsen rejects the barrier between the visual arts and literature, just as American minimalists rejected the barrier between painting and sculpture in their search for a third way in the arts. The American minimalists (and, as I have tried to show, Danish artists as well) made specific objects. In *informations* Hans-Jørgen Nielsen and Henning Christiansen made *se-ting* and *høre-ting*. They did work in the same field as the Americans. Their work was not peripheral. It was just as central as the works of arts carried out by American minimalists.

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