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## Why Have There Been No Great Danish Video Artists?[1]

### I.
### Production: Artists

**1**

Patterns of apparently idiosyncratic artistic activities and a taste for oxymoronic solutions may be safely regarded as a typical "Danish" one – predictably unpredictable and always highly individualistic, but at least intentionally social. Not few of most exponent video artists in Denmark will retreat at some later point of their career to the more traditional media of drawing, graphics, print or photography.[2] Raising the questions of the conditions of authorship was also representative for many artists in Denmark. Per Kirkeby (born 1938) demonstrated such a typical trans-disciplinary artistic method at the beginning of his career: He complemented the own range of artistic (mostly painterly) techniques and procedures by performance and video in collaboration with Henning Christiansen, Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman, followed by a first short film (1968) under the influence of Andy Warhol. William Louis Sørensen (1942-2005), on the other side, began in the second half of the 1960s to expand his work in the traditional areas of photography, film and electronic media, including video and computer. Sørensens` work moved, as he put it himself, "in the space between all the media".[3] The inclusion of the audience was also part of the program already in the course of the sixties and seventies, when Sørensen was an active member of the art scene of the second largest Danish city of Århus. A leading role played both the potential participation of the audience and the indeterminism, manifested by the built aleatoric elements, as shown by his live video performances and installations since the early seventies. The so far first known concept for a closed circuit video installation in Denmark (however not realized) stems from September 1968 and is named *Any magnetic or magneto-optical recording system that…* Under Sørensen´s direction, the video installation emerged as a space-time of pure potentiality: "A.: Any magnetic or magneto-optical recording system that stores and sends off quantities simultaneously adding quantities is recording with two variable delays […] B.: A two tracks tape loop is distributed over three tape recorders with two variable delays. […]"[4]

Sørensen´s first realized closed-circuit video installation / performance was entitled *A TV. Circuit* and executed 1971 during the international show *Propositions d´artistes pour circuit fermé de television* in the Gallery Yellow Now in Liège in Belgium. This is a section from artist´s concept:

"1. The camera is focused at one person of the working team crossing the shooting angle of the camera, entry left or right, each time at a changed distance of one centimetre to any distance available from the camera – time and number of times of crossing the angle is determined by the person crossing, according to succession, intervals, position etc. […] 4. Any interval between the former three momentums or interval within each momentum is performed by two negative pictures focused at a distance so that they become one to one with the receiver screen in size […] August 1971." (Kacunko, *Closed Circuit* DVD; Frandsen, „...To establish")

The neo-avant-gardist features like indeterminism, variability and the participatory potential became obvious in such a setup that makes it possible to act in any position between a chosen camera and a screen. In one closed-circuit video installation designed and executed in February 1976, William Louis Sørensen

focused four live video cameras and microphones in four different directions, so that the input and output devices simply visualized the live participation of the camera field space (Kacunko, *Closed Circuit*, p. 322).[5] In another one, entitled *To drop a TV circuit recording*, realized in Århus in April 1978 and documented by video (11 min.), Sørensen employed two cameras scanning an area and using the tools like microphones, mixer and zoom-lenses of the cameras to "program" an aleatoric setup-outline, as it were (Kacunko, *Closed Circuit*, DVD).

Such setups remind us on Jacques Ranciére´s ideas about *le spectateur émancipé*[6], on Yves Klein´s *Theatre du Vide* (ca. 1960) and on Jacques Polieri´s early video-scenography, to which I used the label *Theatre de la Vidéo* (Kacunko, *Closed Circuit*, p. 257). Such an empty space (and time) of "pure potentiality" was first materialized with the video-performances- and installations or set-ups, which, however, were very soon challenged by the neo-avant-gardists from the Fluxus-circle or the influential artists from the post-minimalist and body-and-performance-art context. (In-)famous in this context was Bruce Nauman´s apparently arrogant or elitist statement "*I mistrust the audience participation*".[7]

## 2

The video-induced break of the traditional separation between the artwork and the viewer happened all over the place. Niels Lomholt (b. 1943) is a next prominent example from Denmark: Graduated from Bath Academy of Art in England in 1969 (Painting and Photography) before returning to Denmark, he remembered "five years of confrontation with almost all that moved in art in the 60's." He wrote about the "lessons with Claes Oldenburg, Richard Hamilton and afternoon in the same house as Marcel Duchamp, Conceptual Art, Joseph Kosuth, Art & Language and Pop Art as far as the eye reached […] Staying abroad was an art education". His work around 1970 "was a kind of conceptual Land Art. This work transformed into postal size. Soon the work became more photographic and documentary."[8] Mail art was and still is a counter-culture operating as an alternative gallery space and below the point of sale; as Lars Movin remarked, the commodification of art in this (Danish) context was constantly questioned. In this case, it means that art was not for sale, but for exchange, while the hand of the author was an identity mark supposed to mock the official art system.[9]

With regard to videotapes, Niels Lomholt's "perfectionist mood descriptions"[10] of the early years owe some of their character to his collaborator, photographer Tom Elling, whom he met in 1975 and who possessed an eminent sense of lighting, while working out precise moods in a manned of a "postmodernist video director." The *Gunter K/-sagen* (1983) was a visually accomplished *film noir*-video without a concrete action plan, regarded by a contemporary critics Carl Nørrested as a prelude to Lars von Trier´s debut film *The Element of Crime* (*Forbrydelsens Element*) of 1984, for which Elling served as the cinematographer. (ibid, p. 36 and Movin, *Danish Video*, p. 73). The latter´s film's international success seemed to have the concrete result, so that Lomholt, Elling and Peter Laugesen – so Nørrested´s estimation – could complete their feature film project *Nachthafen* in 1986. What remained of it on Lomholt´s website today is a his roughly documented video installation *Go Ahead Nach Hafen* (4 x 30 min., set up in the Husarstalden in Roskilde from March 1st to 23rd 1986): It was to be regarded as a sketch for *Nachthafen*.

Between 1987 and 1990, Lomholt produced a five-parts videotape-cycle entitled *Gentle Tourism* – "a journey", as he described, "through the political landscape of Europe, entertainment, opinions, consumerism and historical monuments. The history and the trace of the chronicler, new pattern on the traveller's retina. The march of history in the aesthetics of the electronic wall. A counter movement to the tightly constructed films, the soft construction: Believe, wait, sense and other delays."[11] The character of video footage from Berlin or Venice was designed to separate itself from the narrative and to "dissolve the materiality of the world". The editing process supported such a visual character of the videos, rising

questions about "the electronic credibility, alternately moving away and getting closer still in the consciousness, underneath the skin or on the surface" (ibid).

Carsten Schmidt-Olsen was born in 1952 and grew up in the north of Denmark, where he still lives and works. From 1974 to 1975 he attended the *Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek* in Copenhagen, a school for classical drawing. He sees himself as a concept artist, which uses various media such as painting ("robot-painting"), graphic design, photography, video, performance and Mail Art; to the latter, he was introduced by Yoshio Nakajima back in 1979. In the 1980s, Schmidt-Olsen formed together with Jørgen Christensen group *Golden Boys* and under this name, the **two** artists conceived in 1987 for the video exhibition "Monitor 87" at Frölunda  Kulturhus in Göteborg, Sweden, three video installation concepts, including two closed circuit video installations: *Ass Hole Video or Other Holes Video* and *Video lap, lap up*. Only the last draft was realized, and it basically led the closed-circuit video connection ad absurdum (cf. Kacunko, *Closed Circuit*, DVD).

Schmidt-Olsen moved on with some solo projects in the beginning of 1990s, as the live video installation *VideoTrans* shows: Executed 1991 for the video festival *56 degrees North* in Århus, the piece included in its first phase a live video performance performed by the members of *Århus Filmværksted* with several linearly related video camera/monitor-units (cf. Kacunko, *Closed Circuit*, DVD).  Then, the same setup was executed twelve CC-video cameras and monitors for the opening of the festival on September 7th 1991 in a closed showroom, whereas the last camera in the line was connected to a video projector.

Jørgen Christensen and Carsten Schmidt-Olsen executed video tapes since the beginning of 1980s, such as *No Really Title* (1981, 45 min.). Schmidt-Olsen produced a couple of shorter, high-estimated videotapes by the end of 1980s and around 1990: In *Stiff-Ballet* (1988, 7:20 min.), a music-box Prima donna performed her dance as if she would perhaps never stop; in medaled *Storm* (1991, 2 min.), he "demonstrated" a storm in a glass of water against a fixed background, and in a fixed position to the camera, challenging "our conception of gravity" (Movin, *Danish Video*, p. 74).

Torben Søborg (1930-2022) contributed substantially to the production and distribution of independent video in Denmark (i.e. in his understanding: not acquainted to the commercial art galleries) and abroad, and we shall return to his video workshop and distribution later on. His *Figures in Room (Version I)* (1983, 6:00 min.) was a "visual paraphrase of a poem by Helge Krarup, emphasizing by jumps in picture and sound the lines: *Figures meeting and passing by each other*". While Søborg included here Helge Krarup, who also co-realized an early videotape for TV back in 1973 (cf. next section), the second version of his videotape *Figures in Room was* included in the International Video Magazine *INFERMENTAL*, Edition III, in 1984. In *A Man Cut By Window ... or André Breton's Dream* (1984, 2:30 min.), Søborg similarly "visualized" one of André Breton's *Dream sentences* from his *Le Manifeste du Surréalisme* (1924).

Pseudo-documentaries, video-essays and formal-technical experiments by Lomholt and Schmidt-Olsen led to an open competition between the two artists´ "camps", while Søborg, less profiled as artist himself, managed to collaborate with both, as well as with many other video artists of different generations. His cooperations with the mentioned Helge Krarup or with Svend Thomsen pointed additionally to further video genres during the first decade of introducing video in Denmark. *Electronic abstractions* was one of them: American photographer and filmmaker Ronald A. Nameth (b. 1942), who collaborated also with John Cage, Terry Riley and Andy Warhol, played a particular role during the emergence of video art in Denmark: He worked with the interaction between abstract, electronically created effects and human movements performed by dancers.[12] Nameth tested video feedback possibilities on the Danish Film School's video equipment in 1972 and in the *TV-byen* (*TV city*) in 1973 together with the American Tom DeWitt and the Danish brothers Helge and Steen Krarup. *Videolandskab Feedback* (1972) by Helge and Steen Krarup was an early result of this video pilot project at DR/TV (Nørrested, "Art-video", p. 33).

*Scratch Video* was a video art genre quite popular in Denmark throughout the 1980s, which was in part imported from the United Kingdom and which went "almost as far away as it is possible […] from 1970´s concept-oriented experimental cinema and video and from the lengthy monumental visual progressions" (Movin, *Danish Video*, p. 75) – and from the video-feedback experiments as well, as we should add. In the context of Svend Thomsen´s video gallery *Trekanten* in Copenhagen (since 1984) and the video-authors-association with the same name, Ulrik Al Brask, Frants Pandal and Knud Vesterskov have played perhaps the most exponent role. Ulrik Al Brask´s video *Infantile Alchemy* (1985, 4:10 min.) combined a post-modern inspiration with a deserted environment on a mystic *St. Hans´* Night. In *Upside Down* (1986, 5:50 min.), Ulrik Al Brask and Frants Pandal "praised" the world's motorways and the eternal motor traffic, while Ulrik Al Brask´s *That´s The Way Freedom is* (1986, 2 min.) was a scratch-video based on TV-materials from the catastrophe of *Challenger* in 1986: A Ronald Reagan-quotation was used as a rhytmic pattern. Also in Ulrik Al Brask and Frants Pandal´s *Scratching the Eyes Out. In Three Easy Lessons* (1989) was like in many other scratch-videos the rhythmic soundtrack a constitutional part of the work.

Knud Vesterskov (b. 1942) belonged with Ulrik Al Brask and Jens Tang to the mentioned *Trekanten*-association. The three video directors became known for their videos with "rapid, intense and concentrated bombardment of the senses" (Movin, *Danish Video*, p. 75), but also with quite precise and very well rhythmized audiovisual "synesthesia"-effects. Vesterskov combined scratch video-features with feature- and blue-movies characteristics as well as private amateur home videos.[13] *Johnny – A Modern Interpretation of Slaveology* (1988, 8 min.) was such a *Trekanten Video*-production by Ulrik Al Brask, Knud Vesterskov and Jens Tang with a more rigorous-political claim: In heavily electronically adapted footage from Dante's *Inferno* and *Ben Hur* to real fist fucking, this video, so Lars Movin, "masterly portrays the innermost soul of subjection." The appropriated film- and video-footage was combined with the travelling circus and finally poured into a "homogeneous color-distorted picture collage, altogether making a statement of man´s enslaved existence; we are slaves of working, slaves of gambling, slaves of sex" (Movin, *Danish Video*, p. 76).

Frans Kannik (1949-2011) can be regarded as a typical, yet exceptional example for a self-educated, "trans-medially" working, multifaceted artist switching from painting and graphics to performance and installation as well as video and sculpture. He became quite important for the Danish art scene from 1980 on, not least through the founding the neo-expressionistic artistic workshop Leifsgade 22 at Islands Brygge in Copenhagen. In *Domus Vista* (1982, 20 min.), Kannik and Finn Petersen documented a video performance (on VHS) showing two artists painting different motives on the same plastic sheet. In a video produced by the *Danish Video Art Data Bank* (Haslev) entitled *Venus* (1983, 20 min.), Kannik showed a naked female model, while camera (conducted by Torben Søborg) was capturing her profile at a closed-circuit-connected TV-monitor; the whole scene was recorded. This videotape may be regarded also as a "sketch" for a not-realized video installation project, which was even better documented on a lithograph: Kannik´s project envisaged an arrangement similar to Velazquez´ *Rokeby Venus* (1647), only with a real CC video camera and connected television monitor instead of the large mirror.[14]

Ane Mette Ruge (b. 1955) worked together with her Dutch spouse Jacob Schokking (b. 1956) and they formed a self-governing institution *Holland House*, which became important for the Danish video scene – especially for video performance- and installation-genres as well as music-dramatical theatre – throughout the 1980s. Ruge and Schokking exhibited their video installations *Helge, Nonni & Norma* (1986), *Corpus Delicti* (1987) and *The Wake* (1989) both in Denmark and abroad. *Source & Echo* (1990) was exhibited in Denmark, Canada and in France and it dealt with the "sources" of time-based audiovisual inputs; while crossing each other, they become as "echoes" the sources of new figures.The point was that the spectators

at some point must give up "retrieving" what is the actual "source" and what its "echo" (cf. Movin, *Danish Video*, p. 82).

Ane Mette Ruge examined also in her video tape *Cast* (1987) the relation between form and content of the video, sound and text, revealing her background in photography as well, but with altogether distorted motives (seen through water and alike): "A line of ragged photos is passing and transforming into some kind of distant, mythical gathering of persons in a landscape of clay pillars and brown or blue figurations" (Movin, *Danish Video*, p. 83). In *R.E.M.* (1991), Ruge explored the video technique more focused with reference to the "Rapid Eye Movements" (known during the "deep" sleeping phase) and with usage of flickering visual and auditive fragments.[15]

Henrik Rubens Genz (b. 1959) studied at the Kolding Handicraft College before attending Niels Lomholt´s video courses and making his video-debut with subjective semi-documentaries. *Eternal Winter* (1986) is a paradigmatic example of such a introvertish, rather depressive video-"confession", introduced by the author with the following words: "It's still winter, though we have the 2nd of July. Just before midnight and nonetheless the light of noon. Such absurd experience of time is the framework of this story: Describing the thoughts of someone / life in the minutes before midnight on this fortuitous, but weird summer day" (Søborg, *Video Data Bank*; cf. Movin, *Danish Video*, p. 78). Such a self-conscious retreat from the self-contained, socially controlled and politically secured "coziness" (*Hygge*) is at that time to become a feature of the mood that characterized the Danish and Nordic artists´ "rebellion" (and art-market-invasion) of the then popping-up of the postmodern, "Nordic Miracle"-generation. Henrik Rubens Genz produced in 1990 also two semi-documentary videos about ex-drug addict and manic criminal Patrick Small (*Small Talk* and *Den Mand Kunne Jeg Bare Stole På*).

**Production: Workshops**

**4**

The introduction of the first portable recording devices dates back to 1968, the year in which Torben Søborg established the first Video Workshop (Video Workshop / Haslev [*Fantasifabrikken*]) under the Haslev seminary (Haslev College of Education). The acquired video equipment served both to local needs, teacher training and documentation as well as the artists who were allowed to use it for the completion of their own work. It started out with the equipment of that time – Sony reel-to-reel tape recorders and black/white cameras – but in 1975 one of the first U-Matic edit suites of Denmark was purchased there (in fact, the most of the above mentioned video-masters were taken on U-Matic Low Band, i.e. a semi-professional format). Usually, the video workshop served as a student facility, but simultaneously it has also maintained various external functions. Courses for those among the local population wanting to make local TV and radio have been held.

In 1977, The *Danish Film Institute Workshop in Copenhagen* and the *Danish Film Institute Workshop* in Haderslev opened, both financed by the Danish Film Institute. In 1978, The *Århus Film Værksted* was founded, where video courses and cooperation with the local Århus TV were carried out. Each year, during the *Århus Festuge* (Festival week), an international video festival was organized in cooperation with the Danish Film Institute Workshop in Haderslev. In 1985, *Video Journalen* was organized by Raymond Hansen in Copenhagen, resulting in a total of 180 minutes of television, broadcasted 15 minutes a day for three weeks. In the autumn of 1986, the *State of Europe* project was launched by the Danish Film Workshop, initiated by *Triple Vision* (independent production company); it had the similar concept to *Video Journalen* (1985), but now related to the subject whether Europe could survive the American wave of culture. The results were screened in 1988 at the first international festival of the Danish Film Institute Workshop in Copenhagen.

In 1987, the *Værksteds-sammenslutningen* (Workshop Association) was founded in order to secure optimal conditions for the users by preserving best production facilities for video works. In the autumn of 1988, the DR´s (*Danmarks Radio*) monopoly was broken by establishing of TV2 with a nationwide TV channel and nine regional stations; in accordance to the *Channer Four* model, the Danish video workshop milieus were supposed to be stimulated, however, remaining on the drawing table. In 1990, *Mediekunstskolen* was founded at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts (which purchased video equipment already at the end of the 1960s) in Copenhagen. Torben Christensen was the first manager.[16]

**II.**
**Distribution and Reception: Exhibitions, Festivals, Symposia, Galleries, Publications, Archives**

**5**

In 1972 (January 22nd till February 14th), the artistic use of video, film and photo-slides was first showed in an international context in Denmark: 75 artists participated in the exhibition *Projektion* in the art gallery Louisiana in Humlebæk.[17] It is however rather unlikely that this show was yet to "trigger" the video art in Denmark for the immediate time to come. In 1973, a law amendment made it possible to show local experimental TV through cable nets, which lead to the short-lived private local TV projects in Haslev, Varde, Ishøj, Næsby and Farum (1975-1977) – however, without any ambition of producing video art.

In 1976, another international show entitled *Video International* was organized by German-American art historian Fred Licht in Kunstmuseum in Århus; we cannot say much about this show yet, although it is being quoted by Lars Movin sixteen years later as "first real video exhibition" in Denmark (Movin, *Danish Video*, p. 50). We could confirm Marianne Heske from Norway or Goran Trbuljak from former Yugoslavia as participants; Carl Nørrested claimed in an article from 1986 that during the *Video International* in 1976, "*videokunst for danskere endnu var en by på månen*" ("video art was for the Danes back than still a place on the Moon") (Nørrested, "Art-video", p. 36). Both superlative- and pejorative estimations need in any case to be confirmed and substantialized by the future research. In any case, before the beginning of 1980s, there cannot be talked back a continuous distribution and reception of video art in Denmark. Nørrested´s claim that video art in Denmark was a "distinct" (*udpræget*) 1980´s phenomenon without a "domestic" (*hjemlig*) tradition (ibid) must be seen in this light.

In 1979, *Dansk Video Tidsskrift* (Danish Video Periodical) was published by the *Film Institute Workshop / Haderslev* (later *Danish Film Institute Workshop / Haderslev*), edited by Hans V. Bang and Peter Louis Jensen. It could be regarded as another phenomenon of the 1980s, as we know it when thinking of *Infermental*. In the same year, *Video Monitor*, another video periodical, was first published by the Video workshop in Haslev, edited by Torben Søborg. Next year, *Dansk Video Tidsskrift* and *Video Monitor* 1980 merged into one, *Dansk Video Vidsskrift* (Danish video Periodical) which continued until 1983. Also in 1980, a book about the history of the (video-) workshop-idea in Denmark by Erik Thygesen was published: *Uprofessionelle billeder. For en demokratisering af medierne*.[18]

In 1982, a law bill was passed that secured local TV on a permanent basis in Denmark; Søborg started to include producing of video art into the context of his Video Workshop in Haslev. In the same year, the *1. Danske Symposium om videokunst* took place on November 6th at *Huset* in Copenhagen, initiated by Niels Lomholt and Torben Søborg. Almost twenty video enthusiasts discussed the (1) technical potentials of the video medium as an art form, the (2) production possibilities, the (3) status of video art in the Danish art institutions, and the (4) exhibition and exchange possibilities both in Denmark and abroad (Movin, *Danish Video*, p. 46).

In 1983, Torben Søborg inaugurated *The Danish Video Art Bank* in Haslev, a non-profit agency for promoting and distributing Danish video art outside Denmark. In 1996, Søborg left the college, so the Haslev *Workshop* and the *Data Bank* separated (Movin, *Danish Video*, p. 71-2).[19] Also in 1983, Niels Lomholt organized at his private residence the *Falling Annual Livingroom Video Festspiel* – a kind of follow-up to The *1. Danske Symposium om videokunst* from previous year. In 1984, *Falling Annual Livingroom Video Festspiel* by Niels Lomholt was held again, while  Torben Søborg in Haslev attempted to revive *Video Monitor* with a specimen copy (and published 49 issues with irregular intervals between 1985/86 and March 2001). Later on, *Video Monitor* transformed to *Dansk Video Tidsskrift* to *monitor*, and finally to *VIDEO ART\e-monitor* (a joint venture between video workshops in Haslev and Haderslev).

In 1984, Søborg finally collected and published *Katalog Over Dansk Videokunst* with support from the Ministry of Culture, as an indirect offshoot of the *1. Danske Symposium om videokunst* in 1982 in *Huset* in Copenhagen. The publication indicated thirty artists and four artist groups who claimed to work in video art. Described were some 100 works on tape, video installations and video performances between 1968 and 1984. "One may regard this catalogue", so Movin, "as some kind of monument of the first Danish video art generation" (Movin 1992, p. 71/72).

Meanwhile, Svend Thomsen worked on video recording of the street theater and performance in Copenhagen since 1977, and started the first formal collaboration with the *Festival of Fools* (or *Video Fools*, later KIT). In 1983, Thomsen took the initiative for the formation of the *Trekanten* (the Triangle) – an "Audio Visual Gallery and Art Space" (association, gallery and workshop), In Viktoriagade 7 in Vesterbro-district in Copenhagen. It evolved, as he summarized later on, "from being the first video group to an 'institution' for the 'new' art forms" until 1990. This first video gallery in Denmark, would split soon into the *Videoformidling-* (mediation-) group around Thomsen (related to documentation-productions) and the group *The Triangle in public* with Ulrik Al Brask, Jens Tang and Knud Vesterskov (related to "stretch-video" and gay-video). Thomsen created subsequently a video production company *Trekanten Video Formidling* (*TVF*), which purchased a used U-Matic editing equipment on a bank loan. *TVF* (Triangle Video Mediation) produced videos for dance companies and visual artists as well as the documentations of the "Time Based Art" in widest sense (music, song, theater, dance and poetry – "live"-presented artforms).

In 1985, *Århus International Video Festival* started, an event arranged by *Århus Filmworkshop* and the *Danish Film Institute Workshop* in Haderslev, managed by Peder Andersen. This festival demonstrated quite an impact during the rest of decade. In January through February 1986, another, this time large video festival was held at *Huset* in Copenhagen and in Kunsthallen Brandts Klædefabrik in Odense: *Video Marathon* was the first time-opportunity for Danish public to see a larger overview of the international video art, however, without much of Danish video. Parallel to *Video Marathon*, a *Nordic Video Conference* in Copenhagen was held as well.[20]

In 1988, *The Danish Film + Video Workshop Festival* was the first international festival of the *Danish Film Institute Workshop* in Copenhagen, which showed the results of the *State of Europe* project (1986), covering the theme of the independent film and video production versus television. In November 1988, the *Video Marathon II* – follow-up of the large video festival-event from 1986 – was held at *Pumpehuset* in Copenhagen, with Danish and international video installations being in focus: Marcel Odenbach, Marie Jo Lafontaine, Danish *King Kong Production*. Torben Søborg underlined in a critical article the rising interest in video installations. In the catalogue of *Video Marathon II*, he presented a list of not less than ten Danish video installations exhibited within a year.[21]

At the same time, a peak of Danish video festivals can be tracked back, with *Videomani* in Ålborg, *Nykøbing Falster Art Festival*, *Video Huset* at the Roskilde Rock Festival and *Østervendsyssels Film & Video Festival*. However, the trend cooled down quite soon. Also in 1988, *Video Galleriet* was opened in *Huset* in

Copenhagen in collaboration with *Kunstfagsalen* at Copenhagen Central Library, as a place for permanent video screening. Vibeke Vogel was the manager. *En Støj in Øjet* [A Noise in the Eye]*: Film- og videoeksperimenter på danske værksteder*, a book on independent and experimental video production and the workshop network by Susanna Neimann was issued in Århus.[22]

## A historiographical conclusion

**6**

Lars Movin, the author of the first historiographical survey of video art in Denmark (1992: Movin, *Danish Video*), had brought a number of conclusions about its specifics: Regarding (1) the relations of video and television, neither clear critical statements has been detected (apart of few exceptions), nor particular interest in media specificity of video; regarding (2) the video and technology, technical level of video-work was higher than the EU-average, due to the Danish video-workshop-tradition; (3) videos´ contents were "often contentwise tame and marked by ignorance of narrative and other structure[zi]ng instruments" (Movin, *Danish Video*, p. 70); regarding (4) the video aesthetics, Movin continued, "it is hard to find any distinct Danish profile. Which apparently is due to the fact that the artists have been compelled to direct towards other countries in order to find inspiration (Movin, *Danish Video*, p. 69)." If there was a specific Danish genre, there would be some "sort of introvertish video noir of the mid-80´es where thin young cigarette smoking men dressed in black outfits, and with *Weltschmerz* in their eyes, would ramble the night-wet streets, searching for the postmodern answer to Nordic melancholy" (ibid.). Regarding (5) the status of video, until mid-1980s at least, video art was rather an underground phenomenon, not least due to (6) the relationship between video and film: "Denmark has a strong short film tradition, but at the same time also an almost puritan relationship to electronic media" (Movin, *Danish Video*, p. 12). The experimental film gained indeed quite a recognition, influenced among others by Jørgen Leth and Jytte Rex, while the avantgarde´s unexpected breakthrough in the new Danish film came with Lars von Trier. After his *Liberation Pictures* (1982), a film about the martyrdom of a German soldier, his dystopic Trilogy *Europa* (1991) was followed by the huge success of the group *DOGMA 95* (together with Thomas Vinterberg) that have (re-)established the status of Danish film after the Danish feature film received high international recognition through two times winning Oscars for the best foreign films from the mid-1980ies on.[23] Finally, (7) video was often understood and practiced as "postmodern" medium, being intense, fragmentary, ambiguous, kaleidoscopic, complex and multi-levelled, so demonstrating its mostly claimed linkage to the visual arts: "Video creates images dealing with what images are, what seeing and looking is all about, and how we will gain experience by watching images (Movin, *Danish Video*, p. 16)."

These rather chilling and necessarily simplified characteristics of Danish contribution to the first 20 years of Video art in Europe can be regarded also as humble or self-critical attitudes, seen through the prism of the Danish self-conception: The Danish society understands itself traditionally as a flat-hierarchy democracy (while being constitutional monarchy) amidst the emancipated genders networking in a quite coherent overall conditions and being exposed to a rather strict social (self-)control. The video art in Denmark has shown some related specifics in its production, reception and distribution right from the start: The contexts of international Situationism, Neo-Dada and Mail Art were decisive, while the video genres like "scratch video" (found footage and fast cutting with multi-layered rhythms) gave the shape to the expressions of an quasi-outsider art challenging established systems of broadcast television and contemporary art market (while the latter, strictly speaking, was not yet existent). In addition and parallel to the rest of Europe, Danish video tapes covered interests in subjective documentary, sound-vision-text-structures, visual impressions and animation as well as in ironic narrative and gender issues.

[1] This selected historiography of works and events relates to the first two decades of video art in Denmark and is tied to the respective timeline. The contribution is based on my lecture *Why Have There Been No Great Danish Video Artists? On Video Art Historiography in Denmark*, which was held on 22. of May 2018 in Bibliothèque Nationale de France within the project *Emergence of video art in Europe: historiography, theory, sources and archives (1960-1980)*. The title paraphrases Linda Nochlin´s article about the female artists (*Why Have There Been No Great Female Artists?*, 1971) and Steve Deitz´s talk on internet artists (*Why Have There Been No Great Internet Artists?*, 1999/2001); it expresses my wish to reexamine some perspectives on "Greatness" in the context of emerging emancipatory and democratizing cultural practices such as video art in Europe.

[2] Ulla Hjorth Nielsen, "At male med lys", *Klip*, Århus, nr. 7 (May 1990), p. 8.

[3] Lars Movin, *Danish Video*, Danish Film Institute Workshop, Haderslev 1992, p. 37.

[4] Slavko Kacunko, *Closed Circuit Videoinstallationen. Ein Leitfaden zur Geschichte und Theorie der Medienkunst mit Bausteinen eines Künstlerlexikon*s, Logos Verlag, Berlin 2004, p. 322. – Complete quotes of Sørensen´s video concepts can be found in the DVD-part of Slavko Kacunko, *Closed Circuit.* – Jan Würtz Frandsen, „...To establish a field of indistinctness", in URL: http://home.tiscali.dk/wls/janwf.html (not active any more).

[5] Cf. Helge Krarup, "Dimensions", in URL: http://home.worldonline.dk/wls/HelgeK.html (not active any more).

[6] Jacques Ranciére, *Le spectateur émancipé*, La fabrique Paris, 2008, pp. 7-29.

[7] Bruce Nauman speaking to Willoughby Sharp in "Nauman Interview", *Arts Magazine* 44, no. 5 (March 1970).

[8] Niels Lomholt, *In and Out of Mail Art*. URL: https://www.lomholtmailartarchive.dk/texts/niels-lomholt-in-and-out-of-mail-art.

[9] Charlotte Greve, "Danish Artists in the International Mail Art Network", *Nordlit*, no. 21 (May 2007), pp. 183-198, 196. DOI: https://doi.org/10.7557/13.1759.

[10] Carl Nørrested, "Art-video — en kunst på skærmen", *Kosmorama – Tidsskrift for filmforskning og filmkultur*, Copenhagen, nr. 178 (winter 1986), p. 30-36, 35. URL: http://video.dfi.dk/Kosmorama/magasiner/178/kosmorama178_030_artikel6.pdf?_ga=2.92725272.404206202.1689516448-359990899.1689516448.

[11] URL: http://www.nielslomholt.dk/tapes-ii/.

[12] URL: https://www.bauhaus-imaginista.org/articles/4335/interview-with-filmmaker-and-photographer-ronald-nameth.

[13] Frans Rasmussen, "2. danske kortfilm- og 1. Videofestival i Holbæk 1988", *Klip*, Århus, nr. 1 (1988), p. 28-30.

[14] *Frans Kannik* (Exhib.-Cat.), Borgen, Kopenhagen 1991. – Søren Nagbol, „Kannik's Bodies, many views of reality", in *Frans Kannik* (Exhib.-Cat.), Borgen, Kopenhagen 1991. – Martin Zerlang, „Kannik's Art, Contact and confrontation", in *Frans Kannik* (Exhib.-Cat.), Borgen, Kopenhagen 1991.

[15] Helle Høgsbro, "Den 3. danske kortfilm- og videofestival", *Klip*, Århus, nr. 8 ( October 1990), p. 4-7.

[16] Lars Movin, "Fra videokunst til videopraksis. Torben CHRISTENSEN – interview med professor Torben Christensen om Mediekunstskolen", in *Kunst & video i Europa, elektroniske understrømme* (Lars Movin and Torben Christensen), Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen 1996, pp. 363-4.

[17] Flemming Koefoed, Poul Borum, Uffe Harder, *Katalog over udstillingen PROJEKTION*, Humlebæk 1972.

[18] Erik Thygesen, *Uprofessionelle billeder. For en demokratisering af medierne*, Informations forlag, Copenhagen 1980.

[19] The Catalogue appeared later as Danish Video Art Data Bank also as a digital archive on the Internet, before it was acquired in 2005 by the Netherlands Media Art Institute / Montevideo Time Based Art in Amsterdam. In 2012, Torben Søborg donated the Archives of Independet Danish Video Art and all video tapes and other materials related to the Video Art Data Bank & Archives to Copenhagen University, Institute of Art & Culture, on initiative of Slavko Kacunko. As a part of the donation was a digitalized data base (HTML) and a collection of typewriter-typed (often not published) documents.

[20] Lars Movin, "Billeder uden spilleregler", *Levende Billeder* (27.12. 1985) – og Lars Movin, " Videokunst — fremtidens TV", *Politiken* (21.3.1986).

[21] Torben Søborg, "Video installationer ... like having your cake and eating it, too!", *North-information*, nr. 161 (1988), p. 20-24.

[22] Susanna Neimann, *En Støj in Øjet: Film- og videoeksperimenter på danske værksteder*, Forlaget KLIM, Århus 1988.

[23] *Pelle Erobreren* by Bille August (1987) and *Babettes Gæstebud* by Gabriel Axel (1987).