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1 Article

2 “Festive Customs” and “Everyday Beauty”. 3 The Agenda and Self-Conception of the Nordic 4 Life Reform Movement

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9 **Abstract:** In the second half of the 19th century a wave of modernisation, industrialisation and
10 urbanisation swept the Nordic countries, catapulting what had until then been lagging and primarily
11 rural countries into modernity. These major upheavals, however, also plunged the Nordic countries
12 into a profound social and cultural crisis resulting from their consciousness of their own
13 backwardness vis-a-vis the countries on the European continent, as well as the recognition that a
14 nostalgic nationalism recalling a mythical past had become obsolete in the industrial age. In response
15 to this crisis, a life reform movement emerged that was based on Arts and Crafts movements as
16 well as various artistic and literary reform movements and—equally absorbing rural traditions and
17 progressive social ideas—tried to establish a new national everyday culture. In this article, the two
18 key terms coined by Ellen Key, “Festive Customs” (‘festvanor’) and “Everyday Beauty” (‘vardags-
19 skönhet’)—the programmatic core of the Nordic life reform movement—are analysed and
20 illustrated in various typical manifestations. It also examines to what extent the Nordic life reform
21 movement with these two key concepts as its core agenda found expression in arts and crafts, in
22 painting as well as in the architecture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and
23 contributed to the progress of social and cultural renewal.

24 **Keywords:** art history; Nordic countries; life reform movement; Ellen Key; 19th Century; 20th
25 Century

26

27 1. Introduction

28 In the second half of the 19th century a wave of modernisation, industrialisation and urbanisation
29 swept the Nordic countries, catapulting what had until then been lagging and primarily rural
30 countries on the margins of Europe into modernity. It set off various social upheavals similar to those
31 which had occurred some decades before, first in England, the cradle of the Industrial Revolution, and
32 later on the European continent as well. One aspect of this was a growing openness towards other
33 countries. Close ties, prompted by felt affinities, developed with the German Empire, for example,
34 which was adopted as a model to be followed in the spheres of technology, science and art. At the
35 same time, numerous Nordic artists and writers were drawn to the European continent, especially to
36 France and Germany, where some were more successful than in their home countries (Henningsson et
37 al. 1997). These major upheavals, however, also plunged the Nordic countries into a profound social
38 and cultural crisis resulting from their consciousness of their own backwardness vis-a-vis the countries
39 on the European continent, as well as the recognition that a nostalgic nationalism recalling a mythical
40 past had become obsolete in the industrial age and could no longer suffice as the foundation of a
41 cultural identity (Häfner 1998, pp. 5–9).

42 In response to this crisis a life-reformist movement of renewal arose, drawing strength from the
43 Arts and Crafts Movement as well as a variety of artistic and literary reform movements. Building
44 equally on folk traditions and progressive social ideas it attempted to establish a new national culture

45 in everyday life. At the centre of this movement are the two concepts of “Festvanor” (‘Festive
46 Customs’) and “Vardagsskönhet” (‘Everyday Beauty’) formulated by the Swedish author and
47 educational reformer Ellen Key (1849–1926). Her essays bearing these titles (Key 1891, Key 1896)
48 expressed a longing for a renewed festive ritualising and aesthetic enrichment of everyday life.

49 This article presents the two key terms “Festive Customs” and “Everyday Beauty” as comprising
50 the basic agenda for the Nordic life reform movement and describes some of their typical
51 manifestations such as the artists’ celebration or festive rituals. In so doing it also examines the
52 question of to what extent the Nordic life reform movement with these two key concepts as its core
53 agenda found expression in arts and crafts, in painting as well as in the architecture of the late
54 nineteenth and early twentieth century and contributed to the progress of social and cultural renewal.

55 2. Ellen Key in her contemporary context

56 2.1. *Aesthetic lifestyle reformer and patriot*

57 Born 1849 on the southern Swedish estate Sundholm to a family of landed gentry which later
58 moved to Stockholm, in 1875 Ellen Key began teaching in Stockholm and in 1883 to lecture at the
59 Swedish Workers’ Institute. In these years she progressed through lectures, publications, and a wide
60 range of personal contacts to become one of the leading intellectuals of the country. In her works
61 Ellen Key promoted equally artistic, literary and political goals. Her contacts included
62 representatives of new artistic and literary currents such as the group of painters known as
63 “Opponenterna” (‘The Opponents’) founded in 1885, which included among others Carl Larsson
64 (1853–1919), Richard Bergh (1858–1919) and Georg Pauli (1855–1935), and the writers who called
65 themselves “Det unga Sverige” (‘The young Sweden’), including Gustaf af Geijerstam (1858–1909)
66 and Victoria Benedictsson (1850–1888). In her political work, Ellen Key advocated the rights of the
67 rural poor, of the workers’ proletariat and in particular of women. She was the founder and
68 co-founder respectively of the women’s rights organizations “Tolfterna” (‘The twelve’) and “Nya
69 Idun” (‘New Idun’). She was also a supporter of the socialist leaders August Palm (1849–1922) and
70 Hjalmar Branting (1860–1925) and after the founding of the Swedish Social Democratic Party in 1889
71 appeared at party events. The circle of like-minded “enlightened radicals” which collected around
72 Ellen Key and called themselves “Sällskapet Junta” (‘the Junta Society’) can be regarded as one of the
73 nuclei of the life reform movement. It included the painters Richard and Gerda Bergh (1864–1919),
74 Carl and Karin Larsson (1859–1928), Anders Zorn (1860–1920) and Georg and Hanna Pauli (1864–
75 1940); the art historian Carl G. Laurin (1868–1940); and the publisher Karl Otto Bonnier (1856–1941)
76 and his wife Lisen (1861–1952). They met weekly in the home of Ellen Key or Hanna Pauli for
77 discussions about socialism, pacifism, education, philosophy, religion and art. Hanna Pauli’s
78 painting “Vännerna” (‘The friends’, 1900–1907; Figure 1) captures such a meeting in her home,
79 where Ellen Key is reading to the group of friends (Ambjörnsson 2012; cf. Lane 2008).



80

81 Figure 1. Hanna Pauli (1864–1940): *Vännerna* ('The Friends'), 1900–1907, oil on canvas, 204 x 260 cm,
 82 Nationalmuseum Stockholm, Public domain.

83 In her works Ellen Key engages with a great number of natural science and humanist
 84 viewpoints, ranging from the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin (1809–1882) and Ernst
 85 Haeckel (1834–1919), to the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) and Friedrich Nietzsche
 86 (1844–1900) (Wittrock 1953). In particular Nietzsche's summoning of a golden age, in which the total
 87 festival promises liberation—"Singing and dancing, man expresses himself as a member of a higher
 88 community [...]. Man is no longer an artist; he has become a work of art." (Nietzsche 1954, p. 24 f.,
 89 quoted in Assmann 1989, pp. 244–245)—leads to a reinterpretation of aesthetic into festive
 90 experience, to the demand for a unity of art and life. These thoughts are reflected in Ellen Key's
 91 writings, especially in *Beauty for Everyone*, in a manner similar to that expressed by other proponents
 92 of youth and reform movements (Berggren 1995, pp. 40–49; cf. Assmann 1989, pp. 243–246).

93 Ellen Key's work cannot be definitively classified as progressive or conservative, which to some
 94 extent is typical of the life reform movement in the Nordic countries. Although a campaigner for
 95 women's rights, she was branded as an anti-feminist, for example, by Hedwig Dohm (1831–1919) for
 96 maintaining that motherhood was a woman's calling and that her natural place was in the home
 97 (Ambjörnsson 2012, pp. 221–359; cf. Lane 2008, pp. 19–23).

98 Ellen Key exerted a major cultural and social influence far beyond the Junta Society and
 99 Sweden. Her numerous articles and other writings, in which she dealt with a wide spectrum of
 100 themes, were repeatedly collected in anthologies and translated into practically all European
 101 languages (Ambjörnsson 2012, pp. 575–584). Her works on feminism and pedagogy had the greatest
 102 impact, especially her book *Barnets århundrade* ('The Century of the Child', Key 1900a; cf.
 103 Ambjörnsson 2012, pp. 135–219). She also undertook, especially in the early decades of the 20th
 104 century, extended lecture tours throughout the world and a great variety of people, from the authors
 105 Selma Lagerlöf (1858–1940) or Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926) to the American architect Frank Lloyd
 106 Wright (1867–1959), read her works and were lastingly influenced by them (Ambjörnsson 2012, pp.
 107 361–532; Friedman 2002).

108 Typical of the striving of the life reform movement for national and cultural renewal is the
 109 dispute that the Ellen Key waged in 1896 and 1897 with the New Romantic poet Verner von
 110 Heidenstam (1859–1940). The latter described Sweden in his essay "Om svenskarnes lynne" ('On the
 111 character of Sweden') as a "widely travelled old man of the world, who has seen everything and tried
 112 everything" and was yet "rich in opportunities", but stood in the autumn of his life bent by age and
 113 burdens (Heidenstam 1896, quoted in Linnell 1995, p. 224; cf. Häfner 1998, pp. 13–18). Ellen Key
 114 criticised this old-age idea in her essay "Om patriotism" ('On Patriotism') as an obsolete national
 115 identity which was frozen as "commemorative stones, tombstones and memorial statues" and a

116 ceremonial festive rhetoric, the most extreme expression of which was the national anthem, a pure
117 song of homage to the monarch (Key 1897a). She concluded from this that the national identity needed
118 a cultural and political renewal, i.e. the culture had to be re-invigorated from folk culture and the
119 political conditions democratised. Here the artistic and moral education of the new populace played a
120 crucial role, and this would take place according to Ellen Key, less in school and more in the home. She
121 took her lead in this respect from the Norwegian art and literary historian Lorentz Dietrichson (1834–
122 1917), who saw in a beautiful home the prerequisite for a beautiful, healthy and moral society. In
123 addition Ellen Key maintained that building on the beauty of the home the new “religion of beauty”
124 would conquer architecture and urban life, ennoble everyday life and ultimately transform the entire
125 society (Sheffield 1997, pp. 35–43; Häfner 1998, pp. 25–35).

126 2.2 *Arts and Crafts and Industry*

127 The idea of cultural renewal through “Everyday Beauty” and a return to rural or folk
128 handcrafts is not Ellen Key’s invention, but rather an inheritance from the Arts and Crafts
129 movement, which throughout the entire second half of the 19th century opposed increasing
130 industrial mass production. In the Nordic countries these ideas were advocated most loudly by the
131 national romantic movement in Norway. Firstly, in 1837 the landscape painter Johan Christian Dahl
132 (1788–1857) praised the exemplary artistic quality of the traditional Nordic wooden building style.
133 Later this theory became most prominently represented by the Norwegian national antiquarian
134 Herman Major Schirmer (1845–1913) and the Schirmer school he influenced (Lane 2000, pp. 19–48).

135 In Sweden, on the other hand, the Arts and Crafts movement in the latter half of the 19th
136 century was more strongly characterised by its interest in industrial production. Following the
137 repeal of guild laws and the removal of tradesmen’s monopolies, the Swedish Arts and Crafts
138 Association (Svenska Slöjdföreningen) was founded in 1845. It was to ensure the quality of
139 craftsmen’s products (Frick 1978, pp. 14–62). However, in the steadily expanding exhibitions which
140 the Association arranged in the second half of the 19th century the thematic focal point shifted.
141 Following the example of international exhibitions and in step with advancing industrialisation this
142 moved increasingly from the presentation of domestic art and craft products to the exhibition of
143 industrial products (Sörenson 1999).

144 The largest of these exhibitions was *Allmänna konst- och industriutställningen 1897* in Stockholm
145 or *Stockholmsutställningen 1897* (*‘General Art and Industry Exhibition 1897’*, in short *‘the Stockholm*
146 *Exhibition 1897’*), which was largely dominated by the presentation of technical and industrial
147 achievements (Figure. 2). Some 3700 exhibitors from all over the world presented their products and
148 technological innovations in around a hundred pavilions, erected according to plans by Carl
149 Westman (1866–1936) on the south bank of the bay Djurgårdsbrunnsviken (Hasselgren 1897; cf.
150 Ekström 1994). The exhibition marked the high point of a development based on international
151 expositions and through which national identity was presented, primarily through the technological
152 advancements of domestic industry. In the architecture of the exhibition and the products exhibited
153 this was given expression in an exotic festive eclecticism—the proverbial “cream-puff architecture”
154 (Danish ‘Flødeskumsarkitektur’), as it appeared in international exhibitions and towards the end of
155 the 19th century also celebrated its breakthrough in the Nordic countries. A prime example of this
156 was the large exhibition hall of Ferdinand Boberg (1860–1946) and Fredrik Lilljekvist (1863–1932),
157 the leading contemporary Swedish exhibition architects, featuring a Turkish-style cupola and four
158 minarets (Ekström 1994, pp. 128–163).



159

160 Figure 2. *Allmänna konst- och industriutställningen 1897* ('The General Art and Industry Exhibition 1897')
 161 in Stockholm.—In the centre of the photo is the Great Exhibition Hall by Ferdinand Boberg (1860–
 162 1946) and Fredrik Lilljekvist (1863–1932). Hand-coloured photochrome, Detroit Publishing Co.,
 163 United States Library of Congress, Public Domain.

164 In her essay "On Patriotism" Ellen Key has surprisingly kind words to say regarding the
 165 exhibition. In so doing she refers less to the art and architecture of the exposition—apart from
 166 praising the work of her friend Carl Larsson, who through this occasion would gain access to a wide
 167 audience—and more to the exhibition as primarily an expression of national pride, energy, creativity
 168 and, as she wrote, as "a great national event", through which "national enthusiasm and national
 169 self-confidence experienced a renaissance". In so doing she conceded that this newly won
 170 self-consciousness was less the result of a national orientation of art, handicrafts or architecture but of
 171 the success of science, technology and industry (Key 1897a, pp. 246–247; cf. Häfner 1998, pp. 42–47).

172 The reversion to traditional folk crafts and the distancing of arts and crafts from industrial
 173 production was not least thanks to external stimuli. As well as the National Romantic movement in
 174 Norway mention could also be made of the Austro-German art historian Jacob von Falke (1825–
 175 1897), director of Gemäldegalerie in Vienna. He visited Sweden in 1870 on the invitation of King Carl
 176 XV (1826–1872, regnavit 1859–1872) and in his book *Die Kunst im Hause* ('Art in the Home'),
 177 published the following year and translated into both Swedish and Norwegian, he expressed his
 178 admiration for Scandinavian arts and crafts. The English Arts and Crafts movement, the rise of
 179 which was followed with keen interest in Sweden, was another important influence. Ellen Key—as
 180 well as Carl Larsson—was influenced by publications from the movement. She was a reader, for
 181 example, of the art and crafts periodical *The Studio* right from the beginning of its official publication
 182 in 1893, from 1894 onwards the writings of John Ruskin (1819–1900) and from 1895 onwards those of
 183 William Morris (1834–1896) as well. She later made numerous references to them in her own
 184 writings, especially in *Beauty for Everyone* (Sheffield 1997, pp. 35–37; cf. Lane 2008, pp. 22–23).

185 2.3 *Beauty for Everyone*

186 Not only did Ellen Key spread her conception of an artistic enrichment of everyday life through
 187 her writings and lectures. In the spring and autumn of 1899, as the first step towards reform of arts
 188 and crafts and cultural renewal, together with three friends from the Junta Society, Gerda and
 189 Richard Bergh and Carl G. Laurin, she furnished two model rooms in the Stockholm Workers'
 190 Institute, the so-called Blue and Green Rooms. The furnishings were to demonstrate "simple and
 191 functional forms" and were a "mixture of rural Swedish and contemporary English" styles (Key
 192 1900b, pp. 40–42). The furniture was designed by Carl Westman, the crockery by the artist Alf
 193 Wallander (1862–1914). The facilities were completed with reproductions of artworks on the walls:
 194 in the Blue Room, for instance, through pictures by artists as varied as Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528),

195 Jean-François Millet (1814–1875) and Carl Larsson, painters whom Key and her co-campaigners
 196 clearly regarded as models (in the case of Dürer and Millet) or as part of the Nordic life reform
 197 movement and were intended to add artistic support to the pedagogical import of the interior. The
 198 model rooms were to demonstrate how, through the use of functional furniture, the contribution of
 199 harmonious colours and the rejection of historical décor, interiors could be furnished tastefully and
 200 with little expense (Key 1900b; cf. Lengborn 2002, pp. 69–75; Lane 2008, p. 24).

201 The great success of this exhibition—it was viewed by 5000 visitors—encouraged Ellen Key to
 202 extend and revise her essay “Skönhet i hemmen” (‘Beauty in the Home’) published in 1897, and
 203 together with the three magazine articles published in 1891–1897: “Vardagsskönhet” (‘Everyday
 204 Beauty’), “Festvanor” (‘Festive Customs’) and “Skymningsbrasan” (‘The Twilight Fire’) present a
 205 summary in the anthology *Skönhet för Alla* (‘Beauty for Everyone’) (Key 1891; Key 1895; Key 1896; Key
 206 1897b). This appeared in 1899 with a title page designed by Carl Larsson in the series of the radical
 207 Uppsala Student Association *Verdandi* published by her friend Albert Bonnier (Key 1899; Figure 3).



208

209 Figure 3. Ellen Key (1849–1926): *Skönhet för Alla* (‘Beauty for Everyone’), Stockholm 1899. Cover by Carl
 210 Larsson (1853–1919).

211 In these four essays Ellen Key sets out a comprehensive agenda for cultural renewal, ranging
 212 from the reform of arts and crafts through the artistic enrichment of daily life to the establishment of
 213 festive customs—in short aimed a “religion of beauty”. In the essay “Beauty in the Home” Ellen Key
 214 begins by referring to the conclusion of the Swedish art theorist of the late 18th century Carl August
 215 Ehrensvärd (1745–1800), that the need for beauty is a fundamental human need. She then proceeds
 216 from this to develop a practical guide for the home furnishings, in so doing propagating maxims like
 217 simplicity, practicality and expression of individual taste. She especially criticized the “shabby
 218 German” taste of the 1870s to 1890s, i.e. the industrially manufactured ruffles and plush interiors of
 219 late Historicism. In opposition to this she proposes an artistically sophisticated “everyday
 220 aesthetics” (‘vardagslivets estetik’), arising on the one hand from the Gustavian classicism, whose
 221 combination of respectable austerity and simplicity expressed moral as well as aesthetic quality, and
 222 on the other hand, the arts and crafts of traditional rural folk culture. Ellen Key envisaged the path to
 223 this *Beauty for Everyone*, among other things, to be through the co-operation of industry and crafts, as
 224 she wrote in “Beauty in the Home”:

225 The only possibility of having more tasteful urban rooms is to begin by demanding from all sides
 226 that they are not decked out with these ugly and senseless frills but instead simplified in the
 227 direction of sound and refined taste. And the only way to ensure that everyone can acquire really
 228 affordable and lovely things is that the manufacturers—in particular of furniture, wallpaper, fabrics,

229 glass, porcelain and metal objects—link up with arts and crafts practitioners so that all of these
230 objects, from the simplest and smallest, such as the match box, to the largest, are given a beautiful
231 form and appropriate decoration. Only then, when there is nothing ugly left to buy, when beautiful
232 things are as cheap as ugly ones now are, can beauty for everyone actually become a reality. (Key
233 1899, quoted here in Key 1913, pp. 5–6.)

234 In this context Ellen Key referred repeatedly to John Ruskin and, at least in the revised version
235 of 1899, to William Morris as well. Their influence characterizes especially the aesthetic ideals that
236 she formulated in *Beauty for Everyone*. She traces the roots of beauty to functionality, the sense of
237 beauty to moderation and restraint and good taste basically to honesty. The ideal of beautiful arts
238 and crafts products correspondingly derives from functional form, the absence of ornament, and
239 good materials (Key 1899, pp. 11, 18, 21). As an aesthetic education and to become acquainted with
240 the traditional rural folk culture, Ellen Key recommended a visit to the open-air museum Skansen,
241 founded in 1891 on the Stockholm island Djurgården. And as a model of the ideal of festively
242 refined, everyday aesthetics she proposed the artistically conceived and handicraft-rich home of
243 Carl and Karin Larsson, Lilla Hyttlös in Sundborn, which they had furnished with simple, colourful,
244 furniture and textiles inspired by traditional rural models. (Key 1897b, pp. 15–17; cf. Häfner 1998,
245 pp. 31–35; Lane 2008, pp. 25–27).

246 In her essay “Everyday Beauty” the reformer evoked the beauty of the unadorned everyday life
247 in nature’s change of the seasons—meaning life in the country—the joy of simple work and
248 self-realisation in art. In this context, she proposed a series of life principles, such as that every day
249 you should read a good book. Here it is most apparent that not only arts and crafts and painting, but
250 also education through regular reading played a central role in the life reform movement and,
251 together with the joy of the simple life, comprised the celebration of everyday life, the “Beauty of
252 Everyday Life” (Key 1891; cf. Sheffield 1997, p. 39).

253 In “Festive Customs”, Ellen Key lamented the loss of old customs and holidays—and attributed
254 this to a lack of healthy conservatism. She called for a renewal of the holiday calendar to promote the
255 establishment of traditions continuing through generations and the festive elevation of everyday
256 life. She sketched out a festive calendar which included both Christian high days and popular folk
257 customs, such as Christmas, New Year’s, Twelfth Night, Easter, Spring and Midsummer festivals,
258 and described the relevant festive rituals for each of them. She conceived of these celebrations less as
259 precursor to a golden age in the sense of Nietzsche, but first and foremost as a life reform means to
260 structure and elevate everyday life. In this context she also noted that such festive occasions were of
261 greatest significance for children and that it was the task of the mother as “the artist of the domestic
262 sphere”, to communicate to her children, for instance through festive occasions, a sense of beauty—a
263 theme which she would later deal with in more detail in *The Century of the Child* (Key 1896; Key
264 1900a; cf. Sheffield 1997, pp. 39–40).

265 Finally, in “The Twilight Fire”, the most poetic of the four texts, Ellen Key highlighted the
266 particular importance of light, twilight and fire in the long, dark winters and bright summers as the
267 origin of many Nordic traditions and the central role of the hearth as the focus of domestic society
268 (Key 1895; cf. Sheffield 1997, p. 40).

269 Ellen Key’s *Beauty for Everyone* is therefore based on a combination of the reformed arts and
270 crafts, proximity to nature, down-to-earth work, artistic and literary education, as well as
271 inter-generational traditions in the form of a festive customs. These aspects are manifested not only
272 in Ellen Key’s show rooms and publications, but at the same time also in contemporary Nordic
273 painting.

274

275 3. Nordic painting in the second half of the 19th century

276 3.1 *Between the centre and the periphery*

277 In tandem with and related to the efforts to develop a new everyday culture and a reform of arts
278 and crafts, Nordic painters discovered the “Nordic” as a subject together with closely related themes
279 such as the artists’ celebration and festive rituals. This happened primarily through views from the
280 outside portrayed by painters who had escaped the narrow circumstances of their
281 home-countries—in the art academies in Denmark and Sweden, as well as in private schools in
282 Norway and Finland. At the beginning of the 19th century the framework of academic training still
283 mainly encompassed a *Grand Tour* to Italy, although from about 1840 the academies in Munich and
284 in particular in Düsseldorf in gained in attractiveness. In the 1860s and at the latest with the
285 Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871 these centres in turn declined in popularity and Paris became, as
286 the cultural mecca of Europe, the preferred destination of Nordic painters (Varnedoe 1982, pp. 13–
287 19; Hedström 2012, pp. 187–190).

288 In the 1870s and 1880s a veritable colony of Nordic artists arose in the French capital, studying
289 mainly in private academies or taking lessons in the studios of established painters. For example, the
290 previously mentioned Hanna Pauli attended the Académie Colarossi in 1885–1887. Among the
291 private teachers Léon Bonnat (1833–1922) was the most popular. His Nordic students included, for
292 example, in 1877–1879 the Dane P.S. [Peder Severin] Krøyer (1851–1909), in 1885 the Norwegian
293 Edvard Munch (1863–1944) and in 1887–1889 Prinz Eugen of Sweden (1865–1947) (Sarajas-Korte
294 1982). Among the Nordic painters living in Paris at this time are some of those who achieved great
295 success and became known internationally—first and foremost the Suedo-Finnish Albert Edelfelt
296 (1854–1905) as well as the somewhat younger Anders Zorn. After studying in Stockholm and
297 undertaking extensive study trips Anders Zorn moved to Paris in 1888 and remained there—with
298 the exception of a one-year stay in the US on the occasion of the World’s Columbian Exposition in
299 Chicago 1893—for eight years. He became one of the most prominent painters in the French capital,
300 before returning in 1896 to Stockholm (Bastek 2012).

301 In Paris the Nordic painters encountered the latest cultural currents and artistic techniques of
302 the time, such as realism, naturalism and impressionism, and in the artist colonies in Barbizon and
303 Grez-sur-Loing the practice of painting en plein air. Furthermore, they discovered a broad range of
304 new artistic subjects. It is striking that they only developed a limited interest in portraying the bustle
305 of city life, although their cosmopolitan experience and the cultural life in the French capital with its
306 ateliers, salons and cafés must have served not only as the backdrop for their creation, but also as an
307 influential source of inspiration for the painters from the countries on the northern periphery of
308 Europe. However, their esteem for their native lands, more precisely the penchant for the
309 representation of the Nordic landscape and rural life grew; things Nordic became a much-loved
310 topos. This enthusiasm found support from abroad in the generally pessimistic and anti-modern
311 mood, which was widespread in the Panic of 1873 and the Long Depression (1873–1896) on the
312 European continent, following which especially Norway and Finland were reinterpreted and
313 transformed from a backward periphery to the image of unspoiled origins (Varnedoe 1982, pp. 13–
314 19; Huusko 2012). This explains the growing appreciation which the Nordic painters enjoyed. If they
315 were still little appreciated at the *Exposition universelle de Paris de 1878 (World Exhibition of 1878 in*
316 *Paris)*, the French critics at the *Exposition universelle de Paris de 1889 (World Exhibition of 1889 in Paris)*
317 showed they were sufficiently impressed to maintain that they had not only caught up with French
318 painters technically but their work also showed that unique “Nordic” quality (Braun 1982).

319

320 3.2 Artists' celebrations and festive rituals as motifs

321 Two visual themes stand out alongside the representations of landscapes together with
 322 impressions of light and weather—"Twilight and Light" (Jackson 2012)—as especially typical for
 323 Nordic painting: the artists' celebration and the rural holiday customs. Both subjects take on major
 324 significance in the Nordic life reform movement and complement or partially overlap with Ellen
 325 Key's concepts of "Festive Customs" and "Everyday Beauty".

326 The theme of the artists' celebration became among the Nordic painters a systematic
 327 self-representation of a group gathered in a festive ritual which regarded itself in the post-feudal
 328 society primarily as a cultural trend-setter. This can be seen in two examples of works featuring this
 329 subject: Hugo Birger's (1854–1887) "Skandinaviska konstnärernas frukost i Café Ledoyen"
 330 ('Scandinavian artists at Breakfast in Café Ledoyen') depicting a number of Skandiavian artists at
 331 breakfast in Café Ledoyen in Paris on the day of the Paris Salon's opening in 1886, and P.S. Krøyer's
 332 "Hip, hip, hurra! Kunstnerfest på Skagen" ('Hip, hip, hooray! Artists' Celebration in Skagen', 1884–
 333 1888) (Figures 4–5). Despite the festive informality of the image and the spontaneity they portray,
 334 both pictures are consciously composed illustrations of the two groups of artists, the leading
 335 Swedish and Finnish artists in Paris in 1886 and the members of the artists' colony in the Danish
 336 Skagen district. In both pictures it is not only possible to read the composition of the respective
 337 group at the time—each person represented was and still is known by name—, but also of the
 338 relations between those portrayed. In addition both portray the artists as established bourgeois
 339 groups; Hugo Birger at least placed them on the opening day of the Paris Salon in a highly
 340 representative locale, i.e. the Café Ledoyen, one of the finest establishments in the French capital,
 341 between the Avenue des Champs-Élysées and the River Seine, at that time situated behind the Palais
 342 de l'Industrie (erected in 1855, demolished in 1897) and today located behind the Petit Palais, built in
 343 1897–1900 (Arvidsson et al. 2014, pp. 150–153, 164–167).



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345 Figure 4. Hugo Birger (1854–1887): Skandinaviska konstnärernas frukost i Café Ledoyen, Paris
 346 fernissadagen 1886 ('Scandinavian Artists at Breakfast in Café Ledoyen on the day of the Paris
 347 Salon's opening in 1886'), 1886, oil on canvas, 183,5 x 261,5 cm, Göteborgs Konstmuseum, Public
 348 domain.



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Figure 5. P.S. [Peder Severin] Krøyer (1851–1909): Hip, hip, hurra! Kunstnerfest på Skagen ('Hip, hip, hooray! Artists' Celebration in Skagen'), 1884–1888, oil on canvas, 134,5 x 165,5 cm, Göteborgs Konstmuseum, Public domain.

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The subject of the rural holiday customs appeared and gained in importance in connection with the national romantic criticism of what was deemed to be the vulgar urban mass culture of the industrial age together with monarchist national rhetoric which was seen as obsolete. The farming class was regarded as the cradle of Nordic society and the preservation and artistic representation of traditional rural festive customs was seen as a contribution to cultural renewal. This renewal, however, had not only progressive but also conservative, even restorative features. To this it must be added that rural customs and traditions in the late 19th century in the Nordic countries just as in the countries of the European continent were on the retreat—as a result of rural depopulation, urbanization and industrialization (Häfner 1998, pp. 25–31; cf. Lane 2000, pp. 19–48).

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A special importance was placed in the Nordic countries on Midsummer celebration ('Midsommar'), at summer solstice. It was viewed by rural people often as the year's second-most important celebration, after Christmas. Although its roots date back to pre-Christian traditions, the Midsummer celebration—just like celebration of St. Lucia's day and many other modern holidays—only acquired its current form and became of universal significance for the whole country in the late 19th century. This was partly the result of conscious efforts to construct a new national tradition (Frykman et al. 1991). The great importance of the midsummer for creating a national identity can be explained by its combination of popular tradition and natural display: On the one hand it is a festival linked to a number of popular folk customs, such as dancing around the Midsummer Pole ('midsommarstång') or May Pole, as portrayed in Anders Zorn's famous "Midsommardans" ('Midsummer Dance', 1897) (Figure 6). On the other hand summer solstice, as the longest day of the year—in the northern areas of Scandinavia actually a day without night—through its annual recurrence not only serves as the basis for the ritual character of the festival, but also connects it with a cosmic or atavistic natural experience, the idea of a soulful nature. It both art and literature this is often continued in the parallel linking of inner psychological and external natural experience (Varnedoe 1982, pp. 18–19).



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Figure 6. Anders Zorn (1860–1920): Midsommardans ('Midsummer Dance'), 1897, oil on canvas, 140 x 98 cm, Nationalmuseum Stockholm, Public domain.

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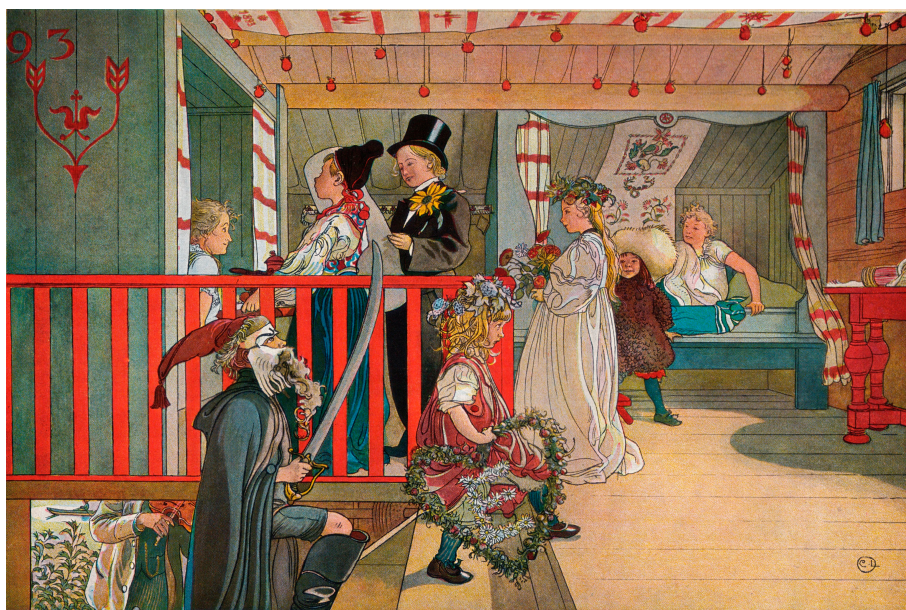
The two topics of artists' celebrations and festive rituals acquire a great significance in the artist colonies and groups which the Nordic artists established, first in France and later in the Nordic countries, as a programmatic, ideal image of their own life in these colonies and groups and in turn as an expression of the life reform quest for cultural renewal. Carl Larsson, who lived in Paris from 1877, spent the summers of 1880 and 1881 in Barbizon and the years 1882–1885 in nearby Grez-sur-Loing—both artists' colonies to the south of Paris in the district of Fontainebleau. In Grez-sur-Loing he met his wife, the Swedish painter Karin Bergöö, and there he discovered watercolour painting. Some of his most important works were painted there (Löfgren 1992). During these years a whole series of Nordic artists moved to Grez-sur-Loing, including among others P.S. Krøyer and Richard Bergh (Herlitz 2013). They would provide important impulses for the subsequent establishment of several artists' colonies and groups in the Nordic countries, e.g. through P.S. Krøyer on the Skagen painters in Denmark (Svanholm 2004), Richard Bergh and Carl Larsson on "The Opponents" in Stockholm and Richard Berg on the so-called "Varberg school". In this context mention must also be made of the Swedish author August Strindberg (1849–1912) who stayed in Grez-sur-Loing and later in Paris in 1882, and returned to the French capital in the years 1885–1887 and in 1894. In the 1870s Strindberg had already written on impressionist painting, and from his time in France came a travel report, *Bland franska bönder* ('Among French farmers', 1889) as well as the autobiographical novels *Inferno* and *Legender* ('*Inferno*', 1897, '*Legends*', 1898). Not only do these works provide an insight into Strindberg's experiences during his time in Grez-sur-Loing and Paris, but also spotlight the country life and the art scene there (Brandell 1983; Hedström 2012, p. 194; cf. Herlitz 2013, p. 242).

403 4. A synthesis of a literary, artistic and arts and crafts renewal movement

404 4.1 *A Home: Life reform as lived and promoted by Carl Larsson*

405 In the last decade of the 19th century a number of Nordic painters returned to their native
 406 countries from abroad. For example, Carl and Karin Larsson moved to Sundborn and Anders Zorn
 407 to Mora—both in the Dales (Dalarna) region—and the previously mentioned artist colonies and
 408 groups developed. This shifted the discourse on cultural renewal to those locations. To an increasing
 409 extent, the various arts and crafts, artistic and literary renewal movements united in a synthesis; this
 410 applied in particular to Ellen Key's ideas of "Everyday Beauty" and "Festive Customs" and the
 411 painters' characteristic "Nordic" subjects of artists' celebrations and festive rituals. They merged
 412 with the broader life reform movement of renewal which drove the social and cultural renewal—in
 413 both arts and crafts and in architecture (Lane 2000, pp. 79–117).

414 Carl Larsson's work and way of life serves as an exemplary embodiment of this life reformist
 415 renewal. At its core was a synthesis of art and life, as well as the ideal of a cheerful life in the country,
 416 unspoiled by modern industry. Carl Larsson's paintings show primarily the life of his own family in
 417 their home Lilla Hyttnäs, designed by him together with his wife Karin. He explained that his
 418 pictures were less naturalistic representations, but more a "manifesto", aimed at reforming equally
 419 "taste and family life" (Larsson 1899, p. 48). In fact, the domestic life and the everyday pursuits of the
 420 couple and their eight children were artistically enhanced. This became, as Ellen Key wrote, the
 421 product of "ingenious inspiration, festive moments and joyful work" (Key 1897b, pp. 15–17, here p.
 422 17). They worked and played and Carl Larsson presented a series of holiday customs which
 423 structured and enriched the family's everyday life, such as shown in the picture "Namnsdag på
 424 härbret" ('Nameday in the Storage House', 1898) (Larsson 1899) (Figure 7).



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 426 Figure 7. Carl Larsson (1853–1919): *Namnsdag på härbret* ('Nameday in the Storage House'),
 427 watercolour, ca. 1895, watercolour, 32 x 43 cm, Nationalmuseum Stockholm, Public domain.

428 Carl Larsson's works spread widely through his numerous books, such as *Ett hem* ('A Home',
 429 1899), *Spadarfvet, mitt lilla lantbruk* ('In the Country with Us', 1906) or *Åt solsidan* ('On the Sunny Side',
 430 1910) (Figure 8). They served as visual illustrations for the writings of Ellen Key, who herself
 431 referred repeatedly to her friend Larsson. Together they founded the much-touted "Swedish style",
 432 which became a greatly admired and imitated model, not only in its country of origin but also
 433 world-wide (Snodin et al. 1997; Lengefeld 1993).



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Figure 8. Carl Larsson (1853–1919): *Ett hem* ('A Home'), Stockholm, Albert Bonniers Forlag, 1899, cover.

437 In Sweden Ragnar Östberg (1866–1945), one of the country's leading architects, was among
438 those to take up the ideas of Ellen Key and Carl Larsson. In 1906 he published his own booklet with
439 the title *Ett Hem* ('A Home'), an introduction to the building and furnishing of artistically designed
440 country cottages (Östberg 1906; cf. Sheffield 1997, pp. 41–43) (Figure 9). They also influenced, for
441 instance, the Skønvirke movement in Denmark, which arose at the beginning of the 20th century
442 around Caspar Leuning Borch (1853–1910), Anton Rosen (1859–1928) and P.V. [Peder Vilhelm]
443 Jensen Klint (1853–1930), which was situated between Art Nouveau and National Romanticism and
444 became institutionalised in 1914 with the publication of a periodical with the same title. Finally,
445 Ellen Key and Carl Larsson communicated extensively with the national romantic circle of the polar
446 explorer Fridtjof Nansen (1861–1930), the painter Gerhard Munthe (1849–1929) and the young
447 architect Arnstein Arneberg (1882–1961) in Lysaker in Norway (Lane 2000, pp. 79-89).



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Figure 9. Ragnar Östberg (1866–1945): *Ett Hem* ('A Home'), Stockholm, Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1906, cover.

451 4.2 From home to actually existing "People's Home"

452 The efforts of Ellen Key and Carl Larsson were also reflected in Swedish arts and crafts, as can
453 be seen in contemporary arts and crafts exhibitions and later in the work of Gregor Paulsson. The
454 next exhibition, *Konstindustriutställningen 1909* ('*Arts and Crafts Exposition 1909*'), strongly reflected a
455 return to indigenous handcrafts and artwork. In keeping with the life reform ideas, from its
456 buildings to the entrance tickets, the exhibition was completely designed in a bright romantic style
457 by Ferdinand Boberg (Sörenson 1999, pp. 357–420).

458 The art historian Gregor Paulsson (1889–1977), from 1920 onwards director of the Swedish Arts
459 and Crafts Association and a key figure in the modernisation of architecture and arts and crafts, also
460 made frequent reference to Ellen Key (Sheffield 1977, pp. 43–49). As he wrote in his autobiography,
461 his reading of Ellen Key's *Folkbildningsarbetet* ('*Popular education*', Key 1906) was a transformational
462 educational experience (Paulsson 1974, p. 14). Both his books *Den nya arkitekturen* ('*The New*
463 *Architecture*', Paulsson 1916) and *Vackrare vardagsvara* ('*Better Things for Everyday Life*', Paulsson 1919)
464 were to a certain extent a continuation of Ellen Key's efforts—although he primarily based them on
465 the ideas of the German Werkbund and the German debate prior to World War I (Seelow 2016a). He
466 called for an extensive reform of Swedish arts and crafts and described a concept of developing taste
467 through artistic education (Paulsson 1916; Paulsson 1919). Similarly *Hemutställningen* ('*Home*
468 *Exhibition*') which he curated in Liljevalchs Kunsthalle (1917), at which 23 furnished affordable
469 apartments for plain workers were on display, could be regarded as a continuation of Ellen Key's
470 Blue and Green Rooms (Wickman 1995).

471 The same applied to *Stockholmsutställningen 1930 av konstindustri, konsthantverk och hemslöjd*
472 ('*Stockholm Exhibition 1930 of Art and Crafts and Home Industries*') directed by Gregor Paulsson.
473 Together with the *Acceptera* manifesto published by the exhibitors in 1931 it marks the breakthrough
474 of modernism in Sweden and the Nordic countries (Asplund et al. 1931; Rudberg 1999; Seelow
475 2016b). The modernism featured in the exhibition and promoted, in the *Acceptera* manifesto under
476 the keyword "Functionalism", in architecture, urban planning and arts and crafts was regarded not
477 only as the product of an inevitable progress, which had to be "accepted"—hence the title
478 *Acceptera*—but also as a logical continuation of traditional architecture and arts and crafts following
479 Ellen Key's "Everyday Beauty" (cf. Näsström 1930).

480 In subsequent years this functionalism developed into an agenda equally aesthetic and political
481 for the restructuring of Sweden as a "Folkhem" (literally 'a People's Home'), the term symbolising
482 Sweden's social democratic welfare state (Lund 1998; Rudberg 1998). Under the social democratic
483 prime minister Per Albin Hansson (1885–1946) Ellen Key's concept of home, supported by the
484 concept of "Samhällsmoderlighet" ('society's motherly care') which she proposed and which
485 included state welfare and state relief, was expanded to a meaningful model for the social
486 community life of the entire society (Key 1903). The actually existing "People's Home" developed
487 from "Beauty in the Home" and "Beauty For Everyone" (Rudberg 1992).

488 5. Conclusion

489 The life reformist renewal movement, which arose in the Nordic countries as a response to the
490 crisis resulting from industrialisation, extended far beyond the reform of individual spheres of life.
491 On the contrary, from the demand for social and cultural renewal a comprehensive agenda grew for
492 reform of the national culture. This ranged from reform of the arts and crafts, with a revival of
493 traditional folk handcrafts, through the discovery of the "Nordic" as a subject for painting, to the
494 artistic elevation of everyday life and the establishment of festive rituals.

495 The concepts of "Festive Customs" and "Everyday Beauty" promoted by Ellen Key played a
496 decisive role, as they provided the programmatic basis for a festive enrichment of everyday life as
497 well as applying an aesthetic assessment to all its aspects. Ellen Key called for a new "religion of
498 beauty" which, based on the beauty of the home, would conquer arts and crafts, architecture and
499 everyday life, elevate everyday living and ultimately transform the society. It is worth noting in this
500 context the extent to which the two notions of "Festive Customs" and "Everyday Beauty" served to

501 encompass the various reform efforts and as such contributed to overcoming the boundaries
 502 between the different media—painting, arts and crafts and architecture. The ideas expressed by
 503 Ellen Key in her writings on “Festive Customs” and “Everyday Beauty”—summarized in *Beauty for*
 504 *Everyone*—found their expression in painting as well as in arts and crafts and architecture.

505 Thanks to the complementary effects and mutual enhancement of the various media, the
 506 Nordic life reform movement succeeded in linking its quest for cultural and social renewal to a
 507 comprehensive festive ennobling of everyday life and an artistically enhanced everyday beauty.
 508 Conversely, it can be stated that through the parallel impact of efforts in the various media they
 509 become themselves a festival of everyday life, to some extent the boundaries between agenda and
 510 self-presentation or even between art and life were dissolved. This can be observed most clearly in
 511 the life and work of Carl Larsson. During his stay in Paris and Grez-sur-Loing, and later with his
 512 membership of groups such as The Opponents or the Junta Society, and through his exchanges with
 513 Ellen Key he became one of the leading protagonists of the Nordic life reform movement. His
 514 pictures show the results of these efforts in the example of his own family—the life characterised by
 515 festivities in their artistically furnished home. Finally, Carl Larsson’s life and work was further
 516 promoted in numerous publications, both his own as well as those of Ellen Key, as a perfect example
 517 of the vaunted life reform ideals.

518 In its pursuit of national and cultural renewal the Nordic life reform movement was not only
 519 successful in permanently influencing painting, arts and crafts and architecture, but to a certain
 520 extent in spreading the renewal to the whole of society. Admittedly this did not result in a golden
 521 age or “total festivity”. But the renewal contributed in Sweden also to transforming the country,
 522 through a conversion equally aesthetic as well as political, to a “People’s Home” version of a social
 523 democratic welfare state.

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