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Tweeting Sweden: Technological Solutionism, #RotationCuration, and the World's Most Democratic Twitter Account

Angela Kristin VandenBroek

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By Angela Kristin VandenBroek
Binghamton University, State University of New York

Introduction

Well, I guess I'm the one calling the shots for this account now.

—@sweden / Jack Werner, December 10, 2011

On December 10, 2011, Jack Werner became the first of more than one hundred twitterers to curate the official Twitter account for Sweden, @sweden. Every week control of the @sweden account is given to a Swedish citizen to say anything desired—as long as it is predominantly in English—with "No censorship, no limits." [1] The

project is intended to promote Sweden by representing the country through the complex mix of "skills, experiences and opinions it actually consists of" in order to create interest in Sweden's culture, business and people. [2] Over the course of the last three years the project has included Swedish citizens living across Sweden and abroad; it has included indigenous Sámi, natural citizens, and immigrants from Bosnia, Brazil, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Iraq, Poland, the United States, and Turkey. The curators have ranged from ages fifteen to sixty. There have been: marketers, designers, programmers, journalists, photographers, writers, sheep farmers, reindeer herders, naked naturalists, sexologists, singer songwriters, vloggers, bloggers, welders, astronomers, statisticians, oceanographers, feminists, financiers, lawyers, chefs, librarians, students, teachers, parents, and rail traffic controllers.

The Curators of Sweden is managed by the Swedish Institute (Svenska Institutet) and VisitSweden, branches of the National Board for the Promotion of Sweden. [3] The Swedish Institute is a public agency responsible for gaining "knowledge and understanding of different cultures, their people, and to promote Sweden and Swedish issues globally." [4] VisitSweden, also a government organization, is responsible for promoting tourism and travel information. [5] The two public organizations collaborated with the private marketing firm Volontaire to create the branding project that was intended to "break all branding principles and revolutionize the voice of a country." [6] Since its launch in 2011, the project has been awarded the Swedish Golden Egg award for public relations, the Gold Clio Award, Gold in

the Euro Effies, and Grand Prix at the Cannes Lions. [7] Additionally, as of this writing, the Twitter account has more than 82,150 followers [8] and Volontaire has claimed that the project has a 553% retweet and reply rate and a US$40 million public relations value from media coverage alone. [9]

The BBC in January of 2012 published, "What is undoubtedly a clever publicity stunt does also appear to be the 'democratic experiment' it claims to be. Tweets are not censored and are by no means all positive." [10] The New York Times commented that "if there is anything to be learned from the @sweden experiment, a government initiative that entrusts the country's Twitter account to a new citizen every seven days, it is that there is no such thing as a typical Swede." [11] Other news organizations have commented on the absurd and strange tweets of curators: "The feed is currently occupied by a writer and marketer called Jack. Although he also admits to being called 'ass face' on occasions" [12] and "Sonja certainly has offered a different perspective in spades—whether she's tweeting about eating a uterus for dinner, folding her breasts in half, or sharing a doctored photo of Elin Nordegren carrying the decapitated head of Tiger Woods." [13] Overall, the news buzz tended to present the Curators of Sweden as important or interesting for their readers because of its unpredictability, its controversies, and its democratic reputation.

The hype and publicity have left many inspired and with a desire to replicate the project in other countries and locations. Kirkstall Online (@kirkstallonline), the Twitter account for the Kirkstall

Valley Community Association in Leeds, United Kingdom, coined the hashtag #LocationCuration on January 12, 2012 to describe the projects that had developed over the year since Curators of Sweden began, such as @TweetweekUSA and @peopleofleeds. On March 22, 2012, Twitter user @auldzealand coined #RotationCuration to specify a project that rotates between multiple curators on a regular schedule, rather than an account that curates a location specifically. Rotation curation boils off the content and context of the Curators of Sweden reducing it to its technology, including the Twitter platform and the project's infrastructure. By transplanting this technology, others have sought to recreate the success of the Curators of Sweden, allowing "real people" to speak for a group that is usually represented by marketing managers or politicians in an effort to bring about a more democratic approach to branding and group identity building.

According to the Wikipedia listing of current rotation curation projects, there are 78 locations (countries, regions, states, cities and neighborhoods) with Twitter accounts that are rotated between curators as of February 2015. [14] However, of these, only Sweden, Northumberland (@VisitNland, 13,259 followers), and Vermont (@ThisisVT, 7,913 followers) are official government entities. [15] After @sweden, the next largest account is Malaysia (@twt_malaysia) with 29,741 followers, just a third of the size of the Curators of Sweden. Sixty-nine of the accounts have less than 10,000 followers and 31 accounts have less than 1,000 followers. These projects have been far less successful with comparatively small follower counts, minimal press coverage, and failures in the recruiting curators. Meanwhile,

the Curators of Sweden celebrated its third year with an interview on National Public Radio's Morning Edition [16] and an ever-increasing audience.

The Curators of Sweden, the self-proclaimed "most democratic Twitter account in the world," [17] has largely succeeded in its aims to convince its audiences that it represents Swedishness through democratic means. While the hashtag #RotationCuration attributes these successes to the technology of @sweden, I argue that to reduce the project to its technology impoverishes our understanding of it. We must expand the scope of our analysis to understand what @sweden is doing, how it is doing it, and why it is successful. Reducing the Curators of Sweden to its technology is a form of technological solutionism that ignores the wider complexities of the original project and how the change in the technology's context fundamentally alters the role it plays, and thus fails to produce the results of the original project.

#RotationCuration as Technological Solutionism

Evgeny Morozov laid the groundwork for his arguments on technological solutionism in *The Net Delusion* [18] and in *To Save Everything, Click Here* [19] he articulated his unease with popular and scholarly approaches to "the Internet" that recasts "all complex social situations either as neatly designed problems with definite, computable solutions or as transparent and self evident processes that can be

easily optimized — if only the right algorithms were in place!" [20] Technological solutionism, he argued, stems from Internet-centrism. Morozov described Internet-centrism as a group of interconnected myths that impact public understanding and academic theorizing of the Internet. Internet-centrists view the Internet as a melting pot of context-less technologies that are consumed by the meta-narrative of "the Internet", [21] which Morozov described as a "mythical entity." [22] This mythical entity is used by Internet-centrists to argue that the Internet fundamentally revolutionized human society and will never end, making discussions of its relations with historical politics and technologies or any suggestions for its replacement or alteration difficult if not impossible. [23] Finally, Morozov described how Internet-centrists view the nature of the Internet as fundamentally open, free, and equalizing. Internet-centrists then use the mythical Internet as a model for fixing all human ills and perfecting all practices by making them more efficient through its use—this is technological solutionism.

Morozov's (2013) arguments have already spawned scholarship that has begun to question technological solutionism in computational thinking, [24] health and self-monitoring, [25] and political movements. [26] A pessimistic approach to technology and critique of techno-utopianism is not new, however. Other scholars have previously questioned the democratic limits of technology to give power or voice to underrepresented peoples. [27] That said, I find Morozov's approach to be more useful to think with in the case of the Curators of Sweden and rotation curation.

To extract rotation curation from the Curators of Sweden, herald it as the key active ingredient of the project, and then apply it to other places and groups as a solution, is to exemplify the Internet-centrist approach that Morozov has outlined. Like Morozov's description of Internet-centrists, proponents of rotation curation have stripped away the historical roots of the project and presented it as a project that is fundamentally digital and specifically consumed by its Internet-ness. Discussions of the project and rotation curation center on key myths of the Internet's nature, especially openness and democracy, attributing the project's existence to possibilities only available because of the Internet. All of this allows rotation curation to be displayed as a solution to democratic participation in group representation and identity building without contemplating the wider network of actors, cultural practices, and histories entwined with the Curators of Sweden.

By re-imagining the Curators of Sweden to exist within the milieu of Swedish history, culture, and nation branding practices, it is possible to see the project as more than rotation curation. These elements in excess of rotation curation can then provide insight into why the Curators of Sweden has been successful and other rotation curation projects have been comparative failures. On a wider scale, this perspective provides ammunition for the technological solutionism as a critique as well as provides a framework for rethinking our portrayals of technology in social projects and movements.

More Than #RotationCuration

The Curators of Sweden is one facet of a larger project from the Swedish government to brand Sweden internationally. Other related projects include Sweden.se, Democreativity, SwedishDesign.org, and *Svensk Form*, which all serve to put forth a representation of Sweden that has been carefully crafted over several decades by governmental agencies stemming largely from politics that arose out of Swedish Romanticism and Swedish Modernism. [28] In order to understand the Curators of Sweden, one must begin with the development of Swedish Modernism and trace the trajectory of ideas and tropes through this period into the development of the Swedish national brand and into the production of the Curators of Sweden.

The National Romantic movement in Sweden during the late 19th century through the 1920s was influential on the development of Swedish Modernism, particularly through the linkage of beauty, the home, and social justice. [98] Carl Larsson's popular 1899 *Ett Hem* (*A Home*) depicted, in vibrant colors, Larsson's home, creating an aesthetic of beauty that was rooted in the home, intimacy and private spaces that were at the center of the Swedish National Romantic movement. [29] During this period, the social justice connection to beauty and home was cemented by Ellen Key's manifesto *Skönhet för alla* (*Beauty for Everyone*). [30] Key argued that better living conditions and equality could be achieved through the creation of beautiful objects—beauty judged on simplicity and ease of use in addition to aesthetics—that were affordable and accessible to everyone. [31]

Swedish Modernism is a political movement and an aesthetic that dates back to 1930 when the first manifesto of Swedish Modernism was printed. Acceptera, written by Swedish architects Gunnar Asplund, Wolter Gahn, Sven Markelius, Eskil Sundahl, and Uno Åhrén, aimed to establish a specifically Swedish form of modernism that emphasized functionalism and a patchwork revision of history that reconnected traditional values with contemporary development. [32] From this milieu, the Social Democrats were formed and by the 1920s had gained power in parliament as the party of the people. The Social Democrats embraced the narratives of the period and defined their platform with the label folkhem, meaning "the people's home," which became part of the persuasive argument that helped establish the modern Swedish welfare system. [33] Per Albin Hansson, the Social Democratic prime minister associated with the creation of the Swedish Model and welfare state, which is considered the cornerstone of Swedish Modernism, described the folkhem platform in 1928:

> The home's foundation is community and a feeling of togetherness. The good home does not recognize any privileged or neglected [members], any favorites or stepchildren. There, no one looks down on another, nor tries to gain advantage at another's expense, nor do the strong push down or plunder the weak. In the good home consideration, cooperation, and helpfulness prevail. Applied to the great home of the people and the citizens, this would mean breaking down all social and economic barriers that now divide the citizens into the privileged and the neglected, into rulers and dependents, into

rich and poor, into landed and impoverished, into plunderers and the plundered. [34]

Swedish Modernism as a design aesthetic developed alongside the welfare state. Influenced by other forms of European Modernism, especially German Modernism, Swedish Modernism took up the theme of functionalism, but embedded it within the already established narratives of beauty, home and social justice. [35] In contrast to other European Modernist movements, Swedish Modernism emphasized local traditions and—rather than creating a binary between the local and the central or international—created a nationalism that grew from the rationality of the local and the home. [36] Although the Social Democratic party has lost some of its power and influence in Sweden's government, the basic underlying principles have been maintained and appear embedded in many of the government's projects. [37] This is most easily recognizable in the promotion of Swedish design and Sweden's national brand.

Svensk Form, the world's oldest design publication, was founded in 1845 as mandated by the Swedish Government to "safeguard the quality of the Swedish craft industry." [38] At the time of *Svensk Form*'s establishment, the rise of mass-produced, poor quality products were seen as threatening the guild-trained craftsmen industry. [39] By 1919, the narratives of the Swedish National Romantic movement and early Swedish Modernism had taken hold and helped to shape the mission of *Svensk Form*, which, that year, took up the slogan: "Beautiful Everyday Goods." [40] In connection with the creation of

the Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design, *Svensk Form* encouraged new approaches to design that embraced industrial mass production, rather than fought it, bringing Key's vision of Skönhet för Alla to fruition. [41] Today, *Svensk Form*'s mission is "to demonstrate the benefits of good design to social development, to stimulate the development of design in Sweden, to increase respect for the value of design work and to expand and deepen attitudes towards issues of form and design." [42]

SwedishDesign.org, a side project of *Svensk Form* in conjunction with the Centre for Business History, is a social media site for Swedish designers to share their work. It is also a glimpse into the effects of Sweden's governmental influence on designers. Keith Murphy found that Swedish designers believed that Swedish design was "nothing special" [43] and that they saw little connection between their work and the political practices of their government. However, he also found that they consistently reproduced the cultural geometry that reinforced Swedish Modernism and fit within a "normative Swedish style." [44] Murphy argued that the straight lines and ergonomic curves of Swedish design were more than surface trends, but shapes that transmitted meaning from Swedish ideologies. [45]

The Curators of Sweden emerged from these narratives on design, social justice and everyday-ness. In the following sections, I will explore the ways that three particular tropes (beauty, home, and everyone) are performed and embedded in the curator's content, the project's design, and marketing and media engagements surrounding

@sweden. The beauty trope represents the themes of simplicity, ergonomics, ease of use, affordability, and discussions of Swedish aesthetics. The home trope includes the themes familiar, care, family, and the intimate and private settings of everyday life. The everyone trope encompasses a range of themes including democratic values, accessibility, social justice, equality, and the Swedish notion of lagom. [46]

Three Tropes

 The tropes beauty, home, and everyone are abundant in Swedish nation branding projects, even beyond the Curators of Sweden. For example, the work showcased by Swedish designers on SwedishDesign.org features all three. The everyone trope is present in the posted work of designer Ninna Berger, whose project Restructional Clothing employs women from the Botkyrka Women's Resource Center who have been unemployed for a long period of time. Her project is intended to recharge the women's creative energy and support social economics in the community. The beauty trope is clearly represented in many of the designs and products, for example, the Manhattan Cabinet by Röshults. The Manhattan cabinet has a concrete base with simple metal sides. The designer described the simplistic shelves as "4 mm iron walls on a steady foot of concrete will house your items in an ordered and practical manner." [47] The home trope is best represented by the abundance of household items that would seem unusual for a gallery of design and art. However, these items, like the Tejphållare (tape holder) by Runius Design, are described in terms of

Swedish beauty and the importance of beauty in everyday objects. Runius Design described the Tejphållare tape holder as having fewer components and requiring fewer assembly steps and with an ergonomic handle that does not overburden the user's wrist and arm. [48] The selected tropes are easily discerned in the material designs of Sweden, perhaps in part due to the cultural geometry documented by Murphy, but nonetheless create a visible network of ideas and influence that stretch beyond the Curators of Sweden, connecting the project to a deep history and contemporary ideology. [49]

Beauty

Twitter is not a Swedish invention and it was not made for the Curators of Sweden — in some ways, Twitter is particularly ill suited for rotation curation. Yet, Twitter is beautiful under the view of Swedish Modernism. [50] Twitter launched in 2006 as a microblogging platform that was tied to the idea of SMS technology. The idea and the interface were simple, easy to use, and free to anyone with an Internet connection. The client-side interface consists of three content spaces: the header, the sidebar and the tweet feed. The header contains basic navigation and search functions. The sidebar contains the user's Twitter stats, following suggestions, and the currently trending topics. The tweet feed displays a list of the recent 140-character tweets from followed users. The infinite scroll function autoloads tweets as the users scrolls down, further increasing ease of use. Juxtaposing this interface with the many layers of pages, widgetized areas, and

complex menus of Facebook and other popular websites, emphasizes the simplicity and cleanliness of Twitter by contrast.

The server-side databases and scripts that keep Twitter running, however, are complex and sophisticated requiring extensive development labor. In November of 2013, Bloomberg reported that Twitter had grown to include 2,300 employees from just eight employees in 2008. [51] In addition to the growing human labor behind Twitter, its technology has shifted from using the programming language Ruby on Rails to Scala. Ruby is an object-oriented programming language, meaning that all programmers must follow a strict method of programming when coding in Ruby. Scala, however, is a flexible language that allows users to code under multiple paradigm models—including functional, object-oriented, imperative, and concurrent— and has been described by the Twitter engineers as a "new, exciting, and 'beautiful' language that keeps the team engaged." [52] Additionally, Scala is capable of performing a great number of simultaneous tasks to manage Twitter's 288 million regular users and approximately 500 million tweets per day. [53]

The feat of organizing the human and technological labor behind Twitter to produce the simple, easy to use, free Twitter interface is not accidental. Twitter's mission is to "give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly without barriers." Its compatibility with Sweden's beauty ideals, was not missed by the Curators of Sweden's creators and managers. In describing why Twitter was chosen for the project, they described Twitter with a

strong emphasis on simplicity, ease of use, accessibility, and its free access:

> The messages are *text-based* and may be *up to 140 characters long*. Twitter as a medium makes it *easy to reach out* to the target audience in realtime. It is *quick to update and to share* content. *Anyone can follow* the Curator of Sweden and the network's global reach means that the message can be received all over the world. [54]

In addition to the beauty of Twitter platform, the Curators of Sweden incorporates the cultural geometry of Swedish beauty into its visual identity. The project's logo uses a sans-serif grotesque typeface, meaning that it has straight-lines, gentle curves, and a consistent stroke without embellishment. The graphic elements of the logo consist of two right angles and a straight line. The colors, blue and yellow, represent the Swedish flag and are a staple of the Swedish brand. The Curators of Sweden website is equally as austere with primary design elements being simple blue and yellow straight lines. [97] Non-essential elements have been created in grayscale and lightened in order to highlight only the primary content.

The twitter profile for @sweden is more austere than the website. Twitter, at the time the @sweden account was created, allowed for users to change the background, cover photo, profile photo, and the colors of their profiles. However, the project chose to match the background to the website's light yellow, fill the cover photo area with

solid blue, and use the current curator's photo with the project logo's borders as the account profile. [55] It is unlikely, given Volontaire's expertise and previous work, that the decision to keep the interface simple and clean was made out of ignorance. Rather, the Curators of Sweden's visual identity fits nicely within the larger brand of Sweden, which has consistently published simple, geometric, blue and yellow designs.

In addition to the project's adherence to Swedish design norms, the curators described beauty in similar ways. Curator Therese Bohman discussed Carl Larsson's paintings with followers, describing him as one of the most famous Swedish artists who "painted everyday life in the house where he lived with his wife and their many kids." [56] Many curators described Sweden as a beautiful place, especially when describing water, architecture, and the functional aspects of society, such as agriculture and food. Adam Arnesson posted, "But I shouldn't complain about the cost of food. I partly blame us farmers for not marketing our beautiful products." [57] Anders Dalenius also discussed the beauty of agriculture, tweeting "'Why corn?', you ask. Well, cornfields are beautiful, it taste good and tou can feed the wild boars with what you dont use in the winter. [sic]" [58] Off the farm, curators also described the beauty of food, such as this tweet by Anna "So what do the Swedes have for lunch? Don't know. This one however is having green pea soup with horseradish. Beautiful, simple and tasty!" [59]

Even when posting as a dissenter from norms of beauty, the curators often recognize beauty as a key aspect of Swedish history and identity from which they must distinguish themselves. Linnea Harnesk discussed her choice of chunky high heels in contrast to Swedish design's tendency for ergonomics, "Though Sweden are somewhat considered to be the pioneers of ergonomics, I'm not. These are my everyday shoes." [60] Perhaps one of the most iconic forms of Swedish beauty is IKEA. IKEA describes its design as something for "everyone" and on their "Democratic Design" webpage says,

> We believe *quality and design should be affordable* to many. The LAMPAN table lamp was designed using the five elements of "democratic design"–*form, function, quality, sustainability and a low price*. So instead of thinking outside the box, we got rid of it. [61]

IKEA has been a fairly popular topic among curators. Curators described IKEA as inexpensive, functional, efficient, simple, beautiful, and a normal part of Swedish homes. IKEA was often invoked as a symbol of Swedishness or as a contrast to one's self to demonstrate one's deviance. In response to the question "Do you say a prayer to Ikea?", [62] Hanna Andersson tweeted, "@SenatorCaesar Not me, I only go there to shop and worship cheap furniture #ikearules." [63] Olivia Solman noted the companies usage of flat, easy to transport packages: "Parents just texted, they are on their way back from Ikea with the car full of flat packages." [64] Matilda Henriksson, using a photograph of her living room, demonstrated her Swedishness

with the amount of IKEA furniture she owned: "Other side of the livingroom. High % of IKEA.." [65] Natashja Blomberg facetiously described Swedes' relationship to IKEA as more contentious, while still upholding Swedes' connection to it: "we all hate IKEA but still buy an overload of shit when we visit. @busterup25." [66]

Home

> @JackalAnon the whole point of this account is me being my self [sic] & showing everyday life from my personal view. Assange ain't part of that
>
> —@sweden / Nedda Yaldan, March 28, 2013

> I'm not sure why I got picked, but I'm honored and will do my best representing Sweden by just being myself.
>
> —@sweden / Pernilla Andersson, September 17, 2012

> @djfilippone just being myself, glad you like it. Not everyone will, I´m sure ;) Everybody's different. I'll just show you my side of sweden
>
> —@sweden / Sophia Sundberg, September 2, 2013

When a new curator is given control of the @sweden account, they are given guidelines on what to do with the account. The first states: "We

want you to be yourself, nothing else. That is, do what you normally do. Tweets will not be censored as long as they do not break the law or are for personal financial gain." [67] By design, the project aims to be about making Swedish life familiar to non-Swedes, arguing that Swedish "political objectives, trade, investments, visitors, exchange of talent and creativity are all heavily dependent on the view of the outside world." [68] Thus, it is unsurprising to find the home and "everyday life" featured prominently in the tweets of curators.

Volontaire's promotional video for the project outlined what was possible through the project, such as sharing traditional food, sharing "our" taste in music or cinema, or "come with us to a regular day at work." [69] Overwhelmingly, these possibilities came to fruition through the curators who used the account, not just as a platform from which to speak, but also as a documentation of each curator's life. The "everyday" was present in the live tweeting of curators' activities, such as meals, work, and visiting friends. However, by using twitter's photo embedding features, curators also shared their personal living space and the intimate settings of family and home. For example, Maria Sjöberg shared a photograph of her kitchen: "Even my kitchen interior is in it's [sic] original state from 1947. I'll only show you the clean side today. http://t.co/uDWAY0j3Qw" [70]

Some of the parents posted images of their children and discussed their childrearing practices through the organization of their home. Natashja Blomberg was the most prolific curator on this topic. Blomberg spent most of her week as curator discussing gender and

childrearing. Specifically, she tweeted about raising her children without introducing strict gender rules. She used photos of her home to illustrate how she materialized her beliefs into practice: "Kids are playing in their KIDS room. (not boy/girl/princess/batman room)". [71]

Curators also tweeted frequently about Swedish laws and customs that made family the center of Swedish life. They often emphasized the differences between Sweden and other countries, especially the United States. Oscar Forsström discussed parental leave: "Bringing up kids in Sweden is great. We have paternal leave for 480 days, if a kid is sick you get payed [sic] by the government." [72] Retweeting a post from UberFacts, Christopher Banks shared that "RT @UberFacts: The U.S. is the only developed country that does not have mandated vacation time for workers." [73] Ivar Arpi discussed the intersection of law and the home in Sweden through child abuse laws: "In Sweden it's illegal, and frowned upon, to spank/hit your children. There are a lot of brats around though. But don't hit them. Seriously." [74]

Everyone

> Every week, someone in Sweden is @sweden: sole ruler of the world's most democratic Twitter account.
>
> —Swedish Institute and VisitSweden, n.d.

This sentence is the first description of the Curators of Sweden on its "About" webpage. The Curators of Sweden is explicitly a brand rooted in Swedish democratic values. The project's marketing materials consistently use the word democratic to describe the project and the government's motivation. Google has indexed approximately 5,240 webpages for the search terms "'Curators of Sweden' democratic" as of June 2, 2015. Press coverage of the project consistently describes it as democratic. The *New York Times* published an article titled "In Sweden Twitter is Democratic, and File Sharing is a Religion." [76] In another *New York Times* article, Patrick Kampman, Volontaire's creative director, is quoted describing the rationale behind the project as representing Sweden, which "stands for certain values — being progressive, democratic, creative." [77] *Al Jazeera* called the project the "democratization" of Sweden's brand. [78] In 2012, a *Fox News* host introduced the project with "In Sweden something unusual is happening. Normally a country that has a Twitter account has that account run by an official of the government. Not so in Sweden. The people are actually in charge." [79] YouTube commenters, Internet commentators, and tweeters took this statement as convincing proof of the democratic nature of the project because of the supposed incongruity and impossibility of a conservative *Fox News* anchor finding a Swedish project as democratic instead of socialist.

Beyond simply calling the project democratic, the project has used the curators as signifiers for diversity by carefully choosing curators based on gender, race, religion, occupation, age, location, education, and personal tastes. By creating a sense of diversity and openness to

any Swedish citizen, the project has successfully provided evidence of its democratic values. However, the selection of curators is anything but democratic. The criteria to become a curator are steeper and less representative than it might seem. To become a curator, one must be a Swedish citizen, an interesting and prolific tweeter, able to write engagingly in English for seven days, and be nominated by someone else. [80] These criteria on the surface seem like low barriers considering that the Twitter platform is free, English is spoken by 86% of the population, [81] and the country's Internet penetration stands at 90.6%. [82] However, Christian Christensen, in a critique of the Curators of Sweden, calculated that the criteria to become a curator made the potential pool of applicants only 0.5% of the country's population. [83] The small pool of candidates is further reduced by the vetting process, which involves just three people—one of whom is a marketing specialist and the creative director of Volontaire, Patrick Kampmann—carefully choosing curators from the pool of nominees. [84] Despite this reality, however, the project has been largely successful in promoting itself and Sweden as democratic and open to everyone.

To date the most controversial curator has been Sonja Abrahamsson, who on June 12, 2012 asked, "Whats the fuzz with jews. You can't even see if a person is a jew, unless you see their penises, and even if you do, you can't be sure!? [sic]" [96] From there, Sonja spiraled into what was described by the media as an "insane racist rant" [85] and came to be called the "official Jew tweets from Sweden" that could

have been the downfall of the Curators of Sweden. [86] Sonja's tweets continued down the path for an additional twenty minutes:

> In nazi German they even had to sew stars on their sleeves. If they didn't, they could never now who was a jew and who was not a jew. [87] Once I asked a co-worker what a jew is. He was "part jew", whatever that means. He's like "uuuuh… jews are.. uh.. well educated..?"   [88] Where I come from there is no jews. I guess its a religion. But why were the nazis talking about races? Was it a blood-thing (for them)? [89] [sic]

However, Sonja's controversial questions and comments about Jews, homosexuality, AIDS, and down syndrome were not the downfall of the Curators of Sweden. Rather Sonja's tweets created the opportunity for the project managers to reaffirm the project's narrative of inclusivity. VisitSweden's marketing director, Maria Ziv, during an interview with the *International Business Times*, first expressed embarrassment for Sonja's tweets: "What she wrote when this started about the Jews [etc.] was from my perspective completely unnecessary, and I'm really mortified that she's offended so many people. That's not at all the intention of the project." [90] However, after setting the scene of disapproval, Ziv was able to more forcefully foreground the project's image as democratic, inclusive and open: "There's always going to be something that doesn't suit someone. If we start backing down, if you take away everything [potentially offensive] and just leave the stuff that offends no one, then we're not really saying anything and there's no point in doing it." [91] Ziv's counterpart at the Swedish Institute,

Sergio Guimaraes, used a similar tactic during an interview with the *New Yorker*: "The whole point of the account is to show a varied picture of Swedish society, and this is made possible through the freedom of speech that Sonja has used." [92] In addition to providing the organic opening for the representation of the project's inclusivity, Sonja's week as curator doubled the accounts followers from 30,000 to 60,000.

The Curators of Sweden may not be the utopian, democratic experiment that is presented in the project's marketing materials. However, the ideology of everyone—democratic values, accessibility, social justice, equality, and lagom—is strong and persuasive with few contradictory voices. This was aided by the voices of the curators, the least controlled, predictable, variable in the project. Despite the occasional offensive tweet, most curators supported and bolstered the normative Swedish discourses on equality and social justice.

Conclusions

The Curators of Sweden has been lauded as innovative and a potential game changer in nation branding and marketing. However, the project is more than just a clever marketing technology. The project is steeped in Swedish history and is formed out of a milieu that supports the project's aims and efforts. The project managers and creators have crafted the project, from choice of platform to visual identity to choice of curators, to represent a specific form of Swedishness. They were able to rely on the pervasive ideology of Swedish Modernism

to regulate curator behavior as they conformed to norms or verified norms by demarcating their deviance based on them. They had an added fail-safe in the project by promoting the project as democratic and representative of real Swedes. So, when they stumbled into controversy over Sonja Abrahamsson's tweets, they could distance themselves from her words without harming the project's goals and representations of Sweden.

The project, however, may be successful as a tool, but it is not a solution to nation branding internationally or for creating democratic participation. [93] The strong ties to Swedish Modernism have made the Curators of Sweden, uniquely Swedish. A Curators of the United States or a Curators of China project would likely fail, because without the social narratives and ideologies that buttress and support the project, the result would appear disingenuous or would fail to be embodied by the curators and their produced content. A Curators of the United States, in order to be successful, would need to be based on the histories and ideologies of the United States, such as the American dream, freedom, and liberty. This is not to say that these tropes are accurate representations of the United States —or that beauty, home, and everyone are holistic and accurate representations of Sweden. Rather, I suggest that nation branding projects must rely on tested and powerful narratives in order to be successful in implementing a project that requires the engagement and labor of the nation's citizens.

It is also important to view the Curators of Sweden, and other nation branding schemes, as steeped in power and complexity that stem

from the goals of governmental entities. These goals may not be in line with utopian narratives of the projects they create, as ultimately these goals must by their nature, as governmental, be related to politics, international relations, and economy. Some of these goals are explicitly stated, although not emphasized, in the Curators of Sweden's description:

> In an age of mass communication and increasing globalization, a country depends largely on how it is perceived abroad. Political objectives, trade, investments, visitors, exchange of talent and creativity are all heavily dependent on the view of the outside world. Sweden's development and future prosperity depend on strong relations with the outside world and a more active exchange with other countries in many areas. [94]

But, these motivational goals are not represented in the larger marketing materials or in the content created by the curators. They are instead, moved to the background, and left largely ignored, in favor of the narratives of Swedish Modernism and design.

Christian Christensen suggested that the takeaway lesson that the business community and international government entities can glean from the project is not one of "transparency, democracy, and openness" but rather that Sweden has a "public relations acumen, and an understanding of how technology discourse and commercial logic can be applied to shaping national image in the geo-political

arena." [95] Likewise, we should not take away from the Curators of Sweden that the technology of rotation curation can be a one-size-fits-all solution. Rather, as I have sought to demonstrate, we must connect the Curators of Sweden with the institutions, histories and people that created it, its platform, and its context to provide a thicker description of Swedish nation branding as a practice. This perspective erodes the reductionism and the solutionism of rotation curation and, instead, puts the emphasis back on the complexities of technological engagements by states and citizens.

Notes

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[7] Volontaire, n.d.

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[40] Svensk Form, n.d.

[41] Svensk Form, n.d.

[42] Svensk Form, n.d.

[43] Murphy, 2013, p. 118.

[44] Murphy, 2013, p. 118.

[45] Murphy, 2013, p. 123.

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