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### CURATORIAL STATEMENT

#### Minority Report: Challenging Intolerance in Contemporary Denmark

by Trine Rytter Andersen, Kirsten Dufour, Tone O. Nielsen & Anja Raithel

*"I applaud the anthropology, according to which human beings are neither good nor bad for natural reasons, and which points out that human beings can be helpful and cruel in different situations. It is my hope that Minority Report will become an eye opening framework for similar reflections and exchanges."*

**Trine Rytter Andersen, July, 2004**

*"We went to visit America's Black Holocaust Museum, located in a black neighborhood in Milwaukee. It was founded by Dr. James Cameron, the only known survivor of a lynching in Indiana in 1930. It was June 19, 2004, 'Emancipation day.' Inside the museum, Dr. Martin Luther King's famous speech 'I have a dream' was written on the wall. Outside in the streets, the black community was celebrating the abolition of slavery 141 years earlier. Why are white artists, intellectuals, and activists not out there in the streets with them? When do we get down from our pedestals into these other streets and start creating the utopia of the multitudes together?"*

**Kirsten Dufour, July, 2004**

*"Ethnic intolerance is not an inherent characteristic of human beings. It is taught! By clarifying the extent to which ethnic intolerance has openly been institutionalized politically in Denmark in recent years – and thus legitimized socially – it is my hope that Minority Report will be able to contribute to its deprogramming."*

**Tone O. Nielsen, July, 2004**

*"It might be the case that there aren't a lot of racists in Denmark, but the few there are breaks you down. You can't expect all people to love one another, but you can insist on equality before the law. You can work for the constant improvement of the law with the aim of considering difference in the name of equality."*

**Anja Raithel in conversation with Abir Alameddine, October, 2003/2004**

### Introduction

*Minority Report: Challenging Intolerance in Contemporary Denmark* is an interdisciplinary exhibition, which investigates the premises for the more outspoken intolerance towards and among ethnic minorities in Denmark during recent years. Co-curated by independent curators Trine Rytter Andersen, Kirsten Dufour, Tone O. Nielsen, and Anja Raithel, the show is the first in a series of recurring international art exhibitions, which the City Council of Aarhus has initiated under the heading *Aarhus Festival of Contemporary Art*.

*Minority Report* unfolds in different locations in Aarhus and environs, Denmark, during the period of September 25 – October 24, 2004 and presents 63 Danish-based and international visual artists and filmmakers as well as 53 theoreticians, politicians, musicians, performers, networks, and cultural organizations from Denmark and abroad. All have from very different social and political backgrounds worked thoroughly with the question of intolerance. Through visual art, film, music, performance, lectures, debates, hearings, workshops, and text, the exhibition initiates an interdisciplinary and cross-national encirclement of intolerance in Denmark, which due to the diverse starting points of the participants is able to raise new kinds of questions that will hopefully invigorate the dominant discussion on foreigners in Denmark. For a month, the city of Aarhus is transformed into a vital platform for debate upon which the problematics of intolerance and co-existence are visualized, analyzed, and exchanged from the perspective of minority as well as majority groups in close dialogue with the audiences.

### Background

Intolerance towards ethnic minorities is not a new phenomenon in Denmark. In recent years, however, it seems to have manifested itself more powerfully and in wider circles. The gradual transformation of Denmark from a monoethnic to a multiethnic society has, similarly to a number of other European countries, been accompanied by an ever more outspoken hostility and doubt towards foreigners, both what concerns the question of refugees' and immigrants' access to

Denmark as well as the presence of ethnic minorities in Danish society.<sup>1</sup> Within recent years, it seems to have become more legitimate to express one's feelings of xenophobia, both among majority- and minority groups.

Politically, the development has resulted in a series of tightenings of the immigration and asylum laws. Hence, the immigration, integration, and repatriation policies of Denmark are presently among the toughest in the world. Socially, the question of foreigners has contributed to an increased polarization between proponents of immigration stop, assimilation, and a homogeneous Denmark on the one side and proponents of immigration, pluralistic integration, and a multiethnic Denmark on the other side. The debate is characterized by stubborn and predictable outer positions and both wings present arguments designed to appeal to the feelings of the population – either those of compassion or those of fear – rather than democratic and ethical principles of equal rights. In spite of this development and the growing international critique, Denmark has officially repudiated all accusations of having grown more xenophobic, racist, and discriminatory.<sup>2</sup>

### **Intention**

Taking its starting point in the current situation of Denmark, *Minority Report* wishes to delve into the increasing legitimization of intolerance and further investigate its grounds and conditions, mechanisms and functions, directions and forms. The exhibition sets forth to explore what social and political developments have paved the way for the increasing xenophobia in Denmark; which ideological and psychological operations it rests on; and how it is practiced within the social, political, educational, cultural, and juridical fields. In other words, Denmark becomes a “case study” for *Minority Report*, opening up the possibility for an examination of a phenomenon that is not restricted to Denmark solely, but visible in a large number of other European countries.

In doing so, *Minority Report* distances itself from the conception of intolerance as a “natural,” “inherent,” “essential,” and hence “inevitable” characteristic of human beings, arguing that it is a *construction* produced by specific psychological, ideological, sociological, economical, and political conditions. Through the exposure of the construction of intolerance, the exhibition hopes to create greater insight into the ways it operates and thereby prepare the way for alternative models for meaningful co-existence. In that sense, although *Minority Report* takes its starting point in Denmark, its scope goes well beyond the national, carrying relevance to the growing number of nations experiencing a similar development.

*Minority Report* names itself after Steven Spielberg's screen version of Philip K. Dick's science-fiction novel of the same title. In the future universe of the movie, the police are – with the help of three oracles – able to predict, pursue, and convict future criminals before they have in fact committed a crime. The modern concept of justice is turned upside down: you are no longer innocent until otherwise proven, but convicted before having committed a crime. The exhibition examines whether ethnic intolerance operates according to the same reversed principle: Are foreigners automatically criminalized on the grounds of a presumed “otherness” in relation to the Danish concept of “normality”?

*Minority Report* wishes, first and foremost, to investigate the relation between the increasing intolerance and Denmark's recent transition from a Social Democratic government to a neo-liberal politics in 2001 with the election of a right-center coalition headed by the pro-market liberal party, Venstre, and supported by The Danish People's Party. Has globalization and its demand for freely accessible markets and mobile work forces reinforced nationalistic sentiments in Denmark? Is there a connection between the increasing intolerance in Denmark and the country's gradual transition from a politics based on notions of solidarity to a politics based on the concept of private responsibility? What kinds of intolerances exist and at whom are they directed? How is the notion of “Danishness” constructed, and what role does it play in Denmark's immigration and asylum laws and the classification of newcomers? How are the newly tightened immigration, integration, and repatriation legislations perceived by the different minority groups in Denmark? How has Denmark historically legislated against intolerance and for affirmative action, and how have such legislations been defended within the framework of democracy? And when did the term “ethnicity” replace the term “race” in Denmark, and what precisely is understood by ethnicity in Denmark?

### **Concept & Methodology**

*Minority Report's* exposure of the construction of intolerance takes place by changing the conditions under which the question of foreigners is usually discussed. Whereas the Danish debate has up until now mainly played itself out between national professionals in the media and state institutions, the exhibition initiates an international, interdisciplinary, site-specific, interactive, and political exchange.

Firstly, the contributions by international participants enable a much needed global critique and contextualization of the Danish development, while the richly faceted analysis needed to uncover the various conditions and functions of intolerance is secured by the interdisciplinary nature of the

exhibition.

Secondly, the simultaneous unfolding of *Minority Report* in a series of different locations in Aarhus and environs allows the exhibition to reach a large number of different communities, while the differences in the character of the statements made and the activities initiated open up the possibility to engage a large number of diverse audiences.

Thirdly, and most importantly, by bringing together participants from all areas of the socio-political field and allowing their conflicting positions on the subject to be exchanged, *Minority Report* recognizes the antagonistic dimension of any democratic exchange, thereby abandoning previous attempts to address the question of intolerance from a consensual or moralistic starting point. Proponents of immigration as well as immigration stop, of pluralistic integration as well as full assimilation, of multiethnicity as well as homogeneity from minority groups as well as majority groups will report. Due to *Minority Report's* interdisciplinary and trans-national structure, however, the exchange of these positions now takes place across nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, discipline, age, and privilege, allowing for an alternative complication of the stereotypical identities and fundamentalisms that intolerance is rooted in. The goal is not to contribute to an increased polarization, but to confront the various participants and audiences with new and unexpected questions, thereby challenging the current perspective on immigrants and refugees nationally as well as globally.

A consultant group consisting of Rabih Azad-Ahmad (Chairman of Multicultural Association, Aarhus), Ellen Nyman (actress, performance artist, and writer), Kim Su Rasmussen (Ph.D. in History of Ideas, University of Aarhus), and Bünyamin Simsek (Member of Aarhus City Council for the party Venstre) has since December 2003 advised the curatorial team in its research and curatorial processes in order to secure such a political inclusiveness. However, in order not to contribute to the intolerance that *Minority Report* sets out to challenge, the exhibition places – with reference to the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights – one constraint: all statements are welcome as long as they neither encourage nor contribute to the violation of the sovereignty of the subject.

### **Structure & Thematic Questions**

Physically, *Minority Report* unfolds in four *stations* for permanent activities and on-going programs and a series of *satellites* made up of site-specific activities and temporary interventions in specific environments. The diverse locations allow for different methodological approaches to the theme of the exhibition.

**Station 1: The Equestrian Hall** – built in 1860 as a riding arena for the military and now a cultural center – constitutes the central nervous system of the exhibition. Located in the center of Aarhus, the space is divided into a series of visually different zones for different activities. In the *Information & Communication Center*, visiting audiences can access the research material collected by the curatorial team and purchase relevant literature and merchandise. The *Information & Communication Center* also features flyers, publications, and websites by a large number of organizations and networks working within the field of intolerance and co-existence that the curatorial team was unable to include in the exhibition. The *Debate Zone* will host a series of lectures and debates with speakers and debaters from the political, social, cultural, and theoretical fields, during which different aspects of intolerance and co-existence will be discussed in close concert with the audiences. The *Debate Zone* also constitutes the setting for a women's hearing and a concluding youth hearing, where ethnic minority and majority youths are invited to set the agenda for Denmark's future equality, immigration, and asylum policies. The *Stage* will feature a series of concerts, performances, and stand-up comedy, allowing for the question of intolerance and co-existence to be addressed with the means of political music, theater, and humor. In the *Café*, visitors and exhibition participants can eat and socialize for the duration of the exhibition, while children can play in the *Children's Play Corner*. In addition, The Equestrian Hall will also present an art exhibition featuring, among other things, a movie theater, painting, photography, sound- and video installations as well as art works made specifically the exterior and interior of the building.

**Station 2: Aarhus Art Building** – a non-profit exhibition space for contemporary art established in 1917, which receives support for its programs from the city of Aarhus and The Danish Arts Council – provides the setting for the presentation of a series of art historical key works and new projects created specifically for *Minority Report* by Danish-based and international artists and networks. Located within walking distance from The Equestrian Hall, the works and projects presented in Aarhus Art Building all share a deconstructive and/or representation critical approach to the question of intolerance and co-existence.

**In Station 3: The Movie Theater East of Eden** – a small alternative movie theater, which since its opening in 1978 has shown independent films primarily – a film program consisting of fourteen documentaries, feature films, art videos, children's, and youth films by Danish-based and

international filmmakers and visual artists are screened. The films span from the early 1970s to the present and elaborate on various aspects of the theme of the exhibition. The children's and youth films are screened in the daytime to allow school classes to attend, while the remaining program is screened in the evening.

**Station 4: The Book** is a 152-pages long publication to be regarded as a two-dimensional exhibition space for participants working with text or montage specifically. The book presents essays, projects, and montages that put the question of intolerance and co-existence into a theoretical, historical, and cultural perspective.

Around the stations, a number of **Satellites** are in orbit: projects, interventions, and events created for specific communities and sites in the public spaces of Aarhus by artists, cultural organizations, and theoreticians in the attempt to reach a large number of different communities and actively engage them in the theme of the exhibition.

Together, the stations and satellites form a kaleidoscopic encirclement of the exhibition's overall thematic, allowing the viewer to gradually develop a series of analytical tools to comprehend the conditions and operations of intolerance as s/he moves from location to location, from event to event.

### Encouragement

*Minority Report* has found encouragement in the increasing interest among international contemporary artists to comment on and produce alternatives to the present world order. Denmark, for instance, has witnessed a marked increase in the number of artists commenting on the global geo-political situation in their work. A large number of these artists have responded specifically to the recent developments in Danish immigration and asylum policies. Similar reactions within the aesthetic field can be found in a number of other European countries, whose political situations are related to the Danish.

*Minority Report* has also found inspiration in a series of innovative and meaningful exhibitions from the past twenty years, which in different ways have addressed the concepts of gender, identity, ethnicity, and multiculturalism. Exhibitions such as *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* (1984), *Mistaken Identities* (1992), *The Whitney Biennial* (1993), *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art* (1994), *Inclusion: Exclusion* (1996), *Feast/Hospitality* (2003), and *Year 2052 Malmoe will no longer be "Swedish"* (2003-04) have in different manners contributed to and developed further the representational critique that first emerged in the visual arts by the late 1960s. Taking their starting point in the politics of representation, a number of artists embarked on a deconstruction of the West's dominant models of representation in an attempt to challenge its Eurocentric and patriarchal structures. Inspired by feminism, identity politics, queer theory, and post-colonial theory, they exposed the continuous privileging of the white, male, heterosexual subject and the ideological conditions for the construction and marginalization of the West's "Other" (woman, ethnic minorities, the colonial subject).

Structurally, *Minority Report* is indebted to exhibitions like *Laboratorium* (1999), *Indiscipline* (2000), *Democracy When!? Activist Strategizing in Los Angeles* (2002), and *Documenta 11* (2002), which in a similar fashion to *Minority Report* involved non-artistic disciplines in interaction with the aesthetic. These exhibitions all departed from the concept of art's autonomy from the surrounding world, based on the recognition that the aesthetic field is informed by the contemporary order and capable of producing alternatives to it. The thematics of the different exhibitions were consequently addressed from a number of different fields in interaction with the visual arts, as is the case with *Minority Report*.

As curators of this first *Aarhus Festival of Contemporary Art*, we hope that *Minority Report* can live up to this legacy. If *Minority Report* succeeds in establishing a foundation for the acceptance of difference by exposing the construction of intolerance, it is at least socially responsible.

### Notes

1. As of January 1, 2003, "foreigners" (which the Danish Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs defines as foreign citizens, immigrants, and descendants, as well as children of mixed marriages and adopted children) made up 8% of the 5.4 million Danish population (source: [www.inm.dk/Index/sos.asp?o=56&n=1&t=7&s=4](http://www.inm.dk/Index/sos.asp?o=56&n=1&t=7&s=4)). In comparison, this figure was 4% in 1995 (see Lise Togeby, *Fremmedhed og fremmedhad i Danmark*, Denmark: Columbus, 1998, p. 29).

2. Cf. the critique of Denmark's present immigration and asylum legislations in a report by Alvaro Gil-Robles, Commissioner for Human Rights for the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, July 8, 2004, and the Danish government's subsequent dismissal of it. See

