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New Nordic Exceptionalism

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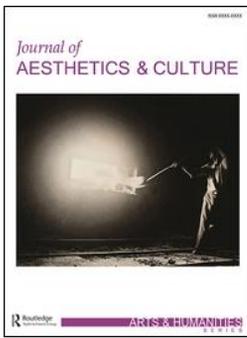
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New Nordic Exceptionalism: Jeuno JE Kim and Ewa Einhorn's *The United Nations of Norden* and other realist utopias

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Abstract

At the 2009 Nordic Culture Forum summit in Berlin that centered on the profiling and branding of the Nordic region in a globalized world, one presenter stood out from the crowd. The lobbyist Annika Sigurdardottir delivered a speech that called for the establishment of "The United Nations of Norden": A Nordic union that would gather the nations and restore Norden's role as the "moral superpower of the world." Sigurdardottir's presentation generated such a heated debate that the organizers had to intervene and reveal that the speech was a performance made by the artists Jeuno JE Kim and Ewa Einhorn. This article takes Kim and Einhorn's intervention as a starting point for a critical discussion of the history and politics of Nordic image-building. The article suggests that the reason Kim and Einhorn's speech passed as a serious proposal was due to its meticulous mimicking of two discursive formations that have been central to the debates on the branding of Nordicity over the last decades: on the one hand, the discourse of "Nordic exceptionalism," that since the 1960s has been central to the promotion of a Nordic political, socio-economic, and internationalist "third way" model, and, on the other hand, the discourse on the "New Nordic," that emerged out of the New Nordic Food-movement in the early 2000s, and which has given art and culture a privileged role in the international re-fashioning of the Nordic brand. Through an analysis of Kim and Einhorn's United Nations of Norden (UNN)-performance, the article examines the historical development and ideological underpinnings of the image of Nordic unity at play in the discourses of Nordic exceptionalism and the New Nordic. By focusing on how the UNN-project puts pressure on the role of utopian imaginaries in the construction of Nordic self-images, the article describes the emergence of a discursive framework of *New Nordic Exceptionalism*.



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In November 2009, the Nordic Council of Ministers of Culture organized a 2-day Nordic Culture Forum summit at the Nordic embassy complex in Berlin. The seminar sought to examine “the role of the Nordic Region in a globalized world,” by discussing “the profiling and presentation of Nordic art and culture.”¹ The forum gathered “representatives of the whole ‘food chain’” of cultural production in order to share knowledge on the “profiling, launching, presenting, branding, publicizing, exporting, competing with and evaluating the impact of Nordic art and culture.”² One of the speakers at the event was Annika Sigurdardottir, the Officer of Internal Missions in the lobby-organization The United Nations of Norden (UNN). I start this article with a transcript of Sigurdardottir’s presentation in full length, as her “United Nations of Norden Recruitment Speech” is one of my main objects of analysis in the following:

The United Nations of Norden (UNN) is a lobby organization, working to articulate and shape the common destiny of the Nordic Nations. The goal is to erase the national borders between our countries and let go of our archaic attachment to the fatherland.

We are currently at a critical time, where the challenges facing us now are more challenging than ever. There are three challenges in the world. One, the crisis—the financial, the political and ecological. Two, the physical battles—the continued territorial disputes causing bloodshed. And three, another kind of warfare fought with softer weapons and a global scramble for larger political influence through culture, sports and tourism.

Our role as the UNN is not to be a military superpower. Our role is to be a moral superpower, and to be that we have to shine as an example of what can be achieved when people cooperate with one another, united in a common purpose and a common destiny. Ours is a community based on common-sense ideas of being good citizens; sharing values of feminism, environmentalism, secularized Lutheranism, corporate transparency, stable public policies, and an avoidance of conflict.

The Nordic image that unites us stems from the times when the cold war polarized the world, and we remained unaligned, choosing a third way, a necessary neutral zone. It is vital that we hold onto our specialness since this is our unique position. The world needs a neutral north onto which it can project utopian ideals, and hopes for the possibility of another world.

We can be proud of our achievements, our history, and our role as mediators. Together we have built a nation that is prosperous and safe, being a society of moderation, both in production and consumption. It is a place that is open and diverse, and it is a federation that is respected, both in Europe and in the world. And with this acknowledgment, we can finally end the competition between our nations about who is the most Nordic country among us.

When the world was polarized, Norden remained outside of that. Now the world is globalized and has no ideological poles, except for the West and the Islamic poles, and we need to remind ourselves that we were always beyond the poles. We existed as hope for something else to be possible, and this is why we cannot escape the question of a unified interest since the world needs a new voice of reason that can guide through the crisis. Let us keep our eyes on the future and head toward the potential of a borderless and a United Nations of Norden.³

According to a report from the event, Sigurdardottir’s recruitment speech for the UNN was met with a set of mixed responses, with a notable difference between the Nordic and German delegates. While a prominent German professor pointed out that this summoning of “solidarity based on a common cultural past and the claim for moral superiority [...] would be scandalous if spoken by a German person,” the responses from Nordic delegates were in contrast marked by curiosity and interest, inspiring queries such as, “do we really want a United Nations of Norden?” and if so ‘how can we start this?’⁴ The serious discussion that ensued about the potential of a new Nordic federation prompted the organizers of the forum to intervene and restore order by

revealing that the UNN was not a real organization, and that Annika Sigurdardottir was an actor delivering a performance text made by artists Jeuno JE Kim and Ewa Einhorn.

The “United Nations of Norden Recruitment Speech” is part of Kim and Einhorn’s long-term artistic examination of Nordic political and cultural history, and especially the effects and affects connected to the branding of Norden as an exceptional region politically, economically, and culturally. In their work, Kim and Einhorn often create fictive organizations, institutions, and utopian scenarios that function as a framework for their critical interventions in political debates and discourses. The “United Nations of Norden Recruitment Speech” has later been included in a video trilogy that Kim and Einhorn presented at their exhibition *Allt för alla* [Everything for Everyone] at Gävla Konstcentrum in Sweden, in 2010. The UNN-video was not a documentation of the Nordic Culture Forum-intervention, but a sale’s pitch speech made for camera by the “Director of Internal Affairs” at the UNN. The work was presented together with a video documentation of a lecture by Kim-Eric Williams, the Governor of the Swedish Colonial Society, a real organization that works to celebrate the history and legacy of the New Sweden Colony in the United States between 1638 and 1655, as well as an interview with a researcher from the “Global Think Tank for Nordic Studies,” a forum under the (fictional) organization New Sweden Associate that works to turn “Sweden” into a transferrable “idea” and “mode of life” that can work as a model against the polarization of the world.⁵

Enmeshment of the factual and the fictional is a central starting point for Kim and Einhorn’s engagement with the politics and poetics of “imagined communities” in Norden in a globalized world.⁶ In this article, I’m interested in mining the potential in this confusion between truth and fiction generated by Kim and Einhorn’s UNN-intervention at the Nordic Culture Forum. My interest in this has less to do with the fact that parts of the audience at the event seemed to be “tricked” by the artistic “fiction,” but more to do with the ways in which the speech calls attention to the performative power of fictions, imaginations, and utopian visions in political thinking more broadly. The fact that the UNN took on a brief life of its

own at the Nordic Culture Forum—regardless of its artistic nature—invites a number of questions. Kim and Einhorn raised some of these in a recent article about their intervention:

Why was UNN received without hesitation by some of the audience? Were some parts of the speech reasonable and “real” enough to strike a chord in the listener to be an attractive political movement? If so, which elements?⁷

This article seeks to shed light on these questions by analyzing the UNN-performance in relation to the context of its reception. As I was not present at the Nordic Culture Forum where Sigurdardottir delivered her speech, and only know the event through documentation provided by the artists, I am not seeking to answer why the *specific* audience reacted the way they did. By reception, then, I am pointing to the broader conditions that enabled the idea of UNN to appear legible as a political proposal worthy of debate. This means that my analysis remains less invested in situating the UNN-project within the field of contemporary art than the political discourses the performance works with and within. One of the main reasons that the UNN-speech could pass as a serious project at the gather in Berlin, I argue, is that Kim and Einhorn’s performance mobilize two discursive formations that have been central to the debates about the branding and identity of “Nordicity” over the last decades. On the one hand, the speech draws on the discourse of “Nordic exceptionalism,” that developed in the early 1960s in the attempt to describe and promote the so-called Nordic “third way” in the then polarized world order divided between capitalism and communism. On the other hand, the performance invokes the recent discourse of the “New Nordic,” that from its emergence in relation to the so-called New Nordic Food (NNF)-movement a decade ago, has given art and culture a central role in the attempt to re-fashion the Nordic brand internationally.

In the following, I seek to recap some of the main touchstones in the discursive history of Nordic exceptionalism in order to ground my analysis of how the utopian rhetoric of the UNN-project draws upon and responds to the century-long investment in ideologies of “Scandinavianism” and “Nordism.” As part of my larger research

project on the conceptualizations of colonialism and racism in the Nordic region, this article seeks to shed light on how the idea of Nordic unity and uniqueness contributes to the shaping of contemporary political imaginaries. In Kim and Einhorn's project I thus hear not only a fictitious summoning for the creation of a UNN but, more importantly, a call for questioning and analyzing the ideological underpinnings and performative effects of the discourses of Nordic exceptionalism and the New Nordic. Approaching UNN with this call in mind, I suggest that Kim and Einhorn's intervention point to the ascending framework of a New Nordic Exceptionalism.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF NORDIC EXCEPTIONALISM

The discourse of Nordic exceptionalism is often traced back to the period following World War II, when researchers within the fields of International Relations and Security Policy caught interest in the Nordic region as an example of what Karl W. Deutsch in 1957 described as a unique "security-community" in a time of global unrest and polarization.⁸ With reference to the alleged "mutual sympathy and loyalty" between the Nordic nations—the so-called "we-feeling"—researchers argued that the Nordic region stood out for its unique ability to resolve problems, domestically as well as internationally, by means of "peaceful change."⁹ The Norwegian political security analysts Johan Jørgen Holst and Arne Olav Brundtland introduced the term "Nordic Balance" in the early 1960s to describe the Nordic strategy of "reduced great power involvement" in relation to the conflict between the superpowers of the West and East.¹⁰ Politicians as well as researchers in the Nordic countries thus effectively sought to establish the reputation of Norden as "norm entrepreneurs" in the larger field of global politics.¹¹ Despite—or rather because of—its economical dependencies and weak militaries, the Nordic countries became known for its ability to develop alternative models of engagement within the areas of political mediation, conflict resolution, and global cooperation.¹² While the Nordic Region took on the role as the symbol of "bridge-building" between communism in the East and capitalism in the West, the Nordic countries also positioned themselves as frontrunners of international solidarism between the

Global North and the Global South.¹³ Sweden's Prime Minister Olof Palme was perhaps the most outspoken advocate for this version of internationalism with his "stand for national freedom and independence" for all peoples, as he stated it in his 1980 article "Sweden's Role in the World."¹⁴ Sweden's exceptional activist foreign policy—which included a relentless critique of the US intervention in Vietnam, as well as economic and moral support of anti-imperialist movements in countries including Nicaragua, South Africa, and Namibia—became an important symbol of the Nordic self-described role as the "moral superpower" of the world, to borrow the Swedish Undersecretary of state in the 1980s, Pierre Schori's own term.¹⁵

Parallel to the focus on Nordic Balance in foreign and security politics research, the discourse of Nordic exceptionalism also had a different strand in the discussions of the social and economic policies of the so-called Nordic Model.¹⁶ The Nordic Model became a central organizing figure in describing, theorizing, and promoting the unique mixture of socialist redistributive justice and capitalist market economy in the social democratic welfare states. While the Nordic Model has been key to theorizations of the welfare state, the concept has also had an important ideational and normative function in establishing an image of Norden as an international symbol of generosity, equality, and care-taking.¹⁷

In Kazimierz Musiał's discourse analysis of Nordic exceptionalism, he highlights the role that these "images of reality" (which he distinguishes from "experiences of reality") have played in turning the history of Nordicity into "a compelling narrative for the international public."¹⁸ Reading across the internationalist Nordic Balance literature and the welfare state debates on the Nordic Model, Musiał highlights the importance of what he terms "autostereotypes" in the discourse of Nordic exceptionalism. Defined as the "discursive construction of self-images," the central autostereotypes used in the fashioning of Nordic identity have included "progressiveness, peacefulness, the egalitarian society, solidarity with the Third World and environmentalism."¹⁹ These autostereotypes have been advanced in a number of different ways and venues, including through the work of inter-parliamentary forums such as the Nordic Council (NC), established in 1952. Although the NC's role

as a consulting forum gives it no direct political license, it has been crucial for inter-Nordic cooperation to bolster the image of Nordic cohesion internationally.²⁰ The Nordic decision to act as a single unity in the UN and UNESCO is central in this regard, as these forums became important platforms for the promotion and “export [of] Nordic values” internationally, as researchers have made clear.²¹ The Finnish diplomat and former Ambassador to the UN Max Jakobson’s 1987 speech to the UN General Assembly gives an indication of this:

[This] little [Nordic] group of politically stable, socially advanced, prosperous countries which have no major international claims to press or to counter, no present or recent colonial record, and no racial problems, represents moderation and rationality in an assembly often swayed by fanatic or neurotic forces.²²

Jakobson’s idealized description of the Nordic exceptional difference in political, social, and economical terms is but one examples of the long legacy of hyperbolic rhetoric in the promotion of Nordicity internationally.

It is this rhetorical tradition that Kim and Einhorn invoke in Sigurdardottir’s recruitment speech for the UNN, where she mobilizes many of the autostereotypes mentioned above—including Schrod’s concept of “moral superpower,” and Jakobson’s whitewashed version of the Nordic non-involvement in the unfinished histories of racism and colonialism. While the UNN-speech reiterates this glorified history of Norden, Sigurdardottir also makes clear that “the Nordic image that unites us stems from the times when the cold war polarized the world.”²³ And new times call for new images and imaginaries. The UNN is thus framed as a solution to a series of challenges and crisis that threaten the “destiny” of Norden. One of these includes the co-called crisis of the discourse of Nordic exceptionalism.

THE CRISIS OF NORDIC EXCEPTIONALISM

While the 1970s and 1980s have been described as “the ‘golden age’ of the ‘Nordic model’,” the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall challenged the narrative of Nordic exceptionalism to the degree that it was understood to be in a state

of “terminal crisis.”²⁴ The image of Nordic exceptionalism had been dependent on a bipolar world order where the perpetual conflicts and tensions *elsewhere* enabled the Nordic countries to appear different with their alleged balanced security policies, generous international solidarity work, and egalitarian socio-economic welfare system. That large parts of the political establishment in the Nordic countries reacted to these world changing events less with enthusiasm than “skepticism, frustration and attempt to limit the impact of change,” is thus not surprising.²⁵ In the 1992 article, “Nordic Nostalgia: Northern Europe After the Cold War,” Danish International Relations theorist Ole Wæver claimed that “Nordic identity is in crisis. With the European revolution of 1989–1990, the meaning of ‘Norden’ has become unclear.”²⁶ According to Wæver, “Nordic identity is about being *better* than Europe”—as well as “being *better off* than Europe”—and since this no longer seemed to be the case, Wæver reported on a growing doubt in the Nordic countries “as to whether ‘Norden’ is at all a useful symbol anymore.”²⁷ This sudden doubt about the status of the Nordic Model was also evident in much political rhetoric in the early 1990s, including in statements by state leaders such as the Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt, who in 1991 made clear that “no one wants to be a compromise between a system which has turned out to be a success and another that has turned out to be a historic catastrophe.”²⁸ The Finnish Prime Minister Esko Aho was more direct, proclaiming “The Nordic Model is dead.”²⁹

With the rapid growth of the economies in Central Europe following the fall of the Iron Curtain, the political, economical, and internationalist narratives of the Nordic social democracies lost much of its appeal—domestically as well as internationally. The efforts to reboot the image of the Nordic region have been manifold and varied. One of the most important attempts to rejuvenate the interest in the Nordic region can be seen in the venture to redraw the territorial boundaries of Norden to include the new Baltic states. While researchers in the 1990s predicted that the investment in Nordism would be replaced by “Baltism,”³⁰ discourse analyses of debates on Norden in the 1990s and 2000s demonstrate that the Nordist approach and the idea of Nordic exceptionalism did not disappear.³¹ Even though the geographies

of the Baltic—and more recently, the Arctic—have been important to the attempted economical, political, and ideational refashioning of Norden, the search for new anchor points to bolster Nordic identity and the Nordic Region have continued.³²

In his 2007 article “Branding Nordicity: Models, Identity and the Decline of Exceptionalism,” Christopher S. Browning suggests the importance of distinguishing between *identity* and *branding* in analyzing the history of Nordic exceptionalism. Although Browning affirms that “the ‘Nordic brand’ is losing its marketability,” he disagrees with the claims that this should endanger Nordic identity.³³ Pointing to the difference between *identities* (that are constructed through intersubjective negotiations that makes them fundamentally changeable, multiple, and fluid) and *brands* (that operate through more stable and specific forms of reference in the marketplace of commodities and ideas), Browning suggests that the demise of Nordic exceptionalism is not necessarily a negative thing. The narrative of Nordic exceptionalism has from the start been marked by a paradox, Browning explains: On the one hand, it has been hailed as an identitarian concept that marks the Nordic *difference* from Europe. On the other hand, it has been promoted as a brand and model to be *copied* and implemented by others.³⁴ If the Nordic brand no longer holds a compelling power internationally, Browning argues, can also be seen as a result of the “staggering success for [the branding of] Nordic ideals and the Nordic model—especially to the extent that [its] internationalist and solidarist elements have become Europeanized and accepted as a part of the EU’s international profile.”³⁵ Breaking with the ubiquitous crisis narratives in the debates about Norden after the Cold War, Browning argues that Nordic identity has the potential of reconstituting itself around other elements than its “exceptionalism.” This reorientation might already be on its way, he suggests, by noting that the Nordic countries “appear to have lost interest in even selling a Nordic brand anymore.”³⁶

While Browning’s distinction between the identity and brand of Nordicity is helpful in nuancing the discursive construction of Nordic exceptionalism, his claim about the alleged declining investment in the branding of Norden appears less grounded, as I will return to. For how does this latter claim, for instance, relate to the interest

and appeal of the idea UNN at the Nordic Culture Point seminar? And, more importantly, to the existence of gatherings such as Nordic Culture Forum in the first place, with its focus precisely on “the profiling and presentation of Nordic art and culture?”³⁷

FROM SCANDINAVIANISM TO NORDISM

When Sigurdardottir delivered the “United Nations of Norden Recruitment Speech” at the Nordic Culture Forum, her presentation was accompanied by a PowerPoint show. The first image in the series presented the flag of the United Nations of Norden, made by Kim and Einhorn (Figure 1). Combining elements of all the Nordic cross flags, the UNN-flag takes the white cross from the Danish flag, while the four quarters follow the color schemes of the Norwegian, Finnish, Icelandic and Swedish flags respectively. This blending of different flags in order to symbolize the unity between nations has visual connotations to the disputed union mark, better known as *sildesalaten/sillsalladen* [herring salad], that was introduced in the canton of the Swedish and Norwegian national flags in 1844 to symbolize the union between the kingdoms that lasted between 1814 and 1905. This visual allusion to the history of unions between Nordic countries is but one example of how the UNN-project taps into the unfinished history of the ideologies of Scandinavianism and Nordism. In order to get a better sense of this, a quick recap of the history of Scandinavianism is necessary.

The union between Sweden and Norway was not based on consensus, but resulted from the Napoleonic wars where Denmark, after the Treaty

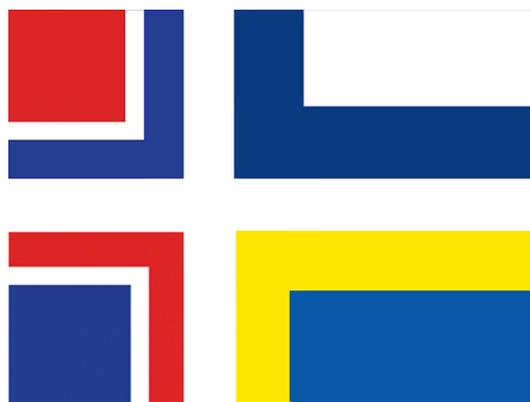


Figure 1. Jeuno JE Kim and Ewa Einhorn, *United Nations of Norden flag* (2009). Courtesy of the artists.

of Kiel in 1814, was forced to cede Norway to Sweden. While the union was controversial on both sides of the border, this did not stop the burgeoning debate and interest in establishing a union that would encompass all three Scandinavian nations at the time. Students, scholars, and authors were the central proponents of the movement known as Scandinavianism that developed as an “alternative nationalist ideology” in the early 1800s.³⁸ Advanced as a cultural as well as a political program in a time where Sweden faced threats from Russia in the East and Denmark from Prussia in the South, the proponents of Scandinavianism frequently invoked images of a common Nordic heritage of language, culture and politics—such as the Viking Age and the Kalmar Union (1397–1523)—in order to demonstrate the natural unity of the region.³⁹ The advocates for Scandinavianism included leading scholars and thinkers, such as the Danish clergyman, poet, and political philosopher N.F.S. Grundtvig, who in his 1810 pamphlet “Er Nordens Forening ønskelig? Et Ord til det svenske folk” [Is Nordic Unification Desirable? A Word to the Swedish People] stated his “warmest desire and brightest hope in Nordic unification,” that he saw as the “Region’s destiny.”⁴⁰ The Danish author H.C. Andersen even wrote a national anthem for a unified Scandinavia in 1837, “Jeg er en Skandinavian!” [I am a Scandinavian!]; a song brimming with mythical autostereotypes of the region’s unity and uniqueness, as the opening lines suggests: “Vi er eet Folk, vi kaldes Skandinaver/I trende Riger er vor Hjemstavn deelt;/Men mellem Nutids store Himmel-Gaver/Er den: vort Hjerte voxer til et Heelt!” [We are one people, we are called Scandinavians/In three realms our homeland is divided;/But between the great heavenly gifts of the present/It lies: our heart grows into one].⁴¹ The romantic image of Scandinavian oneness came to a serious halt with the Danish defeat in 1864 in the war against Prussia–Austria in Schleswig, where the Swedish–Norwegian union refused to deliver military support. While this did not terminate the interest and investment in a common Nordic unity, the political visionary pan-Scandinavianism receded in the latter part of the century to be replaced by what historian Marja Jalava terms a more “practical Scandinavianism or Nordism.”⁴² Here Nordicity was promoted as a “meso-regional identity,” where Norden was figured not as a replacement

for national identifications but as a central feature of “what it meant to be a Dane, Swede, Norwegian, Finn or Icelander.”⁴³

With Finland’s independence from the Russian Empire following the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the recognition of Iceland as a sovereign state in union with Denmark in 1918, the Scandinavianst framework took a Nordist turn. This is visible in the reappearance of the idea of a specifically Nordic union during World War II. In journals such as the anti-totalitarian *Nordens Frihet* [Nordic Freedom] and debate books, including the influential 1942 *Nordens förenta stater* [The United States of Norden], the idea of a Nordic federation was promoted as a solution to the totalitarian attacks on the so-called Nordic traditions of freedom, justice, and democracy.⁴⁴ The proponents for a union were well aware, as Tora Byström has noted, “that the conditions for a United Nations of Norden did not exist in a time where three of the states were occupied, and the fourth, Finland, was engaged in the war on the same side as the occupier of Norway and Denmark.”⁴⁵ But the planning of a future union was motivated by the contention that it was important to be prepared for the end of the war, when a new political system might be imminently needed. Although the UNN never came to fruition in the aftermath of World War II, the ideological support for this “utopian thought,” as Byström calls it, lingered on.⁴⁶

THE NEOLIBERAL TURN IN NORDIC CULTURAL POLICY

Research literature often describes the legacy of Scandinavianism and Nordism as the “ideological roots” of the establishment of the Nordic cooperative initiatives from the 1950s and onwards.⁴⁷ Including the establishment of the 1952 NC, and signing of the Helsinki Treaty of 1962, that delineated the intergovernmental strategy to “promote and strengthen the close ties existing between the Nordic peoples in matters of culture, and of legal and social philosophy.”⁴⁸ The inter-Nordic unity was further formalized with the establishment of the Nordic Councils of Ministers (NCoM) in 1971, as well as funding initiatives such as the Nordic Culture Fund, that supports artistic and cultural projects with participants from at least three Nordic countries. This intergovernmental

investment in buttressing Nordic cooperation and unity did not cede following the so-called crisis of Nordic exceptionalism in the 1990s, as Browning seems to suggest. Within the realm of arts and culture, for instance, new structures have been established to promote the Nordic framework, including the influential NIFCA: Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art (1997–2006), and its successor Nordic Culture Point (2007–).⁴⁹

Yet, the Nordic cooperation since the 1990s has been increasingly shaped by the neoliberal turn in European economic politics.⁵⁰ In the case of Nordic cultural policies, this is visible in the ways in which “economical objectives have replaced educational and aesthetic objectives” in the support of arts and culture, as cultural policy theorist Peter Duelund explains.⁵¹ According to Duelund, the Nordic cultural policies have from the 1990s and onwards been through a period of “political colonization,” that has involved a strengthening of the connections between arts and business, an expansion of private and business sponsorship, a reduction in the state regulations of cultural industries, an increased political regulation of “earmarked” funds to politically defined purposes, and a revitalization of a national dimension in cultural politics in response to migration and globalization.⁵² This commercialized focus in Nordic cultural policies is on display in the framing of the 2009 Nordic Culture Forum summit in Berlin where Kim and Einhorn presented their UNN-project. This contextual framing needs to be taken into account when discussing how Sigurdardottir’s UNN-speech could appear as a serious proposal from a real lobby organization. After all, the UNN-speech included not only a series of well-known autostereotypes from the discourse of Nordic exceptionalism, in a narrative that tapped into the historical desire for Nordist unity. Sigurdardottir also presented this package in the effective visual and rhetorical style of a corporate sale’s pitch.

While the UNN-speech’s idealist rhetoric of Nordic eminence might appear too pompous to pass as credible for listeners unfamiliar with this lingo—such as the German delegates at the Nordic Culture Forum—it is perhaps less surprising that it could be heard as a proper contribution to the debate on the future of Norden among the Nordic delegates. After all, the speech does not include any motifs that haven’t already been

circulating in the discussions on the branding of Nordicity. Instead of criticizing this commercialized discourse head on, Kim and Einhorn’s UNN-project probes the critical potential of *over-identifying* with the glossy tropes of Nordic exceptionalism. Following the tradition of political culture jamming,⁵³ Kim and Einhorn’s critical strategy operates not by “speak[ing] truth to power,” but by “speaking the truth of power,” to borrow Brian Holmes’ description of the art activist collective The Yes Men’s approach.⁵⁴ By utilizing the established idioms of Nordic exceptionalism—albeit in an arguably embellished and amplified way—Kim and Einhorn created a rupture in the Nordic Culture Forum not by *obstructing* but by *fitting too perfect* into the debate. Their successful simulation of the political rhetoric of Nordic exceptionalism made their call for an imaginary Nordic Union appear real enough to merit interest and attention; real enough to make the organizers interrupt the conversation by attempting to reassert the difference between art and politics, fiction and truth.

GUNNAR WETTERBERG’S *THE UNITED NORDIC FEDERATION*

The distinction between fiction and truth is difficult to parse when dealing with the discourse on Nordic exceptionalism, which has been guided less by descriptive and explanatory concerns than by promotional interests in advancing an idealized image of Nordicity.⁵⁵ By successfully exploiting the performative power of the airbrushed images of Nordicity at play in this discourse, Kim and Einhorn’s UNN-project underlines the central role that images and imaginaries play in political narratives. The main difference between the UNN-speech and other so-called “earnest” political speech acts is in short not to be found in its discursive means, but in the question of its intentional ends.

The UNN-project puts pressure on the interdependence of aesthetic and politics, fiction and truth, in the discursive construction of Nordic exceptionalism. This point can be substantiated further if we approach the UNN-project in perspective of the debates that took place in Swedish newspapers in the weeks leading up to the Nordic Culture Forum in Berlin. During the annual Session of the NC in Stockholm in the end of

October 2009, the Swedish former diplomat and historian Gunnar Wetterberg published a series of debate articles in the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, where he summoned the Nordic politicians to establish a “new Kalmar Union” that could gather the five Nordic countries and three autonomous territories in a “United Nordic Federation” (UNF).⁵⁶ Such a federation, Wetterberg explained, would give the Nordic countries “an international position of power” as the “world’s tenth largest economy, in reality bigger than Russia and Brazil”; a fact that would give Norden a central position in all international political and economic councils and committees.⁵⁷ Inspired by the federal government structure of Switzerland and Canada, the UNF would secure the individual states political autonomy on domestic issues, while a Nordic Parliament would be in charge of foreign and security policies, financial and labor politics, education and research strategies, as well as jurisdiction.⁵⁸

Wetterberg’s suggestion for a Nordic union generated a lively and enthusiastic debate in the papers, and a poll by Oxford Research suggested that 42% of the Nordic population supported the idea.⁵⁹ The broad interest in the proposal of a Nordic Federation made the NC and NCoM commission Wetterberg to expand on his idea. This resulted in the book-length study, *The United Nordic Federation*, published as NCoM’s annual yearbook in 2010. Wetterberg’s pitch for a UNF has striking resemblance to the idealized language of Kim and Einhorn’s UNN-speech. Although Wetterberg’s proposal is primarily motivated by the prospect of how a Nordic union could be a “catalyst for economic development,” and thereby be a stepping stone to the establishment of a “new Nordic economy,” he makes clear that the “essential precondition” for the establishment of a union is the historically strong-rooted “cultural community” between the nations.⁶⁰ This cultural community is known for its “deep-seated attachment to equality and love of nature,” and “impressive openness to the outside world,” a fact allegedly demonstrated by the Nordic acknowledgement of “migration [...] as a basis for progress,” and consensus on the fact that “xenophobia conflicts with the forces that underpin Nordic affluence.”⁶¹ While Wetterberg notes that these “Nordic conditions and values may well be different from those of so many other countries,”

he stresses that the Nordic states need to join forces if they are to be able to retain and promote them in a new global order.⁶² In order for this “realistic utopia” to materialize, as Wetterberg called it, the NC and NCoM should start commissioning proper feasibility studies that could act as a stepping stone for the drastic policy decisions to come.⁶³

In the Foreword to *The United Nordic Federation*, the then Secretary-General of the NC, Jan-Erik Enestam, and the then Secretary-General of the NCoM, Haldór Ásgrímsson explain that the Nordic prime ministers all found Wetterberg’s proposal “dramatic but unrealistic.”⁶⁴ But since the NC and NCoM want to support debates that can “provide ammunition for new arguments, new attitudes and new directions for Nordic co-operations,” they wanted to give Wetterberg a chance to develop his proposal.⁶⁵ Given the continuing legacies of Nordist thinking central to Wetterberg’s proposal, it might be difficult to see the radical newness of his ideas. But one of the things that indeed can be said to be novel here is his earnest attempt to position the idea of a Nordic union as a starting point for a “New Nordic” way that can pull the region out of the crisis caused by the faltering narrative of Nordic exceptionalism.

THE NEW NORDIC: FROM A CULINARY TO A CULTURAL MOVEMENT

When Wetterberg and Kim and Einhorn presented their parallel ideas of a Nordic union in the fall of 2009, the idea of the “New Nordic” had already become a circulating trademark and operative framework for the branding of Nordic culture, including food, art, architecture, film and literature. While the notions of “Nordic art” and “Nordic design” have long and complex histories of their own,⁶⁶ the concept of “New Nordic” both draws on the strategic essentialism operative in the tradition for speaking of a “Nordic aesthetic,” while suggesting that something new and different is in play. The use of “New Nordic” as a novel brand emerged in particular from the discussions around the so-called NNF-movement in the early 2000s. The current Secretary-General of the NCoM, Dagfinn Høybråten, describes this phenomenon as “a bottom up movement that started with a group of food aficionados and chefs who had a love for Nordic food and food products,” in his

introduction to a special issue on “The Future of New Nordic Food” in the NCoM-journal *Green Growth: The Nordic Way*.⁶⁷ The most central of these “food aficionados” is the Danish entrepreneur and chef Claus Meyer, who together with chef René Redzepi opened the restaurant Noma in Copenhagen in 2003. In 2004 Meyer took initiative to a New Nordic Cuisine Symposium, supported by NCoM, where 12 male chefs from the Nordic countries signed “The New Nordic Food Manifesto” that outlined the ideological program for this burgeoning movement.⁶⁸ The 10-point manifesto is well-stocked with autostereotypes of Nordicity, as seen in the first paragraph that describes how the NNF-movement seeks to “express the purity, freshness, simplicity and ethics we wish to associate to our region.”⁶⁹

The NCoM was quick to support this new entrepreneurial engagement with Nordicity, as demonstrated by their 2005 “Århus Declaration on New Nordic Food.” The declaration details NCoM’s commitment in promoting “New Nordic Food” regionally and internationally as a project that shall offer “the consumer a better quality of life through healthy and tasty food based on Nordic ingredients,” as well as represent “a forward-looking answer to increased international competition in the global food market.”⁷⁰ As an ideological program operating across the cultural, biopolitical, and economical fields, the NNF-movement stands out as a perfect exemplification of Duelund’s argument about the increasing “political colonization” in Nordic cultural policies that privilege commercial initiatives that aid the branding of Norden. NCoM’s numerous strategy plans and branding initiatives for the NNF over the last decade has not only been central in making New Nordic Cuisine into a celebrated trademark internationally, it has also turned the “New Nordic” into a brand that has aided the promotion of contemporary art, architecture, design, performing arts, films, TV-shows, and other realms of cultural production from the Nordic region internationally. The numerous exhibitions, conferences, publications, events, and strategy plans sporting the phrase “New Nordic” in their titles speak to this.⁷¹

THE CONSERVATION OF NORDEN

The discourse on the New Nordic bear resemblance to the utopian language of Kim and

Einhorn’s UNN-project. In the language of New Nordic, Norden appears as a strong brand and cohesive national identity, bolstered by an image of healthy attitudes, values, and practices of living. The investment in presenting the New Nordic as an all-encompassing “social movement”—to borrow General Secretary Høybråten’s description of NNF—is on show in articles such as “Do We All Live in a New Nordic Food World?” (2015), published at *Norden.org*, the main website of NC and NCoM:

Food culture and gastronomy function like tasty glue, making people feel attached and alike in spite of other factors that could divide them. Agreeing on what is “our food” and “our eating habits” creates strong unspoken bonds. With the New Nordic Food (NNF) movement turned into an intergovernmental vehicle for gastrodiploacy, the Nordic region united under one gastronomic banner has gained an impressive reputation and overwhelming adoration from the world, making us Nordics assess the bounty of our homeland in a new light.⁷²

The description of how the NNF-movement operates as an “intergovernmentalvehicle for gastrodiploacy” underscores the politicized nature of this so-called “bottom-up” cultural movement. This mythical construction of the “we-feeling” of the Nordic region, to borrow Karl Deutsch’s term, where food culture works as a “tasty glue” that brings people together, also runs through the self-presentation of the NNF-movement by figures such as René Redzepi and Claus Meyer. While Redzepi frequently references the fact that “we were Vikings” in his description of the “authenticity” of the NNF, Meyer emphasizes the crucial role played by the Nordic soil or “terroir,” that is not only pure and unique, but also marked by a “soul [...] which has remained nearly untouched by time.”⁷³ The NNF-movement seeks in short to bind the Nordic nations together aesthetically, geographically, and historically by calling for a return to the imagined roots of a Nordic spirit.

These appraisals of the “bounty of our homeland” Norden clearly exhibits what critics have called the “gastronationalist” inflection of the NNF-movement.⁷⁴ In an analysis of the NNF-movement from a critical whiteness-perspective, Rikke Andreassen points out that the search for the purity of the Nordic terroir “reflects an earlier historical investment in (or obsession with) finding

the pure authentic Nordic race” among Nordic racial theorists in the period between the early 19th century and World War II.⁷⁵ Andreassen argues that the discourse of NNF contributes to the continuing (re)production of a racialized ideal of Nordic whiteness: “In a time where the Nordic society is becoming increasingly racial and ethnically diverse, the New Nordic Kitchen turns the opposite way and call for a narrow focus on the Nordic as mono-cultural and mono-racial.”⁷⁶

Despite the positive affective connotations that cling to the term “new” then, the discourse of the New Nordic have clear conservative functions. Analogous to Håkan Wiberg’s description of how the term Nordic Balance more than anything worked to conserve the status quo in the 1960s by “offer[ing] a suitable vehicle for expressing the *idea* that [the Nordic countries] *were* cooperating in one sense—while not cooperating in another sense,” the New Nordic sells an image of a novel and innovative Nordic brand and identity rooted in a nostalgic image of a mythical past of racial, cultural, and political unity.⁷⁷

NEW NORDIC EXCEPTIONALISM

The investment in the New Nordic has enabled the advancement of what I suggest to call the framework of *New Nordic Exceptionalism*. By this phrase I seek to capture how the discourse of the New Nordic has mobilized the fields of art and culture to reenergize the narrative of Nordic exceptionalism domestically and internationally in a time where the image of a Nordic Model of political bridge-building, internationalist solidarism, and social welfare policies seem increasingly fractured. The radical changes that has taken place in the political and socio-economic landscape across the Nordic countries over the last decades—with the “variegated neoliberalization” of the Nordic welfare states, and the dramatic influence of anti-immigrant right-wing parties as some key examples—have troubled the idea of the Nordic states as the political, financial and ethical “norm entrepreneurs” of the world.⁷⁸ Events such as the Muhammad cartoon crisis of 2005–2006 in Denmark, the terror attacks by the white right-wing terrorist Anders Behring Breivik in Norway in 2011, and the racist school killings in Trollhättan in Sweden in 2015, have called international media to look “behind the myth of the Scandinavian

utopia,” as British journalist Michael Booth phrases it in the subtitle to his popular travelogue *The Almost Nearly Perfect People* (2014): “[O]nce you go beyond the Western media’s current Scandinavian tropes,” Booth explains, “a more complex, often darker, occasionally quite troubling picture begins to emerge [. . .]: the racism and Islamophobia, the slow decline of social equality, the alcoholism.”⁷⁹

The retro-utopian framework of New Nordic Exceptionalism is not void of “darker” images like these, but the political problems implicated herein are often repackaged and presented in the style of the popular so-called “New Nordic Noir”—crime thrillers, that as the name suggests, are known for presenting the “dark underside” of the “cradle-to-grave welfare system” in a simple and precise style of gritty realism.⁸⁰ The deployment of these “dark” images and imaginaries of New Nordic art and culture in the reenergizing of Norden as a political and economical brand is explicitly in play in NCoM’s most recent strategy report, *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region 2015–2018* (2015). The strategy reports aims at turning the phrase “The Nordic Perspective” into a brand that can bring “the Nordic countries [together] under a single and unified concept.”⁸¹ The 30-page document takes its starting point in the “characteristically Nordic cuisine, design, films, music and literature [that] have been bringing the Nordic region international recognition” over the last decade.⁸² The “distinctly Nordic element—a Nordic trademark”—that connects these cultural and artistic “successes” are, according to the strategy plan, grounded in the “Nordic governance and welfare model.” In the strategy plan the discourse of Nordic exceptionalism and the New Nordic are thus effectively mapped on to each other. While the Nordic Model is positioned as the secret behind New Nordic art and culture, the rhetoric of the New Nordic is deployed to describe how the Nordic Model has “renewed itself” following of the financial crisis, so much so that “countries all over the world” have once again started to “discuss whether our model could serve as a possible buffering and stabilizing factor in an increasingly uncertain global economy.”⁸³ The role that artistic and cultural imaginaries play in the description of this ascendant New Nordic Exceptionalism is especially visible when the

strategy plan references the potential obstacles ahead:

We in the Nordic region are also facing a number of serious challenges. We are far from perfect, and it is perhaps this imperfection that makes us fascinating. At the same time, we are always at the top of international rankings regarding openness, trust, equality, environment and happiness. These are the values we want to share with the rest of the world, along with our pragmatic politics, dark thrillers, and the strong role of women.⁸⁴

In NCoM's neoliberal language, problems turn into challenges, failures appear as assets, and the troubling political images—such as the mainstreaming of racist and Islamophobic discourses and politics, to invoke Booth's examples—appear as “fascinating” episodes of a Nordic “dark thriller.”

CONCLUSION: THE LIMITS OF THE NORDIC “REALIST UTOPIA”

Kim and Einhorn's UNN-project presented the audience at the Nordic Culture Forum with a discursive mirror that aimed at distorting the Nordic self-image perpetuated by the discursive framework I have termed New Nordic Exceptionalism. The fact that the UNN-intervention seems to have been largely forgotten in the years following the Nordic Culture Forum, and has left few marks even in the debates on contemporary art, could be read as a sign that the performance misfired. Yet, whether the intervention was successful or not depends on our expectations and measurements of success of a work like this. To fault Kim and Einhorn's critical redeployment of the utopian language of Nordism for not jamming the discursive machinery of New Nordic Exceptionalism more thoroughly would in my view be off-target. For as I have hoped to show in this article, the value of Kim and Einhorn's UNN-project is located less in its (dis)ability to *rupture* than in its precise display of the troubling *traditions* and *continuities* at work in the discursive framework of New Nordic Exceptionalism.

The UNN-intervention demonstrates the remarkable resilience of the idealized Nordist narrative of unity and uniqueness—a resilience that seems able to neutralize even the most exaggerated attempts at exhibiting its hyperbolic self-images and nationalist logics. By highlighting the

interconnectedness of the discourses on Nordic exceptionalism and the New Nordic, the UNN-project exhibits how a Nordic framework both has been and still can be used to legitimize and naturalize a nationalist safeguarding of the purity and authenticity of the Nordic “terroir” against foreign influences. The nationalism of the New Nordic seems in short to follow in the tradition of how Nordism, in Ole Wæver's description, has historically functioned less as a “tool *against* separate nationalism, but rather as a pooling of nationalisms”; “a collaborative nationalism with the effect of putting itself morally above other nationalism.”⁸⁵ The idealized autostereotypes of Nordic excellence and ethics thus work to make the nationalist inflection of New Nordic Exceptionalism to appear not only *different* from the historical “troubling” nationalisms of the world, but also as a model for others to follow.

Kim and Einhorn's UNN-intervention calls on us to reflect further upon the issues and problems that have to be neglected and forgotten for the narrative of New Nordic Exceptionalism to work, including the unfinished histories of Nordic colonialism, the political mainstreaming of racist and Islamophobic discourses, the mushrooming of depression and stress-related illnesses, and more. Kim and Einhorn's examination of mechanisms at play in the discursive nationalization of Norden also raise questions to whether the Nordic branding initiatives will be able to uphold the image of unity in the face of the increasing antagonistic nationalist politics at play in the different Nordic states in the wake of the rising influence of nationalist right-wing parties in the last decades. The temporary re-introduction of border control between several of the Nordic countries in January 2016 in response to the global refugee crisis is but one example of the growing discrepancies between the “image of reality” and “experience of reality” (to use Musial's terms) of a Nordic unity today. The conspicuous absence of any mentioning of these antagonistic nationalisms from the discussions on the future of Norden suggests that some “imperfections” might be too difficult to reframe as “fascinating”—even for the branding machinery of New Nordic Exceptionalism. Some aspects of the Nordic “realist utopia,” to borrow Gunnar Wetterberg's term, seems just too real to be dealt with.⁸⁶

Notes

1. “Nordic Culture Forum to Discuss Profiling,” Norden.org (November 2009). <http://www.norden.org/en/news-and-events/news/culture-forum-to-discuss-profiling> (accessed November 21, 2015).
2. Ibid.
3. Jeuno J.E. Kim and Ewa Einhorn, “Everything for Everyone,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 7, no. 1 (2014): 22–23. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17528631.2013.858917>
4. Ibid., 24.
5. For a discussion of the exhibition, see Niels Hebert, “Massiv attack på varumärket Sverige” [Massive Attack at the Swedish Brand], *Arbetarbladet* (October 2010), <http://www.arbetarbladet.se/kultur/massiv-attack-pa-varumarket-sverige> (accessed November 30, 2015). Recently, Kim and Einhorn has developed their UNN-concept within the framework of an animated TV-series entitled *Krabstadt* (2013–). See Jeuno J.E. Kim and Ewa Einhorn, *Civilisation & Provocation—The Ultimate Krabstadt Fanbook* (Malmö: Förlaget, 2016).
6. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006).
7. Kim and Einhorn, “Everything for Everyone,” 24.
8. Karl W. Deutsche et al., “Political Community and the North Atlantic Area,” in *The European Union: Readings on the Theory and Practice of European Integration*, 3rd ed., eds. Brent F. Nelsen and Alexander Stubb (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1957/2003), 123; and Christopher Browning, “Branding Nordicity: Models, Identity, and the Decline of Exceptionalism,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 42, no. 1 (2007): 32. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0010836707073475>
9. Deutsch et al., “Political Community and the North Atlantic Area,” 124.
10. For a discussion on the “Nordic Balance,” see Arne Olav Brundtland, “The Nordic Balance: Past and Present,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 2, no. 2 (1967): 30–63. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/001083676500100403>
11. Christine Ingebritsen, “Norm Entrepreneurs: Scandinavia’s Role in World Politics,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 37, no. 1 (2002): 11–23. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0010836702037001689>
12. Ibid., 11.
13. Browning, “Branding Nordicity,” 35.
14. Olof Palme, quoted in Ibid., 34.
15. Ann Sofie-Dahl, “Sweden: Once a Moral Superpower, Always a Moral Superpower?,” *International Journal* 61, no. 4 (2006): 896. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/002070200606100408>
16. For a discussion of the relationship between these different disciplinary takes on Nordic exceptionalism, see Mikko Kuisma, “Social Democratic Internationalism and the Welfare State After the ‘Golden Age,’” *Cooperation and Conflict* 42, no. 1 (2007): 9–26. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0010836707073474>
17. Ibid., 16.
18. Kazimierz Musiał, “Reconstructing Nordic Significance in Europe on the Threshold of the 21st Century,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 34, no. 3 (2009): 287. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03468750903134723>
19. Ibid., 289, 297.
20. Ibid., 295.
21. Browning, “Branding Nordicity,” 35; and Heidi Haggren, “The ‘Nordic Group’ in UNESCO: Informal and Practical Cooperation within the Politics of Knowledge,” in *Regional Cooperation and International Organizations: The Nordic Model in Transnational Alignment*, eds. Norbert Getz and Heidi Haggren (London: Routledge, 2009), 88–111.
22. Max Jacobson quoted in Browning, “Branding Nordicity,” 36.
23. Kim and Einhorn, “Everything for Everyone,” 22.
24. Kuisma, “Social Democratic Internationalism,” 18; and Marja Jalava, “The Nordic Countries as a Historical and Historiographical Region: Towards a Critical Writing of Translocal History,” *História da historiografia* 11 (2013): 251.
25. Ole Wæver, “Nordic Nostalgia: Northern Europe after the Cold War,” *International Affairs* 68, no. 1 (1992): 77.
26. Ibid., 77.
27. Ibid., 77, 78.
28. Carl Bildt quoted in Browning, “Branding Nordicity,” 42.
29. Esko Aho quoted in Ibid., 42.
30. Jalava, “The Nordic Countries,” 250. For examples of the proposal of the shift toward Baltism, Ole Wæver, “Nordic Nostalgia,” 96–102; and Ole Wæver, “From Nordism to Baltism,” in *The Baltic Sea: A Region in the Making*, ed. Sverre Jervell et al. (Karlskrona: Baltic Institute, 1992). For an analysis of the role of the Baltic in the reconceptualization of Norden since the 1990s, see Musiał, “Reconstructing Nordic Significance.”
31. Kuisma, “Social Democratic Internationalism,” 18.
32. The category of the Arctic has similar to the Baltic become central to the discussions of the future of Nordic politics and economy, especially following the establishment of the Arctic Council in 1996, when Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark (representing the Faeroes and Greenland), Iceland, Russia, Canada and the USA signed the Ottawa Declaration. For a critical discussion on the rising discourse of “Arctic exceptionalism,” see Juha Kämpylä and Harri Mikkola, *On Arctic Exceptionalism: Critical Reflections in the Light of the Arctic Sunrise Case and the Crisis in Ukraine* (Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2015).
33. Browning, “Branding Nordicity,” 28.
34. Ibid., 27.

35. Ibid., 44. Browning also points out that the so-called ‘Europeanization’ of the Nordic model has also entailed important losses, including the investment in developing social democratic alternatives to current liberalist agendas of deregulated markets and individualist concepts of the social order.
36. Ibid., 30, 44.
37. “Nordic Culture Forum to Discuss Profiling,” n.p.
38. Bo Stråth, “Nordic Modernity: Origins, Trajectories, Perspectives,” in *Nordic Paths to Modernity*, ed. Jóhann Páll Árnason and Björn Wittrock (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 26.
39. Ibid.
40. N.F.S. Grundtvig quoted in Gunnar Wetterberg, *The United Nordic Federation* (Stockholm: The Nordic Councils of Ministers, 2010), 30.
41. Hans Christian Andersen, “Jeg er en skandinav!” (1937), <http://visithcandersen.dk/d-hca-jeg-er-enskandinav.htm> (accessed November 30, 2015). The English translation is a modified version of the translation of “I Am a Scandinavian!” at *Le Traveling Students Blog*, March 24, 2013, <https://xiaohaizimen.wordpress.com/tag/poem/> (accessed December 1, 2015).
42. Jalava, “The Nordic Countries,” 250.
43. Ibid., 251.
44. Karl Petander, Willy Kleen and Anders Örne, *Nordens förenta stater* [The United Nations of Norden] (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1942). In her analysis of the debates following the publication of *Nordens förenta stater*, Tora Byström notes that over 20 books were published on the subject in Sweden alone in the period between 1942 and 1944. See Tora Byström, “Nordens förenta stater: Debatten under andra världskriget om en nordisk union” [The United Nations of Norden: The Debate About a Nordic Union During Second World War], in *Forskningsfronten flyttas fram: nordiska perspektiv*, ed. Hans Albin Larsson (Bromma: HLF Förlag, 2005), 145–66.
45. Byström, “Nordens förenta stater,” 155. My translation.
46. Ibid., 163. My translation.
47. See for instance Browning, “Branding Nordicity,” 30; and Håkan Wiberg, “The Nordic Countries: A Special Kind of System?” *Current Research on Peace and Violence* 9, no. 1–2 (1986): 4.
48. “Preamble to the Treaty of 23 March 1962” (1962), Norden.org, <http://www.norden.org/en/om-samarbejdet-1/nordic-agreements/treaties-and-agreements/basic-agreement/the-helsinki-treaty> (accessed November 30, 2015).
49. For a discussion of the importance of NIFCA to the promotion of Nordic art internationally, see Cecilia Gelin, “The Utopian Institution?,” in *Art and Its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations*, ed. Nina Möntmann (London: Black Dog, 2006), 6–7. For a discussion of NIFCA and its successor Nordic Culture Point in a broader perspective, see Stuart Burch, “Norden, Reframed,” *Culture Unbound* 2, (2010): 574ff.
50. I use “neoliberal” here in line with David Harvey’s definition of neoliberalism as a “theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.” David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.
51. Peter Duelund, “Nordic Cultural Policies: A Critical View,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 14, no. 1 (2008): 18.
52. Ibid., 17.
53. Margaret E. Farrar and Jamie L. Warner, “Spectacular Resistance: The Billionaires for Bush and the Art of Political Culture Jamming,” *Polity* 40, no. 3 (2008): 273–96. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.polity.2300104>
54. Brian Holmes, “Do-It-Yourself Geopolitics: Cartographies of Art in the World,” in *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, ed. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 2007), 281.
55. I’m drawing here on Håkan Wiberg’s discussion of how the concept “Nordic Balance” has been less descriptive and explanatory than performative in its creation of an image of a balanced region. See Wiberg, “The Nordic Countries,” 10.
56. Gunnar Wetterberg, “De fem nordiska länderna bör gå ihop i en ny union” [The Five Nordic Countries Should Come Together in a New Union], *Dagens Nyheter* (October 27, 2009), <http://www.dn.se/debatt/de-fem-nordiska-landerna-bor-ga-ihop-i-en-ny-union> (accessed November 14, 2015). My translation.
57. Ibid. My translation.
58. Gunnar Wetterberg, “Historisk möjlighet att skapa en ny nordisk union” [Historical Possibility to Establish a New Union], *Dagens Nyheter* (December 2009), <http://www.dn.se/debatt/historisk-mojlighet-att-skapa-en-ny-nordisk-union/> (accessed November 20, 2015).
59. Mikael Bondesson, “Många vill se Sverige i ny förbundsstat” [Many Want to See Sweden in a New Federation], *Dagens Nyheter* (November 2010), <http://www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/manga-vill-se-sverige-i-ny-forbundsstat> (accessed November 13, 2015).
60. Wetterberg, *The United Nordic Federation*, 18, 19, 24.
61. Ibid., 24, 25, 26.
62. Ibid., 9.
63. Ibid., 63.
64. Haldór Ásgrímson and Jan Erik Enestam, “Foreword,” in *The United Nordic Federation*, ed. Gunnar

- Wetterberg (Stockholm: The Nordic Councils of Ministers, 2010), 7.
65. Ibid.
66. See, for instance, Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen and Kristin Ørjasæter, eds., *Globalizing Art: Negotiating Place, Identity and Nation in Contemporary Nordic Art* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2011).
67. Dagfinn Høybråten, “The Future of New Nordic Food: Introduction,” *Green Growth: The Nordic Way* (March 2015), <http://nordicway.org/nnf/> (accessed November 30, 2015).
68. The Nordic Council of Ministers. For a history of the New Nordic Food-movement from the perspective of NC and NCoM, see *The Emergence of A New Nordic Food Culture: Final Report from the Program New Nordic Food II, 2010–2014* (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers & Nordpub, 2015); and Susanne Kolle et al., *Ny Nordisk Mad: 10 år efter* [New Nordic Food: 10 Years After] (Aarhus: DCA—Nationalt Center for Fødevarer og Jordbrug, 2014).
69. “The New Nordic Food Manifesto,” New Nordic Food, <http://newnordicfood.org/about-nnf-ii/new-nordic-kitchen-manifesto/> (accessed November 20, 2015).
70. “Aarhus Declaration on New Nordic Food” (2005), in: The Nordic Council of Ministers, *The Emergence of A New Nordic Food Culture: Final Report from the Program New Nordic Food II, 2010–2014* (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers & Nordpub, 2015), 67.
71. The examples of the use of how the phrase “New Nordic” has been deployed and disseminated within the different realms of art and culture are to multiple to be mentioned here, and deserves a study on its own. Notable examples in recent years within the field of art and design include exhibitions such as “North by New York: New Nordic Art” (2011) curated by Robert Storr and Francesca Pietropaolo at the Scandinavia House: The Nordic Center in America in New York, USA, “New Nordic: Architecture and Identity” at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark in 2012, and ARoS: Aarhus Art Museum’s series ARoS FOCUS//NEW NORDIC (2015–ongoing).
72. Edith Salminen, “Do We All Live in a New Nordic Food World?” Norden.org (March 2015), <http://www.norden.org/da/aktuelt/artikler/do-we-all-live-in-a-new-nordic-food-world> (accessed November 24, 2015).
73. René Redzepi in: Ursula Heinzelmann, “An Interview with René Redzepi: Noma Copenhagen,” *Gastronomica* 10, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 99. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2010.10.3.97>; and Claus Meyer in: René Redzepi and Claus Meyer, *Noma: Nordisk mad* [Noma: Nordic Food] (Copenhagen: Politiken Forlag, 2006), 177. For a discussion of the use of the Viking figure in NNF, see Ulla Holm, “Noma er fascisme i avantgardistiske klæ'r” [Noma is Fascism in the Clothes of the Avant-Garde], *Politiken*, May 8, 2011, <http://pol.dk/1275730> (accessed November 30, 2015); and Rikke Andreassen, “Gastronationalisme—en nostalgisk søgen efter det nordiske” [Gastronationalism—A Nostalgic Search for the Nordic], *Social Kritik* 144 (2015): 6–15.
74. See Andreassen, “Gastronationalisme,” 10.
75. Ibid., 10.
76. Ibid., 14.
77. Wiberg, “The Nordic Countries,” 10.
78. For a discussion of the “variegated neoliberalization” of the Nordic welfare states, see Toni Ahlqvist and Sami Moisio, “Neoliberalization in a Nordic State: From Cartel Polity towards a Corporate Polity in Finland,” *New Political Economy* 19, no. 1 (2014): 25. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2013.768608>
79. Michael Booth, *The Almost Nearly Perfect People: Behind the Myth of the Scandinavian Utopia*, iBooks Edition (London: Jonathan Cape, 2014).
80. The Economist, “Inspector Norse: Why Are Nordic Detective Novels so Successful?” *The Economist* (March 10, 2010), <http://www.economist.com/node/15660846> (accessed June 10, 2016).
81. NCoM, *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region 2015–2018* (Copenhagen: NCoM, 2015), 5. The strategy plan is also accompanied by a five minute commercial video, available at <http://www.norden.org/en/news-and-events/videos/the-nordic-perspective> (accessed November 30, 2015). For a general presentation of the strategy plan, see Michael Funch, *On Top of the World* (Norden.org, 2015), <http://www.norden.org/da/aktuelt/artikler/201con-top-of-the-world201d> (accessed November 30, 2015).
82. NCoM, *Strategy for International Branding*, 5.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Wæver, “Nordic Nostalgia,” 88.
86. Wetterberg, *The United Nordic Federation*, 63.